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DEAR ONES IN THE FAITH:

A friend and I were talking about “God helps those who help themselves” (see enclosed article). He said, “God helps those who **cannot** help themselves.” That is also true. In Scripture, for example, when people were raised from the dead, it is obvious they could not help themselves.

There is a fine line between the “sovereignty of God” and the “free moral agency of man,” about which there has often been debate. We hear it said that man is a free moral agent. But that must have some limitations. We did not choose who our parents would be, what country we would be born in, whether we would be male or female, the color of our skin, hair, or eyes, and many other things.

Some say, “When it is *your time* to die, it will happen.” But this raises the question: “If it is the pilot’s *time* to die in a crash, why would everyone else need to die?” Or what about a man who drives like an idiot, gets in a wreck, killing him and his family—was it God’s will that he drive like an idiot? That each has a “time” to die can be argued from Scripture. This was certainly true regarding Jesus’ death (Matt. 26:18; John 7:8). But we should also factor in: Because of “foolishness,” some die *before their time* (Ecc. 7:17).

Like the writer of the “Faith Chapter,” when I wrote the accompanying article—**OUR GOSPEL MUSIC HERITAGE**—I had more to say than space to say it! (cf. Hebrews 11:32). So, I will include here a few (left out) thoughts:

We usually think of Moses as the great Lawgiver, but he was also a singer. So was his sister Miriam (Exod. 15:1, 20,21). Deborah and Barak were a singing duo (Judges 5:1). David was known as the Sweet Singer of Israel (2 Sam. 22:1; 23:1). Jesus, along with his disciples, sang (Matt. 26:30). We think of Paul as an apostle, but he was also a singer, along with Silas (Acts 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:15).

There are Christian groups that oppose the use of musical instruments in church—some, I suppose, even claim this makes them “the true church”! But playing the piano is not a negative for me. My initial opportunity to get out and about in the Lord’s work was as a piano player for a traveling evangelist.

As a young preacher I often played the piano and sang a gospel song written by Mosie Lister: **FEELING MIGHTY FINE, I’VE GOT HEAVEN ON MY MIND**. This lively song, quite popular with southern gospel quartets, was well received in California. But, when I sang it in St. Catherines, Ontario, I was not

sure how it would be received. The Canadian Christians, it seemed to me, were a bit more reserved.

The piano was positioned in such a way that my back was to the people as I sang. As I finished, the people were laughing and smiling, like they were really blessed by this song. Maybe they were, but I found out later what happened: Because it was a lovely autumn day, the front door of the church had been left open. A black, medium-size **dog** had come in. He worked his way down the aisle behind where I was playing the piano, looked at me (I was later told), hesitated, then crossed in front of the first row of seats, up another aisle and out!

Though the Palm Springs desert usually receives little rain, because Mount San Jacinto rises abruptly above town (nearly 11,000 feet in elevation) it receives snow and provides a good water supply. There are waterfalls, including Tahquitz Falls (only blocks from downtown), Snow Creek Falls, and others. This water supply makes possible the irrigation of **over 100** golf courses in the desert. Some say it is the largest concentration of golf courses in the world.

We had a very mild winter, if one can even call it “winter.” Perhaps two or three mornings I briefly turned on the heater because of the night chill. While writing this letter, a neighbor told me they never turned on their heater this entire winter. We did have an (unusual) heavy rain storm move through in September. This—followed by an abundance of sunshine—brought out the lovely pink verbena wild flowers in early October. Usually this does not happen until Spring. They continued to blossom all winter, month after month, and are just now beginning to fade as summer heat sets in (cf. Isa. 40:8).





East of Palm Springs in the Mecca Hills is “Painted Canyon,” an area very similar to Petra in Jordan (which is often included in Holy Land tours). One of many canyons is called “Ladder Canyon” which I have long found intriguing. As one follows the sandy path, over and over it seems an end has come, only to find there are more twists and turns. This narrow canyon is unique in that it is only three or four feet wide with walls 80 feet high!

Not far away is the Salton Sea, the **largest** body of water within the state of California. It is 227 feet **below** sea level and has a salt content about twice that of the ocean. Interestingly, the Salton Sea was not there (as such) until 1905. At that time, water from the Colorado River breached an irrigation canal that was being constructed and water poured into the basin. The railroad tracks had to be relocated to higher ground. The Salton Sea, along with the surrounding hills and mountains, is **very similar** to the area of the Dead Sea in Israel.

At the far end of the Salton Sea is the Sonny Bono National Wildlife Refuge (named in memory of the former Mayor of Palm Springs). A vast farming program provides feed for tens of thousands of overwintering snow geese and many other migratory birds. Over 400 species of birds have been identified here.

Just east of the Salton Sea, near Niland, is “Salvation Mountain,” a California curiosity! For many years Leonard Knight (1931-2014), lived there, and kept painting this mountain. Many would drop off their left-over paint. I had opportunities to talk with him several times. I liked him. Some thought he was a nut, others considered him a unique and talented artist. Huell Howser (“California Gold” television program) and **many** other reporters have done stories about Leonard and Salvation Mountain, causing thousands to see the words: “**GOD IS LOVE.**”



Not far from Salvation Mountain is the (seemingly) insignificant town of Calipatria (population 6,000). But it has a claim to fame: As the “lowest down city in the Western Hemisphere,” its flagpole is the world’s **tallest**, extending up 184 feet to sea level! Because the flag flies at sea level, I suppose a claim could also be made about it being the **lowest** flagpole! Interesting.



I have here shared some things about the area where I live. But, having an interest in **people** and **places**, I like to know about the area where **YOU** live. When I hear from those who live in a town or city I am unfamiliar with, I often use internet information to learn more: the location, history, climate, population, landmarks and points of interest.

People live different places for different reasons. No earthly place is perfect. As I thought about this, an old gospel song came to mind:

*Anywhere is home, let come and go what may;
Anywhere I roam, He keeps me all the way;
So for His dear sake, my cross I'll meekly bear;
Anywhere is home, if Christ, my Lord, is there!*

Finally, I want to remind everyone that most of the articles I have written over the past several years are posted on the website: ralphwoodrow.org. They are also available **in print**. Here are some of the titles:

The Bible—Used and Misused Bits and Pieces Did Jeremiah Preach Against Christmas Trees? Did Mary, the Mother of Jesus, Have Other Children? God has a Plan for Man Healing and Miracles Is Sunday the Mark of the Beast? Is the World Getting Better? Joshua's Long Day—How Long Was It? King James ONLY? (four articles) New Jerusalem—Literal or Spiritual? Only God Can Make a Tree Overlook People I Have Known (four articles) “Route 66” The Book of Ax? The Coming of Elijah—Future or Fulfilled? The Kingdom of God—Postponed or Present? UP Words! Why?

Let me know which articles you would like, how many, and they will be mailed free and postage paid.

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