

Ralph Woodrow
PO Box 21
Palm Springs, CA 92263-0021



BITS AND PIECES

In addition to other ministry endeavors, for eleven years — from 2010 to 2021—I served as pastor of a church in Indio, California (about a 25-minute drive from Palm Springs). This church (founded in 1955) functions as an interdenominational ministry, for which we used the generic name RIVER OF LIFE WORSHIP CENTER. Our emphasis was on what people have in their hearts, more than wearing a particular “tag.” I liked to use the slogan: “A church where salvation makes you a member.”

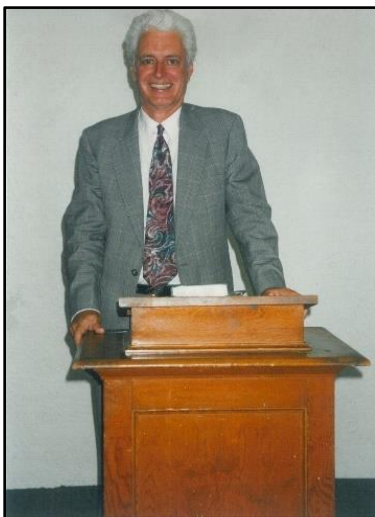
Recently I have looked back over sermons I preached there, also short items I put together for the church bulletin. In this article, I decided to share some of this material—on a *variety* of subjects—with those of you on the mailing list. But, in leading into this, I will start with some ministry background:

My first attempt at preaching was in Riverside, California, where I grew up. I was 15 years old (almost 16). My text was First Corinthians 9:24: “Know ye not that they who run in a race run all, but one receives the prize? So run that you may win.”

Looking back now, I realize I was quite young. But at the time I did not think much about that. It simply seemed this was what I was supposed to do. We recall that Timothy, Jeremiah, and some others in the Scriptures started at a young age.

That first preaching session was not in the main auditorium of the church, but in an adjoining room seating about 75. It was considered a youth meeting, but people of all ages attended, including the pastor who was in his 50s. He encouraged me, soon after this, by inviting me to preach in the main church services.

Years passed. I had moved away from Riverside. Pastors had come and gone. I was again invited to speak at this church. While there, I went back into that room where I made my first attempt at preaching, stood behind that same wooden pulpit, and this photo was taken.



Later, in 2015, the church (building) was destroyed in a fire late at night, believed to have been caused by an electrical malfunction.

We sometimes hear people say—perhaps upon returning from a trip: “We *knew* we were in the will of God—everything went *smoothly*, there were no problems of any kind!” We rejoice when things go smoothly. But this, *in itself*, does not indicate one is in the will of God.

Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, certainly functioned within the will of God. But things did not always go smoothly for him, as shown by the following statements (and these are *just* from Second Corinthians!):

Stress. “...hard pressed on every side” (2 Cor. 4:8).p

Confusion. “...perplexed” (2 Cor. 4:8).

Sickness, aging. “...outwardly wasting away” (2 Cor. 4:16).

Disrespect. “...regarded as impostors” (2 Cor. 6:8).

Sadness. “...sorrowful” (2 Cor. 6:10).

Poverty. “...poor...having nothing” (2 Cor. 6:10).

Accidents. “...three times shipwrecked” (2 Cor. 11:25).

Violence. “Five times I received...forty lashes minus one. Three times beaten with rods, once stoned” (2 Cor. 11:24).

Physical danger. “I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits...in danger in the city, in danger in the country...in danger from false brothers” (2 Cor. 11:26).

Physical exhaustion. “I have... toiled and often gone without sleep, without food...” (2 Cor. 11:27).

Emotional exhaustion. “I have daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:28,29).

Pain. “...I was given a thorn in my flesh...to torment me” (2 Cor. 12:7).

Unanswered prayers. “Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me...” (2 Cor. 12:8).

Burnout. “I had no rest, but was harassed at every turn—conflicts outside, fears within” (2 Cor. 7:5).

