

# Aspects

## FINDING THE DIVINE

*Coming to God for the first time through Christ, we're given a very special gift: the Holy Spirit. Many think of this companion as just someone available for emergencies — a spiritual 911 to God. But He's so much more. The Spirit is our Counselor, illuminator, our umbilical to the wisdom of the Father. He is always there, helping us see the unseen glory beneath the mundane.*

**BACK IN 1968/69, BACK WHEN THE HEMLINE WARS** battled wildly between the mid-thigh and ankle, back when bell bottoms were the rage and fabric colors caused migraines, back when NASA prepared for the moon and Richard Nixon prepared for the White House — back when the world was at once more simple and perilously confused, Gary and I readied an old, beat up, discarded bread truck for a summer journey south.

The point man for the missions group had visited our church in Marshalltown, stroking the congregation for funds and stoking enthusiasm in those willing to make the journey. His words ignited our youthful ardor for the unsaved, and my friend and I committed ourselves to spending the summer of '69 in a mountain village of eastern Mexico.

The old bread truck was in terrible shape — we probably paid as much as two hundred dollars for it — and much work was required to get it ready for the trip. Being teenagers, however, our concern lay more with creature comforts than structural integrity. The truck was to be not only our transportation, but our quarters for the summer, so our priorities were interior looks and ease of living.

We first built a false floor and laid carpet, then covered the walls of the cavernous interior with wood paneling. From someone's basement or attic we acquired an old overstuffed chair, which made the space look more like Aunt Edith's parlor than a transport for racks of bread. The interior was finished with a short wardrobe of sorts, attached to the wall just behind the driver's seat.

Because teenagers require music, we next considered what would be installed for a suitable sound system. To be honest, the years have erased the logic behind our decision; it could have been that all our funds had been used up in the walls and floor of the interior, or that we simply possessed more records than tapes. Whatever the reason, we mounted a record turntable atop the wardrobe. That would be the source of our music.

Now, the attentive reader will immediately recognize a problem with this scheme. Records are played on a revolving disk, with the actual sounds being picked up off their surface by a needle affixed to the end of a free-swinging tone arm. By design, the tone arm pivots side to side, up and down, letting it track easily through the concentric grooves on the record. The slightest bump sends it skipping and screeching across the surface of the platter.

Since the ride of the bread truck was not what one would call pneumatically sound, this was not a terribly bright decision.

Well, we *were* teenagers, but we weren't congenitally stupid, either. We knew the rules. We realized that we would not be using

our fabulous stereo sound system while traveling down the roads of the U.S. and Mexico — no matter how smooth the pavement. We knew that the records would remain stacked and silent until we were stopped — until we could unroll our *very* long extension cord and plug it into a steady source of electricity.

In fact, we didn't listen to those records at all until we had made it all the way south to our destination — past San Antonio and Laredo, Texas; past Monterrey to the tiny mountain village of Galeana — and we could plug into the power supply of the small missions church.

### **Power Source**

**WHEN AN INDIVIDUAL BECOMES ASSOCIATED WITH GOD** through Christ, that individual is, from that point on, permanently and steadily linked to Him by the Holy Spirit. The presence of God in that life is constant: it does not waver, there is no ebb and flow. The Spirit Himself is likewise constant: He does not vacation or nap, nor does He present Himself complete to one individual, but abridged to another. He is there, steady and complete, in every believer.

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**PORTIONS OF THIS ISSUE OF ASPECTS ARE TAKEN FROM THIS WRITER'S WEEKLY INTERNET COLUMN REFLECTIONS BY THE POND, FROM THE YEAR 1996.**

Given that, why do so many of us live out our Christian lives like that truck-bound record player — only energized when we've stopped and plugged ourselves into the local church?

Every Sunday morning church parking lots the world over fill with cars. From those transports emerge Christians of every stripe and color, every economic station and substrata, every personality and size. Come Sunday morning they arrive dressed in their best and troop inside for their instruction and worship. For a little while they are energized, thoroughly and completely connected to God through study of His word and worship of His holiness. Like the stereo plugged into the church's electricity, their rejoicing sounds forth in loud praise while they are connected on Sunday. But, just as with the portable record player, once they disconnect and move off, they fall silent.

