

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)



January 2012 Archive



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The QBC Daily Nugget January 2, 2012

“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)

JUDE 24-25 – Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: ON A DIVINE LEASH. My dog abounded with energy this morning. It was early on the day after Christmas and time for Jake’s morning ritual – the walk. As I bundled up and headed outside, I looked around the neighborhood and listened. Quiet. Complete silence. I didn’t even hear any of Jake’s friends bark. It reminded me of the first line of the well-known poem, *“Twas the Night Before Christmas”* by Clement Moore, but with a little twist. I am sure we know the first line but here it is anyway – *“Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.”* I altered it a little as Jake and I began our walk – *“Twas the morning after Christmas, when all through the neighborhood, not a creature was stirring, not even a vehicle.”* But Jake sure was stirring. Must have been the chill in the air or maybe it was energy coming from the pieces of Christmas dinner ham I slipped him last night. Whatever the cause, he pulled hard on the leash sending me some messages, “Hey, I know you are the master, but cut me some slack. I want to explore that bush. I want to go over in that yard. Please, give me a little leash. I’ll be good.” Even though Jake’s tugs provide me some needed arm workout, we both knew who was in control. I was sovereign over his movements. It wasn’t long till the pulls lessened and he submitted to my leading and we enjoyed the exercise.

I sometimes liken my Heavenly Father’s care as me being on a “Divine leash”. Look into your life also and see if that isn’t true. We still battle remaining sin and that battle isn’t easy – *“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)*. And one aspect of that battle is we too often want our own way in life and thus pull against the desires of our God. Here is one area showing how we are prone to want to tug against God’s direction in our lives – strained relationships with other believers. I have chosen this one for two reasons – first, out of personal, painful experience and because allowing this to exist will poison a church fellowship. We must strive to *“maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-6)* and what message does it tell the world about Jesus and His church, if we cannot even exist among ourselves in love, peace, and mutual edification?

This is how I view strained relationships in the need of forgiveness and reconciliation that are pulling against the Divine leash. We dig our spiritual heels in and say, “I am not in the wrong. I don’t have to do anything. It is the other person’s fault.” That is pulling on the Divine leash that calls us to set aside our pride and defensiveness and exhibit humility and love. That doesn’t mean we are responsible for the reactions of others in our attempts of forgiveness and restoration. However, if we harbor bitterness and exhibit a judgmental spirit toward them for their response or lack of response, two things will happen. We will have a miserable spiritual walk for we have forgotten how merciful and longsuffering God was and is with us and we are failing to be like Him. Another thing will happen is it will spill over into our other relationships. We will be distracted to where even our healthy relationships will be impacted due to being so occupied and maybe even obsessed with the strained one. God calls us to love. He calls us to forgive. He calls us to “forget things that are past” and if we don’t strive for those, we will feel the pull, the painful pull of the Divine leash on our hearts. Are there any such relationships in our lives right now that we need to address? Being on a Divine leash is a positive. It means God will preserve us all the way home to heaven. It also means He won’t allow us to continue in ways that are displeasing to Him and especially in relationships. I put Jake on a leash because I love and want to protect him. God is so much more in His love to us and that by putting on us His Divine leash.

PRAYER: “Lord, I praise You for grace that not only saves but keeps and protects me from my always wandering self.”

QUOTE: “God’s love covers us with not only the garments of salvation but His protection in our battle against sinful self.”

The QBC Daily Nugget
January 3, 2012

“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 17:1 – And after six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: WITH HIM TIME. Did you ever wake up in the morning, do a mental check of all that has to be done from in home responsibilities, to errands to run, to appointments to keep, to work to do, and events to attend and simply sigh? I do and my sigh is a form of communication that says, “I have way too much to do and just not enough time to do it.” Though my sigh may be telling me that, it isn’t really true. We cannot possibly believe that our good and sovereign God would design our lives to be so engulfed with things to do and places to go that we exist in perpetual states of physical and spiritual exhaustion. No, I don’t think that is the abundant life Jesus promises us (**John 10:10**). Even though our Lord Jesus knew the high and costly physical demands to do the will of His Father, He did not lack the spiritual fellowship with His Father which would prove to be sources of delight and strength to do the will of His Father. And the same applies to us, His children. Service for the Lord is extremely demanding for two reasons. The first reason is because of the incredible privilege of the high calling. The One who calls us to serve is the King of Kings and to serve Him appropriately means to serve Him with our best efforts. He is worth nothing less. The second reason why service for the Lord is demanding is because service is people-oriented not task-oriented. Tasks are important but people more so. Tasks normally have a start and an ending. We do the task, then it is over. Not so with serving people. People last forever and our service to them in the church will always exist till Jesus comes or we go to heaven. We are needy people always in need of each other to help one another in our spiritual journey. Proper service for the King of Kings is people-oriented with no break in the service.

As exhausting as service for the Lord is, how do we maintain faithfulness and run the race till the end? We need the second truth in our Lord’s life when He walked upon the earth and served people – consistent spiritual fellowship with God. I call this “with Him time” like the disciples enjoyed with Jesus in today’s reference. And without “with Him time”, we will fill up our time with things and events that just might not be the Lord’s desire for us. “With Him time” is taking our hearts and minds into heaven before we take them into the world.

Let me ask this question . . . did we start our day, not like the opening of today’s nugget with the all-revealing sigh, but with prayer? Prayer something like the counsel I got from a very wise pastor who once told me, “Jim, start your day by asking God what He would have you to do today and just today.” Did we lay before the Lord our plans, our desires, and our agendas and ask Him to bless it? Or did we come to our Father and say, “Father, lead me by Your plans, Your desires, and Your agenda today. Your will be done, not mine.” That does not mean we don’t plan our day or seek to be good stewards of our time. What it does mean is we are sensitive to God’s Spirit and Word that might just alter what we want to do for the far more important what God wants us to do – like spend time with a hurting brother or sister, like attend that Bible study, like go to prayer meeting, like visit a shut-in, like have family devotions, like give a gospel tract to the grocery clerk, like write a note or email of thanksgiving to a servant of the Lord who ministers to us. God speaks loud and clear to us and He will do so each and every day. Whether we hear Him is determined by how we value and commit to “with Him time.”

PRAYER: “Father, help me to see my Christianity is not to be lived in isolation but community with other believers.”

QUOTE: “Jesus did not put us in His church for our sake, but for His sake and the sake of His other sheep.”

The QBC Daily Nugget January 4, 2012

“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 JOHN 4:16 – So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: HOW DO WE KNOW HIM? As many of you know, we have a little outreach in our church centered around basketball. We open up our facilities for guys to come and play basketball a few times a week. It has opened opportunities to share the Word and develop relationships with many young and even “old” people. In the course of the evenings, we have what is called “halftime”. It is during that time, we stop play, gather around and share the Bible with those in attendance. During halftime last night, I opened up with a question, “What is God like?” Immediate silence and no movement in the crowd, but silence doesn’t bother me so I waited. Then a hand slowly went up and a response came out from one of the guys, “God is an ‘old man’ version of Jesus.” That was thought provoking. Many do hold God as a “grandfather figure” seated in heaven. That opened the door a little. Another response, “He is nice.” Then, “He knows everything.” These were answers to my questions from young people who do not know Christ but are willing to engage in spiritual conversation. Let me encourage us. If we think people won’t talk about spiritual things and we are fearful to leave the safe haven of Christian everything to engage unsaved people, dismiss these as the flesh and devil dealing with us. People will talk about spiritual things or at least will listen. I don’t think the problem is the unwillingness of the lost, but unwillingness of Christians to make sharing the Gospel a priority purpose in their lives.

Back to halftime. What was revealed in the short dialogue that occurred among the basketball guys is that people, all people, do have some concept of God. Solomon affirmed this in these words, “*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**). To put eternity in the hearts of men and women is to make them know this life isn’t the end all. There is something else, or more importantly Someone else out there that is in eternity that we will encounter. People do have a God-given concept of God, but outside of Christ, people don’t have the totally right concept of God. What about us who claim to know God through Jesus Christ? Do we have the right concept of God? Put ourselves at halftime last night and I asked the question, “What is God like?” How would we answer? Before we do, I am not wanting to hear the “pat” Christian answers, though those are right. What I want us to share is what we personally have experienced in knowing a personal God. Give me answers that come from our lives and experiences that make the theology we know in our heads a theology that we have lived in the valleys of a trying and hard life.

So, the nugget today offers no application. Just a challenge. Take this verse, “*Be still and know that I am God*” (**Psalm 46:10**) and set aside time this week to do it. The common thread weaving all the answers together that came from my unsaved friends who I play basketball with was a lack of scriptural basis. Let’s strive to make sure our answers to the question, “What is God like?” is so rooted in the scriptures that we not only know Him by the scriptures but daily walk with Him through the scriptures.