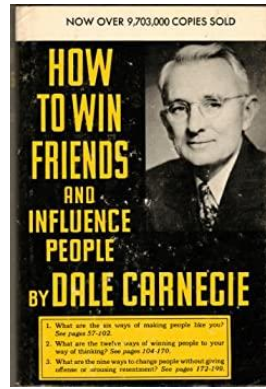
Pressure. “We were under *great pressure*, far beyond our ability to *endure*...we despaired *even of life*. In our hearts we felt the sentence of death” (2 Cor. 1:8).

There are those who (foolishly) say, “Poor Paul. If he had just had enough faith, he could have named it and claimed it—and would not have had those troubles!” **What?**

It seems popular today to preach that upon accepting Christ one can become rich, live in an elaborate home, drive exotic cars, attain great success, have perfect health, and prosper in material things. But there are serious problems with this teaching: It is contrary to Scripture (1 Tim. 6:9) and, when it does not happen, some are ready to give up and cast aside their faith entirely.

Paul was honest about the troubles that came his way; yet, he could speak of his inner victory and peace even in the midst of the storm! “We are hard pressed on every side, *but not crushed*; perplexed, *but not in despair*; persecuted, *but not abandoned*; struck down, *but not destroyed*” (2 Cor. 4:8,9). **What a testimony!**

When I was a teenager, I obtained a copy of the book *HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE* by Dale Carnegie (1888-1955). I paid 65 cents for a paperback copy! I don't know where he stood spiritually, but he did not hesitate to cite biblical passages such as "agree with your adversary quickly" and "a soft answer turns away wrath" (Matt. 5:25; Prov. 15:1). He often used stories to illustrate various points, some from his own personal life. This is one of my favorites:



When I was five years old, my father bought a little yellow-haired pup for fifty cents. He was the light and joy of my childhood. Every afternoon about four-thirty, he would sit in the front yard with his beautiful eyes staring steadfastly at the path, and as soon as he heard my voice or saw me swinging my dinner pail through the buck brush, he was off like a shot, racing breathlessly up the hill to greet me with leaps of joy and barks of sheer ecstasy.

Tippy was my constant companion for five years. Then one tragic night—I shall never forget it—he was killed within ten feet of me, killed by lightning. Tippy's death was the tragedy of my boyhood.

You never read a book on psychology, Tippy. You didn't need to. You knew by some divine instinct that you can make more friends in two months by becoming genuinely interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you...



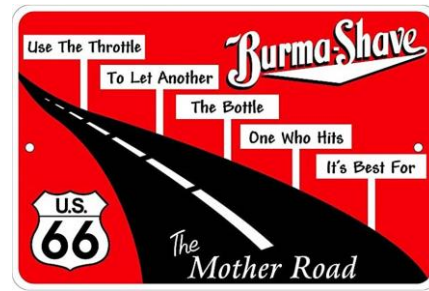
Perhaps only a few readers will now recognize the name **T. Texas Tyler** (1916-1972). But back in the 40s and 50s, he was quite well known—was even referred to as "the man with a million friends." He recorded a number of country music hits, including: "Remember Me," "Filipino Baby," and "Deck of Cards." But despite his widespread success, drugs and alcohol were destroying his life, eventually causing him to become keenly aware of his need for God.

After he came to the Lord, he traveled around singing and playing his guitar, giving his testimony. When I was 21 years old, I was preaching under a gospel tent in Long Beach, California, on Pacific Coast Highway. I invited him to come one night. He drew a good crowd, looked really sharp in his white cowboy suit, hat, and guitar.

As he took the pulpit, he asked how many had seen him before. Hands were raised. Then he asked, "How many have never seen me before..." and as hands were raised, he quickly added, "and never want to see me again?" He had everyone's attention.

