

THE QBC DAILY NUGGET

The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold (Psalm 19:9b-10a)



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The QBC Daily Nugget February 1, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

MATTHEW 26:56 – “. . . But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left him and fled.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: IT IS STILL POSSIBLE. It wasn't just Peter. It wasn't just Matthew. It was all of them. Yes, even the one who was called “the apostle of love” for his fervent love for the Lord Jesus Christ. The Shepherd was taken and the sheep fled. Yes, they were fearful, but the fleeing was willful. They all would have regret and the lesson learned would have lasted a lifetime. As they abandoned Jesus, the words He had just recently spoken to them pierced their souls, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away because of me this night for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” (**MATTHEW 26:31**).

The sadness one feels when we watch this scene in the garden of Gethsemane as the disciples publicly denied the Lord and fled didn't begin there. We must go back, back to the intimacy of the fellowship Jesus experienced with them BEFORE the garden. The disciples didn't know their own hearts. We, with access to the whole story, knew they were ripe for a fall as these words came out of them all – “Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same” (**MATTHEW 26:33-35**).

Boasting of spiritual experience or spiritual resources or, for that matter, boasting in general, never ends up with good results. We have a tendency to think this was all about Peter, but it was all of them and it isn't just about them. It is still possible to boast of spiritual strength only to find ourselves in spiritual defeat given by the sovereign Lord to teach us humility and the folly of trusting ourselves.

A 17th century pastor named William Mason wrote with great insight the following words about the disciples fleeing from Jesus. He wrote, “On reading this who can refrain from crying out, ‘Lord, what is man! What danger am I in! Lord, keep me! What awful effects have a fit of fear, and a frame of unbelief produced! Here was the beloved disciple John, who lay in the bosom of Jesus, the courageous Peter, who was to die with Him, the ambitious James, who requested to sit at his right hand in his kingdom; with every one of the other disciples, forsaking and flying from innocence in distress. The Shepherd was seized, and the affrighted sheep were instantly scattered. Provoking ingratitude! Do you think, oh my soul, you would have acted one whit better? Verily, if so you are vain.” The Apostle Paul warns us about thinking we are something when we are nothing or thinking we are strong when we are weak – “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (**1 CORINTHIANS 10:12**). Someone once said this of the invitations of the Lord in coming to Him, “When you come to the Lord, He will never send you away empty unless you come so stuffed full of yourself that there isn't room for any of His blessing.”

As we read the account of the disciples, first of them making boasts of their commitment to Jesus, and then making their flight away from Jesus, it would do us well to remember that account isn't ancient history. It is still possible, possible within the heart of each and every one of us who claim to know the Lord.

PRAYER: “Lord, remind me always I am a sheep of Your pasture with a heart still prone to wander.”

QUOTE: “A trust in oneself will never pass a single trial or enable a fleeing from any temptation.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 2, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

PROVERBS 23:26 - My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: COMPETING CLAIMS. Are you a sports fan? Does a good board game excite you? Does the thrill of a competition excite you? You may be none of these and competition is something which holds no interest. That is okay. We need both competitive people and non-competitive people in the world. It's part of the wonder of human diversity of we who are made in God's image. However, whatever category we find ourselves – competitive people or non-competitive people, competition is present in all of us. Each moment of each day one of four forces seeks to win over our hearts. Competition rages with fierce intensity between them. They are our flesh seeking to win our heart over to earthly comfort, the world seeking to win our heart over to its thinking, the devil seeking to win our heart over to sin, and the Lord Jesus seeking to win our heart over for His dwelling.

Adolph Menod, a French pastor from the 18th century, said, “But this heart that is within us, and more than anything else, is us is also a heart that aspires to give itself. Beyond that, it finds itself only in giving itself away.” As for the last part of Menod's statement, “it (our heart) finds itself only in giving itself away”, I would change it a little, “It finds its rightful self when giving itself to the right object.”

As we look at today's reference, let's take the four words, “give me your heart”, and seek to apply them to the only proper object competing for our hearts – the Lord Jesus Christ. First, the words of Solomon are a command. God commands us to give us His heart. He rightly owns it as our Creator – “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’” (**GENESIS 1:26**). He also owns our heart as Redeemer – “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (**1 PETER 1:18-19**). God graciously allows us to obey His command to give Him our hearts which is defined as a complete surrender of our mind, will, and affections. Another thing about this command is the single direction where our hearts are to be given. Our God is a personal God who wants no competition for our hearts. He said, “Give me” not “Share with me” your heart. No divided wills, no divided affections, and no doubled-mindedness. We must notice also the personal responsibility – “your heart.” This isn't about us collectively. It is about us individually. Peter got this lesson face to face from the Lord Jesus – “Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?” When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!” (**JOHN 21:22**).

The flesh, the world, and the devil will always scream loudly in the competition for our hearts. Too often, one of the three screams loud enough to bend the heart its way. But what about the “competing voice” of God for our hearts? Do we remember how Elijah heard Him? The account is found in **1 KINGS 19:11-12** – “And he said, ‘Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.’ And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.” It was a low whisper. Let's not let the loud yells of the flesh, world, and devil claim our hearts and keep them from the only one with the rightful claim.

PRAYER: “Lord, teach me to give You my heart not once in life but all through life.”

QUOTE: “There is never a moment when competition for our hearts is not in full swing.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 3, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

EXODUS 14:13-14 – And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: NO MORE EGYPTIANS. It was Christmas Eve. Six-year-old Mary Lou was walking down a dark city street with her father on their way to the children's service. Her active little mind was filled with the wonders of the event she and her classmates were about to celebrate - the coming of the Christ Child from heaven to earth, to be born a tiny infant in a lowly stable. Above them was the velvety blue-black canopy of a star filled heaven, with an infinite variety of brilliant lights twinkling down to earth. Her eyes were fixed on the shimmering tapestry above as she and her father walked, silently but thoughtfully, toward the lighted church at the end of the block. Suddenly she looked up at her father and, with that rare insight peculiar to a six-year-old, observed: "Daddy, I was just thinking - if the wrong side of heaven is so beautiful, how wonderful the right side must be!"

There is something else we need while traveling on this earth to make heaven a greatly desirous place. We need Egyptians. No, not literal Egyptians as neighbors or friends. For God's people in today's reference, these Egyptians meant bad news. We need "spiritual" Egyptians. Before we identify them, consider the relationship between the Israelites and the Egyptians – “Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves” (**EXODUS 1:11-14**). Did we catch at least four things these Egyptians imposed upon God's people? First, they afflicted them with heavy burdens. God's people were shackled with unbearable weights upon their souls. Then, they continued to put the heat on them with oppression. Add a constant anchor of oppression on an already weighted heart, and it is nearly intolerant. A third thing was the cruel and ruthless manner in which they were treated. And finally, it wasn't an ideal place of employment – “And made their lives bitter with hard service.” How did the Israelites respond? They groaned – “During these many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God” (**EXODUS 2:23**). They wanted out of Egypt! Rightly so. Now, about those “spiritual Egyptians” in our lives. Been burdened lately with the sin that clings so close to us? Oppressed with the daily engagements with the world, flesh, and devil? How about just the cruelty of humanity and our too much self-centeredness? And when it comes to bitter and hard service, whatever our lots in life, there are times we join one of Job's friends echoing these words, “but man (and woman) is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward” (**JOB 5:7**).

For the Christian, “spiritual Egyptians” are necessary. We may not like them. The Israelites didn't like their Egyptian “close associates” either, but without them, they would not have groaned to the Lord for rescue. The same applies to us and our “spiritual Egyptians”. Without them, we won't be groaning and longing for heaven. The trials and temptations caused by our own “spiritual Egyptians” drive us, like the little girl looking at this side of heaven, to focus on the beauty and wonder of the place where burdens are no more and sinful oppression is a memory wiped clean.

PRAYER: “Lord, I praise You for the certainty of a heaven with no more sin.”

QUOTE: “A trial free life would not create a heaven yearning life.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 4, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

EXODUS 14:13-14 – And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: THE SEEING EYE OF FAITH. One day John Wesley was walking with a troubled man who expressed his doubt as to the goodness of God. He said, “I do not know what I shall do with all this worry and trouble.” At the same moment Wesley saw a cow looking over a stone wall. “Do you know,” asked Wesley, “why that cow is looking over the wall?” “No,” said the man who was worried. Wesley said, “The cow is looking over the wall because she cannot see through it. That is what you must do with your wall of trouble – look over it and avoid it.” The lesson of the story is “Faith enables us to get above circumstances and look to Christ who is over all, blessed forever.”

In today's reference, the Israelites had a huge “wall of trouble” to look over also. It wasn't a stone one like the cow peered over. It was their enemies. Egyptians in hot pursuit and not just a few – “The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horseman and his army, and over took them encamped at the sea, by Pihahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon. When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord” (**EXODUS 14:9-10**). They had a couple of choices. Succumb to fear or exercise the seeing eye of faith. As the people sought help from their leader Moses, we get a wonderful illustration of how faith sometimes works. Faith isn't always activity-based in service for the Lord. Faith also is passive to include the ability to simply wait on Him and His help, at His timing. Let's consider the seeing eye of faith as the Israelites were confronted with some serious trouble.

First, the seeing eye of faith stares fear of circumstances in the face, refusing to be defeated – “And Moses said to the people, ‘Fear not’”. Fear of the seen seeks to quench faith in the unseen. We know all too well how easy it is to worry about things instead of exercising faith in the Lord Jesus who is in charge of all things. Next, the seeing eye of faith waits on the Lord – “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord.” Often worry leads us to want to “take charge” and solve difficult things without a season of waiting on the Lord. That doesn't mean irresponsibility. It does mean we ensure we don't “go alone” in life when trouble comes. We seek to rest in the Lord as His providence unfolds. It isn't easy to wait when we want to act, yet, waiting is a significant tool our Lord uses to build us in the faith. Take a concordance some time and trace the words “wait, waiting, waited” just in the Psalms. You will know what I mean. Finally, the seeing eye of faith maintains confidence that the Lord will act, even when it appears He delays – “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.” Moses promotes confidence in the people toward the Lord by proclaiming his confidence toward the Lord. God is most pleased when we anticipate His help with confidence, not a faith wavering between fretful unbelief and restful belief.