Technology today has advanced far beyond the idea of mounting a stereo turntable in a bread truck. The CD has effectively replaced the antiquated record player, and travelers in any vehicle today can enjoy full, symphonic sound anywhere — even jolting down a rocky path suitable only for 4-wheel drive. Indeed, even the vehicle is no longer necessary; a portable CD player delivers full-bodied stereo sound to anyone on foot. The latest batteries are smaller and more powerful than anything known in 1969.

Yet the faith of many is still as moribund as an old record changer in a dilapidated bread truck. Without the physical hook up to the institution — without actually being on the church premises dressed in Sunday finery, their faith is as silent and lifeless as a turntable strapped down and locked in place for the bumpy ride.

Every Christian today comes equipped with the most sophisticated, powerful battery pack ever devised, but many still conduct their lives as if they're powerless outside the four walls of the church building. Every one of us has been converted into a freestanding temple, but many are still operating under the idea that communion with God is either impossible or unnecessary off the church grounds.

Christians today have not learned how to find God in the banalities of daily living. They've not discovered His presence — though it is there — in the events and moments taking place around them every day. And because of this their praise falls silent, and they miss out on the power and sweet communion available to them wherever they are, whatever their activity.

Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the ark of the Testimony behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Put the atonement cover on the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy Place. *Exodus 26:33-34*

Through Christ Jesus, God has stepped out of the secrecy and cloying incense of the Most Holy Place; through Christ, the Holy Spirit has been released to dwell in each one of us; in Christ Himself we have a steady, dependable Brother who journeys with us through *every* day — not just Sundays.

One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. *Psalms 27:4*



Open my eyes, that I may see  
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;  
Place in my hands the wonderful key  
That shall unclasp and set me free.

Silently now I wait for Thee,  
Ready, my God, Thy will to see;  
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine.  
Open my ears, that I may hear  
Voices of truth thou sendest clear;  
And while the wavenotes fall on my ear,  
Everything false will disappear.

Silently now I wait for Thee,  
Ready, my God, Thy will to see;  
Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine.  
*Clara H. Scott*

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## GOD DWELLS THERE

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**I WAS RAISED — LITERALLY, FROM THE TIME** I was a babe in a basket, carried to church by Mom and Dad — with the notion of a “personal Savior.” When, as a young lad of eight years, I walked the aisle, professing faith in something higher than myself, it was faith in a *personal* Savior. Yet for most of my life, the Godhead was separate from daily living, somehow set off in a closet, something to be hauled out when convenient or necessary. To me, God was anything but personal.

Our God, however, is not set off in a closet. He is not detached from our daily life, patiently waiting for us inside the doors of the local church building. As I write these words, He is watching over my shoulder, making sure I get it right; as I walk the driveway, down to get the day's mail, He walks beside me; and with every decision, every choice to be made, He is present, counseling righteousness and truth.

He is even part of something as common and earthy as raising and harvesting the garden.

### *In The Harvest* **September 4**

Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion;  
to you our vows will be fulfilled.  
O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come.  
You care for the land and water it;  
you enrich it abundantly.  
The streams of God are filled with water  
to provide the people with grain,  
for so you have ordained it.  
You drench its furrows  
and level its ridges;  
you soften it with showers  
and bless its crops.  
You crown the year with your bounty,  
and your carts overflow with abundance.  
*Psalms 65:1-2,9-11*

**IT'S DIFFICULT TO HARVEST THE LAND'S BOUNTY** without giving praise to our generous God. When the bushel baskets are mounded with plump tomatoes; when the cart is filled with dirt-dusted potatoes, red and white and golden yellow; when the air is filled with the fragrance of onions and garlic and fat carrots that have sprouted pointy feet; when the crawling green vines are

dotted with this autumn's pumpkins and squash and gourds — in the midst of all the digging and heaving and hauling, it's impossible to not lift up thanksgiving to God who brings life and sustenance to those who call upon His name.

