From Uplook, 2000

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What a Day! (January 2000)

From Uplook, January 2000. Editorial.

The lesson I learned was much more than child's play.

Architects must be in an impish mood when they design houses like ours. No doubt, sitting at their drawing tables (or computers) their minds wander back to the days of their childhood and they fondly recall some of their happiest memories.

It's the hour between supper and the call for bed—the sweetest hour of the day. Tummies are full with Mother's cooking. Everyone is home. Darkness is falling outside but it's unnoticed inside because of the warm glow of the lamps. Schoolwork for the younger ones is done. Ahead lie bedtime stories, hugs and kisses, sweet dreams. But right now it's the last chance to expend some of the boundless energy with which little people come equipped. The architect smiles. He moves his pencil (or mouse) to redraw the house he is working on. Let's see. It must have a central core, a center wall around which the course can be laid out. A sharp hairpin turn by the front door. A twist to the right around the stairway going to the second floor. Then the back stretch —preferably with some frictionless flooring surface ideal for stockinged feet to slide on. Now into the kitchen eating area and a hard left into the dining room. Blast into the straightaway, the long stretch through the living room that joins the first turn where the grandfather clock will stand. Ah, perfect! He gives a self-satisfied smile.

Some people are appalled at the idea. Using the living room for, well, living? Preposterous! And children acting like children in broad daylight? Outrageous! But I recall those days with great fondness. The house filled with laughter and shouts of glee. Sometimes Dad would join in the fray; perhaps a tussle on the floor. At other times he would be Home Safe, the one place of security in our chaotic little world.

Last night, sitting on the sofa, I became Home Safe for five-year-old Sara. She was in the lead position with her brother Dave hard on her heels. Peals of little girl laughter rippled through the house.

Then, in a desperate lunge for freedom and the opportunity for a new lease on life, Sara flew toward me, David a step behind. She barely made contact with my outstretched arms and clung to me while her brother, three years her senior, playfully tugged at her legs. As she began to resemble more and more the rope in a tug-o'-war, she looked up at me, her face wreathed in a grin. "I've never had a day like this before!" she said.

Isn't that the truth! We never know what a day may bring forth (Prov. 27:1). And sometimes in life's race, when we seem to be making as much progress as children racing around the house, we find ourselves in the clutches of circumstances far less friendly than a brother. It's then we look up into the face of our Father and say, "I've never had a day like this before!" Recall the words of Scripture that record the following in the life of Job: "And there was a day…" (Job 1:13). It was a day so horrific that Job seemed to have had only two extreme alternatives: curse God or worship Him. Stretched to the limit, he looked into the face of the

Father he trusted—“and worshiped” (v. 20). The year 2000 has arrived. Making our way through its twists and turns, we have no idea what lies around the corner. Some of those days will doubtless be recorded in our true biographies written in heaven as “evil” days. How we need to be fully equipped so we “…may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:13). No use bearing the burdens of yesterday or the worries of tomorrow: “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Mt. 6:34), said the Saviour. But He also promised: “My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

There will be such days in life (and such grace), “…until the Day dawn, and the Day Star arise in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19). Then we will look up into His face and say, “I’ve never had a day like this before!”

On the Move (February-March 2000)

From Uplook, February-March 2000. Editorial.

You may have travelled farther than you think. But are you moving His way?

It has been my lot in life to celebrate my birthday just three days into the new year. That means I have little time to recover from the painful exercise of assessing my performance in the last year of the 1900s. I try to soothe my forlorn heart with the hope of a better year ahead when—wham!—the calendar tells me I'm another year older already. And I'm just three days into the new year!

The Old Book is right when it describes life in our little world as "a vapor," "a shadow," "a tale that is told." The scientists speak of nanoseconds and picaseconds—slivers of time that only slice the few short years we are given into more pieces, but cannot serve up any more of the stuff.

You may not realize just how far I've travelled in my, gulp, 49 years on the planet. My Northwest Airlines Frequent Flyer program update just arrived, telling me that since I signed up I have accumulated over 300,000 miles on their airline. But that doesn't include the other airlines, or car travel, or walking for that matter. Yet adding them all together is only the beginning.

The earth spins once on its axis every 23 hours, 56 minutes, and 4.091 seconds. During that time it covers about 7,900 miles. So in my almost half a century, I've covered 141,388,275 miles through the cycle of day and night, give or take a few pirouettes. But there's more.

I also have made 49 return trips around the sun. Each journey hurtles me and my six billion fellow passengers at an average speed of 66,600 miles an hour. Each circuit is 595 million miles long! So, let's see—that makes 29,155,000,000 miles around the sun since I gave my first cry in 1951. Dizzy yet?

Without a moment's vertigo, we find that our whole solar system is also spinning like a small compartment on a giant ferris wheel, the Milky Way. Revolving around the center of our galaxy, at the breathtaking speed of 155 miles per second, I don't expect to make a full revolution before I have to leave compartment earth (one orbit is said to take 250 million years). Just the same, my 49-year's journey adds about 239,679,972,000 miles to the total. If only I could get travel points!

The God who put these heavenly bodies in their place, set them spinning, and sustains them in their courses, is the God who also offers to control our daily movements through time and space as well. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way" (Ps. 37:23).