Faith doesn't always have to be seen in the busyness of activity. In fact, it might best be displayed in the quietness of the heart that waits on the Lord for His faithful guidance and interaction through the troubles we encounter in life.

PRAYER: “Lord, teach me that waiting on You is a big part of my relationship with You.”

QUOTE: “A heart that is learning to wait on the Lord is a heart being transformed by the Lord.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 5, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

PHILIPPIANS 2:12 – Work out your salvation with fear and trembling

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: IT TAKES TIME. There is a wonderful account of Jesus healing the blind man at Bethsaida. Sometimes our Lord healed immediately, like the leper – “And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, “If you will, you can make me clean.” Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean” (**MARK 1:40-42**). Other times, it was a process, like in the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida – “And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Do you see anything?” And he looked up and said, “I see men, but they look like trees, walking.” Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly” (**MARK 8:22-25**).

The Puritan John Owen wrote on healing, especially spiritual healing, “I know God sometimes comes upon a soul instantly, in a moment, as it were, wounding and healing the soul. So it was in the case of David, when he cut the hem of Saul’s garment. But ordinarily, in such a case, God calls for waiting and laboring, attending in prayer as the eye of a servant rests upon his master. So says the prophet Isaiah, ‘I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob’”. And that leads to the topic of the day. It not only may take time to heal spiritually but also physically, like the blind man who at first “saw fuzzy images of man as trees” until Jesus completed the work giving him clear sight. It also takes time in the spiritual development of God’s children. Justification is instantaneous. Sanctification is not. One is declared once and for all. The other is slugged out throughout life.

Today’s reference is really incomplete. If we simply leave the instruction as is, we will get pretty discouraged fast. If salvation is the work of conforming to the Lord Jesus Christ and I am commanded to “work it out” and I have no indication of resources to do so, there will be fear and trembling. Fear because I know I cannot take one step on my own toward that goal. Trembling because I know God demands this work in me and I cannot do what He demands. So, to keep us from sighing the big sigh and giving up, these verses get a big transformation with the inseparable thirteenth verse – “for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (**PHILIPPIANS 1:13**). As we attach this verse to **PHILIPPIANS 1:12**, we see two applications. First, God works in you do whatever He wants for His good pleasure. That is good news because what He wants for us is best for us, despite what we may experience. Another important truth is that when we lack the “will” to live out the Christian life and seem to lack the energy to “work” out the Christian life, we see that God creates in us both. But it will take time and effort.

J.R. Miller sums it up nicely, “Christ’s followers are transformed – old things pass away, and all things become new. Those who believe in Him are fashioned into His image. But these blessings do not come easily. The heavenly graces are not put into our life as one might hang up lovely pictures on the walls to adorn a home. They must be wrought into our life in a sense, by our own hands. We must work out our own salvation, although it is God who works in us, both to will and to work.” And, that brothers and sisters, takes time.

PRAYER: “Lord, help me to walk with You, not behind You or ahead of You.”

QUOTE: J.R. MILLER, “The lessons are not easy – sometimes they are very hard.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 6, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

MATTHEW 9:36-38 – When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: **SEEING, FEELING, PRAYING.** What would you tell me is necessary to be an effective witness for Jesus Christ, not just modeling our Lord in our actions, but in boldly sharing His Gospel? You might tell me knowledge. Correct. You might tell me a holy life. Correct. You might tell me a course on how to share the Gospel. That would be fine, but there is something else that must take place before all those things. There must be a seeing, feeling, and praying heart. Without these, we may have the right message and right method while lacking the right heart and, with our God, the heart of service for Him is far more important than the action of service for Him.

In today's reference, we see this in the heart of our Savior. First, He SAW the crowds – “When He saw the crowds”. Unless we take our eyes off ourselves and our interests (**PHILIPPIANS 2:4**), we won't see as Jesus sees. Ask ourselves this question – As we go through our daily routines of work, roles, and errand running, do we see every person as Jesus sees them? The answer to that question will determine the presence of or lack of the next ingredient in having the heart of Jesus – compassion – “He had compassion for them”. He FELT for them. He saw. He felt. Sustainability in the Christian life is not by our perseverance. It is by Christ's love controlling us (**2 CORINTHIANS 5:14**). And what does that lead to? PRAYER. Jesus doesn't just tell us to pray. He tells us to pray with zeal – “therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest”. When the hearts of God's people begin to see and feel, prayer for the lost will come and it will come with intensity. Like the examples to follow . . .

George Whitefield, the famous English evangelist, said, “O Lord, give me souls, or take my soul!” Henry Martyn, missionary, kneeling on India's coral strands, cried out, “Here let me burn out for God.” David Brainerd, missionary to the North American Indians 1718–1747: “Lord, to Thee I dedicate myself. O accept me and let me be Thine forever. Lord, I desire nothing else. I desire nothing more.” The last words in his diary, seven days before he died, “O Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.” Thomas a'Kempis, 1379–1471: “Give what Thou wilt, and how much Thou wilt, and when Thou wilt. Set me where Thou wilt and deal with me in all things, just as Thou wilt.” Dwight L. Moody: “Use me then, my Savior, for whatever purpose and in whatever way Thou mayest require. Here is my poor heart an empty vessel; fill it with Thy grace.” Martin Luther: (some words from his great agony of prayer on the night preceding his appearance before the Diet of Worms) “Do Thou, my God, do Thou, God, stand by me against all the world's wisdom and reason. O do it! Thou must do it. Stand by me. Thou True, Eternal God!” John McKenzie prayed a prayer of a young missionary candidate as he knelt on the banks of the Lossie: “O Lord, send me to the darkest spot on earth!” “Praying Hyde,” a missionary in India: “Father, give me these souls, or I die.” Mrs. Comstock, a missionary in India, a prayer of parting when she sent her children home: “Lord Jesus, I do this for thee.” John Hunt, a missionary to the Fiji Islands, a prayer upon his dying bed: “Lord, save Fiji, save Fiji, save these people, O Lord; have mercy upon Fiji; save Fiji!”

Let's seek the Lord to make us a people who see, feel, and pray for those who are sheep without a shepherd.

PRAYER: “Lord, help me to see as You see, feel as You feel, and pray as You pray.”

QUOTE: “The heart of evangelism is to have the heart of God.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 7, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

PSALM 56:3 - When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: FROM FLEEING TO CLINGING. Just take a moment, after reading this paragraph, close your eyes, and imagine what it would be like to never have experienced being afraid. Never once being afraid of the dark. Never once being paralyzed by fear of unfamiliar surroundings. Never once feeling afraid being around people. Never once being afraid of being in the presence of God. Not one single time in life experiencing the sickly feeling of being afraid. Okay, time to close your eyes and imagine such an existence.

Alright, eyes open. Hard to imagine something we have never known, isn't it? It wasn't hard for Adam. He knew both experiences. He knew the incredible joy and freedom from the slavery of being afraid of anything. His “fearless” life in which he walked with His God in complete harmony is implied at the end of the creation account where the scripture reads, “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (**GENESIS 2:25**). When we are afraid, we are filled with shame and clothed with emotional baggage of dread, terror, unbelief, and guilt. Adam knew nothing of these awful soul pains. However, that would, sadly, soon change – “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself” (**GENESIS 3:8-10**). Enter being afraid and it caused Adam to no longer cling to His God. His new found fear caused him to flee from his God. That is what sinful fear does. It always makes us want to run from God instead of running to God. Sin, left unchecked in our lives, produces ungodly fear. The Lord withdraws a sense of His favor, as He did with Adam. He basically leaves us to ourselves. Not permanently or in reality, but in experience. We know theologically we are always in God's presence. We also know experientially what it is to be in God's presence and when things are right before us, we learn this truth, “Perfect love casts out fear” (**1 JOHN 4:18**). Yet, we may find ourselves like Adam – being afraid because something isn't right between us and God. Now that isn't always the case, like in today's reference where David is facing a tough situation. In this situation, his being afraid made him not flee from God. It made him cling to God. Why? We see no indication of a breach in the fellowship between God and David. David was experiencing natural fear not sinful fear. David clung to his God out of needed dependency. Adam fled from his God out of sinful independence.

Hopefully, we are walking more like David than Adam. The reality of the Christian life is such that we will walk in both of these individuals' shoes. We walk like David in natural fear and cling to our Heavenly Father. We will also walk like Adam in sinful fear and flee from our Heavenly Father. As we walk like David, we walk in freedom from fear. As we walk like Adam, we walk in the bondage of fear. The Puritan William Gurnall wrote, “The chains of love are stronger than the chains of fear.” And that provides hope when Adam gets “the best of us” at times. Go back and read the **GENESIS 3:8-10** account of Adam fleeing God out of sinful fear. Take a real close look at who was going after Adam despite the fallen man's attempt to get as far away as possible from God. It is God. The God who made Adam afraid was the same God who so loved Adam He pursued him to remove the dread of being afraid. And brothers and sisters, that is the message of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. He pursues us with the words, “Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid” (**MATTHEW 14:27**). Let's not flee, but cling to such a Savior!

PRAYER: “Lord, teach me to take my unhealthy fears to You as I seek to walk in the healthy fear of You.”

QUOTE: “Sin not dealt with will always produce an unhealthy fear of God in us.”

The QBC Daily Nugget
February 8, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-9 -So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: **JUST LEAVE THE SPLINTER.** Remember the last time you got a splinter in the hand or finger? I remember those “thorns in the flesh” that hurt and if located in a difficult to reach place, required some assistance to get dislodged. I have memories of my mother breaking out a sewing needle and digging deep to get that piece of wood or other irritating object out of my finger or hand. The splinter hurt and so did its removal.

