



LETTERS OF FAITH AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Volume 1

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13

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Introduction

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **Philippians 4:4**

Chaplain Michael's goal is to make God's Truth understandable to everyone in short imaginative stories meant to encourage weary or lonely souls, uplift those in need, or minister to those needing a little more blessing in their day.

Written as warm, weekly devotional letters, you will discover more about God, heaven, the role of angels, worship, prayer, and living the Christian life more fully as you seek to open your heart more fully to Him.

Author's Biography

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A retired military veteran, Michael is indebted to the Lord Jesus whom he met while serving our country overseas. He now serves Him wherever the Lord leads.

Letter 1: The Storm Will Soon Pass

I can remember when friends came over that my mother always welcomed them, and we had so much fun together. Mother provided the milk and the cookies, and we provided the noise and the mess to clean up.

When it was time for our friends to go home, mother did not shoo them out the door with a broom nor did she abruptly gather up the dolls or strip us of our superhero capes. Instead, she would gather us together, tell each of our friends how nice it was to have had them over and how special they were, and then she would pray for each of us by name.

Is it any wonder on that late summer night when the crackling thunder boomed from above and the peels of lighting lit up the dark sky that we all found ourselves huddled around mama? Putting her loving arms around us, she would assure us that the storm would soon pass and that we would be alright.

The storm did pass, and we were alright.

Today, with all that is going on in our lives and in the world around us, it would be good to feel mama's loving arms and hear those precious words again, 'The storm will soon pass and you're gonna be alright.' Mama's home with Jesus now. She has heard the Savior say, 'Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant.'

Before mama left for Heaven, she drew us to herself and told us that there were days when she felt lonely and even scared because of life's problems. Then mama said, "But God never let me down. When I took my eyes off the world and off my problems and put my trust in God alone, He filled me with His peace."

Mama said her favorite verse in troubled times was Psalm 91:2 which says, I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust." She told us, "When I remember this verse, it's as if God puts His arms around me and says, "The storm will soon pass and you're gonna be alright."

Mama was so right. God cares for us more than anyone else ever could. Even Jesus said, "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:26). When we think of how our loving God takes care of even the birds and the butterflies, we are assured that He will take care of each of us in all of life's circumstances.

Mama taught us to sing a hymn called Trust and Obey. One stanza goes like this: Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies, but His smile quickly drives it away. Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh nor a tear, can abide while we trust and obey. Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.

One day I asked mama what it meant to trust and obey. She told me that trusting in Jesus begins by not trusting in myself to get to Heaven, but to trust in Jesus Who paid for all of my wrong deeds, words, and thoughts when He died on the cross and rose again. Then mama taught me John 3:16, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life." On that day I obeyed. I prayed, 'Jesus, thank You for paying for all of my sins. Come into my heart and be my Savior forever.'

Now I knew why mama could say, 'The storm will soon pass and you're gonna be alright.'

Letter 2: Responding to Life's Circumstances

"It's on Sale! It's on Sale!"

"Yes, that was the first complete sentence my daughter spoke. And it just happened to be in church while the Pastor was speaking."

My friend related to me that one Sunday morning her three-year old daughter had brought to church with her an advertisement that had come in the mail.

"The Pastor was so kind. He looked at the congregation who were laughing and smiling and said, "Perhaps I will use that as an illustration next Sunday."

Beloved, how we respond to circumstances in our life makes the difference every day. Not just in our own lives, but to those around us.

As Christians, how should we respond to these days in which we live? Every generation from the time of Jesus has faced this question. And God Himself has given us the answer. The simple, yet important truth is found in one of the shortest verses in the Bible: 1 Thessalonians 5:16, "Rejoice always."

Far too often we allow our circumstances to dictate the amount of joy that shines through us. The world tells us that our joy ought to be based on our circumstances. And that would make perfect sense if our joy could be found in the things of this world. Look at the world around us. Can you really base a life of joy on our day-to-day situations? God wants you to find your joy in Him.

While talking with His disciples Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” The word ‘full’ means ‘over-flowing.’ I call it ‘Jesus Joy’.

The Bible says, “The joy of the LORD is your strength.” We have read it, sung it, and we need to live in the joy of the LORD. Will the Joy of the LORD see you through your circumstances?

Let’s take a look at our greatest example, Jesus. The night before Jesus was crucified, He prayed in agony, sweating drops of blood. He even told His disciples, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death” (Matthew 26:38).

Although Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow, He still had joy. How do we know that? The Bible says, “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the JOY that was set before Him endured the Cross” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Isn’t that amazing? Jesus was facing the most excruciating experience of His life and He faced it with His eternal perspective of joy. Jesus looked beyond the cross to what it would accomplish: Glory for the Father and salvation for the world. He endured the cross for you and me.

His joy was not based on His temporary circumstances, and our joy should not be based on our temporary circumstances either.

The Apostle Paul said, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:18). Heaven is going to be so wonderful forever.

When your personal world or the world around you looks dark and discouraging, remember the joy in Jesus that is set before you will last for eternity. God Himself will be with you. Because of that, you can rejoice today and always! It all begins by trusting in Jesus who endured the cross for you.

Prayer: Jesus thank You for paying for all of my sins when You died on the cross and rose again. Save me. Fill me with Your joy. Amen.

Letter 3: The Bible – Our GPS

Have you ever been lost driving somewhere? Trying to get to your destination, while at the same time maintaining your calm? "Where is it!?" you ask. Add to that, rain or snow coming down, unfamiliar streets, a rented car, and a time that you are expected to be there. Each of these can add a certain amount of stress to your situation.

Day-to-day life can be like that when we experience unfamiliar events, detours, or changes in our daily routine. And the more events or challenges we experience, the more likely we will be tempted to stress or fear.

Most of us do not like getting lost. I have had to pull into the gas station more than once and ask for directions. But as we navigate the uncharted waters of our lives, we have options. We can allow our circumstances to dictate how we are going to react, or we can respond with confidence in a way that will bless us and bring glory to God.

On her way to her first PTA meeting in a new town, Betty took a wrong turn and was running behind time. Not wanting to make a bad first impression by arriving late, she began to speed up. Approaching a four-way stop at the same time as another car, she thought at first that she would quickly go. Instead, she waved the other car through. It turned out to be the new PTA president who did not want to be late either. That act of kindness led to them becoming friends. Soon after, Betty shared the Gospel with her, and she accepted Jesus as her Savior!

As Christians, we have something much better than a road map, atlas, or GPS. We have the Word of God which tells us not only how to get to our destination but also how best to live while on our journey so that we don't fear or stress out. Most of us know that stress is not good for our physical well-being, nor is it good for our spiritual well-being. Fortunately, when it appears, it can be seen as a signpost on life's highway that reads: Rest Stop. Time to stop and rest in Him. The Psalmist says, "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him" (Psalm 37:7).

There is a wonderful hymn called Day by Day. Within the first stanza are these words; 'Day by day, and with each passing moment, strength I find to meet my trials here. Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment, I've no cause for worry or for fear.'

The Father who loves you beyond all measure is the One who says, "Fear not, for I am with thee." He who has promised to be with us throughout life's journey is the same One David wrote about in Psalm 23 when he said, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me."

We may go through the valley of the shadow of death, but we do not stop there. God brings us through on our way home where the things of this world can neither haunt us nor hurt us. Therefore, we can confidently proclaim with David: "I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Jesus confirmed what David said when He said, "In My Father's house are many dwellings; I go to prepare a place for you... Where I go you know, and the way you know" (John 14:2-4).

Jesus said the Father's House is Heaven, a real literal place. Jesus has gone to prepare real literal places in Heaven for all who trust in Him. But His disciple

Thomas answered, "No, wait Lord. We do not know where You are going. So how can we know the way. I have not even started, and I feel lost. How do I get there?" Jesus said to Thomas, "I'm the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

Like Thomas, every person is born into this world lost and separated from God. But by God's grace, through faith in Jesus alone, God has paved the way to Himself.

Prayer: Are you lost? Tell God out loud or in your heart: God, I'm lost. Thank You Jesus for paying for all my wrong deeds when You died for me and rose again. Help me always to point lost people to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost but now I'm found. Was blind but now I see.

Letter 4: Not Confined

We have come to know that we can actually feel more confined than we once thought we were. Like incarcerated felons or prisoners of war, solitary confinement seems like the next step, right? NOT SO!

Many of God's saints have been confined not knowing what might come next. Perhaps you have heard of some of these people.

Jonah: Confined to the belly of a big fish for three days

Daniel: Confined to a den of hungry lions

Paul: Confined to a prison cell on more than one occasion

When we feel confined, cooped up, and about to crack up, it is a good time to remember who is in control of all circumstances - our loving heavenly Father. It is comforting to know that ultimately all things work together for good to those who love God.

While we await God's perfect plan to unfold during these uncertain days in which we live, perhaps we could use some advice on how to live in a way that will keep our spirits alive and thriving. And the best counsel for Christians does not come from the advice column of the local newspaper, but it is always found in God's precious Word, The Bible.

As the Apostle Paul waited in a prison cell confined, cooped up, and not knowing what tomorrow would bring, he gave us some advice, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). While in a Roman prison awaiting his

possible execution, Paul was able to say, “I have learned in whatever state I am to be content” (Romans 4:11).

Paul looked back on all the occasions that God had continually proven Himself faithful. By looking at the past faithfulness of God in your life, you too can live courageously today rejoicing in the Lord. And as every day leads to tomorrow, we find that God can be trusted for not only today but for the future as well. We do not know what tomorrow will bring, but we do know Who holds tomorrow in the palm of His hand.

After Jesus was crucified, He was laid in a borrowed tomb - confined as it were to a lonely dark hole in a mountain. There He remained cut off from the world of the living. It all looked so hopeless. But the Father and the Son already had a plan. You see, on the third day the stone was rolled away so people could see that death could not restrain Jesus. When you trust in Jesus as your Savior because He died for your sins and rose again, He gives you power not to be constrained by the limited pains and problems of this world.

When I was a child, I wanted to fly. Not in an airplane, ‘I’ wanted to fly. Later, when I trusted Jesus as Savior, it felt like I was flying. Why? Because Jesus had set me free. Jesus says, “If the Son makes you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

Are you feeling down, confined, or cut off? Take Paul’s advice, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, Rejoice!” Every Christian can rejoice, and every person can become a Christian.

Prayer: Tell Jesus the best you know how: Thank you Jesus for paying for my sins. I invite you into my heart to be my Savior, Amen.

