First Baptist Church picks new pastor

By Nick Maheras

Folks at First Baptist Church on N. Main Street are excited about their new pastor.

After several months of searching, the congregation voted last weekend by acclamation – and a rousing one at that – to call the Rev. Roy Alton "AI" Cadenhead to serve as senior pastor.

“Our church is thrilled to death,” Norman Jameson, chairman of the search committee, said. “We are as excited as we can possibly be. Our church constitution calls for a standing vote. It requires 75 percent.”

“Everybody in a packed auditorium leaped to their feet for a standing ovation (when the vote was called). Then, they gave him another one to welcome him. AI made a whopper of an impression.”

Cadenhead will preach his first sermon at First Baptist on the second Sunday in January.

The search committee received and solicited resumes and conducted a survey of the congregation, Jameson said.

“We wanted to get the pastor that our church needed and wanted,” he said.

“The ability to preach was the number one priority.

“He (Cadenhead) fit those (survey) categories. AI’s tape (sermon) was very strong. We knew he was a solid preacher and that he had a strong commitment to the Bible.”

Cadenhead will assume his new senior pastorate Jan. 1.

“I’m very excited about it,” Cadenhead said. “There’s always a lot of mixed emotions when you have to cut loose from where you are, particularly when it’s a pleasant situation.

“AI restored old Mustangs for a hobby,” Jameson said. “He is the kind of guy who joined a karate class to meet church prospects. He and his family are also very musically talented and inclined.”

Cadenhead will replace the Rev. L. Lamar King, who resigned last March after 14 years as senior pastor at First Baptist to assume the pastorate of First Baptist Church of Charleston, S.C.

Cadenhead said, “But they are interested in growing and becoming more effective in the community.

“I really think the need for High Point First Baptist is probably growth. When you grow, you’re able to do a lot of things for your church and for your community.”

Cadenhead has written three books and is working on a fourth. He has also written articles for national publications and columns for area newspapers.

His activities, however, are not limited to the academic, pastoral or scholarly.

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Cadenhead

Age: 47; native of LaGrange, Ga.
Family: Wife, Suzanne; son, Chris, 23; daughter, Melody, 17.

First Baptist is not a broken church that needs to be fixed,” Cadenhead said. “But they are interested in growing and becoming more effective in the community.

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Cadenhead will replace the Rev. L. Lamar King, who resigned last March after 14 years as senior pastor at First Baptist to assume the pastorate of First Baptist Church of Charleston, S.C.
Recently, I was standing in front of a store looking at some items displayed in the window. While standing there, I began hearing a very strange sound off in the distance.

I could hear this strange sound getting closer and closer. I was totally intrigued totally because it had been so long since I had heard a sound like this one.

The sound was so pleasant to hear, and as it got closer, I began to recognize the source of the sound. It was nice to know that it still existed! I have wondered lately if it had gone out of style.

Or maybe people have just forgotten how? It was coming from a man walking down the street. He was whistling.

I didn't know people whistled anymore. I thought that whistling went out with the invention of canned biscuits, instant pudding, and riding lawn mowers.

Evidently no one had told this old gentleman that you aren't supposed to whistle anymore. He was not killing time. His stride was very regular as though he might be heading somewhere important.

But, then again he was not in a frenzied trot like most of us have a tendency to move.

Most of us are so busy and in such a hurry that we are oblivious to anything except our next source of stress.

And we must save every ounce of strength for the next battle we must fight.

Why don't people whistle anymore? It's not terribly hard. Most anybody can learn. So, it must be something else.

One thing for sure, you cannot talk and whistle at the same time.

Do people have time to whistle? Most of our days are so intense that there simply isn't time. And it is practically impossible to grit one's teeth and whistle at the same time.

Another thing, do people whistle when they are happy? Or does whistling help to make people happy?

I'm not sure which is the case. On the surface, however, it appears that folks are just too serious or too sad.

The man I heard was whistling "Amazing Grace." And I thought to myself that there must be a sermon there somewhere.

Maybe he just had something worth whistling about. Is it possible that we have just forgotten about something which should be a source of joy?

Maybe we have become too busy for our own good. One thing I do know, the old boy whistling "Amazing Grace" made me feel just a little better by walking past me. And he never knew it.

I think I want to learn how to whistle again. Care to join me?

Dr. Cadenhead is Pastor of the First Baptist Church.
High Point.
First impressions can lead to hasty conclusions

I had an interesting experience in Augusta before I moved to High Point that I pass on simply for what it is worth to you.

It was early one morning as I was on my way to the office. I was driving down Walton Way, which is one of the busiest streets in town at that time of day.

As usual, I was running late because I had tried to finish a few duties at home before leaving. I entered the Walton Way raceway, which resembles Eastchester at 8:00 a.m.

The pace car was way out front, and I did not have time to play around. But, I pulled in behind a gray Ford, which was obviously not in the rush that some of us were experiencing.

Cars behind me were blowing horns, and several made a rather risky pass in one particular wide place in the street. The horns and the frustration did not bother the gray Ford in the least.

I could see only two people. The big guy who was driving was pointing to various things along the street.

Every now and then he would reach over and pat the other person. Give me a break. The world was in no hurry for them.

But, as I moved closer I could not help but notice the head of the other person who remained perfectly still, erect, and facing forward. I thought to myself, that woman has the longest and most pointed ears I've ever seen.

In fact, she seemed strange enough that I wanted to take a closer look at this lady.

My first impression was that this lady might keep me from being the ugliest person around.

When the street changed to a four lane, I pulled around in the fast lane. And would you believe it, sitting straight up in the passenger's seat was an enormous Bulldog.

The dog was looking around as if he owned the street. The man once again reached over and gave his friend a pat.

The dog nodded in approval. I felt a little guilty. Here I was, thinking how ugly the man's passenger was. The dog wasn't ugly at all, but quite handsome, at least as a dog!

Now, what is the moral of this story? When you are in a rush, there is a tendency to jump to conclusions.

Hasty assumptions made on first impressions are frequently wrong. How careful we need to be on or off the busy streets in town.

St. Paul stated it much better, “Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.” (Ephesians 4:1-2)

By the way, I cannot be sure, but I think the Bulldog was even wearing a seat belt.

Dr. Cadenhead is pastor of the First Baptist Church, High Point.
Earlier in my ministry, I served as a chaplain in a large medical hospital in Atlanta. I remember, in particular, one very moving experience that will forever stick in my mind.

A little 4-year-old girl was dying from a brain tumor. Her pain was unbelievably intense. No medication or procedure made a difference. The time was late in the afternoon one day, and I was the chaplain on call. Assuming the chaplain on that floor had left for the day, the nursing staff called for whoever was on call, and I quickly made my way to the room.

I must confess that I was very uncomfortable because there was so little that could be done. A “fix-it” kind of person always has trouble with something that has no direct solution.

I visited with the family, prayed, and then sat in the end of the rather dark room, at a total loss as to what to do for the pain of the child and that of the family.

Her moans of pain were almost unbearable for me, and I just wanted to distance myself as much as the room would allow.

At that time John, the chaplain assigned to the floor, happened to be visiting patients later than normal.

Not seeing me in the room, John quietly walked in and sat by her bed, never saying a word.

He gently took her hand and just held it for a brief period of time. That was all he did.

Almost like magic, her crying ceased, and she quietly went to sleep.

Without ever saying the first word, John got up and left.

I have thought about that experience many times, and it always reminds me of the importance of a simple touch.

It can do wonders, even in situations that seem to have no solutions.

Jesus had a habit of touching people.

He could have performed his miracles from a distance, but most of the time the miracle was accompanied by some form of touch.

Our society does not touch much anymore. Yet, children and adults alike need it.

Some children will misbehave because a spanking is better than no contact at all.

A simple touch can bridge the generation gap. It can comfort a domestic flare-up.

It can help a skinned knee and soothe the most anxious mind. I can think of few things that families need more today than a little touching.

But, don’t take my word for it. The next time your pass your son, or daughter, or spouse, hug their neck and watch what happens. It’s not only magic. It’s almost entertaining.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
Easiest path is not always best

Al Cadenhead

I much prefer easy solutions to problems. I even prefer effortless solutions to hard problems, at least whenever possible.

If your life is like mine, we spend an enormous amount of time and energy looking for those easy answers.

The temptation is also great to come to a mountainous opportunity and want to circle it rather than to climb it. The temptation is just as real to confront a moment of truth and want to flee from it rather than face it.

We have all been there. This kind of temptation is a normal part of our existence. And occasionally, the easy way might be the right way, but not always.

Tomorrow is an important day in the life of the Christian community. We refer to it as Palm Sunday. It is more than just a prelude to Easter.

That first Palm Sunday represents a decisive moment in the ministry of Jesus.

He had spent time ministering to people in the ministry of Jesus. He had spent time ministering to people in the provinces around Jerusalem and was developing a following.

The crowds were growing larger. Jesus began to realize, however, that if he was to fulfill his ministry, he had to go to the capital city itself and meet his growing opposition in that key area.

It would have been much easier to stay on the outskirts, but thoughts of his own personal convenience and comfort and safety were not the key issues in his decision to “set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

There had to be other options, although I am not sure what they might have been.

And after all, as the divine Son of God he could do whatever he pleased.

It was a hard problem. He could have yielded to the temptation and circled the mountain instead of climbing it.

He could have just walked away from it all and found solace in the fact that the loyalty of the people was fickle at best.

Yet, after reading the story hundreds of times through the years, I continue to be intrigued by the fact that he willingly “set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

There are moments of “Jerusalem” in the lives of every one of us. Sometimes we seem to have a whole series of Jerusalems.

And keep in mind that there are Jerusalems in our journeys that are just worth the risk.

Where is your Jerusalem? Is there a difficult moral decision you must make, one that might be costly yet you know it is right?

Possibly there is some issue in your work. Is the temptation greater to circle the mountain rather than to climb it? Maybe it involves your family. Maybe it is at church where the issue must be decided.

There are times when I feel downright guilty when I look at my own life and my tendency to take the easy way out, especially when I read that verse from Luke, “When the days drew near for him to be received up, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

I am glad he did not take the easy way out. My salvation was at stake. I wonder who is being shortchanged when I fail to set my face toward my Jerusalems?

Al Cadenhead is the pastor of First Baptist Church in High Point.
Ring Easter bells to celebrate victory

The story is told that during Napoleon's Austrian campaign his army advanced to within six miles of Feldkirch without resistance. But as Bonaparte's men advanced toward their objective in the night, the Christian of Feldkirch gathered in a little church to pray. It was Easter Eve.

The next morning at sunrise the bells of the village pealed out across the countryside. After all, it was Easter morning and ringing the bells had been a part of their celebration for many years. The threat of danger was no excuse to silence the bells. Napoleon's army, not realizing it was Easter Sunday, thought that in the night the Austrian army had moved into Feldkirch and that the bells were ringing in jubilation. Napoleon ordered a retreat, and the battle at Feldkirch never took place. The Easter bells caused the enemy to retreat, and peace reigned in the Austrian countryside.

There is a message that we give when we ring the bells, a message that needs to be heard. There can be a great deal of symbolism in the word, "bell." The bells we need to ring are not necessarily of steel and iron. These bells take other forms. They come in many shapes and sizes. An appropriate question for this week's celebration might be to ask, "What are our bells and how do we ring them?" After all, this is Easter. We may not live in Austria and Napoleon has been dead a long time. But another man lives and reigns supreme, and not just any man. He is on our side in the battle. And we already know how it will all end, regardless of the battles that remain. Just as it was with the little town in Austria today in Easter Eve. There are bells that you need to ring today.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
There is so much life around everyone now

We have just celebrated the Easter season, and it truly is a beautiful occasion. The timing of the celebration makes it even more meaningful.

There have been many attempts to determine the exact Sunday on which the resurrection took place, but the particular time that we have chosen to celebrate it is more than just coincidence.

Easter is a celebration of new life, life not only given to a crucified Lord, but life offered to us through the simple act of faith.

This new life comes after darkness has been defeated. But, once again, the timing of this celebration is not accidental.

It comes when the trees are issuing their buds. The grass is turning green. Flowers are beginning the bloom.

This season is a phenomenal time of year.

Growth seems to be the goal of all living things.

During the last few days I have spent a little time in the yard, although not nearly enough. There is a real clue in the voices of my neighbors when they comment on how much time I have been spending on the inside of my house.

So much is happening outside right now that it becomes a theater of beauty. Trees that I assumed were dead when we move here in January are producing new leaves.

There are a few shrubs that I considered cutting down several weeks ago that have now come alive and are sending up new growth.

I read somewhere once that growth is the only sure sign of life. If that is true, there is so much life around us this time of year.

This time of year should also be a time of some inner reflection upon ourselves. Are we growing?

Sure, we're a year older than at this time last year. Lots of changes have taken place in our bodies with the passing of time.

But, has growth occurred in other important areas of our life? Are we any stronger spiritually? In other words, have we matured in such a way that we are better equipped with the kind of strength that truly undergirds?

Have we grown in our tolerance and understanding of one another? Have we grown in terms of our compassion for people around us each day?

Have we grown in our ability to hope even in the midst of troubled times? Have we grown in our intellectual abilities? Have we grown in our ability to trust each other?

It would appear, then, that if we are not growing in these areas, we are not totally alive.

Which brings me back to where I started. Now life is everywhere.

But, what about when we look in the mirror? Do we see real growth there as well?

Al Cadenhead is the pastor of First Baptist Church in High Point.
Imagination serves us all

Al Cadenhead

No one could be in the pack without making the trip through the pipe.
Growing up for me was no easier nor harder than any other child. There were lots of things about growing up that I did not like.
But when things got tough, I always fell back on my imagination. When schoolwork got me upset, I just went to the woods and imagined myself on the open sea.
When Mom and Dad wouldn't let go, I just went about three hundred yards and climbed into the tree house. I couldn't possibly have felt freer than when I was up in it.
The closest friend I had was my imagination and it rescued me many times from tough circumstances.
I always knew which world was the real one, but the imaginary one always made the real one better.
Then in the process of growing up, I got the idea that the imaginary world was strictly for children. After all, an adult must be realistic and deal with only facts.
But, if growing up is difficult, then so is being grown. And the world of the imagination sometimes is still needed to balance out the real world.
God has placed so many gifts before us, far more than we can even count. Many, if not most, of these gifts are absolutely taken for granted.
One of those gifts is our imagination. And our imagination serves us in so many ways other than just escape.

It broadens the horizons of our soul as well as the reality of everyday possibilities. Consider all the discoveries that have been made because of the imaginary capabilities of the human mind.

I'm all for the world of reality and accept my place in it, but I also claim my right to the imaginary world. It can save an adult just like it can rescue a child.
And so tonight, after a busy day of work, I may go home and stand on the deck and peer out through the wooded area that separates our yard from Oak Hollow Lake and imagine that I am hunting wild and dangerous game in a jungle in South Africa.

So, if you should come by the house, be sure to come to the front door and come through the house. Some wild animal could be stalking in the back yard.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor of First Baptist Church in High Point.
Religion evolves
History, mistakes teach church lessons

It has been said that the three subjects most likely to stimulate an argument are religion, politics and one's dog. The reason is obvious. They all deal with very personal dimensions of one's life.

Particularly, the areas of politics and religion bear much in common. They both provide order and security for our lives and therefore, will always be the focus of much of our attention. It is also not coincidental that within both religion and politics there has been a significant swing from the left to the right.

The conditions that have brought about major changes in religious perspectives are the very same circumstances that have moved mainline politics from the left to the right, as most readily seen in the presidential election of 1980 and the political arena since.

What we are witnessing is a response that is as much emotional as it is political and religious. The shift to conservative politics and religion grows out of a grasping people. It is a desperate grasp for something stable, clear, and secure in a world where there seems to be little that is certain.

It is precisely a world where things seem to be coming unglued that fires the engine for a conservative swing. We need answers, solutions, and direction and we need it quickly. Worldly circumstances are painted grey and we need it in black and white. Therefore, we seek out institutions and leaders who can eliminate tension and tell us what is right and how we are to think. Authority is granted to those who can produce dogma. Power comes into the hands of those who can change the gray into strictly black and white.

Given this crazy, paradoxical world we live in it is not surprising at all that religion and politics have taken on the label of conservative. It comes from the depths of human existence as a cry for something solid in a world where everything appears to be fluid.

Yet, there are some tremendous risks. Even a superficial review of recent history should warn of the dangers before us.

One hazard lies within the realm of religion. The decade of the '50s were good days for the church. As a response to the turmoil of the war, religion moved to the front of our culture. There were few churches in the decade that did not grow. Membership in worship groups and Sunday school grew by amazing numbers. It was an honest response by people for security after a most difficult time of turmoil. Most churches made the assumption that this was the way it would be forever.

Then came the decade of the '60s and the pendulum swung in the other direction. That period of American life was too complex to give simple answers, but it is obvious that much of the turmoil grew out of the disenchantment and even disillusionment of the younger generation with the institutional church. Many churches experienced a lessening of interest and were subjected to a great deal of criticism.

Surely, we can learn something from that era of our history and beware that the potential is now great for a similar reaction. What is going to happen to people who are looking to the church for quick, easy answers if they become frustrated and disillusioned once again?

The church must take seriously her position in American culture today. There is tremendous pressure on the church and it appears that most leaders, religious and political, are not even aware of what is happening. Easy, quick answers to modern problems are not easy to come by. No amount of dogma, authoritarian leadership, or institutional worship can relieve us of personal responsibility. Ethical decisions are not always clear cut.

In our God-given freedom, we must sometimes wrestle with solutions to our problems. The New Testament does not that must be made from data that is gray, not black and white.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor of First Baptist Church in High Point.
Take time to enjoy the sunset

Al Cadenhead

Since last Sunday was Mother's Day, we called off most of our evening activities at the church and encouraged people to spend the time at home with family.

That was a good choice since frequently we in the church business have a way of keeping people in the road all the time for all the meetings that good, dedicated people should attend.

I even tried to follow my own advice on Sunday, and our family spent the afternoon doing little things around the house and yard that usually never get attention.

One of the most pleasurable parts of the day was the closing hours. Since the proof copy of a book that I am writing was due to be mailed the next day, I collected the manuscript, my reading glasses, a folding chair and made my way through the back yard down to the side of Oak Hollow Lake.

I took Dooly, my Black Lab, with me instead of carrying a dictionary. I could just check with him concerning any questions that might arise about spelling or word meanings.

That spot by the lake has become one of my favorite places. To be in the middle of a busy town it is unbelievably quiet.

If you can tune out the planes from the airport, the setting becomes a showcase of nature.

Dooly went to sleep immediately and began to snore. And for the next two hours, I became immersed in nature's wonder.

Some fish were flopping around close to the bank. Ducks were paddling right out in the middle of the lake as if they owned the place.

A young boy was fishing on the other side, stopping only occasionally to look around as if he might have been wanting to welcome the game warden.

I'm sure that's why. The breeze was blowing through the trees, making a different sound than I am accustomed to hearing from Georgia Pines.

Just as the sun began to set, a whole flock of crows collected above me. I have not heard so much noise since the last time I went to my wife's family reunion.

Then, as if someone gave a signal, they were gone; and everything became unbelievably quiet again.

At that time everything else on the stage became insignificant in comparison with the sunset.

It was breathtaking.

The colors were bright pink and orange, shapes that could only be painted by the Divine.

And I thought, what a show!

Darkness embraced the lake, I folded my chair, woke up Dooly and walked back to the house.

I didn't get a lot of work done.

Two thoughts came to me.

First, I thought of the Psalmist when he declared, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge."

The Psalmist was right on target.

My second thought was how nice of God to produce that show on a night when I happened to have time to observe it.

How thoughtful of God to arrange the events of nature to accommodate my schedule.

Or, on the other hand, could it be that God puts on a show like that every night, and I am too caught up in little circles to pay any attention?

Just to find out, I may go back one night this week and sneak up on the ducks and the sunset and see if it happens again.

Maybe this kind of thing goes on all the time.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
Memorial Day weekend usually becomes a trumpet call for the summer. After all, we made it through, and it is time to open the windows and let summer breezes do their magic.

For many people this weekend becomes a time of changing gears. Our music changes from the soft sounds of winter to the sound of beach music. The direction for our travel changes from the ski slopes to water parks and the sea shore.

The routine changes for many people. Children are out of school. College kids are looking for work. Teachers are at home counting the days as they long to go back to work! Right.

Vacation and travel plans are on the minds of people. Summer really is an intriguing time.

However, if Memorial Day is no more than a signal for summer to us, then we have committed a serious act of ingratitude. We can very easily lose sight of the purpose for special holidays.

The main reason, of course, is to focus our attention and bring to mind some special event in history. This is the reason for Memorial Day, and it should be one of the most important days on our calendar.

For too many of us the day is little more than the official beginning of summer, and it should be so much more. This is a season when we pause and recognize those who have made our freedom possible.

As I write these words, I do so with the assurance that it will essentially be printed as written. Granted, the editors may make a few adjustments. That's how they justify their jobs and mega bucks.

But, basically it comes out as I write it. No one will put me in jail for what I write and say.

And you have a right to respond in like manner to what is written and said without fear as well.

Freedom of speech is only one facet of freedom. There are many more, and we take them for granted. Most of us have never known anything but freedom and assume this is the way everybody lives.

But, that is not so. This freedom of our's comes with a high price.

Memorial Day should cause us to stop and remember all those who have made our way of life a possibility, those who paid for it with their lives.

God give us grace to be a grateful people.

Jesus summed it up well when he said, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friend."

Al Cadenhead is the pastor of First Baptist Church in High Point.
The Bible offers advice on many relationships

The shelves of bookstores are absolutely filled with books that deal with relationships, and some of them are very good.

There are books that can help us get along with a mother-in-law, a cantankerous boss, a spouse during mid-life, a child who at age 13 knows everything, even those people who we absolutely cannot stand.

These books are helpful, and yet we frequently ignore the richest source of useful information found anywhere in history.

The teachings of Jesus are also filled with practical wisdom. They may be other-worldly in origin, but never in application.

Found in his teachings are the most practical words of advice for getting along with people.

For example, Jesus talked a great deal about forgiveness because he knew that broken relationships and hostility reduce the meaning of life for all involved.

Part of being human is that we are full of contradictions. We live separate lives, and at the same time want to be close.

In short, it is the removal of the effect of the past on the present. One who forgives no longer carries the burden or resentment of the past into the future.

One is free to live in the present with the load taken off the shoulders.

We have heard the expression, “Forgive and forget.”

The phrase sounds quite noble; but in reality, I am not sure that it is completely possible.

On a very practical level our minds retain most of what we experience, or at least they should. The real challenge is not washing it from our minds, but not nursing it and making it better.

Forgiveness is the only way we can positively deal with the hurts and scrapes that come our way.

“Forgive and forget” sounds noble.

However, the truth is that we have to forgive because we cannot forget.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.

Our communication sometimes falters and we end up misunderstanding, frustrating and hurting one another. Resentment turns to anger, and we end up doing and saying things that separate us.

Forgiveness, as Jesus used the term, does not mean forgetting.

What it does mean is “we shall not let this separate us.”

Forgiveness is the refusal of love to let anything separate us from another human being.

I think it is worthy of noting that the Hebrew word for forgiveness means “lightness” or “lifting up.”
Isaiah reminds us we will soar

The prophet Isaiah may have been talking about his own people and situation, but he appears to be dealing with our day and age.

In the 40th chapter of his book he says, "My way is hidden from the Lord and my judgement is passed over from my God."

He was referring to the people of his day who were becoming discouraged.

They felt that God was ignoring their plight and had possibly forgotten they even existed.

They were apparently becoming weak and frustrated. Things that were obviously important to them, for some reason, were not coming to pass.

And we all know that there is little as frustrating as to have one's goal foiled.

The people of Isaiah's day had theirs, and we have ours. It is painful indeed to feel that our ways appear to be hidden from God.

But Isaiah reminds everybody that the day will come when we will soar.

"We will mount up with wings like eagles; we will run and not be weary; we will walk and not faint."

These are very simple, but very reassuring, words that our day will come. Our way is neither hidden from nor forgotten by our creator.

Instead, he gives power to the faint and strength to the weak. Our strength will be renewed.

But, Isaiah goes on to say that all of this comes on the other side of a "bridge."

In the meantime, we must be crossing a "bridge of waiting." All of these things come, but only after our being willing to wait.

And for some of us, that is a major assignment!

I can think of nothing that is harder for me than to wait.

I don't like to wait at stoplights; I don't like to wait in the grocery line; and much to my shame, I have trouble waiting on God.

I like for him to work on my schedule rather than his; and sometimes to my advantage, he chooses to do for me what I need rather than what I want.

I must confess that sometimes when I feel that my way may be hidden from his sight, it could be that I just have not waited long enough.

It was obviously difficult for the people in Isaiah's day, and it sure hasn't gotten any easier in the 20th century.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
We need relationships in our high-tech society

I made a stop recently at a service station that had a "do it yourself" credit card machine.

All the transactions were handled by the machine. No attendant was even close.

I must confess that I thought I was going to have to claim social security before I figured out the sequence.

The machine even started beeping me telling me to hurry up.

I thought to myself, "This is absurd. My anxiety level is going up because a machine is telling me to hurry." Not long ago I put my money in a soft drink machine. Not only did I get a soda but the machine talked to me.

It wished me a good day and then said "I hope you will enjoy your soft drink.

I really felt I should say something in response as a courtesy but how do you wish a machine a good day? Do you say, "I hope you have a good day also, and may no one kick your can!"

We can make a collect long distance call; and if our party does not answer, we will have never talked to a real voice.

We do banking through instead bankers, buy lunch through our computerized society.

I even know of all sorts of things through our computerized society. I even know of a church that offers Communion by way of a vending machine.

There is nothing inherently wrong with high technology.

In fact, "high tech" has become the new frontier for the entire world. The race really is on.

Technology has made tremendous progress, but unfortunately this progress is discouraging face-to-face contact.

Regardless of how advanced we become, there will always be a need for contact.

It is a part of our needs system as much as eating and breathing.

We need relationships. We were created with a vacuum that can, first of all, only be filled with a relationship with God.

We were also made for relationships with other human beings. We starve without either.