The Apostle Paul has a “splinter” also. In today’s reference he said, “A thorn was given me in the flesh”. We don’t know specifically what it was and that point is non-important to us right now. Bottom line, God gave his choice servant a “splinter” and it wasn’t going to be taken away. Not only was it going to remain with him for life, it hurt. Paul described his thorn as “a messenger of Satan to harass him” in ordering to keep pride under wraps. The word “harass” may seem like a little inconvenience to us, but not in this case. For Paul, his harassment was anything but a little inconvenience. Its definition includes these meanings, “To strike with the fist, give one a blow with the fist, to maltreat, and to treat with violence.” Think about our trials in life and then try to put ourselves in Paul’s position of being pummeled by a messenger of Satan. It would be like standing beside a world-class boxer and just letting him keep giving us blow after blow after blow to our face with no mercy. Makes our trials seem quite small, doesn’t it? And from a human perspective, the next two things about this thorn in Paul’s don’t sit too well in our desire for earthly comfort. First, this thorn in the flesh was not given by Satan. Yes, it was a messenger of Satan, but it came from God. God chose to send Paul a painful experience to his soul. If we adhere to a theology that God wants us to be comfortable and not suffering, this is a huge blow to such a position. Remember, our God is more committed and desirous of our conformity to His Son than our comfort in this life. The second thing about this thorn is that God would not remove it, even as His servant pleaded in prayer for its removal. It was the big “no” to Paul’s prayer and it was for his own good.

Thorns in life are for our own good. We may not like them. We may rebel against them, but we will get them. We need them and we don’t need them removed. They work in us the way Paul’s thorn worked in him – to keep him low and dependent on God’s grace. J. R. Miller wrote this about thorns in the Christian’s life, “The Master told Paul that his thorn was necessary to him, to save him from becoming proud. We may think of our thorn, too, as something we need. In place of allowing it to irritate us or to spoil our life, its mission is to make us sweet, patient, loving. Many people beseech the Lord to take away their thorn. Yet it may be that the prayer is not answered, will not be answered, and should not be answered. It may be that the thorn is necessary to keep them low at God’s feet.” Miller went on, “We are all in danger of settling down into a spirit of ease and self-satisfaction.” To avoid this danger, to protect us from falling into the danger of spiritual pride or spiritual laziness, we need thorns or splinters. So, when it comes, and it will, just leave the splinter alone. It is there for a very good reason.

PRAYER: “Lord, help me to be submissive to the process You choose to make me humble.”

QUOTE: “When God gives us thorns, they hurt only for our good, not our harm.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 9, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

ROMANS 7:18 - For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: WHEN DESIRE IS ENOUGH. I hope I am not alone in this. I don't think I am, but here goes. Have you ever had tension inside your heart when it comes to say, personal Bible reading or prayer time? A tension that says, “I want to read my Bible, but I don't want to read my Bible.” “I want to go to prayer meeting, but I don't want to go to prayer meeting.” The tension is between desire for and resistance against. Part of us really does want to spend an uninterrupted hour in our Bibles. Part of us really does want to go to the prayer meeting. Simultaneously, there is this tug inside that may actually override and prevent the desire from becoming action. Paul knew the power of this tug. He said, “For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry out” - right desire, but no ability to carry it out. Now before we attempt to look at this, a couple of things we need to get out of the way. Paul is talking about the power of our remaining flesh. He is not talking about spiritual laziness that accepts a lack of discipline to spend time in the Bible. I also don't think he is talking about having a weekly schedule so full of earthbound things that prayer meetings and fellowship with other believers misses getting “penciled in” our schedules. No, he is talking about the power of the remaining sin within us that prevents us from seeing our desires become actions.

A prayer found in *The Valley of Vision*, a collection of Puritan prayers and devotions, captures the honest heart of the believer who realizes that our desires are all too often overridden by our flesh and prevents our desires from becoming actions. The unknown author wrote, “O God of grace, thou has imputed my sin to my substitute, and hast imputed His righteousness to my soul, clothing me with a bridegroom's robe, decking me with jewels of holiness. But in my Christian walk I am still in rags; my best prayers are stained with sin; my penitential tears are so much impurity; my confessions of wrong are so many aggravations of sin; my receiving the Spirit is tintured with selfishness. I need to repent of my repentance.” It is not difficult to see the heart's desire coming forth in this very transparent prayer. Strong desires were overmatched by the inability to carry them out completely and holy, but don't leave that prayer discouraged. There are times desire alone is enough – “For if the eagerness (desire) is present, it is acceptable according to what one has, and not according to what one does not have” (**2 CORINTHIANS 8:12**). God accepts the desire even when the ability to achieve the desire is lacking.

In today's reference, Paul had the desire to do right and since God wants our hearts in devotion before He wants our hands in service, the desire counted without the actions. The Puritan John Downname wrote a classic book on spiritual warfare titled *The Christian Warfare Against the Devil, World and Flesh* and said this about desire, “For He (God) respects not so much our actions as our affections; not our works, as our desires. For the Lord accepts the desire for the deed.” That isn't a call to spiritual laziness. We cannot take today's reference or Downname's insight and make excuses for neglecting a diligent approach toward seeking and serving the Lord. What we may do, however, is to realize the power of our remaining flesh and accept that there are times our desires to please the Lord is all we can muster up when we grow weary in spiritual warfare. After all we have done to stand (**EPHESIANS 6:10**), we may find ourselves taking Paul's words in today's reference and praying them, “Lord, nothing good dwells within me. You know I have the desire to please You. Accept my desires, even though I fail to make them actions due to the flesh I still battle.” It's a good prayer for there are times when desire is enough.

PRAYER: “Lord, keep my heart not only active in service for You but desirous of service for You.”

QUOTE: “Every acceptable service for Christ begins with a willing heart.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 10, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

ROMANS 8:15-17 – For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: DON'T GROW UP. The storm raged as the ship struggled to maintain her course. Tossed about in the rough seas, the passengers onboard grew more and more frightened as the night darkened and the winds howled. Most were huddled around little groups sharing their fears and even some near panic state fearing the ship wouldn't weather the storm. In the midst of the anxious passengers a little girl sat quietly listening and smiling. She didn't appear to have a care in the world. The fierce storm didn't break her spirit or cause stress lines to appear on her face. Puzzled by the confidence and calmness coming forth from the girl, a very tense passenger asked, “How can you be so calm? Don't you hear the storm? Can't you feel the ship rocking? Why aren't you afraid for our safety?” The little girl, grinning with a huge smile, “Oh, it will be okay. Nothing to worry. You see I have been here before. My father is the captain of this ship. He knows what to do and I trust him. We will be fine.” And soon, her confidence was validated as the storm passed and the ship maintained her course, arriving safely to its port of destination.

Have you been in any big storms lately in your life? You might be able to reply, “No, things are pretty smooth right now. Oh, there are a few inconveniences, but nothing I cannot handle.” If that would be you, it is safe to say, “Get ready for a storm or two coming your way along with some turbulent seas.” Someone once said, “We are either in a trial, coming out of a trial, or preparing to enter a trial.” Sounds like a pretty good paraphrase of Paul's instructions to the new believers in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch about the necessity and inevitability of “storms of trials and tribulations” in this life – “When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (**ACTS 14:21-22**)

When we come to these storms in life, we may react in one of two ways. We may act “grown up” or adult like and more often than not, try to reason our way out of the circumstance or fret ourselves through the circumstance. The other reaction is to be like the little girl on the ship – become like a child and maintain trust in our Father. Child-like faith doesn't demand a reason for the storms. Child-like faith doesn't stress out when the dark clouds of a providential storm cloud our soul. Child-like faith simply trusts the One who has covenanted Himself to care for His child. Jesus emphasized the importance of “not growing up” in our relationship with Him – “At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (**MATTHEW 18:1-4**). Entering into a saving relationship with God through the Lord Jesus demands a child-like faith that trusts based on the credibility of the One being trusted. But let's not forget that once in that relationship, its health and its growth rests on the same child-like faith that established the relationship with Jesus. Yes, we grow in spiritual maturity by grace and knowledge, but never to lose the humility and simplicity of being a child. In some aspects of our faith in Christ, it is important we “don't grow up.”

PRAYER: “Lord, keep my heart so child-like when it comes to walking and trusting You.”

QUOTE: “God doesn't call us to understand everything but to trust Him in everything.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 11, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

GALATIANS 6:9a – And let us not grow weary of doing good.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: REASON FOR GETTING UP. Years ago a man named John Walker was the keeper of the lighthouse on Robin’s Reef at Staten Island. There he lived happily in the faithful discharge of his duties for four years. He soon encountered severe pains which required a departure from the reef to a hospital on the mainland. As John was being placed in the boat to depart, he called to his wife, Catherine, these words, “Mind the light.” Things did not improve for John Walker. He never returned as the lighthouse keeper. However, his faithful wife heeded the words from her husband to “mind the light” and carried out her duties, alone, for more than thirty years as the lighthouse keeper, warning mariners of the dangerous rocks nearby. John and Catherine Walker lived with a reason for getting up each day – a call to faithfulness, a call to mind the light.

When we wake up each morning, what seems to be our driving reason for getting up? My initial response is because I have to get up. That isn’t genius like by way of an answer. All of us have to get up. Each of us have responsibilities to fulfill, things to accomplish, and people needing our attention that will go nowhere if we simply turn over and pull the blanket up a little closer to our chins. But if we simply come out of a sleep with an immediate attitude of “I have to get up” and drag ourselves into the day, we will be missing the most important thing we can do to get our day started right.

There must be a motivating factor beyond earthly responsibilities that takes us beyond the reason for getting up in the morning to just “I have to get up”. Jesus mentions it twice in the Parable of the Talents – “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ **His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’** And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ His master said to him, **‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master’**” (**MATTHEW 25:14-23**).