He was going to sing several songs before giving his testimony. But with a couple songs yet to go, a string on his guitar broke! I had a guitar that I had ordered through the Sears and Roebuck catalog. It seems impossible now, but I believe I only paid \$12.50 for it. It was probably made in Taiwan, looked nice,

but was far from being a *quality* guitar like his. With his string broken, he borrowed *my* guitar to finish his songs. He never said anything, but I imagine he was thinking: *What a piece of junk!* 😊



An older generation may remember what became part of Americana in the 1940s. Before interstate freeways, signs among the highways advertised Burma-Shave, a popular shaving cream. Five signs, spaced about 100 feet apart, would each contain one line of a 4-line couplet, and on the fifth, the words "Burma-Shave." Some were funny, some were about driver safety, some warned about drinking and driving.

SHE KISSED A HAIRBRUSH
BY MISTAKE
SHE THOUGHT IT WAS
HER HUSBAND JAKE.
Burma-Shave

AROUND THE CURVE
LICKETY-SPLIT
BEAUTIFUL CAR
WASN'T IT?
Burma-Shave

DON'T LOSE YOUR HEAD
TO GAIN A MINUTE
YOU NEED YOUR HEAD
YOUR BRAINS ARE IN IT.
Burma-Shave

AT INTERSECTIONS
LOOK EACH WAY
A HARP SOUNDS NICE
BUT IT'S HARD TO PLAY.
Burma-Shave

DROVE TOO LONG
DRIVER SNOOZING
WHAT HAPPENED NEXT
IS NOT AMUSING.
Burma-Shave

HANDS ON THE WHEEL
EYES ON THE ROAD
THAT'S THE SKILLFUL
DRIVER'S CODE.
Burma-Shave

HE SAW THE TRAIN
AND TRIED TO DUCK IT
HE KICKED THE GAS
AND THEN THE BUCKET!
Burma-Shave

CAR IN DITCH
DRIVER IN TREE
THE MOON WAS FULL
AND SO WAS HE.
Burma-Shave

Having read the story behind the product WD-40, I placed a can on the pulpit as a sermon prop.

In 1953, Norman Larsen (1923-1970), head chemist at the Rocket Chemical Company in San Diego, worked to develop a formula for the aerospace industry that would displace water and prevent corrosion. His first attempt failed. His second and third attempts also failed. After 39 failures, his persistence finally paid off on the 40th attempt.



Consequently, he named the formula **WD-40** which stands for Water Displacement, formula number 40. It was such a success that, in 1962, when astronaut John Glenn orbited the earth, the outer skin of his space capsule was fully coated with WD-40. To this day WD-40 has been used in a wide variety of ways.

In my message I recalled the saying: "If at first you don't succeed, *try again*," also a similar principle in Galatians 6:9, "Let us

not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap *if we do not lose heart.*”

At the time of Noah, it rained **forty** days and **forty** nights (Gen. 7:4). Moses was on Mount Sinai for **forty** days and **forty** nights when he received the Ten Commandments (Exod. 24:18).

Israelite spies were sent to search out the Promised Land for **forty** days, but the Israelites could not enter in because of unbelief. Consequently, a year for a day—**forty years**—marked their time of wandering in the desert (Num. 14:34). In 1983 I flew over this same basic land area—from Cairo (Egypt) to Ammon (Jordan)—in *less than two hours*. Quite a contrast to forty years!

During their journey, the Israelites received manna for **forty** years (Exod. 16:35).

According to the law of Moses, those who committed crimes were beaten with stripes, not to exceed **forty** (Deut. 25:3).

In Nineveh, Jonah preached that the city would be overthrown in **forty** days (Jonah 3:4).

Jesus fasted **forty** days and **forty** nights (Matt. 4:2). And between his resurrection and ascension he was seen alive during **forty** days (Acts 1:3).

Even among non-Israelites, the number 40 seems to have been considered significant. The time period in which the Egyptians embalmed a body was **forty** days (Gen. 50:3). Goliath, a Philistine, defied the armies of Israel for **forty** days (1 Sam. 17:16).

