

December 31, 2008

Just a thought to end the year with.

I read that “if you're struck by lightning, your shoes and socks will likely be knocked off. Rapid heating, evaporation, and expansion of sweat on your skin literally blows your clothes off. If this happens, the current does not enter the body and should not cause injury.”

So, let me get this straight. If I'm struck by lightning and I end up standing in the middle of the street naked, that's a good thing. Hmm. Actually, I'd rather be dead. The rest of the world might prefer that, too.

O.K. enough with the horror flick.

As 2008 ends and I look back over the year I have two questions: Am I happy with the part of 2008 that was my responsibility? Can I look back and feel a sense of satisfaction for the part I played in my little corner of the world?

I'm not looking to do “big” things. Most of us, including me, do mostly “little” things. But those “little” things add up. They become “big” things. In the past I could get so hung up on doing something “big” and memorable that I'd forget to pay attention to the “little” things whose path I had ventured across.

These “little” things are really what we are remembered for. Sure, people remember the “big” stuff. But most will tell you it is the “little” stuff that matters the most. Like the sincere gesture of compassion. Or the time you took just to listen to someone's story (without telling yours); for no other reason except that they matter. (Sidebar: Guys, the “little” stuff matters!) It is not about building a dynasty. It's about loving someone. Now.

I'll bet, like me, you did a lot of “little” things this year. Routine things. Things that just had to get done; not a lot choice in the matter. But they are the true essence of life. This is where life is lived day by day. This is where our true legacy is built.

Now, Jesus did some “big” things. Raising the dead comes to mind. But the thing that gets me most is that He “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). It seems this is all God knows how to do. He creates the world and

it is pronounced "good". He heals and it is written: "He does all things well." Good. That's God. He talks about "good" news. "Good gifts". "Good" fruit. "Good" seed. "Good fight". This is all God knows how to do. Because He is good. He is the embodiment of all that is good. So, He is the "good shepherd". "No one is good----except God alone" (Mt. 10:18).

I suspect that if God is good it might be a good idea if I was good, too. I seem to recall that we are to pattern ourselves after Him. True?

So what do we do? How about doing what He did and still does: go about doing good.

In 2009, I'm going to think less about doing something "big" and focus on doing something "little"; lot's of little things--doing good. Like Jesus. The fragrance of a life lived for God is in the "little" things. Now, that's "big".

The "little" stuff really is the "big" stuff.

December 22, 2008

I have noticed, as I'm sure you have, that we live in a society based on a foundation of fear. We live in a "what if", "just in case" "you never know" "you can't trust anybody" "what will people think" "stay in my box" "I don't like change" "what might happen" kind of world. And it hinders us from enjoying life as it was intended (John 10:10).

I am tired of the hinderance. I think God is, too.

There is insurance for everything. For instance, you buy a brand new device and the first thing they want to sell you is insurance, in case it doesn't work! If there is the potential of it not working then why sell it in the first place? It doesn't say much for a companies integrity. If it doesn't work as advertised they should just take it back. And you shouldn't have to have insurance for that. But lots of people buy the insurance. Why? Because they have been trained to fear what "might" happen.

Our friends live in a condo in a secure and gated community with armed guards and surveillance 24/7. You can't get through the gate without authorization. Once through the gate you can't enter the condo building without further authorization (by the way, the building itself is protected with the latest gadgetry and cameras); an armed guard stands outside the

door. Only you can give permission for someone to enter. There has never been a break-in in the history of the complex. My friend still has 3 locks on their INSIDE door! Fear.

There are anti-aging cremes and regimens for exercise. Why? Because we are afraid of aging. And we have been taught that aging is bad. It is to be feared. Why have we bought into that when aging is a natural process and one that should be enjoyed? I turn 50 on January 1st. I think getting older is kind of cool. I'm also enjoying Colleen getting older. Aging is a precious time in our lives. It is also a very intimate time. Some things and experiences can only be shared as one ages.

Remember the Y2K scare centered on computers loosing all their data? Bogus, right? But a lot of people made a lot of money playing on peoples fear. We have been trained to fear because that is where the money is. Can you think of something you "need" that is not based on some aspect of fear? The fact we are told we "need" something is indicative of the fact that we will be less than we can be if we don't have it. Fear.

Fear can be a good thing. But we have to learn to control it rather than having it control us.

Do bad things happen? Of course. sometimes terrible things. But I have learned to keep my focus upon God and His love and care over me. Then I live in hope; hope controls my thoughts and decisions. When my sole focus is on the "bad" things then I begin to live in fear; it begins to control my thoughts and decisions. I have chosen to let hope, not fear, dictate how I will live my life. This sounds like I have it all together. But I have to work at it, as do you, every single day!

Every Christmas I am challenged to realign my thinking about peace and fear. Again, this Christmas I am trying to let the words of the angels sink into my spirit: "peace". Everything about Christmas points toward peace. Not fear. Jesus was all about peace. Not long before ascending to heaven He left us some stirring words: "Let not your heart be troubled. Trust in God...Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14: 1, 27)

We might be onto something there.

Merry Christmas!

December 18, 2008

I have never gotten really excited about getting gifts at Christmas. I've enjoyed them all, most of them at least.

I find Christmas puts me in a contemplative mood.

Here are some of the things I find myself contemplating about this year:

**1. God controls my destiny.** Think Mary and Joseph. Would they have chosen their path? More than likely they wouldn't even have dreamed of doing things this way. Sound familiar? If they had, it certainly didn't include an immaculate conception. No matter how I strive or struggle, God alone makes things happen. The past months have been one reminder after another that John 15:1-5 really is true; I can do nothing without Him and I am nothing without Him.

**2. I am astounded and pleased at the same time that He actually answers prayer.** Think old Simeon and Anna in Luke 2. Both appeared to desire, and lived to see, the appearance of the Christ. Am I excited about Jesus as they were? Sometimes I think I'm more focused on the day to day rather than the eternal.