Letter 5: What Will We Do in Heaven?

Sometimes part of an angel's ministry is to assist new arrivals feel at home in heaven. Such was the case with a man who had just placed his faith in Jesus hours before his entrance through the gates of heaven.

"Welcome to heaven! What's your name?" asked the greeting angel.

"Hello. My name is Hog."

"Hog, that's an interesting name," said the angel.

"Yeah, that's what my buddies call me because of the motorcycle I ride. Actually, I was riding my bike home from a Billy Graham crusade right before I showed up here. Mr. Graham said that Jesus died for all of my sins on the cross, that Jesus rose again on the third day, and that whoever would trust in Jesus would be forgiven of their sins and go to heaven forever. He said that we shouldn't put it off because none of us knows how long we have left on earth, and that Jesus will accept us just the way we are. I was on my way to tell everyone I know that I gave my heart to Jesus when I arrived here. Mr. Graham was right, no one should put off trusting in Jesus."

"Tell me, Mr. Hog, do you know if you have any friends or family here in heaven?"

"I don't know, Mr. Angel. Before I heard Mr. Graham preach earlier, I never thought I would be here. But I feel like I'm home now."

"Indeed, you are."

"Mr. Angel, on Friday nights I went to the bar where I drank and played pool. Painted on one of the walls were pictures of people floating on clouds and playing harps and guitars. Do people do that here in heaven?"

"It's better than that Mr. Hog. While there are no clouds to float on, we do have more instruments in our praise choir than Solomon had in his orchestra."

"I don't remember a band called Solomon. Must have been before my time." said Hog.

"Well, nonetheless, if you like to play music, I'm sure there is an instrument for you."

"That's great Mr. Angel, but I like to do other things, too."

"Well, Heaven is the right place for you, Mr. Hog. You will never be bored, nor will you ever exhaust the activities you would like to do," said the angel.

What will we do for eternity? Here is where many people have speculated and latched on to false beliefs. For instance, books, TV shows, and stories made up by people who have never cared to reference the Bible, tell us how individuals in heaven float around on clouds playing harps, that people in heaven are on their hands and knees polishing gold streets, or that they're yawning, singing the same chorus over and over and over again. These are false assumptions not found anywhere in the Bible.

Since heaven is going to be so much greater than anything we have ever experienced on earth, how can we really know what heaven is going to be like or even what we will do in heaven? God has revealed some things to us in His Word.

Perhaps you have heard someone say, "I'd rather be having a good time in Hell than to be bored in Heaven." Well, the truth according to God's Word, the Bible, is that no one in hell will ever-ever have one second of good time. In comparison, people in heaven will only experience joy and exhilarating happiness in the presence of God forever.

Jesus sometimes called heaven the Kingdom of God. Kingdoms include the city, the countryside, and activities of all sorts. While we are no doubt going to experience some supernatural wonders, there is no reason that what brought us joy on earth would be absent from heaven, unless God has something that will bring you even greater joy. With pain-free bodies and sharpened minds, the natural and hidden talents and abilities that God gave us on earth will be even better put to use serving and enjoying the kingdom of God with great pleasure.

Before Jesus ascended back to heaven He said, "I go to prepare a place for you..." (John 14:2). Jesus said this to each person who would place their faith in Him. Do you have a longing for heaven? Jesus said, "I'm the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

Prayer: Right now, you can pray and talk to God from your heart: Jesus, thank You for paying for my sins when You died and rose again. Help me to live here for You with the time You have given me.

Letter 6: Created to Worship

Is it possible that the passengers on the Mayflower thought their descendants would travel on ships, too? Ships that travel through outer space. Do you think Ozzie & Harriet ever thought their grandchildren would consider keeping their children home from school and learning on a computer?

Many changes can bring welcome convenience to our lives. I think of washing machines, telephones, and indoor plumbing. But some changes disrupt the true order of life that God put in place from the beginning. And when there are changes in these areas of life, we know things are not right.

For example, God has created us to be social beings.

The word 'monk' is from a Greek word that means, single or solitary. Yet most monks live in communion with one another. Solitary confinement in prison or in war is a punishment inflicted on people. We were not created to live in isolation. I am so thankful that we are never truly alone. God has promised, "I'll never leave thee nor forsake thee." (Hebrews 13:5)

While God is with us, He also created us to be with other people. While angels are around us, God created us to be with other people.

This current disruption in our lives reminds us that God has a purpose for us to live in communion with others so we can demonstrate His love towards one another. Through our encouraging words and unselfish deeds, we demonstrate His love.

Jesus said, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 13:34) We need to be together to love one another.

God has not only created us to be social beings, but He has created us to be worshipful beings. God has created within us a desire to worship and long for something or someone bigger and stronger than ourselves - Someone or something that can handle the impossible and comfort our souls. Only God, who created us, can rightly fill that void because He put it there for Himself.

Archaeology and history tell us that cultures throughout the ages have had their gods, of one sort or another, whom they worship. There have been the Greek gods, Roman gods, Hindu gods, Chinese gods, and so forth. The list can be traced all the way back to Satan who declared, "I shall be like the Most High."

Why does Satan want to be like God? Because he wants to be worshiped. Remember, when Jesus was being tempted in the wilderness. The Bible says, "The devil took Jesus up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And the devil said to Jesus, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." (Matthew 4:8-9)

Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" (Matthew 4:10)

Yes, we can and should worship God in private through prayer and for some people through song. But God also calls His people to worship Him openly and together. Like the angels of Heaven who declare, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God almighty." We who belong to Him yearn to gather with one another and worship our God. When that is not possible, we know things are not right.

Let this disruption in your life remind you that this world is not our home. Every moment that passes we are that much closer to our permanent residence,

777 Crystal River Avenue that flows by the throne of God. There, relationships, social-ships, and worship will all be met perfectly in Him Who created us for Himself.

There is only one thing that keeps God from fulfilling His purpose for a person's life, and that is sin. But He is willing and the only One able to cleanse us of our sin and move in to take up permanent residence within us.

God says you must agree with Him that you have done and said things that are wrong, that is sin. Believe in your heart that Jesus died in your place for your sins and rose again.

Prayer: If you do, you can pray (talk to God openly or privately): God, I'm a sinner. Jesus, I know that You died for my sins and rose again. I invite You into my life as my Savior. Help me to live for You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Letter 7: He is Risen

We can still here the joyous refrain from last Sunday's celebrations: He is Risen!
He is Risen Indeed!

Because Jesus arose on the first day of the week, Christians gather on the first day of the week. Around the world, millions of people celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. In hundreds of countries and numerous languages, the same Truth and Hope is proclaimed - Jesus is alive. And because He lives, there is glorious hope for today, tomorrow, and beyond.

The chorus of one hymn says: 'Because He lives, I can face tomorrow, Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know He holds the future, and life is worth the living just because He lives!'

"Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene." (Mark 16:9). Mary loved Jesus very much. She was one of the last to depart from the cross and the first to arrive at His tomb early Sunday morning. It was silently dark outside the garden tomb and her eyes were still wet from affectionate tears for her Lord when she heard His tender voice say, "Mary." Her heart began to race as she wrapped her arms around the risen Lord. Oh, the Joy that was poured into her life at that moment.

Has your personal world changed because of circumstances beyond your control? Health, finances, relationships, or something else? Are you feeling down as Mary was when Jesus was missing from her life? Do you want to maintain or restore the Joy the comes from The Lord?

Do what Mary did. Cling to The Lord. The Bible says, “The Joy of the LORD is your strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10). As children of God, we need the supernatural Joy of the Lord every day, especially in these days in which we live.

Like the Love of God, the Joy of the Lord is powerful and unending. The Joy that Jesus gives helps you live every moment with an attitude of gratitude and victory over the temporary circumstances of this world.

We can be robbed of the short-lived happiness this world seems to offer, but nothing can take away the Joy of the Lord. Why? Because the Joy of The Lord is based on the Love that God has for you. And nothing can remove you from God’s love.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” (Romans 8:35, 37)

Though Jesus knew the cross of agony and pain lay ahead of Him, and the separation from the Father would be terribly intense, the Bible says:

“For the Joy that was set before Him He endured the cross,” (Hebrews 12:2).

What was the Joy set before Jesus? He knew that when He rose from the dead that it would bring glory and honor to the Father, and that it would bring salvation to the world, including you and me. Jesus died in our place for our sins and rose again that whoever would trust in Him would be forgiven of their sins.

Prayer: You can pray right now: Dear Jesus, I know that you paid for my sins when You died and rose again. Come into my heart and be my Lord. I will follow you every day because I know You live. Fill me with Your Joy. Amen.

Letter 8: Spiritual First Aid

This week I was bitten by a spider. My skin swelled and began to itch. Before I knew it, I was scratching my arm so much I was not able to concentrate on what I was doing. I found out what to do for a spider bite. The remedy for my bite was to mix one teaspoon of baking soda with two teaspoons of water and to apply the paste to the bite with a cotton ball.

So I applied the paste, it drew out the poison the spider had injected into my arm and the itching stopped. Happily, I journeyed through the rest of my day.

Does it seem like the changing circumstances in your world have injected unholy poison into your spiritual life and taken your mind off the blessings of God? Does it seem like you are spending more time scratching your head than trusting in God Who will always be faithful to the end?

Perhaps it's time for some spiritual First Aid. The three steps for extracting unholy poison from your life and getting your mind back on the blessings of God are found in the truth of God's Word, the Bible.

First, we must cleanse our spiritual wound. The way we do this is by asking God to forgive us of any sin that has gotten into our heart by word or deed. Don't be shy. God loves you and He wants to cleanse your wound. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Satan would love nothing more than for you to forget God's Great Faithfulness. How often is God faithful? Always.

One wonderful hymn proclaims of God: 'Great is Thy faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see; All I have needed Thy hand hath provided. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.'

The next step in healing our spiritual wound is to put some Holy Bactine on it to prevent infection. Again, talk to God.

Pray: Father, Thank You for cleansing me. I ask You now to allow the Holy Spirit to work in my life to help me do Your will and to keep me from being infected by the things of this world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

And finally, let's bandage that wound with Love.

Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

Those who know the sacrificial love of God can demonstrate His love toward others. And as we do so, others will see how God's love is far better than what this world can offer us.

As Christians, we need to seek spiritual first aid when events in this life distract us from focusing on God's faithfulness, His promises, and His love.