Now let me ask a question. Who is the he and to whom does the his refer in the latter half of the verse? The New King James, by capitalizing the He, concludes that it is the Lord delighting in the way of the good man. Whatever this verse means, we know that is true from other passages: "Those who are of a perverse heart are an abomination to the Lord, but the blameless in their ways are His delight." "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are His delight." "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight" (Prov.

11:20; 12:22; 15:8). The other side of the coin ought to be just as shiny. When He directs our steps, we find delight in His “good…acceptable and perfect will” (Rom. 12:2). Standing outside on a clear night, we look up into the velvet sky and see the history of God’s dealings with the stars. We see them not as they are but as they have been, under the watchful care of their Maker. And He, in the stillness, would ask us, “Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons? knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth?” (Job 38:31-33).

Good questions! If He does so well directing everything else in the universe, why wouldn’t I delight in His way in my life too?

Tentative Arrangements (April 2000)

From Uplook, April 2000. Editorial.

Would God actually go camping? Something is more amazing than that!

Heavenly wisdom helps us distinguish between the temporary and the permanent. For example, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning” (Ps. 30:5). “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). The saint’s pain is temporary; his gain is permanent.

My grandfather’s younger brother, Dick, was a successful businessman; he sat on the police commission; he was mayor of our city; several Prime Ministers had dinner at his home by the lake; he received the Queen on one of her state visits. But it wasn’t always like that.

He was raised in a large, working-class family. When just a boy, unknown to his parents, Dick began horse trading. He found he could buy horseflesh in Toronto (a ferry ride away) more cheaply than in St. Catharines. Little by little, with his marginal profits, he purchased better and better animals until he brought home a fine looking, high-spirited creature—that went mad on him. The local detective, “Flat-foot” McGee, had to shoot his profits through the head.

During the Depression, he worked as a delivery boy in my grandfather’s grocery store. In those days the grocery list was picked up, filled, and delivered to the customer’s house. But Dick couldn’t stand waiting for

the woman of the house as she wondered what else she might need. So he memorized every item in the store and would recite it as a checklist for her. He could repeat that list, word perfect, fifty years later.

It wasn't long, however, until he was on his own. He bought some real estate, had a warehouse—which burned to the ground. What to do? Quit? No, these failures were only temporary. He became an auctioneer, started a rental business, and who knows what else. He didn't think hope died until you did.

My uncle often quoted this anonymous poem:

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest, if you must—but don't you quit!
Life is strange with its twists and turns,
As every one of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about
When he might have won had he stuck it out;
Don't give up though the pace seems slow—
You may succeed with another blow.
Success is failure turned inside out—
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems afar;
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit—
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.

Our Lord teaches us that in the life of the believer it's never quitting time. How grateful I am for His own testimony: "He shall not fail nor be discouraged" (Isa.

42:4). If He isn't discouraged, why should I be? When Israel was far from home, enslaved in Egypt, Jehovah didn't give up on them (though they often gave up on Him). He was prepared to do whatever it took to win His people's hearts. He actually lived among them in a tent for nearly 500 years! But in the days of Eli, the people thought of His golden throne, the Mercy Seat, merely as a lucky charm in battle. Later, in the days of Saul, the ark languished in Beth-shemesh. When David became king, he said it was not right that God should be living in a tent. He prepared for a temple, and Solomon built it. What a magnificent structure! How permanent it looked! But it too was only a tentative arrangement. Today Gods dwells on earth, amazingly, in these tents of our earthly sojourn (1 Cor. 6:19) and "we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened" (2 Cor. 5:4). But that, too is only temporary: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor 5:1). Meanwhile, keep keeping on in the pilgrim way!

The Nexte Thynge (May 2000)

From Uplook, May 2000. Editorial.

Is it possible to walk in step with the will of God? Begin with the next step.

I have discovered in life that it isn't the work you do that tires you; it is the work you ought to do but leave undone. In an old poetry book which I value there is an anonymous poem called "Doe the Nexte Thynge." It says:

From an old English parsonage down by the sea,
There came in the twilight a message to me;
Its quaint Saxon legend deeply engraven,
Has to my thinking the teaching of heaven;
And on through the hours the quiet words ring
Like a low inspiration: "Doe the Nexte Thynge."
Jesus would have you daily more free,
Knowing the might of this royal decree;
Ever in waiting, glad for His call,
Tranquil in chastening, trusting through all.
Comings and goings no turmoil need bring,
His all your future: "Doe the Nexte Thynge."
Do it immediately, do it with prayer,
Do it reliantly, casting all care;
Do it with reverence, tracing His hand
Who placed it before you with earnest command.
Stayed on Omnipotence, safe 'neath His wing,
Leave the results to Him: "Doe the Nexte Thynge."

We are living in frenetic days, days so busy that they can squeeze eternity right out of our minds and hearts. Time's ever increasing pace sweeps us past the quiet

place, the sanctuary of the soul, pushing us out into the stormy hours without even a glance at the map or compass, without a word to the Captain. Days turn into weeks…into years…into decades. The urgent things of life, rarely of eternal significance, push out the important things, which rarely seem to be urgent. I can always witness to my neighbor or study my Bible or visit the fatherless and widow tomorrow—or so my harried schedule tells me. But it isn't true, of course. I have no tomorrows, only today. And now is the time to doe the nexte thynge.