Each moment of our lives is being written in the journals of heaven to be read at the judgment seat of Christ. It doesn’t matter who we are or where we are located, the issue remains the same for all – faithfulness. No one is insignificant. Stay at home mom keeping the home fires burning and raising the next generation? Significant. Executive in a well-established business striving for integrity? Significant. Widow or widower sitting alone suffering intimate loss and laboring in prayer? Significant. Teenager striving for purity in an impure world? Significant. The list goes on and on. We each have a divine reason to get up each day. It is to strive to hear one day, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” And such a life is not lived in perfection. Being faithful doesn’t mean being flawless. It means getting up each day with the proper reason to get up – to live faithful to God’s Word in every detail of each day.

PRAYER: “Lord, help me to start my day with my thoughts toward heaven not my earthly schedule.”

QUOTE: “A life of faithfulness is not built year to year but minute by minute.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 12, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

LUKE 22:14-16 – And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: THOUGHTS TOWARD HEAVEN. Heaven. What comes to our minds? A place of beauty? Freedom from sin? Perfect worship? Reunion with departed loved ones? I am sure these things come to mind and perhaps others. Interestingly, we don't get a lot of information from our Bibles describing heaven or what we will do while in heaven. God has chosen not to reveal great details. Oh, He reveals glorious details, but not whole details.

The story is told about a composer of some familiar hymns. During the writer's meditation on his piano, he penned the beloved hymn “Over the Sunset Mountains” and was certain its message would catch on so he confidently approached a publisher. The response saddened him. “We would like to use it,” the approving publisher said after glancing over it, “but we have one little suggestion. Can you take out this reference to Jesus and enlarge a little more on heaven?” Clutching his manuscript, the composer replied, “Heaven without Jesus? Unthinkable!” Then the composer walked from the publisher's office with another song coming on: “I Have No Song to Sing, but that of Christ, my King.” Both songs have become favorites with Christians. As we ponder heaven, it is proper to consider the place and all those things we mentioned above. Yet, take time this week and pray through **REVELATION 4** and **REVELATION 5** and see that heaven appears far more concerned about a Person than a place.

As much as we may desire to be free from this world and go to heaven, it is important to determine how desirous we are to be free from this world and go to be with Jesus Christ. In today's reference, we see not just a desire, but also an earnest desire. It comes from the heart of our Lord Jesus. The scene is intimate at the final Passover observed with the Lord and His disciples. Sense the solemn sacredness filling the room. Jesus looks around and says, with deep compassion, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Allow His intense desire for fellowship with His disciples warm our hearts as we see Jesus' heart. Now, listen to the Lord Jesus pray for us, “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (**JOHN 17:24**). More intense desire for fellowship and this in heaven. Our Bibles tell us the Lord Jesus doesn't change – “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (**HEBREWS 13:8**). Have we thought about His unchangableness when it comes to His intense desire for our fellowship, both now, as with the disciples at the last supper, and in the future, in heaven, as He prays for us to see His glory? Our level of joy and holy living directly relates to our grasping the desire for fellowship Jesus has for us. Seeing His desire for our company leads us to consistent seeking of such fellowship with Him and it is in that place where true transformation occurs (**2 CORINTHIANS 3:18**)

John Mason said, “How can we expect to live with God in heaven if we love not to live with Him on earth?” It is a probing question and forces us to evaluate how we view both this life and heaven. The best way to view this life is that all we go through is a training ground preparing us for what we will be in the next life – completely holy and conformed to the Lord Jesus (**1 JOHN 3:1-3**). To do so radically changes our daily attitudes and actions.

PRAYER: “Lord, teach me to think long and often on seeing You face to face.”

QUOTE: “Heaven isn't just a place to go, it is a primarily a Lord to see.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 13, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

PSALM 53:2 – God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: TWO TYPES OF THEOLOGIANs. Every human being is a theologian. And it matters not whether an individual claims or denies their status as a theologian. God said it, so it is true – “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (**ROMANS 1:20**). They is everybody. Not just a select few. Solomon penned these words ensuring my opening statement holds true, every human is a theologian, because eternity is written on the heart of everybody. Deep down inside we know there is a God, there is a day of judgment, and denying it doesn’t invalidate it, “He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end” (**ECCLESIASTES 3:11**).

Getting back to the every human being is a theologian statement, we are so because of the knowledge we possess of the being of God. We know some of His attributes such as all-knowing, all-powerful, and always present. Now let’s do a little heart probing. There is a difference between being a “head knowledge theologian” and a “heart knowledge theologian”. The first type doesn’t necessarily manifest itself in life transformation. The second type always leads to life transformation. And when we take today’s reference and meditate upon its ramifications, we will see just what type of theologian we really are in our daily lives. So let’s break down the two types of theologians based on the the one character trait we see in God from today’s reference – His omnipresence, or always present nature. First, the head knowledge theologian acknowledges this because it is simply true. He or she may give God the “lip service” without the “heart service” as Jesus said, “And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁷ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”” (**MARK 7:6-7**). The “head knowledge theologian” will acknowledge God sees them, but it doesn’t see the heart of God who sees them. If they did, they would see a heart that yearns to be sought for by His creatures. And that leads to the second theologian, the heart knowledge theologian. This one is what we want to be each day. The heart knowledge theologian, like the head knowledge theologian, acknowledges God’s omnipresence, but the response is poles apart. He or she becomes passionate and committed to taking today’s reference and saying, “Look at me, Lord, and see me seeking You.” That isn’t arrogance because it happens in the private recesses of the heart and not for public proclamation. What it really exhibits is a life living out the fourth Beatitude – “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” (**MATTHEW 5:6a**).

In striving to be a “heart knowledge theologian” we are seeking the heart of God, not a mere knowledge of God or the blessings of God. What happens as this starts to take root in us is we find ourselves being hungry for the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Holiness becomes not a necessity to see the Lord – “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (**HEBREWS 12:14**). Holiness becomes a delight in anticipation of seeing the Lord – “When He comes on that day to be glorified in His saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed” (**2 THESSALONIANS 1:10**). To be a “head knowledge theologian” is to have a cold heart toward God and others. To be a “heart knowledge theologian” is to be enflamed with love for God and others. Since each of us are theologians, take a few moments and determine what type we are in actuality.

PRAYER: “Oh, searcher of hearts, find in me a heart hungering and thirsting for righteousness.”

QUOTE: “Seeking God is not an easy pastime or effortless hobby given a few token minutes of time.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 14, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

PROVERBS 23:7a – For as he thinks in his heart so is he.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: RIGHT THINKING. Jesus gave a command about prayer that is profound, promising, and prompting – “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (**MARK 11:24**). He also said something that applies to prayer that is sad, real, and quenches prayer – “And He could do no mighty work there, except that he laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He marvelled because of their unbelief” (**MARK 6:5-6**).

Underlining these statements from our Lord is the contrast between belief and unbelief. And when it comes to the Christian faith, it begins in our mind. Belief is intelligent. It is based on reliable and objective evidence. John Trapp said, “It is the nature of faith to believe God upon His bare Word.” Belief begins in the mind comprehending Biblical truth which leads to an embracing of this truth through the will and inevitably, the affections. Unbelief also begins in the mind, but there are two distinctions with unbelief. There is willful, as we see in Thomas, “Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord’. But he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe.’” Notice Thomas’ declaration of unbelief – “I will never believe”. This was volitional. He chose unbelief. There is another form of unbelief showing just the opposite – “And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, ‘What are you arguing about with them?’ And someone from the crowd answered him, ‘Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.’” And he answered them, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.” And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” And Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible for one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (**MARK 9:14-24**). Unlike Thomas, this sensitive soul loathed his unbelief and knew the powerlessness within himself to be free from its crippling influence.

As we seek to live out the Christian life, and especially in the battle between belief and unbelief, right thinking is imperative since the mind is the first place we grasp truth and it is the mind, under the guidance of God’s Spirit, that steers us toward belief. Conversely, without right thinking, we will default to unbelief. Our minds gravitate to either position and there is no third landing spot. The only way toward right thinking is to be renewed in the mind by the right source – the Scriptures. We grow in faith by a regular input of the Bible in our minds leading to an output of the Bible in our lives – “Faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ” (**ROMANS 10:17**). And how important is this when it comes to believing prayer! Read the opening paragraph again and see where our thinking currently is toward our prayer lives. Is it blossoming because of a believing thinking pattern or floundering because of an unbelieving thinking pattern?

PRAYER: “Lord, teach me that mind transformation isn’t just Your work alone.”

QUOTE: “Unless we take captive our thoughts, they will take captive of us.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 15, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

PSALM 86:11 – Teach me Your way, O Lord: I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: THE ODDITY IN THE CHRISTIAN. Christians are a strange bunch. We make some pretty bold claims. Just consider three. First, we proclaim that we know God and His Son Jesus Christ who rose from the dead. That is foolishness to the world (**1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25**). Another thing of a bold nature, we proclaim we have God’s Word to the world, the only Word to the world, and that this book is infallible, inerrant, and sufficient for all of life (**2 TIMOTHY 3:16**). That, too, is absolute foolishness to the world. Finally, we tell the world this Jesus who rose from the dead is coming back and that without Him, no one goes to heaven (**2 THESSALONIANS 1:5-12**). Not only is that foolishness to the world, it is met with hostility that grows with each passing day.

There is something else that makes us Christians a strange bunch. We have two hearts residing within us. No, not two blood pumping organs, but two real hearts that are like two dogs fighting each other. The first heart we were born with is bad. Very bad. It is dead in sins and trespasses (**EPHESIANS 2:1-3**). To go even further, David describes just how bad and the source of this heart, “Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (**PSALM 51:5**). And there is no human surgeon who can perform the necessary heart surgery to make this heart better. That leads to the glorious truth of the second heart in the believer. It comes from the Great Physician and Creator – “I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me” (**JEREMIAH 32:39-41**).