**3. I am learning that God is still a God of miracles just as He was at that first Christmas.** He has never changed! Think about that. I'm thinking consistency. I'm thinking that I can count on Him. I can't relate to that very well (except by faith) because I change all the time. At the end of every year, I look back at my life and take note of how I have changed. In fact, I have a list entitled "Personal Growth Issues". This list contains things I need to work on in my personal and spiritual life. It is a list that provokes and demands change. But not God. He never changes. Never has. Never will. I'm glad because that kind of consistency doesn't leave me guessing about what He is going to do or how He is going to respond.

**4. I am wanting to be more of a worshipper.** Not just in church but in all of life. When I read the Christmas story it is replete with worship. That might be something worth considering. Maybe God is trying to get me to see that He loves me to live my worship (Rom. 12:1).

There are a lot of other thoughts but these 4 can suffice for now.

Have a great Christmas! And take the time to join me in some contemplation.

December 8, 2008

The clock thing is beginning to get to me. Remember the clock. It sits on the floor beside me looking imploringly at me saying, "Display me. Display me!"

Well, it has convinced Colleen to be in its corner. Two against one. It is trying to divide our household!

Colleen has taken the clock out of its box. She has put a battery in it and put it on my desk. With eyelashes fluttering she asked me to attach it to the wall.

What was I supposed to do?! Well, I didn't do what I was supposed to do. Instead I did what every self respecting male would do in similar circumstances. Nothing. I put it back on the floor. Fluttering eyelashes. I've been married too long to be taken in by that ploy.

Now Colleen, whom I love and adore (slightly different than my feeling for the clock), has put it on her desk. It still is not up on the wall.

But, now, Colleen is forever asking me what time it is. She says she wouldn't have to ask if "somebody" would attach the clock to the wall. True.

My resolve is weakening. I'm not sure if I'm going to win this fight. But like every self respecting Christian I'm determined to beat back temptation! The wall will stay unadorned, except with pictures.

Will you pray for my victory?

December 1, 2008

The Secret Service of the United States has a long and storied history. It was founded in 1865. Its members are willing to lay down their life for the sake of keeping the President, or anyone they are assigned to protect, alive. That's their job. They do it well. Tim McCarthy did it well, too. He's

the guy who jumped in front of a bullet meant to kill President Ronald Reagan in 1981.

Let's return to 1865. This was the year the Secret Service came into being.

So what's the big deal? Think about it. 1865. Abraham Lincoln. Ford's Theatre. John Wilkes Booth. Gun shot. Assassination.

It is ironic that the very man who brought into being the Secret Service was not saved by it. In fact, the very day the bill was signed to establish the Secret Service was the day Lincoln was assassinated.

A lot could be said about this episode in history. A lot has been said. And written. And analyzed. I'd like to add my bit to the reams of words written.

### **My thought is just this:**

Sometimes we have to engage in something that will have no benefit for ourselves but will serve for the betterment of those who come after us. Think about the elderly man who plants a tree in his yard knowing full well he will never get the benefit of sitting under its shade but that someone else will. Think of the craftsman who diligently builds a dresser he will never use but he does it to the best of his ability anyway.

This is living unselfishly. Living for others. Making sure someone else's life is better for having been in contact with you. Think of the Good Samaritan. Think of Jesus who came to serve and give His life. Think of the parent who scrimps their every penny to make the live of their progeny better than what they could have envisioned.

This is living with the future in view. How can I make life better for those coming after me? How can I leave the world a better place than I found it?

I suppose this isn't much to think about. But it could make a real difference.

November 27, 2008

Is life fair? Probably not. Should it be?

If life was fair what would it look like? Who would define what fairness is, or

is not?

Sometimes life is just that. Life.

Would life be boring if it were “fair”? Would it be too predictable?

What would life teach us if it were as “fair” as we would want it to be? If life were “fair” according to our personal definition of fairness what would we learn?

If the definition of “fairness” were left to us I think it would end up saying that we would never go through difficulties. We would never face struggles that tempt us to give up on God. We would never have the privilege of questioning life. We would never have internal battles with truth that would lead us to ultimately finding Truth. We would never see the light at the end of the proverbial tunnel. Instead, we would be always standing in the light with a perfect understanding of every circumstance facing us?

Would that be nice? Sure. But would it be good? I don't think so.

We need difficulties so we can grow. No doubt we can grow without going through difficulties. But some of our most significant moments occur when life is not “fair”; when all we see is the light at the end of the tunnel. At least, we hope it is the light and not the entire train catapulting itself toward us.

I can pinpoint to some of my most significant struggles as doubling as my most significant learning moments. These are “moments” I can pinpoint as having been the most influential, and positive, times of my life.

Is life “fair”? I hope not.

You might have a different opinion. That's fair.

November 10, 2008

This morning, I'm reading the *GLOBE AND MAIL* and *USA TODAY*. Stories about people inspire me, surprise me and, sometimes, leave me wondering “What were they thinking”.

One story was about a person who had (according to Christina Binkley of the Wall Street Journal) who had gone into a luxury accessories store in New York City and threw down \$3000.00 for some shoes and boots. Five minutes after leaving the store the buyer came back to the store and returned everything. She said, "I just can't do this any more." I say good for her! It's nice when people respond to common sense given realities in our world where most people live on less than \$2.00 per day. This consumer has inspired me to think through my purchases. She has also brought another reality back to my mind: purchasing things does not, will not and cannot ever bring joy or peace or wisdom that lasts to my life. If it doesn't bring something to me that will last beyond me then why do I want it?

Another story riled me. It was about people who normally would not venture into a pawn shop doing so in response to the financial crisis we are currently experiencing. One owner was saying people are pawning anything to put gas in the tank or to pay the mortgage. I understand that. Some things are necessary. But it was reported that one lady (whose name I won't use here; you know how how Americans are about suing) brought her sons coin collection, which took years to accumulate along with the memories involved in putting it together, and the silver she received as an inheritance from her grandmother and gave it up for a pittance of its real value. Here is what she said, "I'm embarrassed, but not too embarrassed to do this. I have no use for these things, and to be honest, with Christmas coming, I need the money." That is moronic!