I think it's fair to say that every Christian who is at all listening for the Shepherd's voice generally knows what He wants us to do next. We may not know what to do regarding some big decision down the road, but the Lord didn't promise us wisdom for situations that have not arrived yet. He is the God who is "a very present help," a help in the nick of time.

Sometimes I don't do the next thing because I think other tasks would be more enjoyable to perform. The tough jobs slip to the bottom of the pile. But the Lord has promised that His will is "good and acceptable and perfect." His commandments are not grievous. His yoke is easy, His burden light. Personal enjoyment (though thought to be man's inalienable right) is not the basis for a servant doing a work for God.

Sometimes I don't do the next thing because I feel I am not up to the challenge. But He is the kindest Master and never gives us something that is beyond our Spirit-aided capacity to do. He would say to us as He said to another: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul's ready

response: “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9). If I respond to the nudgings of the Spirit, I can be certain of the following:

1. The nexte thynge for you to do will be a vital component of God’s cosmic plan for the universe. The Lord is offering you and me the opportunity to have a significant part in the governing of the universe.

2. The nexte thynge gives us the thrilling privilege of seeing God turn time into eternity by taking our ordinary lives and doing extraordinary things in them.

3. The nexte thynge can certainly be accomplished because all the resources of heaven are made available to the child of God who is about his Father’s business.

4. The nexte thynge could be the last thing on the Lord’s list for me do do before His return. One of these days will be the last. Remember: you can never do a good thing too soon because you never know how soon it will be too late. Doe the nexte thynge.

Back of the Clouds (June 2000)

From Uplook, June 2000. Editorial.

The storms down here shouldn't be allowed to block the sunny forecast.

The day dawned wet and raw. I felt as limp as the gray flannel sky. I was leaving for meetings and didn't feel either willing to leave home or prepared to go. And I felt I deserved to feel miserable, and to inflict it on those around me. Somehow I said my goodbyes and boarded the plane. The engines roared to life, and the aircraft lifted off the sodden runway into the sullen clouds. The plane lurched and bounced through the turbulent air. For a few moments nothing could be seen out my window but swirling gray. And then it happened.

We broke out into calm blue sky as far as the eye could see. From the upper side, the clouds looked puffy and white. The golden sun shone through the little porthole, onto my upturned face, into my soul. And just as sudden as the change outside, a snatch of a song broke through the inclement weather in my heart:

> *Never fear tho' shadows dark around your path may fall;*
> *Do not let your heart be troubled;*
> *From His throne in heaven God is watching over all,*
> *He will ever care for you.*
> *Back of the clouds the sun is always shining,*
> *After the storms your skies will all be blue;*
> *God has prepared a rosy-tinted lining,*
> *Back of the clouds it's waiting to shine through.*
> *Keep the light of hope eternal dwelling in your heart,*

Rest upon the Father's promise,
And you'll find that cares and worry quickly will depart,
Heaven's peace will enter in (C. R. Freeman).

Those rays of sunshine had travelled 93 million miles to reach me and I believed then, as I do now, that they came right from God: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). Sunshine was His idea, and evidently the apostle thought that there was a relationship between sunlight and Sonlight. In each case the shining came directly from His heart.

This issue of Uplook features articles on the wonderful Epistle to the Hebrews. It is radiant with the light of heaven. Everywhere the Lord Jesus is seen in His surpassing glories. But there are clouds in the book, too.

The clouds of Gradualism (2:1-3): If we do not give "earnest heed" to what we have "heard," the truths which we ought to hold dear will drift away from us. The word "slip" means "to flow past, to glide by" (Vine's). Almost imperceptibly the dark clouds of "neglect" (v. 3) block out the light and leave us chilled and uncertain of the way to escape the coming deluge. Let us affirm what was confirmed (v. 3) to us.

The clouds of Agnosticism (3:7-19): "Better to believe your beliefs and doubt your doubts than to believe your doubts and doubt your beliefs." We say we trust in an all-wise, all-powerful, loving God. Do we act like that? Martin Luther, who had been "under the weather" spiritually, awoke one day to find his wife dressed in mourning. "Who died?" he asked. "God did," she replied.

“Foolishness,” retorted Luther. “Why would you say such a thing?” “That’s how you’re acting,” she replied.

“Let us therefore fear”—take God seriously—lest we allow the storms of doubt to sweep our minds rather than calling on the One who in a moment can speak His “Shalom!” and bring immediate calm.

The clouds of Dwarfism (5:11-14): Little sins rob us of great blessing. Only a thin mist blocks out the sun. Inattention to the Word, frittered hours, day-dreaming life away, petty quarrels, and spiritual lethargy keep us from growing strong in the Lord. Cut off from the influence of heaven’s light, we grow limp, unable to draw up the deep things of God. “Let us go on to [maturity]” (6:1). “…be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (v. 12).

The clouds of Pessimism (10:32-37): It isn’t easy to live under a cloud. The early believers (and many saints today) at first “took joyfully” the spoiling of their goods because they saw beyond the storms and knew that in heaven they had “a better and an enduring substance.” But as the clouds lingered they found “reproaches and afflictions” hard to bear, and were tempted to cast away their confidence instead of casting their care on Him. We have the same choice now. Let’s live in the Sonshine.

On Weeds and Weeding (July-August 2000)

From Uplook, July-August 2000. Editorial.

