

God Let Me See the Hedge

*and Other Glimpses of
God's Creation and
The People In It*

by Mac Wilkey

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I. Glimpses of God's Love

These poems attempt to describe just how much God loves us. The God of the Universe has a definite plan for our lives, and He will ensure that we have the opportunity to serve Him according to His purpose for us.

This first poem is based on Satan's reference to the hedge in the book of Job. There is not even a hint that God regularly removes the hedge around us at Satan's request. God only removed the hedge around Job to demonstrate the faithfulness of His servant Job. The hedge around each one of His other servants is always in place and doing its job to keep Satan at a safe distance away.

God Let Me See the Hedge

Once when I struggled and floundered about
When I heard Satan allege,
"He doesn't care what might happen to you."
God let me see the hedge.

Satan had not even made it inside;
Only his words made it through--
Speaking as if he had total control,
But talking was all he could do.

The hedge was so thick even Satan's long arms
Could never reach me inside.
The hedge reached to Heaven; no one came across
Clearly old Satan had lied.

Now when some sickness or hurt causes pain,
I'll trust what God has in store.
Never forgetting that He's in control,
I see the hedge like before.

What about sickness and pain and death and disappointments that happen to us? How do they fit in with the concept of the hedge? Are random events just allowed to happen in the universe or does God have a master plan? When Brother Dean Johnson was preaching on the story where the fearful disciples were crossing the stormy sea only to be met by Jesus walking on the water, the answer came to me. God is always in control, and the circumstances of life are not like a runaway school bus, but are more like an amusement park ride. He will safely bring us through each event and He will be waiting at the end of the scariest ride of all with a special surprise – a Heavenly home prepared especially for us.

It Is I; Be Not Afraid

The disciples He sent out to sea; they were huddled in a boat.
The storm was raging mightily, and they feared it might not float
From the darkness Jesus came to them; on the water He appeared.
And they gladly took him in their boat when his words had calmed their fears.

It is I; be not afraid. For I am the one who made
This circumstance that you are going thru.
When the storms of doubt arise, I'm the one who clears the skies.
Rest assured; I shall deliver you.

They rolled me slowly down the hall. Confusion seemed to reign.
(The nurses rushing to and fro) Did they even know my name?
Then my Savior stood right by my side; I could feel his presence there,
And the words He spoke brought peace to me though the rest were unaware.

It is I; be not afraid. For I am the one who made
This circumstance that you are going thru.
When the storms of doubt arise, I'm the one who clears the skies.
Rest assured; I shall deliver you.

And when it's time for me to go, and I take my final breath,
I know He'll be there by my side when the circumstance is death.
He has walked across life's final sea; He will guide me to the shore.
As my feet step out on Holy ground, I might hear these words once more .

It is I; be not afraid. For I am the one who made
This circumstance that you are going thru.
Don't you know, my precious child that I've waited quite a while
To show all this, my heavenly home, to you?

The following poem/song was “written” by me as I traveled to Tuscaloosa, Alabama. I sang the song over and over and wrote it down when I returned home from the trip. Originally a three-stanza poem with a lot more repetition of the title phrase, it was revised to focus more directly on God and the certainty that He has great plans for us. I’ve included both versions for completeness and because God may have a purpose for the middle stanza in someone’s life.

He’s the God of Tomorrow as Well as Today - *Shorter Version*

Have you ever just wondered what God has in store
When He’s saying, “Be patient—just one battle more?”
Does He know all the burdens that you have to bear?
Does He know that you’re hurting; does He hear every prayer?

Yes, He knows about burdens and He knows that they’re real,
But He sees the next valley while you’re climbing this hill.
He knows all your heartaches will be taken away
For He’s the God of tomorrow as well as today.

He knows what we’ll be like when we’re fashioned His way.
He knows where we’re headed and how long we’ll stay.
He knows that these trials can hardly compare
With the pleasures and joys we will have over there.

When in white-robed perfection, together we'll stand.
Throughout endless ages — oh won't that be grand.
So, remember if He lets some trials come your way,
He's the God of tomorrow as well as today.

The longer version which follows deals with our human frailty, especially our tendency to say hurtful things to the ones we love. Like the problems of this lifetime, our sinful nature will also be changed when the God of Tomorrow fashions us "His way."

He's the God of Tomorrow as Well as Today - *Longer Version*

Have you ever just wondered what God has in store
When He's saying, "Be patient—just one battle more?"
Does He know all the burdens that you have to bear?
Does He know that you're hurting; does He hear every prayer?
Yes, He knows about burdens and He knows that they're real,
But He sees the next valley while you're climbing this hill.
He knows all your heartaches will be taken away
For He's the God of tomorrow as well as today.

He's the God of tomorrow as well as today.
He knows words are hurtful, and He knows those we'll say.
He knows that we'll fail Him, but He knows that we care.
He knows when we're crying, and He answers each prayer.
He knows about weakness, and He knows about sin.
His own Son He gave us — this vict'ry to win,
And He knows what we'll be like when we're fashioned His way
For He's the God of tomorrow as well as today.

He's the God of tomorrow as well as today.
He knows where we're headed and how long we'll stay.

He knows that these trials can hardly compare
With the pleasures and joys we will have over there.
When in white-robed perfection, together we'll stand.
Throughout endless ages – oh won't that be grand.
So, remember if He lets some trials come your way,
He's the God of tomorrow as well as today.

God is in control because He is omnipotent (all-powerful) and omniscient (all-knowing). I have always been amazed (and a bit perplexed) that He knows the future, but still leaves us accountable for our own actions by allowing us to choose whether we will do good or evil, reject Him or accept Him, and curse Him or bless Him. We certainly can't hide anything from Him, and this poem describes just how great and awesome our God really is.

God's Greatness and His Love

He's big enough to hang the stars in Heaven;
His power is such He calmed the raging sea.
He's pure enough to be the Lamb Most Holy,
But He loved enough to die for you and me.

His power is such His words brought forth creation.
Sin then entered in deceitfully.
He could have started over if He'd wanted,
But He had a plan to rescue you and me.

He's strong enough to withstand all temptation
Though Satan tempted Him relentlessly.
He only asked His bitter cup be taken,
But He loved enough to taste of death for me.

He's pure enough that He alone could die for
A human race filled with iniquity.
Unblemished as a Lamb He stood in Heaven,
But He came to earth to die as sin for me.

He's big enough to hang the stars in Heaven;
His power is such He calmed the raging sea.
He's pure enough to be the Lamb Most Holy,
But He loved enough to die for you and me.

Just think about how great God is and how weak and insignificant we are in comparison to Him. Yet He loved us and made a way for us to be acceptable in His sight. When I thought of my own salvation, I described my feelings in the following poem. I suspect that others have had very similar feelings and experiences when they admitted their helplessness to save themselves and accepted God's gracious gift of eternal life through Christ's atoning death and wondrous resurrection.

Salvation

Oh, Holy God,
I stand in Your presence
With no hope of heaven
Outside of Your grace.

Please save me, Oh Savior.
This instant You're lifting
The weight of my burden.
Sweet joy takes its place.

Dear Savior, I thank you
For surely You suffered.
You bore all the sins for
The whole human race.

May my life give glory;
As I enter Your kingdom
With Your power flowing
Like these tears down my face.

Oh, Holy God,
Magnificent Savior,
Sweet, sweet Holy Spirit,
You've hallowed this place.

I came to this building —
Walked in as a sinner;
Now I'm bound for heaven
On the wings of your grace.

During the days surrounding my mother's funeral, we often sat on the front porch. As humans do we griped about the gnats and flies that buzzed around us. "By His Stripes We Are Healed" (page 45) deals with God's answer to my questions about Mother's death; this poem provides another answer God gave me during that same period of time. It serves as a rebuttal for Ogden Nash as well as the rest of us, who probably agreed with him whether or not we voiced our concurrence.

A Rebuttal to Ogden Nash - Gnats and Flies

In his poem, Ogden Nash credited God for creating the fly and for having a valid reason for doing so. He irreverently blames God for forgetting to pass on the reason to the human race. My rebuttal follows.

Gnats and Flies

I asked the Lord to tell me why
He made the gnat and made the fly.
They both are pests; they aggravate;
They do no good; there's no debate.

To my surprise, He answered me;
He understood my plight, you see.
The gnats and flies surrounded Him
When Roman nails pinned down each limb.

"I would have swatted them away,
But couldn't move My hands that day.
My friend, I know they aggravate,
But is your torment all that great?"

He left me to my thoughts — alone;
The answer came when He was gone.
When I'm by gnats and flies maligned,
My Savior's wounds come to my mind.

And though I still swat them away,
I think about the cross that day.
My debt to him I recognize,
And thank Him for these gnats and flies

It's not hard to imagine how God views our ungratefulness for all of the blessings He has given us. Like the gnats and the flies in the preceding poem, we let the negative events in our lives defeat us. We get so involved in our jobs and our hobbies and our personal goals that we forget to say thanks to the ones who love us and support us. Of course, Jesus is the One that we owe the most, but there are others God has placed in our lives who we also should appreciate. This poem

describes one man's "dream" which helped him see the light. It was written as a song that could be sung to the same tune as "Thank You (for Giving to the Lord)." The dream is about the events which might follow those in the "Thank You" song.

Ungrateful

I dreamed I stood in Heaven;
Some folks just milled around.
Most, it seemed, were saying, "Thanks,"
And some were being crowned.

A voice was heard by all of us
"You've finished thanking those
Who changed your life so very much;"
Then Christ Himself arose.

"The things you've done unto the least
You've also done to me.
And now you get a chance to share
Those things they did not see."

A woman said, "Hey, mister,
I brought your coat to you.
You'd left it at my table,
And the rain was pouring, too.

"Although you hadn't left a tip,
You seemed a bit upset
That when you rolled your window down,
You got your shirt sleeve wet."

And then I heard, "Hey, mister."
Of course, I looked around.
The smiling face that faced me then
Was my old Pastor Brown.

“One time I helped your son,” he said,
When he was in a bind.
You had gone fishing with your friends;
I helped to ease his mind.

“I read to him from John fourteen,
And we went for a walk.
The scripture helped, but more it seemed,
He wanted just to talk.

Another said, “Hey, mister;”
I turned to face my wife.
“I bore your son and gave my love
Throughout our married life.

“I washed and cooked and ironed the things
I bought you at the store,
But you just said, ‘I’m leaving;
I don’t love you any more.’ ”

A grander voice said, “Mister,”
And to my awful shame
I turned to see my Savior’s face.
Did He not know my name?

“You have believed and trusted Me;
In Heaven now you stand,
But never even thanked me for
These nail scars in my hand.”

Then I awoke and thankfully
My precious wife – so dear
Was lying by me on the bed;
I whispered in her ear,

"I love you and I'm grateful for
The million things you do."
She didn't wake but simply smiled
And said, "I love you, too."

I found my son's room where I saw
Him sitting on his bed
His Bible open in his hands
From John fourteen he read.

"Why don't we go for breakfast, son,
I think we need to talk.
The diner's down the road a bit,
But we could use the walk."

The winter wind was blowing hard
As we slipped through the door.
"Go find a table for us, son,
While I do one thing more."

I slipped back to the kitchen door
And saw her standing there.
The waitress fixed her daughter's lunch,
But tension filled the air.

She said, "Just take these crackers, dear;
They'll do although they're old.
I've got to buy a coat for you
Before it gets too cold."

I slipped some twenties from the stash
I used for golfing trips,
And meekly held them out to her
Then spoke with trembling lips.

“Somebody left this tip for you;
It’s really hard to tell
Just who it was – there’s such a crowd;
You must have served them well.

“And somehow he forgot his coat
Although it’s nippy out.”
I placed it ‘round her daughter’s arms
And saw the look of doubt.

“You’re Johnny’s father; aren’t you, sir?
Your son is really nice.”
And though the gift was not from me,
They had to thank me twice.

I joined my son. “We’ll take your mom
A sausage biscuit back.”
“I’ve fixed her one with bacon, Dad.”
He showed the paper sack.

I said, “Let’s pray.” We bowed our heads;
It took me quite a while;
And when I said “Amen,” my son
Was wearing quite a smile.

I left the biscuit and my son
Who knew his mom preferred
The bacon to the sausage;
My heart again was stirred.

As I drove off to find the church
And thank dear Pastor Brown,
I thanked God for the dream and for
The gratefulness I’d found.

What a wake up call! Seeing Jesus face to face, and having Him remind us that we took Him for granted. Sometimes, I think, we take for granted that everyone believes that the Bible is true. The “Roman Road” is based on verses of scripture which detail that all have sinned, that all need salvation, that Christ desires to save, and that those who believe that He died for them can have everlasting life. The next poem challenges that assumption by presenting a man who simply says that he CAN’T believe. What would you say to him?

I Don’t Believe; I Can’t Believe

Many thought their prayers were answered
As he rose and walked the aisle.
They almost stopped their singing
They had waited quite a while.

As the preacher reached to greet him,
He sharply turned and looked away.
His signal stopped the music,
And his words caused such dismay.

“I don’t believe; I can’t believe.
You know how hard I’ve tried.
I can’t believe the gospel;
Its truth I have denied.

“The preacher’s word are surely clear;
The lacking is in me.
I can’t believe a Holy God
Would ever die for me.”

Each member of the church came forth;
They stopped and tried to share
The reasons why their faith was real
How they knew God did care.

His wife and daughter also came--
Their love a certainty.
They hugged the hopeless father
And prayed that he could see.

"I don't believe; I can't believe;
Your words I don't deny.
I know that each of you believes;
I know you wouldn't lie.

"But what if you're mistaken.
No one would die for me.
I don't believe; I can't believe;
I doubt I'll ever see."

His little daughter took his hand;
He turned to face the crowd.
If one of you would die for me,
Then please just tell me now.

Each one he looked at looked away;
He looked down in dismay,
And saw his daughter's precious lips
And heard her sweetly say,

"I'd die for you; I know I would
If I could save your soul.
You can believe; you must believe
Because I love you so."

The man was shaken to his knees;
Belief came rushing in.
"I can believe; I do believe;
My soul is saved from sin!"

Is there one who is watching you?
Who daily checks your ways.
To see if really you believe
The words that Jesus says.

Can you step forth and meet his gaze?
Or must you look away?
Will you give strength to all his doubts?
Or will your actions say,

"I do believe, I do believe;
You can believe Him too!
He gave himself upon a cross
He truly died for you."

The next poem/song was obviously inspired by the wireless telephone commercial where the guy with the phone seemed to be traveling the world over to ask the person on the other phone, "Can You Hear Me Now?"

Can You Hear Me Now? I'm Calling!

Can you hear me now? I'm calling
From the deep, dark jungle
Where the leopards circle and the lions prowl.
Where the clinging vines of sin have me entangled,
I wonder, Lord, can you hear me now?

I can hear you now; I hear you
Like I heard old Samson
From the pagan temple though he broke his vow.

When he lifted up his blinded eyes toward Heaven,
I heard him then, and I hear you now.

Can you hear me now? I'm calling
From a deep, dark dungeon
Where the chains of sin have got me bound somehow.
Where I cannot see the precious light of Heaven,
I wonder, Lord, can you hear me now?

I can hear you now; I hear you
Like I heard old Moses
When he broke the tablets at the golden cow.
When he begged for mercy for a fallen people,
I heard him then, and I hear you now.

I can hear you now; I'll hear you;
I will always hear you;
I could hear your whisper 'neath a waterfall.
But the question isn't whether I will hear you.
But rather, child, will you hear my call?

Can you hear me now? I'm calling
From the gates of Heaven,
And you should be thankful that you hear my call.
For when you don't listen then you're heart grows harder,
And a hardened heart won't hear at all.

Helping a lost person hear God's call and turn to Him is our "charge" as my friend Jerry Rich puts it. Although a sinner can accept Christ as his savior at any time in a service (or at places other than church buildings) the "invitation" portion of a worship service is especially designed to encourage those with spiritual needs to come forward. The following poem/song is my attempt to write an invitational song to reach those that are lost—to help them hear God's call and to realize what an amazing gift God is offering.

What Did I Do to Deserve Such a Savior?

What did I do to deserve such a Savior?
I was so vile 'til Your blood was applied.
Then tho' my right-ness is all of Your doing
I'm not the same as the sinner who cried,

"I cannot live without you, Lord.
Please take my sins all away.
You who were never found guilty
Offer what I cannot pay."

I can do nothing to merit Your mercy
Though I'm indebted and surely will try
All that my efforts and ministries tell You
Is that I'm thankful You willingly died.

"I cannot live without you, Lord.
You took my sins all away.
You who were never found guilty
Offered what I could not pay."

When with the saints we are finally gathered
When the redeemed ones lift voices on high
We will look back to the day when you saved us
When at the altar you first heard us cry,

"I cannot live without you, Lord.
Please take my sins all away.
You who were never found guilty
Offer what I cannot pay."

God's love is shown first and foremost through His gift of salvation, but He also displays His love for us as He cares for us and protects us during our life on earth. I wrote the following poem in my twenties. It reminds me that I have been

under His care for a very long time. The last few lines seem even more true to me in my fifties.

Cradled in His Arms

Cradled in His arms
Safe with no alarms
By His love protected
Faithful and true

I'm walking in His way
He guides me day by day
Past challenges intended
To change my course

I've asked Him why
It happened
And why it's best for Him
I'm waiting for
The answer
"I've got you, trust Me"

Lo. These many years
I've known the King of kings
Faithful and true
Is He
Now I'm more His servant
Now I'm more His friend
His child I've always been

Jeremy Britton, another young man in his twenties inspired the next poem. Basically, I just tried to capture his testimony to a Youth Vacation Bible School class one Saturday morning. I think the testimony of one who was just a few years older

than they were had a bigger impact than one from a real old guy like I was at the time.