It may seem I am being contradictory by stating the Christian has two hearts when the Lord, through the prophet Jeremiah, states He gives us one heart. However, I think we get the picture when we grasp three things. First, an understanding of how God looks at us in His Son, the Lord Jesus. God sees us perfect, new creatures in His Son – “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (**2 CORINTHIANS 5:17**). God sees the one heart He created in true righteousness and holiness (**EPHESIANS 4:23**). We struggle with seeing ourselves as God does. The next piece of clarifying information helping us to see the so called “two hearts in the Christian” is when we see the prayer of David in today’s reference that reveals a heart prone to division or “two hearts”. A final help is when we see and feel our Christian experience in the light of **ROMANS 7:18** – “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.” And in the light of **GALATIANS 5:17** – “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these things are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.” God sees us as one heart. We experience the tension of a divided heart where it feels like we indeed have two hearts – one is desirous to fear God and the other wants nothing to do with fearing God. And that is the Christian life.

How do we combat this ever present war inside of us? Two ways. First, we must learn to think and see ourselves as God does. That isn’t easy with our remaining sin and an accusing devil. The next thing is to pray today’s reference like David. A lot. Keep petitioning our God to make our heart experience one to fear Him and not divided by the various things causing the division. We are an oddity to the world and very often, even to ourselves because of the conflict of two hearts within.

PRAYER: “Oh, Lord, do what I cannot do when it comes to keeping my heart focused on You.”

QUOTE: “To walk in the fear of the Lord requires a heart united in the fear of the Lord.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 16, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

EXODUS 13:17-18 - When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, "Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt." But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: **THERE IS NO BY PASS.** I remember, while serving in the Navy, a challenging year of being a “weekend husband and father.” My family lived in Roanoke, a city in the southwestern portion of Virginia. I was stationed in Norfolk, a city in the southeastern portion of Virginia. Friday afternoons and late Sunday afternoons would find me traveling route 460 across Virginia for the couple hundred mile journey to and from home. Along the road were various towns. Approaching some of them were signs reading “460 Business Route” and “460 ByPass”. Same road, basically, but one took you through cities and the other allowed the easier and faster way to “bypass” cities avoiding congestion and slow travel. I never took the business route. I stayed on the bypass route because it was quick and easy.

In today’s reference, the Israelites are being led out of Egypt. And the way out wasn’t the “bypass” or “easy” route. It was the “business route” - “God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near (for my purpose today, I define “near” as the “bypass route or easy way”. Let’s re-read God’s leading of the Israelites in that light – “God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was the quick and easy bypass route.” The next verse in today’s reference reads, “But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea”. I define “way of wilderness” as the “difficult, inconvenienced, and slow business route” and it wasn’t easy. Let’s re-read God’s leading of the Israelites in that light also – “But God led the people around by the business route encountering breakdowns, construction, and slowdowns.”

The Christian life is not lived on the fast and easy bypass lanes of life. God leads us through the “business routes” or wilderness where we encounter trials. In the wilderness of spiritual struggles the Christian is formed, not in the open field of spiritual ease. Just a brief study of wilderness experiences in the Bible will show God’s choice servants went there and often stayed there for a long time. Read about Moses (**EXODUS 3:1-6**), David (**PSALM 63:1**), John the Baptist (**JOHN 1:23**), and even our Lord Jesus (**LUKE 4:1**).

As God leads us into our individual wildernesses, how do we initially react? We might be like the Israelites. I know my initial response isn’t “Amen, thanks for the wilderness.” I wish it were so, and hopefully I am getting there, but there is still too much Israelite in me and maybe in you too – “They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (**EXODUS 16:1-3**). The responses? First, we may find ourselves complaining. They did. Next, we might be longing for “perceived” easier times. They did. Lastly, we will feel God gave up on us. They did, though He didn’t. When God takes us on the “business route” or the wilderness path, one thing must be our map – ““You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed” (**EXODUS 15:13a**). We must remember that God led us here in steadfast love like He did the Israelites. It will ensure we complete the journey successfully.

PRAYER: “Lord, help me see that trips through the wilderness are for my good.”

QUOTE: “The pathway to heaven is always through the wilderness not the open field.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 17, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

1 CORINTHIANS 2:16 - For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: LEARNING TO REASON RIGHTLY. How is your reasoning power? I am not referring primarily to the daily work of discernment in making decisions in life. Both types of individuals, believers and unbelievers, have a reasoning power and they exercise it daily. Some believers have great common sense and reasoning power. Some don't. Some unbelievers have great common sense and reasoning power. Some don't. The reasoning power I want us to consider today involves the spiritual warfare that we engage with each day of our lives. We will do so by looking at two incidents when invitations were given to reason. One isn't good. The other is extremely good. First, the bad . . .

All was well in the garden. The man and his wife were in harmony and life was good. In fact, here is what God thought about it, “And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (**GENESIS 1:31a**). But it didn't last and it all began with an invitation to sit down for awhile and do some reasoning, “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths” (**GENESIS 3:1-7**).

Bad type of reasoning occurs when our enemy seeks to get us to doubt the working and Word of God. The seed of doubt remains in the heart of the believer and the devil will seek to drum up a conversation with us, like he did with Eve, and reason with us for the purpose of pouring a little water and fertilizer on that seed to make it sprout. Never begin a conversation with him. We will always lose. Martin Luther used to tell the devil, “Leave me alone, I am not your creature.” That is good advice when trials and temptations come and doubt of God's help begin to be whispered in our hearts through the reasoning power of the devil who is a master at conversation.

But there is another type of reasoning. The good type and that is between God and us, “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (**ISAIAH 1:18**). God invites us to a conversation to exercise our reasoning power for our good. He wants us to discuss our sins, burdens, cares, and all the other things in our life with Him. And the purpose is for Him to clean us up! He desires us to reason with Him so we may understand Him and His desire for our wellness.

When it comes to being a good communicator, exercising our reasoning power is important. It allows us to see things objectively and not primarily emotionally. Satan reasoned with Eve through her senses which led to doubting God's objective truth. God reasons with us through the mind, the heart, and the will in order for us to build trust in His objective truth. Let's strive to reason rightly and may it begin with refusing a conversation with the devil and seeking one with God.

PRAYER: “Lord, help me to reason with You and refuse to reason with the devil.”

QUOTE: “When we reason with the Lord it is always for our good, but with the devil always for our hurt.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 18, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

LUKE 1:46 – And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: WORSHIP BEGINS INDIVIDUALLY. Mention the word “worship” among a group of Christians. What happens? Commence a wide, deep, and lofty discussion. I don’t need to go into the range of topics found in this open field. We each have a little list of things. If we do enter into such a discussion, a couple of things might occur. Maybe not for you, but they have for me. We leave the discussion a little discouraged when we didn’t see eye to eye when words like “blended”, “contemporary”, and “traditional” are tossed out there and all the concepts associated with each. Another response might be the awareness of the volatile potential of such a discussion and simply avoid going down that path. When I see a discussion like that coming my way, it reminds me of a lake in Virginia where my family and I spent a vacation. Beautiful place and advertised as a great fishing hole. The problem was the snakes. Signs everywhere read, “No fishing from the bank due to presence of poisonous snakes.” YIKES!!! Only fishing from a boat was allowed. I sometimes think there are topics, like worship, we discuss among Christians where I see a sign reading, “Danger. Proceed with caution. Potential spiritual damage if humility and gentleness not guiding the discussion.”

When it comes to worship, it doesn’t begin in our churches on the Lord’s Day. It begins in our individual hearts when we awake each morning. Genuine private worship is what produces genuine corporate worship. Like everything in the Christian life, personal ownership, personal responsibility, and personal privilege is the starting point. What we are in public is what people think we are. What we are in private is what God and we know we are. Our simple goal in life is to ensure our private being matches our public being and nowhere is that more important than the supreme calling and privilege of every single Christian – worship.

In today’s reference, Mary provides a great model of what a private worshipper looks like. She does two things, not actions alone, but actions flowing from who she was. We may easily go through the external mechanics of worship. Who hasn’t come to church physically, but the pressures of the week behind, the sin clinging to us, the stresses of the week ahead, and the voice of an accusing devil made our worship simply a “going through the motion” experience? Though we may despise such external conformity, the reality of the Lord’s words about such an experience stings the soul – “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me” (**MATTHEW 15:8-9a**).

Mary’s actions toward her God and Savior were two. First, she magnified the Lord. Magnify does not mean “make great” for the Lord is already such. It means to ascribe or acknowledge such greatness which requires a heart that is experiencing His greatness. And where might that greatness be felt in the life of the believer? Here are just a few - the greatness of His mercy, love, grace, and faithfulness. We would be far more truthful worshippers on the Lord’s Day if we recalled His greatness to us everyday that fueled our private worship. Another thing we see in Mary is that she rejoiced in her Savior. Nothing will deaden the daily worship of the believer than to forget the saving work of Christ in the forgiveness of our sins. Peter warned about this in his second epistle. He tells us to “make every effort to supplement your faith” - please read the list of the supplements on your own – (**2 PETER 1:5-7**). He added these serious words of forgetfulness, “For whoever lacks these qualities is so short-sighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins” (**2 PETER 1:9**). Mary didn’t forget her Savior and her heart blossomed with true worship. And it was one on one – Mary and her God. True worship doesn’t start on Sunday when the clock reads, “time for the service to start”. No, it begins in the private closet where the individual soul seeks his or her God with the goal to magnify and rejoice in Him.

PRAYER: “Lord, forgive me when I fail to pursue private worship with consistency and sincerity.”

QUOTE: “One of the clearest evidences of a Spirit-filled life is a life of thanksgiving and praise.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 19, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

EPHESIANS 4:20-21 – But that is not the way you learned Christ assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: ARE WE BEING TAUGHT? The gospel accounts differ. Each one, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, have distinctions about them in giving accounts of our Lord’s life, mission, and Person. There are also a lot of commonalities and one is the description and action of Jesus, the teacher. Here’s a sample from each gospel. First, Matthew – “Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them” (**MATTHEW 5:1-2**). Next, we have Mark – “And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them” (**MARK 10:1**). The third gospel is from Dr. Luke – “Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat” (**LUKE 5:3**). Finally, the Apostle John weighs in with his evidence of Jesus, the teacher – “Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret” (**JOHN 18:20**).