How does morning glory become bindweed? Or holy desire get entangled with lust?

Don’t confuse me with a gardener. I plant flowers each year but I don’t read garden catalogs in February, longing for the moment when the snow melts enough to see the soil. I like flowers as art, the bold interplay of colors, the drama of the unfolding bud—flowers as ideas, blooming in my mind, not the real thing struggling to survive in my yard.

I have no feel for flowers. I don’t understand their needs: their longing for sunlight or shade, for sand or loam; their passion for wiggling their roots into manure. Flowers are like strangers whom I admire from a distance. In fact, when I finally get around to visiting the garden center, I can almost sense the flowers sighing with relief as my shadow moves past them. They seem to know that the ones I take home with me will never attain botanical greatness. They may not even survive the season.

Flowers and I find the basis for a relationship in our hatred for weeds. I was out hating this morning. Perhaps that’s too strong a word, but I was tearing them out of the ground and leaving their limp bodies to shrivel and die without the slightest twinge of conscience. And as I worked at it, trying to push back the evidence of the Curse only slightly, I thought of the other weeding I needed to do.

My soul is a garden inclosed, as the Singer wrote: “Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits” (Song of Sol. 4:16). It is my garden because I live and work there. But it doesn’t belong to me. It is His. I am responsible to cultivate thoughts of Christ, to receive with meekness the engrafted Word, and to benefit from the fructifying influence of the Spirit. The life is from Christ; the fruit is the Spirit’s; the Husbandman is the Father. But I am on the weeding brigade.

What lessons enriched my weeding time this morning? Let me include five (I weeded out the rest):

1. When weeding, sooner is better than later. Weeds are tenacious! Japanese knotweed sprouts through four inches of asphalt. Bamboo grows 18 inches a day. Roots of Canada thistle spread through an area 20 feet in diameter in one season. A wormwood plant produces over one million seeds per season. A yellow nutsedge spawns almost 2,000 plants in a year. While the thistle is still tender, before the dandelion’s taproot has anchored well below the surface, before the quack grass has spread out of control, nip it in the bud. So it is with the weeds in my heart. The longer they are left to grow, the greater the influence and the greater the hold.

2. A gentle, steady application of water helps. When the ground (or heart) is hard, it’s almost impossible to uproot the cursed things. Regular exposure to the Word will soften the hold bad habits have on the soul.

3. Weeds aren’t fussy; they’ll grow anywhere. In her book, My Weeds, Sara Stein writes: “That’s one of the first things you notice about weeds. They grow in

driveway gravel, on railway beds, through cracks in sidewalks…It isn't that they must have an awful place to grow, it's that they make do where cultivated plants cannot." In the process, weeds steal nutrients from the soil, block sunlight, drink up the rainwater, entangle roots, and just plain take over the place. The spiritual applications should be obvious to all.

4. You have to be careful when weeding because you can do damage to the flowers. He is a dangerous man who starts weeding before learning the difference between violets and bellwort, between snapdragons and toadflax. The study of soul weeds, called Hamartiology (from the Gk. hamartanein, to miss the mark) is necessary for those serious about what the Master does and doesn't like in His garden. The seeds of wrong thoughts spring up into noxious growth that stifles the Life in us.

5. You win or the weed does, but failure doesn't mean you can't try again! Weeding is a life-long work. But weed-free living is part of the blessed hope when at last the curse is removed (Rev. 22:3). Amen to that!

This Uplook features articles on Elisha, the man of God. He followed Elijah, of course, and in some ways seemed more effective in weeding the garden of Israel than his predecessor. It may be that the sixth point, learned from his life, is this: sometimes when convincing weeds to let go, a constant, steady pressure is better that a violent snatch.

Life Behind Bars (September 2000)

From Uplook, September 2000. Editorial.

The Lord can open prisoners' hearts just like He once opened prison cells.

America leads the West in the incarceration of its populace. According to the US Department of Justice (as of June 30, 1999) 468 out of every 100,000 people in the country sit behind bars. That's dramatically up in the last decade (292 per 100,000 in 1990). This doesn't include those on parole, those wanted by police, or those guilty of unsolved crimes.

The number is staggering. It approximates one out of every 200. If you add to that family members affected by these incarcerations, and the victims of the crimes committed, you begin to recognize what a mission field of needy, hurting people there is, directly affected by the prison system in this country. Over the centuries, men have expressed their hopes that incarceration can effect change by the words they have used for their jails (jail is from a Middle English word for "cage"). Young offenders were sent to reformatories. Older criminals were kept in penitentaries. Now they are called correctional institutes.

But it is a rare thing to see slaves of sin reformed from their debilitating habits by man-sized techniques. The penal experts have tried. But with all the research dollars spent and endless self-help experiments, the only long-term, surefire answer is found in the offer made two thousand years ago: "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (Jn. 8:36).

I recollect clearly my first encounter with God's prison reform. It was the fall of 1974. I was inside the Richmond County Correctional Institute, Tobacco Road, Augusta, Georgia, with brother Sydney Temple.

The clang of the great steel doors behind me was met with a response in the pit of my stomach. The guard stood aloof; his face had known few smiles. I was ushered down a narrow hallway to another steel door where I waited for the turnkey. Whoever said, "Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage," had never been inside, I thought to myself. It was October, but the day had been borrowed from summer. I felt awkward standing there sweltering in the Georgia heat.