PRAYER: “Lord, drive me to Your Word that I might see You there for who You really are, not what I may think You are.”

QUOTE: “Stay in the scriptures and know the true God. Ignore the scriptures and we create a God of our interpretation.”

The QBC Daily Nugget January 5, 2012

“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 THESSALONIANS 1:6-7 - And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: CALLOUSED FINGERS. In France, there once lived a poor, blind girl who obtained the Gospel of Mark in raised letters and learned to read it by the tips of her fingers. By constant reading, these became calloused, and her sense of touch diminished until she could not distinguish the characters. One day, she cut the skin from the ends of her fingers to increase their sensibility, only to destroy it. She felt that she must now give up her beloved Book, and weeping, pressed it to her lips, saying “Farewell, farewell, sweet word of my Heavenly Father!” To her surprise, her lips, more delicate than her fingers, discerned the form of the letters. All night she perused with her lips the Word of God and overflowed with joy at this new acquisition.

Calloused fingers . . . over reading the Bible. Granted we are not blind in need of a braille Bible but if I were to pick up our Bibles and examined them, would they show signs of wear and tear from our constant poring over its contents? Are the words of Job our words, “*I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food*” (**Job 23:12**). Missing too many meals physically will show in our energy levels, our ability to fight off sickness, and simply just leads to the obvious condition of poor health. Neglect of the necessary spiritual food in our Bibles leads to a malnutrition of the soul and that right quickly. Even in a matter of days. Backsliding begins by missing time in the Word and soon, very soon, spiritual indifference chills us like a frosty morning in January. The little girl’s love for the Word of God was shown by her calloused fingers searching the Word of God. We are not dependent on our fingers to read our Bibles and thus will not have calloused fingers, but it is a certainty that if we neglect reading and studying our Bibles we will have calloused hearts.

Charles Spurgeon, as only he could do, put forth these passionate words to his congregation one Lord’s Day concerning the Bible, “There is dust enough on some of your Bibles to write “damnation” with your fingers. There are some of you who have not turned over your Bibles for a long, long while, and what think you? I tell you blunt words, but true words. What will God say at last? When you shall come before him, he shall say, “Did you read my Bible?” “No.” “I wrote you a letter of mercy; did you read it?” “No.” “Rebel! I have sent thee a letter inviting thee to me; didst thou ever read it?” “Lord, I never broke the seal; I kept it shut up.” “Wretch!” says God, “then, thou deservest hell, if I sent thee a loving epistle, and thou wouldst not even break the seal; what shall I do unto thee?” Oh, let it not be so with you. Be Bible-readers; be Bible-searchers.

Dear friends, “*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*” (**John 3:16**). And God so loved the world that He gave His Holy Word to become our greatest earthly possession that in diligently seeking its contents we might discover our greatest eternal treasure, the Lord Jesus. Calloused fingers? Probably not, but what produced such in the little French girl is to be the same for you and me - a love for the Word of God that will not allow the “dust” of the world in all its demands upon our time to so cover our Bibles we could sadly write, “Loss of first love.”

PRAYER: “Lord, forgive me for the too many times I put things of the world ahead of precious time in Your Word.”

QUOTE: “If God gave us a Book to know Him by, it is a natural conclusion He wants us to be in His Book regularly.”

The QBC Daily Nugget January 6, 2012

“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 3:14-19 – For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: OH THE DEPTHS! The late 19th century Presbyterian minister John Henry Jewett tells of a time when he was crossing the Atlantic Ocean onboard a liner. In his own words, here is the account, “One night, when I was recently crossing the Atlantic, an officer of our boat told me that we had just passed over the spot where the *Titanic* went down. And I thought of all that life and wreckage beyond the power of man to recover and redeem. And I thought of the great bed of the deep sea, with all its held treasure, too far down for man to reach and restore. Too far down! And then I thought of all the human wreckage engulfed and sunk in the oceanic depths of nameless sin. Too far gone! For what? Too far down! For what? Not too far down for the love of God! Listen to this: He descended into hell and He will descend again if you are there. If I make my bed in hell, Thou art there. Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. He bore our sin, then He got beneath it; down to it and beneath it; and there is no human wreckage lying in the ooze of the deepest sea of iniquity, that His deep love cannot reach and redeem. What a Gospel!”

Sin. The world is gripped in it and the Christian so struggles with it. It is a paradox that every true believer experiences – the deeper we go in the love of Christ, the deeper we go in knowing our sinful nothingness. Such an awareness is not an unhealthy place to be, if the proper perspective is maintained. And what is that proper perspective? It is to see the depths of our sin conquered by the depths of Christ’s love that so humbles us, and creates within us, a heart of love. This heart then propels us towards a life of humble, self-denying, and fruitful service for the Savior’s sake. The Apostle Paul had such a heart and life. Conquered by the depth of Christ’s love, Paul knew he existed to be controlled by that love in the service to others. In the opening chapter of his letter to the Philippians, Paul stated the very reason for his existence in the world – *“I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith”* (**Philippians 1:23–25**). He existed for the sake of others and particularly, their growth in the faith.

What about us? Has the depth of Christ’s love so conquered the depth of our sin like it did Paul, producing within us a heart and life like Paul? Has the transforming power of Christ’s love caused us to view our existence in the world for the sake of others and their growth in the faith? I believe the church today suffers from shallowness in relationships. Our relationships with other Christians, for the most part, don’t get too deep. Spiritual intimacy is scary, difficult, but extremely liberating. However, the average Christian rarely gets beyond the “surface things” like church attendance, an occasional prayer meeting or Bible study when it comes to relationships with other believers. This speaks volumes about just how much we know of the love of Christ.

When we see the depths of our sin and experience the depths of Christ’s love conquering our sin, the result will be the radical change from living life self-focused, driven by personal agendas to self-denial, driven by Christ’s agenda. And that will be seen in the levels of sacrificial service and interaction we have with other believers.

Oh, the depths of Christ’s love - deeper than our sins and when encountered, begins the process of making us true followers of Him who is love and enables us to spread forth the sweet fragrance of His Person and love in the lives of others.

PRAYER: “Father, I so praise You for grace manifested in the love of Your Son that is greater than all my sins.”

QUOTE: “No one has fallen into the depths of sin so deep that God’s love cannot rescue and restore them.”

The QBC Daily Nugget January 9, 2012

“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 JOHN 1:5-9 – ⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: EYE TO EYE WITH JESUS. One of the more difficult schools I attended while in the Navy was instructor school. It was pretty intense. Just picture being in front of a crowd of about thirty, not knowing any of them prior to the class, having a senior navy person sitting in the back of the class with a clipboard, a pen, and an evaluation sheet. He isn't there to enjoy your presentation. In fact, the subject likely doesn't interest him. The preparation and presentation is why he is in attendance. And then toss in this little “threat” before the first class begins – “Some of you may not get through this class. Your follow on orders are subject to cancellation should you not pass this course of instruction.” The person with the clipboard holds your next three years in his hands. I recall laboring many hours in preparation and then lying awake many hours fretting the next day's presentation. I got through but one of the “down checks” I consistently got on my evaluation sheets was “poor eye contact.” I still struggle with that in public communication.

Eye contact with Jesus. We are called to “look unto Jesus” in our daily walks with Him – *“Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2)*. That is our responsibility, but have we thought much of His eyes upon us – each moment of the day? The Apostle John describes the eyes of Jesus – *“His eyes were like a flame of fire” (Revelation 1:14)*. In our Bibles, the imagery of fire points to purging, to refining, to remove dross. The look of Jesus, with eyes like a flame of fire, is the look of omniscience or all-knowing. Take time and read Peter's confession and restoration found in **John 21:15-19**. Imagine the eye to eye contact Peter and Jesus had that history-changing breakfast morning. Now make it personal. We are eye to eye with Jesus all the time. What does such an awareness produce in us and flow from us? Humble confession. We need to ensure our worship of the Lord isn't just about singing, praying for things, attending church, or other external acts we may perform. A significant God-pleasing aspect of worship is our expressions of genuine humility and confession of our many sins. Isaiah tells us God will look upon the person who is *“humble, contrite, and trembles at His Word” (Isaiah 66:1-2)*. Does confession make its way into our prayer lives consistently? Not just confession of “the fruits of sin” like outbursts of impatience, frustration, or anger, but confession of the far more significant issue of sin in our lives – the “root of sin”; our remaining corruption that produces the fruits of sin.