Jesus was aware of this need. In so many of Jesus' healing experiences a touch was involved on His part.

He could have operated from a distance. He seemed to know that a touch, in and of itself, has certain healing quality.

And even though there are many recorded experiences of Jesus in solitude, so much of His time was spent in relationships with other people.

Today you will encounter people who are starving, not for food but rather for relationship. In this cold, high-tech world you may be that person's only opportunity for contact.

The love of Christ should find expression through us in many ways.

One important way is to let it cut through the impersonal nature of our technological society.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
Our happiness depends on how we use our minds

Our minds are one of God’s greatest gifts to us. The quality of our minds is what sets us apart from the lower forms of animal life – at least most of the time it does.

Our mind is given to us to serve us; and like all of God’s gifts the key is in our stewardship.

One of the intriguing aspects of the mind is the fact that it always seems to be active.

For example, try not to think. I remember as a child trying to play a game with myself. It was called “trying not to think about anything.”

At a given moment I would make an earnest effort not to think about anything, trying to draw a total blank in my mind.

But in trying not to think, one must think in order to do so. (What used to be a game for me now occurs regularly in the pulpit.)

The mind is constantly working, and one of the keys to a joyful life is keeping it moving in the right direction.

And we do have the power and ability to direct our thinking. We can use our mind in positive, healthy ways or allow it to run free and make slave of the rest of our body.

Paul said, “Whatever is pure, honest and just, think on these things.”

Jesus said if you think it, you may as well have committed it.

I believe Jesus knew that if you think on some thought long enough, you will eventually convince yourself it is right, whether it is or not.

Consider a little hurt you’ve received.

You can nurse it and make it bigger or forget it as a part of life.

I am convinced that Jesus knew us well enough to know that we can talk ourselves into just about anything.

We are masters at something called rationalization. If we work at it long enough and hard enough, we can justify the most unpractical and sometimes unethical behavior.

Turn something over and over enough in the mind, and anything can eventually seem right.

Remember, our minds are gifts, and our happiness depends on how we use them.

Paul’s letter to the Phillippians makes a lot of practical sense.

“Whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, think about these things.”

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
True celebration accents today

Over the door of the National Archives in Washington the following words appear: “The Past Is Prologue.”

I like even better the words of Thomas Jefferson who once said: “I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past.”

Jefferson’s words were in no way a disregard for the importance of history, but an underscoring of the responsibilities of the present and future.

The words over the National Archives door and the words of Jefferson suggest to us that America is a concept and not an accomplishment. In other words, the story is still being written.

July 4th is a celebration of the past, and a recognition of our indebtedness is enormous! For those heroes, we give our thanks. Yet, this celebration reminds us of what we have done.

There is a text in Deuteronomy where God is speaking to the people of Israel.

“And now, O Israel, give heed to the statutes, and the ordinances which I teach you, and to them; that you may live.”

The people of Israel had been set free from Egypt and had obtained possession of some land. God was telling them it was not being free from Egypt, their power or their land on which they dwelled that will make them a place in the world, but rather, how they live, how faithful they will be.

The end of the story was yet to be written.

July 4th is a celebration of our history, and a rich history it is. But, celebration at its best is more than a memorial to the past.

True celebration also spotlights the present and its inseparable bond with the past.

We must remember that it is not our history that has made us, but our principles and the way we choose to live. America is not an accomplishment; America is a concept.

America is an idea and a dream that must strongly be our own.

Indeed, the past is prologue and the story is still being written.

Al Cadenhead

ON THE INSIDE

At Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
A wise man listens to advice

The writer of Proverbs makes a statement that deserves to be entered into our memory bank: "The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice."

All too often, however, we forget. Leadership is the key to success in any business, profession, or organization. However, leadership becomes a very illusive quality when one begins to define it and describe its make-up.

The fact remains that a leader is a "sought after" person. There are qualities that are obviously essential to a competent leader.

A list would include such things as physical energy, a sense of purpose and direction, affection, integrity, decisiveness, intelligence and many others. Paramount in that list is the ability to give people what they need. How do you know what people need? It's a very simple process and is the result of one item that is left out of most listings of leadership traits. It is listening! Listening not only provides information and understanding, but it also indicates to people that one is concerned.

It is a sure way of winning devotion. This is true whether one is leading a church, a nation, or some other organization.

During the Bolshevik takeover in Russia, the revolutionary leader, Lenin, became ill and later died. There were two contenders for the position and in their concept of leadership they represented two different approaches to the task.

One was a talker, the other a listener. Trotsky was a talker. Stalin was opposite. While Trotsky was out haranguing the huge gatherings of people, Stalin sat and listened.

His biographer, Deutscher, says, "He was unsurpassed in the art of patient listening. Sometimes he would be seen in a corner of a staircase listening immovably, for an hour or two."

Stalin won in the struggle. Of all the reasons, the single most important was summed up by Deutscher: "Stalin possessed, in a high degree, the gift for silence, and in his respect he was unique in a country where everybody talked far too much."

Please understand that I am not holding Stalin up as a model, far from it! But there is a lesson to be learned and it is one that many of us overlook. Whether leading at home, church, business, or just about anywhere, one who is forever talking and not taking time to listen may one day discover there is no one around.

Listening is not only an art, the writer of Proverbs lifts it up to the level of virtue. "A wise man listens to advice." A place to begin might be to listen to that advice.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
Persistence is a virtue

Even though the word does not sound like one of those deeply cherished theological terms, I am convinced that one of the most important elements that is found in the Christian lifestyle is persistence.

The word is usually associated with a child who refuses to give up until a wish is granted, or a teenager who is determined to have something done one particular way.

We do not talk much about persistence as a virtue, but I am convinced that it may be one of the most highly valued of our virtues.

If it isn’t in the Bible, it should be. It is kin to the verse that also should be in there, “Grin and bear it.”

So much of our success depends on this simple dynamic called persistence.

We are constantly faced with circumstances when we must decide whether to stick with something, or call it quits.

And there are times when the only logical thing to do is to back out.

But that should not be every time we have to exert ourselves nor always at the first sign of trouble.

To persist means to continue in the cause – to remain – to endure.

In other words, it means one will not quit.

Too many Christians too soon grow weary in well-doing and seem ill-prepared for the grind of the long haul.

We must develop the ability to keep on keeping on, even in the midst of adversity.

A good beginning is important, the big splash is great, the spectacular plunge is exciting; but in the end, the battle is won by those with persistence to continue.

Almost anyone can start something; not everyone has the faith to see it through.

Persistence is the secret behind the great achievements of life.

The electric light bulb was not made in a flash. Edison worked on it, gave up on it, and experimented with it for months. The idea may have come in a flash, but the reality required persistence.

• Persistence means that when we fall, we just get up again, and again, and again.

In fact, the mark of the Christian life is not that one never falls. Instead, the mark of a Christian life is not that one never falls. Instead, the mark of a Christian is that when you fall, you just get up.

The writer of Hebrews described that life very well when he said: “Let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.” (Hebrews 12:1b) Most of us give up far too soon!

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
We show love in all ways

In every good marriage there comes a time when one needs to break down and say, "I love you." Sometimes the words come easy, and then there are the more crusty old souls who have to choke a few times to get them out. Nevertheless, once spoken, the words have a tremendous and mysterious power. And the chances are good that most of us do not offer those words to our spouse nearly enough. Nevertheless, once spoken, the words have a tremendous and mysterious power. And the chances are good that most of us do not offer those words to our spouse nearly enough.

But, there is another way that our partner may hear, "I love you," or something to the contrary. One way that it is heard is as it rebounds to them from others who associate with us. Our spouse sees it in their faces and hears it in their voices if we have been "loving" our spouse in our friends' presence through our words. Practically everything we say and do concerning our spouse comes back into his or her life.

Whatever joy or frustration we may feel in a relationship will communicate itself to our friends, and sooner or later they will reflect it back to our partner. The wife who shares the nice things her husband does and speaks of him with some sense of joy is building a picture of him as a success in the most demanding interpersonal relationship of all. The same is true of a husband who speaks to others of his wife with deep affection and tenderness. When he speaks openly of his gratitude for her and her help he is telegraphing "I love you" to her through every person he meets.

This is not to say they can't joke with each other and have fun. However, there is a fine line of difference between having fun and exposing one another's dirty laundry. Sometimes we want to humiliate each other because we have negative feelings toward each other that we don't have the fortune to say directly, so we design cutting humor to make our cheap shots. After all, it's safe to take shots at each other in public. Our mate's dirty linen should be as out of sight as our own.

We publish our love (or distaste) by the stories we tell and the jokes we make. Others around us hear our message loud and clear, and sooner or later, it comes back to our spouse. Whenever our friends are around our spouse, their attitude and behavior will hopefully be a message from us to our partner of "I love you."
Most things in life worth having require some risk

The writer of Proverbs offers a lot of wisdom concerning relationships.

For example, he says, "Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you - better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away" (27:10).

In so stating, he was not being negative toward a brother as much as he was underscoring the importance of a friend.

We need to remember, however, that the kind of friendship he speaks of does not just suddenly appear. It must be developed very carefully.

I have heard it said many times that most things in life that are worth having require some kind of risk.

There are just very few things that are worth anything that do not involve a little bit of gamble.

With a little effort a number of examples could be offered, but there is no area of living that is as risky as any I know. It is the risk of relating to people.

To reach out to anyone, whether it be friend, parent or spouse means opening yourself up for possibility of being hurt.

Most of us at some time have experienced the pain of opening ourselves up to someone only to be hurt as a result.

That experience could have been with just a friend or it could have been with someone much closer — like a husband or wife.

After a bad experience like that, the temptation is to close ourselves off from the world — build a wall around us — and not run the risk of that kind of pain again.

If we don't get close to anyone again, there will be no risk and no pain. The problem is that this is a very high price to pay for our safety.

By nature we are social creatures. We are most fulfilled and gratified when we are interacting with others. To avoid the risk of relating is to live a very lonely existence.

Quite a few years ago, a song by Simon and Garfunkel became popular. It stated, "I am a rock, I am an island. And a rock feels no pain."

The words are very true. To become a rock is to feel no pain. To turn inward and cut oneself off from the world of people is a safe existence. As a rock one may feel no pain, but there is also no joy and warmth as well. And what a high price to pay!

Reaching out and opening up involves risk. But then again, most things that are worth having do require a little risk.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
Be faithful in all things

St. Paul was writing the Corinthian church long ago and was addressing the issue of stewardship. He said, "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful."

Stewardship is an interesting word and is found throughout Scripture. I am also well aware that when the word is used by a minister, the listener's anxiety level immediately jumps up to the red zone on the meter.

The assumption is that one is about to experience the guilt heaping semantics of a plea for money.

Limbs are protected from arm-twisting and our defenses are secured.

The truth is, however, that stewardship covers far more than just our checkbook.

Stewardship has to do with our faithfulness is all matters. In fact, for some of us our checkbook might be the easiest part. Stewardship and faithfulness work hand in hand.

A good steward is faithful in big things and - I quickly add - in small things as well.

Too many people consider faithfulness an issue only with the great issues of life.

They are not faithful in the little things. And they really are not to be depended upon. They do not always keep their promises. They break engagements. They appear late for their appointments. They are neglectful and careless in little things.

In general they are good people, but their life is honeycombed with small failures. One who can be positively depended upon - who is faithful in the least things as well as in the greatest, whose life and character are true through and through - gives out a light in this world which honors Christ and blesses others.

Brooke Foss Westcott wrote long ago, "Great thoughts go best with common duties. Whatever therefore may be your office, regard it as a fragment in an immeasurable ministry of love."

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
Anger is not always sinful

A few days ago I made a quick stop by the grocery store on my way home from work. The junk food cabinet was getting low, and I could not stand the thought of another evening without certain necessities of life: cookies, soft drinks, popcorn and other high priority items.

The day had not gone well, and I cannot say that I was in the best of moods. As I was backing out of the parking place, a man in a white sports car came barreling around me, He was not going to wait one second for me to get out of his way. As I tried to put my car in forward, he just kept coming as if I had violated some law by my existence.

That did it! In a matter of milliseconds I convinced myself that he was a thief, wife-beater and heathen, and needed to be dealt with. I put my car in forward and decided to confront him. It was my duty. My honor was at stake.

But for a moment in my anger, I had convinced myself that he deserved all manner of punishment for the evil he represented, when in reality he was probably just a guy who had experienced a hard day as well.

Anger is a strange dynamic. In and of itself, anger is not wrong nor evil. In fact, if handled in the right way, it can motivate us to do some things that otherwise we would never get around to.

It can fuel the engine to right wrongs and confront injustice that otherwise would go unheeded.

Anger is not sinful. Even our Lord experienced moments of anger. But he always used them to correct some wrong that had developed.

Yet, if we nurse our anger and feed it and embellish it, anger can become a spark that will burn down the house.

Anger is an emotion, and it is as natural as breathing. But if allowed to grow unnecessarily, it can cause us to do things that later we can hardly believe.

The real truth is that I discovered he was big as a mountain and common sense prevailed.
The innocent remarks of children can be a source of great wisdom. We "grown ups" could enlighten ourselves significantly if we just listened more. Let me offer an example.

My wife, Suzanne, was talking with her kindergarten class one day about what the children wanted to be when they grew up.

She asked each child to share with the class their plans. There were the usual aspirations. They wanted to be doctors, lawyers, nurses, pro-basketball players, a policeman and other very typical professional people.

But, there was one response from a little boy named Billy that was a little surprising.

Billy said, "I want to be a trash man."

Just in case he was misunderstood the group asked him again.

He said, "I want to be a trash man, the man that picks up our trash."

They continued on with their discussion.

Why should we be surprised at Billy's response? Can you imagine what our life would be like if there were not those faithful people who keep us from being covered up with our own trash?

We even complain when holidays interfere with trash pickup.
And most of us act like our rubbish just automatically finds its way to the landfill.
We forget that somebody has to transport it there. And the quality of our lives is greatly improved because of what they do.
Their job is dangerous. There is a high rate of injury due to being hit by cars that are too busy to even slow down when they are doing their job.
And they cannot cancel their day just because it is raining or too cold for the rest of us.
They are honorable people even if they are seldom appreciated for the contribution they make to our way of life.

So to Billy, I say go for it. You could do a whole lot worse in your aspirations.
And if you are assigned a route that comes to my house, let me know.

I want to put your name in my book right along with my doctor and vet and lawyer and other people who make my life better.

This is Labor Day weekend. The celebration is symbolic of many things, some of them are labor related issues and some are not, such as the conclusion of summer.
But, it also becomes a good time to stop and take note of many people who serve us and add to the quality of our lives.
And we should offer a word of thanks to God for the Billys who show up at our houses each week and haul off what we no longer want or need.
And just as appropriate would be a word of thanks directly to them.
After all, they are real people – important people.
One of the puzzling and paradoxical trends of our day and age is the growing sense of aloneness that seems to characterize so many people today.

The trend is so ironical in that it is taking place in a world where people are being pushed closer and closer together. Many sociologists explain that this contagious sense of loneliness is the direct result of a world that is becoming more and more crowded. The assumption is that if one cannot retreat outwardly, one turns inwardly, building defenses within. And there may be some truth to that description.

However, I am convinced that this sense of aloneness has a spiritual dimension that is generally ignored and unaddressed. So much of that aloneness is the result of habitually turning our interests and energy inward. An empty heart is frequently a heart that has not learned the secret of focusing on others, instead of being totally wrapped up in one's self.

To make that kind of lifestyle change requires fortitude and endurance. An owner of an empty heart is frequently one who has not learned the truth about love. Love is not something you can command for yourself. What we need to remember is that love found “in the giving” rather than “in the receiving” is always our’s to command. Whenever and wherever your life touches another life, there you have opportunity.

To mix with men and women in the ordinary forms of interaction becomes a sacred function when one carries into it the true spirit of love.

This is not some kind of mushy, shallow behavior that raises either suspicion or, sometimes, aggravation. Rather, to give a close, sympathetic attention to every human being we touch; to try to get some sense of how he or she feels; what that person is, what they need; to make in some degree this one’s interest our own. That disposition and habit would deliver any one of us from complete isolation or emptiness.

Loneliness is not just a sociological issue. It takes on spiritual dimensions when we listen to the words of James, “If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well.” All too often our loneliness is a product of a selfish heart.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor of First Baptist Church in High Point.
I was driving home from a meeting late one evening last week; thinking to myself that if meetings have anything to do with getting into heaven, we Baptists are glory bound.

It was also one of those nights when you are not just “tired”; you are “tired of,” and there is a difference. We have all been there. You know that the fuel tank is getting close to empty and you need more than just going to bed ahead of the news. It’s much deeper.

As I was driving, I was thinking of what some options might be. And my first thought is always that it is time to get away, just for a few days. Maybe it’s time to fulfill my fantasy of working on a shrimp boat for a few days. After all, the ocean has always been my first line of defense against fatigue. It possesses a spiritual, mystical, medicinal quality that I find in few other places.

Then, again, this time of the year makes us look toward the mountains. We are just a few days away from a myriad of colors that only the hand of God can paint. From our part of the state we are a short drive away from a natural sanctuary that is capable of inspiring the most fatigued of souls. Who of us has not found reassurance in the midst of the mountains? Especially this time of year.

As I approached my home, reality became an issue. Because I knew neither my schedule nor my checkbook allowed for a trip to the beach or the mountains, at least not right away. Anyway, it was a pleasant night.

When I got out of the car, I realized what a beautiful night it was. There was a hint of fall. The air was cool and dry, and I just happened to look up.

The sky was absolutely clear and filled with stars. It was the kind of night that you only see in the fall. It was a gorgeous sanctuary, so majestic, so inspiring. And I didn’t even have to leave town, or write a check.

An 18th century writer by the name of George MacDonald must have had a similar experience because he writes, “I looked up to the heavens once more, and the quietness of the stars seemed to reproach me. We are safe up here; they seem to say; ‘we shine, fearless and confident, for the God who gave the primrose its rough leaves to hide it from the blast of uneven spring, hangs us in the awful hollows of space. We cannot fall out of His safety.’ ”

The Psalmist wrote, “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names.”

What a beautiful sight was the sky that night! So many of our deepest needs can be met by just looking up. We don’t even have to leave town. Most of the time, however, we are too busy to notice. The same God who hangs the patient stars each night knows our name as well.

I went into the house that night feeling better. I still want to work on a shrimp boat some day, but that will have to wait a while.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
I have always enjoyed visiting my father-in-law about this time each year. Prior to his stroke, his first love was his yard and at least 1,000 plants that were strategically located both inside the house and outside. The reason this time of year makes me think of him is that he had a routine that he followed each autumn. Almost all the plants had to be moved to another specific place. Some plants were moved to protected areas of the yard. Other plants were moved from outside to the basement to protect them from the winter. Other plants that were in the basement were moved upstairs.

The yard swing was removed from the stand and brought to the basement. The hammock was stored inside. There were dozens of rituals that were honored as preparation was made for the cold days of autumn and winter. If you were to ask him about all of this ritual, he would say, "It's just the time you do these things. This is how you prepare for winter."

Then in the spring he would go through similar rituals, but in the opposite direction. The reason I have always enjoyed watching this rite of autumn at his house is because he has always been so much more attentive to the seasons than I. I have a bad habit of waking up one morning and noticing that the leaves have suddenly changed colors. I am not even sure when it happened.

My father-in-law could tell you which tree changed first, which leaves fell first, which leaves fell last, and which tree is most likely to produce the first green leaves of spring. He is so much more conscious of the changing seasons. The change of the season is a source of excitement and anticipation for him.

I suppose God could have created a world that remains constant all year, chose the season He likes best and just let everyone live in it year round. Yet, for reasons of His own, God decided to make so much of what we experience in the form of cycles. Life has a mystical rhythm. "To everything there is a season," and every season is a source of phenomena beauty. But, most of us never notice.

I am convinced that one of the worst things that ever happened to us can be best described in the phrase, "climate controlled." This means that if our thermostat is functioning properly, we can be insulated from the changing season and be perfectly comfortable all year long. The problem is that while we are enjoying our year-round comfort, the seasons come and go and we hardly notice. We drive, work and live at 72 degrees and experience very little of the changing season except what we see through a window.

I have so often wanted to be more alive to the seasons, especially as they make their predictable change. Yet, I always seem to be somewhere else when it happens. God did not create the seasons to aggravate us. I am convinced He did so to add beauty and depth to our lives. And so much of it goes unnoticed and unappreciated.

Since my father-in-law became ill, he has given most of his plants away. But, I guarantee you he is watching through a window and is paying attention to the scores of trees that adorn his yard. And I really need to call and see if the few things that remain have been shifted to the proper place. In the meantime I will go home tonight and bring in my hammock. I might as well since I never used it this summer anyway.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
Poor attitudes, selfishness plant seeds of misery

If you were to ask people the question, "What do you want from life?", the vast majority of them will respond by saying, "I just want to be happy."

Ask the question, "What are you searching for in life?" The answer continues to be, "I am searching for happiness."

And that is all well and good. There is nothing shameful about wanting to be happy. However, most of us who have been around for a while know that happiness can be a very illusive rascal.

We have discovered that the pursuit of happiness is like trying to "hem up" smoke. You get a handful for a second and then it scoots away. A truth that most of us discover far too late in life is that happiness is not something we pursue. Instead, happiness is a by-product of the way we manage our lives.

I read something recently that might be worth passing along. And it comes at this issue of happiness through the back door. It was an article that guaranteed a way to be unhappy. So, if you want to be unhappy, let me give you four easy steps.

First, develop a negative attitude. A negative attitude is a great guarantee of misery. The negative attitude of the people of Israel was revealed in the early chapters of Genesis when Moses led them out of Egypt. Their negative attitudes were demonstrated in the crisis of the Red Sea, their food, their water, and their meat. Every time we sow negatives, we reap a harvest of negatives.

Second, develop the "I" personality. How many times do we use "I" in a two minute conversation? If more than once, we must watch out for this personality flaw. When we constantly do nothing but think about ourselves, what are we going to do, what fun we are going to have, etc., we are preparing for unhappiness.

Third, develop the unforgiving spirit. The Bible says, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). We are to forgive not once, nor twice but an indefinite number of times. An unforgiving heart guarantees unhappiness.

Fourth, gossip about other people. A gossiping person is a very insecure person. Puritan Christians in early America tarred and feathered the town gossips. The Bible is not silent on this issue. Actually, happiness is something which we receive as a by-product of what we're doing with our lives. By kicking the addiction of a negative attitude, the "I" personality, the unforgiving spirit and the gossip habit, we will not be guaranteed happiness. Life is seldom that simple. Yet, doing so might shift us just a little on the happiness scale in the right direction.

If you are waiting on the Publisher's Clearing House truck to pull up in your driveway to be happy, you are in for a long, sad wait.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
Weariness affects the spirit

Al Cadenhead

There is a certain weariness that occasionally finds its way into our lives.

The result is a loss of confidence and a loss of feeling, or so it seems. We may still be on our feet, but there is no skip in our step. We need to be aware, also, that weariness occurs more than just in regard to our bodies.

In fact, some of the most difficult pangs of weariness occur in the realm of the spirit. In other words, in our spiritual life.

For some of us that weariness may be experienced in our prayers.

There are some who give up their prayers because they have so little feeling in their prayers, so little warmth of feeling.

But who told us that feeling was to be a test of prayer? The work of prayer is a far too noble and necessary work to be laid aside for any lack of feeling.

There is nothing wrong with feeling.

Emotions can push us through some very dry and dusty paths. But just as emotions and feelings cannot alone get us through, neither should their absence bring life to a grinding halt.

A drought does not mean that water has disappeared forever.

One simply waits for the rain to return and adapts to its absence in the meantime.

Are there times when you just do not feel in the spirit of prayer? You are experiencing no spiritual uplift? Are you indifferent to the degree that you had just as soon not offer your prayers?

Claim that mood, and go on with your prayers any way.

The Psalmist said long ago, “I am laid low in the dust; preserve my life according to your word.” (119:25)

Maybe you are there with the Psalmist right now. Possibly your weariness is far deeper than just a tired body. One option is always to simply quit praying, which makes about as much sense as a thirsty man reconciling himself to never again drink water.

A better option is to keep on searching and waiting for the rain.

So, what should one do when weariness invades the spirit? You continue to present yourself before God, with or without feeling.

Press on, you who are dry and cold in your prayers, press on as a work and as duty, and the Holy Spirit will, in His good time, refresh your prayers Himself.

And the feeling will return, not necessarily today or tomorrow, but it will return.

Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give your rest.” Note that He did not say, “Come to me and I will immediately make everything right, including our spirits.” He only promised rest.

And with rest, sooner of later, comes a renewal of feeling and confidence. And there will come a day once again when both the body and spirit are functioning well together.

In the meantime, one continues with a devout spirit, a bended knee and a folded hand. And eventually the rain will fall again upon a thirsty ground.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
Many depend on you for care

I have periodically written about Dooly, our Black Lab. He's a good guy but a walking gold mine for a veterinarian.

Name it, and Dooly has it wrong with him. Our vet bill constantly ranks up there with taxes and Mastercard.

But, Dooly is only one member of our zoo. There is Scarlett, the cocker spaniel; two cats, one indoor and one outdoor; and Garrison, the Amazon parrot.

And every one of them suffers from some kind of physical or mental impairment, sometimes both. We are a veterinarian’s dream.

With our family’s schedule I cannot honestly say that we give each of them the attention they need. We cover the basics but they really do deserve more attention.

In recent weeks, however, we noticed a significant change in Scarlett’s behavior. She could not find her ball.

There were some other incidents that indicated she was having difficulty with her sight. Our veterinarian confirmed what we already suspected — that she had become totally blind due to an early problem with cataracts.

In the past few days I have become especially sensitive to her dependency on me. And I must confess that I am much more mindful of her needs. I have also become intrigued by her dependency upon my voice.

She listens carefully and follows the sound very closely. When I approach her in the evening, she barks and is alarmed. When I call her name, she comes straight to me and is very happy. She deals with her dependency by listening to sound of my voice. It has become and interesting relationship, one that I am learning from.

The Gospel of John records a statement by Jesus which I now more fully appreciate. Jesus said, “The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice.”

He also said, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.” His words are a beautiful description of the kind of intimacy that Christ offers us.