Eventually I was admitted to a room twenty feet by forty, perhaps. Concrete block walls. Benches without backs were the only furniture except for the ornate pulpit that seemed incongruous. Instead of stained glass windows, there were cold steel bars.

I sat on the edge of one of the benches. Almost immediately the door reopened to admit twenty-seven rugged-looking customers. They were all dressed in prison garb. Prison garb with one addition—they all had smiles.

My collar cut my neck and my tie kept yelling at me. I felt so out of place—until I was introduced. Smiles flashed, handshakes were extended, and I heard, "Praise the Lord, brother," more than once. Then as the service began, I took a good look at God's prison reform.

Ralph, who led in prayer, was in for armed robbery. He also prayed for the warden every day since the Lord had changed his heart. The young man at the pulpit, who was waving his arms to the rhythm of thirty voices

almost on key, smiled at me. I wondered what that handsome, happy inmate was in for. I was later to learn that by the time he was twenty-four, Herb had been expelled from school and the army, was an alcoholic and a heavy drug addict, and was serving a life sentence for the murder of his wife and both of her parents. Satan is a cruel master. But I heard Herb lift his voice to God and sing,

"I've found a Friend who is all to me,
His love is ever true;
I love to tell how He lifted me,
And what His grace can do for you."

That's God's prison reform system. He doesn't change the prison; He changes the prisoners. God takes poor sinners and turns them into saints—not perfect, but learning. He sets them free. He gives them hope. He turns their prison cells into a palace. It's still noisy and dirty and hard to take, but the King is there.

The fellows listened as I talked about freedom in Christ. They didn't seem to mind that I could leave and they had to go back to their cells. God had changed their hearts. They were more free in their Georgia cells than thousands who walk city streets but are still enslaved to sin.

The Grace of Kings (November 2000)

From Uplook, November 2000. Editorial.

Can it be true that I am as rich as God is? How else can we understand Ephesians 1:3?

It is not always true that generosity is the grace of kings. It ought to be, but as Paul remarked to the Corinthians, it was the “deep poverty” of the Macedonian Christians coupled with “the abundance of their joy” that “abounded unto the riches of their liberality” (2 Cor. 8:2).

Of course, if the truth were known, those humble believers in Macedonia actually were kings. As am I! I’m so rich I’ve no idea how much I have. My Father is the most wealthy and the most generous Person in the universe (Rom. 8:32). And all of my brothers and sisters equally share in the bounty (Acts 20:32). We will never get to the end of it; we’ll never get over it.

Of course when I arrived on this planet almost fifty years ago, I did not even have a set of clothes to my name (1 Tim. 6:7). If others had not come to my aid, I would have perished.

As I grew, I came to discover how dismal my situation really was (Eph. 2:12). I was spiritually bankrupt with no way of diminishing the debt load (Lk. 7:42); in fact, my indebtedness grew every day. But then I heard about a fabulously wealthy prince (Rev. 1:5) who had taken pity on me and—I can hardly believe it still—died for me, impoverishing Himself in the process (2 Cor. 8:9). And in His will He left me everything He had (Heb. 9:15-16)! In

fact, He made it possible for me to become a member of the royal family (Eph. 2:6).

One of the seeming misunderstandings among the members of heaven's royalty at present is assuming that our inheritance cannot be accessed until we get Home. It is true that your inheritance is "reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:4). But we have already received "the earnest of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14) which is hardly a small portion. It is, in fact, the Holy Spirit Himself! Already we have dipped into the treasure troves labeled "the exceeding riches of His grace" (Eph. 2:7) and the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8).

What does this mean, practically? How can I live frugally and yet spend lavishly on others—"as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6:10)?

My grandmother Nicholson was a wee Scots woman whose face shone with the reflected light of heaven. She never had much in this world. She looked after other people's children, cleaned other people's houses and washed other people's clothes. But after I began preaching she would often squeeze a $5 bill into my hand.

"Aw, Grandma," I would protest, "I have enough. You keep it."

With a smile I can still see after many years, she would say, "Now, Son, I'm just investing in a little real estate in heaven."

When we children were younger, Grandma often came over on a Friday night to give my folks a night out. Just before she tucked us in, we would kneel by the bedside. I can still remember one request she would pray for us:

“May these children always have enough to be generous.” Yes, we can afford to be generous. Why do we give away words of encouragement as if they cost a thousand dollars a piece? Would that there were more Barnabases among us who would be as spontaneous and reckless in dispensing their treasures as God has been generous with us. He is, after all, the God who loves a cheerful (Gk., hilarious—spontaneous, not with a bargaining spirit) giver.

So substantial are these unsearchable riches that Paul made it his life’s work to invite everyone he met to share the mother lode with him (Eph. 3:8-9). Your stake in heaven’s wealth is not diminished by giving it away. In reality, dispensing it is the very way we come into the enjoyment of it.

Has your appreciation of heaven’s riches waned? Go show some of them to a new believer. You’ll be the beneficiary. You’ll catch their excitement in the discovery.

Go ahead. Take heaven’s challenge. Try to outgive God. No one has been able to do it yet. Nor will they ever, for He is “no man’s debtor.” Live like a king. Spread the wealth. You have enough to be generous.