If we are taking time to have “eye to eye” contact with Jesus, genuine confession will flow. And what do we get back from eye contact with Jesus when we practice confession of sin? Consider these wonderful experiences. We confess our prayerlessness and Jesus looks back with compassion not condemnation. We confess putting our interests ahead of others' and Jesus looks back with loving patience, not harsh impatience over our self-absorbed lives. We confess our sinful desire for a comfortable Christianity and Jesus looks back with the promise of real comfort, not anger over our unwillingness to enter into His sufferings. We confess our lack of Epaphroditus-type relationships in the body of Christ as intimate family members, co-workers in the Gospel, and soldiers in spiritual battle and Jesus looks back with a willingness to teach us death to self, not a look of “You have failed to invest in my people, so I am done investing in you.” Eye to eye contact with Jesus cleanses the soul. It brings humility and true confession of sin. It will be met with a loving look back. I may not be the only way who struggles with eye to eye contact. Maybe you do also when it comes to spending time “looking to Jesus.” Let's work harder to have those regular encounters with Him *“whose eyes are like a flame of fire.”*

PRAYER: “Lord, thank You for being a God of love who looks at me not in condemnation but compassion.”

QUOTE: “Eye to eye contact is what we always have with the Lord whether we recognize it or not.”

The QBC Daily Nugget
January 10, 2012

“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 13:1-2 – That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: MAKING OURSELVES AVAILABLE. I just cannot seem to stop thinking about the relationship between this man and the Apostle Paul. It is heartwarming and challenging to the mind. His name is Epaphroditus. Paul loved this fellow believer and he affirmed it in a letter sent back to Epaphroditus' church. This letter we know today as the Epistle to the Philippians found in our New Testament – *“I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me”* (**Philippians 2:25–30**). If we meditate on this relationship it will take us in two directions. First, he will show us what normal Christian living is all about. He is not the exception in relationship with other believers. He is the pattern for us. Another direction we will be guided to see is that Epaphroditus is not some extraordinary individual. He is common and ordinary – just like us. We don't read of him being a great preacher, writer, or anything else. Just a healthy believer who knew what it truly meant to be controlled by the love of Christ and that love manifesting itself in his sacrificial relationship with the Apostle Paul. Go back and read the scripture I provided describing him. Write down, literally or mentally, what true Christian investment in other believers looked like. We will find intimacy, joint service, fighting spiritual warfare together, and knowing the supreme privilege of giving oneself for others.

As an exemplary example of being a slave of Jesus Christ, Epaphroditus is a man we each should strive to emulate in our relationships with other believers. And with all the wonderful things Paul said of this dear brother, one thing really struck home with me and is found in today's reference describing Jesus. It is not explicitly stated but implicitly shines bright - Epaphroditus and Jesus made themselves available for people. Epaphroditus gave of himself to Paul in such fashion that he left the comforts of home to go to Rome and serve him. With Jesus, we find Him sitting on a beach, making Himself available, and the people came to Him. What about us? Are we modeling both examples? Do our brothers and sisters know us as compassionate AND available Christians, eager to invest our two most precious resources on earth – our time and our persons in them? One of the main reasons why we may not be used in greater fashion by our Lord in His church and world is we simply are not available. If we find ourselves always on the go, running from one event to another, and living so full and private lives, the message we send to others is this, “I don't have time for you. I don't have any room in my life to invest in you.” Don't think this is far-fetched. When we are not willing to give of ourselves and time for others that is exactly what we are saying. I have experienced it and it hurts. I recall seeking spiritual help from a Christian who I greatly admired and I received no response. My first thought was, “I am not important enough.” Then I thought, “he is too busy for me.” Now think about Jesus – does He treat us like that? Never in either case. He is always available for us and He said to us, *“I leave you an example to follow.”* I am convinced we are surrounded with Christians who long for true spirituality and genuine relationships with other believers. At least I hope so for that is a healthy desire in all Christians! If we don't hunger for relationships with other believers for spiritual growth – giving and getting – something is seriously wrong in our spiritual lives. For the sake of our own spiritual health and that of others in the body of Christ, we should spend time with the Lord and ask Him to reveal just how available we are to each other in the church. As we enter into the new year, let's resolve to follow our Lord and Epaphroditus in our relationships with one another. And the resolve begins with our availability. We will be pleasing unto the Lord and finding our usefulness in kingdom work expanding.

PRAYER: “Lord, thank You that You are never too busy for me.”

QUOTE: “Our lack of availability might be the very reason for not being used of the Lord to greater extent in our lives.”

The QBC Daily Nugget January 11, 2012

“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 PETER 5:5 – Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: BE CAREFUL OF COMPARISONS. Comparisons. The word means “the act of comparing or process of being compared, a statement or estimate of similarities and differences.” We do this all the time. When we buy things, we compare quality and prices between products. When we dress, we look to be color coordinated by comparing pieces of clothing. As one reads the Bible, we see comparisons throughout. They are great tools for teaching and learning. As good as comparison is when it comes to certain things in our lives, there is an area of comparison that is not good and spiritually unhealthy – comparing ourselves and our situations with other Christians.

Comparing ourselves with other Christians cuts two ways. One produces ugly self-righteousness that sours our spiritual life to where joy, peace, and humility are missing. We become judgmental and critical of others. Here is how that works. We see a fellow believer struggling with sin or we see a family that has a prodigal son or daughter that has walked away from the faith. Or maybe we see a marriage that is in trouble. The ugly comparison would produce this type of heart language, “How could they struggle in that area? I would never do that” or “How could they have a son or daughter that acts like that? My kids would never fall into such a life” or “I would never let my marriage get into that condition.” It may not come out like that in exact words, but don’t underestimate the power of the devil and self to produce a false sense of spiritual strength and confidence. The Apostle Paul wrote two portions of scripture to put on as the shield of faith to prevent us from this ugly of the ugliest – “Christian Phariseism” – *“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12)* and *“But by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10)*. I know what it is like to wear both shoes – to be the “Christian Pharisee” looking down on another Christian and to be the one looked down upon by a “Christian Pharisee.” Both are sinful attitudes that harm the body of Christ and for sure, rob us individually of a sense of Christ’s presence.

The second way comparison cuts is when we compare ourselves with other Christians with a spirit of discouraging envy. We look at the brother or sister who seems to have it all together. They are steadfast - faithful to prayer, faithful in the Word, serving the church sacrificially, and just gives the air of being “Super Christian.” We dejectedly think, “I wish I was like that.” Or we look at that “model” family in our churches. The marriage looks really good, the kids don’t act up in church and don’t seem to struggle with disobedience to parents and we long that our homes could be such a “slice of heaven.” Examples we should be for each other and certainly that extends to our families, but examples are not to create pride and a sense of spiritual superiority toward others. Healthy Christians are not perfect examples but sincere examples. Perfection is for another world. If we are viewed as “model” Christians in “model” families, let’s be very careful that it produces humility and approachability to where those viewing us as such feel comfortable to come to us for help. If we give forth the “vibes” of being “perfect models” it will discourage fellow sheep, not encourage fellow sheep. Always remember this definition of the church – “We are all messed up people, meeting with fellow messed up people, to seek and be with Him who loves and helps messed up people. Comparisons are good, but be careful for they can also be harmful.

PRAYER: “Lord, I praise You for the gifts of brothers and sisters who willingly enter into my life and model You for me.”

QUOTE: “To know more of Christ’s love, we must put off the mask of “I’ve got it all together” in each other’s presence.”

The QBC Daily Nugget January 12, 2012

“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 13:58 – And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: **HINDERING GOD.** How would you feel if I made a “pastoral visit” to your house? If you like my company, it might be met with anticipated joy and I would reciprocate by looking forward to spending time with you. If you don’t like my company, and I admit there is enough not to like, still let me come. At least endure the hour we would have together. I promise it will be short. Consider it a “church member duty” if you must.

The evening has arrived for my in home visit. You greet me at the door and guide me to the room – could be a dining room, den, the living room, the sitting room. . . doesn’t matter as we settle in for some small talk. After we have pretty well exhausted all the “safe” topics of conversation, there is a short period of “awkward silence” between us. Like those silent times in a prayer meeting, though they are not to be awkward during that sacred time. Silence should be sought and welcomed. I think sometimes we should gather for prayer and spend a lot of silent time together. It is far more important for God to speak to us than we talk to Him. That is not to say we ignore petitioning our loving God, but we need to make sure a good balance occurs in our dialogue with Him. Be careful not to talk so much we actually drown out the still small voice of God through His Word. Okay, back to me being in your home . . . I break the silence in the room with this “bombshell” of a statement. “(Insert your name), I need to tell you that I believe you are directly hindering the work of God in our church.” As the comfortableness in our conversation gives way to a tension we could cut with a knife, you might be tempted to see me to the door. Or perhaps there is a feeling of defensiveness rising inside that wants to vent on me with words like, “What are you saying? Who are you to say such a thing?” however, your self-control grants me time to elaborate.