For the sheep who hear His voice there is no fear of disaster. They shall never perish, Christ confidently guarantees, because they are not dependant only upon their own efforts, but upon the one who is the source of the voice.

It is God Himself who has thrown upon their behalf all His divine resources. Even though intimacy is implied here, much more is involved. It has to do with a much needed dynamic called assurance.

God’s love has gripped us and will hold us. “My Father who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” This is the gift to those of us who listen to the sound of His voice.

Tonight when I am at home, I will take no pleasure in Scarlett’s blindness. As she listens for my voice, she reminds me to take more seriously those who are dependent upon me.

And I am also reminded of my own dependency upon the One whose voice is the source of divine love.

By the way, Dooly is stumbling around now. I think he has figured it out and wants in on some of this. He may be smarter than I’ve given him credit, which isn’t much.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor of First Baptist Church in High Point.
Our society seems reluctant to make firm commitments

Our world is in the process of making so many changes, some good and some bad. There is one change, however, that bothers me as much as any of the others and I am not exactly sure of the cause. It has to do with our attitude toward commitment, commitment on all levels. We can see it in the realm of national pride, religious matters, and in relationships. There just seems to be a growing reluctance in our culture to make firm and lasting commitments.

Look at the effect this trend is having on marriage relationships. We are entering a society where marriage is being understood in terms that do not always include commitment. No lighthearted techniques of living together can help human interrelatedness unless they are expressions of an underlying spirit of commitment. It has to be the cornerstone of any lasting marriage.

Regardless of how one modifies the outer forms, there must be a “till death do us part” at the heart of each partner. Otherwise it becomes too easy just to pack up and leave, which is usually the easy way out. Permanent relationships cannot be built on a “ships that pass in the night” attitude. Complete sharing will never be risked when the partner may be a stranger in the near future.

Commitment is a highly personal dedication, freely arrived at, and enforceable only by the person himself or herself. It is the only marriage technique that is universally applicable. It is to know that one person loves you so much that he or she has committed himself to be a part of your life forever, regardless of consequences and in spite of your frailties and stupidities.

The psychiatrist, David Mace, says, “We can somehow endure pain, provided we can grasp a loving hand and be supported by a familiar arm. We can live through failure if only one dear companion goes on believing in us. But, what we cannot endure is the experience of being utterly alone.”

Commitment not only affects the one making the commitment, it affects the one receiving the commitment. We do things very differently when we know our partner is truly committed. One plans differently for the future, works differently, raises children differently, and handles weaknesses differently.

There are no certainties, no inevitable happy endings. There is also no “do this and you will have a wonderful marriage.” But, you can rest assured that without commitment you are rowing upstream and are unlikely to have the best your relationship can offer. And that’s what commitment is all about; it laying your life on the line for someone.

The Rev. Al Cadenhead is pastor of First Baptist Church in High Point.
How sad it would be to move through the Thanksgiving season without confronting and dealing with one of the most central issues of the event. Allow me to explain.

Our pilgrim forefathers were certainly not the originators of gratitude, but they had a need to pause long enough to express something that was important to them.

Their situation, like many before and since, was far from perfect. There was much about their experience that was not ideal.

And it says a lot about their character that they did not wait until everything was "just right" before they offered thanks.

Too many of us subconsciously put off our gratitude until we have things exactly like we want them.

We will not be satisfied with anything less than what we want. On the other hand, if we wait until everything is in perfect order before we offer thanks, gratitude will never be expressed.

But, there is still another central issue which was present in their celebration.

It is the very simple fact that they recognized their dependency upon God. Acknowledging such a fact was not a threat to them. They recognized that they could only do so much to produce a good harvest. They could work hard and sensibly, but the rest of it was God's hands. They could not create rain, or sunlight, or warmth to make the crops grow. All of these vital things were in the realm of the Divine.

They were not threatened nor were they ashamed of their dependency upon God. And because they acknowledged their reliance, they were in a frame of mind to be truly grateful.

A casual observation of modern man indicates that we with all of our pomp and pride would like to ignore our dependency.

To ignore it, however, does not change it. Man, by nature, is a dependent creature.

Modern man would like to think he is smart enough and ingenious enough that he no longer needs God.

Yet, let man try to produce rain or sunlight, or any number of things that are essential to life. In spite of our intellectual advances man must still rely upon the Creator.

There is a scene out of the old movie "Shenandoah" where James Stewart is offering thanks at the table.

He goes through a long litany of all that they have done to make the food possible and then closes the prayer by saying to God, "We thank you anyway."

As long as we think that our bounty comes out of our own ability, we can never assume a stance of gratitude.

But once we recognize that we are where we are by the grace of God, then gratitude becomes the logical next step.

So, if we are not satisfied with the quality of our gratitude this year, it could very well be that our pride is getting in the way.

May this season of the year remind us that all the good gifts we enjoy are a part of our experience because of the grace of God.

Otherwise, Thanksgiving becomes just a hollow ritual.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
Choose ‘last words’ carefully

The writer of Proverbs says, "A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered."

The two key words of that verse are "restraint" and "even-tempered." The verse is far more than just an exhortation against pitching a fit.

Restraint and even-temperedness refers to what we do say as well as what we do not say. The verse is also a reminder of the importance of our words, and the way we use them.

Allow me to share a story that might illustrate the value of words.

Wednesday, the day before Thanksgiving, was a very tragic day for an acquaintance of mine who lives in south Georgia. He is a plant manager for the company I once served as an industrial chaplain. He is a super guy, hard working and dedicated to his job and his faith.

On that Wednesday, his wife was taking his mother and stepfather to a doctor's appointment in Valdosta, Ga. His daughter was also along for the ride.

On their way there, a man failed to stop at an intersection and hit them broadside in a horrible crash. The man who ran the stop sign was killed instantly. The stepfather was killed instantly. The mother was killed instantly. The wife died on the way to the hospital. Only the child survived the crash.

Needless to say, that family has been on my mind and in my prayers. However, there is one little piece of that story that weighs heavily in my mind. The mother of the child was not killed instantly. In fact, there was a period of a few minutes before the ambulance left for the hospital when the mother was able to talk with her daughter.

It is absolutely none of my business what those words might have been, but I have great difficulty in removing from my mind the image of that injured mother and what she might have said to her 11-year-old daughter. I have to believe that the mother knew from the extent of her injuries that she probably would not survive the experience. With that being the case, what words did she select in that critical moment? I am sure that those words came from the depth of her heart.

If you knew that the words that you were about to speak to your daughter or son or husband or wife or mother or father would be your last message to them, what would you say? You can bet that you would choose those words carefully and not take a single one for granted.

The chances are good that you would "try" to say something of your love and affection. At the very least, you would be careful not say some things; any ill-timed criticism, any unkind and insensitive word, a cutting word spoken in anger, or a harsh word that really belonged to someone else.

Think of the significant people in your life today. What if the last words that you recently spoke to them were your last? Did those words convey the depth of your feeling for them?

If that is not the case, it is quite likely that you will have another chance. But, the truth is that there will come a day when the words to each of those relationships in our lives will be the last.

Will we know when that final word is occurring? Only in a very few cases. In the vast majority of cases we will not know.

The obvious solution is to attach great value to the words we offer in each experience. I might add that paranoia is not the answer. The solution is simply to pay attention to what we say and to place value on those sounds that proceed from our mouths.

Practicing restraint and even-temperedness is more than just controlling our temper. It is the awareness that our last words could be just that, our last.

There will be many other emotional moments in the life of that 11-year-old girl, but few will be laced with reverence of those few words by her mother in that final moment.

On another night long ago, when I was six, my grandfather was fatally injured in an automobile crash. We were away from home for a while before they located us. When my dad arrived at the hospital, his father had already died.

The doctor said that my grandfather had been calling for my dad for a while before he died. He arrived too late. On more than one occasion, I have heard my dad say how he wished that he could have been there for that last conversation. But, it was just too late.

Most of us will have new opportunities today for words with those significant people in our lives. The writer of Proverbs is encouraging us to attach great value to what we say.
One afternoon a man from another town came by my office seeking help for his drinking problem. We talked for a while and then I called a local organization that volunteered to send a particular man over.

The man who came was an alcoholic himself and he was very quick to confess his addiction problem. He easily established a connection with the visitor. Understanding became immediately apparent. This advocate was able to move in and do what I could not do because he had been there. He shared the same problem and had felt the same pain. There was a common ground, a shared experience.

What does this story have to do with the celebration of Christmas?

Essentially the same dynamics were at work with the birth of Jesus. One of the most beautiful references to the Christ child was that his name would be called Emmanuel, which is translated, "God with us.”

He came to us and become one of us, taking upon himself the struggles of any normal person.

Life is not always easy. Regardless of who we are, there are problems and difficulties. No one is immune.

There are those times when life would be absolutely overwhelming if we could not believe that God, our ultimate source, really does care and understand. We need to remember, however, that were it not for Christmas, we might be left to doubt that God really does understand what it is like to be human. After all, how could one with infinite power and glory appreciate the struggles of everyday living?

Forget for a moment all the glitter and hype of the season. Instead, contemplate the historical fact of Christ’s birth. This fact means that God knows what life is like. In the person of Jesus He moved among us and experienced life just as anyone of us.

Even God learned first hand what it is like to be hurt, rejected, disappointed, and even betrayed. He was not stranger to sadness, grief and heartache. The beauty of it all is that He did not stop there. He showed us the potential of life in the midst of all the struggles.

So, right in the midst of the human drama God became a full participant. Among many things this participation means that whatever life hands us, whether joy, sadness, disappointment or sorrow, God cares and understands.

He understands because He has now been here. He has experienced it first hand. And it is all because of Christmas.

Life, at best, is a strange mixture of good and bad. Yet, because of Christmas God knows. God knows.

Al Cadenhead is pastor of the First Baptist Church, High Point.
Christmas message gets lost in rush

Shopping, activity has little to do with true celebration

Due to my own procrastination I had to do some Christmas shopping this past week. What a delightful experience! No lines. No one angry at anyone else. No traffic. Right!

I didn’t stay out long. And it wasn’t just because I ran out of money and time. I was seriously afraid that I was going to commit a murder.

The first stage of hostility is reached when you, at least, discriminate fairly carefully those to whom you would do bodily harm, only the guy who steals the parking place you’ve waited on and had traffic blocked for 20 minutes. Or the kid who breaks in line at the check-out counter. Or the lady at Wal-Mart in line ahead of who bought gifts for everyone in Cincinnati and wants to argue with the clerk that she was charged a nickel too much for one item. You gladly give her the nickel out of your pocket. Just go on!

The second stage of hostility occurs after two traffic jams and three stores where they have nothing that you need and you just dare somebody to look at you in the wrong way. You’re moved from the jolly mode to the attack mode. Anybody will do. You even grit your teeth at the little, white haired man who asks, “Do you work here?” What’s the matter with him? Of course not! Can he not tell that I am just looking for socks that match! Is he blind or just dumb?

What have we done to this season of joy? There are those who think that it has gone so far that we can never return to a simple celebration. They suggest that the only choice is to just bury the whole ordeal. Write the whole thing off. Or, at best, we perceive it as basically insignificant and give it very little attention. But, to take that attitude is to “throw the baby out with the wash water.” Writing the event off is just as insidious as letting it be totally swallowed by a consumer society. The message of Christmas is entirely too extravagant to ever declare it as insignificant. And our celebration should be extravagant, but in ways other than through our credit cards.

Many years ago the educator Horace Mann traveled up and down the state of Massachusetts raising money for a home for orphaned children. Impressed by the urgency of the need, he said in one meeting, “This home would be worth all the money in the state of Massachusetts if it should save only one boy.” He was challenged by one person in the audience who called out, “Aren’t you making that a little strong?” To which Mann replied, “Not if it were my boy.”

Christmas itself is an extravagant event. What could be more lavish than the line from the Gospel of John that many of us memorized as children: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...” The extravagant message of Christmas is that we are loved beyond measure, loved to the degree that God would offer His own child as an orphan to a hell-bound world. If that is not reason for celebration, there is no cause for joy ever. The celebration is for a love which is so strong that nothing we have done, are doing, or will do can put us out of its reach.

What does this have to do with the Christmas madness that surrounds? Just this: Subject yourself to as much or little of the routine panic as you can tolerate. But remember that all the activity and shopping has little to do with the true extravagance of the celebration.

In fact, all of our madness has less to do with it than we dare admit. When we have swapped the sweaters and shirts for the right size and put away the decorations that surround us, we will still be surrounded by a love that reaches out of heaven and delivers us from a fate far worse than Christmas crowds and frantic activity.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...” That is cause for celebration!
Love, expectation go hand in hand

Since we were traveling New Year's weekend, there was plenty of time to listen to the radio and also to the endless litany of New Year's resolutions by everybody under the sun.

There were the usual traditional resolutions dealing with weight loss, smoking, drinking and more exercise.

Interestingly, one recurring item on so many of the lists had to do with a determination to be more loving in the coming year. In most cases, however, they did not describe how they were going to flesh that out in reality.

A desire to be more loving has a nice sound to it. Quite honorable, even Biblical. But on a day-to-day basis how is it going to take place in one's life?

Without a plan it could be little more than a syrupy feeling that is quickly forgotten in the push of the daily routine.

Allow me to be presumptuous enough to suggest one way that this resolution might be fleshed out in our lives.

The place to begin is to realize that there is usually a close connection between love and expectation.

The truth is that we tend to love those who meet our expectations. That is true of relationships within the family, church, work and the neighborhood.

More often than not, our love is quite conditional. Respond to me in a certain way and I will love you as a result. Meet my emotional needs, and I will honor you with my affection. We do it all the time, especially with those closest to us.

What would happen within our homes if we tried to disconnect our love for the closest to us from our expectation of them?

Instead of allowing our love to be a response to their meeting our expectations, what if our love became just an open door? Something offered even before we make our expectations known?

In fact, one of the best ways we can love someone is to just let them love us as best they can.

Let me explain what I mean by that.

We miss so many expressions of love that are made toward us because we have predetermined notions of what that love should look like.

We have certain expectations of someone; and when they love us in ways that don't correspond to those expectations, we may miss their expressions of love altogether.

Just to let them love us in whatever way they can has a tremendously freeing quality to it.

Even if their expression does not appear on the list of expectations that we have of them, allow it to be a valid form of their love for us.

It may just be the best they can do at the moment.

This involves more than just a play on words. It really means that one of the best things we can do for our mate, or child, of friend is to just let them love us in ways of which they are capable.

Sounds easy. Try it and you will discover that it takes a fair amount of discipline, and a whole lot of sensitivity.

So, if being more loving was on your list of resolutions, great. Put some feet on that feeling by allowing people to love you as best they can. Just accept and claim it.

There is nothing narcissistic about such a goal. You are simply offering a gift of love by allowing them to love you in ways appropriate to them. You claim it for what it was meant to be, even if it did not appear in your instruction manual of expectations.

Sounds a little strange, loving someone by allowing them to love you in ways of which they are capable. It may be one of the most gracious acts you offer all year long.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
I was listening recently to George Gershwin's masterpiece, "Porgy and Bess." It has been ages since I last heard any of it.

The music is so beautiful, and I have always been impressed with how profound the lyrics are and how they get right to the heart of what life really is all about.

The music makes me stop and think just a little.

Take, for example, the old gentleman who sings, "I got plenty of nothing and nothing's plenty for me."

As he sings, there seems to be a hint of contentment that almost makes me envious.

He obviously does not have much but what he does have seems to satisfy him.

As he conclude his song, he becomes a little more specific when he sings, "I got my gal, I got my Lord, and I got my song."

After all, he has a right to be happy. He has a wife who cares, a Lord who loves, and a song in his heart.

In addition, he seems to have discovered a secret, whether he realizes it or not. He has gotten very close to what happiness is all about.

Happiness is such an illusive rascal. There is very little question that most of us want it. The problem comes in that we just do not know how to find it.

Al Cadenhead

ON THE INSIDE

In addition, he seems to have discovered a secret, whether he realizes it or not. He has gotten very close to what happiness is all about.

Happiness is such an illusive rascal. There is very little question that most of us want it. The problem comes in that we just do not know how to find it.

My personal feeling is that happiness is not something you seek directly. Happiness tends to be a byproduct of one's commitment to the true "basics" of life.

We work ourselves silly trying to buy, rent, and mortgage happiness. We try to find it by trying to possess it and that becomes an endless tunnel.

The old gentleman in the song seems to have found it in his gal, his Lord, and his song. And when you get down to the bottom line, isn't that where happiness is most likely to be found?

Most other things are simply decorations for the basics of life. Somehow we get side-tracked and these things which are a means to an end become an end in themselves.

Which brings me back to where I started. The fellow in the song seems to have found some contentment. He found it because he knew where to look. I am afraid that most of us today are looking in the wrong places.
Little things can mean most in many marriages

Some of you may remember a song recorded back in the late '70s by Neil Diamond and Barbara Streisand entitled, "You Don't Send Me Flowers Anymore."

I heard it on a local radio station recently and was reminded of the unfortunate truth of its lyrics. It's a very lovely song but also a very sad one.

In the song they are lamenting back and forth to each other, "You don't say you need me; you don't sing me love songs; you don't send me flowers anymore."

The sadness continues as the former lovers admit that they have grown so far apart that they have neither the courage nor the knowledge of each other to be able to say goodbye.

They seem to be locked into a mechanical relationship that has lost its excitement and appeal.

As they look back, it is these small things - the little things - that they miss the most. Granted, beyond these little things are probably some larger problems; but the pain comes as they notice the absence of the little "niceties" that came so naturally in times past.

The song reminds me of the importance of the little things in marriage. While there are big problems that sever relationships, many more marriages have been weakened or destroyed by the little things.

On the other hand, many marriages have withstood the "big" storms because of the presence of the nice "little" things.

In a very subtle way, the little problems eat away and erode a relationship, and one day two people wake up and realize that they no longer know each other. The way it happens is so silent but so insidious. It seldom happens intentionally.

On the flip side, it's the little reminiscences, the impulsive "I love you," and the silent hug that nourish and spice up a relationship.

The little things are not terribly expensive and don't require a lot of long-range planning; but, they do require energy and effort. Just as a thoughtless, ill-timed, insensitive word can cut and hurt, so can a gentle, carefully placed word of concern strengthen and soothe.

It is amazing how we tend to get in return what we have given. Concern generates concern and insensitivity breeds misunderstanding.

Never underestimate the power of a simple touch, an unexpected gift, or a "how are you feeling?" that waits for an answer. We would do ourselves and those close to us a real favor by remembering the value of little things. Neil and Barbara's song is a good reminder.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point and a clinical member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists.
Most parents are familiar with the verse in Proverbs, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

Most of us have clung to those words at some stressful moment hoping that the writer of Proverbs was right.

We really should keep in mind, however, that the word, "train," can be little tricky. All too often we assume it to be formal instruction, something planned and carried out carefully.

If you are a parent, an appropriate question might be, "What are your children catching from you?" As a parent it is probably one of the most important questions you might ask.

Our children do learn from our verbal instructions. They need it, want it and appreciate it. However, they learn and remember so much more from our behavior than from what we say.

A parent cannot instruct an attitude. It can only be demonstrated. What we say to our children is important, but what we practice in front of them is even more crucial.

When our son Chris was about 3 years old, I observed him doing a cute but very frightening thing.

He was playing in the backyard with a little toy lawn mower. I watched him go through a strange routine over and over again.

He would push his toy mower a few feet, stop and act like he was cranking it, then he would back up and kick it very hard.

Obviously he had seen someone who was having trouble cranking a real lawn mower, and he thought the kick was a part of the normal process. Since there is only one person at our house who uses a lawn mower, I was a bit taken aback by the experience. He had seen me kicking my mower, and I didn't even know he was watching.

And I couldn't even remember behaving that way; although I am, unfortunately, more than capable of such a childish display of emotions.

The experience caused me to really wonder what else he was catching from me. The old adage, "Do as I say, not as I do," ought to be regarded as a felony. At times it is very confusing for our children to hear us speak and then watch us live.

Now, I am enough of a realist to know that there will always be some inconsistency between words and actions. However, the whole issue simply highlights the importance of one's example. And even though I have no research to support it, I have an idea that the passing of time does not lessen the importance of that example.

My parents are alive and well, and I still pay rather careful attention to the way they handle themselves and the way they respond to life. I have a hunch that the same would apply to those of us whose children are grown or almost grown.

Our children do catch a great deal from us. They catch our feelings, our attitudes, and our beliefs. It is going on all the time, whether we are aware of them or not. I don't know about you, but for me the whole thing is a little frightening.
God is the true master of big, small surprises

One of the amazing revelations that comes to a believer is the discovery that God is a God of wonderful surprises.

Some of those surprises come in the form of life's great events. We hope for them, quietly plan and work toward them. Yet, when they arrive, they are still surprisingly overwhelming.

On the other hand, some of God's best surprises are not necessarily momentous occasions and occasionally come when we least expect them. They are not preceded by a drum roll, or trumpets, and are hardly noticed by anyone else. They may be known only to us. Still, it is a sweet surprise and happens when we least expect it.

We frequently use a word to describe that kind of moment. The word is, "serendipity." Sir Horace Walpole coined the word back in 1754, basing it on a Persian fable, "The Three Princes of Serendip."

Serendip was the Arabic name for the island now called Ceylon. The legend was that every time the princes of Serendip went on a journey, they found valuable things they weren't looking for.

Because they were good men of high character, they found unsought blessings and prosperity along life's way. So, finding something you aren't looking for has come to be called serendipity.

God is the master of serendipity and continually provides us with moments of surprise, gifts unexpected, both great and small.

This past weekend my parents were visiting with us. Don't get ahead of me here. Although pleasant, their visit was no surprise. We had planned it for weeks. And we filled the brief time together with a full schedule, probably too much.

While they were here, we made a quick trip to the Duke campus for a brief visit with our son, Chris, who is in the Divinity School there. Just a quick hello and goodbye. After all, life must operate on a schedule and we can spend only the allocated minutes for each activity of a day.

We were rather rushed and, to be honest, I was somewhat preoccupied with a number of events that were occurring during those several days, which is unfortunately the way I do too much of my life.

A part of our quick tour quite naturally included a visit to the Duke Chapel which is always an experience in itself. As we entered the doors, we were greeted by more than the usual beautiful interior.

A very gifted musician was playing the big pipe organ. Along with the pipe organ was the sound of a violin. The duet was absolutely breathtaking. They were playing "Ave Maria," and continued on with several other selections.

We discovered that they were rehearsing for a wedding to be held later in the day. For those of us listening it was no rehearsal. The main event could not have been better.

Everyone inside the building seemed transformed by the sound. When the heavenly gates swing open, or, if it cracks open just enough to let some of us slip by, the sound that will break forth from heaven could not sound much better.

I do not know where else God was on Saturday afternoon. I can vouch for one place where His presence was felt very strongly. I was inspired and refreshed. The best thing about it was that I had not planned it. The experience was not even on our schedule for the day. What a nice surprise. Serendipity is the word.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor of First Baptist Church in High Point, and a clinical member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists.
Lent is a time for reflection

This past week began the season of Lent.

For some it is a season filled with meaning. Others may participate in religious traditions that make no observance of Lent at all. In fact, it may be an absolute mystery to them.

Lent is the 40 weekdays prior to Easter and it began on Wednesday, known as Ash Wednesday.

The season is a time of reflection, a time of prayer and repentance, a time of preparing for the annual celebration of Easter.

Even those who observe Lent have differing ways of celebrating the season. The more liturgical traditions celebrate Mass on Ash Wednesday.

A part of the Mass is the marking of the cross on one’s forehead, the mark being made from the ashes of the Palm leaves from last year’s Palm Sunday.

Other traditions may meet in small groups for prayer and focus on the need for repentance. Penance is the theme.

There are other parts of the Lenten season that have become so secularized that they have little or nothing to do with this Christian observance.

The most absurd and well known divergence can be seen in New Orleans with the Mardi Gras. Mardi Gras, by definition, is the last day before Lent, also known as “Fat Tuesday.”

It is an absolutely insane time of partying and frivolity as one blows it all out before shifting into the more somber, contemplative mood of Lent.

There is always a lot of television coverage on the Mardi Gras. It is frequently characterized by behavior that can be a problem to the city of New Orleans and even to one’s own personal health, without going into specifics.

I actually heard one commentator on the evening news refer to the Mardi Gras as a Christian celebration. Such a statement borders on comedy. If Mardi Gras is a Christian celebration, my dog, Dooly, is a Southern Baptist.

On the other hand, Lent can be a very meaningful time. We frequently talk about giving up something for Lent. In fact, we have made some commitments in our family.

To give up something for Lent is more than just correcting some behavior in our life that may not be to our best interest.

This “absence” of something is to be a continuing reminder of the sin in our lives and the fact that we have fallen short of the mark.

For what it is worth, let me share with you my perception of Lent. I perceive it as a journey. The observance reminds me of the great distance between my life and the life of Christ.

In a spirit of contemplation I realize how big the gap is between my life and behavior and the life God has called me to live. Lent is a journey, a time of travel, trying to lessen the gap between me and my Lord.

It involves much more than just giving up chocolate or sweets, or some other destructive habit. It is an honest acceptance of the fact that I am not what I should be, but by God’s grace I can do better.

In an effort to close that gap I am also journeying in time toward the event of Easter. If I make Lent a personal journey, I will arrive at Easter with a renewed sense of appreciation of what Christ did for me on the cross.

Some comment that the season of Lent seems somber and heavy, and it is. After all, sin is a serious matter, a heavy issue. But, remember that we are preparing to celebrate the answer to that problem. And what a grand answer God has made!

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point and also a clinical member of the American Association Of Marriage and Family Therapists.
Handbell choirs offer lesson

Some of the best events go unnoticed by the community in general. And when there are no threats or violence or destruction of property, they usually do not make the news. Once such event occurred last weekend at the Benton Convention Center in Winston-Salem. The church music department of the North Carolina Baptist Convention sponsored a gathering of handbell choirs from all over the state. The mere size of such a group would border on news in and of itself. There were 88 choirs there with all their equipment. That equals about a thousand people and all their stuff, which is a lot.