Big Ol' Arms Around You

Every morning when you wake up,
You know He's reaching down;
His big ol' arms around you,
He speaks without a sound.

He tells you He'll be with you —
Take every step you take.
He'll feel each pain you suffer,
And if your heart should break,

You'll feel His arms around you
And know how much He cares,
And you can even talk to Him
With very simple prayers.

And when at times you are afraid,
He'll chase those fears away.
Those big ol' arms sweep 'round you.
He gives you strength to pray.

And even when you're tempted,
You'll know He's been there too.
His big ol' arms will hold you back;
He'll show you what to do.

And when at night you toss and turn,
And prayers aren't getting through,
He'll tell you not to worry as
He reaches down for you.

The next poem is another from my early poetry days. As Jesus did with the parable of the prodigal son, this poem uses the love that parents have for their children to draw a “word picture” of God’s love for us.

May I Walk With You My Child

A boy sits in his room alone
Enraged at what his parents said.
Announcing that he’d run away,
They’d said to him, “Well, go ahead.”

He’d packed his bags expecting them
To try to stop his leaving home,
But no one else had said a word;
They seemed content to let him roam.

He put his cap and jacket on
Then slowly walked toward the door,
But no one called for him to wait;
No footsteps hurried ‘cross the floor.

He shut the door and started out
And heard no shout – no last reprieve.
“At least they could have said, ‘Good-by’
“Their lack of love I don’t believe.”

He walked along familiar streets.
They seemed much stranger now to him.
He looked back once but not again;
The sun had set, the light was dim.

He came into a part of town
That looked so new – so strange and wild.
He heard a sound and then a voice,
“I’d like to walk with you my child.”

His father's voice – his father's face –
A welcome sight he thought he'd lost.
But now he knew that he would be
A son no matter what the cost.

The next poem/songs are my attempt to write praise songs. I'm still waiting for God to provide the music. Until then, I'll sing them *a capella*.

Praise Phrases

I.

You gave the words we sing in the chorus
You send us blessings in so many ways
You who are Holy are right here before us
You'll let us see You if we seek Your face.

II.

How can this world full of those You created
Forget our maker--refusing His love
How can we doubt when we should be elated
Great are the gifts from our Father above

III.

Oh what a feeling when we sense His glory
Glimpses of heaven--our earthly reward
Taking us back where we first heard the story
Oh how we're blessed when we call Him our Lord.

The following poem resulted from my attempt to write a chorus for the poem/song "Seeing Him First." The chorus never seemed to fit, but the thoughts and pictures it brought to my mind needed to be expressed.

I Want to See Him First

Seeing Him first – seeing Him first
The One who redeemed us though He knew our worst
He who satisfies hunger and quenches all thirst
Above all else in Heaven, I want to see Him first

In thoughts of our loved ones, we oft get immersed
And the glories of Heaven – in them we're well-versed
But when they ask me "Whom seek ye?" my answer's rehearsed
"The One who redeemed me – I want to see Him first"

Seeing Him first – seeing Him first
I picture that meeting – my old heart might burst
To think that without Him my soul would be cursed
Above all else in Heaven – I want to see Him first

II. Glimpses of the Bible

I'm not sure when I first realized that Jesus didn't "make up" the parables. Everything in the Bible is based on events that actually happened. God has complete control and can make happen what He desires to happen. The Old Testament wasn't a random series of events that God inspired men to write about; it was a planned sequence of events that God ordained to occur to provide the basis for His son's arrival on the earth. Accordingly, the New Testament describes the working out of the plan God ordained before the foundation of the earth. The next series of poems are based on "glimpses" that God has allowed me to see. In most cases, they represent something unique that I "saw." Sometimes, they represent what others "saw" and related to me. God has many ways to inspire us if we are open to Him.

The first poem in this section was begun during my college days when I had nothing to fear because I had nothing to lose. I re-wrote the poem when I was fifty-four and a whole lot wiser. Regretfully, I'm no longer the idealist that I once was, but I think this poem captures the really important things in my life from an individual perspective. It represents what God has shown me to be the important things in life—those things that we can and should consider essential to living a life that could one day be evaluated by a loving savior as "well done."

Walk Like A Hippo

May I walk a little straighter--not like an alligator,
But like a hippopotamus when he's really mad.
May the love I show my brother keep us close to one another.
May the best times be remembered as the last ones that we had.

May a grain of salt be taller than the worth I give a dollar.
May I never honor riches over doing what is right.
May my deeds and not my station dominate my reputation.
May I keep in mind the servant is the greatest in His sight.

For our God who knows the pattern of a Jupiter and Saturn
Of the Tennessee and Jordan inside their stormy banks
Didn't spare His own son Jesus. May my walk be one that pleases,
And may I not give credence to the devil and his pranks

May I value more the knowledge that I learned at Jesus' college
Than the B.S. that I garnered from my academic start.
May I seek out Holy beacons--ignore the devil's deacons.
May I keep my parents' teaching--from their wisdom not depart.

May I seek not my own glory; live a life that tells the story
Of a man who found "amazing grace" when he came "just as I am"
May I know that I'm a debtor who's forgiven but no better
Than the vilest, blackest sinner who was washed by Calv'ry's lamb.

The poem "Walk Like A Hippo" captures the idealism that I had as a 20-year old just starting out in life on my own. I had not yet realized how completely hopeless I really was to live a good life on my own. I had accepted Christ as my Savior, but I hadn't grasped how surely my accepting His sacrificial death on the cross had bound me by His promises and determined my eternal destiny based on that one act of faith on my part. Sitting in church and thinking about how older folks were always saying that they were "bound and determined" to do this or that

caused me to think about how those same words described perfectly our election by God into his kingdom.

Bound and Determined

It's not by strength of character or degree of skill.
It's not by deeds of righteousness or even how I feel.
It's not how long and hard I work or if I sacrifice.
I'm totally dependent on the Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm bound and determined to walk on streets of gold.
I'm bound and determined to talk with saints of old.
I'm bound and determined to see my savior's face.
I'm bound by his promises – determined by his grace.

I'm bound by the promise He made to Abraham.
I'm bound by the promises of the great I AM.
And though He spoke these words before I came upon the scene,
I'm bound by the promise of John 3:16

It was pre-determined a long, long time ago
Before this world was fashioned – whom He did foreknow.
Then He did predestinate that whosoever will
Would be called and justified – oh, what a thrill.

I'm bound and determined to walk on streets of gold.
I'm bound and determined to talk with saints of old.
I'm bound and determined to see my savior's face.
I'm bound by his promises – determined by his grace.

Secure in the knowledge that we are destined for a glorious home in heaven with Christ, we also have assurance that He will provide for our needs here on earth. One day when I was driving on top of Sand Mountain and looking across a valley to another mountain range, I realized that these huge mountains were the

kind of mountains He promised that our faith could move – not some small mountains that a bulldozer could actually move. I wrote the poem from the perspective of someone who was trying out God’s promise (with respect to mountain moving) one step at a time. God is so wonderful that He keeps His promises even when we are slow to accept them because of our reluctance to really believe in Him.

Moving Mountains

Lord, there’s that mountain you want me to move –
The one I’ve been trying to tunnel through.
I’ve got a little faith but I surely need more
‘Cause, Lord, I’ve never moved any mountains before.

Now I’m down in the valley and that mountain looks high
But I’m getting a grip and I’ll lift toward the sky
I’ve just got one question as my own knees I bend
Lord, are you ready to lift on your end?

Well, here goes, Lord, I’m lifting – I’ve counted to three
And it sounds like an earthquake as that mountain breaks free;
Now I’m just hanging on as it sails through the air
Get ready, ocean, we’re sending it there.

I remember wondering if Jesus ever passed by the tree that was to become the cross on which He would hang on Calvary. I pictured Him walking up to it and perhaps taking a leaf in His hand. Would He have been tempted to curse that tree and make it die? Of course, I couldn’t know whether that event ever happened. It wasn’t recorded in the Bible.

However, I could be absolutely certain that God, the Father, had looked out over His vast creation and seen that very tree. He could have cursed every tree on earth, turned the planet into one big desert, or done any number of things to prevent His precious Son from dying on that cross. I tried to portray the kind of love that God had for us to enable Him to allow His own Son to die for us in the following poem.

I Know That He Knew

If a board near a trail
Had just one rusty nail,
And your child was to come by today;
You couldn't feel at ease;
Your worry wouldn't cease
'Til you'd taken that danger away.

Thus it's so hard to see
How that God cared for me
Enough to let His Son feel the pain.
For our omniscient God
Saw the path that He trod,
And the cross that His Son's blood would stain.

Since He numbers each hair,
Sees each bird in the air,
Then He knows when a seed starts to fall.
And one day He could see
As it fell from a tree
What its future would be after all.

He for sure was aware
As it flew threw the air
Knew just where in the earth it would go.
He saw it start to sprout,
Watched the leaves folding out,
And His sunlight and rain made it grow.

As it grew through the years,
Did our God shed some tears
As He looked at that tree on display?
For I know that He knew
As that little tree grew,
That it would become the cross some day.

Did He just look away
As they felled it that day
When He'd watched it become fully grown?
Oh the love that it took
As His own He forsook
Will never by mortals be known.

Yes I know that He knew
As that little tree grew,
That it would become the cross some day.

The following poem was in response to an article requesting poems to be written on the subject of the trinity. Like a few others, this poem was basically written in one sitting—God just seemed to give me the words.

The Trinity

We struggle hard to understand
How God could be a trinity
But when I think of simple me
Not shrouded with divinity

I see that I'm a father of
Three daughters that I love so well
And yet a son of one dear man
Whose love for me I scarce can tell

And yet my spirit swirls inside
My mind and soul as dad and son
It feels and prays and guides my thoughts
And somehow all of these are one.

So God as Father I can see
Whose children number as the sand
Whose love for each is greater far
Than this old dad can understand.

And God the Son I also see
Whose Father is because He is
And though I love my father too
I can't match Jesus' love for His

And God the Spirit I can feel
Inside me now--God's guarantee
Connecting father to the son
And all of Him to all of me.

I wrote the following poem for a Wednesday night Bible study in the book of James. It captures one of the strong impressions that I received from my mother – it's not HOW MUCH scripture you read, it's what you DO with the scripture that you have read. James makes it very clear that one who calls himself a Christian but doesn't follow Christ's teaching is as ridiculous as someone who looks in the mirror and then walks outside the house and forgets how he looks. I think of mother every

time I re-read this poem. She was a woman who never forgot her Christian countenance.

The Biblical Mirror
James 1:23-24

The Bible's a mirror and in it I see
The face of the Christian that I ought to be

I ought to remember the way that I look
And act like the man that I see in the Book

But sometimes I act like a man I don't see
The man in the mirror could hardly be me

It's as I've forgotten who I really am
When things that I do make that image a sham

I surely should focus more clearly and see
The way I should act as His Word shows to me

And then keep that image more clearly in mind
When I leave the church and the Scriptures behind

When trials are faced and life's choices are made
My life will reflect what the Mirror portrayed.

The following poem introduces itself. I actually saw the cross ties in the form of a cross beside the railroad crossing on county road 69 and old U.S. highway 72 (now Alabama 277). I was surprised that it got the attention it has received since it is not very polished and has the "corny" caboose rhyme in the third verse. Two students used it as the subject of a "paper" for a school project and Patricia Wolf

included it in her Spring 2004 “Chattels of the Heart.” It is an example of God using “real life” events to speak to us about His eternal truths.

Old Cross Ties

As I drove along a country road, I passed a railroad track.
I saw the old, used crossties had been placed off in a stack.
They all were stacked up neatly except two that caught my eye
Though they were tossed at random, formed a cross against the sky.

The cross they formed was empty as if on a discard pile
And it really shook me up and I pondered for a while.
For lots of folks have simply tried to put the Lord aside.
The railroad track they’re trav’ling on is simply not cross tied.

The beams used to replace the old may offer some support
But lacking those that form the cross, I know they’ll come up short.
You may think you’re the engineer and know no tie is loose.
Without the cross of Christ, I know you’re driving the caboose.

Now every time you make a change – before you throw the switch.
Make sure your track’s on solid ground or you’ll be in a ditch.
Don’t always go for something new and toss the old aside
The railroad track you travel on must simply be cross tied.

Amber, my middle daughter, called me on the phone with the idea for the next poem. Basically, I just tried to describe the picture she had in mind as she related it to me. I remember her being a little amazed that I had captured her thoughts so well. She should have remembered that the same Spirit is in each one of us and ministers to us all.

Peace Like A River

A source so small but oh so strong
Based on its altitude, it flows--
The water quickly swept along
Untroubled as downstream it goes.

Though twists and turns lie up ahead,
The water doesn't hesitate.
It rushes down the river bed--
For no one will the river wait.

Where mountains rise, it doesn't stall
And never slows for sudden drops.
Leaving its bed, a waterfall
Descends although it never stops.

God's peace starts small, a calming touch,
But from on high it surely flows.
The peace He gives means oh so much,
And trusting Him it quickly grows.

Through twists and turns throughout my life,
His peace has never lagged behind.
His Word transcends this earthly strife
And brings peace to a troubled mind.

When trials and temptations loom,
He shows the path He's mapped for me:
And soaring past impending doom,
I land amidst the tranquil sea.

The next poem was submitted to the Fellowship of Christian Poets for their November contest. Although, two of my poems have been selected for the monthly focus by John Evans ("Ungrateful" and "His Father's Son") I never had a poem

selected as the “Poem of the Month.” This poem portrays the subject of our thankfulness and some of the reasons why we should offer our thanks to Him every month.

THANKSGIVING

To the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost
How great You are—I trust You most
All through the year, You’ve rescued me
Now, looking back, Your grace I see,
Kept by your power from harms unseen
So blessed my life in Christ has been
Great God above throughout my life
In happy times and bouts of strife
Victorious—O God Who reigns
I treasure all the laughs and pains
Not doubting that You’ve kept control
Great God and Savior of my soul

Sitting on the front porch at church before Sunday School [some will be amazed that I was ever there early] I listened to the singing birds. The next poem portrays those thoughts that came to me that morning.

I’ll Be the First to Sing

I listened Sunday morning
To all the singing birds;
I saw no choir director
And heard no human words.

Each song seemed to initiate
The next song through the air.
Some times the birds just sang alone;
Sometimes I heard a pair.

But seldom did their voices stop.
One always seemed to fill
The ending of another's song
With its melodious trill.

I thought back to before the dawn
When all the birds had slept
As night's sounds settled for the day,
And all their silence kept.

One little bird had ventured forth
When none but she would sing.
Not in response but on her own,
She let her music ring.

Lord, help me be the one who dares,
When no one else will sing,
To watch your wand and see you point
And let my music ring.

My feeble voice may not be strong
As others that are there,
But maybe mine will start the song
As it sweeps through the air.

Then other voices will respond —
Some sweeter — some more strong —
Some solos and some grand duets
Will join God's chorus song.

The music made – so glorious
Can melt the hardest heart,
And God can bless each one of us
Who simply did his part.

One of the most remarkable scriptures to me is the passage where Christ relates that the rocks would cry out with praise if the people had not willingly shouted His praises. God assures us that His ultimate will is not dependent upon human choices. We can surely be blessed in magnificent ways by listening for His direction and following the inspiration He gives us, but there should never be any doubt that He is in control.

I submitted this poem to a web site when some Americans were being held hostage in one of the Middle Eastern countries. When they were rescued and brought back to safety by the United States Armed Forces, the poem seemed to be prophetic (i.e. “be all you ought to be” was the current catch phrase for their enlistment advertisements.. All I can say is that I’m not a prophet, but the same Spirit does minister to all of us. I just write. Let God have all of the praise.

Let There Be No Doubt

If God’s expecting praise,
Let there be no doubt.
If God’s expecting praise,
Let there be no doubt.
If God’s expecting praise,
Let there be no doubt
If He doesn’t hear from us,
He’ll make the rocks cry out

If God sends revival,
It better start with me.
If God sends revival,
It better start with me.
If God sends revival,
It better start with me.
There's plenty of other dry bones
To revive — don't you see.

If faith says, "No mountain,"
No mountain will be there.
If faith says, "No mountain,"
No mountain will be there.
If faith says, "No mountain,"
No mountain will be there,
And the Colorado Rockies
Will be lighter than air.

If God says, "No prison bars,"
Then you will be free.
If God says, "No prison bars,"
Then you will be free.
If God says, "No prison bars,"
Then you will be free.
Like the jailer and his family,
You'll be all you ought to be.

If God says, "No sickness,"
Then healing will be found.
If God says, "No sickness,"
Then healing will be found.
If God says, "No sickness,"
Then healing will be found.
Even if the doctors that you know
Are all out of town.

I've included the following poem because it attempts to portray a stunning picture that God gave me. I visualize an enormous Christ towering above the mountains in the west. His arms stretch as far as I can see. He fills up the horizon. The poem doesn't do justice to the inspiration. Perhaps someone else will see what I am trying to "say" and "pick me up. "

Christ is the Horizon

Christ is the horizon
That I'm walking toward
His arms always open
My Savior and Lord

Beyond the next mountain
Across the vast plain
Shows me the right path
And eases my pain.

He is the horizon
Just waiting for me
He never recedes
I always can see

I look toward the earth
And see hazards below
I yearn to surrender
My feet move so slow

I view the horizon
My Savior is there
He shows me each peril
But I'm walking on air

He is my horizon
I keep Him in sight
He steadies my swaying
And sets me aright

He strengthens my weakness
The footholds I find
New joys in my heart
His peace on my mind.

“Empty” is another poem from my twenties. Sometimes I’m amazed when I look back at the earlier poems and realize that I already had some of the same beliefs that I have now. Sometimes God rekindles us and it has been so long that we have been “on fire” that we think it is something new.