First of all, I am not going to do that to you. I need to make that “home visit” to my heart and tell myself what I pictured telling you. We may truly find ourselves “hindering the work of God” by what is revealed in today’s scripture reference – unbelief. It was said that Jesus was actually hindered from doing many mighty works because of unbelief. Now before we again get defensive and say, “I am not an unbeliever. I believe”, remember that we are not talking about being in a state of unbelief as a person. We are talking about hindering God’s work because of acts of unbelief. And don’t think this fight against unbelief is for the unbeliever. We, as Christ’s people, fight it too and it will be a present foe until Jesus comes or we go to heaven. So, how is unbelief manifested that hinders a work of God in our churches and lives? Prayerlessness. A lack of a deepening and persistent prayer life reveals a person succumbing to unbelief. We see this so clear in the Parable of the Persistent Widow – *“And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, ‘In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’ ”* And the Lord said, *“Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”* (Luke 18:1–8). What is the opposite of unbelief? Faith. What does the Lord say was the evidence of faith in the widow’s life? Persevering prayer. When we fail to strive for a persevering prayer life in our individual and family lives and that carries over to our lack of commitment to a persevering prayer life in our churches, what message gets sent to heaven? Unbelief according to the parable Jesus taught. He equates persevering prayer to genuine faith. Can we hinder God’s work in the church? No. He will do His work through His church. The question will be whether we are included. Unbelief produces an inconsistent prayer life. God works through the prayers of His people in His church. Are we hindering that work by unbelief by a non-persevering prayer life? Think about it as I call to schedule a visit in your home.

PRAYER: “Lord, forgive me for manifesting my unbelief through my lack of persevering prayer.”

QUOTE: “Unbelief is not just an attitude. It includes failure to obey God’s Word in the discipline of believing prayer.”

The QBC Daily Nugget January 13, 2012

“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 THESSALONIANS 1:2-8 - We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: THE WORKING OF THE WORD. My wife is my spiritual sounding board. When we get into deep spiritual discussions, I think she knows what I am going to say and where I am going with the conversation before I say a word. I often “complain” to her with words like, “I just don’t see spiritual growth in my life. The pace of my spiritual development makes me feel like the snail crawling up the ramp to get into Noah’s ark. I just don’t think I am ever going to get there.” Do you ever struggle with the easily discouraging times when you just cannot see the Word of God producing fruit in and from your life? Spiritual growth isn’t difficult to define. It is to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ that is producing within us likeness to Him (**2 Peter 3:18, Romans 8:29**). The means of that growth are primarily three – time in the Word, time in prayer and obedience to what we are discovering in the Word and prayer. Though easy to define, spiritual growth is not always so easy to distinguish in our lives. Is it possible to do a thorough self-assessment and determine if we are growing spiritually, even if it is at a spiritual snail’s pace? I think so and the example in the Thessalonian Christians gives us three evidences that the Word is working in our lives toward spiritual growth.

First, we receive the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit – *“because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thessalonians 1:5)*. How do we know if we are doing that? If the Word is coming with power and conviction, there will be a delight in the Word that produces a consistency of disciplined time in the Word. Think about it. If I am really convinced my Creator/Redeemer God has given me His Word, nothing is going to prevent me from being in that Word. Nothing. Another evidence the Word is working in our lives is the fruit of a changed life observed by other believers – *“you became an example to all believers” (1 Thessalonians 1:7)*. Don’t get discouraged here. More often than not, we are our worst enemies in evaluating our influence on others. If the Word is changing us, it will impact body life. People will be influenced by us in a positive way. We will be sharing the Word with other believers. A fruitful and growing life will always be a sharing and influencing life. The final piece of evidence coming from the Thessalonians showing the Word is at work in our lives is that we cannot remain silent with the life-changing Gospel – *“the word of the Lord sounded forth from you” (1 Thessalonians 1:8)*. A lot of Christians stay on the “fringe” in church life. They come to church on Sunday, maybe attend an occasional prayer meeting, but they don’t get engaged in Bible studies in small groups, or more importantly, invest in intimate spiritual relationships with other Christians. Why? Many reasons perhaps, but one is they have nothing to share because they are not growing by the Word. The last thing a lukewarm Christian wants to do is be in the presence of another Christian who is not! And it extends into sharing the Gospel with unbelievers. Spiritual growth is not selective. We are not growing spiritually by just doing Christian things and being with Christians. There must be Gospel engagement with the lost. Jesus didn’t leave us, His church, to sit around in Christian circles of comfortableness. He left us with a mission and message. Let’s not be deceived thinking we are spiritually healthy if we are not burdened and active in the work of the Gospel. If the Word is really working, we cannot be on the sidelines of sharing the Gospel. The love of Christ will not allow us to sit still and silent. Spiritual growth is difficult to measure if we look inside ourselves. Instead, let the Thessalonians do the proper work of evaluation in us.

PRAYER: “Father, help me fall in love with Your Word to where it is my daily delight and portion.”

QUOTE: “Our commitment to God’s written Word reveals our commitment to God’s Son, the Living Word.”

The QBC Daily Nugget January 16, 2012

“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 19:1-3 – The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: THE TALKING MOON. We are creatures of habit. We do things out of routine. Nothing wrong with that. Just make sure that in living out routines in life we stay alert to our God showing us spiritual lessons in our routines. We will learn a ton of spiritual lessons for our growth if we walk through each day with our “spiritual antennae” up and ready to receive instruction from the Lord. For me, I have a Sunday evening routine. After the evening church service and time interacting with my brothers and sisters, I retreat to my office. It is normally a time to reflect on the just completed Lord’s Day events and start thinking about the next one. One recent evening, in the midst of this routine, I opened the back door of my office to an open field. The view overwhelmed me. Right before my eyes was a full moon. It was breathtakingly clear and it began to light up the backfield like a spotlight. I couldn’t just ignore the lessons I was being given by the sight of God’s creation. I could not just let my routine unfold and miss out on some very powerful lessons I sensed were coming my way.

As I stared at the moon, I thought of the creation account in Genesis. The Word of God reads, “*And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars*” (**Genesis 1:16**). This was the fourth day of creation when God spoke into existence the sun and the moon. With penetrating force, it appeared the moon became my teacher, putting me in a class of instruction. The “talking moon” began with this direction - “Jim, look at me. The God who spoke me into existence is also the God who so loves you and has ordained everything in your life to unfold for your good and His glory. Why do you fret, stress, and seek to be in control of things? Don’t close the door and go about the routine of life. Stare at me and let my light take you to meditate upon Him who is the light of the world and the light of your life that is directing your life.” That was pretty powerful since I am a “control freak” when it comes to events, circumstances and just about everything else in my life, but my encounter with the “talking moon” wasn’t done.

In my continuing encounter with the “talking moon”, another lesson unfolded. The light coming forth from the moon was so bright and crystal clear. It was radiant. Before I let that thought pass by, the “talking moon” said, “Jim, you are right. I am pretty bright tonight, but don’t give me credit. I am only a reflector of the bigger light. Remember what God did on the fourth day? He made ‘the greater light to rule the day’ and me, to ‘rule the night’. And by the way, I don’t generate my own light. I shine from the energy of the bigger light, the sun.” I knew that scientific fact, but did I really ever think about its spiritual parallel in my life? Well, the “talking moon” ensured I saw this lesson. As Christians we are “light reflectors” not light generators. We are to be shining forth the radiant beauty of the Son. Jesus shines through us and the questions we are to ask ourselves are, “How bright are we today? Are the people we are encountering, beginning with loved ones in our homes, and beyond, “blinded” by the shining beauty of Jesus Christ coming forth from us?” My ability to shine forth the grace and truth of Jesus is based on how close I am to Him. My times in His Word and prayer, which should produce a life of compassionate obedience, determines how bright I am shining Jesus, the Light of the world, to those in my life.

Well, class was over for the night as I bid good night to the “talking moon.” However, maybe class really isn’t over . . . maybe it is just starting as I learn, we learn, to be always alert to the lessons God wants to teach us as life unfolds. Don’t get so busy that we don’t take time to have the spiritual antennae up and ready to receive things from God. There is a lot more out there in life than a “talking moon” ready to teach us spiritual lessons to make us more like and more effective for Jesus Christ.

PRAYER: “Lord, please keep me close to You so that I might radiantly reflect You.”

QUOTE: “The light of Jesus shines through His Children that make staying close to Him their highest priority in life.”