Imagine the floor of the convention center completely covered with tables, and every table loaded with beautiful and expensive handbells. Keep in mind that everyone there has a whole “table full of bells.” When you walk in and see this mass collection of people and bells, your first thought is that there is no way this many people can ring all these bells together, or at least at the right time.

Yet, when their guest director stood before them and raised her baton, those who gathered around the tables produced one of the most heavenly sounds I had ever heard. The performance time that I enjoyed was the result of many hours of their rehearsing throughout the weekend. And, I repeat, the sound of that many bells playing in perfect rhythm was a sound that could easily have come from the sky.

Handbell choirs have always intrigued me anyway. A ringer has to have phenomenal coordination. That leaves me out. For someone who has to sit down to chew gum, I choose to leave handbells alone. I could seriously injure myself with these objects.

Since this past Saturday was first time I had been to a handbell convention, I came away with several impressions of not only what I heard that day but also what I saw. For one thing, there are no heroes, no soloists who overwhelm you. Everyone just plays their part and at the right time. Some people have a dozen bells in front of them. Others have three or four. Some play little bells and some play big bells. And although I know nothing about it, the little ones seem just as important as the big ones.

I would imagine that a few of the small bells played on their own would not produce a very impressive sound. Yet, play them in concert with a thousand others and the sound is very moving. There must be a lesson there.

I also noticed that one of the ringers during one of the selections played her bells only a few times, not nearly as much as some others. I suppose her note was just not called on as often as some notes.

Nevertheless, she was always ready when the time came for her to ring. She waited patiently and rang the note perfectly on every one of those few occasions. Concentrating, patient, and ready. There must be a lesson there as well.

Looking back on last Saturday I can remember the characteristics of very few individuals. But the picture of that large group, with hundreds of people poised, watching their part is an image I would like to remember. I think there are some lessons we can learn from handbell ringers.

We all have a part to play. Some roles seem large. Some seem small. All are important and vital to the total sound. We don't play our part every time, but wait upon the direction of our leader. We must be patient, ready, and alert. Let the director direct. Let the others play their notes. Just concentrate on our own part and do the best we can. Play it together with lots of other folks and the result is a beautiful sound. I am convinced that handbell ringers have discovered something worth passing along about life.

I have often compared life to a game. Maybe a concert is a better paradigm. We are not responsible for the whole show. And when everyone plays their part energetically, correctly, and on time, the result is a concert. The poet, Jean Ingelow, wrote:

I am glad to think

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I am not bound to make the whole world go right;
But only to discover and to do,
With cheerful heart, the work that God appoints.

I will trust in Him,
That He can hold His own; and I will take His will, above the work He sendeth me,
To be my chiefest good.

The notes we have been given to play are never insignificant. The key is to be ready, willing, alert and patient. Unfortunately, that leaves a lot of us out of the concert.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor of First Baptist Church in High Point; and also a clinical member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists.
Parents teach kids about love

There are many ways in which learning takes place. However, one of the most significant methods of instruction happens to be the "example," or in current language it is called the "model."

What we say to our children is important. Sometimes they remember; sometimes they don't. But seldom do they forget what they see in our example, good or bad. And what we teach them with our words about the dynamics of family is not nearly as effective as what they witness in our behavior.

In a book entitled, "If I Were Starting My Family Again," John Drescher made the statement that he would love his wife more. In fact, he was a little more specific than that. He said, "That is, I would be free to let my children know that I love her."

In that statement Drescher has touched on something that ought to be a source of concern for parents.

We talk about love so much. We say it ought to be the cornerstone of a relationship, the basic principle of family life. But what does our example say? Never forget that real love is visible and obvious.

The way two parents express their love to each other is a big factor in how the child will eventually express himself or herself to their future mate. Every day we teach our children something about the meaning of love.

As parents we should not be afraid to openly express our love to each other in front of our children. When was the last time your children heard you tell your mate, "I love you?"

Children like to see their parents happy and "in love." Even though a child may act as if embarrassed when parents openly express their love for each other, there is a sense of security that a child experiences that most kids absolutely crave. Do our children see us doing little things for each other? The little acts of kindness are visible and teach multitudes about love and concern. Do we pass on loving words about our mate in the ears of our children? Or, do we tear each other down in subtle ways in front of our children?

Our children need to see that the close relationship between a husband and wife is more than just a burden. It is also a source of joy and excitement, something very special. I can think of very things that will do more to make a child feel secure than to see two parents who obviously and openly care for each other. What kind of model are you giving your child? Is your child's concept of love being enlarged or enhanced?

To make a long story short, if you love your mate, let your children know it!

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point, and a clinical member of the American Association Of Marriage and Family Therapists.
We all have value in the eyes of God

Basketball fanatics can possibly remain "in the closet" and go relatively unnoticed until March rolls around.

"March Madness" has a way of bringing a closet fanatic out into the open. A true hoop lover can remain quiet and dormant only so long, especially during the festival season of March.

The statistics and personalities of the game become the conversation of almost everyone. Point totals, rebounds, and assists replace the weather as the primary object of concern.

The spotlights are bright and the camera lenses are cleaned. With high school championship games stacked on top of each other and college teams straining for a place on the sports headlines there is plenty of camera time for the superstars, and the media works days and nights to keep them in front of us.

I am all for the superstars. They inspire us. In fact, how many of us have watched an ACC game and then immediately went to the backyard goal and became Tim Duncan as he slam dunks the ball with three seconds left to win the game in front of 9,000 cheering fans.

There is a certain amount of pleasure in just watching someone who does what they do with exact skill and dedication. Even when you don't care for the particular sport of a given superstar, you can't help but be impressed by someone who is the best at whatever they do.

We live in a superstar culture, a world that makes a path for the heroes. The media scientifically raises them before us. We treat them as if they are larger than life. They seem to be immune to the daily disappointments of the normal life. Their lives seem to have so much value!

However, there is a flip side to our superstar culture, and it can become quite heavy for some of us. It has to do with the fact that most of us will never be superstars or heroes. The vast majority of us live out our days in very normal and routine ways.

There are times when the issue is even more critical than not making superstar status. It may be that even in our mundane world we have failed. It's bad enough to never make the superstar cut. Failing in our routine world is even a harder pill to swallow.

Do we have any value? Is there a part for us even though it never makes the headlines?

One of the most "in touch" philosophers of our day is Charles Schultz, the creator of Peanuts. He is certainly aware of some of the anxieties of daily living. In one comic strip Charlie Brown was lamenting to his friend Linus: "I've always been criticized, right from the beginning. The moment I was born and stepped onto the stage of life, they took one look at me and said, Not right for the part!"

I think Charlie Brown put his finger on a source of anxiety for many of us. There is a feeling deep inside us, way off in one of those dark corners, that says we do not belong here, that only superstars count. This feeling of "not belonging" brings about a sense of discontentment that permeates all that we do.

The theory of transactional analysis came about a few years ago as a response to this same issue. T.A. encouraged people to grow and mature to the point that "I'm not OK" could be changed to "I'm OK."

In no way am I saying that we should view ourselves as sinless and perfect. That would be an over-reaction in the opposite direction. I am referring to a basic contentment that comes from the feeling that being here is no mistake.

If, like Charlie Brown, we have decided: "I don't belong, I'm not right for the part," then nothing else is going to look right either. What really happened the day we were born? Was it something good? Was it something bad?

Believe me, God knew what He was doing when He made you. You were no mistake! What you are, when you are,
Faith

VALUE: God is aware of all

(FROM 8A)

and where you are was no accident.

 Granted, not complete, but something good! God knew what He was doing when He put you together. You were intended and designed as a part of His total plan.

So, turn the tube on and watch them run up and down the floor like the fate of the world hangs on every shot. "March Madness" may be closer to the truth than we realize.

Just remember this. The camera may always be focused on the stars of the game. And no one in the stands is even aware of your presence there in your old chair. But there is One who is aware. You are in His focus. You have enormous value to Him. And besides, not being a superstar means that we don't have to worry about praying all those taxes. What a relief!

Al Cadenhead is the pastor of First Baptist Church in High Point.
Happiness depends upon the people around us

We have freedom to change our lives

Like everyone else, there are times when I will stop and resolve to make some kind of change in my life.

It may be as simple a matter as getting more sleep or it may be a profound issue that affects the lives of my family or my congregation.

For example, on more than one occasion, I have made the commitment to myself that I would really try to make my happiness dependent on how I respond to life rather than letting it be determined by what life does to me.

The tendency is to be a victim of the circumstances that surround us. We tend to be happy if everything is going OK and generally according to our wishes.

On an intellectual level I know that my happiness is primarily a product of how I respond to life, the attitude I employ, and what is going on inside my soul.

Seeking to make happiness an inside job is a discipline that requires a lot of personal management. No doubt such a discipline is an honorable pursuit. It sounds really cool to be able to discuss such a goal with one's cerebral friends.

Yet, let's be honest about the truth. Even a little thought will show you how vastly our own happiness depends on the way other people present themselves toward us.

The looks and tones at our breakfast table, the conduct of our fellow workers or employers, the faithful or unreliable people we deal with, what people we deal with, what people say to us on the street, the letters we get, the friends or adversaries we meet, even what someone says they heard about us, these things make up very much of the pleasure or misery of our day.

We can resolve with great intensity to be above all these things and be happy regardless of the sweetness of life or lack thereof.

There is no question that we can reserve the right to respond with strength and character and add a quality to our life that only we can determine from within.

Along with that resolve, there is another that is equally as honorable. It is to turn the idea around and remember that just as we are affected by the conduct of people all around us, so are we adding to the pleasure or the misery of other people's days.

This is half of the matter which we can control. Whether any particular day shall bring to us more of happiness or of suffering is often beyond our power to determine.

Whether each day of our lives shall give happiness or suffering rests within ourselves. It is just another area where we do have some freedom. We must decide. In fact, we must decide many times each day.

The writer of 1 Peter was suggesting the same when he wrote: "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another, be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble."

I suppose the bottom line is that we do have a choice. If someone is ugly toward us, we can try to out-ugly them. Or we can learn from them and be mature enough to be different.
Jesus set example for humbleness

The first Holy Week was filled with extremes for our Lord. The events took him from cheering crowds through the upper room to the tomb, from moments of quiet contemplation to the violence of the cross, from the press of the crowds to the solitude of the garden. Nowhere is the drama of Holy Week more visible than in the upper room.

This particular room was prepared for the Passover Feast. In this brief experience of the supper Jesus would teach mankind more lessons than one could comprehend in a lifetime. For example, consider the action of Jesus in washing the feet of the disciples. The Scripture indicates that as the meal was being prepared, Jesus wrapped a towel around himself and did something that was a normal task in those days for a servant. He washed the feet of all his guests. Even now such a task seems so common for such an esteemed person. Yet, there is another dimension of his act that amazes me even more.

Keep in mind that he washed the feet of all the disciples, even though he knew that one in the group would betray him into the hands of his enemies. Let’s be honest at this point. If you knew that an acquaintance or colleague was about to betray you and endanger your life, would you provide such a humble gesture as to wash this one’s feet?

If it had been me, I would have unloaded on the sorry soul who was secretly setting me up for trouble. To include him in the washing was to provide a huge example, one not so easy for us to follow.

Quite often we find, in the closet intimacy of social or family ties, persons hard and not genial, with whom sympathy is very difficult, and whose mere presence in our midst creates a constant conflict in our souls. There are, also, enemies, open or secret, whose enmity we may feel yet cannot define.

Al Cadenhead

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Our Lord, going before us in the hard way, showed us how we should walk. This period of Lent and the observance of Holy Week is an appropriate time to offer a solemn self-examination and ask ourselves, “Is there any false friend or covert enemy whom we must learn to tolerate, to cooperate with, to pity or forgive?” Can we in the silent confines of love mentally wash their feet as our Master washed the feet of Judas?

Possibly there are no enemies who spring into mind. Are there relationships in the normal run of our lives whose habits and ways are annoying and distasteful to us? Can we still relate to them in love? Can we honestly do our best to avoid harsh judgments, harsh speech, and the need to make known to others our aggravation?

To be honest, I wish Jesus had not given us that example. It would be so much easier to write off our adversaries as unworthy and undeserving of our affection and courtesy. At the very least we might ignore them. But, to humble ourselves and wash their feet? That is asking a lot.

Once we seek to follow the example of Jesus, we are quickly reminded of how much difference there is between his life and ours. We might even be forced to use some of the energy necessary to fuel a judging spirit for prayer for our own fallen souls.

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Possibly you have read some of the writings of Franz Kafka.
He tells the story of a man who had been confined for many years in a cell and had given up all prospects of ever being free again.

When the slightest glimmer of hope would rise in him, he would quickly put it out of his mind. The intriguing part of the story is that one day he tried the door of his cell and found it unlocked. He discovered that it had been unlocked all those years.

All he had to do was open the door and walk into the light of freedom.

Hope is such a struggle for so many people. In fact, for too many people hope has been given up, given away; and life is drastically influenced.

Without a sense of hope and promise for the future, life loses its vitality and promise. When there is no hope for the future, there is no power in the present.

This weekend we are celebrating Easter. I would not even try to summarize all that Easter represents to the human race. This I do know, right in the middle of all that Easter means to us is the issue of hope.

How better can one describe the circumstances of Christ's resurrection than the struggle with lost hopes? The dispirited followers of Jesus were fraught with feelings of doubt and despair when the first Easter dawned. But then as they were walking toward the tomb it happened. They had come for a burial, but, they were greeted with a resurrection. Their worst fears disappeared and their best hopes were confirmed.

We could use a little of that same reassurance today as well. In one way or another and in some time or other we all struggle for hope. And we need to remember that whenever we live our lives void of hope, it is of our own choosing. It is a decision we make, either intentionally or passively.

Like the prisoner in Franz Kafka's story, we are choosing not to try to turn the handle on the door that can lead us to sunshine and freedom.

Easter is a powerful reminder that God is capable of bringing us out of any state of despair, if we allow him.

After all, long ago he took a situation that was about as futile and hopeless as any in history. He is still in the same business now as he was then.

The celebration of Easter is filled with many traditions and rituals, some more meaningful than others. In the midst of all those traditions this week, do something that could be life-changing. Go to the door and check it. It may already be unlocked.
I was traveling alone recently and listening to the radio. There was some kind of talk show where a man had all the answers to all of mankind's questions, even some we've not thought about.

A few of his comments were less than kind to churchgoing folks. In fact, he was quite critical of them. During his remarks he made reference to the "clock and calendar" Christians. He defined this particular group of believers as those who go to church because the clock and calendar "says" it is time to go.

If it is Sunday morning and the clock "says" 9:45 a.m., then it is time to go to Sunday school. If it is 11 a.m., it is time to go to worship. Wednesday night rolls around; and even though one is tired from a busy day, the clock "says" it is time to go to midweek prayer service. On and on we could go, but I think you get the point.

My first reaction to the phrase, "clock and calendar" Christian, is that this is a terribly unexciting way to do the Lord's business. It sounds infinitely more pietistic to feel "led" to go to choir practice than to simply go because it is that particular night of the week. On one hand the habits of the "clock calendar" Christian seem terribly routine.

On the other hand, where would we be in any church without that group of people. Their faces may not be glowing but their faces are familiar, and you can count on them. One can count on their presence for the support of activities within the church life.

Their tithes and offerings come in regularly and make meeting the budget possible. Even when they are away during some summer Sundays their offering still makes it to the plate. It might come as a surprise to you to know that the church's business creditors seldom say, "Just pay us when you feel led."

Yes, the "clock and calendar" Christian's commitment may seem a bit dull, and it would be nice if everything could be done out of burning inspiration, but it is because of them that the programs of the church continue.

Without them the work of the Lord would suffer a great deal. In fact, after 25 years of ministry I am willing to conclude that without them the programs of the church would collapse.

We need to remember that God did not necessarily call us to be inspired, even though it is exciting. And yes, we are to be willing to be led by the spirit. But, sometimes for reasons we cannot explain we do not feel led to any thing or any place.

God did call us to be obedient, and being obedient means that sometimes we conduct ourselves by what we ought to do whether we feel inspired or not.

So, before we make "clock and calendar" Christians sound like they have some kind of social disease let's be honest and offer a word of thanks to them for keeping the lights on and the program going.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor of First Baptist Church in High Point and also a clinical member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists.
Take time to relax with your family

Like a lot of people this year I have so much been looking forward to spring. I feel like this past winter has been going on since 1989. I’ll bet that next year when the Woolly Worm makes its prediction for winter, we listen. It clearly predicted a cold beginning of winter, a moderate middle and a long, cold conclusion of the season.

The Farmer’s Almanac was right also. It missed several storms by a few days but came really close every time. Next year’s sales are predicted to put it on the New York Times best seller list.

And, so much for global warming! The ozone layer has joined lower taxes as a myth.

The bad news is that spring occurred last Saturday between the hours of 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. If you went to the mall or the grocery store on Saturday, you might have missed spring completely. I never thought I would see the day when spring would actually be shorter than Christmas. But, it was nice. Now I guess we move straight on to summer.

With summer just around the corner everybody begins to think of trips, vacations, and all kinds of outings. After all, it has been a tough winter and now it’s time to stretch and move around.

Even though the schedule during winter is busy enough, the pace tends to pick up even more with spring and summer. It becomes obvious to us that the only way we are going to get it all in is to make plans now for much of what we will be doing in the months to come. And if you haven’t made any plans, you need to be giving it some thought.

As you make those plans, allow me to make a suggestion. Right now, before things get too hectic, make some commitments to some family time. I’m talking about more than just a one shot, big time trip together. But rather some regular time together when things are “low keyed” and relaxed and you can just be “family.”

For some reason when we plan time together as a family, we feel like we have to structure the time with activity. Every minute has to be filled with some kind of action. And certainly every family needs to have experiences of doing things and going places together! But it is just as important that a family have some times of doing nothing together. That’s right, nothing.

Just as with the activities, these times may have to be planned and reserved as well. If the times aren’t reserved they may never occur. Families need time together to be open and relaxed; to actually do something that has become a rarity, talk.

Unstructured time together doesn’t necessarily equal boredom. We need time to be together, to talk, share, and actually get to know the people with whom we live in the same house.

Anyway, since spring occurred last Saturday and many of us missed it, it is now time to start thinking about summer. As you make your plans for this busy season ahead, allow yourself time for personal activity together. But, just as importantly, reserve some time for the family to do “nothing” together. Try it, you’ll like it!

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Al Cadenhead
God bless our most important teachers

Mother's Day is a time when we almost naturally focus attention on the home and family, and what a complement to mothers that they are so quickly associated with this most basic of all institutions. With rare exceptions they are the glue that holds it together.

The role of the family is difficult one.

We often hear that the challenge and stresses upon the family are greater today than ever. While there may be some truth to that statement, the task assigned to the family has always been nearly impossible.

The family is a place where totally self-centered infants are guided and nurtured into reasonable, mature individuals with the capacity to give and receive love. Those who are doing this nurturing and guiding are mothers and fathers who have considerable maturing of their own to complete.

One reason that the task of the family is so difficult is that those of us doing the teaching are still students ourselves. The lessons of love and learning are taught by teachers who are still students.

And each other.

The family should be a refuge of joy. The world is so serious, at times such an unhappy place. The home can be an opportunity for joy. Even when things are far from perfect, when illness invades the ranks, when everything you own breaks down, when there is so much to do, home can still be a place where you can take a deep breath and experience one of life's disappearing qualities, something called joy.

Most importantly, the family needs to be open to the resources of our faith.

Through the unconditional love of God we are better able to accept ourselves and others. Through our faith we have resources for our difficult moments when nothing seems to go right and everything seems to coming apart.

So much hangs on the most important schoolhouse in the history of the human race. And on this particular weekend may God bless the most important teachers who ever lived, our mothers.

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Jesus told a number of parables during His earthly ministry. One of the most well known and most quoted parable is that of the “Good Samaritan.” Through the years there have been many attempts to interpret the story and there are, truly, many possibilities depending upon which character you might be focusing.

In the parable a man has been beaten and left for dead. We know nothing about him. During the course of the story three people pass by the man but only one offered help in the man’s time of need.

A priest came by first and offered no help. Soon after that a Levite passed and he, too, ignored the man’s plight. The sharp edge of the story is the obvious religious background of these two men.

All kinds of explanations have been offered as to why they did not help. The explanations range from one extreme to the other. Many interpreters point to them as being totally insensitive. Others have tried to be kind and defend their behavior by saying they simply were over involved in their work and just did not notice. After all, one of these two was charged with overseeing the religious ritual in worship and the other was charged with the responsibility of preserving Israel’s religious heritage of the past. They have important things on their minds.

But, the spotlight really shines on the Samaritan. At first, he seems to be the most unlikely of the group to offer help. But, if you look deeply enough, it is easy to understand why he would be the most sensitive of the group and most likely to offer help.

The Samaritan was a racial half-

breed. He was considered ceremonially unclean as no self-respecting Jew would associate with him. He had been excluded from all respecting people. Few people would have anything to do with him. For all practical purposes he had been ignored by the mainstream of society. To make a long story short, he knew what it was like to be forgotten and ignored.

As he encounters a man on the road who was being ignored and was experiencing pain, it is not surprising that he of all people stopped and offered help. Could it be that he knew what pain was like? He knew how it felt to be ignored. He knew the anguish of being passed by.

The Samaritan’s own suffering has possibly made him sensitive to the plight of others. Because of his own experience he could not only sympathize but he could empathize. Just possibly, his own suffering may have given him a unique sensitivity to the hardship of others. So, it is not surprising at all that he stopped and offered help.

It is conceivable that our own suffering can make us more sensitive to people around us. If you have known pain or possibly are experiencing it now, then the experience has given you the ability to empathize with the suffering around you.

Like the Samaritan, your experience with suffering makes you sensitive to the struggles of people you encounter. You can help and offer aid. Why? Because you have been there.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point.
Parables are not always warm, fuzzy

The parables of Jesus are often perceived incorrectly as nice little stories that leave you with a warm, fuzzy feeling. If sweet and harmless is a part of your definition of these stories that Jesus told, you might consider reading them again and sensing the stern, sometimes radical, nature of the parables of Jesus. They are anything but sweet and harmless. Some of them can be a little frightening.

For example, Luke records a parable of Jesus concerning the barren fig tree. The tree was certainly committing no grave crime. But, the owner gave instructions to the keeper of the vineyard to cut it down. Why? The parable explains it very simply. The tree was bearing no fruit.

The problem with the tree was that it was not doing anything. It was simply existing, taking up space and good air, and putting back very little in return. Unfortunately, many of us are guilty of the same problem. We are content to exist, and give little concern to the fruit we should be bearing.

We are satisfied to compare ourselves with the thieves and murderers and we think that since we are not guilty of those crimes, we pass the test.

We might even stand in front of the mirror and say to ourselves, “You’re a good person, you don’t steal, you don’t swear, and you wouldn’t think of killing anyone.” But, we are telling half the truth when we evaluate our life performance in terms of what we do, not do.

What are we doing? What contributions are we making to our community? What fruit are we bearing that makes our town, church, and street a better place to live?

Can we describe ourselves as a giving person or are we content to see life in terms of what we can take? Remember, also, that our taking is not necessarily illegal. We can never break a law and still be a “taker” in God’s eye.

Each one of us has opportunities of influence and input. We can seek to make a contribution or we can just sit back and criticize the efforts of those who do want to help. There are enough takers in the world, people who are content to watch a world of suffering and need and see it as someone else’s responsibility.

In Jesus’ parable the owner of the vineyard made it clear, “If the tree does not bear fruit, cut it down!” That is a fairly serious indictment of the way most of us do life. Sounds like we need to be attentive to the approach of the keeper, especially if he is carrying an ax.

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Of all the things you do each day, what would you designate as the most important? There are many possibilities and the list we might together compile would be a long list.

I wonder if listening might be on your list. Unless you live in a cave out in the wilderness and have nothing to do with people, there are very few things that you might do that are as important. Notice that I did not refer to “hearing.” I chose the word, “listening.”

Hearing is a word used to describe the physiological sensory processes by which auditory impressions are received by the ears and transmitted to the brain.

Listening, on the other hand, refers to a more complex psychological procedure involving interpreting and understanding the significance of the sensory experience.

Surely no one would question the role of listening in professional life. How could a lawyer, doctor, nurse, receptionist, sales representative function without listening? Unemployment would soon occur.

Poor listening is responsible for a tremendous waste in education, industry, and many other areas of life. Any capable leader, political or otherwise, can immeasurably improve his effectiveness by cultivating a listening ear. Regardless of the area, time spent in listening plays a vital part in building good relationships with people.

I am afraid, however, that we forget how important listening is in the area of family life. In fact, it is an area where my scores are frequently quite low. And I say that with shame.

You would think that one who spends a multitude of hours listening to other people would be a sure bet at home. My family knows the truth.

Most of us by nature are not good listeners. When we have to live with the demands and pressures of the job there is a tendency not to want to listen to someone else with a problem or concern after we have "clocked out."

You arrive at home, and there is little energy to spare. One would like to forget about problems for a while. Maybe there are other plans that do not include sitting still.

Yet, there is a spouse and possibly there are children who have needs as well. Listening requires effort and energy. And there are so many other things that compete for our time and ears. Family members attempt to make entrance to our private and protected corners. We see their talk as interruption. And when we do listen, we say in subtle ways that they need to hurry because we are terribly busy.

It is believed that by the age of 15 a child asks 500,000 questions. There are two ways of looking at this. On one hand, that is a lot of interruptions. On the other hand, that means a half million opportunities to share something about the meaning of life.

If only we could pay more attention to the questions of our children. We also need to hear with the “third ear.” This is the ability to go beyond just what is said and hear what is meant. One night not long ago during a hurried family meal our teenage daughter, Melody, spoke up, “Dad, I guess you have to go to another meeting tonight, don’t you?” I am sure that her question had more to do than with just my personal schedule. Even an almost grown daughter has needs that require a little time and attention.

Listening is a gift that is frequently offered the least in the home, particularly if we perceive home as a place to get away from people. Our children especially need an attentive ear. They are not around forever and we’ll soon wish we had given more of ourselves.

Listening requires effort and energy, even a little sacrifice; but, it is an investment that pays tremendous dividends. The chances are good that it would improve relationships. For some of us, it might keep us out of hot water.