Perhaps you need more than first aid. If you do not know Jesus as your Savior, you need a new life, spiritual life. And He will give you new life if you ask Him. Jesus said, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have 'everlasting' life." (John 3:16)

Prayer: You can have a conversation with God right now. Silently or out loud you can pray: Dear God, I'm a sinner, and I need new life. Jesus, I know you paid for my sins when You died in my place and rose again. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Letter 9: Making Memories

Do you remember when the old Sears and Roebuck catalog would arrive? The dolls, the plows, and the pocketknives. Times have changed, but our memories linger on.

Coming home from school to the smell of apple pie, chores to do, and family time. Times have changed, but memories linger on.

How about that first kiss from your future husband or wife. Times have changed, but memories linger on.

Memories are made in the present to be remembered in the future. Today is yesterday's tomorrow. Tomorrow, will be our memory of today.

In these past weeks, we have been challenged by changes in our lives. But as Christians, we do not face these days alone. When all is said and done, we'll look back on the memories we made and thank God who has been with us all along.

Some of our most precious memories are made when we are in communion with our precious Lord. There's a sweet hymn called Precious Memories:

Precious mem'ries, unseen angels, Sent from somewhere to my soul;
How they linger, ever near me, And the sacred past unfold.

Refrain: Precious mem'ries, how they linger, How they ever flood my soul;
In the stillness of the midnight, Precious, sacred scenes unfold.

We are making memories today. How do you want to remember today? As a day of victory or defeat? A day of faithfulness or false hope? A day of promises kept

or broken abandonment? Remember, we have victory in Jesus. He pulls no punches. He said, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

We are going through tribulation now. But as Christians, we daily overcome through Jesus who loves us, helps us, and is coming back for us. Paul reminds us: “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,” (1st Corinthians 15:57). We receive the victory when we place our faith in Jesus as our Savior. Faith is the victory! Oh glorious victory, that overcomes the world.

Remember, God is faithful. And since He never changes, He will always be faithful. The Psalmist declared, “Your faithfulness endures to all generations.” (Psalm 119:90)

Remember also that God always keeps His promises. This is the promise that He has promised us – eternal life. (1 John 2:25)

Remember, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Sometimes when you read one of God’s promises in the Bible, it’s written in the past tense. Because if God has promised, it is as good as done.

Today, you can choose the type of memories that you’ll look back on. God makes it possible for you to remember Days of victory, Days of faithfulness, and Days of promises kept. The greatest memory to have in your heart is of the day you trusted Jesus as Savior. You can make that memory today.

Pray: Jesus, thank You for paying for my sins by Your death and resurrection. Let’s begin to make memories.

Letter 10: The Angel's Interview

Recently, I heard that after a new arrival has been in Heaven for a week that angels are conducting interviews to find out if Heaven is what the believer thought it would be. If that were true, what do you think some of the questions and answers might be? Well, I'm sure you would want to be prepared to answer some of those questions. So, let's listen in on one of those interviews today.

"Greetings! I'm one of the multitude of angels that God created before time began. I'm here to ask you a few questions today. First of all, how do you like Heaven so far?"

"Wow, Mr. Angel! Heaven is even greater than I thought it would be!"

"Tell me, what did you expect would happen when you came through the gates of Heaven?"

"Well, I tell you, I forgot that a couple of your angel friends were going to bring me here. What an exciting trip that was! Then, when we arrived and came through the gate, I thought St. Peter was supposed to be there."

"Tell me, were you disappointed when Peter did not greet you?"

"Oh no sir. Jesus Himself welcomed me home. And that was a very special moment for me. A tear came to my eye, and I hugged Jesus and told Him how much I loved Him and thanked Him for His amazing grace and saving a wretch like me."

"Tell me, in the week that you've been here, have you thought that maybe something is missing?"

"Well Mr. Angel, I was kind of expecting a mansion, a harp, and a crown."

"Tell me, have you been disappointed with your living conditions?"

"Oh no sir!"

"Tell me, do you know how to play a harp?"

"Well, not really."

"Let me assure you, when all the saints are gathered before the throne of Jesus, He will hand out the crowns according to what each one has done."

"That sounds great Mr. Angel!"

"Tell me, have you been surprised by anything in Heaven?"

"Well Mr. Angel, I could say that I am surprised that everyone agrees on and enjoys the same music. Beautiful music that fills all of Heaven itself. It's not too loud, it's not old fashioned, it's just perfect. Everyone says so."

"Tell me, what has been a highlight for you since arriving here in Heaven?"

"Oh Mr. Angel, every single thing has been fantastic. Talking with some of the other people here has been great. Like when I spoke with Mr. Noah, he understood how important it is to pick the right kind of pet to take with you if you're going to be traveling. And Mr. Jonah told me that even though he felt down in the mouth at times, it's always best to trust God.

Mr. Angel, everything is just so marvelous here in Heaven. And to know that it is going to last forever and ever is incredible! And it's really not the music, the crowns, the people, or the streets of gold. It's really all about being here with Jesus

my Savior forever. He who loved me and gave His life for me that I could trust in Him and be here in Heaven with Him eternally."

That was the interview of the believer in Heaven by the angel.

The most important question for each person to answer is not asked by an angel. It is asked by Jesus Himself. Today, Jesus is asking you; "Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15)

The answer is not multiple choice. Jesus most definitely said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

Prayer: If Heaven is your desired eternal destination, you can tell Jesus out loud or in your heart: Jesus, I have sinned. Thank You for paying for my sins when You died on the cross and rose from the dead. Because You died for me, I will live for You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Letter 11: In This Season

A friend who works as a questioner told me that one of the questions that she likes to ask people is: Do you have a favorite season? Some of the answers given have included: baseball season, Christmas season, spring season, hunting season, canning season, and Thanksgiving.

The Bible tells us: “For everything there is a season.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). This includes the period of time in which we are now living. One thing the Bible makes clear, and we know from personal experience, is that a season does not last forever. In times like these, we are grateful for that truth. Other times, we wish a specific season would never end.

As we persevere in the days in which we live, we do so, not depending on ourselves, the government, or the medical professionals, but on God who calls us to holy living while trusting completely in Him.

During hurricane season, a church in Florida boarded up its windows in response to news of a very powerful category 5 hurricane with wind gusts of over 150 mph headed their way. Before leaving the city because of mandatory evacuation orders, the church members gathered in prayer. They prayed that God would somehow use this crisis for His glory and the good of people, that the church building would be protected, and that when they returned, He would use them to reach out to the community. Before leaving, they agreed that whoever could do so would meet back at the church building.

When the citizens were allowed back into their city, they discovered homes had been flooded, trees toppled, businesses destroyed, and neighboring streets impassible because of mud, debris, and downed power lines.

When the church members gathered at the church, they were amazed to see the building still standing amidst all the destruction. Yes, that is what they prayed for, but aren't we like that sometimes when God answers our prayers? Amazed at what He does.

They began to serve their community by turning part of the church into a place of refuge and comfort for the devastated. They set up cots, prepared meals, and shared the true hope and light of the world, Jesus. This actually turned into a time of rejoicing for many as this season of loss was transformed into eternal gain as people accepted Jesus as Savior.

I have read ministry reports and heard from fellow laborers that we are in the midst of a great harvest season. Not of fruits, vegetables, or grain but of human souls. Because of this season of separation, masks, and other precautions, more people are seeking something lasting. They are hearing of eternal life in Christ, an everlasting home in Heaven, and a permanent erasing of their sins in the Light of the Gospel. Through friends, television, radio, and social media, what Satan thought was a great season of discouragement, is being used of God as a time of rejoicing for many - including those in Heaven who rejoice over every sinner who repents.

As with all previous seasons, the season we are living in now will surely pass. In the meantime, we are called not to give up, get down, nor throw in the towel. Instead, we are called to live with the perseverance of the saints. The Apostle Paul says it

this way, “Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” (Galatians 6:9)

The Lord’s promise, “I’ll never leave thee nor forsake thee,” (Deuteronomy 31:6) includes every season of life. Life itself is but for a season. Then eternity begins.

Prayer: Have you invited Jesus to be with you in every season of life and beyond? Pray now: Jesus, thank You for dying for my sins and rising again. I trust in You as my Savior. Amen.

Letter 12: COVID Conquering, Overcoming with Victory in Him Daily

While sitting in my study this morning reading, I noticed my nose was rather stuffy. Then the word COVID came to mind. I asked myself, “Soul, do you have a Covid complex?”

Especially during this time, Christians should be living with a COVID complex.

This is probably not original with me (rather the Apostle Paul), but having a COVID complex entails: Conquering and Overcoming with Victory in Him, Daily!

COVID. The very word that Satan is using to strike fear in the hearts of millions can remind us that while taking precautions such as washing our hands, keeping our distance, and covering our coughs and sneezes, we need not live in fear.

The first letter in the word Covid is C. Which reminds us that we are Conquerors. Actually, the Bible says: “We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37)

Conquering is an active word. So, what should we do? We should actively pray every day. Give thanks and praise to God for who He is, and ask Him to protect our friends, family, doctors, and nurses to help people get well. And pray for many, many people to trust in Jesus as their Savior.

The second letter in the word Covid is O. Overcomers. We are not only conquerors, but we are overcomers. The Apostle John said, “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4)

The One who is in you is the Holy Spirit. He helps us to overcome he who is in the world, the devil. The enemy's schemes and lies to scare us will utterly fail.

The third letter in the word Covid is V which for us stands for Victory! Because we are Conquerors, because we are Over-comers, because the Holy Spirit lives in us, we live in Victory! Paul says, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:57). O victory in Jesus, my Savior forever!

The next to the last letter in the word Covid is I. This reminds us that our victory is "in" Him. "By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit." (1 John 4:13). When we trust in Jesus as our Savior, we are placed "in" Him and He comes to live in us. He is always with us, never to leave or forsake us.

And finally, the last letter in the word Covid is D for Daily. Jesus teaches us to pray, "Give us this day our Daily bread." (Matthew 6:11). This demonstrates our continual trust in God for our every need. He gives us what we need to live in this world. And He has provided all that we need to live with Him in Heaven when that time comes.

His provision comes through Jesus Who said, "I'm the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

Pray: Come to Jesus now and pray: Thank You Jesus for paying for my sins when You died and rose again. Come into my heart as my Savior and help me to live for You always. Amen.

Remember, as Christians we can live with a COVID complex; Conquering, Overcoming, with Victory, In Him, Daily!