Oh yes, I suppose those filthy heathen down the road are enjoying a bountiful crop, too. And I suppose we may have helped some with the planting and watering, the nurturing and composting. I suppose an earthly explanation exists for every vegetable and fruit harvested.

Then why is it the breast swells with the overwhelming Spirit of God when the harvest is brought in — and yes, consumed? I know the agronomist can explain how the seed we planted germinates, roots, and grows into a mature plant — all part of the natural process. I know the meteorologist can explain how the endlessly multi-shaped clouds that pass over our heads are simply water vapor that originated on earth.

How can I explain to them that I see God in the plant that sprouts and grows, and I see Him in the passing clouds that paint the blue sky? How can I explain that even when the back is aching from digging the potatoes, when the hands are raw from washing and peeling the tomatoes, when the humid summer air is made even more miserable from the rising steam off the canner filled with jars of beans — how can I possibly explain that God dwells there in all of it?

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder  
Consider all the works Thy hands have made,  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,  
Thy pow'r thro'out the universe displayed.  
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;  
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!  
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;  
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

*Stuart K. Hine*

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## LEARNING ABOUT OURSELVES

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**GOD GAVE US HIS WORD** as a guide book for knowing Him better. It is filled with stories of real people who sought Him, walked with Him, called upon His Name, even terribly disappointed Him. Through their stories we learn of God's character: His enduring patience, His deep love for mankind, and His mysterious requirement for blood sacrifice.

Through these stories we also learn much about ourselves. No man can read of Joseph racing away from the villainous wiles of Potiphar's wife<sup>1</sup> without wondering whether or not he would do the same. No woman can read of Ruth's unselfish devotion to her mother-in-law, Naomi,<sup>2</sup> without wondering whether or not she could have done the same. And no one can read the account of Saul's experience on the road to Damascus<sup>3</sup> without seeing God's grace played out in panorama.



Just as we learn of God and ourselves in His word, we learn of both from the world about us. If we but keep our eyes open, and our ears tuned for the sound of His voice, the world and its experiences will speak volumes about living and walking with a righteous, gracious God.

### ***Instincts*** ***March 20***

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.  
*1 Cor. 15:51-52*

**IN THE WINTER, WHEN THE TEMPERATURES BEGIN TO SLIDE** closer to zero and the wind chill shoves it even further, it is our practice to permit our outdoor cat, Mamma, to come in the house. Our philosophy has always been that outdoor animals stay out, and indoor animals stay in; they do not come and go. But when winter strikes in the U.S. Midwest, concessions must be made.

During the warmer months, Mamma is perfectly content staying outside. But cats, like many people, aren't terribly thrilled with the cold, and soon she's asking to come in.

As a consequence, during the winter Mamma becomes domestic. She sleeps on the sofa next to the fireplace, she methodically cleans herself until she smells almost as good as the indoor cats, and she eats a steady if monotonous diet of dry cat food. She rubs and purrs and plays through the house with the other girls — generally letting them win, although with her street smarts and tree-climbing strength she is perfectly capable of whipping any of them.

But in the final analysis it is mostly a temporary charade, performed in exchange for a few month's warmth and comfort. She is not really becoming domestic at all. When the weather begins to turn back to temperatures above freezing, when the warming sunlight melts the drifts of snow, Mamma is begging to return to her more customary haunts. And instantly she returns to her natural state: predator.

She has only humored us by consuming the dry Friskies during the cold months — as well as kept her strength up. Offer her the open door and she will turn her back on the bowl without a moment's notice, for what she really craves is raw flesh — preferably rabbits, but mice and birds will do nicely, thank you. Whatever the creature, she will consume all of it — from toe to ear, from tip to tail. And there's no dissuading her; we can offer all manner of enticements, but when she's on the scent, she possesses a level of concentration and patience of singular intensity.

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. *Romans 7:18-20*

Mamma's natural, instinctive behavior is a reminder that no matter how hard I try, no matter how civilized I become, I will always be a child of depravity.

Unlike Mamma, however, there will come a day when I will no longer be a child of this earth. Even under the blood of Christ, I may still revisit old, natural habits. But there will come a day when I will be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. And I shall finally, praise God, be like Him.