Listen to her rationale. It's not as though she is starving or needing medical care or needing to pay the mortgage. No. She wants to get rid of this stuff to spend more money on something rather frivolous.

She is parting with memories; some of the most valuable and precious things we have. Some would say she will create more memories with the money she will spend on Christmas. I don't think so. I don't think memories are that important to her given what she is doing with the memories she's already got.

What is she thinking?! She is giving up her connection to the past. She is giving up family treasures for the sake of a few pounds of turkey and some gifts that no one probably wants or needs and will find their way to a garage sale in the summer. Misplaced smarts. I said I was riled.

These two stories have challenged me to do two things. 1) I'm going to

evaluate what I am spending money on. I'm going to make sure I purchase only what I actually need. 2) I'm going to look at the things I do have and make sure I take a moment or two or three to consider the historical value of them. I'm going to remember the memories and use those memories to inspire me and make me thankful for the those who have meant so much to me.

Thanks for taking part in my rant.

November 8, 2008

I am not a musician. Tried to be one when I was 7 years old. I was learning piano but thought the world would be better off if I quit. So I did. That is the long and the short of my musical career. Over. Except for a brief resurrection in College when I was part of two faux bands. It's been really over since then. And it will not be resurrected. Don't feel sorry for me. One day you'll thank me for my decision.

On the opposite end of the musical career scale is George Beverly Shea. Don't know him? You should google his name. He's historical. He's 98 years old! He brings tears to old people and young people; but for different reasons.

George was on a program with Bill Gaither today. The had him sing and while he is known for his singing several songs with his rich baritone voice the song he chose was the one that, in reality, summed up his entire career. The song was the old hymn: *This is My Story*. What is tis story? Jesus. Just Jesus.

The life of George Beverly Shea. Just Jesus. This is his story! This is what he is known for. Just Jesus.

It begs the question: what am I known for? What will I have been known for when I am 98 years old?

Good question.

It will be answered.

I will determine what the answer will be.

You will too.

So...?

October 31, 2008

Life's been tough lately. Hasn't it?

If you have money in the stock market you know what I am talking about. Everybody is getting "crushed" "beaten up" "pulverized". All kinds of words are being used in an attempt to describe our feelings in the midst of one of the most difficult financial times in decades.

It's easy to get caught up in the fear of it all.

Now, by nature, I'm an optimist. Things can be lousy but I'm still going to have a smile on my face. (Of course, when I'm mad this may not be the case.) My default position is to find the potential "silver lining". Is that denial? I don't know. But I do know this: it sure beats getting all stressed out about stuff.

Any body notice if you have been praying more since the "financial crisis" hit?

If we are, the question we could ask ourselves is: why are you praying? So you don't loose any more money? Or that this situation would be used to help people focus on God? If you're honest, like I'm going to be right now, I'm motivated by both reasons. Does one motivate me more than the other? The second should. But does it? Again, in a fit of honesty, I have to say I'm more motivated to pray about the personal impact. Though, in fairness, I am also praying for God's glory to be revealed. (is it done out of sincerity or to try to trick God into fixing this crisis?)

This dilemma of why I am praying has helped me to understand Paul's struggle (in Romans 7) with a bit more clarity. I feel wretched! I wish I didn't care about my personal plight and the impact this "financial crisis" is having on me. But I do care! Do I care too much? I don't know? Probably. Maybe. I am disturbed by how self centered I have appeared to be during this "crisis". I don't pass too many hours without wondering about how "this" or "that" is going to impact me. I am not enjoying living with so much

emphasis on me!

The one benefit in all this is that I know I need God!

Without Him I am absolutely undone. Without a clear, concise and unambiguous vision of Him in front of me every moment of every day I would be living in a constant state of selfishness manifested in fear and anxiety. Can anyone relate? Or am I alone in this?

So, on the one hand, this “financial crisis” has exposed my selfishness. But, on the other hand, it has reminded me, rather forcefully, that my source is God.

So, on the one hand, I am not liking this financial storm. But, on the other hand, I’m loving it because it has reminded me, rather forcefully, that my source is God.

So, rather than being in a bad spot. I’m in a good spot.

Life has been tough lately. But it has also been very,very good!

October 23, 2008

I was reading a comparative study of several U.S. President’s recently. I know that sounds incredibly exciting and you wish you had done the same thing. But we can’t all be lucky. Or can we? Is there such a thing as luck? Don’t all of our decisions and situations lead us to specific moments [intersections of life] when things happen to us? It was decisions, not luck, that got us there; that got us to where others were and got other to where we were. This is not luck or coincidence. It might be God orchestrating our lives for our good and to suit His purposes.

Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. This is not where I was going today. I’ll talk about luck and coincidence and God’s purposes some other time.

Back to the President’s thing. I was struck by one situation in particular. It pertained to President Herbert Hoover. In a biography of his life he recalled that as an orphan growing up in Iowa that he was 10 years old before he realized he could do something for the sheer joy of it without offending God.

I had quickly read over that statement. But then my mind was drawn back to it. I read it again and thought: "How sad."

He had been taught that true joy was found in suppressing joy. What a profoundly ignorant lesson to teach anyone. I am convinced joy is not found in suppressing desire but in discovery its source: GOD.

I think in the Garden of Eden joy was the norm. Can you imagine anything else in that perfect world? Joy is the norm in heaven, too. Can you imagine heaven being any other way? I didn't think so. I suspect God wants us to have a little heaven on earth. And more than once in a while.

Of course, the problem with joy is that we often think in order to have it consistently we have to have some particular person or thing. We know, though, that people nor things are the source of joy.

From personal experience I have come to believe a few things about joy.

**1. Joy is natural in the presence of God.** You want joy? Get to where God's presence is. Reading the Bible, being with other Christians, singing worship and taking a few moments to be "lazy" and just enjoy the sight or the smell or the taste in front of you. Linger.