It was with some hesitation I included the following article in our church bulletin (author unknown). It should be kept in mind that the use of the strong satire is to make a point: If one becomes too critical, it would be difficult for *anyone* to measure up.

PASTOR SEARCH COMMITTEE'S REPORT

We do not have a happy report to give. We have not been able to find a suitable candidate as pastor for this church. We have followed up on your suggestions with interviews or by calling at least three references.

ADAM: Good man, but has problems with his wife. One person we contacted told us he and his wife enjoy walking nude in the woods.

NOAH: Former pastorate of 120 years with no converts outside his family. Prone to unrealistic building projects.

JOSEPH: A big thinker, but a braggart; believes in dream interpreting and has a prison record.

MOSES: A modest and meek man, but poor communicator; even stutters at times. Sometimes blows his stack and acts rashly in business meetings. Some say he left an earlier church over a murder charge.

DEBORAH: One word: Female.

DAVID: The most promising leader of all until we discovered the affair he had with his neighbor's wife.

SOLOMON: Great preacher, known for his great wisdom, but has serious woman problems.

ELIJAH: Prone to depression; collapses under pressure.

HOSEA: A tender and loving pastor, but our people could never handle his wife's occupation.

JONAH: Told us he was swallowed up by a great fish. He said the fish later spit him out on the shore. We hung up!

AMOS: Too much of a country hick. Backward and unpolished. With some seminary training, he might have promise; but he has a hang-up against wealthy people.

JOHN: Says he is a Baptist, but doesn't dress like one. May be too Pentecostal. Tends to lift both hands in the air to worship when he gets excited. You know we limit to one hand. Sleeps in the outdoors, has a weird diet, and provokes denominational leaders.

PETER: Too blue collar. Has a bad temper, is even said to have cursed. He's a loose cannon.

PAUL: Powerful CEO type and fascinating preacher. He is a good writer, but can be harsh, and has been known to preach all night.

TIMOTHY: Too young.

JESUS: Has had popular times, when a large following developed, he managed to offend many of them; seldom stays in one place very long. And, of course, he is single.

PRAYER...

DEAR GOD:

So far today, I have done all right. I have kept my mouth shut. I have not gossiped, yelled, or lost my temper. I have not been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish or overindulgent. I am glad about that.

But in a few minutes, God, I am getting out of bed. From then on, I'm probably going to need a lot of help. Thank you! Amen.



As we “pray the Word,” we may use phrases in Scripture: “Renew a right spirit in me”; “Let the words of my mouth and the medication of my heart be acceptable in your sight”; “Give us this day our daily bread”; “Take not your holy Spirit from me”; etc.

In Hebrews 13:5 we read: “For [God] himself has said, ‘I will never *leave* you nor *forsake* you.’” The writer of Hebrews was recalling the words of Deuteronomy 31:6: “He will not *leave* you nor *forsake* you.”

Some have taught that we should not ask God to be with us, for he has *already* said he will never leave us nor forsake us! This, they suppose, is praying in **unbelief**. But there is nothing wrong with asking God to be with us. Noted men in the Bible prayed this way:

Solomon, at the dedication of the temple, said: “May the Lord our God be with us...may he not leave us nor forsake us” (1 Kings 8:57). David prayed: “Do not leave me nor forsake me, O God” (Psalms 27:9). Jeremiah prayed: “Do not leave us!” (Jer. 14:9).

As we “pray the Word,” we claim the promises of God—promises like “I will never leave you nor forsake you”—applying them to our present situation or need.



Many of us take owning a copy of the Bible for granted. But before the invention of the printing press, Bibles had to be hand copied—a task which took even an industrious scribe at least a year to complete. How many of us could afford a Bible if it cost a year's wages?

Let's do the math. Suppose this scribe worked for 40 hours a week. In a year this would be 2,080 hours. If we figured \$10 an hour, this would make the cost of a Bible \$20,800 dollars! But now, Bibles are available at prices almost everyone can afford and there are organizations, like the Gideons, that even provide FREE copies!