The QBC Daily Nugget
January 17, 2012

“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 16:13-15 – Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: WHO IS JESUS TO YOU? I am known in my family as the “question guy.” Allegedly, I seem to ask a ton of questions of everyone about everything. Perhaps it is true and perhaps it comes from a heavy dose of military life where information was essential to sound leadership decisions and giving directions. I do ask a lot of questions. I want to be “in the know” and so, yes, I am the “question guy.” Questions were often asked by our Lord Jesus to His disciples, too. They proved to be used, not for His sake, but for theirs. His questions pierced their souls exposing the deep seated issues and struggles of the spiritual life. Questions like, “*Why did you doubt?*” (**Luke 24:38**), “*Do you love more than these?*” (**John 21:15**), and “*Why are you anxious?*” (**Matthew 6:28**). And they are questions asked of us by our Lord each day and throughout our days.

Though I am far from being like Christ, let me resort to being like Him when it comes to asking probing questions. In rapid fire succession, here are eight questions. I am providing no answers for us to consider. They are already provided by each of us in how we think and thus how we live before a watching Lord and world. The first question is borrowed from our Lord in today’s reference – “Who do you say that I am?” If we quickly answer, “My Lord and Savior”, that would be good and right. However, if we don’t know Jesus beyond that, we are living infant lives as Christians and not progressing in the grace and knowledge of Him who is far more than just our Redeemer. That leads to the remaining seven questions that look deep inside our hearts and minds to see the depth of relationship we have with Jesus Christ. Question # 2 – Is Jesus our food for daily soul nourishment that we feed upon to satisfy our inner craving for contentment and peace? – “*I am the Bread of Life*” (**John 6:47-51**). Question # 3 – Is Jesus our “map” for daily guidance that leads us in how we talk, act, and the attitudes we display to those around us? – “*I am the light of the world*” (**John 8:12**). Question # 4 – Is Jesus the gate we walk through each morning before we walk through the “gates” of a fallen world full of demands and dangers that seek to conform us to its image? – “*I am the gate for the sheep*” (**John 10:7-10**). Question # 5 – Is Jesus our protector and guardian we rely upon all the day long to keep us from the “wolves” of busyness, worldliness, and lukewarmness that will harm our spiritual lives? – “*I am the Good Shepherd*” (**John 10:11-16**). Question # 6 – Is Jesus our source of life in the power of His resurrection that we acknowledge and lean upon before the day unfolds? – “*I am the resurrection and the life*” (**John 11:25**). Question # 7 – Is Jesus our only lens of interpretation on how we are to live and invest ourselves in this life? – “*I am the way, the truth and the life*” (**John 14:6**). Question # 8 – Is Jesus so precious to us that nothing will keep us from seeking time alone with Him daily to enjoy the life giving communion of His power, love, and Person? – “*I am the Vine and you are the branches*” (**John 15:5-7**).

Jesus is far more to the child of God than Savior. He is everything to us as revealed in the seven “I am” statements He makes. Let’s make time for some soul-searching with these revealing and exposing questions about who Jesus is to us. I know I fall short in seeing Him in all these soul-satisfying roles, but the glories of amazing grace is that Jesus still remains all these things to me and to you. May He grant us a passion to know Him in all His fullness beyond salvation.

PRAYER: “Lord, teach me more and more the riches I have in You.”

QUOTE: “To grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus includes knowing Him beyond Savior.”

The QBC Daily Nugget January 18, 2012

“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)

GENESIS 21:22; 22:1-4 - At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, “God is with you in all that you do.”¹ After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”² He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: PREPARING FOR BATTLE. Did we prepare for spiritual war today? As we rolled out of bed and got ready for the day, did we ready our hearts and mind for the certain spiritual conflict that was going to unfold? Did we take time and think through the spiritual armor essential to do successful battle throughout the day (**Ephesians 6:10-18**)? In addition to the armor of God, the words of Jonathan Edwards and the Apostle Paul are worthy to be recalled and repeated often in our daily walks with the Lord. First, Edwards, “God has appointed this whole life to be all as a race or a battle; the state of rest, wherein we shall be so out of danger as to have no need of watching and fighting, is for another world.” And the Apostle Paul to young Timothy, “*You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him*” (**2 Timothy 2:1-4**).

It is important to prepare ourselves daily for spiritual battle and it is very important. A wise person once said, “If you fail to plan, then you have planned to fail.” It applies in our spiritual life as well. If we don’t take time to get our thoughts and lives anchored in heaven before we enter the world, we have effectively, by neglect, opened the door wide to spiritual defeat as our days unfold. Yet, there is another aspect of preparing for battle. God prepares us for battle. An excellent verse in the eighteenth Psalm reveals to us this truth – “*He trains my hands for war*” (**Psalm 18:34**). Are we being trained or prepared by God for spiritual battle today? In today’s reference, Abraham’s experience shows us a way God prepares His people for extreme trials and spiritual warfare.

We know what is about to unfold. Abraham is being commanded to slay his beloved son. What a thought! And how does God prepare him for this gut-wrenching trial and warfare? God gives him communion with Himself. Take time and read Genesis 12 through 22. Pay particular attention to how close and intimate God is with His servant Abraham. This culminates in these words from Abimelech and Phicol – “*God is with you in all that you do*” (**Genesis 21:22**). Abraham was affirmed of God’s presence and favor in his life. He enjoyed a very close walk with his God. When we are enjoying fellowship with God, His Word is speaking to us, His Spirit sending forth His comfort and making Christ’s presence very real, this is a time to rejoice and a time to prepare. God often visits us in sacred times of communion with Him that takes us into experiences of joy unspeakable and full of glory. Almost like being taken to the Mountain of Transfiguration as we live in the real sense of His presence. Yet, like the mountain visit for Peter, James and John, a return to the valley must occur. Our Lord often prepares us for great trial and warfare by heightened times of fellowship with Him. Be aware that these times are training times for war. Our fellowship with God is not to rest from our labors for Him but to enhance our labors for Him. As Edwards said, “The state of rest is for another world.” Saints of old have given testimony that heightened times of fellowship with God often precede extreme trials and warfare. Charles Spurgeon remarked that he knew God was going to do a great work by the sweetness of fellowship he had that inevitably gave way to very trying times. So, are we being prepared for battle? We have responsibility to do so by putting on the armor and submitting to God’s work of preparing us. This preparation will often come by our pursuit and enjoyment of daily fellowship with Him in Word and prayer.

PRAYER: “Lord, help me to see that times of strengthening my walk with You are times to prepare for upcoming battles.”

QUOTE: “Sweet communion with the Lord isn’t just about warm fellowship. It includes preparing us for spiritual warfare.”

The QBC Daily Nugget
January 19, 2012

“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 3:17 – Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: A LIVING AND LASTING EXAMPLE. Do we have believers in our lives we look to as examples of faithfulness? Are there individuals in our churches we admire for their walks with the Lord as men and women of prayer and sacrificial service to others? Being an example to one another is a privilege and responsibility. The Apostle Paul commended the Thessalonian believers for this very thing – *“And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia” (1 Thessalonians 1:6–7).*

As we look around our churches at these living examples, I want us to bring this closer to home. Actually into our homes. Dads, moms, what spiritual example are we giving our children? As our children grow older and we begin to see the “sprouting of those wings of independence” in them that will soon take them away from the nest, what spiritual imprint is being stamped in their hearts by us? Fellow dads, will our children look back and say, “My dad was not a perfect man, but he was my spiritual example”? Will we rest confident that our children will be able to tell their children how our spiritual example helped shape them? Will they remember us taking them into the Word, modeling prayer, and displaying sacrificial service for the Body of Christ, His church? And moms? Will your children be able to recall all those times of you exhibiting the Fruit of the Spirit in their lives as a result of your guarded and sacred times of being with Jesus where He taught you godly mothering? Parents, will our children ponder how dad and mom faithfully led them to the house of God to hear the Word of God preached, to participate in body life with other believers, and labor together with other families in our churches? I was recently with a young person in our church, a godly young man who longs for fellowship and growth in the Lord. He said, “I love the church, but I wish there were more my age in attendance.” We talked about missing generations in the church and one of the causes of such is that the “missing generation” failed to see from their parents the priority of spiritual things and especially the work of the Gospel and spiritual growth in and through the church. Our children will be taught more by observing what is important to us than listening as we tell them what is important to us. Remember, right before our eyes, in our homes, in our young people is the next generation of the church. Think about these examples that impact watching eyes and impressionable hearts. If we dads and moms don’t make the Lord’s Day, well the Lord’s Day and not just the Lord’s morning when it comes to fellowship and instruction from the Word with God’s people, this is what we “tell” our children by our actions – “Hearing and being with God’s people once on His Day is enough. It really isn’t that important.” This isn’t about legalism. This is about an example of faithfulness. It would be healthy to ask ourselves, “Why wouldn’t I want to be in the Word with God’s people as much as possible on the Lord’s Day?” Sundays are excellent family days – both families – physical and spiritual. Be careful how we approach the Lord’s Day. Our children learn by our example. Here is another example. If we dads and moms don’t think praying together with other believers is important, evidenced by our lack of gathering with other believers for prayer, our children “hear” this message by our actions, “Praying with other believers isn’t really that necessary.” The result will be the death of the prayer meeting as the attending generation turns the prayer meeting over to nobody.