Letter 13: Keeping Heaven in Mind

I remember reading about a wealthy Prince who was planning to travel to a far country. He sent a servant to learn as much as he could about the country so that his master would be as prepared as possible for his trip.

When the servant returned, he told his master that he had learned much about this wonderful place and was eager to share this information with him. The servant spoke about what the country looked like, where the country is located, who the people were that lived there, what they did to pass the time, how to get there, and much more. All of these things pleased the Prince, and he began to prepare for his journey.

Many of us like to travel and visit other places. But for most of us today, our traveling is done by watching National Geographic on TV.

Nonetheless, the Bible tells us that each of us is going to take a journey one day. Not a short-lived vacation, but a journey to a permanent place to dwell. For those who trust Jesus as Savior, that permanent home is called Heaven. If there was ever a time that we should remember that this world is not our home, that we are strangers and pilgrims here on our way to that wonderfully prepared place called Heaven, this is that time.

Today, many people have a longing in their heart for a place that is free from the negative effects of living in a world that is plagued by sin. The tears, the heartaches, the physical and emotional hurt that comes with sickness and broken relationships,

and the violence and mayhem brought on by those who prefer to walk in darkness rather than live in the light.

Is there such a place that is free of these things? Yes. That place is called Heaven. For the next few weeks, we will discover what God has revealed to us in His Word about our eternal home called Heaven. What is Heaven like? What will we do in Heaven? Who will be in Heaven? Is there more than one Heaven? Will we know one another in Heaven? And much more. Together, we will gain new insights and be reminded of what awaits us just ahead.

One of our goals will be to separate fact from fiction. For example, while a group of widows gathered at church one day for a luncheon, the topic of seeing their husbands entered their conversation.

One widow said, “Oh yes, it will be wonderful to see Henry again. I want to see him with his wings.”

Surprised, another lady replied, “Mable, you know we don’t have wings when we go to Heaven.”

To which Mable replied, “Oh, Henry will. I taped them on him at the funeral home.” While only angels truly have wings in Heaven, our bodies will experience change. We'll discover that, too, in the days ahead.

The Apostle Paul says, “Our citizenship is in Heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 3:20)

It can be nice to visit and vacation in other places. But even after a good time elsewhere, it's a welcome feeling to be home. Keeping a picture in our mind's eye of a sign above Heaven's gate that reads, 'Home Sweet Home' is another reminder that we are headed home.

A healthy longing for our home in Heaven helps us to make it through the rough days here on earth. Looking forward to what is true and real about Heaven makes the bumps in this life seem not quite so big. Our relatively short time on earth will be kept in perspective as we compare it to our eternity with Jesus in Heaven.

We can wake up each day singing the hymn, It Will Be Worth It All!

It will be worth it all when we see Jesus!

Life's trials will seem so small when we see Christ.

One glimpse of His dear face, all sorrow will erase.

So, bravely run the race till we see Christ.

Are you prepared to see Jesus? Have you made your reservation for Heaven? God is taking reservations now.

Prayer: From your heart tell Him: God, You know the things I've done. I'm sorry. Jesus, thank You for paying for my sins when You died and rose again. Save me and help me to live for You each day. Amen.

Letter 14: What is Heaven Like?

A morning TV host had a panel of guests on her show. The guests included: Reverend White, Dr. Ho-hum, and Miss Moon Beam. The topic of the conversation that day was: What is Heaven like?

The host began, "Reverend White, is that a Bible you have with you today?"

"Yes, it is. If you want to know the truth about heaven, you will find it in this wonderful book that God has given us. As a matter of fact, heaven is mentioned over five hundred times in the Bible."

"Dr. Ho-hum, what has been your basis of study about heaven?" The host asked.

"Well, I wrote an article about heaven in a very well-known magazine."

"Yes, I know that Dr. Ho-hum. I have read your interesting article. But where did you acquire your knowledge of heaven?"

"Well, I have read a number of magazine articles about heaven in my lifetime, and I have watched some shows on TV, too."

With a smile on her face, the host said, "I see. Thank you, Dr. Ho-hum."

"Miss Moon Beam. Thank you for joining us today. Tell me, how do you know about heaven?"

"Well, I believe I was born there. My daddy always calls me his little angel. And my mother says I'm forever on cloud nine."

"Of course, I should have guessed," said the TV host.

"Reverend White, in the short amount of time we have left today, could you describe heaven to us?" asked the TV host.

"Yes, I would love to tell you about heaven. First of all, the heaven we're talking about today is where God lives. Heaven is a real place, a place as literal and factual as the chair you are sitting in.

Not only is God in heaven, but a great number of angels that He created are in heaven serving Him. Sometimes, God sends angels from heaven to interact in our lives in various ways. The Bible also tells us that in heaven there is beautiful music. No matter your favorite type of music here on earth, you will find that in heaven everyone will agree that the music is even better.

In heaven, there is no sorrow, heartache, or pain of any kind. Our friends and loved ones who have died trusting in Jesus are there right now. Our hands will touch the hands of our loved ones again. And our arms will embrace them once again.

Of course, what makes heaven 'heaven' for the Christian is the perpetual presence of God as Sovereign Ruler of the universe, and the reality of enjoying forever the companionship of our Redeemer and Lord, Jesus. Even now, in heaven, Jesus is preparing places for all who trust in Him."

"So Reverend White, how can someone know if they will go to heaven? Should they live a real good life or follow the Golden Rule or give to charities?" asked the host.

"There is nothing we can do on our own to merit going to heaven." said Reverend White. "But Jesus has told us how anyone can go to heaven if they want to."

"I want to!" said Miss Moon Beam.

"Me too," interjected Dr. Ho-hum.

"Yes, tell us all," said the host.

"Well, the Bible says each of us have said and done things that are wrong and that we know we have. No matter how we might have excused it, God calls it sin. God says because we have sinned, we do not deserve to go to heaven. Instead, we deserve punishment for doing wrong. But Jesus took our punishment in our place when He died on the cross. And because He rose again to life, He can offer us forgiveness for our sins.

Prayer: Any person can pray - that is talk to God from your heart and say: Dear God, I have sinned. Thank You, Jesus, for paying for my sins. Help me to live for You until it's time for me to go to heaven. In Your name I pray, Amen.'

If that is your prayer, heaven will be your forever home.

Letter 15: Three Heavens

Having been sent by God to escort another believer home to heaven at the time of his passing, a couple of angels were nearing heaven's gates. As the gates began to open the believer asked, "What is that beautiful sound!?"

One of the angels informed him that was the sound of eternal praise to God Who made the heavens and the earth.

"Heavens?" he asked. "You mean there is more than one heaven?"

The other angel said, "Sir, you have just passed through the first two heavens and now you are about to enter the third heaven. This is the Father's house where Jesus has prepared a place for you."

While movies, magazines, books, TV shows, and other media can make heaven seem quite fanciful, we know from God's Word that the heaven where God rules over all things and where believers will spend eternity is indeed quite real. Even more real than the other two heavens with which we are more familiar.

Jesus told us we should not spend time worrying since God cares for us. He said, "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:26)

Jesus referred to the birds as flying through the air. This is the first heaven - the canopy around the earth from which the rain and the snow fall and from where rainbows brighten many a persons' days.

The believer said to the angels, "So if the birds fly in the first heaven and God rules from the third heaven, the second heaven must be where the moon, the stars, and the planets have been placed by God?"

"Yes, that's right!" replied one of the angels. "As a matter of fact, I was there when God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth." (Genesis 1:14-15)

"It was really quite spectacular to see the sun created out of nothing." said the other angel. "God spoke and it was done!"

With that the believer said, "Thank you angels for escorting me home to heaven. I cannot help now but join in the worship of Almighty God Who made the heavens and the earth."

"We quite understand," the angels said. "Now we are off to escort another saint home."

As the angels departed, the believer joined in the heavenly chorus, "Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee. How great Thou art. How great Thou art!"

Can you say with full assurance and confidence today that heaven will be your forever home?

An airplane can get you into the first heaven. A spaceship can get you into the second heaven. But only Jesus can get you into the third heaven.

God wants you there with Him because He loves you. He sent His Son Jesus with the invitation. Jesus declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

Prayer: Talk to God from your heart: Dear God, thank You for loving me. Forgive me for the things I have said and done that were wrong. I know Jesus that You paid for all of those things when You died in my place and rose again. Amen.

Now, begin to live as if you are going to heaven because of Jesus.

Letter 16: Favorite Verses About Heaven

Miss Johnson, the fourth grade Sunday school teacher, gave the children a challenge of finding verses in the Bible about heaven and sharing their favorite verse with the class the following Sunday. When Sunday arrived, the children came in and sat down, eager to share the verses they had found about heaven.

After opening in prayer, Miss Johnson asked who had found a favorite verse in the Bible about heaven. All of the hands went up, except for one. Miss Johnson asked, "Leona, you were not able to find a favorite verse in the Bible about heaven?"

Leona smiled and said, "No, Miss Johnson. There are so many great verses I could not pick just one favorite."

"Well, tell us Leona, what is one of your favorite verses about heaven?"

"Revelation 22:5, 'There shall be no night there:' If there is no night in heaven, I can stay up and enjoy heaven forever.'"

"That's true," said Miss Johnson. "Who's next to share a favorite verse about heaven? Tony?"

"Yes, Miss Johnson. 2 Corinthians 5:8, 'We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.' Whoever trusts in Jesus as Savior goes straight to heaven when their time is up on earth.'"

"That's correct, Tony."

"Who else has a verse?" asked Miss Johnson.

"I do," said Jerry. "Luke 10:20." "Jesus said, 'Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.'" Jesus said when you trust in Him, your name is written in heaven as a reservation. That's better than having a star on Hollywood Blvd with your name on it."

"That's very true, Jerry," said Miss Johnson.

"I have one to share, Miss Johnson," said Elizabeth.

"Which verse about heaven is your favorite, Elizabeth?"

"Revelation 21:4, 'There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' In heaven there will never ever be anything that hurts us or makes us sad, ever.'"

"Yes, Elizabeth, that is one of my favorite verses, too," said Miss Johnson.

"I have a favorite verse, too, Miss Johnson. And I drew a picture of it, see?" said Michael, holding up a poster board with his drawing.

"Michael, that's fantastic the way you have drawn Jesus walking right through the stone covering His tomb. What is your favorite verse that goes with your picture?"

"The verse is Philippians 3:21, 'Jesus will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.' "Jesus is going to change our bodies so that in heaven we can do things like that, too." said Michael.