Today, most people in the United States know how to read—and can *read* a Bible if they want to. But in earlier centuries—and certainly in the time the New Testament was written—*most* did not know how to read. Notice the intro to the Book of Revelation: “Blessed is HE who *reads* and THOSE who *hear* the words of this prophecy” (Rev. 1:3). “Faith comes by *hearing* the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). (cf. Isa. 29:11,12; 1 Thess. 5:27).

The book of Psalms is the *middle* book of the Bible and also the *longest* book with over 43,000 words. It is in the book of Psalms we find the *shortest* chapter in the Bible, Psalm 117:

“O praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud him, all you peoples! For his merciful kindness is great toward us, And the truth of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!”

What is not as well-known: the *shortest* chapter is also the *middle* chapter of the Bible (if figured by *chapters*). There are 594 chapters before and 594 chapters after it!

As to verses, the Bible has an *even* number of verses (31,102), so there is not a (single) middle verse. The “middle *verses*” are Psalm 103:1-2—a great passage— with 15,550 verses before and 15,550 verses after:

“Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

The *longest* verse in the Bible is Esther 8:9 with 90 words. The *shortest* verse is John 11:35: “Jesus wept”—*but only if figured in English*. In the *Greek*, in which the New Testament was written, 1 Thessalonians 5:16, “Rejoice evermore,” is shorter, as the following comparison shows:

John 11:35: ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς
Jesus wept
1 Thess. 5:16: πάντοτε χαίρετε
Rejoice evermore

Though the exact number of **questions** in the Bible may vary (depending on translation), there are well over **3,000**. The *first* question in the New Testament was asked by the wise men from the East: “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” (Matt. 2:2). The answer, of course, was BETHLEHEM, where Jesus was born.

Beth is the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In its original form it was a crude drawing of a house. When coupled with other words, *beth* (which means “house”) provides the basis for the names of places like Beth-lehem. Here are some examples from Scripture:

- Beth-abara, “Ferry-house” (John 1:28).
- Beth-anath, “House of replies” (Judges 1:33).
- Beth-any, “House of poverty” (Aramaic, John 11:1)
- Beth-arabah, “House of the desert” (Josh. 15:6).
- Beth-aven, “House of vanity” (Josh. 7:2).
- Beth-el, “House of God” (Gen. 28:19).
- Beth-esda, “House of kindness” (John 5:2).
- Beth-phage, “House of unripe figs” (Matt. 21:1).
- Beth-saida, “House of fishers” (John 1:44).
- Beth-shan, “House of rest” (1 Sam. 31:10).
- Beth-shemesh, “House of the sun” (2 Chron. 25:23).
- Beth-zur, “House of rock” (2 Chron. 11:7).

As to the meaning of Beth-lehem, where Jesus was born, biblical scholars tell us it can mean “House of *bread*” or “House of *flesh*.” Either way, it points to **JESUS**:

“The **bread** of God is He who came down from heaven” (John 6:32). “The Word became **flesh** and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

“Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The following sayings have been used on church signs:

WHEN U THROW MUD AT SOMEONE
U LOSE GROUND.

PREVENT TRUTH DECAY
BRUSH UP ON YOUR BIBLE.

WHAT IS MISSING FROM “CH__CH”?
U R

IF GOD IS YOUR COPILOT, SWITCH SEATS

IT IS TOO HOT TO KEEP CHANGING SIGN
— SIN BAD, JESUS GOOD. DETAILS INSIDE.

WALMART IS NOT THE ONLY SAVING PLACE.

BE THE KIND OF PERSON YOUR PET THINKS YOU ARE.

NEED A LIFEGUARD?
OURS WALKS ON WATER.

GOD WANTS SPIRITUAL FRUIT
— NOT RELIGIOUS NUTS.



RALPH WOODROW
BOX 21
PALM SPRINGS, CA 92263

E-mail: ralphwoodrow@earthlink.net

Phone: (760) 327-6049

Website: ralphwoodrow.org