**2. Joy is natural when you live a generous life.** People live boring lives because they are often not living generous lives. That kills joy. Start giving. Your whole attitude will be changed

**3. "Joy is the serious business of heaven."**--C.S. Lewis. God made us to experience joy consistently. Even in those miserable "I would rather die" moments. What better way to lay a whipping on the devil than to determine to rejoice anyway. Why not. Don't we believe that what the devil means for harm God means for good? Why not. Don't we believe that all things work together for good to those who are called...? Why not. Maybe we don't believe that stuff. If we did it would fill us with joy. Even in those "I would rather die moments".

**4. Joy comes from knowing, really knowing Who it is we serve.** If we are serving the flesh there really isn't a lot of joy to be found because it is all based on what I can do to achieve it or on what others do, or don't do,

for me. But when I am serving God joy is simple because I know everything He does is about me! Joy just happens when I am serving Him.

**5. Joy reveals we are conformed to the image of Christ.** Jesus lived a life of joy. Sure He had His moments of “misery” but those moments never caused Him to lose His joy. He always kept the joy in mind. “For the joy set before Him...” I’m still learning this as I am in the middle of being renewed day by day.

So...we don’t need permission to enjoy life. God planned it that way. It is His desire for His people.

That would be me!

October 8, 2008

I’m perfect! (thanks for telling me). Sometimes you just have to be told.

I am the perfect husband. Colleen has never told me this. But I know she feels this way.

I am the perfect father. Joshua has never told me this either. But I know he feels this way.

I am a perfect Christian. I think people are just too shy to tell me this though. But I know they feel this way.

I am the perfect missionary. Missionaries are shy about such things too. But I know this is what they’re thinking.

I am the perfect grandparent. Taija-Lynn is too young to speak but if she could I know she wouldn’t be too shy to tell me.

I was/am the perfect son. Are my parents responsible for this or was I born this way?

I have have a long list of my perfections. But I’m too humble to share them all with you. I know you would like to see the list. But, go away.

Did you notice something about this list?

It is absolutely ludicrous! There is no way these statements are true. Anyone who has been around me for even a few minutes gets it. I actually am not perfect! At least, no one have ever told me I am. I don't see anybody lined up to tell me either.

So, what does this teach me?

1. I do not need to get too uptight about stuff that happens. Nobody's perfect, right? If that is true why do we get uptight when others "fail" our expectations of them. Relax. They are no different then you or me. People fail us. Get over it, James!
2. I do not need to get wierded out when I mess up. Remember, I'm not perfect. Why would I not expect to mess-up from time to time?
3. I have a long personal "to-do" list. It's quite large actually. In fact I have kept a list of what I need to work on and I check it regularly. Somedays show more progress than others.
4. I need the Holy Spirit always and in all ways because I am incapable of making the deep changes that need to be made. But I can make them when He is giving the directions.

Am I perfect? You know I'm not. But one day I will be. You will be, too. We all will be. Heaven will be a wonderful place.

October 4, 2008

I know you were wanting to ask. So here's the answer: yes.

The clock (see September 10th blog) is still sitting on the floor beside me. Still in the box. Still with the same time on its face. Is this situation likely to change much? I really don't think so.

So there the clock sits. Me mocking it and it doing what angry clocks do to people who don't use them for what they were created to do. What angry clocks actually do to people who don't use them for what they were created to do has never yet been noticed.

Am I afraid of what it could do to me as one of those people who don't use clocks for what they were created to do? Not one bit. Clocks are only dangerous when you let them start ticking. Keep them quiet and they are

no problem. And life is easier. I think.

Last night we were driving home in a traffic jam. Actually, it was more like we were creeping. Move 2 car lengths. Stop for 10 minutes type of deal.

Our city is small geographically but large when it comes to the numbers of cars. There are about 1.2 million people and about 350,000 cars and way too few streets. Evenings are a disaster if you have to get somewhere in a reasonable time frame (there's that clock thing again).

After sitting and idling far too much our car decided to quit. Just like that. No warning. Just quit! And in the middle of an intersection! Nothing we could do but listen to the horns pleading with us to get going. The traffic was so congested we could not even roll the car out of the way. So we sat. Colleen was relaxed. Me? I was instantly immersed in sweat. I mean I was soaked in an instant of time. And embarrassed.

We contacted a friend who was not able to help us but he gave us the number of a mechanic. Hooray! But he couldn't get through the traffic. So we sat. And listened to horns.

Do know how many different horn sounds there are? I should have kept track. My mind when to the possibilities. If I wanted to, and if I were a musician which my friends assure me I am not, I thought I could actually develop an orchestra of horns. If they could be organized into one cohesive group imagine the sound that could be made! Imagine. Perhaps, when someone got mad at you instead of using an angry tone you could turn on the Symphony of Horns. That'd help.

September 16, 2008

Some things are just stupid. I just don't get some things. Maybe there is nothing to get.

I read about Damien Hurst the other day in *Time* magazine. He is an artist, apparently of some repute. Most of the reason he is famous, as far as I can tell, is he does "weird art". Now, I know. most famous artists who go down in history have been viewed as being a little "strange".

I don't think Damien is strange. I think he is brilliant. In fact, the people who

buy his works are the strange ones! I am of the opinion Damien understands how weird some people are and has developed a form of art they could somehow relate to. He is a modern day P.T. Barnham of *Barnum and Bailey* fame who is reported to have said, "There's is a sucker born every minute." (He wasn't the one who coined that phrase, though. But that is for another blog). In fact, the piece I'm talking about is "designed all at once to beguile, flatter and parody" those bidding on it. In other words, Hurst is mocking them! Yet they buy it! How do you spell "stupid"?

So far his worth is estimated, prior to the auction, at \$364 million. The auction is reported to have brought in another \$127 million. Weird is expensive.

Anyway, it was reported that on September 15 and 16<sup>th</sup> (today!) Damien Hurst put 54 pieces of his art up for sale at *Sotheby's* in London. One particular item, according to Ann Curry of *TODAY*, sold for \$18,000,000.00. This is quite a significant amount of money. What did it buy? A genuine, though dead, white bull in formaldehyde! Now, granted, this was a special bull. It was put in a special case on a nice special stand called a "tall marble plinth" for nice special people. And, did I mention, its hooves and horns were covered in real 18 karat gold! As *Time* said, this "bull is truly a cash cow." Hurst calls it "*The Golden Calf*".