Obviously, teachers instruct students. When it came to Jesus, the teacher, He did not lack for an audience eager to hear Him – “On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret” (**LUKE 5:1**). As we consider Jesus, the teacher, His focus was on the Word of God. The crowd, who pressed upon Him, came for what? It was the Word of God. When it comes to our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, are we progressing in our understanding of who He is? Is there a growing grasp in grace and knowledge of Him (**2 PETER 3:18**) in His roles as our King, able to subdue our foes and sins, as our Priest, always interceding for us (**HEBREWS 7:25**), and our Prophet, instructing us in the Word of God? Unless we are growing in these understandings, it is likely we will remain spiritual children and always in danger of being tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine (**EPHESIANS 4:14**). We may acknowledge Him as King and Priest, but what about Prophet in His teaching role instructing us in the scriptures?

Two guys on the Road to Emmaus grasped this truth of Jesus, the teacher. He became Jesus, their teacher. Their experience expanded to the other disciples and reveals this to be the normal expectation of a disciple of Jesus Christ. In this account, **LUKE 24:13-49**, we read two references to what Jesus did as their teacher. First, He interpreted the scriptures – “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself” (**LUKE 24:27**). The word “interpreted” means to “unfold the meaning of what is being said.” It has an “objective feel” to it. Like, “Just give me the facts.” The second reference reads, “They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the scriptures?’” (**LUKE 24:32**). The word “opened” is strong. It means “to open one’s soul, i.e. to rouse in one the faculty of understanding or the desire of learning.” This is personal. This is all about a classroom of two - Jesus and the individual where interpretation becomes life-changing understanding. This is where the faculty to student ratio is 1:1 and that ratio is Jesus and us – alone and individual with Jesus, the teacher, who is always available. And since we are talking availability, what about us, as His students? Could today’s reference be said of us? Are we being taught by Jesus, the teacher so we could call Him, Jesus, our teacher?

PRAYER: “Lord, help me to see You not only as my Savior, but my King, Priest, and Prophet.”

QUOTE: “Unless time is spent at the Teacher’s feet there will be no learning from the Teacher’s Word.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 20, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

ROMANS 5:20 – Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased grace abounded all the more.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: SEEING THE BAD TO KNOW THE GOOD. The late Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman used to tell of a Methodist preacher who often spoke on the subject of sin. He minced no words, but defined sin as “that abominable thing that God hates.” A leader in his congregation came to him on one occasion and urged him to cease using the ugly word. Said he to the preacher, “We wish you would not to speak so plainly about sin. Our young people, hearing you, will be more likely to indulge in sin. Call it something else, as ‘inhibition’, ‘error’, or a ‘mistake’, or even a ‘twist in our nature’”. “I understand what you mean,” remarked the preacher as he went to his desk and brought out a little bottle to show the man. “This bottle contains strychnine. You will see that the red label here reads ‘Poison. Fatal if swallowed.’ Would you suggest that I change the label to read, ‘Wintergreen?’”

The danger we face in seeking to know and experience God’s grace and love is that we must begin with understanding how heinous our sin really is to God. I believe it is quite true that we will never know the wonders and depths of God’s grace and love until we have plummeted into the ugliness and depths of our sin. That is not a call to a morbid introspection that leaves one so overwhelmed that our spiritual eyes are blinded to see the saving beauty of our Lord Jesus Christ. A proper sight of sin and grace is an exclusive work of the Spirit and we are to seek Him for both. In Paul’s “Mount Everest of theology” known as the Epistle to the Romans, he described the awfulness of sin in these words, “Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure” (ROMANS 7:13). He actually calls our sin, “sinful beyond measure.” I like the King James Version on this one. It reads, “Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.” The word “exceeding”, besides meaning “beyond measure”, also means to “throw beyond others”. The Apostle Paul tells us that the giving of God’s law was precisely for that purpose – to show us how awful sin really is and our total inability to do anything with it or about it.

So, how bad do we see our sin? Let’s go beyond the “simple sins” of impatience, outbursts of anger, or worry. Let’s schedule time soon and do this exercise. First, read SLOWLY the Ten Commandments (**EXODUS 20:1-17**). Then, go back again and read each one SLOWLY, examining ourselves with this question – “Am I guilty of ignoring this command or breaking this command in thought or action?” For instance, commandment three – “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain” (**EXODUS 20:3**). Is there looseness in our speech that violates this command? Have we considered that the slang “Oh, my gosh” may actually be a violation of this command? As we work through these commands, adding the two greatest commands, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself” (**MATTHEW 22:37-39**), we will begin to see the purity and majesty of God’s law. We will also begin to feel its ability to show us how bad and ugly our sin is by ignoring and breaking such spiritual beauty found in God’s law. However, that is the bad part which takes us to the latter part of today’s reference – the good part. When we see sin as it really is, then we begin to see grace as it really is – abounding and increasing, leading us to conquer the ugliness of sin in both thought and action.

PRAYER: “Lord, open my eyes to see the ugliness of my sin overwhelmed by the beauty of Your grace.”

QUOTE: “Sin must be seen as the worse thing in the entire world if we desire to experience God’s love.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 21, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

COLOSSIANS 1:3-5 – We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: THE POWER OF HOPE. Hope is often viewed as a desire for a favorable outcome of a circumstance to happen. Each of us has used the statement often through life, “I hope that (we may each finish the sentence). There is Biblical support for such a view of hope. The Apostle Paul, writing to Titus, called our hope “blessed” – “Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (**TITUS 2:13**). Peter describes our hope as “living” – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (**1 PETER 1:3**). The writer of Hebrews shows our faith is inseparably linked to hope – “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (**HEBREWS 11:1**). In fact, if our faith doesn’t include hope for the forgiveness of sins in the past, power over sin in the present, and removal from the presence of sin in the future, I suggest we just abandon the whole thing called Christianity. It is worthless. But let’s ensure we keep the hope in its proper place. It is hope in the Person of our Lord Jesus and when it comes to saving faith, we must always remember, the hope linked to faith doesn’t save, Christ saves. Let’s not get trapped into thinking our faith saves. Faith attaches us to Him who saves and it isn’t the amount of faith that matters, but the presence of faith that matters. However, we are talking about hope today, not faith, though I am not sure we can rightly cut up the pie of faith and hope into separate pieces.

Hope, like faith, is both active and passive. The passive part we’ve pretty well got down. We wait in the certain hope of Christ’s help for each day and of His return for us any day. The active part we might need a little work on. To view the Christian life as merely a decision for Christ and a coasting to heaven misses the Biblical understanding of both salvation and discipleship. Paul called the Christian life anything but easy. He used terms like “fight”, “race”, “wrestling match”, “boxing bout” and an intense “conflict” (**2 TIMOTHY 4:7; EPHESIANS 6:10-12; 1 CORINTHIANS 9:26-27; GALATIANS 5:17**) to describe the normal experience of the true believer. Unless these realities are felt in the soul of an individual, and the intensity varies with each of us, we need to search our hearts for the reason for this lack of spiritual warfare. Warren Wiesbe said, “The Christian life is not a playground; it is a battle-ground” and there is where the power of hope comes to our aid in the war.

In today’s reference, Paul gives thanks to God for the Colossian believers because of two things evident in their lives – faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and love for other Christians. Go back and read the cause of those two spiritual realities. Paul wrote, “because of the hope laid up for you in heaven”. Hope empowered faith and love in the Colossians. In another letter Paul placed these three virtues as inseparable realities in the Christian experience – “So now faith, hope, and love abide” (**1 CORINTHIANS 13:13a**). Why was hope so powerful in the Colossians and supposed to be so in us? It takes us into the realm of heavenly-mindedness. It is the heavenly-minded person who lives out faith in Christ by obedience to His Word that always includes sacrificial investment in the lives of His people. Take away hope, we lose heavenly-mindedness to be replaced by the only alternative – earthly-mindedness where faith in Christ and sacrificial love do not dwell. Yes, hope is powerful. It is the energy that propels a Christian into a life of active faith and sacrificial love for Jesus Christ and His church.

PRAYER: “Lord, make me a person who not only knows the blessed hope but lives the blessed hope.”

QUOTE: “Biblical hope always produces spiritual fruit.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 22, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

COLOSSIANS 1:3-8a – We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: BE LIKE THEM. It was early Saturday morning. I had a nice cup of coffee beside me. My dog and morning companion, Jake, snuggled up in a chair beside me. Everyone was sound asleep, even the world outside was quiet, except with an occasional howl of a dog that didn't even move Jake. The setting was perfect for a little time in my Bible. I find myself in today's reference.

In reading this opening by Paul, I immediately was impressed with the testimony of the Colossians. They were commended for their faith in Christ Jesus and their love for the saints. My impression of them quickly gave way to depression in me. I thought, “I sure would like to be like them.” That state of “woe is me” was almost instantaneously challenged with the still small voice whispering, “Then, be like them.” Being a task-oriented guy, I responded, “Okay, how?” I didn't hear a thunderous voice from heaven or a mystically warm feeling inside, but I did go back and read today's reference and the “how to be a Colossian” is laid out pretty nicely. They worked at it. They didn't get the “heavenly vitamin” and “presto”, instant testimony of faith in Christ and love for the saints. They put in the nitty-gritty hard work that the development of our faith requires.

First, they heard the gospel of the Lord Jesus – “you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel”. Don't slide by this saying, “I've heard the gospel before, no big deal.” There are two types of hearing when it comes to the gospel – hearers only and hearers and doers. Jesus, quoting **ISAIAH 6:9-10**, said, “You will indeed hear but never understand.” The difference in the two types of hearing is what we do with what we hear. If there is no obedience coming forth from what we heard, well, we didn't really hear. Jesus commends the hearers of His Word who become doers of His Word – the Colossians was hearers and doers, but Jesus asks those who only hear, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’, and not do what I tell you?” (**LUKE 6:46**).