Journey Back into Eternity (November 2000)

From Uplook, November 2000. Article.

What was happening before time? You were in God's mind, on His heart.

God's wonderful Word actually begins before the beginning in Genesis 1:1. The Lord lets us in on the pre-planning that occurred in the divine counsels before time's clock began ticking. He has "made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself" (Eph. 1:9). We are heaven's intimates.

Matthew cites Psalm 78:2 and applies it to the parabolic ministry of the Lord: "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world" (Mt. 13:35). In other words, the spoken ministry of Christ actually told out the confidences of the divine Persons, secrets kept in the heart of God through thousands of years of human history. What was God doing before He made man? We dare not speculate where God is silent, but He has revealed ten statements regarding His pre-time activities. As such, "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory" (1 Cor. 2:7).

The Lord pressed Job, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding…Who laid the corner stone thereof; when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God

shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4, 6-7). Man is a relative latecomer to the process. When he arrived, the stage was already built on which the great drama of redemption would be played out. The lights (with both bright and dim settings) had been positioned above, set against the velvet curtains of the heavens.

1. The central figure in the supreme love story of the ages had prepared His entry long before He came: "Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1 Pet. 1:20). In order to accomplish this key part, He veiled His true identity as Writer of the script and came in the lowly garb of a carpenter from Nazareth.

2. Of His return to His former place of honor, He prayed: "And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (Jn. 17:5). While the Lord Jesus lived on this planet, His glory, though veiled, shone through. John wrote: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14). But this must be different from the glory which the Son spoke in John 17. It is a glory unrevealed in time. On His return to earth, He will "appear …in glory" (Col. 3:4) and we shall bask in that glory with Him. What a day that will be!

3. Before time, the main acts had already been written. The role of King had been given to the only One worthy to wear the diadem of the universe, and His kingdom was secured before ever an angel rejoiced or a demon raged in His august presence: "Then shall the King say… Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom

prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt. 25:34).

4. The deeply moving scene at the center of the plot was as good as done before the first star flamed through the night sky, for the Lord of life and glory is "…the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). Isn't it comforting to know that God had the ultimate safety net in place long before sinful man needed it? He is not willing that any should perish.

5. Before any debt had accumulated against the human race, the Lord had calculated the mighty cost and by matchless grace agreed to pay it in full. "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9).

6. With what holy intimacy we listen in on the Saviour's prayer to His Father, "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (Jn. 17:24). It is the only time the Lord Jesus expressed His own will. And what does He want? You and me! With Him! In glory! Forever!

7. What shall we be doing there? Finding out the infinite reasons that the Father has loved the Son since before the world's foundation. The Father will show us how to love the Son as He deserves. It has been the purpose of the Father all along to have a holy, blameless family in heaven, chosen in the Son to love the Son with Him: "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the

foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4).

8. By His foreknowledge the divine Record-keeper has guaranteed safe passage for those who trust Him. There is not a shade of doubt concerning the eternal security of those who would receive God's way of salvation. Known before time, the assurance of their journey through time and into eternity is sealed with the divine autograph. Every believer is included in the number of those whose names are "…written in the book of life from the foundation of the world…" (Rev. 17:8).

9. This life, eternal life, the very life of God, was a pre-temporal offer. "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2). The Father knew what it would cost Him as the Great Planner in the giving of His only Son. The Son knew what it would cost Him as the Great Sacrifice in His descent "even to death on a cross." And what has it cost the Holy Spirit as the Great Indweller, not only coming into a sinful world as Christ did, but into a sinning Church? He is the seal, the earnest, the guarantee that God will not give up on us, and will bring us safely to the land where our names are inscribed in heaven's handwriting. We are as sure of being in heaven as those names which are already there.

10. But it is not only as individual believers that the Godhead in the divine counsels considered us before the foundations of the world. Paul declared his two-fold commission in these words: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of

the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:8-9).

Gospel truth and Church truth were the two pillars of Paul's ministry. And just as the gospel was prepared before time began, so the Church in general, and I in particular was not a second-best alternative after Israel "stumbled" (Rom. 11:11). And just as each individual is secure in the fact of our final destination "ever…with the Lord," so the future of the Church is as certain as the eternal promise of God: "Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Rom. 16:25).

These pre-time revelations are not recorded to satisfy our curiosity. They reveal to us three glorious truths: i) the meticulous nature of the divine plan; ii) the eternal greatness of divine love and grace; iii) the absolutely secure position of every believer.

Thus before human history there was eternal reality. God's eternity flows with all its gracious fullness into man's time-world. David may well express our sentiments when he writes: "Many, O Lord my God, are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered" (Ps 40:5).

But it wasn't just the vast number of God's thoughtfulness that thrilled David. He also delighted in the intricacy and complexity of them: "O Lord, how

great are Thy works! and Thy thoughts are very deep" (Ps. 92:5). Paul expands on the idea in Romans 11,

> *"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*
> *How unsearchable are His judgments,*
> *And His ways past finding out!*
> *For who hath known the mind of the Lord?*
> *Or who hath been His counselor?*
> *Or who hath first given to Him,*
> *And it shall be recompensed unto him again?*
> *For of Him, and through Him, and to Him,*
> *Are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."*
> *(vv. 33-36)*

There was one thing more on David's heart, and it is this that stirs us to join him in worshipping our God together: "How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God!" (Ps. 139:17).