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## THE SOUND OF OUR WEeping

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**THE LESSONS LEARNED AS WE WATCH AND LISTEN** for God around us will not always be pleasant. Indeed, some will cut into our very soul with the awful brutality of a knife blade.

When the apostle Paul was beaten and jailed for the Lord's name, he was living as much under God's grace as before. When Joseph was unjustly imprisoned for two years, it was not because he had fallen out of God's good favor. When Daniel was thrown into the lion's den, it wasn't the result of his unfaithfulness to God — or even God's unfaithfulness to him.

The Lord is in the tough times as much as in the good, and it is up to us to remain attentive to His voice when all we'd rather hear is the sound of our own weeping.

### **Mamma**

**June 19**

**OUR HEARTS ARE HEAVY THIS WEEK.** Mamma has been killed. I found her early Saturday morning lying out in the lawn off the west porch. Her body showed every sign that she had had a point of contention with another animal — probably a coyote or raccoon — and lost. She had been there at least all night.

Linda and I have spent the last five years observing the laws of survival being played out all around us. But the exquisite symmetry of 'survival of the fittest' leaves a rancid taste when the one who has ceased to survive is one dear to the heart.

Mamma was not a house cat forced to live outside, but a true beast of the field who yet had a soft place in her heart for people. She was affectionate and attentive, and only ignored us when dinner beckoned in the bushes. We don't know why, this time, her customary wisdom failed her, and she became entangled with an animal that could best her.

If our hearts are heavy it is from the loss of her companionship and the loss of her sheer unbounded joy in being part of God's nature. It is also for the loss of the many lessons we have learned from her and her life. I will miss her trotting along at my feet on the way to the mailbox — and the way she could be so easily distracted from my company by sounds in the brush. And Linda will assuredly miss her able assistance pulling weeds in the garden.

This was her place before ours. When we met her she was malnourished, pregnant, and responsible for an older son who was also, probably, the father of the kittens in her belly. We helped her back to health, gave her shelter from the winter cold, and found a home for the three boys from her new litter — keeping a farmer's barn free from mice. Her daughter, Amelia, came inside to join our family.

Saturday morning Linda and I buried Mamma in the new orchard, near the old rotting fence ladder, where she enjoyed napping during the hotter parts of the day.

There will surely come a day when we can speak dispassionately of her demise, saying such things as "Well, she had a good life" or "She died out in the wild, where she wanted to be" — but right now those words taste like blasphemy on the tongue. Right now her loss just hurts.

The words that do flow comfortably from the tongue, however, are words of honor and praise to our God. In times of sadness and tragedy — in those times when our natural inclination

is to shake our fist at God — it is our privilege, if we wish, to actually be brought closer to Him.

It is a hollow faith that calls Him Lord only in the pleasant times. As Job told his wife,

"You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" *Job 2:10a*

Standing over Mamma's freshly-covered grave, through the tears we gave thanks to God for her life, for her companionship, for her contagious vitality and spirit. And, though we hurt, we also thanked Him for the lessons we will inevitably learn from her death.



My Jesus, as Thou wilt:  
O may Thy will be mine!  
Into Thy hand of love  
I would my all resign.  
Through sorrow or through joy,  
Conduct me as Thine own,  
And help me still to say,  
"My Lord, Thy will be done."

*Benjamin Schmolck*

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## KNOWING IT ALL

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**GOD'S OVERALL PLAN IS TOO IMMENSE**, too terrible for any of us to acquire in all its details. Surely our simple brains would explode were we to suddenly be made privy to even a portion of what He knows or has planned.

Trust is not helplessness, but neither is it independence; faith is not blindness, but neither is it presumption. It's obvious from the size of God's word and the sometimes unflattering honesty that runs through it, that He has been most generous with details about His ways, His character and personality, and His intentions for every believer. But that is not to say He has told us everything, and the one who is training himself to see the hand and lessons of God in all of life, will cast a skeptical eye upon anyone who thinks He has.