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We often take time for granted

I believe the Bible when we are told in the book of James that, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights."

I also believe that somewhere close to the top of the list of those "good and perfect gifts" would be the gift of time, a gift we too often take for granted.

Time is a part of the created order. In fact, the Bible claims that there will come a time when "time will be no more." That does not mean that life will cease to exist. It just means that the framework called time which frames our lives will no longer exist.

Life will go on outside the framework of time. One writer has described time as a "brief set of parentheses within the context of eternity."

"Time is the arena in which our lives are played and it comes to us as a gift from God, a part of His created order."

Most of our concern with time has to do with its swift passing. We all live with the desire to slow time down. It moves so fast. A few years ago I wrote a book that was going to win a Nobel prize for telling people how to slow down time. I spent two hundred pages and the reader's time only to conclude that you can't slow time down. What an amazing discovery!

There is another dimension of time, however, that has become apparent to me in recent days, a dynamic that I have never appreciated as I should.

"Time is not some cold, neutral force and it is certainly not our enemy, regardless of what the make-up commercials tell us. Time is that gift from God that allows for the sharing of life. It comes to us as moments, as days, as years, and sometimes as years that seem like moments."

Last Sunday afternoon, along with a lot of other parents, we watched a group of young men and women march down an aisle and go through a simple ritual called graduation. I have been there before but there is something very overwhelming about the graduation of the last child. The ceremony was quite brief, and for that I am grateful. Yet, in that short period from the time of their walking in and out of the gym a million memories passed through my mind at warp speed.

It was only a few days ago that a shy little girl made her way into a kindergarten classroom with a world of new experiences awaiting her. I remembered science projects delivered to school with the paint still wet, the anticipation of middle school, last minute book reports, senior high jitters, six years and a million miles of cheerleading, the predictable afternoon door slam and straight to the kitchen, first date, proms, and final exams. And now one simple graduation exercise is to change all that. How could this day have happened so soon?

My temptation is to look at time as a thief, possibly my enemy. It comes and goes so quickly and seems to take so much with it. But, such a perception of time is quite unfair. Time is not a thief. Time is kind and altruistic. Time allows for the sharing of lives, the crossing of paths, when one life is touched by another and forever changed by the presence of a guest, the very special guest of a child.

So, to the God who is the creator of time, the One who is the author of all good gifts, I am grateful. I offer my thanks for the gift of time where lives are shared, very special lives.

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The celebration of a special day like Father’s Day makes us think of relationships, many of which are very personal and close. With Father’s Day as a backdrop let me offer an observation about relationships.

Usually, I find that most of my thoughts are not original. About the time I think I am at the height of my creativeness, I find that someone else has already said it, thought it, or written it years and years ago.

Somewhere there is bound to be a book that contains the theory that relationships are never “static.” In other words, relationships never stand still. People are always either moving closer or they are moving further apart. I believe this will hold true whether one is talking about marriage and family relationships or possibly any normal everyday friendship.

Yet, it is especially true in the marriage relationship. Frequently partners will assume that they can put their marriage in a holding pattern and give it whatever scraps of time and energy are left over from all the other demands of living. Unfortunately, even means he would have needed only one television.

Second, focus your attention upon a relationship. If you are married, what about your spouse? If you have children, that would be a great place to focus some attention; and what a wise investment that would be! Our relationships with our children are as subject to the laws of rust and decay as any other.

If there is no spouse nor are there any children in your life, there is certainly another significant person in your life. Then make a contribution of yourself to that relationship and move closer. It will be time and money well spent.

It is Father’s Day again. Time to stop, think, give thanks, and do a few things differently. Surely, somewhere, there is a book that says: “Relationships never stand still; either you are moving closer or further apart.” If there is any doubt in your mind, just notice the relationships in your life. It’s true. Really true.

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True happiness is born in the heart

I have always been a little suspicious of quick, easy answers to life's problems, particularly cute little sayings that sound so simple.

I realize that they may be true, but life frequently seems so complicated that a cute little rhyme just isn't enough for me.

Now, with that disclaimer made, I want to pass along a little story that I heard recently which includes a simple verse that may be worth remembering. I have discovered it to be helpful for me.

Three little girls appeared at the door of an elderly lady one boring summer morning. The lady's name was Mrs. Palmer. The girls were her neighbors and evidently all well acquainted with her.

The girls were in need of some of Mrs. Palmer's time-honored wisdom. Possibly because they were dealing with boredom, they asked Mrs. Palmer, "We want to be happy. Please tell us how."

She said she could help them by giving to the girls three rules to follow.

First, commit something good to memory each day. Three or four words will do, just a pretty bit of poem, or a Bible verse. One of the little girls jumped up. "I know, you want us to learn something we'd be glad to remember if we went blind." Mrs. Palmer was pleased that they were thinking.

Then she added two more rules, "See something beautiful each day. And, do something helpful each day."

The children came back to see her at the end of the week and reported that they kept the three rules and that it had been a really good week. One of the girls reported that she had been kept for 24 hours within the homewalls by a rain and that she had, nevertheless, seen two beautiful things — a sparrow taking a bath in the gutter, and a gleam of sunlight on a baby's hair.

The cute story aside. The lady's advice is not bad at all. Happiness is an illusive rascal. One does not find happiness. One cannot buy happiness. Instead, it is born of something from within the heart. It is a product, a result of something else.

So, want to be happy? Remember what the lady said, memorize something good each day, see something beautiful each day, and do something helpful each day. That's not bad advice. In fact, you couldn't expect much more for the cheap price of this newspaper.

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I've just been looking over our church's worship sheet for this Sunday morning. Like most churches on this Sunday before the July 4th celebration, we will be addressing the issue of freedom and singing some of the familiar songs that ring freedom's bell. "Let music swell the breeze, and ring from all the trees sweet freedom's song."

At least for just a few brief minutes during our celebrating this week will remind ourselves that freedom is a precious commodity. Yet, before the sounds of the songs leave the air we will move out into our normal routine with little further thought about the value of freedom. The chances are also good that we will give little further thought to the responsibilities that freedom brings with it. We forget that freedom is more than just a state of affairs or a lack of restraints. Freedom is a charge to all who claim it, a heavy responsibility to all who claim it.

St. Paul was writing to the Galatian church long ago and pointed to this charge that goes with "all the rights and privileges thereof." He said, "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another."

In recent years I have developed more and more an appreciation for a phrase that he uses, "called to freedom." More is implied here than just a birthright. Indeed, we were born to be free. Our birthright of freedom is assumed in our national documents such as the Declaration of Independence. The wording is interesting: "We are endowed by our creator with certain inalienable rights ..." Most of us have lived long enough in the tradition of freedom that we no longer just hope that the government is kind enough to grant us. It is absolutely assumed. It is our right. It is our calling.

To be "called to freedom" implies more than just a right. The implication is that freedom is something that we do. In other words, responsibility comes with freedom. Even Paul said, "... do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh." With freedom comes a whole lot of responsibility. There are choices to be made, daily, even hourly.

Paul also throws another little kicker in there. Freedom means being "servants of one another." I really believe that he was referring to the tendency of most of us to think of freedom in selfish terms, thinking only of ourselves and giving little thought as to how our freedom might influence someone else. Freedom usually means getting what we want, when we want it, and how we want it.

It freedom is the mesh that supports life, the system works not because of millions of people running around and doing exactly as they please. Rather, it is through reaching out to each other as servants, through giving and caring about one another, that a real sense of community is developed and the fabric of our society becomes stronger.

So, July 4th is a time of celebrating freedom, and so we should. Most of us have long taken that freedom for granted. This season might also be a good time to remind ourselves that people can do as they please as long as they do as they should. Otherwise, freedom breaks down and the inevitable result is anarchy or some form of monolithic authoritarianism. We will ultimately make that determination, intentionally or by default.

"Let music swell the breeze, and ring from all the trees sweet freedom's song."

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Life does not take joy out of a relationship

"I wish things could be like they were when we first met! It used to be exciting just to be together. Then we were married and something happened."

If these words are familiar to you, possibly said by you, have no fear. You have plenty of company. It is certainly not uncommon for people who have been married for a while to look back and wish that they could recapture that sense of excitement that existed in those early days of "courtship." Why does this happen? Why does a wedding ceremony eventually cause a change in a relationship? Why can't a couple work hard because there were no legal strings attached and either person could call it off with a simple sigh? You worked hard because it was important to you.

Some of the change is inevitable and even explainable. Life is anything but a fairy tale. Life is not only real but at times becomes difficult and even brutal. The demands of the struggle for survival extract a price from everyone. But this does not account for all the change that frequently occurs. The rest of the story is a part of our own doing.

When you first met, you earnestly wanted to please each other. This was your goal. Right there on top of your priority list. You knew it. Everybody else knew it. It was no secret. You wanted to make that special person happy because you wanted their approval. You worked overtime in convincing them that you were the only one who could provide them with what they needed. And you had to work hard because there were no legal strings attached and either person could call it off with a simple sigh! You worked hard because it was important to you.

Then, all of a sudden, one is up to the earlobes in the demands of earning a living, building a career, raising children, and mowing the lawn. The bills are always due and a dollar will not stretch far enough. The girl you picked up a hundred times at 8 p.m. looking like a million bucks has more to do than prepare every hair for your arrival. The guys who always looked his best is now sprawled out all over the recliner. In fact, this guy who couldn't do enough for you had now much rather sit in that chair and watch TV.

At that point an "age old" game begins, one with which we all are too familiar. It's called taking each other for granted. After all, there is a piece of legal paper that says you are bound to each other, so why worry about it? What at one time was excitement has now turned to endurance.

It might be helpful to go back to those early days and remember how hard you worked at pleasing each other. In those days it was very high on your priority list. And there is no law that says it could not become a priority again.

Given things as they are right now, what is the status of your priority list? The chances are real good that other things have moved in ahead of being special to each other. Many of these "things" may be good things, honorable things. Yet, they just might not be as important as a relationship to which you have made a commitment for life.

Life does not take the joy out of a relationship. We willingly hand it over.

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We should attempt to move nearer to God

In a letter to the Colossian church long ago Paul wrote, “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same.”

I personally like the NIV translation which renders the verse, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”

Regardless of the circumstances that prompted such an appeal, I doubt that any one of us would question the wisdom of his words. In theory, all believers would agree that we should “continue in prayer.”

On a practical level we occasionally bump into another issue. What do we do when we just don’t feel like praying? And I know what some of you are thinking right now, “A Christian should always feel like praying. One should never feel like not praying.”

Yet, the truth is that due to the complications of the human soul, there are occasions when praying does not come easily. If you have never experienced those moments, then consider yourself blessed. If you have, then find some little piece of comfort in knowing that you are not alone nor a heretic.

When the set time comes around for prayer, it may be, and often is, the case that the mind and soul is experiencing a dispirited moment, melancholy or otherwise, and finds it a hard struggle to raise itself up to communion with God. Even when the words will not come and the channel seems closed, one must simply be determined to keep the mind’s door open and hold on to the possibility that communion can still occur even without the feelings that we assume are to be a part of the prayer experience.

Can we possibly struggle to keep the door open, open to the possibility of communion with Infinite Love and Infinite Wisdom, without coming away from the exercise brighter, calmer and stronger against evil? Make a vigorous effort to throw your whole soul into some very short petition, and a little piece of the spiritual inertness is bound to be removed, even if no mountains disappear as a result of our mustard seed faith.

On the other hand, even if spiritual inertia remains and the soul continues in a state of dryness, do not be discouraged. I am convinced that if only we make an attempt to draw near to God, we are still better off. I believe that God sees that we have a will to pray, and accounts the will for the deed. A good rule of thumb for us in our prayer life might be to pray hardest when it is hardest to pray.

A 19th century poet, Richard Trench, wrote:

But if distractions manifold prevail,
And if in this we must confess we fail,
Grant us to keep at least a prompt desire,
Continual readiness for prayer and praise,
An altar heaped and waiting to take fire
With the least spark, and leap into a blaze.

I think that is very close to what Paul had in mind when he said we should “devote ourselves to prayer.”
Family vacations are an interesting phenomenon. They frequently require months of preparation, a ton of energy to get it all together, and what they do to the family budget is nothing short of a disaster. And when you finally get everything packed and in the car, arrangements made for the pets, tempers settled from the last two confrontations, you begin to ask the age-old question, “Is it really worth it?” Evidently it must be because we continue to go through this routine year after year.

Last week we made our annual pilgrimage to the beach. There are only four members in our household, and I am amazed at how much is involved in just arranging the schedules of just four people so that we can be in one place at one time. I am absolutely awestruck at how much larger families must go through the same process.

Nevertheless, we were able to arrange for, at least, a few days of everybody being together. As our family has become older and separated by distance, I have developed a deeper appreciation of just being together.

During this past week, I became very aware of the sounds of a vacation. For example, in the early hours of the trip there was some very nice silence while driving. I happened to be driving alone in the truck with all our beach junk. We literally take a truck load of “stuff,” bicycles for everyone, beach umbrella, chairs for the whole beach, and floats. And, most of the time we never use all this “stuff,” but we’ve always carried it. Five hours with no one to talk to was not bad at all. I even listened to a gospel tape someone had loaned me.

On the first night I opened the window and listened to the sound of the ocean all night long. There is no medicine made that does for me what the sound of the ocean does. It’s predictable rhythm is a sedative for the soul, calming and tranquilizing.

During the day there were the sounds of people, some going about their routines, others walking on the beach, children playing. There were screeches from the gulls on the beach as they competed for the popcorn that Melody faithfully tossed them.

There were the sounds of conversation around the table when people actually take time to eat together. It’s a time to catch up and just be together.

This year we added a whole new category of sounds, sounds that are related to a hurricane. We had a front row seat for this very unpredictable lady from the Bahamas. Although we were in an area that did not receive the direct fury of her breath, the scene was interesting nonetheless. The sound of powerful winds and blowing rains will get your attention and make you question if you used good judgment in the decision to stay. After all, we paid our money. Deep down you know the truth, Bertha could care less as to the amount of your investment in the week.

There was also the peaceful sound of the landscape after the storm passed. The calm and peace after a storm has a mysterious quality. The birds return. There is even a snort or two from a pair of dolphins as they make their way up the edge of the water. They are so graceful.

So many sounds to take in. So much to enjoy. But in thinking back about the week there is one sound that sticks in my mind that is for me above all the rest. It is the sound of laughter, innocent, playful laughter. It’s that piece of our lives excluded because of time and stress. It is the laughter that flows from relationships and must be given time to occur. It can’t be forced or hurried. It is the laughter that soothes anxious times and brings people together.

Of all the events of a week at the beach the part that I would most like to “can” and hold on to is the laughter. Then during the weeks ahead when everything is gray and life will be its usual stressful place, I can just pop the top of the can and let some laughter out. It’s a special gift from God, one to be cherished, embraced, appreciated.

Then again, laughter does not have to be limited to the annual pilgrimage called vacation. There will be opportunities today for this medicine of the soul. Listen carefully. You will hear it. When you hear those sounds, store them away. Hold on to them. You might even consider contributing some of those sounds to the people around you.

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"Givers" teach values to children

Al Cadenhead

Last Friday was marked for me by the news of two individuals, one of which is obviously more influential in my life than the other. Early Friday morning on my way to the office, I heard the news that the Lakers had struck a deal with Shaquille O'Neal for $130 million. I was dumbstruck at the news.

For one thing, I cannot think in terms of that much money. It is a world that I cannot possibly comprehend. For example, if I had $130 million, I would apply it to my Mastercard as far as it would go.

I really don't have any frustration with O'Neal. If we as a society deem the entertainment field that important, he has the right to enjoy every dime, excuse me, million. And notice that I said entertainment. Let's be honest. That is what it is. Our culture is willing to pay unbelievable amounts of money to its entertainment heroes. If you want to observe an athlete, go back and watch the reruns of Kerri Strug on Tuesday night.

After arriving at the office Friday, I received news of the death of Miss Marie Gaines of LaGrange, Ga. Miss Gaines was my next door neighbor during my years growing up in LaGrange. She was 102 years old and taught the first grade for 51 years, most of it in my elementary school right across the street from my house.

When I was a boy, Miss Gaines seemed old to me even then. Yet, her gentle face and soft voice never aged. She was always kind to this aggravating kid next door. I mowed her lawn. The pay was up to $1.25 when I left home for college and handed the tradition over to another kid in the neighborhood. She was kind to my dog, Clem. Clem was a big, black dog that most everybody else hated. When I looked for Clem in the evening, frequently her door would open and out would come Clem. She grieved at his death about as much as I did. That impressed me deeply.

When I left for college, she gave me several old books that belonged to her. One was a devotional book that I still use every day. The other books I have appreciated more in recent years than I did then.

Last summer I was in LaGrange for my high school reunion. As soon as I arrived in town, I promptly went to the nursing home where Miss Gaines lived. She was hardly responsive at first until I identified myself because she could no longer see. When I gave my name, her arms came straight up in the air. She grabbed me and nearly pulled me into the bed with her. As exciting as that reunion weekend was for me, seeing Miss Gaines may have been the highlight.

In our conversation that day she laughed about all the retirement checks she had received even though she retired much later than most people. She said, "They didn't know what they were getting into with someone who is living this long. But, I have signed every one." She asked about every member of my family by name.

As for 51 years, Miss Gaines molded the minds of young children. She taught them the ABCs and how to add and subtract. Yet, she taught them so much more. The passing on of values and the strengthening of character was a part of her curriculum. It was not just a job. It was her life and she gave to each of those thousands of students more than they could appreciate at the time. No teacher contract could guarantee that kind of dedication. If we, as one psychologist has said, can be divided into "givers" and "takers," Miss Gaines was a true "giver."

She never shatted a backboard, nor sold Nikes and hamburgers. There was never a front-page contract. In fact, her passing was just like she lived; quiet, dignified, filled with honor. During her 102 years she gave a whole lot more than she took. She will be missed.

Maybe Shaq has his realm of influence too. I don't know. The Lakers seem to think so. Maybe he will encourage kids to follow their dreams. Kids also need to be taught to use their heads. This I do know. When I think of true heroes, my thoughts turn to a white-haired lady who shared an important chunk of my early years. I just wish she could have met Dooly, my dog now. They would have been good friends.
Remember that time is short

If you have ever read the seventh chapter of 1 Corinthians, you are aware of the rather interesting instructions that Paul gives to the Corinthian church.

Paul is anticipating an imminent return of Christ and, as a result, gives them guidelines that sound quite dogmatic.

"If you are married, stay married. If you are unmarried, do not marry," he writes. "Those who have wives should live as though they had none. And I would not touch that with a ten-foot pole!" Those who believe in this do not; those who are happy as if they were not.

And the unusual instructions continue on, most of which make little sense unless you keep in mind a statement of Paul which is found right in the middle of the text. He writes, "What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short." As a context for everything they do, they are to remember that time is short.

Pull this word by Paul from its immediate circumstance and it still has value for us today. That this is a statement about the time is short. Such a statement would add to our anxiety or give us reason to be paranoid. There is simple wisdom in the fact that we are to just conduct our earthly journey with the thought in mind that "time is short." As a context for everything they do, they are to remember that time is short.

If we kept this in mind, do you think it might influence the way we relate to each other? Do you think it might prompt us to reconcile strained feelings...?
Remember that time is short

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Paul is anticipating an imminent return of Christ and, as a result, gives them guidelines that sound quite dogmatic.

"If you are married, stay married. If you are unmarried, do not marry." He writes, "Those who have wives should love as though they had none." (And I would not touch that with a ten foot pole.) Those who are married they did not those who are happy did they were not.

And the unusual instruction continue on most of which make little sense unless you keep in mind a statement of Paul which is found right in the middle of the text. He writes, "That I may, brethren, the time is short." As a context for everything they do, they are to remember that time is short.

Pull this word by Paul from its immediate circumstance and it still has value for us today. But this I say, brethren, the time is short." Such a statement would not add to our anxiety nor give us reason to be paranoid. There is simple wisdom in the fact that we are to conduct our earthly journey with the thought in mind that "time is short." As a context for everything they do, they are to remember that time is short.

If we keep this in mind, do you think it might influence the way we relate to each other? Do you think it might prompt us to reconcile strained feelings that exist between us and someone else? We often do letting a miserable misunderstanding run on for years we are meaning to clear it up for some who we who are keeping these differences alive because we cannot quite make up our mind that may in the day to support our pride and change the direction of a relationship.

We pass other persons silently upon the street, not speaking out of some silly snipe. Yet we know that it would fill us with shame and remorse if we heard that one of these person were dead tomorrow morning. We who pride ourselves in not letting our neighbor snare will let our neighbor's heart ache for a word of appreciation or sympathy, which we mean to give him someday. We have the best of intentions to do things differently.

If only we could know and see and feel, all of a sudden that "time is short," how it would break the spell! How we would instantly and do the time which we might never have another chance to do.

The poet, D. M. Craig, once penned the following words:

I sometimes feel the threat of life is slender.

And soon with me the labor will be fraught.

Then grow my heart to other hearts more tender.

The time is short.

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Remember that time is short

If you have ever read the seventh chapter of I Corinthians, you are aware of the rather interesting instructions that Paul gives to the Corinthian church.

Paul is anticipating an imminent return of Christ and, as a result, gives them guidelines that sound quite doomatic:

"If you are married, stay married. If you are unmarried, don't marry." He writes, "Those who have wives should live as though they had none." And I would not touch that with a ten-foot pole. "These who are engaged should get on with it. Those who are happy are as they were not."

And the unusual instructions continue on, most of which make little sense unless you keep in mind a statement of Paul which is found right in the middle of the text. He writes, "What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short." As a context for everything they do, they are to remember that time is short.

Pull this word by Paul from its immediate circumstance and it still has value for us today. But first I say, brethren, the time is short. Such a statement would not add to our anxiety nor give us reason to be paranoid. There is simple wisdom in the fact that we are to just conduct our earthly journey with the thought in mind that "time is short." As a context for everything they do, they are to remember that time is short.

If we keep this in mind, do you think it might influence the way we relate to each other? Do you think it might prompt us to reconcile strained feel-
One of the hazards of being a little on the obsessive-compulsive side is that you always have a fairly clear idea of how you want things to be. Obsessive-compulsive folks always have a plan. It may be wrong, but we have a plan. You can disagree with us. You can raise all kinds of questions about the wisdom of what we want, but you can never accuse an obsessive-compulsive of not knowing what they want.

The hazard that we face is that we become myopic to everything except that which fits in with our game plan. Life is measured and evaluated on whether or not it fits with our predetermined scheme. Tunnel vision and dead senses are the inevitable result, and so much of life is absolutely missed. We miss the spontaneous sights, sounds and experiences around us because we are so preoccupied with life's plan.

Into all our lives, in many simple and familiar ways, God infuses this element of joy from the surprises of life which unexpectedly brighten our days. In ways that occasionally require some awareness, God adds his own sweetness into his children's cup and makes it run over.

The surprise may take the form of the success we were not counting on, the blessing we were not seeking, the sound of music in the midst of drudgery, the beautiful morning or the glory of the sunset thrown in as we pass to or from our daily work. It may be the unsolicited word of encouragement from a friend, the sentence we read from an anonymous writer, something said by a faceless person from the radio, and the list of possibilities goes on. Our days are filled with these potential surprises if only we are open to them and sensitive to their possibility.

You may classify these experiences as coincidence; they often are. You may call it human goodness; it often is. But always call it God's love, for that is always in it. These are only a few of the overflowing riches of his grace; these are his free gifts. The unfortunate problem is that we are frequently too preoccupied with the progress of our game plan to enjoy them.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point and also a clinical member of the American Association Of Marriage and Family Therapists.
SBI looks into local licensing

By Nick Maheras
STAFF WRITER

The head of the international United Full Gospel Church, based in Thomasville, rejects the state's right to regulate counseling licensure of its pastors.

The Rev. Maston Love Jr., who said he's general overseer of the church's more than 200 congregations around the world, pastors the United Full Gospel Church that meets in the Old Kern Street School in Thomasville. Love is also president of the Carolina Christian University, which has remodeled the facility and offers degrees in religious studies there.

The State Bureau of Investigation is investigating whether one of the boards of which Love is a member has provided false information to secure counseling licenses.

North Carolina requires counselors to be licensed by a state-recognized board if they counsel for a fee, according to the N.C. Attorney General's office.

The North Carolina Board of Christian Counselors and Therapists, operated by Love through the United Full Gospel Church, is not licensed by the state.

Love, however, disputes the state's right to govern licensing of pastoral counselors because such authority, he said, abridges the freedom of religion guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. The 53-year-old retired U.S. Army officer said he will oppose the effort to govern the licensing board's activities all the way to the N.C. Supreme Court if necessary.

"My concern is that freedom of religion is being taken away in the state of North Carolina," Love said. "The state is creating laws that govern religious activities. The board could not be licensed by the state if it wanted to. To license the board, the state would have to dictate religious activities."

"The state has created its own church and its own pastoral counseling association to dictate the movements of ministers. That's against state bylaws and the (U.S.) Constitution. It has its own licensing board for its own pastors. I'm concerned that the ministers in the Thomasville area and North Carolina don't seem to be concerned."

Love is referring to the Fee-Based Practicing Pastoral Counselors Board. It doesn't matter to the state, he said, whether pastors charge fees for their counseling or not. Any pastoral counseling appears to violate state law, according to Love.

"Fees don't make any difference," he said, "if you do anything other than preaching. The state of North Carolina wants the preacher to do nothing but to stay behind the pulpit."

The board licenses only the church's pastors, Love said, and those licenses are intended only to cover them within the walls of their individual churches while providing pastoral counseling.

Many pastors counsel members of their own congregation as a matter of course in their ministry.

The Rev. Al Cadenhead, senior pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point, said most pastors do not charge for their counsel. Cadenhead is a clinical member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists — as is Love.

"There are a lot of ministers who do counseling without any credentials other than having to go to seminary," Cadenhead said. "The counseling I do, I do not charge for — not because of reasons related to liability or credentials. It is because it's an outreach ministry of this church.

"Most pastors do not charge simply because it's a form of their ministry. They do not have to have a license. A license is a state credential that says you have undergone training and have passed board exams. That license does allow you to advertise. It's (obtaining a license) a long, drawn-out process."