Another application we see in the Colossians which formed their vibrant testimony is that they never ceased to be learners – “You heard it (the gospel) and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant” (**COLOSSIANS 1:6-7**). The evidence of the Colossians always being in the school of Christ's discipleship class is that the gospel was bearing fruit in their lives – “it is bearing fruit and growing—as it also does among you” (**COLOSSIANS 1:6**). To paraphrase our Lord, “If you abide in me, you will bear fruit, more fruit, and much fruit” (**JOHN 15:1-9**).

When it comes to being a learner at the feet of Jesus, there isn't one of us who would claim to have “arrived”. That isn't our problem. My problem, maybe yours, is simply the allowance of too much temporal things to cause me to “skip class” when it comes to being under the tutelage of Jesus Christ in His Word. If Jesus is just getting my “leftover” time each day, I won't be like the Colossians. Our Teacher deserves the “best time” of the day, not the “leftover time” of the day. To be like the Colossians will require the hard work of saying “no” to good things to ensure we are able to say “yes” to the best things and that being a hearer and doer of the gospel and a continual learner at the feet of Jesus.

PRAYER: “Lord, open my eyes to see Your gift of faith is to be exercised, stretched, and tried.”

QUOTE: “Faith not only obeys the Word in service to the Lord but studies the Word to know the Lord.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 23, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

PSALM 51:10 - Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: DOING CHRISTIANS OR BEING CHRISTIANS? I find it isn't too difficult to “do” Christianity. I think I have the routine and language down. Go to church? Check. Read my Bible? Check. Leave a tract on a restaurant table? Check. Visit someone who needs a lift? Check. Discuss the essentials of the faith? Check. Generally speaking, all of us would come to the same conclusion that “doing” Christianity doesn't present too much of a challenge. Going through the motions comes naturally to us in many routines of life. And going through the motions may easily slip into our lives as Christians where the ease of “doing” Christianity is just that – easy.

What we will find to be extremely hard, actually impossible, is the “being” of Christianity. The “doing” of the Christian life doesn't pose much difficulty. Give us a list of “spiritual things” to do and we will get it done. Who hasn't gotten up on a Sunday morning and gone to church out of a dutiful habit instead of an overflowing desire in the heart to meet God and His people? That would be an example of a “doing” Christian going through the motions. When it comes to the “being” of the Christian life, we encounter a huge problem. It is called inability. We can't get there on our own. This is an inside work of the heart that manifests itself as an outside work in a life. And what is that inability? Sin. We battle sin and sin allows for the “doing” of a Christian life but adamantly opposes the “being” of a Christian – “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” (**GALATIANS 5:17**). The “doing” of a Christian life, without the power of the “being” of the Christian life is no threat to the kingdom of darkness. “Doing” is in the strength of self. “Being” is in the strength of self abiding in Christ. See the difference? Feel the difference in your daily life? And remember, sin wants no part of us pursuing an abiding life because the abiding life is a Christ-centered and influential life for Him. Here is a good illustration how sin keeps our heart from diligently seeking an abiding life or a “being” life instead of a “doing” life. Ever wonder how a worm gets inside an apple? We may think the little fellow burrows in from the outside. Not true. Scientists have discovered that the worm comes from the inside. But, how does he get in there? Simple. An insect lays an egg in the apple blossom. Sometime later the worm hatches in the heart of the apple, then eats his way out. Sin, like the worm, begins in the heart and “eats” its way out through our thoughts, words and actions. And when it does its work, we become a non-abiding believer. The striving to abide in Christ gets sidetracked. We become “doing” Christians instead of “being” or abiding Christians.

In John's gospel, the familiar “abiding” passage is found in chapter fifteen. Within these beautiful and challenging commands of Jesus, He points us to three areas in which we are to abide. First, He says to “abide in Me” (**JOHN 15:4**). We obey this command by learning “God awareness” or the practice of His presence throughout our days. Next, He said, “abide in my words” (**JOHN 15:7**). Here is the determining factor between “doing” the Christian life and “being” in the Christian life. Is the Bible our daily nourishment guiding us in all areas of life? No consistent intake of the Bible will ensure a lack of consistent output of Biblical living. When this happens, we are “doing” Christians, not “being” or abiding Christians. No Word equals no growth. Finally, our Lord tells us to “abide in my love” (**JOHN 15:9**). To abide in His love includes delighting in what He delights in and pursuing what He pursued – His Father's glory. When we abide in all three areas, then, and only then, does the “doing” of Christianity really matter. The “doing” then flows from our “being” or abiding and that defines true Christianity.

PRAYER: “Lord, help me to pay attention to my heart with greater diligence today.”

QUOTE: “An appointment for a heart check-up should be made and kept daily.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 24, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

JOHN 1:16 - And from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: **HOW GREAT IS GRACE?** Quick quiz. John Newton. What comes to mind when we hear his name? If you don't know, that's okay. You will know from now on when the quiz pops up again. More than likely, we shout, “He wrote probably the most famous hymn of all time – “Amazing Grace”. Correct. John Newton wrote from personal experience just how amazing grace was in his life. Read or sing the hymn soon in your quiet time, but before that, think for a moment how amazing grace is in OUR lives. To sing Newton's hymn is wonderful. To experience and live Newton's hymn defines the Christian life. Have we taken the time to be amazed at just how great God's grace is as we walk with Him through the trials and tribulations of life? (**ACTS 14:21-22**). Settle in for a moment and ponder five aspects of God's grace which should thrill our souls and teach us a little more about His amazing grace.

First, the greatness of **common grace** – “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (**ACTS 17:24-25**). God gives grace to all, even those who reject Him daily. Prior to our salvation, God's common grace took care of us also. He provided all we needed for life even as we gave no thought to Him. Next, the marvel of **saving grace** – “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (**EPHESIANS 2:8-9**). Here is what prompted Newton to write his famous hymn. Common grace becomes “particular” or saving grace to individuals who the Father draws and gives to His Son as they respond with His gifts of repentance and faith (**JOHN 6:37; ACTS 11:18**) A third amazing truth about grace is **training grace** – “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (**TITUS 2:11-12**). Aren't we glad God doesn't just save us by grace and then leave us to figure out living and serving Him on our own? No, He gives training grace or equipping grace to teach us how to live the new life saving grace brought about. Then, we see the wonder of **restraining grace** – “And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, “Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife.” Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, “Lord, will you kill an innocent people? Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.” Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her” (**GENESIS 20:2-6**). This is a wonderful picture of God's grace overruling in a life and preventing sin. Abimelech attempted to take some credit for not greatly sinning against God, but notice who actually restrained him. It was God by His restraining grace. We need to rejoice to think how many times God has prevented us from dishonoring Him by His restraining grace. Finally, perhaps the greatest truth of God's amazing grace is His **sufficient grace** – “But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’” (**2 CORINTHIANS 12:9**). When we think we cannot go on, we go on. When we think the fight is too strong, we fight on. When we are weary in serving, we serve on because of sufficient grace.

Let's not only sing Newton's hymn in our churches, but let's live it in the daily experiences of life!

PRAYER: “Lord, teach me the depths of Your amazing grace.”

QUOTE: **THOMAS GOODWIN**, “Grace is the fullness of love.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 25, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

PSALM 111:2 – Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: THREE STAGES OF BIBLE STUDY. I recently read something titled “In Which Stage Are You?” concerning the stages of Bible study. The little article went like this, “There are three stages of Bible study: first, the cod-liver oil stage, when you take it like medicine, because it is good for you; second, the shredded wheat biscuit stage, dry, but nourishing; third, the peaches and cream stage.” Not a bad way to categorize us when it comes to our attitudes and approaches toward the Word of God.

Allow me to elaborate a little on the three stages. Are we coming to the Bible like taking an awful dose of needed medicine? I recall putting down some liquid medicine in a tiny cup that simply made me shudder. It was so horrible tasting but I needed it. We may approach our Bible, not thinking it is horrible, but more out of duty and necessity than any delight. We may call this the “medicine approach”. The second stage is like coming to a meal that is very good for us, yet, it just lacks the drawing power of one of our favorite dishes. Let my wife tell me a juicy, meaty supper of spaghetti will await my arrival at home and I am feeling pretty good about dinner. On the other hand, tell me it is Mexican night. I either just felt led to fast or I will endure a few morsels to stop the growling in my stomach. Not a dinner I am anticipating. It can be the same with our approach toward the Bible. We need it, but may not desire it. Unlike the medicine approach, this doesn’t leave a bad taste in us; we simply just have no taste in us. We may call this type of Bible study the “survival approach”. Finally, we come to the best of all stages. This is where we want to go and stay in our time in the Word. We may call this the “delight approach” where we “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (**MATTHEW 5:6**) and a longing for the spiritual milk of the Word – “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk of the Word, that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good” (**1 PETER 2:2-3**).

If we find ourselves in the “medicine” or “survival” approaches to our time in the Bible, how do we get to the “delight approach” when we open our Bibles? Consider two things from today’s reference. First, pray for God to give us a glimpse of the greatness of His Word. The Psalmist wrote, “Great are the works of the Lord” and one of the greatest works of the Lord is the giving to us of His Word. David reveals his understanding of the greatness of God’s Word like this, “More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb” (**PSALM 19:10**). That is a heart of someone who is living in the “delight approach” toward God’s Word. And the best place to get it, keep it, and grow in it is by the earnestness of prayer. J. C. Ryle said of prayer, “We must wrestle earnestly in prayer, like men contending with a deadly enemy for life.” When it comes to having the “delight approach” to our Bibles the two deadliest enemies are the busy lives we live and the lukewarm hearts we allow. Only earnestness in prayer will get us into the “delight approach” in our Bible times.