"Yes, He is, Michael. Cindy, would you like to share a special verse about heaven?"

"Yes, Miss Johnson. Jesus said in John 14:2-3, 'I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.' "Jesus said, we will be with Him in heaven in places that He has prepared especially for us."

"Tommy, I know you always have a favorite verse. Will you share it with us today?" asked Miss Johnson.

"John 3:16, 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' "That means that God loves each person in the whole world. And if any person trust in Jesus, who died for their sins and rose again, Jesus says that person will go to heaven."

Letter 17: What Do Angels Do?

As a multitude of angels gathered to receive their next assignment from God, some of the angels began to discuss with one another details of previous assignments.

One angel said, "I was there as they let Daniel down into the den of ferocious hungry lions. When I appeared to the lions, their roars turned into purrs like kitty cats and they curled up and went to sleep. I remember how Daniel witnessed to the king that day. Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him." (Daniel 6:21-22)

Another angel said, "I remember when God sent me to be the heavenly marriage counselor. He told me to give this message to Joseph. 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His Name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.' " (Matthew 1:20-21)

Another angel pointed to some fellow angels and said, "Hey guys, remember when we went to the shepherds in the fields watching over their flocks by night and I told them; 'I have some good news for you. There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.' Then you angels appeared, and we all praised God together and said, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!' (Luke 2:9-20). Then we came back here to Heaven and those shepherds went to see Jesus."

One angel tenderly said, "I was actually sent to strengthen my Creator when in His humanity He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane before going to the cross for God's creatures' sins (Luke 22:43). At times, God still sends me to strengthen His children in moments of great sorrow when they need an angelic touch."

With a smile on his face another angel said, "I remember when I descended from heaven and rolled back the stone covering the Lord's tomb so people could see that He was not in there. At first, those big Roman guards thought the disciples were moving the stone, so they grabbed their spears and swords to stop them. But when they saw it was me, the poor fellows passed out." (Matthew 28:2-4)

"I remember when Jesus spoke briefly of our most special duty", said another angel. Jesus said, "So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom." (Luke 16:22). "It was incredible," he told his fellow angels. "Before we gathered today for our next assignments, another one of God's children fell asleep, and two of us were sent to bring her home. I sure hope more humans soon trust in Jesus as their Savior so that every angel has the joy of being assigned to carry a believer home to Heaven. There is nothing quite like seeing the face of a believer as they enter the gates of Heaven and see Jesus' face."

Are you going to be one who brings joy to an angel? More importantly, are you going to see Jesus' face? You will if you trust in Jesus as your Savior.

The Bible promises believers, "They shall see His face." (Revelation 22:4)

Prayer: Right now, you can pray: Dear Jesus, thank You for dying for my sins. Thank You for Your promise to save me if I trust You. I do trust You. Save me Jesus.

There is a hymn titled: Holy, Holy, Is What the Angels Sing. The chorus goes like this: “Holy, holy is what the angels sing, and I expect to help them make the courts of Heaven ring; But when I sing redemption's story, they will fold their wings, For angels never felt the joys that our salvation brings.”

Letter 18: Our Bodies in Heaven

Henry and Steven, old army buddies and now fellow residents in heaven, heard that the angels were preparing to bring another saint home to heaven. It was their friend Charles. They had not seen Charles since army boot camp.

Henry asked Steven, "You think he'll recognize us after all these years?"

"I don't know," said Steven. "Come to think of it, will we recognize him?"

They kept their eyes on the gates of heaven as one believer after another was escorted in by the angels.

"Look, there he is, Steven!" "Hey Charlie! Charlie!" Henry and Steven shouted.

"Henry! Steven! You guys made it to heaven! You were the drunkest, rowdiest soldiers I ever met. What happened?"

"Remember in boot camp when you told us about Jesus and how He died for our sins and rose from the dead. And if we trusted in Him, He would save us?"

"Yea, and how we laughed at you for believing a story like that."

"Yes, I remember that conversation," said Charlie.

"Well, Steven and I were in Korea under heavy gun fire when that conversation came to mind."

"Yea, Charlie. Henry and I were not even near one another when we remembered what you said to us. Later, when the fighting was over we told each other that we had prayed to receive Jesus as our Savior."

"Amen!" said Charlie.

"You know Charlie, over the years that I have studied the Bible I have learned that when Jesus returns for all believers, we will receive new glorified bodies that will be like His and last forever. But I never thought about what would happen if I came to heaven before Jesus came back for us," Steven said. "Perhaps I had been looking so forward to that new body we are going to receive that I never gave it a thought about coming to heaven without one."

"I agree," commented Henry, "I use to wonder if I would just be a spirit floating around in heaven somewhere because my body is buried on earth and Jesus had not yet returned. But then I remembered how Jesus said the rich man and Lazarus recognized each other after they died. And how the apostles knew it was Moses and Elijah that appeared with Jesus on the mountain even though they never met Moses or Elijah. But look at what God has done! Here we are in heaven and we recognize and know one another."

"Yes, it is such a warm family feeling here in heaven. No one is a stranger, and everyone feels at home," said Steven. "Leave it to God to do such a marvel for His children."

"YEA! YEA!..." "What is that joyous shout?" asked Charlie.

"Another person just accepted Jesus as their Savior," said Henry.

"In heaven, you know when someone on earth trust in Jesus?"

"Yes," replied Steven. "Jesus said there would be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents..."

"We are hoping to hear many more of those joyous shouts before it's time to go," said Henry.

"Go where?" asked Charlie.

"Didn't you know, Charlie. We are getting ready to go with Jesus to gather all the believers from the earth. And as we meet them in the air, we are going to receive our new glorified permanent bodies in the twinkling of an eye," said Steven.

"When is this going to happen?" asked Charlie.

"Any time now. Jesus told us to be ready," replied Henry. "It could be as soon as the next person who wants to be in heaven prays: 'Dear Jesus, I'm a sinner. I know You paid for my sins when You died in my place and rose again. Thank You for saving me. Now help me to live for You today and forever. In Jesus' name, amen.' "

Are you the one Jesus is waiting to hear from for forgiveness of your sins?

Letter 19: Going to the Wedding Feast

After forty-three years of marriage and a capsized boating accident, Fred and Henrietta found themselves escorted into heaven by caring angels.

"Wow Fred! Through all the time we have been together, we have not taken a trip like that before," said Henrietta.

"I agree, dear. And look how beautiful heaven is compared to any place we have ever seen. Let's walk around, Henrietta."

"Fred, do you think angels take people to other places from heaven? Maybe there is an angel station, and we can get a ride somewhere else too, some day."

"I don't know, dear. But look, there is an information booth right over there. Pardon us, I'm Fred and this is my wife Henrietta and.... wait! Aunt Marge, it's you!"

"Hello Fred! Yes, when I arrived in heaven years ago, I was told this would be a place I could serve in heaven that I would enjoy. I certainly do. How can I serve you and Henrietta?"

"We were wondering if angels escort people to other places from heaven?"

"Not currently, but there is another trip that is coming up and it is going to be quite spectacular. Both of you, me, and every other believer in heaven are already signed up for this trip. As a matter of fact, Jesus Himself is leading this one. Jesus is going to descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the glorious trumpet call of God. Our old bodies will be raised from the grave or the ashes brought together from wherever they are, and they will be transformed in the twinkling of an eye into our forever glorified bodies! As if that wasn't enough,

all the millions of living believers on earth will be caught up into the air with us in their new immortal bodies. Then, we will return to heaven and we shall always be with Jesus, never to be parted."

"Wow! Aunt Marge. That sounds like a great event."

"Oh indeed. There has never been anything like it, Fred. But it doesn't stop there," said Aunt Marge. "When we return to heaven with Jesus, we will stand before Him and He will reward us for the life we have lived for Him. For each of us who has been generous with our time, talents, and treasure for Jesus' sake, there is a reward. Virtually anything done for Jesus with the right attitude and motive will receive a reward. I hear Jesus is really looking forward to this event, too. That's why He said, 'Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.' (Matthew 6:20)"

"Henrietta, since I've known you, the happy occasions of weddings and celebrations have always been a delight for you."

"Yes, they have Aunt Marge. Why?"

"Well, after Jesus rewards those who have lived for Him, there is going to be a great wedding celebration called the marriage supper of the Lamb."

"Oh my, Aunt Marge, that sounds wonderful. Where can I get a gown?"

"Let me see..." said Aunt Marge. "Yes, here is the information: 'Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. To her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.' (Revelation 19:7-8)"

Henrietta, a precious garment of fine linen will be given to you and I and to all who make up the church. And you can be assured, they will be beautiful."

"Aunt Marge, who else will be at the wedding feast?" asked Fred.

"All of the Old Testament saints from Adam until the resurrection of Jesus will be there including John the Baptist, who identified himself as a friend of the Bridegroom. But the only way today for any other person to be there is to trust Jesus as their Savior. For all who trust in Him become part of the bride of Christ, the church. God has made it so easy to do that."

Prayer: Talk to God from your heart: Dear God, I know I do not deserve to be in heaven because of my sins. But I know Jesus paid for all of my sins when He died and rose again. Forgive me. Help me to store up treasure in heaven by living for You until You call me home. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Letter 20: Going to the City

There was a time many years ago, when a family of musicians came to our church and blessed us with a variety of rich and warm hymns that reminded us of God's great love and faithfulness toward all of us. Each of the instruments was hand-crafted and sounded so beautiful.

The wife and mother of the family told us a story from her childhood. She began, "When I was a young girl growing up in the hills of Kentucky, I had dreams of going to the big city. I didn't know how I could ever go when my only dress had three patches and I had never worn a pair of shoes. But I never lost that dream and prayed every night that God would fulfill my request."

She continued, "Well, a traveling preacher came to our little church in the hills, and he told us of a grand city that is beyond compare. A city where there will be no night because the Son of God gives it light. That even right now, Jesus is preparing places for all His beloved to live. When he finished describing this big, wonderful city with its jasper stone, gates made of pearl, complete with angels, a crystal river, and a street of gold, I knew God had answered my prayer and wanted me there. But what about my dress and lack of shoes?"

As if the preacher was reading my mind, he went on to mention that the children of God will be dressed in white robes. And as far as shoes, he hadn't a word. Having already placed my faith in Jesus as my Savior because He died for my sins, I was all ready to go."

And he agreed. He said, 'When you trust in Jesus as your Savior, your sins are forgiven, and your eternal home will be Heaven.'