### **Infinity**

**August 28**

**I GAZE UP INTO THE NIGHT SKY AND CONSIDER** the awesome magnitude of the heavens, the millions and billions of stars and planets and comets and chunks of matter from the gigantic to the infinitesimal.



The world has recently been discussing the possibility that life has, indeed, been discovered on Mars. Well, actually, that life has been discovered on earth, in a rock that probably came from Mars. Well, more precisely, that microscopic markings deep inside the rock bear a pattern that is commonly associated with bacterial action.

Or it could be dried mud.

Once the discovery was made public (actually the rock has gathered dust on a lab shelf for twelve years) scientists and politicians alike jumped on it as if Christ Himself had returned:

Today Rock 84001 speaks to us across all those billions of years and millions of miles. It speaks of the possibility of life. If this discovery is confirmed, it will surely be one of the most stunning insights into our universe that science has ever uncovered. *President Clinton*

It is a turning point in human history, suggesting that life exists not just on two planets in one paltry solar system but throughout this magnificent universe. *Carl Sagan*

Immediately the word spread that this discovery of [possible] life on Mars would require the rewriting of religion; it would signal the death knell of Christianity as we know it. Would Martians have souls? Would they require a Savior?

Just as quickly the religious press and talk shows went into action, fearfully denouncing the discovery, as if proving the skeptics correct that, indeed, any sign of life discovered beyond the boundaries of this earth would instantly nullify the word of God. Therefore, the discovery must have some other explanation.

Let's take a breath.

I am not a scientist, nor can I claim to know the entirety of God's word from the tiniest jot and minuscule tittle. Some of what the breathless scientists say may be true; some of what the learned theologians say may be equally true. One thing, however, I do know to be true.

As I gaze up into the heavens, and consider the seemingly limitless boundaries of everything external to this planet; as I look around at the miraculous, clockwork precision of all things fitted together on this earth; as I gaze into the powerful and life-changing truths in God's written word; as I consider all the things I do not yet know about God and His ways . . .

Who am I to define Him? Who am I, with the staggering limitations of my human brain, to presume to know what God — in all his limitless, omnipotent immensity — has chosen to do with this — or any other — universe?



Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said:

“Who is this that darkens my counsel  
with words without knowledge?  
Brace yourself like a man;  
I will question you,  
and you shall answer me.  
“Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?  
Tell me, if you understand.  
Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!  
Who stretched a measuring line across it?  
On what were its footings set,  
or who laid its cornerstone--  
while the morning stars sang together  
and all the angels shouted for joy?  
“Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades?  
Can you loose the cords of Orion?  
Can you bring forth  
the constellations in their seasons  
or lead out the Bear with its cubs?  
Do you know the laws of the heavens?  
Can you set up God's dominion over the earth?

*Job 38:1-7,31-33*

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## A GOOD SCRUBBING

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Revive us again, fill each heart with Thy love;  
May each soul be rekindled with fire from above.

**SINCE CHRIST JESUS CHOSE TO LEAVE HIS FOLLOWERS** upon the well-trod soils of earth, instead of bringing them home at the point of conversion, the least He could have done was to assign us each a plastic bubble in which we could move through the unregenerate world unscathed and untouched by their habits and temptations.

Yes, He mercifully left us the Holy Spirit, without whom we would be as helpless and detached as a cork bobbing alone in the middle of a vast, empty sea. But even with the Spirit we are capable — even *inclined*, some might say-- of collecting the soils of this earth upon our person. And without the periodic good scrub, we present ourselves as little more than scruffy, albeit sanctified, fellow travelers.

### **Revival**

**May 8**

**ACCOMPANYING THE GLORIES OF LIVING WITH GOD'S NATURE** are the glories of living with a septic tank. While the city dweller draws his water from, and sends his sewage to, sites located elsewhere, the country dweller draws his water from his own well and sends his sewage into a tank buried somewhere on his own property.

When I get to heaven one of the first requests I will have for Saint Peter is for him to explain to me the mysteries and vagaries of the septic tank. How in the world does sewage go in and — without benefit of electricity, pumps, or machinery of any kind — clear liquid come out the other end?