The first thing, then, is prayer. We seek God to do what only He can do – change our hearts. The second thing is our responsibility. Notice the Psalmist says of such effort, “studied by all who delight in them”. The word “studied” actually means “sought out” and directs us to personal diligence. It would be like searching for something precious to us and we will not stop looking till we find it. When it comes to Bible study, it would be like searching for something of great value to us that prompts such a diligence that we will not stop looking till it is discovered. That is the “delight approach” to God’s Word. So, what stage are we in? Let’s seek the Holy Spirit to affirm and direct us toward the “delight approach”.

PRAYER: “Lord, may the greatness of Your works so move me to study them with delight.”

QUOTE: “What we delight in most will get the best of our efforts and time.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 26, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

PSALM 111:10 – The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: PRACTICE. PRACTICE. PRACTICE. It is as old as the hills of West Virginia where I grew up. The old adage, “practice makes perfect.” I heard it, committed to it, and saw the benefits of it. Not that it is completely true. No one achieves perfection in anything in this life. I think it should be changed to “practice makes one better”. All of us know the value of practice. Whether in athletics, the development of a musical talent, our places of employment, or really just about anything in life where we seek excellence, the commitment to practice is a must. The desire to achieve demands the sweat of action. Solomon describes quite frankly the type of person who is all about desire without the necessary work or practice to make the desire reality – “The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor” (**PROVERBS 21:25**). I remember a really brief conversation with my folks when as a teenager I voiced a desire, “I would really like a car.” My mom, without hesitation, replied, “Great. Get a job.” Desire alone didn’t produce a vehicle for me. Something had to be added to the desire – work. And when it comes to walking in the fear of the Lord, desire alone won’t make it so.

In today’s reference, the Psalmist shows us that the fear of the Lord isn’t something we have only, but something we work out or practice daily. When it comes to understanding the fear of the Lord which leads to the proper knowledge to practice the fear of the Lord, what are we really talking about? How do we go beyond the simple term of “reverential awe” in our understanding of the fear of the Lord? By the way, that isn’t a bad definition; just don’t let it become a routine definition without meditating upon its depth of meaning. As we consider this practice of the fear of the Lord, let’s look at it from the standpoint of why the Lord gives us His fear in the first place. In the Christian life, all of the Christian life, the “why” question is most important. Asking ourselves “why” in everything we do for the Lord and with the Lord checks our motives. We still struggle with inward corruption and without seeking “why” we pray, serve, read our Bibles, and go to church, we may slip into self-deceiving and self-serving motives. The Puritan Thomas Brooks was right when he said, “Everything we do is tainted with sin” and he was speaking to believers. That is why we need our Lord Jesus as our High Priest (**HEBREWS 4:14-16**).

So, why did the Lord give us His fear that is to lead us to practicing it? Listen to the prophet Jeremiah revealing to us why the Lord plants His fear in our hearts - “I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me” (**JEREMIAH 32:39-40**). Two reasons or two “whys” we have the fear of God. First, it is for our good and the good of our families – “that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them”. I wonder how often we take our simple definition of the fear of God, “reverential awe”, and ponder that it is for our good. What grace there is in a God who looks out for our good by giving us His fear! Another “why” given by the Lord is so we will not walk away from Him – “And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me”. Not only does He treat us with goodness but gives us the very thing we need to stay close to Him! As we grasp these marvelous gifts of His grace, we will want to practice, practice, practice walking in His fear for our good and to keep us sheep who stay close to the Shepherd and not wander away into dangerous pastures. And without His fear written on our hearts, we will head for those pastures – fast!

PRAYER: “Lord, teach me to walk in Your fear all the days of my life.”

QUOTE: “Without the proper fear of the Lord we will never know the proper love of the Lord.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 27, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

PSALM 112:1 – Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in His commandments!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: SEEKING HAPPINESS. Are we happy people? If so, why so? If not, why not? The desire for happiness lies in the heart of every human being. The pursuit of happiness is sought by every human being. Sadly, it is sought too often in all the wrong places. Pleasure is what we were created for and to long for it is a God-given desire. When it comes to the fulfillment of our happiness, we have two options to pursue. The first option is simply a smoke screen offering happiness and it delivers, for a moment, but then it wrecks the soul creating everything but happiness – “By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin” (**HEBREWS 11:24-25**). Our Bibles give us ample examples of those who tasted the pleasures of sin for a short season only to feel its pain and unhappiness afterwards. And as believers, we know the experience too! What looks good and tastes good doesn’t necessarily bring happiness. Our first parents may testify to this painful truth (**GENESIS 3:6**). The second option to where happiness may be sought is the right place, the only place, and provides the true satisfaction we were created for – “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (**PSALM 16:11**). Our happiness rests in our abiding in our Lord Jesus Christ. Our fellowship with Him is the happiness we are to seek. So, how do we seek such a soul-satisfying happiness? The answer is found in today’s reference – walking in the fear of the Lord and greatly delighting in His commandments. Today, we will focus on the latter source of happiness – a great delight in His commandments.

Jesus tells us we are to “abide in His words” (**JOHN 15:7**) and the Apostle Paul exhorts us to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (**COLOSSIANS 3:16a**). In order for both of those to become a “happy reality” in our lives, we need to measure our level of delight in God’s commandments. The Psalmist said that he “greatly delights” in God’s commandments. Not just a delight, but a sustainable pleasure that reaches to lofty heights of delight. Think for a moment of something we greatly delight in. How much time do we invest in the enjoyment of that delight? How do our schedules of life’s events reflect a commitment to pursuing this delight? What about the level of thought we give to the delight? When we greatly delight in something or doing something or in someone, there is no question that object, thing, or person gets top billing when it comes to the allocation of our resources of time, energy, and thought. We will ensure the pursuit of our great delight gets the best of our efforts.

Now measure that temporal delight which brings us pleasure and happiness with today’s reference. How does our desire for the Word of God compare with the desire and investment of that earthly delight we so greatly treasure? It doesn’t take long to answer that question. We may find ourselves being affirmed by the Spirit that today’s reference is something we each could write – “I do greatly delight in His commandments”. The way for that to be true is simply to see the time invested in the Word and the effort expended to obey the Word. Or perhaps, we need to confess that we may “delight in His commandments” but lack a “great delight in His commandments.” Should that be the case, aren’t we glad for the grace of repentance and restoration? God desires for us to be happy and has given us the way, the only way. In Him by His Word. May we become more a people who take “great delight” in His commandments!

PRAYER: “Lord, forgive me when my delight in You is only words not in acts of diligently seeking You.”

QUOTE: “The measurement of our delight in the Lord reveals the maturity of our walk with the Lord.”

The QBC Daily Nugget February 28, 2010

“The Rules of the Lord are true and righteous. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Psalm 19:9b-10a)

MARK 9:24 - Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: THE BATTLE FOR WORSHIP. John Newton was not only famous for penning “Amazing Grace”, likely the most familiar of all hymns. He was also a great preacher and his sermons worth reading. He preached a sermon titled “Guilt Removed and Peace Restored” from one verse found in **PSALM 51**. It was verse fifteen – “O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.” Newton preached that often believers may find themselves in need of the Lord to do what David prayed for – “to open our lips that we may show forth Your praise”. He described this believer as “the doubting believer” or the “unbelieving believer” who is struggling when it comes to offering acceptable worship and in need of a divine work in the soul. Not that this great man of God claimed the believer becomes an unbeliever by denying the faith. The man in today’s reference didn’t embrace his unbelief, he loathed it. Newton’s point is made in these words from his sermon, “Through a sense of past guilt, a sight of present corruptions, the prevalence of unbelief, the workings of a legal spirit, the want of a clear apprehension of the Lord’s way of justifying the ungodly, and from the force of Satan’s temptations, who is exceeding busy to press all these things upon the heart, their mouths are stopped. They cannot believe, and therefore they cannot speak. However, there are seasons and intervals when they obtain a little glimpse of hope, and then the whole desire of their souls is expressed in the words of my text, ‘O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.’”

The Apostle Paul told the Corinthian believers he was not unaware of the tactics of the devil – “so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs” (**2 CORINTHIANS 2:11**). In Newton’s sermon, he identifies a few tactics of the devil which prevent us from offering acceptable worship to the Lord both in our private lives and corporate settings in our churches. But before we consider a few of those tactics, we must establish that worship, acceptable worship, is only made possible by God. We don’t create and execute an order of worship. God must open our lips, as David prayed, and it must be in accordance to His Word, not our preferences. Worship is reserved for God alone and to be orchestrated by God alone. Now some of the tactics Newton reveals which keep us from worship. He preached six of them, but we will only cover the first three. Let me encourage you to go back and read the portion of his sermon above and pray through each of them to include the three we will not cover. First, Newton mentions “a sense of past guilt” as a source silencing the worshipper. We know we are in the chains of past guilt when we fail to preach the gospel to ourselves all the time. The devil is a master at crippling believers over forgiven sin. It is only a constant reminder of the blood of Christ that breaks these chains and sets the worshipper free (**REVELATION 12:10-11**). Next, Newton preached on the presence of our remaining sin as a silencer to the worshipper. The only way out of this ball and chain to the soul is to keep preaching to yourself justification by faith. If we don’t tell ourselves “imputed righteousness of Christ is mine”, remaining sin will strangle any attempt to worship. A third tactic Newton spoke of was the prevalence of unbelief. Don’t think it is easy to believe. It takes grace to believe and the way to get there is to plead like the man did in today’s reference. Pray away unbelief.

Worship is a privilege, responsibility, and a battle. It requires a cherishing of the privilege, a commitment to the responsibility, and a diligence in the war to ensure we are living out our victory in Jesus, to defeat the tactics of the devil who would desire nothing more than to keep us from battling for acceptable worship.

PRAYER: “Lord, help me to see true worship isn’t easy but requires a diligent warfare on my part.”

QUOTE: “If God is worthy of our worship, then He is worthy to receive our best efforts toward worship.”