Love flatly denies that the church's licensing board provided any false information to secure counseling licenses.

"Where did we give them false information at?" Love asked. "We're not trying to hide anything. We don't have nothing to hide."

Love, himself a military chaplain, is recognized by the U.S. Air Force as an endorser of United Full Gospel Church chaplains.

He said the church's counseling licensure board has been granted the right to operate by the state.

"The board has written a letter asking for the statutory rights to operate," Love said. "We have documentation — a letter from Secretary of State Rufus Edmisten — that we have the right to operate."
Be a good steward; use time wisely

The last few weeks of summer have a way of putting us in a series of mad scrambles.

We made all kinds of plans that vary from house repairs to trips to reserving time for leisure, and now we must push to get it all in before the leaves start falling and the school year controls the routine.

As yet, many of those plans have not come about. Now we realize that the summer is almost gone; and if we are to get those things done, we had better gear up and get with it.

The result of it all is an annual mad scramble. We face the usual problem of too much to do and not enough time to get it done. And this dilemma causes us to focus upon a problem that is much larger than summer. It is a problem that I have written about several times in recent weeks because it so dominates the comments I hear from you each day. It is the problem of too little time.

There are times when we forget that time is like any other resource.

It is not endless and we are charged with being good stewards of our time. It is not unlimited and, like our money, we can only spend it once. The challenge, therefore, for each of us becomes the wise use of our time.

Most of us have faced the fact that since our money is not endless, we must make decisions as to where it goes. In our decision process we must decide on one thing over another.

Our time must be approached the same way. Most of us find time to do the things we really want to do. Somehow, we find a way. Therefore, the real issue is not our limited time but our priorities in using it.

We are all granted 24 hours in a day and the real challenge is to make sure that our priorities are in the right order. If we have been "shorting" our families, our church, or whatever, it is because we have chosen to do so.

So much of our personal happiness depends upon our wise stewardship of time. Like so many other things in life, it is a matter of what is important.

Now, with that said and done, let's go back to the mad scramble of these last few days of summer. The leaves will be green for only a short while longer.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point, and also a clinical member of the American Association Of Marriage and Family Therapists.
Act of confession is tied to process of forgiveness

It is not a coincidence that in almost every religious tradition the act of confession is tied to the process of forgiveness. That certainly is the case for those of us who believe in the redemptive power of Christ and the cross. Forgiveness of sin hangs, in part, upon our willingness to confess that sin. Confession is essential. Is confession a result of God's need to rub our faces in our misdeeds? That is clearly not the case.

The role of confession is obvious: to be forgiven of certain behaviors we must first claim responsibility for those behaviors. Yet, claiming responsibility for one's life and actions is not something that is affirmed and encouraged by our world today. The norm today is rather to point the finger at someone else and blame them. This refusal to accept the responsibility for our actions is a cancer that will eat the heart out of our society. We don't have to feel any sting of guilt in today's world because we can blame it on the way our parents raised us or because our environment deprived us of what we really deserved in life.

There is an even more recent trend that is becoming routine news. I am intrigued by the various lawsuits that are being filed against the tobacco industry by smokers who are experiencing poor health. Several suits have been won in recent days, holding the tobacco industry responsible for the addictive nature of cigarette smoking. Last week a suit was filed by a man who experienced a heart attack while wearing a "patch" and continued to smoke even though the instructions clearly stated that one must not wear the "patch" and smoke at the same time.

Now, hear me and understand something. My comments are not a diatribe against the evils of smoking. That is not the ax I wish to grind. Smoking is a choice that adults have the right to make. If you choose to smoke and do it in a way that is not a health hazard to anyone else, that is your right and your choice. But, it is a choice that one makes, and one should take responsibility for the consequences that emerge from such a habit.

When I was a little boy, my mother caught me smoking one day behind the house. She gave me four reasons why I should not smoke. She said it would give me cancer. Cigarettes were bad for the heart. They are habit forming. The fourth reason was that my dad would probably beat me to death if he caught me doing it again. That was 40 years ago. Now, people are suddenly holding the tobacco industry responsible for resulting health problems. If you want to smoke, fine. But claim responsibility for that choice.

I have an old Mustang that has 120 on the speedometer and it is probably capable of traveling that fast. If I am speeding around a curve that is clearly marked 35 mph and lose control, can I sue Ford Motor Co. for building a car that goes so fast? Or am I responsible for my actions? My personal physician has warned me repeatedly about my cholesterol count. Can I sue Jimmy Dean because I habitually eat pork that works against my cholesterol count?

Where does it stop? When do we claim responsibility for ourselves and stop blaming everyone else for our decisions in life? I suppose it is a habit that is about as old as mankind. The Genesis account of the garden paints an image of Eve pointing a finger at the serpent and the Adam pointing a finger at Eve. It's always someone else who is responsible.

We live in a day when this trend is very dangerous. There can never be healing or reconciliation or redemption in life's broken places until there is a claiming of responsibility. There is plenty of "brokenness" found in our homes, communities, and relationships.

Claiming responsibility is as simple as owning and disowning, each of which is equally important. And, it can't be done with the fingers pointed outward.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor of First Baptist Church in High Point and also a clinical member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists.
Cultivate habit of sympathy

St. Paul was writing the church in Rome long ago and he exhorted them, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." For the strong and macho type, that instruction sounds like we are picking up something, lifting a burden for a weaker person, and I suppose that is always a possibility. Yet, some of the most important gifts that we might offer are not big and heavy.

Long before Paul's day a man named Isaiah said, "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." It could be that the bearing of infirmity of the weak might take the form of a word offered in the right season. At first it would appear that the offering of a mere word at just the right time offers little that is heroic. Yet, if you have ever been that person who is weary, you know how a simple word at just the right time can make the difference between despair and holding on.

Something else, however, is necessary before we can really speak that word at the critical time. We must first be sensitive to those needs that surround us. Most of us are oblivious to everything that does not ultimately benefit us. A 19th century author by the name of George Wilkinson wrote, "Cultivate the habit of sympathy." Such a word really struck me. I never really thought about sympathy being a discipline.

The key to being sympathetic is honestly trying to put yourself in another's place. "What would I like were I in that person's shoes?" "What would I like if I were lonely or sick or sad?" You might guess wrong occasionally but more times than not you "will bear the infirmity of the weak."

"Cultivate the habit of sympathy." I never thought much about sympathy being a habit. There is no reason why it could not be. And, sympathy must always precede the strong and learned bearing the infirmities of the weak and weary.

J.C. Whittier once wrote:
"If there be some weaker one, Give me strength to help him on; If a blinder soul there be, Let me guide him nearer Thee."

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Inevitable events feel like surgery

Life is just that way, but it still goes on

In past years I have had surgery at least a half-dozen times, maybe more. Surgeons look at me and smile. They see payments on their BMWs.

Several of these operations were results of accidents. There was no choice to be made. They were absolutely necessary. And, those types of operations may be the easiest. There is no waiting, no decision making. It all happens quickly.

Then, like many of you, I had those kinds of surgeries that are planned in advance. There is a problem of some sort. It may be something that must be removed or a correction of some type of problem. You schedule the procedure for a date in the immediate future. Then you wait.

In the meantime you feel better and begin to question why you ever scheduled this surgery to begin with. The doctor tells you that it is inevitable, it is necessary; and, even though you will experience some pain as a part of the process, you will be glad you went through this after some time has passed. He promises it.

To make matters worse, on the day of the surgery you feel absolutely fine. Why not leave well enough alone? Why do something that cause pain when everything seems okay, like it is?

These are a few of the inevitable questions that come to mind. Many of you know exactly what I am talking about. You've been there.

In many ways this past Tuesday seemed much like the same kind of experience. There was no surgery, at least not physically. And it was no emergency. In fact, it has been planned for 18 years. I have been told by those wiser and older than I that it is best, it is inevitable; and even though you will experience some pain as part of the process, you will be glad you went through this after some time has passed. They promise it.

I tried to remember this when I watched our daughter's red Volks-wagen drive out of the yard on Tuesday as she headed for college. We've been through this before, but it was never the last one, nor was it a "helpless little girl."

Deep in my heart I know it is the right thing and that "wellness" is the result. It's the way it should be. But, just as with surgery, why cause pain when everything seems okay? I know. It is just best. But, this week it really does feel like surgery. The only problem is that they forgot to administer the anesthesia.

The writer of Ecclesiastes tried to tell us that life consists of many kinds of experiences, tasks that are opposites and the emotions that accompany them. A time to be born and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, and the list goes on.

One thing the writer of Ecclesiastes forgot to tell us. He forgot to warn us that there are those events in life when we experience all of those emotions in the very same moment.

Life is just that way; and, life goes on. In the meantime it still feels like surgery, and they forgot the anesthesia.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point and also a clinical member of the American Association Of Marriage and Family Therapists.
Laughter is one of God’s gifts to us

I was going through some old tapes in my car recently. Whenever I open the dash pocket, they always fall out on the floor, which I truly believe is the result of a conspiracy. Every auto manufacturer secretly pays a high priced engineer to design dash pockets so that they always empty the contents on the floor. They have been doing it for years.

Anyway, most of these tapes haven't been played in years. One of them was recorded by an old friend, Grady Nutt. I knew Grady from seminary days and followed him closely as he moved from just being an uncommonly funny preacher to a nationally known comedian who appeared regularly on "Hee Haw." Grady was one of the funniest persons I have ever known, on stage and off. As many of you know, Grady was killed in a plane crash several years ago.

I took the old tape with me on a trip recently and played it several times. I laughed just as much as the first time I ever heard his stories. In fact, one of the advantages of driving alone is that you can laugh and carry on, like a crazy man and not have to answer to anyone, except the guy who might be passing you in the left lane and gives you a really strange look.

Grady told me once that he was not a comedian. He was a humorist, and there is a big difference. He would look at himself, at life, and at reality and see the humor that was an inherent part of it all. There was never a hint of sadistic intent to his humor. Rather, he

laughter. To the surprise of everyone, Cousins recovered from the illness. Needless to say, questions were raised as to whether his care worked or if he would have gotten better anyway. Still, it points to the positive effects of wholesome laughter.

Psychologists indicate that laughter relieves tensions, works against stress, and has a way of cleansing the psychological system. In fact, it is said that a good "belly laugh" has a positive effect on the body for 25 minutes. Just think of the money we could save on Valium and aspirin!

Most of us are so serious all the time. In fact, I am convinced that the majority of us take ourselves entirely too seriously. And while I do not believe God intended for us to take life lightly because life is a serious matter, I am thoroughly convinced that honest laughter is one of God's best gifts to us. It may be that in our "brow-wrinkled" way of taking life so seriously, we may be giving God a big laugh himself.
Attitude of hope opens many doors

As a "man of the cloth" it would be inappropriate if I did not occasionally talk about sin. Is that not what preachers do?

Well, today I want to come down hard on one sin in particular, even though some explanation might be required as to why it could be called a sin. Whether we are talking about the realm of our own personal world or that of the family, there is a sin that creeps in and takes so much of the life out of living. It happens to be the sin of despair. Allow me to explain.

Any quick look at our own life and those around us reminds us of the great need for a word of hope. So much of what we see and hear gives us a very gloomy picture of the future. Listen to the evening news. Read the newspaper. Go to a movie! From a worldly perspective, it appears that we are heading toward an energyless, computerized and emotionless society. On a more personal level we must contend with the gloomy forecast of the increase in divorce, suicide and the ultimate collapse of the family.

If we listen to only this side of the record, we can become very sick persons. And, if we allow, despair can become a primary component of everyday living. Afterall, like the writer of Ecclesiastes, we reviewed it all, and despair seems to be the only resolve that makes sense.

However, there is flip side to that record. It is the message that reminds us that hope is not a thing of the past, and that a future exists for each one of us. It is the belief that what we may be experiencing at the moment is not all there is. It is realizing that all kinds of possibilities for a brighter future are resident in any given moment. With all of the dark clouds we must contend with today despair is probably the easiest stance to take. Yet, an attitude of hope opens all kinds of doors.

Earlier I referred to despair as a sin. I make such a reference very carefully because the last thing I want to do is make someone who is dealing with the loss of hope have guilt added to their load because they have now committed a sin. That is not my intent.

On the other hand, we must be honest with ourselves. If we truly believe that God is in control of this world, that He is actively involved, and that He really does care, then what are we saying with our attitude of despair?

It would appear that we are saying God is powerless to do anything about our situation, that He has lost control, or that He has run out of resources. To believe that "what has been" is "all there is" and that it is all down hill from here on is to commit the sin of despair. This attitude, in a level deeper than words, says that God is helpless to deal with our future. At that point we are treading on dangerous ground.

Regardless of our age and situation there is a future, one better and brighter than the past even though it may be shrouded in mystery at the moment. It is a real future and not a product of our imagination. Like most other things in life, however, it has to be claimed.

The bottom line is that despair is a thief. Quietly, subtly and tragically despair steals the joy from our lives, the skip out the our step, and the light from our path. Life becomes burdensome, directionless, and purposeless. And such an existence was never intended by God. We pay a heavy price and so does every member of our household.

We live in a world of causes. Causes apparently motivate people, institutions, and the human race. Why not get with all the people in your household and together join the fight against the crime of despair?

Al Cadenhead is the pastor of First Baptist Church in High Point and also a clinical member of the American Association Of Marriage and Family Therapists.
Marriage takes work in the real world

Al Cadenhead

Stories of fantasy like that of Cinderella are great for children; but when you apply them to a “real life” marriage, there are some inherent problems that emerge. I can think of one problem in particular. The mythical romances of the fairy stories paint a picture of marriage that is not necessarily true.

In fairy tales it seems that when the stars of heaven are in the proper place and all the conditions are just right, the characters of the story fall in love and then there follows a misleading phrase, “They lived happily ever after.” The impression is that since the conditions were there in the beginning the logical conclusion was that, “they lived happily ever after.”

First of all, people don’t fall in love because the stars happen to be in a certain place. They fall in love because in God’s goodness they meet each other’s needs.

In the second place, they don’t just automatically live happily ever after. A good marriage does not just happen automatically. A good marriage happens because two people are constantly working like crazy to make it happy.

I refuse to believe that we are so naive to think that marital bliss comes from anything less than hard work. I’m all for romance. It adds a quality to marriage that is irreplaceable. On the other hand, when a marriage is happy, I can point you to two people who are working. When it is not happy, I can point you to at least one and possibly

(See ROMANCE of 5B)
Faith

ROMANCE: Takes work

(from 4B)

two persons who have quit working at the relationship.

Two people fall in love because they do something for each other. They meet each other’s needs; and when they stop working to meet those needs, problems arise. It is made even more critical because as we grow older, the needs change.

People don’t just accidentally live “happily ever after.” It happens because people work at it. Make no mistake about it, it is a worthwhile investment.

There is nothing wrong with the stars being lined up just right and the whole universe affirming the chemistry of a relationship. The drawing of two people toward each other is a part of God’s plan. There is nothing evil about romance. But, romance is only half of the equation. The other half might best be described as the sweat of the brow, in other words, hard work.

Which brings me back to where this started. If you do not believe that work is a requirement for a happy marriage, you had better stay in the land of fairy tales.

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The week before last was a rather historic moment for the many who through the years have followed and supported the ministry of Billy Graham. His crusade was a major news issue in our state. Along with a bus load of my church members, I attended the opening service of the crusade in Charlotte, and I am glad that I did.

It was a decision made with some hesitation simply due to the issue of time. There were just other things that needed to be done. But, it was a historic moment, and I really wanted to witness the event. I am so glad that I went.

It was historic in that Billy Graham came "home" to do the crusade. There was certainly no hesitation among state leaders to claim Graham as home-grown. The accolades were plentiful and well deserved.

The crusade was historic also because in the minds of most people, there is the assumption that he will not be able to continue for much longer. In spite of his positive attitude, age and health are forces that are hard to redirect. And even now, it appears to signal the close of an era of evangelism that has never been equaled in modern history.

Many of us have been raised with Billy Graham as a synonym for evangelism. The eventual passing of his torch is just another of the many passages that seem to be coming in numbers as we close out this century.

The crusade was big, too big for the liking of some. Many are turned off by the magnitude of the Graham organization. Yet, what is wrong with numbers? There is something magical about a group of more than 70,000 people collecting in one place for any reason. To gather that kind of group for worship makes it even more impressive. There is nothing wrong with numbers.

Some are turned off by the production mentality of a crusade. What is wrong with that? We will pay $40 a ticket to listen to a musician or entertainer, drive infinite miles, fight crowds, sit in the rain and never give a thought about size of the production that we are buying into. We buy tickets to sporting events months in advance and go to endless trouble just to sit and watch something that has very limited benefit. Worship has just as much right to production as anything else.

There is another dynamic in the Billy Graham crusade phenomenon that lies at the heart of the interest he creates. One cannot help but ask the question, "Why the appeal?" Why does the prospect that one individual will be stepping up to a pulpit have the ability to draw 70,000 people each night and practically shut down a major southern city? How can one person have that kind of appeal? And the truth is that the reason is more than just history or nostalgia. It is the result of an issue much more critical in our society.

It has to do with respect, integrity, dignity and the absolute starvation of people in our culture for someone to represent these kinds of values. Graham has for so many people come to represent the best of these. His life and ministry have been so visible for half a century and have not fallen prey to the disappointing temptations of so many in his business.

I am not recommending Billy Graham for sainthood. That is not my goal. I am simply pointing to a dynamic that was operative in Charlotte as thousands went to enormous
We cannot be useless while doing God's will

Some of life's biggest challenges do not necessarily come at the point of a great crisis when all of our energies and resources must be directed toward a force that is threatening our health or safety. As demanding as those experiences may be, some of the most difficult times come when we are forced to wait. We feel restless and appear to have little opportunity to change our circumstances.

Such moments could very well leave us with a sense of despair and feelings to uselessness. Waiting can seldom ever be claimed as rest. Rest rarely finds its way into lives that are uneasy and when circumstances create doubts about one's worth. I am convinced that these kinds of times test our faith just as much as the big crisis that is observable and known by all around us. In fact, they may be harder for that very reason, few people know and we get less affirmation and encouragement. As one writer has referred to it, "It is the hard journey of developing the patience of the saints."

Yet, at the very moment when we are resigning to a sense of uselessness and despair, we should keep some very important facts in mind. First, we cannot be useless while we are doing God's will, whatever it may be found to be. And we can always do that.

If we are bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit, we are not useless. And we can always do that. If we are increasing in the knowledge of God's will, we are not useless. And we can always do that.

While we pray, we cannot be useless. And we can always do that. God will always find us work to do, a niche to fill, a place to serve, when it is His will and not ours that we desire to do. That role may never take us from the confines of our house or room or sick bed.

We may discover that the greatest challenge of all in life is to wait. Not just waiting on something big and grand and glorious, but waiting when further waiting may be all one can anticipate. To use the words of an older gentleman who was completely and permanently confined to his bed, "If it should please God that I should sit still for the rest of my life, I will claim that as my calling and not complain." Such an attitude is unquestionably the mark of a saint.

The Psalmist described this task quite well. In Psalm 37 he said, "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him." The writer Susan Coolidge once penned the following words:

Is it the Lord that shuts me in? Then I can bear to wait!
No place so dark, no place so poor,
So strong and fast no prisoning door,
Though walled by grievous fate,
But out of it goes fair and broad
An unseen pathway, straight to God,
By which I mount to Thee.

Such an attitude about life sounds fairly easy here at the desk. Living with that kind of spirit and attitude is a challenge indeed.

Al Cadenhead
Success of the day is left in your hands

With rare exception do I omit the request in my early morning prayers that God give me a good day. The words are more than just a habit. I really think it is okay to ask God for a good day. I have to believe that He finds a little piece of pleasure as well in my day being a pleasant one.

If there is any danger involved, it is the tendency to take a rather passive approach to such a request, the tendency to assume that a good day is something done for me, that I am merely the recipient of a nice day, a day when things go according to my plan. Such an attitude has a way of excluding me as a major player in the outcome of the day.

Many of my best lessons come not from the classic thinkers in history but from my contemporaries whose wisdom is often overlooked in the hustle of everyday life. Such a lesson came recently.

I try to get to my office a little past seven each morning. The early hours are usually my most productive. On Monday mornings, I am always greeted by our housekeeping staff, who are already in my office cleaning and dusting, which they do so faithfully. Doris, in particular, is always cheerful, talkative and pleasant, always inquiring about how the weekend went. There is only so much she can do to create a good day for me. She had done her part. The rest was up to me.

Obviously, there are circumstances that make having a good day easier. When everything goes according to plan, the chances are better. For the most part, however, the success of our day depends on us. We must ultimately be responsible. We should not assume a passive role and depend upon everyone else to do our job.

We cannot always select what comes our way. It may be pleasant and welcomed. It may be unwanted and not all what we would choose for ourselves or loved ones. Yet, we always have a choice as to how we respond to our circumstances and the events that surround us. I truly believe that God wants our day to go well. Into each day He allows some sunshine and some rain. He even told us that in this life “there will be tribulation.” Whatever else it means, it means that things will not always go our way.

The major factor in the outcome of each day is not what the world does to us, but how we respond to all that comes our way. We can assume a victim’s stance and be passive all day long. Or, we can claim some responsibility for our lives and those close to us and do what we can to make it as good a day as possible.

I will continue to ask God to give me a good day. Along with that request is the realization that much of the success of my day is left in my hands. Whether it is a good day or not is partly my responsibility.

So, on this fall day when beauty surrounds us like a picture, I say to you that I hope this day is a good one. And to use Doris’ postscript, “I have done all I can for you.”

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point and also a clinical member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists.
Surely the Psalmist must have written Psalm 8 during this time of year. With great emotion he says, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.” How can you look at the landscape during this time of year and not offer the same words of praise?

Last Saturday we attended the Furman homecoming game in Greenville, S.C. The stadium is located at the base of Paris Mountain and is completely surrounded by hardwoods that contained every color imaginable. The sky was as blue as I have ever seen; and right in the middle of the blue sky was the big, lolly, white moon. The scene was absolutely breathtaking. And, the fact that we were beating the Citadel did not take away from the moment!

One does not have to make a trip to mountains to see the beauty of the season. Just look around. North Carolina is alive with color and beauty. It can be found on the streets where we live as well as the hills that surround us. Every year about this time God seems to outdo Himself. Fall is a beautiful season.

It is also at this time each year when I am reminded of another gift that He has created. We often take this gift for granted until its existence is threatened. The beauty of the season would be of little value to us without our eyes.

I do not understand how the eyes work. How can images that are in the outside world be reflected against something in our bodies? One thing I do understand; our eyes are special gifts from God. Yet, we abuse them, take them for granted and have little genuine appreciation for the role they play in our lives.

So, with the Psalmist, stop and look around and praise God for having “set His glory above the heavens.” Along with that praise, don’t forget to offer a word of thanks for the ability to see it.

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Bible tells us true love is sacrificial

I was doing some channel surfing recently and made a momentary stop on one of the 10,000 “tell it all” shows that fill the airways. Afterall, everybody has their own show. Think of everything you would never have discussed or said in public a few years ago and it is now welcomed on these hourlong sessions that usually consist of garbage. I think there will come a day when these kiss and tell “shows of honest sharing” will be placed in the same category as Kudzu and credit cards.

Anyway, on this particular program there was a man talking about how much he loved “his woman.” He went through a long litany of reasons as to why he loved her. He emphasized that she was “his woman” and that he loved her because she did everything just right for him. I don’t remember that he said much about what he did for her, but he loved her because of what she did for him.

Now, I am not criticizing a woman for doing things just right for her man. But, if the only reason we love someone is because of their doing things just right for us, we are operating on a rather shallow concept of love. The kind of love lifted up before us in the Bible is a lot more than that. It speaks of love being sacrificial, not counting the costs, self-emptying. That kind of love offered to someone is a whole lot more than loving someone just because they do things right for us. What happens when, due to circumstances, they can no longer do things for us, right or wrong.

Suzanne and I were eating in a restaurant recently. Seated at a table next to us was a group of people, including a very impressive couple. They were senior in years. The husband was obviously suffering from some type of mental problem. My strong guess would be that he was suffering from Alzheimer’s. He was not able to mix in the conversation very much, but sat quietly with hands that were quite shaky. He was perfectly groomed and dressed, probably by someone else. His wife made every effort to include him in the conversation, always speaking lovingly and gently to him and about him. There was never a hint of embarrassment nor shame implied to his condition. Dignity defined every word and comment.

Without drawing any attention, the wife regularly cut his food and placed it on a fork, allowing him to eat slowly by himself as best he could. She never
opportunity to witness such a gentle display of love and compassion. I was moved by what I saw. I am also convinced that the type of love offered by this kind lady to her husband was much closer to the Biblical concept of love than the guy who was telling the world that he loved "his woman" because of the way she did things just right for him. In fact, he could learn a lesson about real love and dignity from the lady I briefly met the other night.

They are not even in the same league.
Many of us have vision problems

Some woes are not due to illness

In recent months a number of my friends and acquaintances have encountered problems with their peripheral vision. It is just a matter of coincidence that it has happened to several people.

Peripheral vision is a gift we take for granted until it is diminished for some reason. In each case with the persons I've known recently the most immediate problem had to do with driving an automobile.

With one friend in Augusta, the impaired peripheral vision was a result of a deteriorating nerve disease. She gave up driving all together. Another friend's vision was impaired due to a vascular problem that could not be corrected. While he had to give up driving, he continued right on with his golf. It did wonders for his slice!

The problem has occurred with several other friends in recent days and, as a result, peripheral vision has been on my mind lately. It is something that we really do take for granted.

Around the country there has been concern among those who make our auto driving tests over this issue. They are constantly trying to find ways to determine how much we can see. How much can you see out of the side of your eyes? If you have "tunnel vision," seeing only what is straight ahead, driving a car can be very unsafe.

We might apply this same question and concept to our living. While we must have our eyes on our own responsibilities and on our own family, beyond that how much can we see on the side? Jesus often referred to those who have eyes but really do not see and those who have ears but do not hear.