I know enough to know that part of the answer lies with 'organic decomposition' — a fifty-cent phrase meaning things rot down to nothing. Regrettably, however, this system is not without its faults. Over a period of time (just how long depends on which farmer you ask) things choose *not* to decompose and, well, pile up.

Yesterday the un-decomposed pile in our septic tank decided to make its presence known. Happily, by the mercies of God we did not experience a personal version of some of the horror stories told of septic tanks backing up into a house. Our experience was limited to a toilet on the first floor that decided not to eject its contents and a few hours of tending nature's call out in nature itself — as well as, of course, a rather large check written to the local plumbing concern.

The plumber spent a couple hours sending his magical snake running through more than one hundred feet of pipe until things finally began working again. We have now returned, for the time being, to the luxury of porcelain, but the next order of business is to have the septic tank pumped out, so that the situation does not recur. After that, we will have a few years of peace before the possibility rises again.

Don't we all carry around in us a type of septic tank that collects up garbage and waste? No matter how hard we try to avoid it, our lives are surrounded by human byproducts that — try as we might — end up clinging to us. Over the radio, through the TV screen, in magazines, books, computers . . . Daily we are presented with societal refuse that either voluntarily or involuntarily becomes a part of us.

Every once in awhile (just how often depends on which Christian you ask) we need to have our personal septic tank pumped

out. We need revival. We need God to scour out the sewage that has piled up, clean us out, so that we might once again enjoy unfettered communion with Him.

For it is thou, O our God, who wilt enlighten our darkness; from thee shall come our garments of light; and then our darkness shall be as the noonday. Give thyself to me, O my God, restore thyself to me! See, I love thee; and if it be too little, let me love thee still more strongly. I cannot measure my love so that I may come to know how much there is still lacking in me before my life can run to thy embrace and not be turned away until it is hidden in "the covert of thy presence." Only this I know, that my existence is my woe except in thee — not only in my outward life, but also within my inmost self — and all abundance I have which is not my God is poverty. *Augustine*

Hallelujah! Thine the glory,  
Hallelujah! Amen;  
Hallelujah! Thine the glory;  
Revive us again.  
*William P. Mackay*

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## BLESS THE BEASTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

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**TO WAIT UNTIL SUNDAY MORNING TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE** is to miss most of His message; God is communicating His truth seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, and receiving it does not require we be dressed in our Sunday finery. He communicates with us every day in our interaction with friends and family, in the marvelous way the sky is painted at sunset, and in the behavior of the animals that share our world.

Life among the beasts is a never-ending storybook illustrating God's personality and ways. In the uncluttered animal world the Lord's lessons leap out at us with a clarity undimmed by human aspiration and cynicism.

The Almighty has a sense of humor — offered as proof: Jonah — and He will often answer our need with a grinning nod, even as He sends another truth-lesson into our life. God speaks in the small things, the grand and troubling, and in the warm smiling moments when He sends one need to meet another.

### ***On the Palm of His Hand***

***September 18***

**SATURDAY LAST, WHILE LINDA WAS IN THE GARDEN** picking tomatoes and I was gassing up the trimmer in preparation for attacking the tall grass along the fences, a new friend stepped into our life.

She was a glaring splash of white against the green of the grass, traipsing across the lawn as she emerged from the woods, heading up the rise toward the garden. From a distance she was a happy-go-lucky sort, springing into the air in pursuit of a fluttering butterfly — not a care in the world, just playing with bugs.

Upon closer inspection, however, the cat was dirty, her ears scabby. There was an empty look to her eyes, and her bony haunches told us immediately that it had not been fun and games at all, but hunger that had driven her to pursue the butterfly. When we presented her with a bowl of food she attacked it with a

vengeance and — atypical of a cat — polished off the fairly generous contents at once.

Upon even closer inspection we discovered that, in spite of her young age, she was a mother; her teats were swollen with milk, which would help explain her emaciated condition. Tending her litter in the wild, young and inexperienced, she had not been able to hunt for the nutrition she desperately needed to replace that given to her kittens.