Like, I want that in my living room!

Of course, I suspect a lot of farmer/rancher types are out buying up the formaldehyde they can get their hands on. Forget oil! Formaldehyde is where it's at! It might be a good idea to buy formaldehyde stock.

\$18 million for "*The Golden Calf*" and a bunch of formaldehyde.

I'm sure you have a few questions about that.

September 10, 2008

I am sitting at my desk. On my left there is a window that gives me great view of much of downtown Panama City. Beneath window sits a clock. It is still in its box. The time always stays the same: 10:10. It is not an expensive clock. I think we only paid about \$10.00 for it. I say "I think" because I can't remember what we paid for it.

The day we bought it we brought it home and put it beneath the window. It has stayed there. It only moves when I pick it up in order to sweep the floor. Then I put it back down in the same spot. I a clock had a heart and a mind it might be bored by now.

We have often said, "We need to put that thing up on the wall." Our response is always the same, "I know." Yet it stays on the floor proudly displaying the only time it has ever known: 10:10. At least it is consistent.

The clock looks good. It has an off-white face with black numbers. I like numbers on a clock. It takes the guess work out of telling time. It also features lines signifying minutes. You know the little dashes. It has a brassy, goldy, brownish rim around the face.

The box it sits in is nice, too. I thought it was a pretty heavy duty box for an inexpensive clock. It's very sturdy. It's a taupe color. The company has its name on it. Something to do with Home Trends. Maybe I'm onto a new trend of not letting a clock rule my life.

Why don't I put the clock on the wall? One reason really. I don't want it to run my life! You see, as soon as I let those hands start their circular orbit I have to pay attention to it. Well, I don't have to but that's what happens when a clock is in the room. We look at it and govern our days by it. I prefer not to "owned" by a clock. These days I follow the rhythm of my body. When I need a break I take it. The clock doesn't tell me what to do or when to do it. I kind of like it like that.

Right now I own it. It does what I tell it to do. Which is nothing. If it had a mind to tell me it might say it doesn't appreciate my attitude. But so what! I'm the boss. I sit at the desk. It sits on the floor. I sit in a cushy chair. It sits on hard ceramic tiles. In a box. Doing nothing except reminding me I don't want it running my life.

Will we ever put it up on the wall? I don't know. It's always 10:10. Besides, I enjoy life a lot more without the tyranny of the time clock.

August 29, 2008

I'm trying to figure out what my favorite thing is. You thought this was

easy? Maybe for you it was. But for me, well, that's a whole other ball game!

I started with hot dogs. All beef. Cooked really well. Dark, almost burnt, on the outside. I like them for a snack. I like them for breakfast. Loaded with ketchup, onions and cheese and potato chips on the side. They're good anytime. When I was a teenager, I ate 15 at one sitting. And didn't get sick of them. But sometimes, I make other culinary choices. So maybe hot-dogs are not my favorite.

I thought about reading. I love to read good books. I am particularly fond of history and biographies. It is my opinion I have become a better person because of the books I've read. But sometimes, I choose not to read a book. So maybe reading may not be my favorite thing.

I thought about driving. I enjoy the activity I witness when I drive. People in their yards, animals in the fields. I love looking at the old farm houses and imagining what they were like in their heyday and how they represented the dreams of the occupants. But sometimes, I'm tired so I choose not to drive.

I thought about hanging out with friends. This is always a ton of fun! I really enjoy the laughs good friends can enjoy together. I like the fact good friends can share from their hearts and still be friends. I look forward to being with friends. But sometimes, I like to spend time with myself. Vegging. Doing nothing. Maybe watching a ball game.

I thought about sports and hobbies and a few other things. However, "But sometimes" would always seem to factor into the equation.

I still don't know what my favorite things is. Maybe I will never know what it is. But I do know this: I love the search.

Maybe that's my favorite thing? Just the search.

August 23, 2008

A jolt back to reality is good.

I have really been enjoying life lately. Lots to do. Enjoying doing it. Lots of laughs. Looking forward to the next thing. Satisfaction. This could last

forever and I might not complain.

But then I read a quote from David Shields. That's Shields with a "d". He brought me back down to earth with a dose of reality.

He said, "The thing about life is we're all going to die." Now, we all know that that life is terminal. It is. Really.

This sounds sad. But I don't think it is. You see, I'm not looking forward to death. I am looking forward to what comes after death! I'm even looking more forward to what comes after this life than I am about what is going to happen in this life. I am convinced that the life I now live is nice but it is not even worth comparing to the life I will live after I leave this mortal body. The future holds so much more promise. If this is the only life I was to live that would be sad. If that were the case, to borrow a word from the Apostle Paul, I would be "pitied".

I think the thing I hang on to in this life are the relationships developed over the years. You know, friends and family. Even the sentimental things like special days, dates, favorite vacations, pets and dreams of what I want to do in the future have a way of making me hang onto this life. Maybe hanging on a little tighter than I should.

I know I'm hanging onto things a little tighter than I should when I get angry as I consider the potential of losing them. That can apply to anything or anyone.

David Shields has helped me to reconsider life. As I have mulled around in my mind what he said I have to consider what I am living for. So, what am I living for?! Like really living for!

I don't know if I appreciate that question. Primarily because I may not like the answer. To paraphrase the old Fram oil filter commercial: we can deal with it now, or deal with it later.

August 18, 2008

Moments are big deals. Moments are short. They are quick.

Moments change lives.

Moments just happen. Unannounced. They are serendipitous things.

They just happen.

Sometimes they don't just happen. Sometimes they are not serendipitous.

Sometimes moments are planned. Ask Michael Phelps.

Phelps is the record breaking American swimmer who has set 7 new world records and won 8 Gold medals in the Olympics this month.

He has worked hard for these moments to happen. Setting goals and being driven enough to reach them. Years of determination and practice. I cannot imagine the sacrifices involved.

He almost didn't set the record for the most Gold medals won.