Sententious! (December 2000/January 2001)

From Uplook, December 2000/January 2001. Editorial.

What is marked by an economy of words and an abundance of meaning?

I've never used the word before in public. An opportunity like this rarely comes. I dare say you could live a full life without ever using it. But it seems well nigh impossible to write about the Book of Proverbs without slipping it in somewhere. The word? Sententious. Now I know some of you will immediately protest, "Why, I use that word. Doesn't everyone?"

Sidlow Baxter does in Explore the Book: "The English word 'proverb' means a brief saying in the stead of many words (pro = for; verba = words). In popular usage it signifies any pithy, sententious saying or terse maxim. The Hebrew word, however, which we translate as 'proverbs' (mishle) has a much wider meaning, and is used of many discourses, sentences, and expressions which would not be classed as proverbs in English today…The genius of a proverb lies in its shrewd concentration of a truth or of some sagacious counsel in a terse and striking way, so that it catches on, and becomes easier to remember" (p. 132).

E. W. Bullinger's Companion Bible slips it in with his introduction: "TITLE. The Proverbs. Heb. Mishlai; Greek, Paroimiai = any dark sententious saying; Vulg. Proverbia. Whence the English name" (p. 865).

Even H. A. Ironside, thought to be the prince of clear and forthright exposition, thinks it the right word for the occasion: “To the general reader, the book of Proverbs, with its common-sense epigrams and sententious aphorisms, might seem to be the last portion of Scripture requiring any attempt at elucidation. But it is just because its chapters abound in pithy truisms that the marrow is often lost sight of by those who have been accustomed to hearing or reading them all of their lives” (Notes on Proverbs, Prefatory Note).

But William Kelly (often presumed to be difficult reading) doesn’t use the word “sententious” once in his helpful explanation. He writes: “As a proverb is a compressed parable, or an expanded comparison, so it often borders on the riddle or enigma in order to fix attention” (The Proverbs, p. 9).

So in these few paragraphs you have read the word “sententious” no less than seven times! And what does it mean? Webster’s Dictionary gives its definition as: “adj [ME, full of meaning, fr. L sententiosus, fr. sententia, sentence, maxim] 1: terse, aphoristic, or moralistic in expression; PITHY, EPIGRAMMATIC.”

I I don’t think my father-in-law ever used the word “sententious” even though he read a chapter in the Proverbs every day. After a while he thought in proverbs, talked in proverbs, and lived out proverbs in his daily experience. He never used ten words when five would do. His name was John Funk. Eight letters. Monosyllabic. No middle initial.

I never remember him preaching alone. He would have three or four young men in tow. One would just read a passage of Scripture. One would open in prayer. One

would give a testimony; another, a gospel message. And he would finish up. I was one of the young men he encouraged in this way. And there were many others.

He didn't care how much people said as long as they said it in few words. That's why he liked the Proverbs. He'd tell us, "If the fish hadn't opened his mouth, he wouldn't have got caught." Sometimes in his prayers he would quote Proverbs 10:19, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise." He would remind us that multiplying words in the presence of the Lord was an unwise thing to do. And then he showed us by keeping his prayers to the point.

He was an honest businessman who lived Proverbs in the workplace. When Revenue Canada refused to allow him his full deductions for business expenses, explaining that "everyone inflates the numbers," he placed his ledgers on their counter, and said, "Take as long as you like. I can account for every penny." Several months later, when his books were returned with a grudging apology, he requested—and received—a letter to that effect, which he framed and displayed on his office wall. As he would tell us, quoting an old book he read: "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches" (Prov. 22:1). And it is, of course.

J. Boyd Nicholson (December 2000/ January 2001)

From Uplook, December 2000/January 2001. Article.

July 14, 1922-November 12, 2000

It is not an easy thing to write a final testimonial to one's own father. He would be embarrassed to hear himself praised when he lived his whole Christian life praising the Lord and encouraging others to do so. But it is a good thing, a right thing, I believe, to give "honor to whom honor is due."

Boyd Nicholson was not only my father; he was my mentor, my confidant, my co-laborer, my example, and my friend. I expected it to be much harder to let him go, but God's matchless grace (which Dad never tired of declaring) has proven again to be true. The Lord Himself promises that His "grace is sufficient" for us. He has not short-changed us. Nor can we underestimate the prayers of God's people or the comfort of the Scriptures. "He faileth not."

Dad was a Scot who gave up his homeland for a Canadian bride, a homebody who said thousands of good-byes to travel the world wooing a Bride for the Saviour. He was an old airman who exchanged piloting for helping others navigate through life to the celestial city. And he was an artist who gave up his art career to paint word pictures of Christ and the cross, of heaven and home (see word painting on next page).

He seems to have been one of the last of a breed. He was part of a generation of intrepid men of God who

were hallmarked by at least three outstanding characteristics. They had a passion for the gospel that led them to plow and sow and weep and reap in all the wide world's field. They did not flinch when derided on the street corner, or when they were rejected as they went door to door. They just kept at it, and Dad and his generation saw thousands saved. They never got over the pure, sweet gospel because they never got over being saved themselves. Their attitude of wonder is expressed in the words of one of Dad's close friends, Jack Trotter, who would shake his head after hearing the gospel again and say, "How did we ever get in?" They longed for others to get in, too.