Then he held up a coal shovel like my daddy used and said, 'But, until it's time for you to go, your Heavenly Father has some work here for you to do.' Then he quoted the Apostle Paul, "If I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor," (Philippians 1:22)

"Well, I met my husband, we began our family, and each of us sings and plays an instrument for the Lord." With that, she looked at her family and said, "Let's sing."

'I've got a mansion just over the hill-top, In that bright land where we'll never grow old; and some day yonder, we will never more wander, but walk the streets that are purest gold.'

That lady and her family so many years ago instilled in me a longing for Heaven that I have not lost. How about you? Do you long for a place where there is no sickness, sorrow, or pain? A perfect home of peace, love, and joy forever. Every day on earth makes my heart yearn that much more to be with Jesus in that great city.

I do not know if you would prefer the angels coming for you or the Lord Himself when He returns, but there is only one way to know for sure that you are going to that glorious place called Heaven where the Father lives.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

Prayer: You can make your reservation for Heaven right now by honestly praying: Jesus, I am a sinner. I believe that You died for my sins and rose again. Save me now and help me to live for You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Letter 21: Comfort from Angels and For One Another

As two angels returned to heaven after an assignment, one said to the other, "Edward, I'm not sure what it is, but I feel tired. Do you think I'm getting old?"

"James, we're angels. We don't age. We're the same today as when God created us, and we'll never change. But I think I know what you mean. God did create us with emotions. When He sends us to comfort someone like He did today, it feels good to be there for the person. But their sadness or situation can move us, too.

I remember when I and some other angels were sent to the garden of Gethsemane to comfort and strengthen Jesus in His humanity before He went to the cross. We had never seen God the Son like that before. He humbled Himself and became a man to pay for mankind's sins. Since angels do not know the end from the beginning like God does, we did not know what God was doing. We felt so broken-hearted that our Creator was suffering like He was that night. After departing the garden and returning to heaven, I remember feeling tired like you."

"You know, Edward, while people do not become angels like some believe, and we can never become human, there is something we share in common. At times, God sends us to comfort them, and He also tells them to comfort one another. While there are a sufficient number of angels in heaven to comfort all of God's children, He also allows them to experience how good it feels to comfort each other."

"That's true, James. And while there are a number of ways for them to comfort one another, for times like these, God told Paul to write something special: how Jesus will return for all Christians. And when He does, they will all receive a

permanent glorified body quicker than the twinkling of an eye and be escorted to heaven by Jesus Himself. Paul mentions to them that this could happen at any moment and told them 'they should comfort one another with these words.' (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

"James, do you know what God did to encourage us when we returned to heaven after leaving Jesus in the garden?"

"No. What did He do, Edward?"

"He told us the plan of salvation that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were working out to bring salvation to His creation, mankind. It was a plan They decided on before Jesus created us or the universe. He said it was not by force that Jesus was to bear the sins of the world, but it was Their magnificent plan to demonstrate God's passionate love for them. That's why Jesus said: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' (John 3:16). "Then you know what God did, James?"

"No, what did He do?"

"He assigned a number of us angels to play special roles in His plan. For example, He chose which of us would roll away the stone from the mouth of the empty tomb of Jesus, which angel would talk to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary when they arrived at the tomb, and which of us the Roman guards would see before they passed out!"

"Edward, how did you feel when God told you how it all was going to turn out?"

"Though we were still terribly sad for what Jesus would suffer by the Roman scourging and horrible crucifixion, just knowing why He was going through it all and

knowing the glorious outcome of God's plan struck us with such awe. We began to praise God for His compassion, mercy, and love for all people He created. If angels ever slept, I would not have slept for a very long time. I was filled with such reverence. Though God allowed us to take part in Jesus' resurrection, there is one joy we will never know - the joy of salvation."

"Yes, Edward, I have heard a song about that. 'Holy, Holy, is what the angels sing. And I expect to help them make the courts of Heaven ring. But when I sing redemption's story, they will fold their wings, for angels never felt the joys that our salvation brings.' "

"That's true James. But we do rejoice in the presence of God every time someone trusts in Jesus. O that more people would trust in Jesus Who died for their sins and rose again. If they would just pray: Dear God, I know Jesus died for my sins. Forgive me and save me forever. In Jesus' name, Amen.'"

"Edward, do you hear the call?"

"I sure do. It's time to escort another saint home to heaven. Let's go!"

Letter 22: Trouble Along the Way

Sometimes, traveling the highway can be a fun way to get from one place to another. Light traffic, gorgeous weather, and beautiful sights combine to make a special motor experience. But sometimes, Pop goes a tire! Pssssss goes a radiator, or chug-chug-chug the gas tank is empty.

Life itself can be like that, even for a child of God. Right now, many people feel like we are on the side of the road waiting for the AAA tow truck to arrive.

I remember one summer as a family we were going to go to the San Diego Zoo. We had seen the billboards, heard the advertisements on the radio, and watched the commercials on television. Mama called the zoo and asked them to send us information. We received pamphlets with pictures of animals and a map of the zoo. We knew where we wanted to go, what we wanted to see, and daddy looked at the atlas to make sure we took the right way.

The day came, and we were ready to go. All of us boys had our summer haircuts and were ready to see some lions, tigers, and bears. Since we were going to be on the road for a while to get to the zoo, mama and our sisters made some sandwiches and snacks to eat on the way. Our station wagon was in the shop having some work done on it, so daddy borrowed a van from someone at work. We loaded up and headed out onto the highway - and away we went.

A couple miles down the road we heard - pop! Our sisters screamed, and mama said, "It's ok, girls."

Daddy drove the van over to the side of the highway, then looked at mama and asked, "Do you want to change it or should I?" We had a flat tire.

Soon, daddy had it changed, and we were off again to the zoo. But about half-way there, daddy turned on the heater and started pulling over again.

"What's wrong dear?" mama asked.

"The van is overheating. We'll have to sit here for a bit."

"But daddy, the animals are waiting for us," our sisters sighed.

"It's ok girls, the animals will understand," mama replied.

When the engine had cooled down, daddy topped off the radiator with water. And we were off again to the zoo.

I'm sure we were almost there when the van jerked and coughed and daddy said, "Oh no!"

"What dear?" mama asked.

"We're out of gas." In unison, all of us kids moaned and fell over in our seats.

After what seemed forever, daddy made it back with a gas can full of gas. He poured the gas into the tank and we finished our journey to the zoo. We had a great time seeing all the birds and bears and monkeys and hippos and rhinos, and everything. We forgot all about the flat tire, the radiator, and the empty gas tank. Arriving at our destination and seeing all we had looked forward to seeing was worth it all.

You are going to get to where you're going, even if you have some trouble along the way. The first step is deciding where you want to go. Then you have to know

how to get there. We knew we wanted to go to the zoo. And daddy found out how to get there.

The most important destination you will ever choose for yourself is where you will spend eternity. God says there are two places: Heaven and Hell. He leaves the choice up to you. He says if you do not want to be in Heaven, then do nothing and you will not be there. But if Heaven is your desired destination, then Jesus says, "I'm the way....no one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

We could not have arrived at the zoo if we traveled east, because the zoo was south of us. No one can expect to arrive in Heaven if they choose a different way than Jesus. Today, you can choose the way that leads to Heaven by making up your mind to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Prayer: You can pray now, Dear Jesus, I know that You died for my sins and rose again in order to make the way for me to get to Heaven. Thank You for loving me that much and help me to live for You every day. Amen.

On your way to Heaven, and the Lord will be with you all the way!

Letter 23: The Harvest Festival

It's finally here once again. All the invitations were sent out, and it seems everyone enthusiastically responded. You can hear the fiddles playing, breathe that farm fresh air, and of course smell the roasting corn. It's Harvest time - a time of celebration of the hard work and the bounty of the land by which God ordained to bless us.

The Harvest Celebration is not only dependable to bring happy people together, but it also draws dynamic people to participate in all areas of the festivities. For example, at one Harvest Celebration this year, a special gathering of folks is coming together for a time of fun and fellowship.

In charge of the petting zoo is none other than Mr. & Mrs. Noah. Tell us Mr. Noah, why did you and your wife decide to run the petting zoo this year?

"Well, young man, it is the Harvest Festival, and taking care of the young animals does bring back fond memories of our younger days."

Well, look over here! It's a dunk tank. Who could be in charge of it? Yes, it is, it's John the Baptist. John, how did you come about running the dunk tank this year?

"Well, I was over by the river that runs outside of town sharing the Good News and baptizing people when someone said I would be perfect for the job."

Looking at this year's rosters, it appears we have some serious competitors and distinguished guests signed up to participate in this year's Harvest Celebration's Games and Events. Let's see whose participating: for tug-of-war we have Samson vs. the local fire department. Bobbing for apples: Adam vs. Eve. And donkey racing

competition: Abigail vs Balaam. Pie judging will be done by Deborah, Gideon, and Ehud. While special music will be provided by the Solomon Temple Orchestra, featuring the Flying Angels on trumpets. No doubt there will be plenty of rejoicing here.

The Bible speaks of a Harvest Festival that God told Moses to celebrate every year. It was called, The Feast of Weeks or the Harvest of Pentecost. God told Moses it would be a time of rejoicing for everyone as they worshiped God for His provision of the grain harvest.

While the Harvest of Pentecost was being celebrated in the New Testament book of Acts, God sent the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised He would. At that time, the Church was born. From that time on, the harvest celebration for the church has not been about grain, but the souls of people.

Jesus said, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." (Matthew 9:37-38)

Notice, that He says it is "His" harvest. We pray, we sow the seed by telling others about Jesus, we water the seed with our tears and prayers, but it is all for Him. This same harvest is going on today and we need to be a part of it.

Oh, the happiness of Moses and the Old Testament Saints as they brought the harvest sheaves in from the fields and worshiped God. How much more shall we rejoice and worship God as we bring in the harvest sheaves of the souls of people?

One old hymn puts it this way: 'Sowing in the morning, sowing seeds of kindness, sowing in the noontide and the dewy eve; waiting for the harvest and the time of reaping, We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.'

The harvest of souls is not an annual event, but an everyday occurrence. Have you been part of the harvest that someone has rejoiced over? Your heart is the soil, and the Gospel is the seed that Jesus died for your sins and rose again.

Prayer: Believing that in your heart, you can pray: Thank You Jesus for paying for my sins, thank You for allowing me to be part of Your Harvest Celebration, and now help me to bring to You the sheaves of the harvest. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Better than any blue ribbon, is having your name written in Heaven.