Another way to put this would be to ask, "How big is your world? How broad are your concerns? How sensitive and aware are you to those around you in your church, your place of business, your community?" Do you have peripheral or tunnel vision?

The kind of vision problems we face in our daily living are not due to a medical problem. They are a result of our over committed, fast paced, relentless life style. We are driven, goal oriented, and moving dead ahead. Who has time to look around? Most of us might as well be living our lives while looking through a tube. We see very little else.

The 10th chapter of Luke describes Jesus as sending out His disciples and he makes a statement to them, "Then turning to the disciples he said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes which see what you see!' " The truth is that many of us do not see very much.

Which brings me back to where I started. A number of my friends have recently been faced with peripheral vision problems. They can attribute their impairment to some type of medical problem. There are lot more of us who suffer from a similar problem. The difference is that we do not have an excuse.

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There have been a number of stories and reports in the news recently about the increasing violence in the streets. By referring to “streets” I do not mean gang violence or robbery or personal assault. Instead, I am talking about the violence that takes place as we drive from home to work or just from point A to point B.

There have been several shocking programs on television in the last few weeks presenting the disturbing statistics of the increase of violence that takes place while we are under the steering wheel of a car. Remember, also, that we are not talking about New York turnpikes or L.A. freeways. We are talking about the streets of our own towns of High Point, Greensboro and Winston-Salem.

Since man was able to climb on the back of a horse, we have used transportation as an opportunity for venting our frustrations. The advent of high speed cars has served only to make those frustrations more lethal. Our streets and highways have become battlegrounds and the problem seems to be getting worse.

I do not raise this issue because I am innocent of any charges raised recently by these alarming trends. My family will be the first to admit that I suffer from a temper that is as volatile as any. It is a constant struggle for me, especially while driving my car. As a preacher, my fear of unemployment causes me to issue forth restraint on the streets as well as other places. Never doubt, however, that is a constant struggle for me, especially when some imbecile whose I.Q. equals the number of tires on his car pulls in front of me, or worse, rides my bumper.

I was on N.C. 68 a few weeks ago on my way to Thomasville. I was in the right lane and needed to get in the left lane rather than be forced to turn onto Business 85. Traffic was heavy but there was room to my left. As I signaled, the man behind me immediately sped up to keep me from getting in the left lane. I still was able to get in with no hindrance to anyone. The man then changed lanes and pulled up to my right side and in the fast moving traffic proceeded to go into a fit. I recognized some of what he was saying because I have not spent my entire life at church study. Some of it I could not distinguish. I'm going way out on a limb here and assume he was probably not complimenting me on the previous week's column. This went on for a fairly long distance.

My inclination was to offer a challenge. Instead, I waited until just before turning left, and with him still shouting and waving his fist, I smiled and threw a kiss at him. He really went ballistic then.

This problem of increasing violence on the highways may be more of a frightening commentary on our society than we want to claim. The bottom line is that we are a very angry society and our low frustration threshold on the streets and highways is just one indication of the depth of the problem.

I want to respond to one comment made on a recent television program about this problem. One commentator stated that we should keep in mind that the person we become in the automobile is not really ourselves. We are just under a lot of stress and the stress causes us to behave differently.

I agree that the stress and tension causes us to behave differently, but I believe the opposite is true. I believe we may be experiencing more of the real self than we dare admit. While in the privacy and power of an automobile you can peel away some of the normal inhibitions that frequently limit behavior. Add a little stress and fatigue to the equation and you are getting close to who we really are on the inside rather than causing us to become someone else. The whole thought is more than a little scary.

Rather than take refuge in defense that our wearied stress has caused us to be someone else, we ought to be honest and admit that it has brought us uncomfortably close the real self. If we do not like the person who is driving our car, it might be a good thing to stop and take note.
Christ didn’t assume the worst about people

The teachings of Jesus are clear that while He was concerned about the outward forms of our behavior, He was equally concerned about the internal motives of our behavior. One cannot find a better example of that concern than in His teachings in what has been called the Sermon On The Mount. Time after time He exhorts us to consider why we behave as we do as well as how we behave.

One example of this instruction in His sermon is found in the seventh chapter of Matthew where He clearly states that we are not to judge. If we take that as just a cold, hard rule, we miss the point. After all, some judgments in life are necessary. Even in the verses that follow, we are instructed not to cast pearls before swine. How can we know when or when not to do that unless there are some judgments involved.

Jesus gives us a strong clue as to what He means when He says, “For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged.” On one hand, He does not mean that we are to relate to others in some lobotomized fashion where we use no judgment at all. Instead, I think He is calling attention to our tendency to be so quick to pass judgment on everyone around us.

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For example, we are so quick to pass judgment on those around us and presume their motives for certain actions. We operate as if we have a crystal ball that gives a clear window right into the heart of everyone. Yet, the truth is that usually we have very little idea as to the motivation of people we encounter. I think Jesus is saying that frequently we do not have enough information to make a judgment, and we seldom ever truly know the motives of someone even though we are always quick to assume the worst about them.

There are few things that irritate me more than for someone to quickly pass judgments on my motives when they don’t have a clue as to what I truly feel in my heart. Jesus is saying that if such an action bothers me, I should afford the same courtesy to those around me.

Why is it that we always assume the worst, seldom the best, about the behavior of people around us? We too quickly assume we know why they are doing certain things when in fact we do not have a clue as to their real motivation for certain behavior. We make accusations about their actions from observations that are limited and partial. We are hurt and enraged when people do not give us the benefit of the doubt and yet we seldom ever offer it as a gift. This is the case not only with our enemies but also with those we associate with every day.

The best example of this behavior is in the life of Jesus himself. He obviously made judgments along the way. He made decisions about His close circle of friends, decisions about those to whom He would invest Himself; and He even chose persons to whom He would confide His deepest thoughts. But, always with those close and with strangers alike He always offered the grace of giving people the “benefit of doubt.” They had to prove the worst before He would assume it.

We do right the opposite. We assume the worst about others until they prove otherwise. I really think this is a piece of what Jesus is suggesting in this part of the Sermon On The Mount.

The bottom line is that if Scripture is true, and I believe it is, the judgment that will be issued to many of us is going to be very harsh because of the judgments that we have offered to others in this lifetime. It is but one more example of how we define grace as something offered to us rather than something offered to others by us. In fact, some of us are in big trouble.

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Wrong turns count in long run

Al Cadenhead

Last Saturday evening there was a contemporary Christian music group presenting a concert in Greensboro. Because we have scheduled them to do a program at our church in the near future, I thought it would be a good opportunity to hear them and see what we might expect. They did a really good job, and I was relieved.

The concert was in a church in the northern part of the city. Getting there was a little problem for me, but you must keep in mind that a sense of direction was not one of my genetic gifts. We are talking about a guy who leaves the interstate for a hamburger and when he exits the hamburger place, cannot remember if he came in from the left or right.

Anyway, after the concert I chatted a while with some friends and made my way to the door. One person asked me, “Do you know how to get back to High Point from here?” I replied, “Of course I do.” After all, no self-respecting male would ever admit that he did not know where he was, and I really did have a fair idea of how to get back.

I aimed my car southward and hoped for a familiar landmark. I saw one and eventually found my way to Holden Road. I knew it would take me to Wendover. Wendover came into view very quickly, and I suddenly saw a sign indicating that I turn right. I was feeling pretty good and was going over in my mind the apology that Suzanne Holden Road. I knew it would take me to Wendover. Wendover came into view very quickly, and I suddenly saw a sign indicating that I turn right. I was feeling pretty good and was going over in my mind the apology that Suzanne might have made for her continual discourse on my absolute lack of directional sense. I’ve listened to it for 27 years.

I approached the sign and quickly turned right but almost immediately sensed that possibly I had turned right one street too early. Maybe it was just a long entrance ramp. After all, this is Greensboro, and everyone knows they put exit and entrance ramps only in places where they could be the most confusing. Instead of turning around, I kept going. I could see Wendover running parallel to me, but there was no entrance point.

My road began to bend more to the right, and Wendover was getting further away. I was determined not to stop and turn around. Sooner or later the road would take me back to familiar sights. Wendover disappeared completely. Obvious to me now, I had turned one road too soon. It was a simple turn, no major change of direction; it was just a brief, insignificant bad choice. Unfortunately, I was too far away to go back and correct it. Keep on going. “I can find my way out of this!” I drove on further.

After a few rights and lefts I surfaced on an access street to a shopping center. I had never seen any of these stores before. I found some comfort in that all the cars still had North Carolina license plates. I found another main road. Nothing was familiar. I tossed a coin in my mind and went right. I fully expected to see a sign any moment that said, “Richmond, 15 miles.” On the positive side, since moving to the area I have really wanted to spend some time in Virginia.

It was Saturday night, however, and my congregation probably would not be receptive to the news on Sunday morning that I was unexpectedly touring the Shenandoah Valley.

Finally, a sign appeared, “I-40, Left to Greensboro, Right to Winston.” Since I did not have a clue as to where I was, that sign was not a lot of help. I tossed another coin and decided that I would like to revisit Greensboro. It had been nearly a half hour since my last visit.

At last I recognized the landscape and found myself at the Wendover - I-40 intersection. But, I am an optimistic man. I was at least a couple of miles further down the road from the place where I tried to turn from Holden Road. That’s progress, even if I did tour northeastern America in the interlude. It was all due to one wrong turn, no big deal at the moment. That one harmless, wrong turn cost me a half hour of frustration.

I am reminded of the impact of bad choices made quickly and wrong turns taken, which at the moment seem harmless. Then we spend endless days and nights trying to find our way out.

Endless are the possibilities for those quick, insignificant, bad choices. It might be a moral choice that at the moment seems totally harmless, or an ethical decision based on the wrong motives, or a word spoken in haste, or a judgment made on limited evidence, or just a wrong turn made while preoccupied with another concern. The range is limitless.

My goal in this writing is not to offer this advice: Never assume that any choice or turn is insignificant. Life is filled with choices that may seem unimportant at the moment, yet hold the potential for redirecting the entire flow of our lives.

Care and thought should characterize every turn, especially if you are on Holden Road and are trying to get on Wendover.
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Needless to say, life is very difficult at times. Rainy days and gray skies are an occasional part of every person's world regardless of who we are or where we come from. Not a single soul is immune.

And when the bumps come, it is certainly not uncommon for us to call upon God to intervene. Yet, to adequately intervene and deal with us and our problems, there must be some understanding of our situation.

It is at this point, however, that a very significant question might be raised. How can a being such as God who has no limits to power appreciate what it is like to be weak and limited? How can one who is creator of time and space understand the dilemma of being a slave to time and space? Even if He can understand, how can we possibly relate to one who is so different and so far above us?

The people of the Old Testament were continually dealing with this distance problem. There was no doubt that God was real, but He was seen as a distant and powerful being to be feared. God may have dwelt in the world, but His perspective was so radically different that creation and creator were worlds apart. Now you and I have an advantage over people in that day. We have a different understanding of God since we are on this side of Christ's arrival. Because of God's advent through a man from Nazareth two thousand years ago, everything has changed.

There was no compromise involved. God lived among us and discovered what He already knew—that life is not easy. In fact, at times it is downright difficult. He experienced firsthand the pain of rejection and misunderstanding. He laughed, cried, walked, talked and loved as any other mortal man.

The story of God's incarnation is not just something constructed to make us feel better about life. The event is a historical fact and because of this fact of Christmas, one question has been answered forever. How can God appreciate our human frailty?

The reason—He can appreciate and empathize with us is that He has been here and knows firsthand what is going on. Because of Christmas, there should be no doubt in our minds that God is able to understand our problems. He has been in our midst and now can totally relate to life's inevitable bumps and jolts. Now, He can intervene and deal with our problems. To come to terms personally with such a realization is reason enough to deck the halls with holly and celebrate.

So, in the next few weeks when you are extremely stressed, overly committed and excessively fatigued, just remember the reason for all of this frenzy. He really does understand what life is like. I find great comfort in that fact.

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Story provides holiday message

Arrival of child can change life

An interesting story written many years ago by Bret Harte comes out of the early gold rush days of California entitled, "The Luck of Roaring Camp."

The story is about a baby born in a gold mining camp in the midst of crude, rugged men whose lifestyles reflected the hard conditions under which they lived.

The circumstances under which the baby came were totally unexpected. However, the beauty of the story was found in its description of the way the baby's presence changed the camp. The men wanted better conditions for the baby and they began to clean up the camp. They took showers with regularity, changed their language and even altered their drinking habits. With the transformation that took place the men discovered a dimension of life they had forgotten.

I find it interesting that the presence of a small baby could change the lives of rugged miners. Yet, for some reason they had a need to make conditions better for the presence of a child. I can only imagine the kinds of questions they might have raised in determining what changes would be necessary.

We are constantly searching for new images and paradigms for both our understanding of the Christmas event and our celebration of it. Is there a fresh new way of approaching this sacred season that would add new energy and insight to something we have observed many, many times?

Although it has no theological connection, "The Luck of Roaring Camp" might provide a new approach.

Just as the men in the mining camp were faced with the task of making changes to provide a better environment for a new baby, we might take a similar approach to Christmas. What if we replaced some of the hype and frantic rush with a serious examination of changes that might be appropriate in our camp for the arrival of a baby? After all, that is what all this activity is about, the arrival of a child.

The season of Advent is the call by the church to prepare for Christ's arrival. Just as with the arrival of any guests there are certain things that just need to be in order. The presence of a baby makes that preparation even more critical. That is what Advent is all about, getting ready, for a baby.

The men in the mining camp altered their dress, their language, and other physical changes that would create a better environment for the child. What kind of changes would be appropriate in our lives today to create a better environment for this One who comes to us as a child? It might be much more involved than dress or language.

The arrival of this child can have a life changing transformation for all who make the preparations. If a mining camp can be radically altered by the presence of a baby, think of the possibilities for the arrival of the Christ Child. Just ask yourself, "What changes do I need to make in order to provide a better environment for the birth of God's son? When you answer that question, you are getting real close to what Advent is all about.

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There must be an ending for a beginning to happen

I was talking several weeks ago with a mother who had just taken her child to his first day of school. As with most families it was an emotional experience for her as she realized that now—for the first time—the child would have experiences she would not be sharing with him. The hardest part, she said, was letting go of his hand and urging him into the class.

Many of us have shared the same kind of experience and it happens in many more circumstances than just the sending of a child to school. The beginning of a new year is a poignant reminder that time does not stand still; one season follows another in a regular, accelerated fashion. There are times when we, like the young mother, have to let go of something in order for the new to born. There must be an ending for every new beginning to take place.

Letting go means letting the past be the past. We cannot struggle to hold onto what lies behind and still expect to take hold of what lies ahead. Old jobs end and new ones begin; old relationships end and new ones begin. Each transition we go through alters the way we live our lives. New beginnings have the capability of making us quite anxious.

At all times, and especially in the New Year’s celebration, we are faced with two different temptations. One temptation is the overwhelming need to hold on to the past. The past is important. It has brought us to where we are today. As we seek to learn more about our past and understand it more clearly, we naturally come to a better understanding of ourselves. To ignore its lessons is to commit the same errors again and again. Such behavior is foolish indeed.

However, we must remember that the past is just that, the past. It is never to be a place where we live. To drop our anchor and try to hold on to it as our home is to be cut off from life. The past is a nice place to visit but never a good place to remain.

The biggest temptation for many of us may be the tendency to live our in from of ourselves. The tendency is so very real for us to always be ahead of ourselves, solving problems and answering questions that have not even been asked yet, and possibly never will. “What if I lose my job?” “What if I get cancer?” “Will my children remain healthy?” “Will I have to sell my house?” “Can I pay for the children’s education?”

If we are not careful, we can spend most of our days and nights living in times and circumstances that belong to the future. The problem with such a habit is fairly obvious and yet we still do it. One theologian has referred to it as “wandering in times not our own.” Even our Lord reminded us that “tomorrow will have troubles of its own.”

The temptation is always before us of being exiles in time. Either we are living in the past where their is nothing we can do to change it. It will always be the past.

Nostalgia can become very destructive of the present moment. We are an exile in time when our longing to return to the past separates us from our homeland of the present. The past and our memory are gracious gifts from God, but we were never intended to live there. To drop the anchor and try to hold on is a choice that ultimately leads to extreme frustration.

Likewise, to live ahead of ourselves and be anxious over problems and circumstances that have yet not occurred is just as fruitless.

So, look back on 1996 and be wise. Look forward to 1997 and be grateful. But, if you want to accomplish anything, sing a song, watch a sunset, enjoy a smile, hug your child, you better do it today.

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As we speed closer and closer to the turning of the new millenium, the newsmakers and bookshelves are being filled with prophets and trend-watchers. No one can doubt that these are interesting times, and I am not sore that anyone can make an accurate call on what the next few years will bring or even what these times will look like.

Some of the prophets are talking doomsday language. Others are filled with apprehension about the high-tech culture that has only begun to influence the days ahead. Still, others declare that the next few years will absolutely be the most exciting times in the history of mankind and that it might best be described as a ride in the nose cone of a rocket.

Regardless of where you are on the spectrum of predictions you might want to pay attention to a few wise visionaries who are offering some speculations and observations that should concern us. According to these observers of 20th century life, one trend that is occurring is the tendency to turn inward. Sounds harmless enough, but not really. Turning inward means redirecting our energies, time and resources toward ourselves and our own needs. This tendency is occurring on many levels.

Look at the way it is being played out on the national scene. The most devastating of circumstances causes concern for people outside its walls has now become inwardly focused with its attention and resources. Churches, today, have a much easier time raising money for structures and entertainment programs than for missions and starving people.

The trend in the church is much more sinister than its traditional complacency. It is a calculated and conscientious effort to turn everything back inward toward ourselves. This trend pulls us away from the people around us and from a hellbound world that is starving for the Gospel. Build the walls, protect our immediate family and let the world go. "Who cares, anyway?" The global internet is only adding to our isolation. We can shop at home, buy a car, check the ball scores, and go to church through the internet without ever leaving our livingroom. We don't even have to deal with people at all. Let the world go, just as long as everything is fine where we live.

Our needs are paramount. We are focused upon them, and we have the resources to tease those needs. And all the while, a bruised and bleeding world draws closer and closer. The outcome of this trend of turning inward is not clear. The truth is that we probably don't want to know where this path leads.

Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point and also a clinical member of the American Association Of Marriage and Family Therapists.
Recently in a conversation with someone from another town we were discussing the importance of church attendance, and more specifically the value of participating regularly in worship. I was obviously making a case for its importance. This individual was not nearly so convinced and raised a valid question. Point blank he asked, "You are a preacher. You are supposed to say that worship is important. If you were not a preacher, would you still feel the same about worship?" My response took little time. I could honestly, quickly and without hesitation say that worship would be just as significant, maybe even more so. The main difference, for me, being how nice it would be to let someone else sit on the platform and worry about how things are going and if we are going to finish in time for everyone to get ahead of the Methodists in the line at the cafeteria. The value I place on regular, routine and habitual worship has nothing to do with my being a professional religionist.

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There was a lengthy period of my career when I served as a chaplain in corporate business and had no assigned duties on Sunday. Worship was no less a part of my life than it is now. I cannot imagine my life without Sunday worship being a regular part of my routine. A need is met that cannot be satisfied in any other way. Whether as worship leader or participant I have discovered that my life is directly influenced in and through worship.

In the memoirs of Edward Burne-Junes it is related that a young artist of considerable talent one day visited the studio of the great painter. With his customary courtesy Burne-Junes showed her his pictures. The two artists lingered for a time in delightful talk over the art which they both so dearly loved. When they returned to the drawing room the young artist was asked what she intended doing with her art. "I mean to begin again," she replied very simply.

The great moments in our lives are the moments of inspiration when we can gain a new vision of who we are and what we can become. For us the vision of excellence is Jesus Christ. Through His life we see what real life ought to be. "Not only does He give us the vision of excellence, but the resources to move our lives forward, to begin again. Alfred North Whitehead once said: "Moral education is impossible apart from an habitual vision of greatness." For the Christian we find that vision in Christ. One moment in our busy routine that is most likely to give us that opportunity is in the process of worship. Sunday worship, at its best, is the lifting up of that vision of excellence. In worship we find the inspiration and strength to begin again.

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Faith does not promise us all of the answers

Recently I was watching on television one of the nationally syndicated religious programs. It was more of a show than it was a worship service, but it was still pretty good. Along with the preacher's sermon there was testimony after testimony by people who had become Christians and as a result everything in their lives had turned out just right. I emphasize the phrase, "just right." All of their dreams had come true. Their businesses had flourished and now they were making significant amounts of money. Their health had been totally restored. One even said his golf game had drastically improved. Because of their faith success had become their constant companion.

Now, I applaud these people. I celebrate their successes and I have no doubt that their new found faith was a powerful dynamic and a positive force in their successes. On the other hand, I worry about the message we are giving that a strong faith always results in success. I am not sure where "success theology" came from. Possibly it evolved from our own need to believe that faith does make a difference in life; and since we are so materially oriented, it is only natural that we would equate results with that which can be seen, counted or stored. We must be extremely careful at this point because success, at least by worldly standards, is not always the result of a life of faith. Some of history's most faithful Christians have known little success in the eyes of the world. It just does not always work out to be pretty and perfect. For many, their faith has been the source of great sacrifice and hardship.

Success theology definitely does not come from the Bible. Jesus promises His own kind of joy and not necessarily that which is known by the world. He does not guarantee a million dollar business as a result of a life of faith, nor necessarily the restoring of health, nor the success of our children. In fact, He says, "In this life you will have tribulation." He only guarantees His presence and that with His help we will overcome.

The theologian V. A. Demant has spoken a true word about life when he says, "Christian faith does not free me from perplexity. It does allow me to live with a lot of unsolved problems." There are many things in life we cannot see how some family problems will be solved, how world peace can be secured. The list goes on. For the strongest of Christians there are times in life when we have only enough light for the next step as the rest of the road is dark. We take that step in faith knowing that while we are on the way more light will be revealed. Sometimes we cannot see around the next turn, but in Christ we find a guide for the next step and in His presence we feel loved and secure.

Hear this and clearly understand: our faith does not promise us all of the answers nor does it give us a guarantee we will be spared life's difficult moments. The promise of faith is that we will always have the resources for whatever life brings.

One other small matter I should speak to. I have been a Christian for forty-two years. It has been the difference between life and death for me. Unlike the guy on TV, it has not helped my golf game. I can live with that.

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Every word we speak influences surroundings

We have witnessed this week the inauguration of the president of the United States. It is an interesting event for a lot of reasons. The event showcases the most powerful man in the world. While there are limits to his authority, few other people ever experience the ability to just speak and, therefore, order it into reality. The inauguration itself is a perfect example. Say the word, sign your name and authorize the spending of 30 million tax dollars on a one day celebration, which I will fight the temptation and remain quiet.

My purpose at this time is to simply point to the power of the presidential word. His voice has power, no one can deny that fact. Some of us might even dream about having that kind of ability. I wonder what it must feel like.

The truth is that we all have similar capacity, certainly not to the extent of President Clinton; but we have power in our voices. The words we speak are filled with power, in and of themselves. We may not be able to order a $30 million dollar party but we influence our surroundings every day with every word we speak.

The reality of this power is the reason the Bible speaks so frequently about the use of the tongue. We are warned over and over again to be careful and not take this power for granted. Every time we open our mouths we have the potential to build up or tear down, to support or discourage, to compliment or demean, to add or take away.

Al Cadenhead

The writer of the book of James says, “If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.” James’ word is a reminder that a destructive tongue is not just the challenge of the nonreligious. We who bear the name of Christ must struggle with it as well and keep it before us every day of our lives.

In ancient Hebrew thought a spoken word was perceived as having a power all its own. Once released, it was subject to no one. Such an understanding of a spoken word is very true. Once released, it cannot be returned to its source. It is released like a missile, except it cannot be guided. It is on its own. That is why we should think carefully about every sound that comes from our mouth.

James further states, “Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.” Our words continually have that potential. He compared the power of the tongue to a rudder of a great ship. It may be small but the power is unbelievable.

We exercise that power continually every day. Some of us talk too much. We offer opinions that are unnecessary, judgments based on inadequate information, conclusions that have not been fully developed, and comments that add absolutely nothing in the spirit of truth and love.

If it is true that some of us just say what we think, then our thinking needs examination as well. What we think is not always accurate. All too often we discover that fact only after we have launched some missiles at our brother or sister. It is then too late. Recall is not an option. Words can be power for good or for bad. Not one of us can afford to ignore this fact and this challenge.

So, the next time you hear the president and think about the power of his words, remember that some of that same power lies resident in the sound of your own voice. Every time we open our mouths we run the risk of “deceiving ourselves and making our religion worthless.” Be careful with the missiles you launch today.

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Take a little time, energy for prayer

Human behavior will always be intriguing, and it can never be accurately described as logical. For example, consider how we ignore things of great value that are at our fingertips. Quite possibly we overlook opportunities simply because they are so accessible.

Take prayer — for example — and how we ignore the opportunity it provides. Prayer is nothing new. As a practice, it has been around since man became aware that there must be some power behind all things and a source beyond our own capacity. History records man's attempt to reach out for mystery of the universe and his attempt to connect with that mystery.

Prayer is not limited to Judeo-Christian culture. There are few, if any, world religions who do not practice some form of meditation and prayer. There is an inherent need in man to call on a power greater than his own.

Prayer has a special place for those of us who follow Christ. Christ provides for us the very best example of the results of a proper kind of prayer life. His disciples must have constantly observed Him as a man of strength and capability. What was it that set Him apart? Yes, He was divine; but I am convinced that the reason for His strength and capability was more than just His divine nature.

One of the secrets of His power can be found in the channel that was always open with the Father. Whether on the mountain top or in the valley His life was continually punctuated with prayer. Therefore, Jesus taught us about prayer not just in precept but by His own life.

We all have access to that same kind of power and peace. Our problem is that we do not take advantage of our opportunities. All the equipment needed to pray is already built-in. The only requirement is a little time and energy. The sad part of it all is that we are the losers when we fail to pray as we should.

There is one issue, however, that stands in the way for too many of us. To develop the right kind of prayer relationship with God means to recognize our dependency upon Him. That is where our pride stands in the way. It is our own feelings of arrogance and our unrealistic estimate of our adequacy that lead us down the road to happiness.