Even more disconcerting was that she seemed to lose interest in whatever family she had left behind in the woods. That first day she returned to the woods after eating her fill. The next morning, not surprisingly, she returned for more food; in fact she woke us by calling up to our bedroom window at seven a.m. But this time she lingered. On this visit she would remain for hours, lazing about the deck, eating more leisurely. Then as each day passed, she could be found outside the house at any time of day or night.

We searched the woods for sign of her kittens, to no avail. It may be that they had already been weaned; it may be that because of her young age and inexperience, they had died at birth; it may also be that her survival instincts won out over her maternal instincts, and once a ready source of food was found, she lost interest in her young, leaving them to fend for themselves.

Cats, like people, are not perfect parents. Their good intentions may yield bad results, or they may even lack the good intentions. They may give birth at an age when they are ill-prepared to meet the demands of their young. When the newspapers carry stories of young mothers abandoning their children or, worse, selling them to purchase drugs, how can we be too critical of an immature cat who forgot to take care of her young.

We can take comfort in the knowledge that we have a parent — a loving, attentive heavenly Father — who will not forget or abandon us. He will never forsake us; He will never turn us out into the street, abandoning us to the wolves. For we are written on the palms of His hands.

But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me." *Isaiah 49:14-16*



I have never understood why it should be considered derogatory to the Creator to suppose that He has a sense of humor.  
*William Ralph Inge*

### ***Small Joys***

***September 25***

Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. *James 1:16-17*

**CAN YOU SAY "OOPS!"?** Can you say "Never mind."?

In this space last week was told the tale of the young and inexperienced mother who presumably abandoned her litter of kittens in the wild once she discovered sanctuary here on our property.

While the lessons learned from that event remain worthy of our consideration, it is only fitting and proper that I correct the record — and the libelous remarks made regarding the feline's qualifications for motherhood.

Wednesday last, Linda and I bundled Angel into the cat carrier and took her in for what was certainly her first visit to the vet. She received a good going over, was poked and prodded, stuck, pricked and stabbed; her ears were swabbed out and drops dripped in; her leg was shaved and blood taken; and ointment was applied to the outside of her ears. When the torture was past, and she was given a relatively clean bill of health, she was bedraggled, but healthier.

She was also still pregnant.

You see, under the more experienced gropings of the doctor it was discovered that the blessed event was yet to take place, that the distention of her belly was, indeed, attributable to the presence of little ones yet to emerge.

So now, with her record expunged, Angel has taken up residence, sleeping on a blanket by the back door and keeping her belly filled with food and the occasional bowl of warm milk. She is beginning to fill out, her ears are looking better, her coat is improving, and the empty look has left her eyes.

Once again Linda has help out in the garden, and I am teaching Angel the bucolic delights of accompanying me on my daily walk to retrieve the mail. Once again we are looking forward to the antics of little kittens — and Angel can look forward to getting spayed the moment they are weaned.

And once again God has brought a new friend into our life. Some days His gift is a splash of brilliant sunlight playing through the turning leaves; some days it is welcome rain to rejuvenate the growing things, and give the fish in the pond some fresh water in which to swim. Some days it is a letter from an old friend, or a young deer that lingers by the library door. Some days His gift is His peace, welling up from within a yearning heart.

And some days it is a small white cat in need of a friend.

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## SEASONS

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**TIME ITSELF IS THE UNQUENCHABLE FORCE** standing between — not as a barrier, but as a connecting link — God and humanity. Nothing is quite so beyond our reach as time. We cannot change or alter it in any way; it is steady, monotonous, inexorable. If our watch stops, time itself continues on. We are helpless against it.

The Almighty, in contrast, holds time in His hand. He is free to shape and craft it to His pleasure.

On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon." So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. *Joshua 10:12-13*

Time is God's creation; He stands outside of it, as a potter stands outside a lump of clay. Yet God dwells *in* time as much as He dwells in all His creation. We may find Him there, in the days and seasons that mark our days. And even there we may hear His voice.



## As Time Goes By

**October 2**

**NOTHING IS QUITE SO REMARKABLE** as the change that takes place in the autumn. Where less than a week ago we were surrounded by green, we are now living in a world of jumbled hues of orange and gold and rust. Where just days ago the lawn around the house was a well-vacuumed carpet of green, it is now, in places, virtually covered over with fallen dried leaves.