Letter 24: The Wagon Master and Scout – the Presence of the Lord

As the seasoned wagon master and young scout were planning the best route for the wagon party headed into new frontier, the scout asked the wagon master, "Is that a dragon?"

"You've not seen a dragon on a map before?" asked the wagon master in reply.

"Never," said the scout.

"Well then, read what it says below the dragon."

" 'Beyond This Point There May Be Dragons.' Did you get this map from a novelty store?"

"No, lad. On some older maps you can find the symbol of a dragon with the words, 'Beyond This Point There May Be Dragons.' This was a way that some of the old map makers had to admit, 'Beyond This Point We Do Not Know What Lies Ahead.'"

"Why didn't the map makers put a smiley sun, some pretty flowers, or a few playful deer? Why not be optimistic?"

"Son, since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, there has been a sense of fear of the mortality of our lives and what lies ahead."

"I guess you're right. But how are you always so confident from day to day?"

"I owe that to my mother. She taught me many verses from the Bible that have guided my life and been a great comfort to me."

"Will you share some with me?"

"Yes, I will. Let's see - the Bible says, 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.' (Psalm 46:1)

All of us have trouble from time to time. And there is never a problem that is bigger than what God can handle for us. That's why the Bible tells us to take all our problems to the Lord in prayer. And when we do, He gives us a peace in our heart that no one else can offer. (Philippians 4:6-7)

At times, even being out here with all the covered wagons and people, the journey can still seem lonely. But mother taught me that I'm never alone because God has promised, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' Hebrews 13:5 That's comforting to me because mother and many of my friends have already gone to be with Jesus. There is only One who can truly be with you at all times; that is God Himself. Look here at the map. Do you see that valley?"

"Yes, I do. It looks like it will be a deep dark valley. Can we go around it?"

"No. It is part of the journey we must take to get where we are headed. We'll have to keep an extra eye on the wagons, but we'll make it through just fine. Times of struggle or seeming despair can be like that valley, son. But mother's antidote was another Bible promise. 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For Thou art with me.' (Psalm 23:4)"

"Your mother liked verses that reminded her of the Lord's presence."

"Yes. Mother said she liked to practice the presence of the Lord because one day she would be in His presence forever in heaven."

"I'm sure your mother was a wonderful lady, but what assurance did she have of being in heaven with the Lord?"

"Because Jesus said, 'In My Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, you may be also.'" (John 14)

"But how can anyone know that Jesus has prepared a place for them in heaven?"

"When Jesus said He was going away to prepare those places, He told us how to secure a home in heaven. He said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" (John 14:6)

"So how does someone go through Jesus?"

"Have you ever told a lie, had a bad thought, or did something you knew was wrong?"

"Well, yea. Hasn't everyone?"

"According to God, yes. God calls that sin and says the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:23) "

"So even though I've sinned, God will give me eternal life in heaven?"

"Yes, if you are sorry for your sins and trust in Jesus who paid the death penalty in your place."

"Jesus, I am sorry for my sins. Thank You for paying for all of them when You died in my place. Be with me every day. Amen."

"Son, now you can go forward every day with the presence of the Lord.

"Wagons! For-ward Ho!"

Letter 25: Myrtle and Gyrtle Go to the Fair

Beloved, it is good to write to you again. When I stay in touch with you, it reminds me that we will be together forever in that wonderful home prepared by the Lord for all who trust in Him. Referred to by some as 'That Mansion in the sky.' Our marvelous eternal home called Heaven.

Have I ever told you about my friends Myrtle and Gyrtle? Myrtle and Gyrtle are sisters, and they were traveling in another state when they learned that the State Fair was going on. Always ready for an elephant ear, cotton candy, and a ride on the Ferris wheel, they decided to go to the fair.

After passing through the gated entrance to the fair, Myrtle said to Gyrtle, "Let's go look at the precious animals."

Gyrtle replied to Myrtle, "You're allergic to animals, Myrtle."

To which Myrtle said, "Oh Gyrtle, don't be such a bore. Come on."

Gyrtle became fond of a fawn whose white spots were in the form of a fan while Myrtle began to cuddle with a twitchy nose bunny with soft blue eyes. But after a moment with her carrot eating friend Myrtle went 'Ah-Chew!' With that, a billy goat butted his pen, which bumped Gyrtle whose cotton candy fell in atop a mama sheep who had just been shorn. With the bleating of the ewe, the cows began to moo, and a bull began to pace within his pen.

With that, a stately stallion said, 'Girls, you had better leave.' To which Myrtle and Gyrtle agreed. And that was the end of visiting the animals at the fair.

As Myrtle and Gyrtle left the barn, Gyrtle asked Myrtle, “What are those tables over there?” A large sign above read: To Whom Do You Belong? With curiosity as their guide, Myrtle and Gyrtle strolled over to see what they could find.

The man sitting at the first table wore a sweater with a worm embroidered on the front. He greeted Myrtle and Gyrtle, “If you like to read, you can join our club.”

‘Thank you,’ they said as they continued to move along.

Next, there sat a lady on a very large ball of yarn who said, “If you like to knit or crochet, you can join our club.”

Myrtle and Gyrtle smiled and went on.

At the next table, a man wearing rubber boots and a hat with fishhooks fastened to it said, “Hello! If you have a story about the one that did not get away, you can join our club.”

Gyrtle told Myrtle, “That sounds kinda fishy.”

Myrtle and Gyrtle came to the last table. Two young girls with bright cheery smiles asked, “Do you know if you’re going to Heaven?”

Gyrtle looked at Myrtle, and Myrtle looked at Gyrtle and they said in unison, “We don’t know.”

“Would you like to find out now?” the young girls asked.

“I sure would.” said Myrtle.

“Me, too.” said Gyrtle.

“Myrtle, would you read what the Bible says here?”

“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)

“Gyrtle, who does the Bible say has sinned?”

“Everybody” said Gyrtle.

“So if you girls do something wrong at home, what happens?”

“We get punished.”

“Gyrtle, read what the Bible says here.”

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)

“What does that mean to you Myrtle?”

“Well, I deserve to die for my sin, but Jesus wants me to live forever, right?”

“Yes, that is correct.”

“Does that mean live with Jesus in Heaven?” asked Gyrtle.

“Yes, it does,” said the girls.

“How does that happen?”

Read here Gyrtle. “While we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

“That means Jesus died for our sins! What should we do?”

“Myrtle and Gyrtle, pray: Dear Jesus, I know I am a sinner. Thank You for paying for all of my sins. And Thank You that Heaven is now my forever home. Help me always to live for You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

That day Myrtle and Gyrtle knew they were going to Heaven. Now you can, too.

Letter 26: The Bible

When we were younger, hospitality seemed to be natural for many people, including our mother. One time she invited some new neighbors over for dinner.

In the midst of preparing the meal, she found that she was missing a key ingredient for her special dessert. She needed to go into town and buy it right away. Mother told me, "Continue to prepare the dinner and I will return soon."

"Yes mother," I said with enthusiasm. I too wanted to make friends with our new neighbors. There would be kids my age to play with now.

As the vegetables baked with the roast, I knew it was almost time to put the marshmallow cinnamon sweet potatoes in the oven. But I realized I did not know how much cinnamon to put on them. What was I going to do?

"Yes!" I said to myself. I knew where mother kept that recipe. When you don't know how much cinnamon, sugar, garlic, or other ingredient to add, checking the recipe is a good idea for the best outcome.

Having a sure reference in uncertain times is so very important for everyone. And no one has a surer reference than the child of God. In His Word, the Bible, God has given us instructions for life, death, and beyond.

That is one of the many reasons why the Bible is the best-selling book of all time. With more than five billion copies in print, translated into hundreds of languages, the Bible offers every person everything we need to know to live our best life now and a much greater life to come.

The Bible is much more than a guide on how to live your life. The Bible is a supernatural book. God used over 40 people to write the Bible. And it was not written at a weekend writing conference. God wrote His Book for us over a period of 1,500 years. The original writings were in three different languages and written on three different continents. God used kings, fishermen, doctors, tentmakers, shepherds, and others to bring His Word to us.

Because God is eternal, He tells us how everything we know came to be in existence, where we came from, and why things in this world are the way they are. God even tells us what is going to happen in the future. Since He began to tell us of future events, many have taken place and the rest will surely come to pass.

Another factor helping us trust the Bible is the life-changing impact the Bible has had for thousands of years. The Bible has withstood the attempts of kings, dictators, and whole societies to abolish it. In some countries, it is against the law to own a Bible. Its words contain a hope not found in any other religious writing, and those words have transformed the lives of millions. The Bible promises what no other book does: life, hope, and purpose as a gift from Almighty God.

In the days in which we live, it is very comforting to have His promises to trust in: "Come unto Me and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) and "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear. (Psalm 46:1-2). Also, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me." (Psalm 23:4). And "I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." (Psalm 23:6)

God tells us that on our own we cannot have the best life possible. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." (John 10:10). Life refers to eternal life. It speaks not only of endlessness but of quality of life. With Jesus, life on earth can reach a much higher quality, and then in heaven it will be complete and perfect.

Are you lacking the key ingredient to make your life superb? The recipe is in the Bible. Give your life to Jesus. He will wash you of your sin, wrap you in His love and welcome you home to Heaven on that very special day. That's His promise.

Prayer: Jesus, wash me of my sin, wrap me in Your love, and help me to live for You. In Your name I pray, Amen.

Letter 27: Granny Smith

"Okay, all you transporting angels gather round here. It seems that some of you have been losing your touch and setting off scientific radars on earth when escorting saints home to heaven. Many of the people whom God created would rather believe in a UFO than our great Creator, so this needs to stop."

"Harry, he's probably talking about me. This great mission of bringing God's children home to heaven has been so exciting that I sometimes show off by darting through space without a thought."

"I don't know Henry, he could be talking about me. I have noticed that, since observing every person I bring home to heaven so excited when they arrive, that I have slowed down the trip a bit and started telling them of all that awaits them in heaven just to see their reaction."

"Harry! Henry! How are you guys?"

"We're great, Harvey. How are you?"

"I'm more energetic and busier than ever!"

"What's keeping you so busy?"

"Oh, it's those fallen angels, again. Ever since Satan moved more of his angels into the heavenly places to try and stop you guys from bringing saints home to heaven, we've been blocking them left and right and keeping the route clear for you angels at every moment. When Paul wrote about the 'spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' he wasn't kidding."