It then takes some big crisis to shock us back into reality and make us realize how dependent we are. Fortunately, even in our crisis, God hears us and responds. But, just think of all the other times we have missed in the meantime. God does so much more for us than just rescue us! The vast majority of people will never make that discovery.

If the fear of God is the beginning of all knowledge, then it appears to me that arrogant independence is the epitome of ignorance.

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Family relationships need
time to grow, nurture

In a conversation over the telephone with a friend, we were sharing some mutual frustrations with our schedules. He told me that he was feeling quite guilty that his schedule did not allow as much time as he would like to be with his children. I immediately came to his rescue because not only was his guilt the issue, but suddenly mine had been triggered as well.

One reason that my guilt was triggered so quickly is that now that our children are “grown and gone,” I continually deal with a lot of regret that I did not give them more of my time when they were home and needed it most. Like a million other people I characteristically have given too much priority to career and professional demands and have not been nearly as available to family as I should. The issue goes deeper than just time with children but also includes availability to a spouse with needs as well.

Anyway, back to my telephone conversation. I tried to ease his guilt by my standard lecture on, “It’s not the quantity of time but rather the quality that counts with one’s children and spouse.” I have soothed my own conscience on many occasions with this very simple answer.

Now I admit that there is some truth to the need for this “quality time.” On the other hand, it can become a real cop out. What happens when you play this theory out and apply it to some other areas of life?

You are traveling across the desert. It has been days since you had a drink of water. In the midst of your thirst a stranger passes and offers you water. He gives you a teaspoon of water but acknowledges that it is the purest quality in all the land. The purity of the water may be nice but you are much more concerned about the quantity.

Another scenario, you’ve been looking forward all day to a good meal that night. Reservations are made at the best steak house in town. You sit down at the table and the waiter places before you a piece of steak which is one inch square, but he reminds you that it is the finest piece of beef that can be bought. Quality may be an issue but quantity is important as well. A big, quality steak is what you want.

Now, back to the real issue, one’s time with children and family including spouse. Sometimes it is totally impossible to have long blocks of time. Therefore, one must make the best of what he or she can offer, but that does not do away with the fact that quantity is important.

Relationships need time to grow; time when people are free and open to talk; when they can think and even do nothing together. Most of the time we spend with our family is structured. The time is usually occupied with some planned activity. If one’s true thoughts and feelings are to be shared, time is a requirement. This is true for both parent and child. A quick 10-minute computer game just before bedtime one night does not necessarily fill the bill. A sandwich served quickly in front of the nightly news does much to strengthen a marriage relationship.

Do not misunderstand, those concentrated five minutes with son or daughter or even spouse are beyond value! But, let’s never allow it to be a cop out for the quantity of time that family relationships need for growth and nurture.

To my good friend over the phone, I wasn’t totally honest. My own guilt got in the way.
Cooperation helps get things done

Last week Suzanne and I attended a conference in California. The meeting was good, the weather was unbelievable and the experience was very positive.

One morning, very early in the session, I was very close to a seizure due to withdrawals from saturated fats. I had been eating California food for several days and you know how health conscious Californians are.

I was determined to pick up some of their health habits while we were there. They only eat yogurt, sticks, and drink bottled spring water. They don't even go out and pick up their paper without carrying their bottled water with them.

I couldn't stand it anymore and slipped out of the session and drove straight to a Burger King down the street and ordered a ham, egg and cheese biscuit and a Coke with extra caffeine. I am just short of going into shock.

After driving through the pick-up window, I stopped at the entrance to the parking lot and immediately opened the sack of food before heading back. The Burger King happened to be at the intersection of Chapman Avenue and the Santa Monica Freeway. The exit of the parking lot was directly across the street from the entrance to the freeway.

While I was opening my food, I heard this loud bump and an even louder voice. Directly in front of me were two cars that were stopped at the light. They were in the lane to turn right for the entrance ramp to the freeway. They were jammed right next to each other, bumper to bumper, not one inch between them.

There was an older car in front and a relatively new car behind. The drivers continued to talk loudly back and forth and even gave some hand signals. I am sitting there with a biscuit in one hand and my Coke in the other and watching them.

As the light turned green, the car in the rear backed up about ten feet. Then with a signal from the guy in front the rear car lunged forward and bumped the front car with a loud "bam." With the motion created by the contact the front car quickly turned right into the entrance ramp. The rear car carefully pulled up right behind him again and I am thinking to myself, "Please don't tell me these guys are about to enter the Santa Monica Freeway pushing each other."

They went through a whole set of hand signals again, shouted back and forth, and the rear car pulled into position again. There was another loud "bam" and up the ramp they went, one right behind the other. I could hear them laughing all the way above the noise of the traffic. And you guessed it, they headed north on the freeway, bumper to bumper, and pulled right in line with the other traffic.

I was entertained, speechless and very impressed. What an amazing sense of cooperation between two people. I definitely would not want to buy either of their cars, but I wish I could bottle some of their cooperative spirit.

I wonder what we could accomplish if we had that kind of cooperation in our communities, in our homes and especially in our churches.

Most of us are headed in the same direction but operating in our own lane. If someone breaks down, we might call the wrecker as long as it does not force us to stop and change lanes. Just think of having that kind of cooperation for more reasons than just a "break down."

There are so many things we could do if we just pulled up bumper-to-bumper and communicated to each other. We might even do more than just get the job done. We might accidentally have some fun along the way. I can still hear those guys laughing above the noise of the traffic. They were having a ball.

I think they know something most of us have never discovered. I wonder if they would consider doing seminars.
God manifests Himself to us in many ways

In my personal devotional time during the last few days I have been reading once again through the book of Exodus. It is a great book and one that we too often ignore in our teaching and preaching. One day this week I was particularly taken by the nineteenth chapter and the events that are so clearly described.

The scene is the edge of the Wilderness of Sinai. It is three months after the Children of Israel have gone out of Egypt, and they have camped there before the mountain where God talks to him and tells him what to say to the Children of Israel. Moses is to remind the people of the remarkable things that God has done, brought them out of Egypt, dealt harshly with the Egyptians, and now has made an interesting covenant with them. If they will obey Him and keep the covenant, they shall become a special treasure to God and to all the people of the Earth. They shall become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Now, that is all fine and well, but what struck me most is what happened next. God told Moses that he should tell the people to prepare to experience the presence of God.

“For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of the people. When the trumpet sounds, they shall come near the mountain.”

According to the text, “Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain and the sound of the trumpet was very loud so that all who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God.”

As I read those verses I became quite envious of the Israelites. What a magnificent moment it must have been to experience the presence of God in such a bold and vivid way. Surely no one could have questioned the existence of Jehovah God after being near the mountain that day. They witnessed the thunders, the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet. The text says that the experience left them trembling.

Even if it left us trembling like it did the Children of Israel, we too would like that kind of indication of God’s presence. So many people today long for reassurance of God’s presence in our world. We look to the mountain and seek a cloud. Sometimes it occurs and sometimes it does not, at least not in the bold form of thunder. We don’t want to be frightened. We just want the assurance that God is near.

The Psalmist said long ago that, “The Lord is near to all who call on Him.” It is possible that the reason he is near “to those who call” is because they are looking for Him, sensitive to His presence, tuned in. Most of the time we are too busy and preoccupied to be sensitive to anyone or anything, including God.

Occasionally He knocks us off our feet with thunder. Other times it is much more subtle. We sense His presence in the embrace of a friend, the smile of a child, the majestic color of the sunrise, the gentleness of a spring shower or the silence of midnight. There are many ways that He manifests Himself to us other than in the form of thunder.

Still, it must have been a magnificent experience around the base of the mountain that day long ago. Thunder, lightnings, a cloud and smoke were all part of the program that day. How awesome it was! Yet, even with that kind of show their memories were very short. It was not long before they were conducting themselves as if they had never had that experience. In a short time their disobedience seemed to indicate that they had forgotten the magnificent presence of God.

Seems like memory has always been a problem for human kind.

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Daily obedience leads to spiritual growth

Last week we talked about the desire that exists in most of us for confirmation of the presence of God in our lives. We long for it and would prefer that it occur in the unquestionable form of thunder, just as the Children of Israel experienced it on the edge of the wilderness before Mount Sinai. Most of the time, however, the presence of God is experienced in more subtle ways. To be alert and sensitive to these possibilities is a vital part of the process.

Yet, our need is so much more than just to have front row seats to a show of God's power. We want more than a confirmation that God exists and occasionally chooses to make His presence known. Our true longing is for much more.

It is precisely that longing that sends so many people on a continual search for something deep and profound in life.

I read recently the story of a man who had tried throughout the course of his life just about every religion known to man. He had hopped from church to church and religion to religion seeking some kind of spiritual depth that would give meaning to his life. He had read books on every one of the religions that he had tried. On an intellectual level he was capable of discussing all the current religions. At every stopping point he was left with a sense of emptiness and a sense that there was still something out there that would offer meaning to his existence. No one could ever accuse him of not using his brain. Yet, spiritual understanding continued to be an illusion.

I am convinced that this frustrated man's dilemma is relived in the lives of countless other individuals. This man's problem and that of so many others is the result of a discovery that most of us have never made. We long for spiritual understanding. We want to experience some type of depth to life. We seek meaning and insight for our lives. The problem is that we go about seeking that spiritual understanding with only our minds and intellect.

There is nothing wrong with intellect, but that alone will not give meaning and understanding to our lives. Read carefully the New Testament and notice the way Jesus goes about the process of calling individuals. In His call He promises meaning to life, but He does not tell us to find it through intellect.

At every step of the way as He calls disciples and invites them to a way of life that is rich and deep. It is important to notice that this call is always hooked up to another command. This command was expressed in such phrases as, 'Follow me,' 'Do as I do,' or 'Hear my voice and obey.' He did not say that we should reason this out, or figure this out or make all the pieces add up. His instruction had little to do with intellect. It has everything to do with obedience.

The reason so many people are in a frustrating and fruitless search for spiritual depth to life is that they assume it is something that can be figured out with the mind. Jesus tried to tell us that meaning is found in the "activity of the heart."

I have always had great respect for the life and writings of Oswald Chambers. He once said, "The golden rule for spiritual understanding is not intellect, but obedience. If a man wants scientific knowledge, intellectual curiosity is his guide; but if he wants insight into what Jesus Christ teaches, he can only get it by obedience."

Chambers also said that no man ever receives a word from God without instantly being put to test over it. We disobey and then wonder why we don't go on spiritually. It should not surprise us that when we shrug our shoulders to God's leading in our lives that we do not seem to move forward spiritually. Growing spiritually is not attained by intellectual mind games. It is found in the simple, daily acts of obedience.

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We all should be willing to be everyone's neighbor

Most of us who are professed believers in Christ claim a strong affinity for the Bible. What we usually mean is that we affirm Scripture as long as it agrees with our natural tendencies or as long as we can interpret it in a way that keeps it within our comfort zone.

Let Scripture stand on its own and we are almost always put into a position of having to look deeply within and raise some honest questions about ourselves and our motivations.

For example, take the simple statement by our Lord recorded in Matthew, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” There is not one single Christian anywhere who would take issue with that command, as long as we can define the word, “neighbor.”

The real pinch of that simple religious sounding sentence is not the word love. We have understood that from day one that love is the key. The problem arrives when we accept the meaning of the word neighbor. As long as we can define our neighbor, we can easily keep that command.

Yet, what is meant by our neighbor we cannot doubt; it is everyone with whom we are brought into contact. First of all, he is literally our neighbor who is next to us in our family and household: husband to wife, wife to husband, parent to child, brother to sister, in-laws and out-laws, even our lazy, sorry cousins.

Then, it is the one who is close to us in our own neighborhood, in our own town, in our own church, on our own street. With these all true charity begins. To love and be kind to these is the very beginning of all true religion.

But, besides these, as our Lord teaches, it is everyone who is thrown across our path by the changes and chances of life: he or she, whosoever it be, whom we have any means of helping. This one may be the unfortunate stranger whom we many meet in traveling, the deserted friend whom no one else cares to look after.

The issue of who is our neighbor is not new. The debate was a current one in the days of Jesus' ministry. In fact, it was a recurring rabbinical debate among the Jewish people. They were more than willing to accept the Old Testament command to love one's neighbor, but they claimed the right to determine who would qualify as neighbor.

In the account in Luke, Jesus answers the question by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. When He does, He turns the whole issue upside down by suggesting that our neighbor might be a sorry old Samaritan; and goes even further to imply that the real question might be “are we willing to be a neighbor?”

That is more truth than most of us can handle. It is just a lot easier when we hold onto our own definitions. Some things never change.

Al Cadenhead
Colors are one of God's gift to us

Al Cadenhead

ON THE INSIDE

Just as the sun disappeared, the sky turned a fiery red. Not only the clouds picked it up, but the exhaust trails of several jets could not resist and turned red to match the clouds. The exploding red sky hanging over the landscape which was already showing the colors of an early spring became a breath taking picture.

I have seen this picture before. I've watched it from this very sight before, but it is always like seeing it for the first time.

God is blessing us with an early spring. We are in a season of the year when the Earth is - minute by minute - breaking out in phenomenal color. If we take time to notice, it is always like we are seeing it for the very first time. Most of the time we hardly notice at all.

During a Christmas visit this year, my Dad and I somehow began a conversation about his World War II experience. I enjoy talking to him and learning more about him and, therefore, about myself in the process. The reason that I mention this is that he was telling me about his experiences on Iwo Jima and Guam and the kind of elation he experienced as he returned home. I thought it was interesting that of all the scenes he remembered most, the one most indelibly printed in his memory was the entrance into San Francisco bay and that he was overwhelmed by the colors. After several years of battle and camouflage the colors of San Francisco bay were just unbelievable.

Color is something we take for granted. It is one of God's rich gifts to us. Yet, it has to be seen to be appreciated. Sunday evening's sunset lasted for only a few brief minutes. Then it was gone, gone forever. The color that surrounds us does not last forever. When it is gone, it is gone. Only the memory remains, assuming we noticed something to remember.

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Lack of respect devalues life, harms society

Cadenhead

The Bible has numerous references to the dignity of respect and honor in our society. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, people are strongly encouraged to honor parents, our elders and others who work hard. I Peter sums it up by saying, “Show respect to everyone.”

I think that idea that more would have been said in the Scriptures about honor and respect were not the assumption made in that day such attributes were “given” among decent people.

It may have been an assumption in that day but not in our day! One would be terribly upbraided for a lack of respect and honor in our society. For example, in my lifetime I can remember when even neighborhood bullies would at least say “Yes sir” and “Yes ma’am” to adults.

You say, “That really isn’t important.” I say, “Wrong! It implies a respect for our elders that is almost nonexistent today.”

As a boy we gave our teachers a hard time about going to school with as much as we could. Yet, there was a healthy respect that I was forced to offer my teachers, even when they were dumb and obnoxious. The last thing I wanted my teacher to do was to call Alton Sr. and tell him that I was disrespectful to her. If so, I would have been justly punished. I was still dead. Now, teachers would be satisfied just to know that their lives would not be in danger.

I can remember a day when the mayor of a city called Alton, Illinois to tell the president by just his last name in a formal way. It was the “The Presi- dent” or “President Eisenhower,” not Eisenhower. Even opponents offered reasonable respect in public.

Now, the Clinton name around like it was slang. I think that we have no life. I don’t vote for him either. In a moment of insanity I voted for Ross Perot. The reason was that I thought that I would vote for him again.

I could go on and on with examples but my point is this, civility and good manners are last becoming a memory of the past. And don’t relate this to the vain wonderings of a man who is approaching 70 years of age. It is an issue far greater than my own limited perception of our culture.

As a boy we were told that a vast majority of Americans think our country has reached an ill-mannered war where the word of the President is often polltested in civility is a serious problem and that it appears that it has become much worse in the last 10 years. The displacement of good manners and courtesy in our culture by crude and obnoxious behavior is all the more evident. It’s a part of our social break-
down. Our culture emphasizes free expression, the freedom of conven- tion and the uninhibited venting of emo-
tions. “It’s healthy,” we say.

A number of organizations and institutions are waking up to the fact that the lack of respect and honor is a major crisis. U.S. News and World Report recently had an article that referred to it as “The American Uncivil War.” The American Association of School Ad-
munistrators has declared this issue of
civility to be an unprevent crisis. Other institutions of public life have considered their concern. Since the late 1960s, states bars associations around the country have attempted to clean up their acts, asking lawyers to treat colleagues and clients with respect. And, many are taking that notion seriously. The Simpson tribunal is another story.

Take note of the political ads that inundate us right now. Our house already has mud stains on the carpet in the area of our house seat. I do not hear one decent recent reason to vote for anyone. Yet, I hear that their opponent can’t match my socks or where on their opponent was the night the lights went out in Georgia. I have made myself a promise this year. I refuse to vote for anyone this year whose ads slag mud at the opponent. Either give a positive reason to vote for you or don’t waste my time.

I am going to keep that promise even if my mother should decide to run for governor.

As a start I feel that the decline of assumed courtesy, or manners, or civility is a symptom of the declining respect of the dignity of the other person and ultimately the declining respect for human life itself. It is all connected.

I have never known a young person who genuinely respected his elders who would even consider robbing and shooting her. Good manners and the respect for human life may be quite a distance apart, but they are on the same continuum.

Some sociologists are telling us that we have reached a point that will require at least 50 years to correct, if it can be corrected at all. Some are going so far to say that it cannot be corrected. Whether it can or not, I am convinced that we have not even begun to try the price for what is happening in our culture. It is a cancer that will eat away the heart of human dignity.

Several weeks ago I was riding in a funeral car at the head of a long pro-
gression. We stopped in Hillsboro. We drove by a house with a yard full of children. Two or three teen-aged boys were poking at each other. One of the boys looked up evidently and noticed the line of cars passing the house. He immediately stopped what he was doing, took his cap off his head, and began to eat his ice cream. He did this for a minute. After the cars passed, he put his cap back on and popped his buddy again.

There have been several times when I have thought about going back to that house and looking up that boy’s parents and tell them they are doing a good job.
Who shares your values?
Sunday, April 28, 1996

(Lack of respect for our people devalues lives, harms society)

The Bible has numerous references to the role of respect and honor in our society.

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament we are strongly encouraged to honor parents, elders and the work that people do. 1 Peter sums it up by saying, "Show respect to everyone."

I have an idea that more would have been said in the Scriptures about honor and respect were not the assumptions that exist in that society. Some of those assumptions would be "given" amongst decent people.

It may have been an assumption in that day but not in our day! One would be terribly unsure if we were to make such an assumption today. And this change is true at all levels of society. For instance, in my humble lifetime I can remember when even neighborhood bullies would at least say "Yes sir" and "Yes m'am" to adults.

You say, "That really isn't important. Adults are supposed to go through life with as much as we could. Yet, there was a healthy respect that I was forced to respect. Today, children even in my day or our day are dumb and obnoxious."

The respect we owed our teachers, the day we went to call Alton Sr. and tell him that I had been disrespectful to her. So, is that where respect has been lost? Or maybe I was just still old fashioned. New teachers, would be satisfied just to know that their lives were important at all.

I can remember a day when the media made a big thing about our president by just his last name in a formal way. It was the "The Presi- dent," "Mr. President" or "Mr. Nixon." I don't know. It was very formal. Even Eisenhower offered reasonable respect in public. When I heard the President's name around like it was slang. I think that is wrong. I am by the way, I didn't vote for him either. In a moment of insanity I voted for Ross Perot. The reality of the day is that people do not care for him again.

I could go on and on with examples but my point is this, civility and good manners are fast becoming a memory of the past. And don't deluge this to the vain wonderings of a man who is approaching 50 with the speed of a jet. It is a national problem affecting all aspects of a limited perception of culture.

And that is the main majority of Americans think our country has reached an ill-mannered wave of materialism. Bullied and polled think civility is a serious problem. And I am convinced that it has become the worst of last 10 years.

The displacement of good manners and courtesies by our culture is very rude and obnoxious behavior is all the more evidence of a common thread being down.

Our culture emphasizes free expression of any belief or opinion and the uninhibited venting of emo- tion. "It's healthy," we say.

A person's organizations and institutions are waking up to the fact that we are dealing with a major crisis. U.S. News and World Report recently had an article that referred to it as "The Civil War". The American Association of School Ad- ministrators has declared this issue of civility to be an urgent necessity.

Other institutions of public life have confessed our concern. Since the late 1980's, state bar associations around the country have attempted to clean up their internal affairs and treat colleagues, judges, and clients with respect. And many that are taking that necessity seriously. The Simpson trial is another story.

Take note of the political ads that inundate us right now. Our house already has smud dirt on the carpet in front of our television. We haven't heard one decent recent reason to vote for anyone yet. All I hear is that their opponent can't match their socks or where their opponent was the night the lights went out in Georgia. I have made myself a promise this year. I refuse to vote for anyone this year whose ads smud dirt at the opponent. Either give a positive reason to vote for you or don't waste my time. And I am going to keep that promise even if my mother should decide to run for governor.

The scariest part is that the decline of promised courtesy, or manners, or civility, is a sickness that kills it all is a symptom of the declining respect or dignity of the other person and ultimately the declining respect for human life itself. It is all connected. I have never known a young person who genuinely respected an elderly lady would even consider robbing and robbing her. But the respect for human life may be quite a distance apart, but they are on the same continuum.

Some sociologists tell us that we have reached a point that will require at least 50 years to correct, if it can be corrected at all. Some are going so far to say that it cannot be corrected. Whether it can or not, I am convinced that we have not even begun to pay for the price that is happening in our culture. It is a cancer that will eat away the heart of human dignity.

Several weeks ago I was riding in a funeral car at the head of a long pro- cession. A group of young men in the town drove by a house with a yard full of children. Two or three teen-age boys were poking at each other. One of the boys looked up and evidently noticed the line of cars passing the house. He immediately stopped what he was doing, took his cap off his head, held it out and bowed and then put it back after a minute. The cars passed after, he put his cap back on and popped his buddy again.

There have been several times when I have thought about going back to that house and looking up that boy's parents and tell them they are doing a wrong thing.
Revelations come through facing enemy

Everyone has had the experience of trying to avoid someone with whom we feel a sense of discomfort. It may be a result of a misunderstanding. There may have been an argument in the past. Or, possibly something embarrassing has happened and you just don't want to be reminded of it.

As a result, we go to all kinds of trouble to avoid this one who makes us so anxious. We will arrange our schedule, plan our activities, and alter our social life just so that we will not have to deal with this person who makes us feel so uncomfortable.

And then, occasionally there comes a time when avoidance is not possible and fate throws you together. In the process you discover that the other guy really is no so bad after all and you have wasted lots of energy with all of the effort to "stay clear" of this feared soul.

With that in mind, think about one individual in particular whom most of us go to great lengths to avoid. This person really makes many of us very uncomfortable. This person is, at times, clear and predictable; and at other times we simply do not understand this one at all. We may have a lot of questions about what is going on deep inside this individual. Understanding what makes this person "tick" is not easy since there is seldom a time when this one opens up to the honest feelings that exist inside.

As a result, we try our best to structure our time and keep our little world busy enough so that we will not just not have any contact. And, one of the best ways is to stay busy and keep ourselves with other people at all time.

so that we will always have someone else to talk to. The key is to make sure we are unavailable. Heaven forbid that we should be caught off guard and come face to face with this source of anxiety. It is amazing how disliked this one is by so many of us.

What would we discover? Would our fears of this person be confirmed? And what would everybody think if the word got out that we really know this person well?

On the other hand, would this experience be like some of the others? Maybe we would discover that this one is not so bad after all. Once we became acquainted, we might feel more comfortable when alone. And, we cannot help but think of all the energy we have wasted trying to avoid this person, energy that could have been used for something else. It really is a nice discovery! Now we don't have to run from this one any more.

Who is this person? You guessed it; ourselves!

*Al Cadenhead is the pastor at First Baptist Church in High Point and also a clinical member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists.*
First Baptist loses senior pastor to Charlotte post

By Nick Maheras
STAFF WRITER

First Baptist Church on N. Main Street will soon begin searching for a new senior pastor.

The Rev. Al Cadenhead Jr., senior pastor since Nov. 13, 1994, will preach his last sermon at the church on May 31.

Cadenhead has accepted the post of senior pastor at Providence Baptist Church in Charlotte. Providence, with more than 2,200 resident members, an annual budget of $2.3 million and a pastoral staff of eight, is one of the largest Baptist churches in North Carolina.

First Baptist has about 1,300 members. Cadenhead said his coming departure makes him sad.

"I'm sad," he said. "It's been a very affirming, positive ministry here for me. The church has been supportive. There's not one single problem to run from.

These people are great folks. They have been nothing but supportive of me."

Still, Cadenhead said he believes going to Providence is what he should do, and he's excited by the challenge.

"It's just a matter of following what I feel to be God's leading in my life at this point in time," he said. "It's a dynamic type of leading. Sometimes, it means having to experience some risk and move out of our comfort zone.

"What I'll be doing is a huge challenge - without a doubt, the biggest challenge of my life. My hope is that I'm just ready for it."

Cadenhead, a clinical member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy, has authored four books - the most recent titled "My First Last Day at School," a daily devotional.

He has also served as a weekly columnist for the High Point Enterprise, writing about religious and family issues.

Cadenhead feels that he has accomplished some of the goals he set for his tenure at First Baptist.

"From a personal standpoint, I made a lot of good friends," he said. "I came here with some goals - to create a long-range plan for the church. We have produced that, and that should give the church some important direction about resources and where to apply themselves.

The church had some debt that needed to be addressed. We have addressed that, and we have retired all the indebtedness of the church, and at the same time, have taken care of a number of property improvements and renovations."

Cadenhead hopes First Baptist has grown spiritually under his leadership.

"I'd like to think we've grown spiritually as a church," he said. "I think we've taken seriously the risk of being a Christian today, recognizing that we are involved in some spiritual warfare that's real. We've dealt with that head-on, talked about it and studied about it.

"We've also made some progress in determining the distinctive ministry of First Baptist. I believe every church has its distinctive role to play. That determines a lot of the church's mission outreach, too."

First Baptist will form a search committee to seek a replacement for Cadenhead.
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