Yesterday I was sweating in sunny, dry heat near 80 degrees, as I cut up a tree and hauled the wood back to the house. Today the wind is almost gale force, under cloudy skies, and by tonight we should have a hard freeze. If Linda and I do not go out tonight and either harvest or cover up the vine crops of squash and pumpkin, we'll lose them in the freeze.

Less than a week ago we were still picking green beans and tomatoes; today the bean vines have been stripped from their frames and removed to the compost pile, while the tomatoes have been pulled up and removed to the burn pile. This afternoon I will harvest the rest of the rhubarb, peppers and celery, and pick up the apples and pears that have fallen in the wind.

God's nature never stands still; it is always moving, pressing into the next day. Today's tree will be taller tomorrow — or it will be fallen, lying dead and rotting in last year's leaves. Today's grass, luxuriously pliant and green, will tomorrow be brittle and parched, brown and sharp to the touch. The fawn that accompanies her mother to the salt lick today will next year be taller and on her own — or she will become a hunter's trophy.

Time never stops. Season passes into season, change inevitably comes. As I gaze out my window, beyond the pond, into the trees of the woods that each day put on new clothes — I feel a sense of urgency. What have I done for the Lord today? The days continue to tick by; what am I doing that will yield eternal results? Am I using the time God has given me?

The person I pass on the street in town today, will tomorrow be older — or dead. What have I done today so that his tomorrow will be something more than just another day older? If he is dead, will I have done something to affect his eternity? Will God's kingdom be better — or larger — tomorrow, because of something I've done today?

When we are born, God gives each of us a bucketful of days. As time passes, the days drip out, one by one, until the bucket is dry. But only God knows how many days are in our bucket.

Work, for the night is coming,  
Under the sunset skies;  
While their bright tints are glowing,  
Work, for daylight flies.  
Work till the last beam fadeth,  
Fadeth to shine no more;  
Work, while the night is dark'ning,  
When man's work is o'er.

*Annie L. Coghill*

## Preparation

**October 23**

**AROUND THESE PARTS WE'RE IN THE THICK OF PREPARATIONS** for the fast approaching winter. With each year of experience under our belts we try to do a better job of getting ready for the winter cold and snow.

In the house, furniture will be removed from the unheated west porch; containers with freezable liquids will be removed from

the garage, workshop, and barn; and window screens will soon be removed from the windows and stored away until next spring.

The vegetable gardens have been cleaned of all this year's harvest, tilled, raked, and sowed with annual rye grass — which will hold the soil in place, and will next year be tilled under as "green manure." In the flower garden the plants that cannot stand the freezing temperatures have been dug up and moved into the sun room, where they will be kept warm until the spring; all the gladiolus bulbs have been dug and brought inside.

The two bird baths will be brought into the barn, the bird houses cleaned out and stored in the workshop, and the bird feeders cleaned and hung outside, filled with seed for the arriving snow birds.

This week we'll begin raking up as many of the fallen leaves as we can, to haul them to the shredder where they'll be run through and stored as mulch for next spring. Fallen pine needles will be raked up and spread over the strawberry plants. And once I'm sure the grass is finished growing, the mower deck will be taken off the tractor and replaced by the snow blade; by God's grace I'll time this to take place *before* the first blizzard — not always an easy thing to do. Then, finally, the snow fences will be hauled out and erected in critical locations along the drive.

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

*1 Peter 3:15a*

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction. *2 Tim. 4:2*

How seldom we prepare the spiritual part of our life as well as the physical. Yet the spirit is eternal, while the physical is all passing away. From our perspective, spiritual things are sometimes vague, enigmatic; from God's perspective, they are the only things that count.

How ready are we when God sets a moment of service before us? How ready are we to minister His word, to encourage another, to demonstrate His grace and compassion?

How well prepared are we for the tomorrow God has planned?



## Notes:

1. Genesis 39:1-18.
2. Ruth 1:1-22.
3. Acts 9:1-19.

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