"Yes, Harvey. And praise God He has given us everything we need, including you, to defeat the enemy at every turn."

"That's right, Henry. He has not only given us everything we need to keep the way clear for the saints unfettered trip home to heaven, but God has also given His children all they need to overcome Satan and his tactics every day before they come home to heaven. Did I ever tell you about Granny Smith?"

"No, who is she?"

"Some years ago, I was sent to bring Granny Smith home to heaven. She had an incredible story to tell me. She told me that every day when she awoke, she began to pray. She said that some days she was too weak to dress herself so someone else would help her. But she said when it came to putting on her spiritual clothing, she would allow no one but God to dress her for the day.

She would pray: 'Heavenly Father, I am here until You send Your angels for me. Dress me for victory today. First put around me a strong and lovely belt of truth in word and deed that I not mock the life You have given me. Now fasten the breastplate of righteousness about me that the life of Christ can be seen in me.

Now, I pray You give me footing that I not slip or slide in the falsehoods around me, but that I share the Gospel of peace while I stand firm for You even in my wheelchair. Now, as I stand on what is true, hand me the shield of faith by which I will deflect every lie, temptation, and evil act of the enemy when he comes against me today. Place upon me the helmet of salvation that all will see from the crown of my head that I belong to You. Now, put in my willing and ready hand the sword of the Spirit, which is Your precious Word. For with the truth of Your Word did

Jesus defeat Satan and send him away discouraged. And let me not forget throughout the day to talk with You in prayer. To give You thanks and praise for who You are, what You've done, and for what is yet to be. And may the Holy Spirit urge me always to lift up my brothers and sisters in Christ who also are in this battle. That they would not be weak or struggle, but that they would seek You to dress them every day for victory in Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen.'

I could not, but I felt like taking Granny Smith back to earth to keep up the good fight and tell others how to have victory in Jesus every day."

"Wow, Harvey! How encouraging. Hey Henry, maybe we'll meet a Granny Smith today."

"I don't know, but it's time to go! Come on, Harry!"

"Bye, Harvey!"

Will you be living for Jesus in victory when the angels come for you? Do you know for sure heaven is your eternal home? When you trust in Jesus as your Savior, the angels will be coming to escort you home to heaven at God's command when it's time.

Prayer: Perhaps you need to pray now: Jesus, I've done things that are wrong. I know You paid for my sins and I am trusting in You alone to save me now and forever. Help me to live in victory. In Your name I pray, Amen.

Letter 28: Mary and Joseph – a Baby?

We continue our celebration of the Advent season with a reminder that God knows what you are going through today. None of today's events have caught Him off guard. As a matter of fact, today's events are part of the reason for the first Advent when God the Father sent the Son to reconcile us to Himself and rescue us from Satan. Recall what God said to Satan in the Garden of Eden: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." (Genesis 3:15)

In the town of Nazareth, about 90 miles from Bethlehem, the time for the Seed of the woman to be born was drawing closer. God sent an angel named Gabriel to share a message with a young girl named Mary. The angel said to her, "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name JESUS." (Luke 1:31)

To which Mary replied, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" (Luke 1:34)

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35) "For with God nothing will be impossible." (Luke 1:37)

The angel Gabriel could have also said, "Remember, Mary, in Sabbath School you learned that the prophet Isaiah said, 'The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.' (Isaiah 7:14) which means, 'God with us.' Mary, God will fulfill His promise through you."

"That's incredible Gabriel. But what about my fiancé, Joseph?"

"It will be okay, Mary. You tell him what I told you. Then tonight, I will appear to him in a dream and confirm what God has said."

Excited in her heart, Mary said, "Okay, Gabriel. Let it be to me as the Lord has said."
(Luke 1:38)

That evening, when Joseph stopped by to see Mary on his way home from the carpenter shop, we can only imagine how the conversation went between him and Mary. "Hello Mary, my sweetheart. I'm hungry. How was your day today? Anything interesting happen?"

"Yes, Joseph, my dear. The neighbors caught extra fish and brought some over to share. I cooked them just the way you like."

"Mary," Joseph said, "There is something in your voice that tells me something more important occurred today."

"Yes, Joseph. You know I would never lie to you."

"Of course, Mary."

"Joseph, today an angel named Gabriel appeared to me. He said he had a message from God that I would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and bear the Son of God."

"Mary, I know that you are of the lineage of David, and I am of the house of David and God promised the Messiah shall come through our genealogy, but I was not expecting anything like this Mary. I better go home now. Good night, Mary."

As Joseph walked home, he wondered what to do. Had Mary been unfaithful? "I love Mary, but maybe I should quietly break our engagement?"

As Joseph considered what to do, he lay down and went to sleep. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:20)

Joseph woke up. Perhaps his heart was pounding with excitement like Mary's was when the angel spoke to her. Like Mary, Joseph was obedient to the Lord. He and Mary stayed together like they both wanted to do. And when the Son was born, Joseph named Him Jesus, which means, The Lord Shall Save.

Jesus saves people from the penalty of sin and eternal separation from God. And He saves them for heaven - eternal life with God.

Prayer: Tell Jesus from your heart; Jesus, thank You for dying for all of my sins. Help me to live an obedient life for You, like Mary and Joseph. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Letter 29: Miraculous Births – John and Jesus

My, my, next week is Christmas. More expectant than any child today about the arrival of Christmas was Mary about the arrival of Jesus. She was about nine months expectant with Jesus in her womb as she traveled with a small caravan to the city of Bethlehem. As she rode on the donkey, Mary shifted her weight to make herself more comfortable, as much as that was possible.

As the wind blew softly on her face, she thought back to just a few weeks before, when the Roman soldiers on proud stallions rode into town. The herald proclaimed in Latin, Greek, and Aramaic, "Hear ye, Hear ye. By order of the Imperial Roman Government, and his most high Caesar Augustus, everyone shall be counted and registered into the chronicles of Rome. Anyone failing to comply will be subject to Roman law."

"So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child." (Luke 2:1-5)

Nearing the time of a child's birth, how many women would travel three or four days by donkey without the convenience of a comfortable bed and a ladies' room nearby? The Roman government could have cared less.

But God used this very act of obedience by Mary to fulfill yet another one of His promises: that of where the Savior would be born. "But you, Bethlehem, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me

the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."
(Micah 5:2)

Why was this fulfillment of God's promise important? Because Jesus' birth in Bethlehem is one of many signs given to Israel and to us as evidence of Jesus' credentials. The birth of this Savior King would be unlike the birth of any other. No one else has foretold where they would be born before they were born.

Another miraculous birth was that of John the Baptist. His father, Zacharias, was an elderly priest. John's mother, Elizabeth, was related to Mary - the mother of Jesus. They had no children of their own and were beyond the years of having children. But as the angel Gabriel had appeared to Mary, so God sent him to Zacharias. Gabriel told Zacharias that though he and Elizabeth were advanced in years, they would have a son by natural means and they were to name him, John.

When Mary went to visit Elizabeth, they confirmed with one another that God was going to do something spectacular through them with the children they were carrying - especially through Jesus, whom Elizabeth called her Lord, even before He was born. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months until John was born. Perhaps Mary stayed with Elizabeth to be a midwife or maybe to avoid the gossip in her own town about her pregnancy before she was officially married to Joseph.

Jesus' birth was a miracle, John's birth was miraculous, and Jesus says that each of us must have a new birth, a spiritual birth. The Bible says that we are all born dead in sin which separates us from God. But Jesus came to give us life, both spiritually and eternally. Spiritual life connects us with God, and eternal life ensures we enjoy that life with Him forever in heaven.

Jesus came that first advent to bring peace between God and man. Each person that accepts God's forgiveness, through Jesus the Son, has peace with God. One of the titles given to Jesus before He was born was Prince of Peace.

The Bible says: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given... and His name will be called Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6).

Jesus said of His first coming, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

This Christmas season receive the gift that truly keeps on giving - Jesus.

Prayer: Talk to God from your heart: God, thank You for loving me. Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to pay for my sins when He died and rose again. I accept Jesus as my Lord and Your gift of forgiveness. Help me to live every day for You. Amen.

Letter 30: The Shepherds Arrive

Weary and worn, having traveled three or four days by way of donkey, Joseph and a very pregnant Mary finally reached the village of Bethlehem. Finding no place to rest among the people, they bedded down with some animals. Joseph gathered some hay and straw to provide comfort and cushion for Mary. Then he gently helped her to lie down and covered her with their half-worn blanket.

As the animals slept, each making their own peculiar sound, Mary was heard to say, "Joseph, Joseph, I think it's time, Joseph!"

“And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:7)

Imagine that, the Creator of the universe coming as a helpless babe being born among the animals and laid in a feeding trough. After the physical experience of giving birth and the moments of adrenaline highs, nearly everyone was ready to hit the hay, literally, even the bleating ewe who thought she was the birthing coach.

But the respite would not last long. We find that “there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to the shepherds, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.’” (Luke 2:8-12)

Then the angels went joyfully back to heaven to see what God would have them to do next. In the meantime, one shepherd said to the other shepherds, "Did you see what I saw?"

"We sure did!" said the other shepherds.

"I have fought off wild animals from attacking my sheep, but I was never more frightened than when that angel appeared out of nowhere. And did you hear what I heard?"

"Yes, we did!" was the reply.

So the shepherds looked at each other with amazement, and excitedly said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." (Luke 2:15)

So the shepherds left their flocks in the care of under-shepherds and they hurriedly went to Bethlehem to see the Babe who would be the Savior, Christ the Lord.

And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. "Hey guys! Here He is!"

"Hello," said one of the shepherds to Joseph. "You're not going to believe this, but my friends and I were out in the fields watching over our flocks by night when a group of angels appeared to us. One of the angels said, "there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Then the angel told us, "You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." So we came to see, and here you are! We're going to tell everybody!"

So the shepherds began to tell everyone what the angel had told them about the Savior being born and how they found Him just as the angel had said. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Through the shepherds, God gave Mary another affirmation and witness of His Son. Then the shepherds returned to their sheep, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it had been told to them.

Though today you may be feeling weary and worn by your circumstances as Mary and Joseph were when they arrived in Bethlehem, know that God has a perfect plan. That plan begins when you trust in the Savior Whose birth was told to the shepherds: Jesus, who said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep." That is what He did for us. Jesus died for you and me to pay for our sins.

Prayer: Jesus, thank You for paying for my sins with Your death and resurrection. I trust in You alone to save me forever, Amen.