The parenting examples I just gave may not apply to all of us nugget readers, but being an example of faithfulness to the Lord’s Day and prayer applies to all. It still holds true . . . one of the most encouraging aspects of the Christian life is observing faithful examples. It is infectious and makes alive these scriptures – *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works” (Hebrews 10:23–24).* May they become alive in us in our homes, churches, and communities.

PRAYER: “Father, help me to be a living example of faithfulness for Your children.”

QUOTE: “Our mutual privilege and responsibility to one another is to be an example of faithfulness.”

The QBC Daily Nugget
January 20, 2012

“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 1:21-25 – For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: IT ISN'T ABOUT US. How do we view the church? Not how we define the church. We know that . . . it is the body of Christ, united in Him, and under His authority (**Ephesians 1:22-23**). However, how we define it will determine how we view the church and live out our lives in the church. Personally? I think the church is in trouble today. I am not a church growth expert, but I agree with the assessment made by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on what plagues the church, “Much of the trouble in the church today is due to the fact we are so subjective, so interested in ourselves, so egocentric. Having forgotten God, and having become so interested in ourselves, we become miserable and wretched.” We may summarize his insight on the church like this – “The problem with the church is we are far more concerned with what we get out of it than what we put into it.” That does not mean we don’t come to church to receive. We do. We need to receive God’s grace and truth, but it is definitely both and with proper understanding of both.

I recently received a phone call from a lady who is very passionate for the truth. She doesn’t attend my church and is actually looking for one. We have talked before and though we have minor differences theologically, I enjoy her hunger for the Lord. She said, “Pastor Jim, what is wrong with the churches? The churches are dead. What do you think is the problem?” That question can and did take up some time to answer. There are multiple reasons but in keeping with the theme of today’s nugget and scripture, let’s reduce it down to just one answer – a church will not exhibit much life when its members view the church from the lens of selfishness instead of selflessness. When our involvement in the church is all about us and not about our Lord and His people, we should expect discontent, dissatisfaction, and disappointment in our church experience. Why? Because we have made something that is not about us, all about us. Remember the Head of the church, the Lord Jesus sets the standard and He said, “*I came not to be served, but to serve*” (**Matthew 20:28**). And this service is all about others and their spiritual health. If we are not living our life in Him and in His church with this servant attitude, we should experience such soul discomfort. It isn’t about us.

When it comes to the church, we would all agree that the church is the family of God – “*I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth*” (**1 Timothy 3:14–15**). Now think of our physical family. When things are not right or selfishness among its members raises its ugly head, do we leave and look for a new family? Of course not! Now think of the church. A lot of “church growth” comes from dissatisfied Christians. Their current church is not meeting their needs or desires so they “leave that family” and go somewhere else. Granted, there are times when leaving a church is necessary. Rare times. Like when heresy and denial of the Word occurs, but more often than not, people leave churches not because of theological dispute. They leave because they are not being satisfied with their desires and preferences. Think about the negative impact on the world when God’s people focus more on themselves in His church than on Him and His people in the church. One thing I must constantly do is to “yank myself” out of my selfish mode of thinking and acting when it comes to church life. Is my church perfect? No. Are there things we do or don’t do that I would like to add or change? Sure, but I must remember, it is not about me. I am not saved by Christ to be a part of His church to seek my own desires and wishes. I am saved by Christ to be a part of His church to deny myself for His sake and the growth of His people. Are you currently in a spiritual serving role in your church? Are you learning to deny yourself for the sake of others and their spiritual growth, laying aside your preferences and desires? If not, you might want to evaluate how you view church and let it start by meditating on today’s scripture. From the example of Paul and the Philippian church, we see it isn’t about us.

PRAYER: “Lord, teach me that my greatest joy is not seeking my own interests but seeing Yours and Your people.”

QUOTE: “The church was not formed to be self-serving but to allow us to be self-denying in service to others.”

The QBC Daily Nugget January 23, 2012

“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 13:7 – Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: THE MORE WE GO AND GROW. The words in today’s reference are found in the account of Jesus’ washing His disciple feet. I read it and think of Jesus saying to me, as He did Peter, “Jim, you don’t really get it, but you will.” I apply this to my understanding of the Christian life. If left to myself, my own understanding will create a “Christianity of convenience” that I fit into my life and avoid true Christianity which is total abandonment to the commands and desires of my Lord Jesus and His Word.

In surveying my walk with the Lord, at least two things are becoming more and more clear in my mind and heart. First, the longer I go and hopefully grow, the more I see how much leaning on my own understanding happens in my Christian life. And what is revealed is my failure to remember this enduring truth - *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9)*. What a patient God we have who puts up with our ignorance and arrogance and even at times borderline presumption as we proclaim what we know of Him and His ways with us by leaning on our own understanding. We are told in powerful simplicity not to lean on our own understanding – *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (Proverbs 3:5–6)*. That requires a humble heart to let the Word direct our paths and not our own understanding. The way of the Christian life is the way of humility. Humility is willing to say and embrace, “I don’t know everything. I don’t have it figured out, but God’s Word says it, I must act upon it.” A good way to see just how close we are to the Apostle Paul and even the Lord Jesus in our growth in humility is how we respond to correction and exhortation by the Word. How do we respond when a sermon or book or fellow believer delivers the Word to our soul and reveals what we think the Christian life is and what the Bible says it is are different? What happens when we look into our lives and see way too much emphasis on ourselves? For instance, we are called to deny ourselves and our comfort for the sake of others by investing in Epaphroditus-type relationships. When we look into our lives and see we are far more concerned about ourselves than others, contrary to the clear teaching of God’s Word, how do we respond? If defensive and justifying lack of involvement, like me many times over, we might be guilty of leaning on our own understanding of the Christian life and not God’s.

A second lesson I think I am starting to get in my Christian life is that the most important thing I do is pray. Not just those “vending machine” type prayers of running to God in more form than substance and ask for things. Not the type of praying that carries more external repeated words or phrases and dangerously close to vain repetitions Jesus warns of in **Matthew 6**. Not the type of praying that is vague and more temporal based than eternal and spiritual based. No, the types of prayer we see coming from the Apostle Paul, Daniel, Hezekiah, and the Lord Jesus. Do a study some time of the prayers in the Bible, especially the ones the Apostle Paul penned in His letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians and compare them with your prayer life. I did. They didn’t match and we know whose prayers needed to be changed. David Brown said, “What is the life of a Christian but a life of prayer?” The only safe way to keep one from leaning on their own understanding of spiritual things and the Christian life is to be a person of prayer who lives in the Presence of Him who understands all. One great reason why we do not significantly invest in each other’s lives is we have not been in those secret chambers of prayer with our God. When a man or woman is close to the God who is love, that love will express itself in the lives of others and especially believers in sacrificial ways. Prayer is the lifeblood of the Christian. So as each of us grow in grace, what lessons are we learning? Are we seeing humility more as we get closer to Him whose judgments and ways are unsearchable and inscrutable? (**Romans 11:33**). Are we leaning less on our understanding and being transformed by a life of prayer? Oh, how patient a God we serve who daily bears us up!

PRAYER: “Lord, forgive me for the so many times I lean on my own understanding of the Christian life.”

QUOTE: “Without a consistent prayer life, a Christian will lean on their own understanding more than they realize.”

The QBC Daily Nugget January 24, 2012

“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 4:22-24 - You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: THEOLOGY AND WORSHIP. Did we catch what Jesus says to the woman in today's reference about her worship? It is found in the first seven words. She worshipped and she was clueless about her worship. Jesus acknowledged the presence of worship in this woman. He also revealed she didn't have the faintest idea of who she worshipped. Chuck Swindoll wrote, “Worship . . . let's think about worship. When was the last time you decided to stop playing “church” and start really worshipping? If the truth were known, many believers don't have a clue what worship is. We wonder, does worship mean I have to hold my hands up when I sing and pray, like some Christians do? Does worship mean I need to close my eyes and envision something heavenly, lest I become distracted by something earthly? Does worship mean I have feelings that are a little bit ecstatic, maybe bordering on the supernatural? What exactly is worship? And is it all that rare? In 1961, while he was speaking to the pastors of the Associated Gospel Churches of Canada, the late A. W. Tozer said that worship ‘is the missing jewel in modern evangelicalism’. I think he was a prophet ahead of his time.”