Empty Is What I Feel

Empty is what I feel
Until I simply kneel
And meet my God

Alone I’ll never be
When He is with me
My Lord and my God

The blessings He gives me
Are joyous to think of
They give me a reason to
Smile through the day.

For I’m always happy
If I but consider
My Jesus – my God.

III. Glimpses of Characters in the Bible

There have been a lot of people who influenced my life. Some of the most memorable have poems about them in the next section of this book. Sometimes I wonder about people in the Bible – what they were thinking, why they acted the way they did, how others around them reacted to them. This section describes those Biblical characters and my thoughts about their special situations.

One of the first characters that I contemplated was the Roman soldier who actually picked the thorns to make the crown of thorns for my Savior's head. Why would he do it? Picking thorns couldn't have been a pleasant chore and weaving the crown had to have been pretty uncomfortable as well. But am I really any different from him?

The Soldier

I wonder 'bout the soldier who made the thorny crown.
Do you think he cut his fingers as he pulled them from the ground?
Did his blood mix with my Savior's blood as he harshly pressed it down?
Yes, I wonder 'bout the soldier who made the thorny crown.

The thorns – they grew from Adam's curse the first time that man sinned.
And they sprang forth throughout the earth – the same way now as then.
He must have seen them growing there around Jerusalem,
And he placed them on the head of One who even died for him.

I wonder 'bout the soldier who made the thorny crown.
Do you think he cut his fingers as he pulled them from the ground?
Did his blood mix with my Savior's blood as he harshly pressed it down?
Yes, I wonder 'bout the soldier who made the thorny crown.

You see — I'm kind of like the soldier that made the thorny crown.
For my sins He was crucified; my sins bore Him down.
For my sins — oh, the blood did flow and splattered on the ground
Yes, I'm kind of like the soldier who made the thorny crown.

Another great man of God who had a moment of weakness was John the Baptist. Who could blame him? Having spent his whole life as the herald of the Messiah, he was stuck in a prison cell and feeling quite alone. Like we do some times, John began to have his doubts. I suppose he began to doubt if he actually saw that heavenly dove and heard the word of God declaring Jesus to be His beloved son.

Even John the Baptist Asked

Even John the Baptist asked
If Jesus was the one.
"Should we look for another?
Are you He that should come?"

And Jesus kindly sent John word
To help him see the light,
"The lame can walk; the deaf can hear.
The blind receive their sight."

The man who saw the Holy Dove
And heard "This is my Son"
Was sitting in a prison cell.
His life was almost done

When he heard of Messiah's deeds.
His soul was greatly stirred.
The miracles described to him
Fulfilled Isaiah's words

The lepers cleansed; the gospel preached
To poor men on that day
And doubts within a prison cell
Did surely pass away

So if you have some doubts yourself;
Is Jesus in control?
Remember John the Baptist asked
And look deep in your soul.

Once blind you now can clearly see;
Sin sickness has been healed.
Once dead in sin, you're raised to life.
The Gospel He's revealed.

I also wrote a poem about Mary – not just the mother of Jesus who worried about Him when she lost Him in the crowd and who suffered as she watched Him die, but the other Mary who met Him in the garden following His resurrection. I thought of Joseph, and John, and finally Jesus, himself, who must have given comfort to these women who were very close to our Savior when He was on earth. Together with all those who long for His appearing, Mary shall see Him in His magnificent glory when He returns.

Now Mary Don't Worry

Oh, look, there is Joseph – the man that I married,
Our young son is missing – He's not in the crowd.
The One God entrusted – the One who's so special
Won't come when I call though I've called very loud.

Now, Mary, don't worry – God wouldn't desert Him
His eyes must be on Him though we love Him so.
His Father in Heaven – He's already serving;
His spirit and body continue to grow.

Oh, look, there is John who was given to me by
My young son who's hanging up there on the cross
The one God entrusted – who's truly so special
Is dying and few in this crowd sense their loss.

Now, Mary, don't worry – God will not desert him
I heard what He cried and I know for a while,
He'll carry the sins of the world on his shoulders,
But soon God will welcome Him back as His child.

Oh, look, there's the gardener keeping the place where
They buried our Jesus who just bled and died.
Our Lord that we cherished has been taken from us
These oils and these ointments cannot be applied

Now, Mary, don't worry – I go to my Father
I can't let you touch me, but surely you will.
When I have ascended and throughout the ages
My Spirit and love you will constantly feel.

Oh, look there comes Jesus in power and glory
Triumphantly now, oh, my heart gladly sings.
The One that we cherish, the One that lives in us
The One from the cross has been named King of Kings

Then there is Caleb. I didn't think so much about him, but I thought more about his family – his brothers and his father in particular. Where were they in the story? Why were only two men (Joshua and Caleb) on God's side and every one else on the other side. What sorry fellows Caleb's brothers must have been [assuming that he had brothers, of course]. But again, are we any better?

Are You Just Like Caleb's Brother

Are you just like Caleb's brother? Would you stand back in the crowd?
Would you wish your brother weren't so bold – that he didn't speak so loud?
Would you wish his vision wasn't plain – that he could let it go?
Oh, those giants make an awful fearsome foe!

Oh, you say you'd be there with him – you'd be standing toe to toe,
Staring down those other ten tribes – telling them, "I want to know:
"If the Lord is on our side when have we ever lost a fight?
"We could be tasting milk and honey by tonight!"

Well is that so?

When your Christian brother stands before the church to tell his plan
To meet some need or ministry that that you don't understand,
Do you sit there with your head down telling yourself in your pew?
"There's really not a thing that we can do."

Old Joshua and Caleb stood alone there on that day,
And the congregation wandered – forty years they had to pay!
They didn't see the vision God gave these two chosen men –
They missed the promised land because of sin!

Oh, join your Christian brothers and let the others know.
That the God that we are serving is an awful fearsome foe.
"If the Lord is on our side, when have we ever lost a fight?"
We could be reaping heaven's blessing by tonight.

Caleb was given a privilege that Moses was never allowed – entering the promised land. The bible story about Moses and his presumption with the rod was the favorite story of a Sunday School teacher in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. My daughter Amber and her husband Frank enjoyed his passion for the Bible so much that they asked me to write a poem about a great man of God who forgot who was the boss

for just a few minutes one day. Remembering this event should be a sobering reminder to all of us.

The Stick That Moses Held

Great things Moses wrought just by holding this stick.
With it, oh so boldly he'd stand.
He parted the water and when tossed aside,
It wiggled, then stopped in his hand.

The people God gave him would groan and complain;
They must have been born with the "Blah's."
At least with his stick and the wonders it wrought
Their negative words turned to "Ah's."

Well, soon they were thirsty – he wasn't surprised.
That wasteland was one pile of sand.
But rocks were just fountains, he'd found out before
When struck by the stick in his hand.

"I already know, Lord, I've done it before."
God's Word seemed redundant right then.
He thought, "Wait a minute while I hush the crowd."
The stick brought forth water again.

And once they were drinking, "Lord, what did you say?
"I'll listen more closely to you.
"You say that my stick wasn't needed at all.
To speak is all I had to do."

He just couldn't argue; he had no excuse
He'd failed to give credit to God
In frustration Moses did not lift his eyes
Beyond what he held – just a rod.

Then as Moses stood o'er the land God denied,
He had no defense for his crime.
God's never redundant; His Word never fails;
His Spirit is Truth every time.

So even if God does some great works through me
That makes me feel pious and grand.
I pray that's I'll see that all things come from Him;
I'm just an old stick in His hand.

IV. Glimpses of Those God Placed in My Life

The previous section of poems addressed specific Bible characters whom the Lord inspired me to write about. Another group of people who had a great impact on my life were the saints of God in the churches that I have attended. Each of the poems describes one or more aspects of these dear people's lives that really touched my life in a special way. Most of these folks are like Brother Jim Bernard who remarked, "Nobody ever wrote a poem about me before." I think these poems show that their subjects truly deserved to have something written about them.

Life is hard; death is scary. As my mother suffered on her death bed, I needed some answers. As He promised, He provided the answers I needed.

By His Stripes We Are Healed

I asked the Lord why my mother must suffer.
Why not take her home? He surely must love her.
She faithfully served Him; it seemed He could let her
Slip quietly off; that would be so much better.

She's no longer able to shine like a beacon.
Her strength is all gone; no more can she weaken.
She's no longer here; been destroyed by the cancer.
Please tell me, dear Lord; all I want is an answer.

He spoke pretty plain though His voice was a whisper.
He showed me why pain was required when I kissed her.
"You needed to know that with death all must suffer.
"Like My Son on the cross, it must be with your mother."

A verse came to mind – its meaning revealed now
For Peter explained, “by His stripes we are healed.” Wow!
He didn’t just die; but rejected, forsaken,
The wounds caused Him pain for each breath that was taken.

We’d like to avoid such visions of anguish;
We cherish His love, but His pain somehow vanquish.
We may even sing of the cross and the garden,
But forget what He went through to merit our pardon.

We picture the crowd and the hill where He fed them,
But white wash our sins and the hill where they led him.
‘Bout the tomb, does He think, “I’ve done that and been there”
And forget how He felt; for three days He was in there.

He taught me that death shouldn’t be taken lightly
Though Heaven is waiting and shining so brightly.
We must not forget when we think of His glory,
The scars were produced by some scenes that were gory.

His sentence of death was much more than “Stop breathing.”
For death is severe and a time of much grieving.
So cherish the mansions He took time to build us,
But don’t look away from the stripes that have healed us.

Mother had trouble hearing and telephone conversations were difficult for her. Before she died, I wanted to make sure that she understood how much she meant to me and how much I appreciated all she had done for me. When her mind seemed to be losing focus, I wondered if I had been too late with the letter, but my cousin Susan assured me that Mother had understood this last letter. Together they had sung “Cowboy Jack” one last time on the afternoon that Susan read the letter to her.

I edited the letter just a little to remove some references that only she and I would have understood. Otherwise, I think it expresses what a fine Christian woman and role model that my mother was to me.

My Last Letter to Mother

Dearest Mother,

Your life has had more meaning and poetry than everything I've written. I worry sometimes that you don't know how much you mean to us—how much a part of us you are. I know that I wouldn't have been a Christian as soon, wouldn't have cared about others as much, and wouldn't have one hundredth of the love to give away if it weren't for you.

I told Lee the other day that you can judge how good of a parent you are by what kind of parents your children become. I hope that I am doing you justice because you were the best mother you possibly could have been. I can't remember one selfish thing that you ever did, and there was never a time when I doubted that you were pulling for me, praying for me, loving me, and being proud of me. Your support was more than just "Okay," it was "the greatest love that one can have." You gave up your own life for your husband, children, and your friends. Needless to say, you spoiled your grandchildren in a superb fashion as well.

I wanted to write some of this down because my memory seems to be fading as the years go by. Luckily some of the distant memories stay sharp while the more recent ones dim. Here are some of the things that I remember – things that mean the most to me.

- ❖ The nights that you read to us from Pilgrim's Progress.
- ❖ The songs you sang about the cowboy.
- ❖ The times you took us to play with Charlotte's boys
- ❖ The times you took us to Crystal Springs to swim
- ❖ The speech you wrote and helped me practice for 4H "At this time of year we begin to think of Thanksgiving"
- ❖ The cherry pies you made
- ❖ The glasses of coke you carried for me

- ❖ The anger you showed when Mrs. Clarke told me not to tell anyone that I was smart
- ❖ The pancakes you cooked and cooked and cooked
- ❖ The messes you let us make with quilts and army men in the floor
- ❖ The times you let us spread bottle caps, marbles, and toothpicks out all over several rooms to serve as horses, knights, and jousting sticks
- ❖ The nights you drove alone to the hospital when a daughter was born to your oldest son
- ❖ The Bible schools you taught and how you cried when I said “Me does” when you asked if anyone wanted to become a Christian. I’m sure that I was saved at that instant although I didn’t officially get saved until Teddy Baker’s revival.
- ❖ The weeks you spent with Kay and our new born daughters
- ❖ The times you hauled kids to church in Kevil Kentucky.
- ❖ The cowboy outfit you fixed me up with in the first grade.
- ❖ The pennies you paid us for household chores so that we could learn about earning money
- ❖ The allowance you gave us and how you had us divide 25% to church and 25% to savings
- ❖ You’re love for your father, sister, and brothers, and even your step-Ma
- ❖ All of the behind-the-scene things that you must have been doing that I never even thought about.

I’m sure that I will think of more, but I hope you get the idea. The way you showed your love for me and the way you showed your love for God are the most important factors in my life—in having me turn out to be a loving father and a Christian man. I never remember you doing a single thing that caused me to say, “I don’t want to be that way.” As much as I have been able, I have emulated the way you live your life and the way you reared your children.

Your oldest son,
Mac

Mother left us before she actually died. Although she knew us by name and greeted us when we came to visit, the dear sweet woman who cared little for

herself, devoted her life to Christ, and was the best listener I ever knew had left the cancer-weakened body about a month prior to her actual passing.

Somehow I realized that those up in heaven wouldn't be constantly looking down on us here on earth. If they did, then how could heaven be a happy place while they were viewing their loved ones go through trials and tribulations. I just didn't feel like I could speak to her and have the assurance that she was listening.

However, I did realize that she was in the presence of Jesus, our Savior. I knew that He could hear my prayers and that He would be able to answer one simple request without any doubt. The next poem is that request. I repeated the request at least once each day for many days after Mother died.

Mac Says "Hi"

Good morning, Jesus; I've got a small favor.
I don't mean to pester, but if you don't mind,
Would you look around for my dear precious mother.
I know she is with you though I'm still behind.

Now I'm not complaining; I know she was ready.
When she took her last breath, my heart said, "Good bye"
But since we're apart and I can't speak directly,
Just give her this message, "Mac wants to say 'Hi.' "

The last poem about my mother is one I submitted for the Mother's day contest at the Fellowship of Christian Poets. In it I compare some of my feelings and actions to those I recall seeing in my mother. This one was written while she was still with us.

The Ways That I'm Like You Mother

I sit here in church as so I often I saw you.
My daughters are here as you too brought your sons.
I see little children, and like you, I speak to them.
I love them like you loved all of God's little ones.

I see someone hurting, and my heart opens to them.
Like you, I must try to let them know someone cares.
They may not even look when my friendly words reach them;
And like you, I'm hurt by their unfocused stares

Like you, I rejoice when some outcast comes forward.
To give all to Jesus--like you I'm so glad.
Like you, I can see through the outside and into
The treasure inside them; see the good 'fore the bad.

Like you, I have faced quite a few disappointments;
But keeping, like you have, real treasures in view,
I try to pass on to the next generation
The things everlasting and precious like YOU.

The next poem is about my father and his father before him. As I try to point out, I often see in myself the flaws that I had seen in him. I want him to understand how much love and respect that I have for the way he lived his life. His "flaw" that I use as the example in this poem is a flaw that is so common to most of us. The message in this poem is for all fathers and future fathers. Hopefully each generation will improve on the previous one.

Fathers In Between

I saw the flaws; they bothered me; they caused me to reflect.
The hurtful things he sometimes said – what if they went unchecked?
I purposed in my “perfect” heart that I would surely be
A better father than my dad-- I tried most earnestly.

But laden with imperfect hearts, we fathers often fail.
We try to show the love we feel, but hidden flaws prevail.
I realize my father had a father he had known
Who loved and raised my father with some conflicts of his own.

My father’s choices and his love are worthy of my praise.
He’s in between the dad he had and those he had to raise.
And for our children we must take this mantel from our dad;
They’ll be the sum of all his love and how much more we add.

Unlike my own father who is still alive and a critical part of our family in his seventies, my wife’s father died before the birth of our first daughter. I didn’t get to spend very much time with him, but from the daughter he raised and the friends he made, I know that he was a very fine man. Some of his wit and personality come through in this true story.

A Man at a Table

He held the short piece of hollowed-out cane in one hand and the thin, smooth stick of about the same length in the other. What appeared to be the two ends of cut-in-two rubber band were sticking out the end of the cane that he was holding – almost hidden by his left hand. With his right hand he stuck the pencil-sized stick into the hollow end of the cane, twisted it a few degrees, then pulled it

out very slowly. Suddenly he released the stick and it snapped sharply back into the cane “sleeve.”

I must have missed the sparkle in his eyes as I focused on the contraption. He repeated the maneuver and again the stick snapped back into the cane “sleeve” with a popping sound. Grabbing the stick again, he managed to pull it completely out of the cane without catching the rubber band. I could see that the end of the stick had a notch cut into it so that it could snag the rubber band. It looked a lot like one of the large wooden needles used by ladies to make Afghans out of thick wool-like thread.

Immediately I wanted to try it, but I didn’t say so; I just watched intently. After a few more demonstrations, he passed the two pieces of wood toward me, and I picked them up without trying to seem too eager. This man with the sparkle in his eyes was the father of the girl I was going to marry, and my natural instinct was to pass “muster.” If there were some kind of trick involved in this new puzzle, I was confident that I could figure it out quickly. After all, I had finished second in the whole school of Engineering at my college just a few months before.

I tenderly slid the slender stick with the notched end up into the cane “sleeve.” I softly pulled the stick back but felt no resistance. Unperturbed, I slid the stick back in again and rotated the stick—trying to align the notch with the rubber band loop (that I couldn’t see inside the sleeve). As I pulled the stick back out, I knew that I had failed to catch the rubber band again. Perhaps the rubber band was closer to the outside edge and not in the center of the sleeve. If so, I would need to keep the stick as close to the outside edge as possible.

After a few more tries, I was at a loss. My practical, logical, engineering, puzzle-solving mind had not even come close to grabbing the rubber band. Grudgingly I returned the contraption to the man across the table.