It happened in the 7<sup>th</sup> race. The 100m Butterfly. On day 8 of the Olympics. If he did not win this race there would be no record of 8 Gold medals. He had to win this race if he was going to have a chance at 8. As a side bar: if he won 7 Gold medals the company who sponsors him was going to give him \$1,000,000.00!! He could secure the cash with a win. There was a lot hanging on this one race.

As the swimmers were coming to the end of the race Phelps was trailing Milorad Cavic. It looked like Phelps was going to lose the race, the chance at the record of 8 Gold medals and maybe even the cool million dollars.

But in an instant, just the last few feet, he changed his stroke and his pace and won by 1/100<sup>th</sup> of a second. That equals about 3/4 of an inch or 2 cm. Not much of a difference between having a great Olympics and having the greatest of all time. 2 cm represented just a moment in time. But it was everything to Michael Phelps.

But this moment. None of Phelps' moments came by accident.

He worked hard. Trained hard. Someone reported that in a week he would swim about 17,000 meters in order to accomplish these moments.

The thing I can't get out of my mind though is that 2 cm. That was the

difference between being great and being the greatest of all time. 2 cm.

What separates us from our goal?

The only difference between Phelps and Cavic that day was this: Cavic glided into the finish. Phelps, on the other hand, changed the strategy. Rather than gliding which would have cost him the race he took a couple of shorter faster strokes. That was the difference. One chose to stroke. The other chose to glide.

Is there “2 cm” of something keeping us from success?

Are we stroking? Or are we gliding?

And the “Moral of the story” is...?

July 23, 2008

John Francis is an interesting character. I was first introduced to him on flight from Dusseldorf Germany to Miami. Our conversation was mainly one sided as I was in seat 22H and John was featured in an article in the *AmericanWay* magazine. But I had to listen to what John was saying. And what he said was quite interesting. You learn a lot when one is forced to sit and listen (or just read).

John mentioned that he had been on a fast from speaking. For 17 years!!! He said it all started on his 27th birthday. He thought he would not speak for the day as a “gift” to himself and the town. He didn’t speak all day. He liked it so much he did it for a week. Then he stretched it out for 17 years. He says he slipped up only three times in those 17 years. It should be noted that during those 17 years he also earned a Master’s and Ph.D degrees. He even did T.V. interviews about his silence. Apparently he did not learn sign language. He was completely silent. Imagine no email. Just listening. No talking.

The over-all lesson he learned was he learned more when he was silent than when he was always engaged in conversation. Through the art of listening, John had discovered that he really had not been a good listener.

Now, I’m a preacher and am not even going to consider a 17 year vow of silence. Though I could start with 17 minutes....

I'm back. I'm waiting 17 minutes before I continued this conversation. It seemed like a long time. But during those 17 minutes I thought silence is not a bad thing. In fact, it might even be a good thing. The old Puritans thought so, too. They would engage silence as one of their spiritual disciplines and be silent for a specified period of time. It was felt they would be better able to hear God and to understand each other. You see, in listening you can't get a conversation to center on you. It has to center on the other person. In listening you give others a sense of value and worth and they, in return, honor you for giving them undivided attention. The deal is this: in silence you often end up with the attention you've always craved. But it is positive attention. Not the negative "I want to avoid a conversation with him" type of attention.

Will I ever commit to a long stretch of silence? I don't think so. But John gave me pause to consider how different life would be I listened a little more and talked a lot less.

And I can commit to doing that.

July 20, 2008

Just thought I'd get it off my chest.

I'M A LOSER!!

Always have been and always will be. One Big loser. I don't know if I deserve to be on the reality series or not but I am an acknowledged loser. At a pastors conference the other day I introduced myself the following way: **"Hello. I'm James G. and I'm a loser"**.

And this does not depress me! Not in the least. In fact, to acknowledge this openly has only served to make me relax.

Before you start giving me tidbits of advice and offering up phone numbers of competent counselors let me say this: I am not depressed. I am not going to go to a counselor about it. And I am going to continue to feel this way. Because I chose to! So there!

What I am talking about may be slightly different from what you are currently thinking.

I'm talking about being like Jacob. Remember when he wrestled with God? He lost and yet he won. All at the same time. He was a huge loser!

I need a few more losses like that. You see, in God's house of statistical data a loss is a win and a win is often a loss. IE. when God gets His way with me I lose and yet I win. When I ignore God and do my own thing or think my own way I win but ultimately lose.

Finally, I am beginning to learn these lessons. After almost 28 years in ministry. And 49 years of life. It's o.k. to be a loser! To give into God and His design for me. Like Jacob did. As Carolyn Arends wrote, "Defeat at the hands of God is magnificent."

So, in case you forgot who I am let me remind you. **"I'm James G. and I'm a loser."**

July 14, 2008

It has been a while since our last chat.

Colleen and I have been in the country of Slovakia ministering to a gathering of Pastors and their families. We have had a great time and have learned to appreciate, once again, cultural differences. Some of these leaders we have known for a couple of years but most we were meeting for the first time.

At this conference it was thrilling, also, to talk to some about their experiences while their nation was still ruled by communism (prior to 1989).

I was elated to visit, for the first time ever, castles from the middle ages! This was very cool. I'm glad I live in these days. The "olden days" don't hold much allure for me other than to analyze.

We are now spending a few days in Vienna before heading home to Panama. I am really missing our home. In the past two months I have only spent about 2 \_ weeks there.

It is quite strange to think of going home to Panama and not home to Canada. Strange. But loving it!

I could probably write a lot more but I find I am a bit tired from all the travel and preaching so am not as creative right now. However, contact me and ask me a question or two or make a comment and I'm sure my creative juices will start flowing again.

Talk to you in about a week.

June 11, 2008

I must be getting acclimatized. It was 31 degrees with high humidity and I thought it was a very pleasant day and cool enough to keep the A/C off.

It is good to become acclimatized. But not all acclimatizations are good. For instance, getting acclimatized to the ways of society is not always good.