What thoughts come to our minds when we consider worship? How would we define what Jesus says are absolute necessities when it comes to worship – “*spirit and truth*”? It is extremely important to get a thorough and Biblical grasp on worship for it is the very reason for our existence and salvation – to worship the one true and living God. John Brown, a 19th century Scottish divine provided an excellent understanding of worship and its basis. He wrote, “To honor God is to worship Him, and to worship God is just to think, and feel, and act, towards Him in conformity to the revelation He has made of Himself. He has revealed Himself as infinitely great, excellent, and good – the Creator, Preserver, Proprietor, Governor of all things. To think, feel, and act in conformity to this revelation; in other words, supremely to esteem, reverence, love, and trust in God, and to express these sentiments, in obedience and submission, this is to worship God.”

When we consider the words of Jesus that our worship must be in “spirit and truth” it includes all that John Brown said and more. To worship in “spirit” means both in sincerity and in the inner most part of our being. As to worship in “truth” means we are driven to ensure our worship is defined by the Word of God, which is truth, and toward the One described in the Word of God as truth. So the question about our worship is really a question of our theology. True worship must first be knowledge-based and then true spiritual experience follows. If theology, Biblical theology of who God is, doesn't determine the direction and conduct of our worship, we will drift into fleshly emotions instead of true spiritual worship. As you and I seek to be true worshippers, take some time and consider the statements made by Pastor Swindoll and Pastor Brown. After that, go back to today's reference and ensure what Jesus said to the woman at the well could not be said of us – “*You worship what you do not know.*” Remember, a sound Biblical theology is to be the flame that ignites our heart for God-honoring and true spiritual worship of Him who saved us for such purpose and privilege.

PRAYER: “Lord, please help me to see that true worship of You begins with knowledge not feeling.”

QUOTE: “True worship of God must come from a mind, heart, and will filled with the knowledge of God.”

The QBC Daily Nugget January 25, 2012

“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 1:18-19 – Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: WE NEED EACH OTHER. Do you believe it? Do we believe it? Do we really see ourselves in need of each other in our spiritual journey to heaven? My wife said to me recently, “Do you know what your problem is?” My first inward reaction was “This is going to take a long time because the list is pretty long.” She gave me grace and only identified one, but it was a “biggy” – “You have lived most of your life independent.” Before I gave into my flesh and volleyed back in self-defense, I simply pondered and surrendered to the truth. I am too independent in too many areas of my life.

When our first parents sinned in the Garden of Eden and separation from God occurred, one of the most disastrous consequences was the sinful spirit of independence entered our lives (**Genesis 3**). And that was in direct opposition to the created order. We simply were not created to be independent. First and foremost, we were created to be dependent on God. Sin fractured that harmonious relationship and now, because of our sin nature and acts of sin, we are extremely independent and private people – not only toward God unless grace conquers us, but even after being saved by Christ, we fight the independent and private spirit. It is not hard to see this in our lives. Quick. Tell me. Are we in a spiritual relationship with another believer or small group of believers built on transparency, mutual dependency for spiritual growth and we meet regularly to ensure its growth? Please don't say, “I go to church on Sunday.” I am glad. We should, but let's be honest, how much investment in deep spiritual relationships occurs on the Lord's Day? Maybe a little in our Sunday School classes. Even there, though, there is not time or even the environment to “take our shoes off” and get really close to each other sharing our highs and lows of walking with the Lord Jesus. It takes more if we are going to practice all the “one another's” in the Bible.

In today's reference, the Apostle Paul is writing to a church so dear to him – the church in Philippi. He loved them and they reciprocated. Notice the intense affection and sharing of that affection with them, “*I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus*” (**Philippians 1:3–8**). Are we in relationships with other believers where we could say, “*I hold you in my heart*”, and “*I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus*”? That can only happen with those Christians who break out of the sinful fortresses of independent and private spiritual living and get “up front and personal” with other believers. I know. It is hard. It takes time. It makes one vulnerable. It makes us real to where people will learn to know us for what we are instead of what people think we are. Yet, with all those challenges, the call to this type of investment with each other is simply right, Biblical, and joy-producing. Think of the privileged and transparent relationship with Jesus and His disciples. There is something liberating about being real. And Paul practiced this beyond the Philippian church. Pay attention to his relationship with the Thessalonians – “*So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us*” (**1 Thessalonians 2:8**). Let's not allow fear, busyness, and pride keep us from learning to be dependent on one another in genuine spiritual relationships. If we fight through our independence and privatization of our Christianity, we will know more joy and intimacy with Jesus as we grow together in Him and the world will see His church for what it is, not perfect, but genuine!

PRAYER: “Lord, teach me more love and investment in Your people.”

QUOTE: “The Christian life is not lived on an island or with the mentality of being the ‘Lone Ranger’.”

The QBC Daily Nugget January 26, 2012

“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 31:15 – My times are in your hand . . .

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: **TICK-TOCK TICK-TOCK**. Do we hear it? No, it is not the sound of a clock in the kitchen or living room. It is the clock of our lives ticking away every day. How are we living it? Are we “redeeming the time” as the Apostle Paul tells us to do (**Ephesians 5:16**)? Or maybe allowing too many things, things which will burn up at our judgment, waste away precious time? I came across this the other day that drove me to deep contemplation and self-evaluation. Maybe the Lord will use it in your life in like fashion. Dr. Leslie Weatherhead, in his book *Time for God*, has a mathematically calculated schedule which compares a lifetime of “three score years and ten” with the hours of a single day from seven in the morning to eleven at night. His reference comes from the Psalms, “*The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away*” (**Psalm 90:10**). Obviously some people live longer than seventy years of age, but it would be interesting to see if when averaged out of all the deaths, the young, middle, and old when death occurs, if the average didn’t come out to seventy years or close to it. At any rate, here is Dr. Weatherhead’s schedule. As we read it, ask four questions of ourselves. First, where are we in the clock of life? Next, are we striving to make our life really count for Christ and His glory each day by using our time wisely as the scripture dictates? Third question, are we misusing our time that might cause us to look back with regret as the clock of our lives continually ticks away? And finally, are we able to look at our lives and praise God that He is helping us “maximize” our time in such a way that He is producing lasting and eternal fruit through our lives into others?

Dr. Weatherhead wrote, “If your age is . . .

15, the time is 10:25 a.m.
20, the time is 11:34 a.m.
25, the time is 12:42 p.m.
30, the time is 1:51 p.m.
35, the time is 3:00 p.m.
40, the time is 4:08 p.m.
45, the time is 5:16 p.m.
50, the time is 6:25 p.m.
55, the time is 7:34 p.m.
60, the time is 8:42 p.m.
65, the time is 9:51 p.m.
70, the time is 11:00 p.m.”

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians, “*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time*” (**Colossians 4:5**). Our clocks are ticking. Do we hear it? Let’s strive to live the only life we have using the time God has given us to the best of our ability and with eternal perspective. Remember, yesterday is gone, tomorrow isn’t promised and thus this day is all we have to live for God’s honor, glory, and purposes. Do we hear it? Tick, tock, tick, tock . . . the day is quickly passing.

PRAYER: “Father, help me to redeem my time so that when I come to the end of my life I won’t look back at wasted time.”

QUOTE: “We have one day at a time to live for either eternity or a passing world.”

The QBC Daily Nugget January 27, 2012

“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 1:17-18 – And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” And immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: DELAYED OBEDIENCE IS DISOBEDIENCE. Mark must have really liked the word. He used it a lot in writing his gospel. It appears nine times just in chapter one. It is the word “immediately” and there is a very vital spiritual lesson to be learned just from this one word when it comes to obeying the Lord Jesus.

I have heard it from Christians. I have heard it a lot from myself. I have lived it in my own life. It is the deceptive danger of delayed obedience to what we know our God commands and desires of us. The conversations with others and even within ourselves to ourselves may go like this, “Yes, I know I need to be more disciplined in the Word and prayer.” Or, “I know I need to be leading my family spiritually.” It continues, “I need to be more involved in the lives of other Christians when it comes to church life and especially in studying the Word and praying together.” One more piece of conversation exchanged with other Christians and even within our own hearts, “I do need to be more faithful to the Lord’s house and the work of the Gospel.” As these conversations occur, pause for a moment and listen. Do we hear it? Is that the voice of the Apostle Paul speaking? Be silent for a moment and we will hear him - *“(insert our name), you were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (Galatians 5:7)*. “Well, Paul, huh, well, I have just been so busy. Things are just so hectic right now. Once I get through this season, then I’ll get on track spiritually.” The Apostle responds again to make sure we got it, *“(insert our name), you were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (Galatians 5:7)*. With heads bowed, humbled by the piercing Word of God, we admit that no one has hindered us from doing what we know to do but ourselves.