I watched even more closely as he grasped the end of the stick with his right hand and again slid the stick into the cane “sleeve.” He rotated the stick until he seemed to feel something. I could almost see the stick rotate inside the tube as the rubber band wound then unwound as he let it spin inside the tube. Then he pulled on the stick—holding only the very tip with two fingers of his right hand. When he had pulled the stick about two-thirds of its length out of the cane “sleeve,” he let I go as before. The stick snapped quickly back into the tube with an audible snap.

I just knew that he was thinking that my four year college education had not blessed me with the appropriate level of common sense. Although I was frustrated, I had to admit that I was beaten. This man with the calloused hands, the chuckle in his eyes—and now a distinct smile on his face—had clearly gotten the best of me.

Although I tried a few more times on my own, I had already given up and was only hoping that the trick would be revealed in short order. Hopefully, the solution was not a family tradition and could not be passed on to a college boy from Tennessee.

Before the night was done, I could do the trick myself—not as smoothly as my future father-in-law—but I could do the mechanics in a believable fashion. I regret that I didn’t have the chance to learn more from this man that I grew to admire in the short time that I knew him. I’ve never met a man who knew him that didn’t speak of him with a little awe.

Curt's little girl became my wife. I've written several poems that attempt to capture my feelings for her. One of the shortest describes what she does to my heart.

What You Do To My Heart

When you come into a room, you give me a lift
From the very first time til the hundred and fifth.

When you answer the phone, you give me a thrill.
I hear the love in your voice — I know it is real.

The times that we've shared are so special to me —
The children we raised — what they turned out to be.

From the time we first kissed as we stood on the porch
Through these thirty-two years, I have carried this torch.

Though some things sure have changed, we've not drifted apart,
And one thing's still the same — what you do to my heart.

My love and admiration for Kay have grown as I have witnessed the
strongest, most special love (other than God's love for us) that I could even imagine.

Your Precious Love

I've seen your picture by each daughter-bride,
And 'fore the magnolia, they stand by your side.
Each daughter arrayed in her new Easter clothes,
And you--oh so radiant --your love how it shows.

I've seen you hold each one – an infant so small;
I've seen you lose sleep while you wait for their call.

I've seen you steal by in the dead of the night,
And just kiss their foreheads and turn out the light.

I've seen you concerned that each child might miss out,
But brought up by you, there was hardly a doubt
The guidance you gave and the love you bestowed.
Equipped them to travel down life's rocky road.

You padded their falls and doctored their ills
With ten parts of love and just two parts of pills.
You knew they were special, but held back your pride
Till all of their triumphs could ne'er be denied.

You even took on a short man who was shy
And made him stand tall with his head in the sky
Why shouldn't he though for he surely was wise
When he won your love, he had life's grandest prize.

So now on our thirty-first Valentine's day
I'm trying to think of a gift --what to say?
There's no one whose perfect but God up above,
But almost as perfect is your precious love.

Some other remembrances from a decade or so back in time.

Mostly I've Been Thinking

Mostly I've been thinking about the times we've had
The times that we've been happy; the times that we've been sad.
And when you are apart from me, except for memories
Forgetful me forgets a lot, but I'll remember these:

The time you walked me in the rain; I asked you for a date.
You said you'd like to go, of course, and I could hardly wait.

We were so nervous neither knew the other one was too,
And we both had a real good time – I was in love with you.

And once I thought that I had lost you – oh, how glad I was
To get you back and close to me. As absence often does,
I knew then that I couldn't stand to be without your love.
You must have been picked out for me by the good God above.

And when we got your ring for you, you looked so pleased. I knew
That you were just as proud of me as I was proud of you.
We both knew then our love was real and would forever last;
Our love was strong, I think because, it grew so very fast.

One of my earlier poems about the woman I love.

The Look of Love

She smiles in a very definite way
That shows what a million words couldn't say.
A glimmer of sparkle from both of her eyes
Adds to the message no mind could devise.

Only a heart completely in love,
Untarnished by self – as pure as a dove –
Could make me tingle and inwardly glow.
I'm sure of her love when she looks at me so.

The nicest thing that she ever has said
Was her pledge made to me on the day we were wed.
'Cause she said, "I do," I will forever boast,
But her sweet look of love I remember the most.

My four women – life with them has been full of blessings. Truly they are the
sweetest things.

The Sweetest Things

My wife and my three daughters are
The sweetest things I know on earth
They're gifts that God has given me
By marriage and three times by birth.

Lee's done so much to make me proud
As a daughter and a scholar
But even more a mother's love
She shows to Madison and Tyler

And though she's tired with much to do
She takes the time to talk with them
It is the sweetest thing I've seen
This love she passes on to them

And Amber Dawn is next in line
So different yet no less a woman
So full of life and full of fun
No matter where she may be going

The sweetest things are in her heart
She fills with love and Bible verses
And then picks up a little child
And smiles away forgotten curses

And different still my youngest one
My little Brooke who still is growing
She runs and jumps and shoots a ball
Her talents too are overflowing

Her heart is big though she is small
She tries to help; is always giving
The smile she shows when I arrive
Alone would make my life worth living

And taking all the sweetest things
I see in them and yet another
The same sweet heart that overflows
Abides within their loving mother

Each of them she's loved so much
She's modeled love for God and others
And passed along one treasured gift
The recipe for making mothers.

I won't describe the circumstances in detail, but I will say that life seemed terribly unfair at the time. A door was closed that we had every right to walk through. Seemingly, our friends had felt no loyalty to us, and God was really testing our faith. As promised, He came through in fine fashion – exceeding our mortal imagination with His heavenly production.

As human beings we are sometimes hurt and amazed at the willingness of Christian brothers and sisters to mistreat their fellow Christians for trivial personal gain. The poem/song “Hypocrite Stew” (page 80) addresses the human side of my feelings. This poem is the higher road and a truer explanation of God's love.

Heavenly Productions – The Greatest Show on Earth

Oh the greatness of your promises fulfilled.
Though none could see the slimmest ray of hope
Your light bursts forth to make a wondrous scene
A sparkling fuse replaced a fragile rope.

Exploding with some colors not beheld
Nor quite imagined as the pages flipped
Effecting us in special wondrous ways
As you produced your perfect fitting script

And though with some reluctance we let go
The dreams that we had fashioned on our own
We're speechless as the final curtain drops
Our prayers applaud the grace that we've been shown.

Brooke is one of the most natural athletes that I have ever been around. The next poem portrays her skill in making an unbelievable play while a freshman in high school.

"The Play"

You've heard of "The Catch" and "The Throw" by Mays,
And those really were fine baseball plays.
But the fielding gem I can't overlook
Is the one by a teenage girl named Brooke.

Like they always do, let me set the stage:
On the mound for us was a girl named Paige,
Kirby was catching and Mia at first
With Brooke at second – well we feared the worst.

For the Wildcat batter like a timely stitch
Meant to save her "nine" on the very first pitch.
She watched the ball as it neared the plate,
And she hit it hard though her swing was late.

The batter sighed at the break she got;
The ball was headed straight for Mia's spot.
It just skipped once then in between
Dear Mia's legs – who could intervene?

Well Brooke was watching the play at the plate,
And not one second did she hesitate.
On that batted ball her attention was keyed
She had to back up Mia so she built up speed

We all thought she would surely fail
But she really moved fast; she was hauling tail
The fans all thought that this ball might pass,
But she scooped it up off the outfield grass.

She didn't slow down; didn't turn to throw;
No one covered first – that she had to know.
She turned toward first, and she held her pace.
Could Brooke beat the batter – who would win the race?

When Brooke tagged first – oh the crowd went wild.
I cheered along for my daughter child.
She had bested Mays (even Fullback Jack).
As she'd told her friend, "Girl, I've got your back."

Though she never was crowned as the Fielding Queen
She's unsurpassed on the sporting scene
And I won't forget 'til my dying day
How smooth she looked as she made "The Play."

My grandmother Wilkey was a very little lady who ran a grocery store along the side of U.S. Highway 27 in Evensville, Tennessee. Every day except Sunday, she spent her days at the store sitting beside an old coal-fired stove when she wasn't waiting on her customers. She loved to tell riddles and visit with her grandchildren at the store, but on Sundays, she loved to sit on the front porch with her grandchildren beside her and play guessing games. My mother told me that when I was very small, I would say, "Pay, Mamma, Pay" when I wanted her to play with me. As far as I know she never refused to play with one of us. Perhaps losing her

young son who was hit by a car on the highway in front of the store made her realize how precious early childhood times are.

Play Mamma Play

"Play, mamma, play," we'd say, "play, mamma, play."
Words she never tired of hearing her grandchildren say.
Maybe childish laughter smoothed away some hurtful scars
"Riddle me this," she'd ask us or we'd count the passing cars.

Watching all our faces surely lightened up her load
As she followed us out to the porch beside the road
We children didn't know that road had stolen Mamma's child
She must have thought about him as we all were running wild.

She never hesitated or made up a lame excuse
Her children's children never wondered if she might refuse
She taught us how to joke and laugh and loved to play each game
Though life had taught rough lessons, she refused to place the blame
On someone else or blame the God she honored up above.
We truly all were blessed by feeling our grandmother's love.

She's moved on up to heaven, but I see her there somehow:
That precious smile is on her face; she has no worries now.
She's sitting out on God's front porch and rocking in her chair
And all her children visit her and oh what joy they share
And even God must chuckle when He hears her say once more
"Now, Son, what did the carpet say to Chrissie's filthy floor?"

Mamma's store was right on the highway where we spent many hours enjoying her company as well as the goodies that she stocked. The year (1968) would have been my sophomore year in college

Country Store, 1968

In a little town in Tennessee
There's a little store -- belongs to me.
Gravels where folks park their cars
I mostly sell just candy bars
And cokes except for those you see
Who keep their grocery bill with me
One wall is filled so high with goods
Some I can sell, some wish-I-coulds
A freezer sits beside the case
Which is the candy-viewing space.
There's ice cream cups with wooden spoons
To spend some hot, dry afternoons

When all the kids come in from school
And stop by here -- they break the rule
(But kids are kids and bus drivers
Want to be known as survivors)
And stopping makes me glad although
The kids don't pay the tax, but go
In hurried dashes to the bus.
But still, I like to see the fuss
When they're deciding to buy pops
Or Baseball Trading Cards by Topps

The store is closed – its memory
Will always be a part of me.

*Note: This poem was originally written in 1968 from the viewpoint of my grandmother,
Emma Wilkey, the store owner. The last two lines were originally :*

*My store won't close– it's part of me
It is and always shall it be.*

My mother's niece lived next door and greatly helped my mother and dad during Mother's illness. There is no way we could ever repay her. I had to at least write this poem to express my appreciation for all that she had done.

Martha

When Mother was a little girl
And her own mother died,
Your mother, Charlotte, took her place
And never left her side.

Now you have walked a million steps
To serve my mother's needs
You've worked and cared and surely done
A million golden deeds.

Like Martha in the Bible
And like her sister, too;
The love you've shown for Sammie would
Make Charlotte proud of you.

Kathryn Cantrell, Aunt Tissie, was one of Kay's mother's sisters who meant so much to us. She was my oldest daughter's babysitter and a strong leader in the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church. Even after her eyesight deteriorated to the point that she could no longer read, she taught a Sunday School class and took her part in Discipleship Training. She was a remarkable woman.

Aunt Tissie

She stands somewhere in Glory with a smile upon her face
No longer lined and wrinkled thanks to God's amazing grace
Those eyes which barely saw beyond the glasses that she wore
See wonders there in Heaven that eclipse the ones before.

The words upon the printed page that blurred beyond her view
Are more alive and vivid now -- so Faithful and so True
She held them dearly in her heart; her focus always keen
And things she'd only dreamed about, are now so clearly seen.

I'm sure she thinks of us sometimes-- the loved ones left behind:
The church she loved so very much that God Himself designed
The sisters, nieces, nephews, friends from days that now are done
But now she gets to spend her time with her most cherished son.

The little child that God withdrew before she heard him talk
The little boy she barely held and never saw him walk
The one who never left her thoughts -- preserved by God above
Now shares in close proximity his precious mother's love

My mother's dad was "Pa." Some of my memories of him are included in this poem about a man I respected even as a small boy.

Pa

Don, Tim and I and Tom and Sam
All called him Pa; I know I am
A better man at fifty-two
Because this tall, thin man I knew.

Sometimes he'd sit and watch us play
And without fail on Christmas day,
He bought each one a fireworks pack
And matches too in that fresh brown sack.

When I was ten I got him to play
Me a game of checkers-what a special day
I remember his smile and his twinkling eyes
I didn't win --much to my surprise.

I can see the truck that he used to drive.
When he came to church when he was alive
He caught his breath 'fore he came inside
And the pain he bore was too much to hide.

When he came inside he sat down in back,
But that meant a lot to a boy named Mac,
And I'm sure that the rest of his grandsons knew
The heart it took to reach that old church pew.

But one day he surprised every grandson there
The ones who attended could only stare
For Pa's eyes didn't for a back seat hunt,
But he kept on walking and sat down up front.

We were all amazed at how improved he was
But we should have known how the good Lord does
He wanted our memory of this man called Pa
To be as strong as the man we saw.

I didn't see our Pa at the church again
But the memory stayed as from boy to man
I slowly grew -- May my own grand son
See my Pa in me when my life is done.

I knew the members of Brother Doyle's family a long time before I came to know this straight-forward man who made such an impression on me. His wasn't an easy conversion; he struggled and he doubted. When he finally allowed Jesus in his heart, he became such a strong Christian. His prayers were so sincere, and his faith was so strong. The first time that his wife Phyllis came back to church after his death, I noticed that she sat down in her regular spot and left a space for Doyle. This poem resulted.

There's An Empty Place Inside Our Church

There's an empty place inside our church
Where he used to stand and pray
Where he got "a hold" of Jesus
In a most straight forward way

He didn't say some words then say "Amen"
As some church members do
But he really talked to Jesus
And his words were getting through.

I saw him walk the aisle in pain
I'll not forget that view
Through pain determination showed
To reach his family's pew.

Now when his wife walks in alone
(My feelings in turmoil)
She sits down where she always sat
And leaves a place for Doyle.

Brother James was a worker. His hands were calloused and rough. You knew that the instant you shook his hand. He had a friendly smile and a great love for people. It didn't take long to figure that out either. When he prayed, he prayed from the heart; there was no doubt of his sincerity. The poem about him is short, but it captures the strong impressions that I acquired in the years that I came to know him and learned to love him. He was a fine Christian man.

I Heard He Was a Working Man

You say he was a working man.
I knew it when I shook his hand.

You say he had a joy for life
I saw the sparkle in his eyes.

You say he had a love for folks
I heard it every time he spoke

He really loved the Lord you say.
I knew it when I heard him pray.

Brother Jim Bernard was the pastor at First Baptist Church in Bridgeport, Alabama when my family joined that church for several years in the 1990s. Brother Jim didn't like to be called a preacher, but he was such a good one that he shouldn't have complained. He had started out in Georgia and moved to Smyrna, Tennessee (close to my home town of Evensville) and had then moved to Bridgeport when called by the church there. Besides being a fantastic preacher, he enjoyed poking fun at others, and was one of those rare pastors who could take it as well as dish it out. I had the privilege of reading this poem at his ten-year anniversary at Bridgeport even though we had moved on to another church by that time. I've been told that Brother Jim has said that I'm his favorite poet. Without him and the words of encouragement that I often received from his church members, I probably wouldn't have attempted to publish this collection of my writings.

A Preacher Came Up From Georgia

A preacher came up from Georgia--he was looking for some souls to win
He was in a bind; he was way behind--he was willing to buck the trend.

He first went up to Smyrna, a church out in Tennessee
And the preacher said to a church 'bout dead, "Folks, listen to me."

"I bet you didn't know it, but I once was a sinner, too.
"And if folks didn't care and say some prayers, I'd still be lost like you."
Well the folks said, "You're just kidding -- you're trying to take us in.
"We'll guarantee you won't ever see any worse than we have been."

But the preacher went to preaching what God placed on his heart
And heaven broke loose, they couldn't refuse, for the Lord is mighty smart
The folks learned that this preacher once was a hell-bound sinner too
But they also learned, they'd not be burned--the Gospel rang so true.

The preacher moved to Bridgeport and started preaching again.
He said, "Listen, folks;" they almost choked as he told them about their sin.
The Spirit traveled throughout the crowd as he read the scriptures clear
And sinners came as if he called their name for the gospel they wanted to hear .

Well the devil he didn't like it, and he tried to cause a mess
But the preacher preached and souls were reached, and the folks just had to confess
Yes, the devil has some power and once he'd had control
Of this good old boy, but to all our joy, he had joined the heavenly fold.

He preached, "Give your life to Jesus" and "You must be born again"
He preached the Word and the souls were stirred as souls had never been.
So if you live around these parts and your soul by sin is scarred
Just find a pew and listen to the preaching of Jim Bernard.

After a few years at Brother Jim's church, we felt God calling us back to our
home church, Mt. Carmel. By then the church had called a new pastor, Brother
Dean Johnson. Brother Dean was a hard working pastor with an unmatched zeal to

do God's will. Sometimes I felt that he didn't realize how well he was serving his Lord. The following poem tried to capture how I felt about this new pastor that God placed in our lives.

Brother Dean

I met a man of God one day:
Though hard at work, he seemed to play.
Some paint just seemed to get away!
Both church and deacon did he spray.

Then later as I sat inside
I heard him preach — so hard he tried
To portray Jesus crucified —
His precious blood was not denied.

We joined the church; I shook his hand
He showed me much that God had planned,
And on God's word, he took his stand —
I've grown to love this Godly man.