I was reading where we are living in a "Post-Truth" era. Albert Mohler describes our time as the "Age of Dishonesty". To use a boxing metaphor one writer said "honesty is on the ropes." Another writer said, "It is a creeping assumption...that there are things more important than truth." Really?

What has happened to us?

These days it seems as though we rationalize our lies so we don't feel guilty. And because we don't want to appear unethical we "devise alternative approaches to morality."

Think of recent terminology. We don't tell lies. We "misspeak". We "exaggerate truth" (How can truth be exaggerated? If it is exaggerated then it is no longer truth. It is simply a lie). When confronted, people have said, "we exercised poor judgment". I even heard one person describe deceit as simply putting a different "spin on truth". Another said, when confronted, that they were simply expressing an "alternative reality". Another coined phrase was "nuanced truth". Years ago even before lying was cool the great Winston Churchill got into the act. He called it "terminological inexactitudes." Cool terms. But in and of themselves devoid of truth.

I wasn't aware that truth could have several spins. I thought truth was a rather simple thing. No more apparently. Using fancy terms, though, does

not nullify the facts. A lie is always a lie. It cannot be spun or nuanced away. And if lying is normal does truth become abnormal? Apparently. Certainly society seems to seem to approve this new morality.

Without honesty is society safe (think of any number of recent scandals)? If people aren't truthful how can we trust anyone. If the lines between true and false are blurry then where can we find some clear vision?

As for me? I'm going to do the "Jesus thing". I'm going to live in such a way that people can trust me. God help us all if we don't.

June 8, 2008

I just have a simple thing to chat about tonight.

We've heard it said many times, particularly by those who are offended by my assertion that there is only one way to get to heaven and that way is through Jesus Christ.

Their argument goes this way: "all roads lead to Rome" or "there is more than one way to heaven" or "Christians are intolerant because they believe Jesus is the only way". You've heard various renditions of the same theme. But these arguments seem to have an inherent flaw build into them.

The flaw is this: "If all roads lead to Rome" why is there a need for religion at all? For that matter why would we need Jesus? Specifically, what would be the point of Christianity? What would be the point of any religion?

The argument of the naysayers is that all religions are right. If that were, indeed, true then nothing is wrong, as all things would be, by definition, right. That being the case there is, then, no need for religion.

But there is a need for religion. Everyone has one. We follow something or someone or a philosophy. We are all seekers. We all want ultimate truth. We are born with this need. It is not just a part of our upbringing. It is a part of our inner being; It seems to be a part of our creation.

Some religion has to be right.

I simply believe Jesus is that ultimate truth. He is my road to heaven. And

He is yours too.

June 4, 2008

I'm calling the cops!!! I don't know what they'll do but I'll have made a statement. I'm calling the cops, on God!

Why?

Because He disturbs my peace!

I have a question. Why does it always seem I am being tested? Just when things are going smooth, the waves have calmed and the sky is blue something happens that disturbs my peace. Do you dislike that as much as I do?

There is no question, God disturbs my peace! I learned it is seldom the devil who does it. The devil has too much to lose by disturbing my peace; like my spiritual maturity.

Why does God feel it so necessary to use obstacles to grow me? Are you like me and think there has got to be a better way? Given my propensity as a human to only grow when presented with an obstacle I have to admit there is probably no better way.

God still disturbs my peace.

Even when I seem to do everything right. Do devotions. Pray. Exercise the fruit of the Spirit. Don't kick dogs or cats or flush fish...

God has a way of disturbing my peace.

Of course, if "my peace" doesn't deepen me spiritually then it is a good thing God does disturb my peace. If "my peace" inhibits my spiritual growth then I suppose I should rejoice when He disturbs my peace. Ouch! I really would rather not rejoice at those times. But rejoicing does seem to be a proper biblical response. Double ouch!! The times when God disturbs my peace really reveal the depth of my spirituality. Lately, I have had to face up to how selfish and self-centered I am. No wonder I would rather not have my peace disturbed.

What else have I learned from having my peace disturbed?

1. I have learned life is not about me and my peace. It is about God. His peace. And Him being glorified through me. And if the best way to reveal His glory is to disturb my peace then so be it!
2. If I handle it well I really do become a better and stronger christian and person. IE. He doesn't do it to torment me but to grow me.
3. I learned it is seldom the devil who does it. The devil has too much to loose by disturbing my peace; like me maturing spiritually.
4. Colleen says I even become a better spouse. (All I can say is, she better not be asking God to do this! Two can play that game.)

There is no question God is into disturbing my peace. For His purpose to be fulfilled in me. I may not like it at the beginning but I like the result.

I won't call the cops after-all.

To God: Keep disturbing my peace.

May 21, 2008

**There are lots of them:** integrity, compassion, tenacity, drive, respect, responsibility, commitment, people person, humility, caring, generosity, honesty, optimism, sense of purpose, high standards, leadership, fairness, enthusiasm...

**We're not done yet:** work ethic, perseverance, good judgment, intellectual curiosity, risk taking, creativity...

**Just a few more:** empathy, team player, sincerity, sense of humor, determination and...

**Finally:** focus.

What is all this about, you ask? Maybe you aren't asking but I'll let you know anyway.

These words are excerpted from comments made by men and women who we would view as being among the top "movers and shakers" in our nation this year according to Toronto's Globe and Mail newspaper. They viewed these personal character traits as being key to their success. I do not know

how many, if any, of those interviewed are Christians but their thoughts provoked me.

What I find fascinating about this list is that these character traits could have been taken right from the pages of the Bible. The Bible talks about these all the time. Read a biography of a biblical character. Peruse Proverbs. Scan Psalms. Glance at Ephesians. Or Philippians. Everywhere you look you are captured by these traits.

Might this mean the Bible still has a lot to teach us about success? Might it be wise to spend some time, each day, digesting what God says about life?

I am of the opinion that once the teachings of the Bible get into our spirit we begin to automatically live by those principles. The result? Success at life. In relationships. In business. Emotional, intellectual and spiritual health.

How do you start? Pick up the book!

April 18, 2008

Every now and again I start to wander about things. Here are today's wonderings:

I wonder if there is a correlation between the size of our mall parking lots and the size of our landfills?