They had a loyalty to the assembly, to meeting in the simple way which they believed the Word of God taught. Their loyalty to local church life was directly linked to their loyalty to the Head of the church Himself. Although they knew many fine believers who felt free to bear the names of various denominations, these men believed with all their hearts that only one Man had died for them, and that He deserved the place of honor. His name alone should be named among His people. When others got miffed and left the assembly in a huff, they wept a while, then wiped their tears away, picked up their tools, and went back to work, repairing the breach in the wall and then going on from there.

They also had a holy reverence for the things of God. They walked softly in the Lord's presence. They were awed that they could come week by week into the Holiest of all to remember Him. And they knew what they were doing when they got there. They had a deep respect for the Bible and never spoke lightly from the

pulpit. In short, it was no idle thing to call them men of God.

They took the Lord and His work seriously. Many of them (and their wives) sacrificed greatly for Him, but thought little of it. On one occasion, shortly after Dad was called to preach full time (and things were pretty slim financially), he received an offer to take an executive post with Mercedes Benz of Canada. He left the letter lying on his desk and went off to preach at a children's meeting in Simcoe, Ontario. At least one child professed faith in Christ that night. When Dad arrived home, somehow the letter had lost whatever appeal it might have had, compared to the salvation of an eternal soul.

Dad never thought he was anything out of the ordinary, a man with a limited education, an unknown in the world. But he knew that his God could do extraordinary things through ordinary men and he set about, by God's grace, to see Him do it. And I think He did.

Look Who Quotes the Proverbs (December 2000/January 2001)

From Uplook, December 2000/January 2001. Article.

You can, too.

A proverb is a truth encapsulated in a succinct way. As such it is portable. You may not readily remember great passages of Scripture, but you can always pack a few proverbs in your emergency kit to be used at a moment's notice.

Almost all of the proverbs that are quoted in the New Testament are taken from the Septuagint, a few phrases excepted. Let's have a look at the way these truisms are utilized.

Romans 3:15-17 quotes Proverbs 1:16. Paul calls up a courtroom full of witnesses for the prosecution, from the Psalms (14:1-3; 53:1-3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; and 36:1 in that order). The proverbs quoted in verses 15-17 are also found in slightly different words in Isaiah 59:7-8. We may use these verses with our acquaintances, to remind them of the diagnosis the Scriptures give of the human dilemma. The cross exposes it. History declares it. The conscience convicts of it. And Scripture says it, so all may realize their guilt and flee to Christ (Rom. 3:19-22).

Proverbs 1:16 sounds amazingly like world conditions as portrayed on the evening news. But as Paul applies it in Romans 3, he gives also the reason—"There is no fear of God before their eyes"—and in subsequent verses describes God's glorious solution through "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (v. 24).

Paul quotes Proverbs again in Romans 12:20, this time from 25:21-22. By this usage, he reminds us that grace is not only a New Testament idea. The God of the Old Testament revealed Himself as “a gracious God” (Jonah 4:2; see also Joel 2:13). And the proverb quoted, “If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink,” was given practical expression by those who knew this gracious God. Boaz did it with Ruth, a Moabite, whose ancestors had refused bread and water to his forefathers (see Deut. 23:3-4). Elisha did it for the Syrian soldiers who had actually come to kill him (2 Ki. 6:21-22)! David did it with Saul’s household (2 Sam. 9:1-7) for Jonathan’s sake. Of course, God does it every time sinners are saved, providing them with Christ, the Bread of heaven (Jn. 6:32).

Both James (4:6) and Peter (1 Pet. 5:5) find it helpful to remind us of the words of Proverbs 3:34, “Surely He scorneth the scorners: but He giveth grace to the lowly.” The words may have been Solomon’s paraphrase of his father’s words in Psalm 138:6, “Though the Lord be on high, yet He hath respect unto the lowly: but the proud He knoweth afar off.” Both NT quotes are from the Septuagint: “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.” Obviously this is a sweeping principle of cosmic proportions. It is seen in its greatest measure in the manifestation of the Christ and of the antichrist. When “God was manifest in flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16), it involved a humbling unparalleled in history (see Phil. 2). But proud man repeatedly vaunts himself throughout time until at last he “opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4). As A. J. Gordon wrote: “The

mystery of godliness is God humbling Himself to become man; the mystery of iniquity is man exalting himself to become God."

Peter quotes the Proverbs more liberally than any other New Testament writer. As well as the citation already mentioned, he quotes Proverbs 10:12 (1 Pet. 4:8), Proverbs 11:31 (1 Pet. 4:18), and Proverbs 26:11 (2 Pet. 2:22). The first speaks of the mantle of love that covers sin, the second alludes to the suffering in life that judges sin in the house of God, and the third describes the evil nature that enslaves to sin, manifesting the unregenerate in their hopeless condition without God.

The last direct quote from Proverbs (3:11-12) is found in Hebrews 12:5-6. One of many "my son" statements from Solomon's pen, this one alone is selected to be reinforced by repetition (vv. 5-6), explanation (vv. 7-8), and application (vv. 9-13). Its message? There is a direct link between love and chastening, between sonship and suffering. Like may proverbs, it is worth its weight in gold.

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