Each week I've watched his preaching show
The things of Christ — the Lord he knows.
God's saving power so freely flows;
So faithfully the seed he sows.

And though he sometimes thinks he's failed —
Some still are lost and bound for Hell,
Before his Lord, he'll hear him tell,
"My servant you have done quite well."

The pastor at Mt. Carmel before Brother Dean was Brother George. Brother George's father had been a truck farmer. Brother George's stories of his father's

prayers after planting his crops made an impression on me. This poem was once selected by John Evans (FOCP) for his monthly column.

His Father's Son

He learned the art of gardening
When he was just a child
The things his father taught him
He's kept for quite a while

He learned the time to plant each crop
How deep to plant each seed
And when the planting work was done
He heard his father plead

"Now Lord the seeds are planted
I've done what I can do.
I need the rain and sunshine
But that is up to you."

The young man left his father's place
As strong as any man
But things about his father's faith
He did not understand

But God broke through this big man's heart
And brought him to his knees
The Spirit turned his life around
The Lord he'd try to please

He struggled with another call
That would not go away
In the Carolina mountains
The young man knelt to pray

He told the Lord that he would preach
The Lord then led the way
He opened up the scriptures
And showed him what to say

I've often heard him preach with power
The gospel strong and clear
His voice would quiver as he closed
He'd wipe away a tear.

"Now Lord Your Word's been planted
I've done what I can do
I've preached the words you've given me
The rest is up to You.

Jerry Rich was a successful man in the eyes of the world. He was the plant manager of one of the larger manufacturing plants in Bridgeport just a few miles from where he was born and raised. His family owned a large farm. His mother and wife went to our church, but Jerry seldom came. His children had attended church regularly, but had drifted away. When I saw him at the local hardware store, I remarked to my teenage daughter, "There is a rich man." I was making a play on Jerry's last name, and spoke loud enough for Jerry to hear me, but I had no other motive for making my little joke. The Lord, however, had been on Jerry's mind and he was under conviction. When he heard my words, he recognized that he didn't have the riches that were most important to a man. At a church service a few weeks later, he accepted the Lord's offer of salvation as explained by our fine pastor, Dean Johnson. Jerry now serves as our chairman of deacons and is one of the strongest leaders in our church. He now doubly deserves the title he first earned by being born into the Rich family. I wrote the poem below for Jerry's 55th birthday in October 2003.

Jerry's a Rich, Rich Man

Jerry's a rich, Rich man.
His last name is Rich; he owns acres of land
But doesn't count titles you hold in your hand.
An heir to his heavenly father he stands,
Possessing salvation — a feeling so grand.
A peace that's secured by God's eternal plan
Jerry's a rich, Rich man.

Charles "Red" Brown was a Sunday School teacher in our church who often wore a dark black shirt. The title of this poem is a quip I made to our song leader when I thought about the three different colors it included. After he died, I studied for a long time for an appropriate theme for a poem. I think I captured some of his character and personality in this poem which emphasizes the colors in his name.

Red Brown is Wearing Black

"Red Brown is wearing black"
I picture him in church again.
He sits in front — not way in back.
It's good to know we made him grin.

Red Brown loved fields of green.
On the farm God let him own.
There may have been some better men,
But not a one that I have known.

Red Brown's beyond the blue.
He never let his faith grow dim.
"He'd heal me if He wanted to."
He surely wanted Red with Him.

Red Brown is wearing white
And seeing sights we cannot see,
And God who maketh all things right
Has given us this memory.

*Red Brown wearing black
Looking out on fields of green
Smiling at someone's wisecrack
Men like him so seldom seen.*

Pat Hambrick once remarked in her Training Union lesson that people should see Jesus in us each day. Although I had known Pat (James' wife), Billie (Red's wife) and Phyllis (Doyle's wife) and each lady's devotion to her husband during those last difficult days, I pictured my wife's Aunt Bill whose devotion to her husband Luke, in similar circumstances, had left an awesome indelible impression on me. Several other ladies have written to tell me how this poem captures just how they felt, too.

Seeing Him First

She stood by his bedside and sadly looked down;
He barely was breathing, but the ends of her frown
Were changed to a smile; she abandoned despair
As her thoughts turned to heaven; she pictured him there.

She thought back a few years when her husband was lost.
She had prayed every night; it was well worth the cost.
Now thanks to God's grace (she gave him a glance)
He would get to see Jesus 'fore she got the chance.

She felt of his forehead and patted his arm
And kissed him for surely it did him no harm.
She spoke out the words saying, "You'll see him first"
Then smiling, she felt that her own heart would burst.

Well, miracles happen, and to her surprise
She heard his weak voice as he opened his eyes.
"I know that I'll see Him; we'll meet face to face,
But I've already seen Him," and he smiled (just a trace).

She started to challenge his words when he said,
"I've seen Him in you as you knelt by my bed.
Through each painful moment, how clearly I see
The Savior in you as you've waited on me."

He then closed his eyes, and the hint of a smile
Was left on his face as he passed the last mile.
He was greeting the Savior — that joy they would share
When his so faithful partner would join him up there.

Then she pushed back his hair and smoothed out his shirt
And kissed him again knowing it could not hurt.
She had been through it all--to the best from the worst —
And she envied a little that he'd seen Him first.

The next poem is another that Amber requested me to write. The father of a friend at work was terminally ill, and Amber wanted to make her a calligraphy poem to encourage her friend and let her friend know that she cared about her situation. All I knew was that he was a tall man and loved very much by his daughter. The Holy Spirit provided the rest of the inspiration.

He's Never Looked So Tall

When I was just a little girl, my father looked so tall.
He towered over other men and made me 'not so small'
I knew that he would keep me safe through every danger here
And in his arms I rode in pride – how could I ever fear?

As I grew up my dad remained a tall man in my sight
He showed me how a man should live and taught me wrong from right
He let me venture “on my own,” but never let me fall
I knew that he would be right there if I should ever call.

And now my dad is facing odds that might cause some to fail
But with his faith in God I know that surely he'll prevail.
He focuses on those he loves; himself he sees as small
But to my sister, Mom, and me, he's never looked so tall.

A true story related by a missionary was the basis for the following poem. I remember my mother seeing the “true” story about a year after I had written the poem. She was tickled.

God Knew Last Week That We'd Pray Today

A sweet little girl in a far distant land
Gazed at her teacher and held up her hand.
“A hot water bottle is needed, you say
Then why don't we get on our knees and just pray.”

The bottle was needed to warm up a child
Whose temperature dropped though the weather was mild
But how could they hope for a gift such as this
Down near the equator – the girl she dismissed

But she reconsidered; she had after all
Been teaching them that our dear God hears our call
She called all the children and stated their goal
But had little confidence deep in her soul

But as all the children encircled her there,
She tried not to doubt as they all knelt in prayer.
The sweet little girl voiced their need right out loud.
The still doubting teacher was really quite proud.

They all said, "Amen" and then went out to play
But one little girl who just hung back to say,
"I think that I hear that old mail truck out there.
"Has God had the time yet to answer our prayer?"

The teacher just smiled — and wished she believed.
She said, "We'll just see" and they started to leave
She looked back just once at the cross on the wall
Then headed outside with some faith after all.

The truck driver greeted the children by name
Then doled out the boxes as if just a game
Supplies that they needed were carried inside
But one girl remained by the truck, and she sighed.

"I guess God will send it next week when you come."
The man looked so puzzled and then he said, "Hmm!"
There is one thing else that's just laying inside.
"This old water bottle." The little girl cried,

"Teacher, He did it; how can it be so?
"It's not even addressed, but God had to know.
"He had it pre-packaged and well on its way
'Cause He knew last week that we'd pray today.

When the mother of my wife's friend Nora passed away, Kay asked me to write a poem for her. Kay knew that she had a large family and was always doing for others. Again, the Holy Spirit filled in the blanks.

"The Joy That Was Set Before Him"

Despising the shame, He looked on toward the Joy
For no greater love could be known
Enduring the cross with no doubt or regret
He's now settled down at the throne

That joy is increasing as He stands in view
Of those He is welcoming there
Like your precious Mother; I know He rejoiced
With her now His joy He can share

Like Him she endured so much suffering and pain
Like Him she considered the cost
She fought and she battled with so much to gain
And joy that can never be lost

Her friends and relations will miss her for sure
But these thoughts bring comfort somehow
Each word that she spoke and each deed that was done
Bring joyous rewards to her now!

After "Nine-Eleven" our church honored the policemen, firemen, and emergency medical technicians in our community. I was asked to write a poem or two. The following were the two poems I wrote to honor the men who protect and serve and to portray the way that our nation reacted to the terror attack.

Friends Who Protect and Serve

When asked to name the friends we have,
We do not hesitate
To name the ones who've helped the most.
Such folks are really great.

Our friends are those who give themselves
When we are in a bind.
They do not ask what we can give;
Such friends are hard to find.

Policemen, firemen, EMT's
Respond to every call.
They selflessly protect and serve--
True friends to one and all.

To these that seldom hear our thanks,
We're gathered here to boast.
Thank God for these true friends of ours
Who help when needed most.

Under God This Nation Proudly Stands

Under God, this nation proudly stands
United more than ever by our foes.
Like all the world – forever in His hands
His name together with our banner goes

Struck by terror's planes, we met the call
Though smoke filled up the harbor's somber skies.
Untouched, our Lady Liberty stood tall
Proclaiming liberty to tear-stained eyes.

With all our trust in Him and not our might,
We surely will prevail – let freedom ring.
Old Glory waving -- what a precious sight--
And none, but God, can claim to be our king.

I don't know the name of the person that inspired the next poem. Perhaps it is a combination of several people that I have met over the years. I'm sure that you've met him too.

A Friend?

I met a man the other day
Who knew someone I used to know.
We shared some stories of our friend,
And watched a friendship start to grow.

But later when I told OUR friend
I'd met the man HE knew so well,
The old friend hardly could recall
The stories that I'd heard him tell.

It made me think of those I meet
Who say the Savior is their friend.
Though they profess to know my Lord,
Will Jesus know them in the end?

And so, my friend, I challenge you:
Add actions to the words you say.
If Jesus Christ is in your heart,
His love will flow from you each day.

When at his feet, we humbly bow,
If we are known, He'll say, "Well done".
But otherwise, He'll say "Depart"
You must be known to God, the Son".

V. Glimpses of Life (With a Little Attitude)

Sometimes we're able to turn the other cheek. Sometimes we want to drive the hypocrites right out of the synagogue. The following poems often take a "verbal whip" approach to those pesky hypocrites (the devil's deacons) and those intellectual scholarly types who have managed to generate an accepted world view that leaves out its creator and His message. Someone needs to ridicule them and their ideas before their ridiculous notions are fully accepted by ordinary people who would otherwise accept the truth as presented in God's word.

The first poem was originally written by me, but I added quite a few suggested revisions from Juanita Dehart, the FOCP poet of the year for 2003. Thanks to her, the poem has just a little more "attitude," and portrays "evolution" as the ridiculous notion that it actually is rather than the scientific alternative to the Biblical account.

Love Means Evolution Didn't (Evolve)

They'd like for us to believe that
Mere matter in various forms
Combined in coincident order
Like particles driven by storms.

For millions and millions of ages
Without any reason or rhyme,
Those random events replicated
Until after eons of time

Some cells became interconnected.
Then life in its simplest occurred--
That even without a director
This process was never deterred.

They try to convince us that thousands
Of changes were forced to be made;
Adjustments then deemed as advancing--
Yeah right-- only those made the grade.

The odds of the oddest occurrence
Were met during millions of years;
Each chance was allowed its own trial
And bested the best of its peers.

At some point some brain cells developed--
They must have or none would survive;
Except for the strong or the many
Whose numbers kept species alive.

The dinosaurs perished as nature
Reached out for the best that evolved,
And unlike the previous failures
With brains all the problems were solved.

And then the intelligent triumphed;
The smartest and best beat the rest;
The cave men lost out in the ice age
As men of our ilk passed the test.

The process continued for ages
Excluding the weak and the slow--
Each century ever evolving
Expanding man's mental plateau.

If so, how does "Love" keep existing
When only the fittest survive?
It's such an unselfish emotion.
What accident kept Love alive?

You'd think that the first time a mother
Paused briefly to wait for her child,
That both of them would have been trampled--
The case for extinction thus filed.

If only the fittest move forward
(Their sons lying cold in the dust)
The human race would have been stymied.
That thought churns up utter disgust!

For Love took the lowest position,
Though meek, science still can't defy.
So, what fact negates evolution?
God does it, with Love that won't die.

One such scholarly intellectual remarked that the previous poem was "silly."
I wouldn't have expected any other response. Similarly, I wouldn't expect the
hypocrite to see any humor or logic in the following satire of the devil's deacons. It
does me good to think that God has the hypocrites figured out and is just watching
them float in their stew.

Hypocrite Stew

I can't say forgive them 'cause, Father, they know what they do.
I picture them floating around in hypocrite stew.
They won't take a life raft though you've thrown 'em out more than two.
I can't say forgive them 'cause, Father, they know what they do.

They're always so busy completing their last 'second mile.'
You wonder how running so hard, they'd still have a smile.
They'll walk in your moccasins building their house on the sand,
And when things go wrong, and they will, they pull pack their hand.

They're back-patting, hand-shaking people that you're glad to see
Unless you are standing someplace where they want to be.
You'll suddenly look up and notice you've been left behind,
And they'll be there smiling to help you to get back in line.

You hate to accuse them 'cause really you can't quite believe
To gain very little, they'd bother to lie and deceive.
They've got it down pat, and they'll sure pat you down as they smile;
You think that you've given an inch, but they took a mile.

It used to concern me that their kind could ever succeed.
"Lord, give me justice; Lord, take your vengeance," I'd plead.
Then God took the lid off and gave me a heavenly view;
I spotted them floating around in hypocrite stew.

I can't say forgive them 'cause, Father, they know what they do.
I picture them floating around in hypocrite stew.
They won't take a life raft though you've thrown 'em out more than two.
I can't say forgive them 'cause, Father, they know what they do.

The following poem pictures a group of people who missed the rapture gathering for a church service on the following Sunday. Sadly, they could possibly continue on without the Holy Spirit for quite a while. See how many characters that you recognize.

Sunday After Rapture

It's the Sunday after rapture
And the crowd's still filing in
Though some landmarks are missing
Some came to church again

The piano player isn't here,
But the song leader is back
There's no one to play the organ
But his tapes are right on track

He never liked Amazing Grace
He's glad that we are gone
And the modern tunes are welcome now
Though few try to sing along

A former preacher wandered in
He seems to be confused
But gladly volunteers to speak
(Well his talent should be used)

No Sunday School is needed now
Most teachers disappeared
The service lasts but half an hour
Though some break down in tears

Some of the same old families
Are here though not the same
The mother may be missing now
You see them mouth her name

There are no crying babies now
None crawling down a pew
The little children aren't around
To bother Sister Sue

She sits there in her fur skin coat
As proud as she can be
It's the Sunday after Rapture and
She missed the mystery

The papers are proposing that
Some aliens fired their rays
And those with slightly weaker minds
Were transported away

With mankind's need to worship still
The New Age church expands
Unfettered by those born again
They lift unholy hands

To praise the one who lied to them
Who gave them each their throne
For seven years of Sundays then
They'll gnash their teeth and groan.

Brother Jim Bernard asked me to write something to spice up a sermon on "The Blood." Since I hadn't really dealt with that subject directly, I began to think about how little we Christians seem to appreciate the marvelous gift that He paid on Calvary. We seem to think we had every right to expect him to offer his blood for our salvation. This poem doesn't rhyme, but it attempts to capture how Christ might feel when looking down at his followers when they seem to be taking him for granted.

That's Quite Alright – It Was Nothing

"That's quite alright; it was nothing."
We used to hear those words quite often.
Genuinely expressing what Christian love is all about.
Freely giving of our time and our possessions and
Not expecting or accepting anything in return.

“That’s quite alright; it was nothing.”
I can picture Jesus saying these same words.
Observing our lack of appreciation for what He has done.
Devaluing His gifts of infinite value
Dismissing His atoning work on the old rugged cross.

“That’s quite alright; it was nothing.”
I don’t see him smile when He’s saying these words.
“It was nothing but my blood which gained you your pardon”
“For nothing but my blood was pure enough to pay.
The debt that you owed-- to gain Paradise for you.

Why can’t we see the power that is in the blood? Do we no longer consider the meaning of the old songs when we sing them? The importance of the blood can never be missed in God’s word. The blood was shed to provide a covering for Adam and Eve. Abel’s blood cried out to God from the ground in which He was buried. The blood of animals was offered by the priests for Israel’s atonement for sin and God became man so that His precious blood could flow in a perfect human being.

Pure and precious blood flowed from our Savior’s wounds and down to the earth from His dying body on Calvary –the perfect antidote for God’s curse on the earth due to Adam and Eve’s sin in the garden of Eden. The Blood of the Lamb was offered to completely and forever atone for the sins of mankind – a flawed sin nature that each one of us shares.

We are to remember often that Christ shed His blood and allowed his body to be broken for us. For this reason we take the Lord’s Supper and will continue this sacrament until He comes.

As can be seen by some of the previous poems, going to church doesn't always ensure one that he or she will be among people who are intent upon doing the father's will. This next poem talks about feeling close to God. Although church is essential to a healthy Christian faith, church and church responsibilities cannot be allowed to separate us from God. When that begins to happen, perhaps we need to take a little walk and talk to God "in the garden," seek out someone who needs a little help, and get back to the basics (i.e. "true religion is this").