In this battle of delayed obedience which is disobedience, we need to come to grips with a few things. When I survey the all too many times I have delayed my obedience to what I know God wants of me, even finding “good” and justifying reasons for doing so, I am coming to at least three conclusions. First, if I sense conviction that I know what God commands and desires of me and I don’t seek to make the necessary changes in my life toward obedience, my conviction is not true. I may have remorse but if I really am being dealt with by the Lord’s Spirit in this area, I will submit and change. I may sorrow over my delayed obedience, but if doesn’t change, then my sorrow is not godly sorrow. True conviction by the Spirit in the child of God will lead to confession, repentance, and change. Another thing I am learning about my delayed obedience is that I don’t really understand the tremendous privilege of obeying God. Think about it. Jesus came and died for us so we could be in harmony with God and lovingly obey His commands for His glory and our good. Do we so delight in the privilege of obeying God? Are we as excited to obey God as little children on a bright Christmas morning or at their birthday party? Disobedience, whether deliberate or delayed, is of the old life, not the new. Living in known disobedience, including delayed obedience, is simply incompatible with the purpose of my salvation. A third truth I am learning about my delayed obedience is that I really don’t grasp just how powerful and subtle the flesh and devil are in this battle. My flesh and the devil are not going to just all of a sudden drop “bombs” of gross sin into my life or in yours. We are alert to the “big sins”. That isn’t the problem when it comes to most cases of delayed obedience. Instead the devil and flesh will be more covert or “sneaky” by deceiving us in letting good, but worldly things, influence us away from immediate obedience and justify delayed obedience.

The disciples knew the call of Jesus to immediate obedience wasn’t something to trifle with or put off. He is the Lord. He is too good, too loving, and too worthy to have His people, bought with His precious blood, not surrender all and that immediately when it comes to obeying Him. And when we do, oh the joy and communion we have with Him who called us out of darkness so that we might walk in the liberating freedom of obedience!

PRAYER: “Father, help me not delay what I know to do that pleases You and stay unchanged in what displeases You.”

QUOTE: “If our sorrow over not doing right doesn’t make us do right, it isn’t godly sorrow.”

The QBC Daily Nugget January 30, 2012

“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 13:4 - The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: WANT TO ISN'T ENOUGH. “I really want to grow in the Lord. I want to have those types of spiritual relationships you have been talking about from the pulpit recently. Who was that guy? Oh, yeah, Epaphroditus. I want to be like him with other believers.” These are some conversation pieces I've enjoyed recently. As I listened, I saw myself. I listened and smiled while inwardly whispering, “Me, too.” After a little more exchange, I did two things. First, I affirmed him and said, “Me, too” and then I asked a question – “What are you doing to make your ‘want to’ a reality?” Pause, silence, a look of “Hmm . . . I never thought much about that. I guess I am just waiting for that to happen.” Well, if that is the case, there is very high probability the ‘want to’ will never become a soul-satisfying and soul-challenging reality.

Today's scripture reference stings the heart of a person who has “the want to” but lacks the active pursuit of the “want to”. Spiritual relationships just don't “happen” – they don't get zapped into existence. Many Christians cry out for spiritual growth, yet, neglect the opportunities for growth. Whether by absenting ourselves from church during times when the means of growth, the Word is being proclaimed, or failing to reach out and build spiritual relationships with other believers for growth, too often our ‘want to’ might not be as strong as we think. I learned the lesson about making one's spiritual “want to” a spiritual life reality from a young believer, very young believer, while in the Navy. Here is my story . . .

He was a sailor on my ship; an introvert, a good worker, and well-liked. We did not work together. Our fields of expertise were like night and day. I was a senior leader of the ship assigned to Combat Systems. He was a junior sailor working in administration. Our “navy” worlds were worlds apart. He also was Jewish. He approached me one day, rather timidly, knowing I was a Christian, and said, “I would like to talk to you about Christianity.” I agreed and stated, knowing his Jewish commitment, “We will disagree.” And so we talked. Afterwards, I gave him three books with three assignments – read the Gospel of John, read *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, and read *Evidence Demands a Verdict* (vol. 1) by Josh McDowell. The assignments were “Let's discuss them after you finish them.” He agreed. That was about a month's worth of reading I gave him. This dear brother was intelligent – far smarter than me – and could read and retain. Less than a week went by. He came to my office and said this, “I am convinced.” I said, “Of what?” He replied, “I am convinced Jesus is my Messiah and I am born again.” I rejoiced with him, questioned his understanding of salvation and then the lesson about spiritual investment and relationship came. He looked at me and said, “Will you disciple me?” I said, “Sure, how often do you want to meet?” He replied, “Every day.” I could see in his eyes and hear in his voice a hunger to know truth and Him who is truth. I also felt the raging battle of his request and my schedule. I was busy. Very busy. As a senior advisor to the Captain of the ship and in charge of the welfare of over 200 sailors, I didn't waste much time in my day, but I could not say no. The only thing I could do was give up sleep. “Okay, every day, 5:30 a.m. we will go through 1 Timothy.” And we did . . . we missed a few days due to shipboard schedules and things, but we met nearly every day for six months as we worked through 1 Timothy. My dear friend and brother made his ‘want to’ for spiritual growth reality.

Now, please don't think I am some “super discipler” because of what happened. Far from it. I struggle like all of us and realize that not all of us are able to give time like that to another believer. My situation allowed that to occur. However, there is no restriction on any of us preventing some type of spiritual relationship with another believer for spiritual growth. It really boils down to how real the “want to” is in our lives. When it comes to knowing the Lord, we are promised that privilege will be ours when we meet the condition He gives, “*You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart*” (**Jeremiah 29:13**). The same principle applies in discipleship of one another. It will happen if we truly want it to happen and seek it. It can be reality. It did with my friend and taught me a great lesson – I will always find time to do the things that I truly want to do and that includes spiritual growth.

PRAYER: “Lord, thank You for giving me the privilege to know You.”

QUOTE: “Make sure our hunger for spiritual growth is accompanied by a diligent seeking to fulfill that hunger.”

The QBC Daily Nugget
January 31, 2012

“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)

EZEKIEL 37:23 – They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: WATCH OUT FOR THE PIT. I always wondered about the pit Joseph was tossed into by his brothers. How deep was it? Did he get hurt when they threw him into it? What caused this pit to be there in the first place? Just to refresh ourselves about the account of Joseph and this pit, here it is – *“Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.” But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” And Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it” (Genesis 37:20–24).* How tragic to be tossed into a pit for his destruction.

There is another pit, not literal like the one Joseph experienced, but far more tragic and destructive. It is the pit of backsliding. It is the place Christians may find themselves if they don’t diligently and daily be on guard in their walk with the Lord. Before we look at signs of falling into this pit of backsliding, what is the definition of backsliding? One author defines it as “Spiritual winter when a Christian’s obedience declines and sin grows stronger.” That isn’t a bad definition but I think a far better way to determine if we are in the pit of backsliding is to look at signs of being there. It doesn’t happen overnight. In fact, it is a slow fall but a sure fall. Dr. Joel Beeke, in his book *Getting Back into the Race: The Cure for Backsliding*, identifies sure signs of being in this condition. He writes, “Backsliding need not involve any big, scandalous sin; it often begins with coldness in prayer and a sense of indifference towards the Word of God. Inner corruption begins to grow and poisons our attitude. We make excuses for sins instead of repenting of them. We would not admit it, but hypocrisy and pride rise up in our hearts. We become impatient, discontent, and quick to anger. Our love for God’s people cools. We develop critical spirits. Complaints, disputes, and arguments multiply but it is someone else’s fault. God’s glory, which once fascinated and filled us, seems distant and unreal. Our souls no longer feed on Him.”

Allow me to elaborate on two signs Dr. Beeke writes that identify being a backslidden Christian who is in need of a restoring touch from our Lord. He mentioned, “Indifference towards the Word of God.” A clear mark of a backslidden Christian is their lack of hunger for the Word of God both in private reading and public proclamation. Healthy Christians look forward to being in God’s Word daily and when the Lord’s Day comes, they look with great anticipation of hearing the Word proclaimed as much as possible. In a backslidden Christian, they can absent themselves from being in the Word and hearing the Word without much, if any, sadness or remorse. Another sign Dr. Beeke states is present in a backslidden Christian is “Our love for God’s people cools”. What does that mean? I think it is better to ask “what does that look like?” A backslidden Christian lacks a desire to be with other Christians in the Word and prayer. They absent themselves from fellowship and opportunities for spiritual interaction with other believers and justify such absence.

As serious as backsliding is, it is not the unpardonable sin. If we should find ourselves just going through the motions of our Christianity, run to our reference of the day and plead the promise of God to take us out of the miserable pit of backsliding. Joseph got out of his pit and we also shall be rescued by the grace of a restoring God!

PRAYER: “Lord, please keep me ever alert to the always present danger of backsliding.”

QUOTE: “God promises to restore backsliders if they return to Him with all their heart.”