Closest I Have Felt to God

The closest I have felt to God
Was not when off to church I'd trod
Or listened to some clergy man,
But when I reached out my own hand
To help someone who could not be
Ever a bit of help to me
Or when I sat alone and thought
Of this great world that God has wrought

When Brother Jim asked for a poem about God's love for his people, I wrote the following poem. I also sent him a copy of "God Let Me See the Hedge." Brother Jim chose to talk about the hedge rather than use this poem which plays on an idea from Mac Davis' song, "Lord It's Hard to Be Humble."

God Loves His People

Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble
When You love me in so many ways.
Each time I look in the mirror
I marvel again at Your grace.

They say that I'm too old fashioned
They say my religion's a sham.
I think its got something to do with the fact
That You love me the way that I am.

Now some think that they are much better;
They strive for much grander reviews
But somehow the deeds that they offer
Are not the ones You want to use.

You've chosen Your way, and Your people
Will follow on faith and no more.
Confounded, they simply won't prosper
For Father, You're not keeping score.

Like Esau who hated His brother
Because of the way that you blessed,
They don't understand why you lavish
Your blessings on less than the best.

As fast as they build, you demolish.
For they just disregard what you say.
They didn't lay proper foundation;
They're building with stubble and hay.

But those that You love, You have grounded
Their service will not be ignored.
On rock and not sandstone they're building
Where heavenly treasure is stored.

"Well done" will be Your proclamation
When heavenly push comes to shove
To others it's "I never knew you"
For they have rejected Your love.

Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble
When You love me in so many ways.
Each time I look in the mirror
I marvel again at Your grace.

The next poem deals with folks who seem to have little time for children.
Unlike Christ who welcome the little children to come unto Him, even Christians
seem to consider Children to be an unnecessary bother to be kept quiet and out of
the way in our worship services.

For Such As These Is the Kingdom of Heaven

I saw a boy standing next to his mother
Pulled on her pant's leg to make her look down.
She kept on talking, never seeming to notice
The wonderful flower her young son had found.

Then in the church as the preacher is preaching,
Some childish laughter erupts from the crowd.
Older heads turn and they frown at that villain.
How can we worship when she is so loud?

But long ago as some children were playing,
One speaker paused as He heard all their cries.
Those who rebuked them were stunned by the Master:
Let them come forward for they are the prize.

For such as these is the kingdom of Heaven.
For such as these did the Lord leave His throne.
For such as these on the cross He did suffer,
And such as these shall call Heaven their home.

The next poem takes another swipe at those with the PHDs. Truly some of the most learned men and women are believers, but it seems that the most vocal are not.

They've Got the Sheepskin; We've Got the Lamb

They've got the sheepskin; we've got the Lamb
The One Who said I am that I am;

May not be the answer to their final exam
But they have the sheepskin; we've got the Lamb

Proud men of letters like P, H, and D
Theorize and estimate about history

They push evolution, but their teaching's a sham
They may clone a sheep, but we'll trust in the Lamb

What if Christians took their tasks from God as seriously as they took their tasks from their bosses at the job site? The following story uses the approach from the old television series, "Mission Impossible" to demonstrate how God might give us our spiritual assignments in a "cloak and dagger" scenario.

The Born-Again Identity

Mr. R. E. Bourne found the Memorex audio cassette in his mail slot at his office at the WorldCom corporate headquarters in Birmingham, Alabama. He picked it out of the slot along with a reminder from the technical library that Working for Dummies was two weeks overdue.

"That's odd," he thought. He had never received a cassette like this through the office mail. Looking around he noticed that similar cassettes were in the mail

slots of several of his coworkers. Maybe one out of every eight slots had a cassette tucked into it. He checked out the cassette more closely.

Etched into the plastic were the words, “Private – R. E. Bourne – Play Immediately – Room SP339.” It wasn’t just written on a label. Someone had produced this tape message especially for him. “That’s odd,” he thought again.

He found room SP339 just off the stairway landing between the third and fourth floors of the building where he worked. It was little more than a closet, but there was a tape recorder as well as a VCR and a television screen in the room. The room had a small table for the VCR and tape recorder and only one chair located just in front of the television screen. It appeared to be designed for individual training sessions by company employees.

When he closed the door after entering the room, he heard a discernible “click” as if the door had automatically locked. Sure enough when he tried the door knob, he couldn’t turn it at all. “What was going on?”

His curiosity got the best of him. He had to play the tape. Figuring out how to get out of the locked room could wait until he found out what special message he had been chosen to hear. Besides, the phone on the wall should allow him to call his best friend, Walt, who could easily open the door from the outside. Old Walt would curse a blue streak when he asked him to walk up or down half a flight of stairs, but Walt wouldn’t tell everyone about his buddy locking himself in a closet. One on one, Walt would give him a hard time but was too good of a friend to let those other turkeys in on the secret. At least, that was what he hoped.

Somehow the tape recorder was wired to the speakers on the wall of the room. The recording started with some music which seemed to fill the room. The melody was familiar – seemed like something from church – but he couldn’t quite

place it. It was so loud that he worried about someone outside hearing it too, but the volume control on the recorder didn't seem to work. He tried to stop the recorder, but that control seemed to be stuck as well.

He listened.

The spoken voice was very recognizable. They must have gotten that actor with the deep voice to make the recordings. Well, after all, they had spared no expense. His name WAS etched into the cassette.

"Hello, Mr. Bourne. I have an assignment for you if you choose to accept it."

He wondered again what was going on. His boss usually gave him his assignments by email and he didn't have any right to refuse one. This must be some special assignment that only a few of the better employees were being offered. He began to feel pretty important.

"The assignment for you and a select group of undercover agents is to continue working in your present job, gain the confidence of your fellow employees and your supervisors, and influence them in special ways as I direct you."

The "task" seemed a little sneaky. This kind of thing was not his way of doing business. He was a straight-forward type of guy. He didn't mind being nice to everyone, but sometimes you just had to put a few of those jerks in their places. And the bosses weren't immune to being challenged when they asked you to do something outside your job description. No, this didn't seem like an assignment that he was likely to accept. They'd have to get somebody else.

"This recording will self-destruct thirty seconds after it stops. You will not be able to play it again for yourself or your wife or your old buddy, Walt."

How did THEY know about Walt?

"You should know who I AM. Goodbye."

The way the voice on the tape emphasized “I AM” made him instantly aware of the speaker’s identity. It wasn’t “they” after all. Perhaps he needed to stop complaining about how “they” did everything and think more about how God wanted to use him at WorldCom corporate headquarters.

He dialed “9 - 2 - 5 - 8” on the wall telephone and began his mission.

“Hello, this is Walt,” said the voice on the other end

Better Off in the Storm in His Hands

A young boy had been exploring in the woods and hills to the west of his neighborhood in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. His companions from earlier in the day had departed, leaving him alone. For some reason he had just not wanted to go home yet. Home was boring. Out in the woods he could let his imagination create an adventure for him. Pretend perils were really much better than the real thing anyway – that he was soon to find out.

His imagined adventure kept him from noticing the storm approach. The dark clouds were almost purple and were streaked with lightning. Although he had heard the distant thunder, he was awakened to the realness of the impending storm when the lightning flashed and several loud bursts of thunder seemed to shake the trees on all sides of him. As the lightning faded, the darkness seemed even darker. He didn’t really know which direction would take him home.

Another streak of lightning lit up the sky and showed him an opening in the rocks just ahead of him. He remembered seeing the entrance to an old mine during a previous exploration. For some reason he had been unable to find it on his subsequent trips to this area. Now it was an inviting refuge with the terrifying storm raging all around.

He dashed through a clearing in the woods to the opening in the rocks. Crawling inside, he thought once that there might be snakes and spiders inside, but he pushed those thoughts aside as the lightning struck a tree close by. A limb, seemingly torn from the tree, crashed to the ground. The noise of the limb hitting the ground combined with the roar of the thunder terrified the boy.

“God please get me through this,” he prayed. “If I can just get home, I’ll never sneak off without telling my folks again.”

The next streak of lightning revealed a figure walking through the clearing. The man who approached was not running and seemed to be enjoying the storm. He walked over to the fallen tree limb and rested one foot on it. He didn’t seem to notice the boy who had found shelter in the cave.

“Hey, mister, come in here where its safe,” the boy cried out to the man. The boy didn’t know what kind of character this stranger might be, but his fear and concern would not let him stay silent and safe alone in the abandoned mine. When the man turned to see who was calling, the boy waved for him to join him in the cave.

The man didn’t rush to get to safety, but he did walk toward the boy. When he got to the opening, he stopped and started to sing. His voice cracked a little, but he sang the song loud as if he was singing to the whole forest and not just to the boy.

If there is one thing that God has intended
Just one thing He wants me to do,
I’d be better of in the storm in His hands
Than sharing that shelter with you.

The boy was alarmed that the man apparently didn't intend to seek safety. Since his own family did not attend church, the boy knew little of the Bible, but he could not fathom how the man could be so bold. Somehow he had to convince him to take shelter.

"Perhaps it's as you say. Perhaps God has more for you to do. But what if he had sent a messenger to lead you to safety. Perhaps he intended for me to be at this very spot to show you this cave. Perhaps, I am an angel. How can you be so sure that he wants you to stay out in the storm?

The man smiled at the boy. Almost like the cartoon character with the light bulb being turned on in the cloud above his head, the man seemed to grasp the boy might just be speaking the truth. He didn't move yet to enter the cave, but he stooped his head to look back into the cave.

Sensing that the man was leaning toward joining him in the cave, the boy sealed his argument by changing the words just a little and singing the old man's song back to him.

If there is one thing that God has intended
Just one thing He wants you to do,
You'd be better off in this cave in His hands
Than out in that storm wouldn't you?

Hearing his own melody and his song rearranged by this young boy, the man laughed out loud. "Perhaps you're right. Perhaps God does want me to share this shelter with you. Surely he can protect me just as well in this old mine as he could out in the storm. After all, I surely don't need to be tempting God. That wouldn't be right would it?"

The boy smiled at the man and made room for him inside the cave. He was glad to have company and a peace came over him. He was no longer terrified, and he felt really good about himself. He had perhaps saved the old man's life. At the very least, he had ensured that the man would be warmer and dryer. Even the storm seemed to calm down although the he could see that it was getting darker by the minute.

The boy dozed off to sleep only to be awakened by the howling wind. Sounds of thunder were all around, but the noise of the wind far exceeded the roar from the thunder. The boy was terrified and started to cry. He felt the arms of the old man around him and somehow felt better. "You'll be just fine," soothed the old man.

Suddenly the roof of the mine shaft collapsed and the timbers and dirt and rocks started falling. The darkness added to his terror, but the old man's grip never lessened and somehow he remained confident that he would be "just fine." In any event, there was little they could do until they could see how to extract themselves from this predicament.

When morning came, the boy opened his eyes to see the man inspecting the collapsed opening to the mine shaft. He wasn't sure where the light was coming from, but there was enough light to see that it wouldn't be easy to dig their way through the debris that had once been the opening to the mine.

The old man smiled when he saw that the boy was awake. "I forgot to ask your name – assuming, of course, that you aren't really an angel."

The boy smiled at first, but was suddenly struck by a terrible thought. If he hadn't convinced the man to seek shelter in the cave with him, the man would probably be okay. At least, he wouldn't be trapped with no apparent means of

escape. "My name is Matthew, but I really owe you an apology. If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't be trapped in here."

The man's reply was a rearrangement of the original song that he had sung to the boy the day before:

I'm sure there's one thing that God is intending--
One thing that He wants me to do,
He wanted me here in this cave in His hands
To point out his purpose for you.

Before the boy could protest further, the man pointed at the source of the light. A small opening in the roof of the mine shaft was now visible. The roof of the mine shaft had only been about six feet, but much of the rocks and dirt had fallen with the timbers. The opening was now at least eight feet above the collection of timbers, dirt, and rocks which was piled at their feet.

"I'll just lift you up, and you can scramble through."

"But what about you? I won't be able to pull you up. Is there anyway we can make a ramp out of these timbers. Together we might be able pile up something high enough for you to be able to reach the opening."

"I don't think it would be a good idea to start shifting these timbers and rocks around. We might cause further collapse. I think it would be best for me to lift you to safety. You can bring back help for me."

Matthew didn't feel exactly right about getting out alone, but he really had no argument for the old man's logic. He hugged the old man, and let himself be lifted up toward the opening. Reaching through the opening, he got a grip on some rocks and pulled himself free.

As he scrambled through, he heard some falling rocks within the cave and was alarmed that the man may have been injured by them. "Are you alright?" he asked.

"I'm just fine," the old man answered. "I want you to hurry home, but there is something I need to tell you before you leave." The boy expected their special song and was not disappointed.

There's many more things that God is intending
Great things that He wants you to do,
You'll be better off; you'll be safe in His hands
I'm passing my mantel to you?

The boy was thinking "Crazy Old Man," but he just said, "Okay" and headed for home. With the light of day, he could easily make out the landmarks and was home within twenty minutes.

"Mom, Dad! Come quickly! An old man is trapped in an old mine out in the woods. Bring a ladder and a rope. We've got to save him!"

Mom and Dad took a little convincing, but they finally realized that the boy was not just making up a story to escape punishment for staying out all night. With the understanding that sentencing would follow the rescue attempt, they headed out with the boy in the lead.

As well as he knew those woods, he had trouble finding the location of the old mine. He found more than one tree limb that had been struck by lightning for much devastation had been done by the tornado which had passed through. After almost an hour of searching, the father and mother were ready to give up.

Finally they agreed to let him stay and keep searching alone. They weren't absolutely convinced that his adventure had been real, but he seemed so determined that they let him stay.

"This time mark the spot," his father reminded him. "No matter what, don't stay out after dark," advised his mother. "Okay, I will," Matthew promised.

It seemed that the opening had been sealed after he had left the woods headed home. The old man had died to save him and now it seemed that even his father and mother were not convinced that he even existed. And he was totally to blame; he had convinced the man to stay in the cave rather than out in the storm. But, really, the man would surely not have survived the tornado if he had stayed safe in the storm.

The boy wanted to cry, but somehow found an inner strength that he had not possessed before experiencing this adventure. Somehow he had a purpose; he couldn't let the man's life be in vain. That old man had said that he expected great things from him. But why did he have to die? The young man smiled to himself as he again sang the special song – this time he knew the words that the old man would be singing

If there's not one thing that God has intended
Not one thing He wants me to do,
I'd be better off in His hands up in Heaven
I finished my work there with you.

God's Best Friend

You probably wouldn't call me a "dog lover" although my family does have a pet dog named Sandy. I take my turn feeding her, taking her to the vet and bathing her during the summer. If she's not too muddy or covered with cuckie burrs, I will usually pet her when I'm not in too much of a hurry.

Sandy, on the other hand, thinks I "hung the moon." If I walk through the yard or venture across a field, Sandy is right behind me (twelve dog steps to every two of mine). When I stop to cut down a tree for firewood, Sandy will find a place in the sun and wait until the job is done, only moving if some uncontrolled limb comes crashing down close by. When I pat her head she nuzzles my hand as if we were the best of friends. It's pretty clear to me that Sandy is a better friend to me than I am to her.

One morning in Sunday School, I happened to think of the way my dog shows her love for me compared to how I show my love for God. I know God has done so much more for me than I will ever do for my dog. He is the creator of the whole universe and the one who ordained that His majestic Son would die as a man on a cross. He gives me my daily bread, but He does so much more. He forgave me of my sins and has put His own Spirit in me so that in Him I can do things that I could not do otherwise.

I can walk and talk each day with the God of eternity. My heart should skip a beat each time I feel His presence, and I should come running each time I hear Him call. I should wait patiently until He finishes a task and then move on with Him. I should not even worry when trouble arises. Unlike the crashing limb that wakes Sandy from her slumber, the hazards of life are completely within God's control.

God is so much a better master to me than I am to Sandy, but I surely should be as good a servant to Him as my dog is to me. How can I be so blind, uncaring, and ungrateful?

Too often I have no more time for God than I have for my dog. I go to church regularly, but I feed my dog daily. When God makes His presence known in a special way, I praise Him (but I do the same for my dog). God is always waiting for me, and I am unwilling to wait for Him.

The truth is painfully clear! I treat God like I treat everyone and everything else—SECOND to ME!

Since that Sunday, my dog now seems more important to me. No, I don't give her considerably more attention, but does remind me, each time I see her, that I need to be more attentive to MY MASTER. I need to be GOD'S BEST FRIEND because of all He's done for me.

The next poem started as a thought expressed to Brother Jim Bernard. I finally got it together as a complete poem. Hopefully, the message comes through (i.e. God is truly omniscient and omnipotent).

God Knows Who Anonymous Is

God knows who anonymous is
He knows why storms hit or miss
He governs all of nature's laws
For each effect, He is the cause

He knows the ones who died to share
Their skins with Eden's sinful pair
To Him no breed can be extinct
Through Him the missing all are linked

To Him the soldier's not unknown
He knows the skin, the blood, and bone
And He will bring him back some day
Just the way he was when he passed away.

For God Is Love We Tell Each Child

For God is love we tell each child
But still we hate; God must be riled

The Neighborly Samaritan

A man was down along a road —
His body cut and bruised.
He needed help or he would die;
He really was confused.

Two men had passed beside him —
Religious leaders both,
And neither seemed to care for him.
Had they forgot their oath?

The man then saw a traveler,
And hope sprang to his mind,
But as he traveled nearer still,
His hopefulness declined.

Arriving – a Samaritan
The injured man – a Jew,
And even words 'tween such as these
Were very, very few.

To his surprise, he stopped to help
And bound his wounds for him,
And took him to a nearby inn –
A neighbor more than them.

Littered Light

Littered Light lands softly at my feet.
How much from God have I let filter through?
To focus on the circumstance I faced
To notice that it bore a special hue.

Like acorns from a mighty awesome oak.
But unlike acorns light will disappear
I can't just stoop and later scoop it up
That special chance to witness gone I fear.

We hand out leaflets that they all ignore
Those littered leaflets crumpled all around
And do not grasp the light the Father sends.
While it is Day and brilliant light abounds.

When darkness falls we know no one can see
The crumpled leaflets or the Father's light
When hardened hearts and oh so blinded eyes
Join gnashing teeth amidst eternal night.

The Answer to Life's Ultimate Question

"What is it?", we ask, but surely we know
That "it" was that finished a long time ago
By He who was first but lastly will be
The King for all ages that all eyes shall see.

He said, "It is I," and "I Am that I Am."
He was the Good Shepherd and also the lamb.
He drank from the cup that we might never thirst
Unblemished perfection yet He became cursed.

The temple destroyed yet built back in three days
Cannot be defined by just one simple phrase
But when we behold Him, we know we shall be
Made into His likeness, and all things shall see.

There's A Little In All of Us

There's a little bitty dog in all of us like the one that wags his tail
We sit up straight when we sense a treat or the mailman brings the mail
Our ears perk up when our name is called; it happens without fail
'Cause there's a little young dog in all of us like the one that wags his tail

There's a little bitty cat in all of us like the ones that stretch and purr
When you rub their back in a loving way and don't upset the fur.
We love a pat and a "job well done" and the use of "Ma'am" and "Sir"
'Cause there's a little old cat in all of us like the ones that stretch and purr.

There's a little bitty horse in all of us like the ones that love to run
We are glad to head for the barn at night when we know the day is done.
If we could we'd let the car top down and feel the wind and sun
'Cause there's a little wild horse in all of us like the ones that love to run.

There's a little bitty pig in all of us like the ones that love the mire
We could sit around with the mess piled up and never ever tire
Our nose would root right below the fence if it wasn't sharp barbed wire
"Cause there's a little fat pig in all of us like the ones that love the mire.

There's a littly billy goat in all of us that makes us butt our head
Into where we know we should never go but until the day we're dead
We'll just run amuck like a pickup truck whose tires have lost their tread
'Cause there's a little old goat in all of us that makes us butt our head.

Hidden Home

The rattle of an empty truck
Along a country road —
The dust that's stirred up by the wheels
Becomes its only load.

The mother robin flies above
The boiling dust below
The bird evades the swirling storm
As it goes to and fro.

But deep within the fog of dust,
The babies in their nest
Are captured by the particles
And layered like the rest.

When motor sounds have passed away,
As silence calms their fears,
The mother's wings disperse the dust
And home just reappears.

VI. Glimpses of My Wit (Or Maybe Half of It)

The poems in this section are just for fun and were not intended to have any spiritual significance. If you do detect some religious insight, praise God because He does work in mysterious ways.

Fullback Jack

Well, you've heard of Jim Thorpe and the other greats,
But have you heard of a fellow who really rates
A notch ahead of that Indian back?
He was rough and tough – old Fullback Jack.

He stood six foot eight and weighed three forty-five,
And there's hardly a player who's still alive
That ever met Jack in an open field
Without being maimed, trampled, or killed.

He carried the ball on the back of his hip,
But no fool coach ever gave Jack lip.
He could carry the ball in a purse if he pleased,
And Fullback Jack would never be teased.

It's said that his team had only one play –
Give the ball to Jack and get out of his way.
They called that play "Old Forty-Four";
Nine times out of ten it brought them a score.

For fourteen years, Jack's big team won
Every game that they played and were ranked number one
'Til they ran up against a team called "The Grays"
Who used a multiple offense and other such plays.

Jack's team led at the half by "a ton"
And everyone figured they'd already won
When off of the bench came a short, squatty guy
With one long arm and a "radar" eye.

He threw that ball the length of the field
To any spot or man that he willed,
And Jack, who was playing for one of the backs
Tackled each man - dropped him dead in his tracks.

He followed each pass as it flew through the air
And made every tackle - no matter where.
'Til injured receivers were leaving the field,
And the fans just knew one was sure to be killed.

Then it happened, and people who saw it that day
Were so shook up that they missed the next play.
The one-armed fellow who passed for "The Grays"
Dropped back for a pass like the rest of the plays.

He threw that ball over hard-charging hands,
And he threw it so hard it would land in the stands.
Everyone knew it was "well out of play"
Except Fullback Jack who well on his way.

As soon as the ball left the quarterback's hand,
Old Jack started for the spot it would land;
He watched its flight, and he built up speed -
Yes, on that ball his attention was keyed.

Fullback Jack hit the concrete wall
With a great impact but his "eye on the ball".
The wall just crumbled, but Jack did too,
And all that was left was "icky" and "goo"

Where Jack hit the wall, a gate now stands,
And through it come all the football fans.
Each of them reads the plaque on the gate,
"This is the spot where Jack met his fate".

Suggested change to last two lines"
To each little grandson or daughter they say
I was standing right here and I just jumped away.

Cultivate a Cul-de-Sac or Two

Her father was a farmer, and she loved the farming life.
She always dreamed she'd grow up just to be a farmer's wife.
She only dated farmer's sons; she loved a farmer's tan.
But somehow none of them were meant to be her farmer man.

The farmer's sons moved off to college; there they studied law,
Engineering, even business--they all had the flaw.
They didn't share her love of farming. Well, what could she do?
She entered Auburn's Agriculture school.

She took Agro-engineering and Agro such and such
But no male in her classes loved the courses quite as much.
They all had perfect tans that didn't stop along each arm.
It seemed that she'd be single when she went back to the farm.

But even agriculture majors had to take a few
Other courses such as math and English 102
And that is where she met him--oh, he made her plans a wreck
His only flaw was that he planned to be an architect.

I'd love to marry you; I'd love to have you as my wife,
But I don't want to spoil your dreams about the farming life.
She simply said, "I love you and you've changed my point of view"
"Your name is Billy Farmer, and I want to marry you."

Chorus:

We'll cultivate a cul-de-sac or two.
We'll plant rows and rows of houses with more houses for a view.
I'll plow out drainage ditches and plant all the lawns for you.
We'll just cultivate a cul-de-sac or two.

So now they have a farmhouse on the county's highest hill
Where Billy's still designing Farmer's houses they will sell.
He plans each subdivision between rows and rows of crops
They both believe a Farmer's life is tops.

Taking the New Purse to Church

Her frilly dress and matching purse would hardly make the Times
But only she knew it was filled with forty-seven dimes.

The Sunday service started well; the songs were in our range,
And Kristy Lee was quite content to rifle through the change.

She held the money in both hands, but when they passed the plate,
She thought she'd let one coin drop--her plan at any rate.

The sound of forty-seven dimes--she grabbed; we heard her shout.
We tried to pry her hands apart and get the money out.

Five dollar bribe--we passed the plate as laughter filled the pews.
Our daughter and her offering had clearly made the news.

Night Just Doesn't Go Away

Night just doesn't go away -
She lingers well into the day,
And won't admit her time is up
At least until the second cup.

But day time is a friendly chap
He leaves if you just take a nap.
And doesn't care to stay away.
For hours on a rainy day.

But night's dark tentacles will creep
Around your eyelids; make you sleep
And if you stay with day too long
She'll let you know that you've done wrong

She's never satisfied it seems
Until she's feasted on your dreams
She's used you up and there's no more;
And tossed you out upon the floor

Alas poor day will saunter in
Like some poor lost forgotten friend
He'll pick you up; you're on your way
I'm glad there is another day.

The Revenge of the Albatross

The sea tossed restlessly, and the mingling of the bird calls with the lapping of the waves upon the log raft caused the only sound which the wretched creature on the raft could hear. "Those crazy mocking birds," he told himself, "trying to disguise their calls so that I will think that they're sea gulls. It's a good think that I'm a biologist."

The poor man listened desperately to the bird calls—carefully distinguishing between those made by the sea gulls and those made by the mischievous mocking

birds. When he detected a sea gull call, he would add one to the number registered in his brain because he had learned from experience that a log drifted away from his raft after precisely twenty-three sea gull calls. With the constant confusion due to the mocking birds, he sometimes missed a count, but except for those few terrifying moments, he had generally been ready for the departure of the logs from his rapidly diminishing raft. He now had seven logs remaining and fourteen sea gull calls had been registered toward the departure of the seventh log.

If the calls had been equally distributed over time, he would have been terribly bored, but the randomly timed calls kept him constantly alert. This “blessing” had its drawback, however, because the sudden meeting of two sea gulls could bring about enough calls in a very short space of time to send two or three logs drifting away from the raft.

He now gazed up and saw two gulls heading toward each other. With fearful eyes, he watched them near each other, but finally they saw each other and one of them veered off to the side. This was not accomplished without a few calls of advice from one sea gull to the other. This rapid repartee had been enough to dislodge the seventh log and produce a count of eight on the sixth one remaining on the raft..

The poor fellow had very little with him on the raft, but in the water around could be seen boxes and other things that the man had had to throw from his raft as it got smaller. He looked vainly for some sign of land, but all he saw on the horizon was a gathering of dark, black clouds. The wind was getting stronger causing the waves to beat more violently upon the raft.

As the winds grew stronger, and the storm crept closer, the man noticed an alarming phenomena. The sea gulls began to warn each other! They began to call out rapidly! Finally satisfied after several terrifying moments, they all left, but the warning calls had left the poor man with only two logs connected together, and those two he straddled as the storm approached.

The storm hit with violent impact—heaving giant waves again and again upon the small raft. Unable, due to his weakened condition, to hold on any longer; the poor man was knocked from the raft by a tremendous wave and thrown into the raging waters.

On a sandy beach the man awoke slowly—conscious of a dull ache in his back. When he opened his eyes, he was amazed to see that directly above him and propped against the very same tree under which his head rested were the remnants of the raft. The two logs were still banded together and at the place where they were joined, a tree limb was lodged. Evidently, the tree limb had saved his life, for

if the limb had not been there, the logs would have surely been washed upon him with enough force to crush his frail body.

He studied the raft for quite a while – somewhat disoriented. In his moments of reverie, he marveled that the two logs had stayed together during the violent storm that had now died down. The dull pain in his back grew more pronounced and became too much for him to stand. Painfully he raised his back and reached under him – touching what felt like a ball of feathers. When he pulled the object from beneath him, he discovered a sea gull which he set down by his side.

The sea gull wobbled uncertainly at first, then, after a few feeble attempts, it perched itself on the right foot of the man and triumphantly gave its sea gull call. As the sound from the sea gull was just beginning to dissipate, the binding between the logs snapped, and no longer hindered by the tree limb, they fell with a crushing force onto the horrified man below. The man died with a hateful stare fixed upon the sea gull.

The Ravenous Bird

I was feeling sad and weary on a night so bleak and dreary
Bent over once to scratch my toe - causing a pain up in my back
Upon the very sudden seeing of a foreign kind of being
I grew scared and looked around, discovered my brown paper sack
A brown and rumped, often used, and kind of smelly paper sack -

In it was my midnight snack
I then heard a ceaseless flapping, sounded like a Bernard's lapping
Right outside the kind of creaky, un-oiled door of my old shack
I stood still, still as a monkey – I, myself, was kind of drunk
But I swear that through the door, a raven flew straight to the rack
He perched and fluffed his dirty feathers all upon my clothing rack,
Quothe the raven, "Cracker Jack"
I sat and stared at him in wonder as the night cried out with thunder
The blazing lightning pierced the sky and left a zig-zag track
As I approached the bird with horror, I caught a glimpse of my poor Laura
Who had died the night before and left me with this empty sack
Her name was written in red letters all across the paper sack
Quothe the raven, "Cracker jack"
"A prize you want", or so I reasoned ; "A tasty dish -a raven seasoned"
With the spices and the flavors that were settled in a stack
High above the sink which glistened and each one was gaily christened
With the juices we had stored long, long ago in burlap sack
Encased within and tightly bound and aged so tender in the sack.
Quothe, the raven, "Cracker Jack"
How mean of Laura to have left me without supper; none to heft me
From the floor so bare and chairless to the spices in the stack
The raven sensed my need for spices and as in my last "Goodby Sis"
He broke out with noises which formed in the word of crackerjack.
My dog scared him through the door and left me with an empty sack
I felt a rattle in the sack, a tiny something in the sack
In it was a cracker jack.
I'd lost my chance for raven dinner, and to keep from growing thinner
I grabbed the dog and thrust his head into the airtight paper sack
I cooked and dressed him on the table as if I'd found him in a stable
A meal much better I'd have had if he'd not made his fierce attack.
A dinner-robbing bird-escaping, sneaky-peeky bird attack
I crowned him with the cracker jack

Two Leaves

A leaf falls from a sprawling tree
And glides until it hits the ground
Then lightly lies upon the grass
Until another leaf comes down

Unnoticed to a passerby
The leaves remain together though
The wind returns to hurry them
And toss them wildly to and fro

The rain that falls unites them more
Until they're tightly, truly bound
And though they're dried by midday suns
They stay together on the ground

As soles come down to shatter them
They're ground to dust and buried there
But more together they've become
Beneath the ground than anywhere

Daytime Moods

Depending upon the weather
And sometimes even whether
You woke up fully satisfied
With what you dreamt last night
Or what you ate for breakfast
A large one or a small mess
Of something low in something
Or something fit for kings

Your mood for the succeeding day
Is set and it will stay that way
Unless you are delighted
Or saddened, maybe slighted
Something out of the way
Which ruins or makes your day

Coffins and Coffee

Why are they trying to fill up the coffins
It wouldn't be bad if it wasn't so often,
And my turn is coming — some day it will be
Time for the coffin, but coffee and tea
Are plainly aware of the place that I sit
For they were much faster in getting to it.

Eavesdropping In the Sand

Two words she'd written in the sand,
And one I could perceive
For when she'd raked her foot across
A part she meant to leave.

The last four letters were enough
To let me understand
It was none of my business to
Eavesdrop upon the sand.

Johnny and the Bumblebee

A little boy was sitting down beneath a willow tree.
He had upon his little head a friendly bumblebee.
The boy — his name was Johnny Townes; the bumble bee's was Fred
He rode around most every day on top of Johnny's head.

They had much fun in all they did and some thought Johnny strange
Because he kept a bumble bee while on the archery range.
But Fred could help his shooting cause he stayed near the bulls eye.
And guided Johnny's arrows in so that they true did fly.

But Johnny learned a trick at school that brought about the end
Of his friendship with Fred, you know, and Fred was a real friend.
While taking P. E. carelessly, he stood upon his head.
And felt the stab of pain just as he squashed his old friend Fred.

Fred was dead and he sure let him know it
All Johnny had was a swelled head to show it.

VII. Glimpses of Christmas

Grandpa's Christmas Monologue

(With Suggestions for Interjected Questions and Comments by Children)

You kids seem to be really excited about Christmas. Reminds me of the Christmases we had when I was a little boy.

You were a little boy?

Sure he was.

Are you having more trouble believing I was ever little or that I was once a boy?

I think she/he just can't imagine a time when you weren't a grandpa.

It was a long time ago.

I bet you were there at the first Christmas ever.

(Laughing) No, not quite that long ago. I do know about that first Christmas though. Why don't you all settle down and let me tell you about a good little boy who was born on the very first Christmas.

(They settle down)

Picture, if you can, a man leading a donkey along a dark lonely trail. On the back of the donkey is a very young woman. Although she is in her teens she is married to the man and is expecting to have a baby any minute.

Why isn't she in the hospital? Why doesn't some body call an ambulance or borrow a car?

(Chuckles) Remember, this was a long time ago. There weren't any cars or ambulances. People either walked or rode horses or oxen or donkeys. This couple had been on the road a long time and were very tired. The man, Joseph, wanted to reach the nearby village of Bethlehem before their child was born. His young wife, Mary, was a good traveler but she desperately wanted to have her baby in a warm house. But that just wasn't to be.

You mean she had the baby out on the lonely trail?

No. It wasn't quite that bad. However, it was late and when they reached Bethlehem all of the rooms were taken. They did have relatives in the town, but they didn't know how to find out where they lived that late at night.

Why didn't they call the operator? Oh, I guess if they didn't have cars; they didn't have telephones either.

That's right. They finally accepted the offer of a kind innkeeper who let them stay in his stable for the night. Just in time, too. The baby, a little boy, was born that very night. After He was born they wrapped him up and let him sleep in the manger.

His name was Jesus, wasn't it, Grandpa?

Yes. His name was Jesus. He was a very special little boy. Mary had been told by an angel that she would have a child and that her son would be the Son of God. Although Joseph loved and cared for Mary and her baby, he wasn't the baby's father.

What about the shepherds and the angels?

Yes, there were shepherds and angels. The shepherds were in the fields taking care of their sheep when a whole host of angels lit up the sky and started singing. The angels were happy that God's son had finally been born. They told the angels all about this miraculous event. The shepherds left their flocks and went to see the baby Jesus.

How did they find him?

They followed the star!

Well, there was a new star in the sky, and it was directly over the place where He born. In any event, they found the baby and worshipped Him. But it was another group of men who studied the skies and saw the star as a sign that a new king had been born.

But how could He be a king if He was born in a stable?

Well, He was a very special child, and He wouldn't be recognized as a king again for over thirty years. However, these wise men knew even then that a King was born. They jumped on their camels and traveled a long distance to see the baby. They followed His star.

Was He still in the stable when the wise men came?

No, He had moved into a house. The star helped them locate the area, but they needed help finding the exact location. That's where they made their mistake; they asked the wrong man for directions.

What happened?

Well, they stopped at the palace in Jerusalem. I guess they thought that a king would be in a palace, right? Well, the king had heard the predictions and he didn't want a new king. He told the wise men to come back and tell him when they found the child. His advisors told them that Bethlehem was the place where the child was to have been born.

Did they come back and tell him?

No. The wise men were told by angel to go back home by a different road. They never told King Herod where they had found Jesus. After the wise men visited the baby and gave him precious gifts — you guys no what gifts they brought don't you?

Gold
Frankincense

Myrrh

Yes that's right. These were very precious gifts fit for a king.

What did King Herod do?

Well, he got really mad when the wise men didn't tell him where Jesus was. He decided to have all of the babies born in the last two years killed. That way he thought that he would make sure that Jesus was murdered, too!

How did Jesus escape?

Well, those angels warned Joseph and Mary. They headed out to another country and stayed until Herod died.

Those angels sure were busy.

Yes. An angel told Mary that she would have a special baby; an angel announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, an angel warned the wise men, and an angel warned Mary and Joseph. But like they say – that's their job. Their God's messengers.

Right – 'cause they didn't have telephones back then.

(Chuckles) I guess you're right

Now tell us about everyone knowing that Jesus was a real king.

Well, that's a very sad story, but it's one you really need to hear.

Why is it sad?

Well it's sad because everyone didn't accept Jesus as their king. The rulers and leaders got very mad at Jesus and had him arrested?

Was He bad? I thought Jesus was always good.

Of course, you're right. Jesus was always good. He was the only perfect person that ever lived. He went about doing good, healing the sick, and telling everyone about His kingdom.

Then why was He arrested?

He was arrested and put to death for two reasons — one more important than the other. The first reason was that the rulers and leaders were afraid that Jesus was getting too popular. They feared that He might be made a king or that the Roman army might be called in to bring things back to order. Either way they would lose their control, and they didn't want that.

But the most important reason that He died was the reason that He was born in the first place. He was sent to save His people from their sins. Since He was perfect, God let Him die in our place as the payment for our sins. He was the perfect Christmas gift. Much better than gold frankincense or myrrh.

Even better than a gameboy..

Or better than a bicycle.

Or better than a doll.

That's right. Jesus gave his own life for each one of us. His gift was the best Christmas gift ever.

God Visits a Music Store Owner

Scene is the inside of a music store "Alfred's Sound Emporium" or some such name. One part of the stage is set up as a recording studio wit microphones visible and earphones available.

Alfred is straightening up the music or the tapes or adjusting some Christmas decorations.

Group of kids come in (dressed like Willie and Waylon perhaps).

Country Singer 1: Hey, Alfred, do you mind if we use the sound studio.

Country Singer 2: Merry Christmas, Alfred.

Alfred: Merry Christmas, kids. I don't suppose you want to pay some on your bill.

Country Singer 3: Can't do it this time, Alfred, but we're pretty sure this song is going to be a hit.

Country Singer 1: Yeah, he's right, Alfred. This is the perfect country Christmas song.

Alfred: You mean it's about wino's and pickup trucks and rain and prison?

Country Singer 2: (Laughing) No, Alfred, this song ain't got no wino's in it.

Alfred: What does that leave then? Let's see-- grandma getting run over by a reindeer the night she gets out of prison in the rain on Christmas Eve.

Country Singer 2: No, Alfred. If it had a reindeer in the song, it would be snowing.

Country Singer 3: Anyway, Alfred, the perfect country Christmas song is about Jesus being born in a stable with cattle and horses.

Country Singer 1: We'll set one of the speakers outside where you can hear the song,. It's going to be a hit for sure.

They go inside the sound studio and begin recording. After a little while, the song can be heard on the sound system.

*The cowboy rode his horse one night, the snow piled on the trail
He'd traveled far to get back home, but feared that he might fail
But then the stars shone brightly; he knew he wouldn't stray
The wise men must have seen them the same way.*

*He wondered if young Joseph felt the way that he did now
He heard the sound of animals, some sheep perhaps a cow
He saw the barn just up ahead; the open door, the hay
Young Mary must have seen it the same way.*

*He tied his horse inside the barn but tiredness settled in
He lay down by the manger and couldn't help but grin
He looked up at the animals and thought back to the day
The Christ child must have seen them the same way.*

*His family heard the noise and all came rushing to his side
They gathered round and then they laughed as little Johnny cried
"My Daddy's home! My Daddy's home! "That's all the boy could say.
The Shepherds must have seen Him the same way.*

The group emerges from the sound studio and say good by to Alfred.

Another group comes in to record a radio commercial.

They go into the recording studio.

Alfred leaves.

One of them comes into the store with Alfred gone and takes the speaker to use as a monitor.

When they finish, they return the speaker. One guy/gal is rewinding the tape, but everyone is urging her to hurry up. She finally picks up some stuff and leaves, but her tape is left in the machine.

Alfred returns to the store and notices they are gone. He closes the door, even straightens the returned speaker, but doesn't notice the wires leading back into the sound studio.

He starts to close his store and begins to talk to God outloud.

“Lord, I’m ready for you to take me home with you. I miss Stella. I miss her a lot. Christmas was her special time, and this Christmas especially I think about her an awful lot. Seems like I almost see her putting presents under the tree, standing by the stove cooking, wrapping presents. I can almost hear her singing Christmas carols here in the store.

“But she’s not here Lord. You’ve got her with you.

“And now that my son, Stan is married and has his own family – he can’t make it here every Christmas. This year they’re visiting his wife’s folks in Sante Fe. Shouldn’t complain about a Christmas in “Santa” Fe should I Lord?. (chuckles sort of).

“But I sure am lonely this Christmas. No body seems to care about me, and I don’t seem to be of any use to any body. I haven’t even fixed a tree this year. I bought a roast and a turkey too, but I’m not sure I’ll even cook it. I can’t eat it all by myself.

“So, Lord, if you don’t mind – just take me home to be with you (and Stella too, of course).

“Please, Lord, what do you say?” [he looks up at the ceiling and then walks toward the door”

I’LL BE AT YOUR HOUSE ON CHRISTMAS EVE

The words are coming from the speaker, but Alfred doesn’t know that. He stops dead in his tracks.

He turns around and says “What---?”

YOU HEARD ME – I’LL BE AT YOUR HOUSE THIS CHRISTMAS EVE.

“Is that you, Lord? Are you really answering my prayer”

JUST THINK – YOU CAN COOK A TURKEY AND A ROAST AND ALL THE FIXINGS IN NO TIME AT ALL. THIS WILL BE THE BEST CHRISTMAS EVE DINNER YOU’VE EVER HAD.

“Wait a minute, Lord. Are you saying that you’re really going to come to my house and eat dinner with me? That’s amazing! That’s great!

YOU CAN COUNT ON IT. I GUARANTEE IT.

“Lord, you don’t have to say that. If I can’t take your word, then who CAN I believe. It’s not like YOU should have to swear on a stack of Bibles. After all—you wrote them. Wow!

“But, Lord, what if I’m imagining all this. You know Gideon even got a sign. No, no—I can’t ask for a sign.

“Well maybe a little sign. Just something so that I’ll really know. Something I come up with on my own. Look, there’s a telephone. Give me a number to call and if the first words I hear are my wife’s name, then I’ll really know I’m not dreaming.

CALL 1-800-843-5673.

“Lord, you know I believe you. Wow! You’re actually giving me a number to call. Thank you, Lord. This is going to be the greatest Christmas of all time.

“I’ve got to get home and get ready for tomorrow. The Lord is actually coming to my house. I’ve got a million things to do.

He leaves and the speaker blares out one final message.

YES THIS CAN BE THE BEST CHRISTMAS EVER AT YOUR HOUSE. FOR FOUR EASY INSTALLMENTS OF THIRTY-NINE NINETY FIVE, YOU CAN HAVE THE PRESTO COMBO COOKER AND COOK UP TO FOUR DIFFERENT MEALS IN THE SAME POT.

SUPER SIZE OVEN NOT INCLUDED.

Alfred, reopens the door and sticks his head in the door.

"Did you say something else, Lord?"

[No audible answer]

"I guess not. Maybe I'd better call that number and check this thing out."

He leaves.

Next day at home, Alfred puts up a tree, get his meal ready, maybe even goes to the store (could meet some more people if more parts are needed)

At some office somewhere, a young lady comes in and sits down at a switchboard. She is taking over for another girl and they talk in general. Apparently the girl coming in is new. The other girl explains the duties.

"You just say your name. Thank them for calling. Find out which deal they're calling about. Then ask for their credit card number. If they ask about delivery, just read the details right off of that sheet. It's easy. You shouldn't have any problem.

"Thanks, Reba"

"Oh, you're welcome, Stella"

Later Alfred decides to call the number.

He just drops the phone when he hears her name.

VIII. Glimpses of Easter

Gnats and Flies

A short play or skit suitable for a church service. Moral: Don't sweat the small stuff.

Scene: Work site (outdoors) on a hot day. One or two workers are front stage and two or more are toward the back with the boss and his wife (or vice versa) dressed up a little too much for the work site. Might have a hard hat and a shirt, tie, and dress pants. The two front stage workers are taking a break and are watching the group around the boss. Gene is the speaker and Ralph is the listener – as always.

Gene: Lord, look at this flies – and the gnats, too – I can't even keep them shoo'd away with both hands. Seems like they're always worse when you're hot and been sweatin'.

(Ralph nods in agreement)

Gene: And look there at that scrape along my elbow. They really zero in on an open wound. Won't even leave when you slap at them. I've actually had to pinch them between my fingers to get them off.

(Ralph nods in agreement)

Gene: I remember this poet feller once – Ogden Nash. Wrote a lot of nonsense poems. I always remembered the one about the flies
Claimed God had a reason for making the fly, but forgot to tell anyone why he did it.

(Ralph chuckles a little as if he's not sure he should laugh).

Gene: I'm not sure he was wrong, Ralph. I sure can't think of any reason why we need these flies – or these gnats either.

(Ralph nods in agreement)

Gene: And look over there at that bunch of suck-ups. They're all talking to the boss – friendly as they can be. If that was me or you, Ralph, that drove up with our wives, they would have acted like they didn't even see us.

(Ralph nods in agreement)

Gene: Just this weekend, I saw Paul and his wife in the mall. I saw him look our way. I told Charlene that I wanted her to meet someone I worked with. When I looked back, Paul had ducked down another aisle. They were long gone. Needless to say if Paul had spotted the boss in that mall, he would have wanted his wife to meet him.

(Ralph nods in agreement)

Gene: I wanted to go over to customer service desk and have them page old stuck-up Paul. "Paul Miller, please come to the hair salon. Your manicurist is ready for you now."

Ralph (actually speaking): That would have been a good one Gene. Why didn't you do it?

Gene: Aw that crabby old lady wouldn't do it. Told me I ought to be ashamed.

(Ralph shakes his head)

Gene: Look over there, Ralph.

(Ralph looks over there)

Gene: He's patting them on the back, shaking their hands. Probably give them a bonus. Here we are, doing the dirty work. They've been up there in the office under the air conditioner all morning. They come out to take a few little measurements while we're taking the only break we've taken all day. What happens?

Ralph: Yeah, just like always.

Gene: That's right, Ralph. Just like always. The boss shows up and sees them working. If he even looks down here at us, he thinks we're goofing off. They get all the credit; we get all the blame.

Ralph: It just ain't fair.

Gene: No, Ralph, it just ain't fair. Nobody cares about us. Nobody cares that we've worked up a sweat and scraped the hide off our arms. Nobody cares.

Ralph: Except these flies and gnats.

Gene: What – oh, right. We do get all the attention from these old flies and gnats. I'm just going to take a short nap. You watch out for me, Ralph. Looks like the boss is leaving, and I don't care about those other suckups anyway. I'm just going to take a short nap.

(Gene lays back with his head propped up. May even lay his head in his hard hat if nothing else is available. The ones at the back of the stage fade out and Ralph walks off the stage as well).

Gene (still resting and with his eyes closed): Lord, those durn gnats are driving me crazy.

Voice: I know exactly what you mean.

Gene: Who's that? Must have been dreaming. Nobody here.

Voice: Gene.

Gene: Who's talking?

Voice: I'm your Lord and Savior, Gene. I want to talk to you about your complaints. I want you to know that I know how you feel. Let's talk about what's bothering you.

Gene: Really?

Lord: Yes, really. Now let's talk about those flies and gnats. You know I used to do a lot of walking when I lived on earth. I'd work up quite a sweat. Those flies didn't leave me alone just because I was the son of God.

Gene: They didn't?

Lord: No, they flew around my head just like anybody else. You know — the last day was the worst. Sweat wasn't the problem then — it was like you said. They really zeroed in on the cuts and the scrapes — the dried blood. I would have swatted them then if I could, but of course, I couldn't move my hands.

Gene: Oh yeah, you were on the cross.

Lord: Glad you remembered. Now, let's move on to the second issue. Seemed like one of your friends was snubbing you, wasn't he?

Gene: That's right, Lord. Paul Miller. He and his wife went out of their way to avoid my wife and me at the mall. What's make people like that?

Lord: I know what you mean, Gene. The same thing happened to me.

Gene: Someone snubbed you, Lord?

Lord: More than once. I remember Peter acting like he didn't even know who I was. The night before I had washed his feet. The next night, he denied that he even knew me.

Gene: He was afraid, Lord. I know that he felt really bad later on.

Lord: Yes, he felt really bad. But he wasn't the worst.

Gene: That last day again, Lord.

Lord: That's right, Gene. That last day was the worst day of my life on earth. That day my own father acted like He didn't know that I was His son. He acted like I was the vilest sinner on earth. Wouldn't even look at me. Left me all alone. That was tough.

Gene: Wow- I hadn't thought of it that way.

Lord: Yes, Gene. I know how you feel about that, too. Now let's move on to that last complaint. Something about not getting the credit you deserve and others getting credit for what you did. Getting credit that they didn't deserve. Maybe even getting blamed for things that you didn't do?

Gene: Yeah, that's right, Lord. It just doesn't seem fair.

Lord: I know what you mean, and it isn't fair. I remember healing that man that his friends lowered through the roof. Some of the religious leaders thought I was wrong to say "Thy sins are forgiven thee." Accused me of blasphemy. Then later on—you know when?

Gene: The last day, right?

Lord: Yes, you remembered—that last day. Seems like I got blamed for everything wrong that anybody had ever done and was ever going to do. And by my own father again. Not only was He forsaking me, but He was punishing me for the sins of the whole world. That was tough!

Gene: I would think so, Lord.

Lord: And your complaint about those other workers getting the credit for the work you had done—I've been there, too.

Gene: You have?

Lord: Have you forgotten, Gene. There's a whole bunch of awful, sinful people who don't deserve My Father's blessings and certainly don't deserve to enter into My Father's perfect Heaven. But the Father is giving them the credit for my perfect life. I got the blame for all of their sins, and they get treated like they never sinned a time in their life. Now do you remember?

Gene: Yes, I remember, November 3, 1994. That's when I got credit for all the good things you had done.

Lord. That's right, Gene. And the day that I got credit for all the bad stuff you had done?

Gene: That last day.

Lord: That's right, Gene — that last day. Now, enough about me. Let's start working on the problems that are bothering you. First there's those pesky gnats and flies.

(Ralph returns and Gene wakes up still foggy from his dream)

Gene: Never mind, Lord. I believe I can put up with a few gnats and flies.

Ralph: What's that, Gene. You still fussing about those gnats and flies that are aggravating you?

Gene: No, Ralph. Those gnats and flies don't bother me at all. In fact, I think I've figured out why God made them in the first place.

Ralph: Why, Gene?

Gene: Some other time, Ralph. We need to get back to work.

The Soldiers at the Tomb

Note: Original Script Lost

Imagine three soldiers guarding Jesus's tomb on resurrection morning. Each of them has volunteered for this duty because of personal encounters with Jesus during the previous three years. One is the centurion whose daughter was healed. One is the soldier who made the thorny crown and mocked Him. The other is the captain of the guards who accompanied those who arrested Him.

Each recounts his own experience with Jesus. Each has concluded on his own that Jesus is someone very special. As they agree that something amazing is about to happen, something amazing begins to happen. Christ arises from the grave.

Anyone is free to work on this concept and develop a skit or story of their own. I wrote an Easter skit which was read by three men on a Sunday near Easter at Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, but I no longer have the document.

IX. Glimpses of Heaven

There are two poems that fit in this category. “Ungrateful” [page 11] and the poem below that describes scenes in Heaven that I “imagined.” Try not to judge the poems too strictly on the details but look at the messages.

When we get to Heaven it will be too late to do anything that we left undone. In “Ungrateful” the dreamer is given another chance when he wakes up and finds out that he has been dreaming. In the following poem the dreamer might be you

An Invitation to the Master’s Table

I dreamed I was in heaven
In awe I looked around
The golden streets were clear as glass
And jasper walls I found

The gates of pearl were open wide
And I just passed on through
There must have been ten thousand there
And more beyond my view

The trumpets sounded out the call
For all to come and dine
And we all hurried to the place
It wasn’t hard to find

My invitation in my hand
I looked around the hall
As tables filled and voices rang
I moved along the wall

I wondered how they all had found
Their friends in all that crowd
And wondered who I'd find I knew
Well, we would be as loud.

My invitation made it clear
Which table was my own
And I was just a bit surprised
When I sat down alone

At other tables there were eight
Or sometimes there were four
But nowhere when I looked around
Sat one man and no more

At last I saw my Savior
The host was coming by
He'd surely give an answer now
For where we sat and why

I said, "Lord, I'm so happy"
To be invited here
But what about the seating, Lord
About that I'm not clear?"

The look upon his face was
So kind but bittersweet
He said, "I thought you'd bring along
A few more folks to eat."

I thought you'd witness to the ones
That I sent to your door
And those you met at church and work."
It hurt me to my core.

I quickly counted to myself
My heart filled with despair
I knew who should be sitting here
In each and every chair.