I wonder if the friends we think we have are really the friends we do have?

I wonder if there is a direct correlation between frustration and waste in our lives?

I wonder why if we should spend more time dreaming our own dreams and less time dreaming others' dreams?

I wonder why we pursue, so hard, that new "thing" when we know it will get old fast?

I wonder why we spend so much on something that we will sell at a garage sale?

I wonder why only 9% of evangelicals give 10% when 100% are supposed to?

I wonder why we strive to “keep up with the Jones’”? Do they care? Then who does?

I wonder what would happen if we spent less time worrying and more time thinking?

I wonder if blaming someone is worth it? Would simply solving the problem be better?

I wonder how much Adam and Eve spent on their wedding? Just thought I'd throw this in.

I wonder why we have to spend so much to celebrate something?

I wonder if I realize that I am the best in the world at something?

I wonder why we get so annoyed at difficulties when they are the very things that make us stronger? And better? And wiser? And...

I wonder how we can balance meeting our needs and meeting the needs of others?

I'm done for now.

April 12, 2008

I thought you might get a thrill out of knowing my daily schedule. No?

I'll tell you what it is like anyway. Of course, it is totally different when I am away from home in a different country. At those times I have to yield to different schedules.

Here it is:

**6:26**--Wake up. This is a most pleasant exercise. Sometimes. I'm really not

a morning person. Nor am I a night owl . I'm not really an afternoon person either. Perhaps I should just stay in bed. Colleen kicks me. I know it is time to get up. I do.

**6:45**----I pull on my de”stink”tive (it’s a stink I’m proud of though I find Colleen rubbing her eyes a lot when she is around me. I didn’t know stink had that kind of impact. I’ve thought of taking her advice and washing it from time to time. But I’m waiting for her to do it. She is waiting for me to do it. Who is going to blink first?) gym apparel, walk out the front door (actually our only door. But most morning I see two of them. Then I rub my eyes.) and take the elevator to the gym. Why not walk down? Walking is exercise, right? I am of the vaunted opinion that I get enough exercise just by thinking about it. Do you know how stressful it is to think about exercising everyday? And do you know how guilty one feels when you don’t do it? Of course you do. You don’t like to do it either. And you feel guilty when you don’t. That’s why I do it. To get rid of the guilt. If it wasn’t for that I’d have the right build that would have me in serious contention for the “Couch Potato Pageant” title.

**8:00**--Breakfast. This has to be good! Best meal of the day. My jaw needs exercise too. I am a preacher you know. But the exercise has drained me. I have never ever experienced that feeling of exhilaration from exercise. Where are those irrepressible endorphins that you are supposed to have running around in your system when exercising? I’ve never been introduced to them. In fact, I’m not convinced they exist! I want to go back to bed. Colleen has a “word” for me. I quickly emerge from the fog. I wonder what other people eat.

**8:30**--Prayer and the Word. This is what I look forward to. But like you, there are days when I struggle to remain alert. I enjoy my prayer list. I go through it systematically and also pray through various passages of scripture. Then I begin to systematically read through the scriptures. This is where I get energized. This is where I find those elusive endorphins. Maybe they’re Christian endorphins. Without this regimen I think I would really struggle in life. This is what gives me bounce. This is what gets me amped up. This is what drives the joy I am able to express. This is what drives every decision I make and gives me the confidence that I have made wise ones. This is as integral to missions as anything else I do. It might be the most important aspect. It is in this time I gain clarity from God and receive wisdom for the various situations I find myself and our missionaries confronting.

**10:00**--Now comes the thrill that everyone seeks. It is the beginning of the administrative day. I stretch out my fingers. Limber up my lips as I prepare to engage the activities of the day. Emails. Phone calls. And letters. Mapping out priorities and action steps. Touching base with churches. If an emergency occurs then everything gets left till the afternoon and, if necessary, tomorrow. Like me, do ever pray for an emergency? You see, reacting to an emergency doesn't carry with it near the guilt of procrastination. Besides, handling an emergency well gives me a rush. There are those endorphins again! They are there hiding in the shadows somewhere. I just have to be involved in the right thing to get them charged up.

**Noon**--Lunch. This is another profound time. Really. It is one of those moments the Lord has given us to relax. To take a break. To enjoy a mini sabbath in the middle of the day. I don't think it was an accident that we are made to desire food about this time of day. Even if one is not hungry it is important to stop anyway. Enjoy this moment. Yes, it arrives every day so it is easy to take it for granted. Don't. Make it whatever you need it to be besides work. And don't feel guilty about it. It is yours. Use it well. I don't always do that. But I'm trying.

I'm getting tired about writing about my day. You're probably getting tired of reading about it. So let's call it quits. I'll fill you in on the rest another time. I only have about fourteen hours to get psyched and excited about exercise. That isn't long enough but it is all the time I have.

See you later.

April 10, 2008

We live in an interesting world. Not just due to the scenery but in how we engage it.

For the most part you would think we'd be happy taking our next breath, taking one more step, chewing down good meal prepared with love, having a comfortable home and enjoying good friends and family.

But no. I know we say these things content us. But no. I not not think they do. If we did find contentment in them, why do we change jobs just

because we are offered more money? Why are most decisions we make governed by money? Why do we keep accumulating stuff? (We all know stuff doesn't make us happy. We've all been there. Done that.)

Some of the most common statements I hear from people who have been on Short Term Mission trips are these:

- "I need to learn how to appreciate what I have"
- "I am angry. We have so much and others have so little."
- "I'm going to learn to live on less."
- "I am committed to giving more."

You can add your own thoughts to this list.

The point is not missions. Nor is it practicing simplicity. Both these are good. And we need to be engaged in them. My point today is more personal. It is this: (and I wish I could remember who it was who said it, but I don't.) "The more you get, the less you are."

Think about it. "The more you get, the less you are." You see stuff takes the focus off our inner life. In fact, we can make a pretty good argument of the fact that stuff helps us avoid confronting our inner lives. All the focus is on "me". The outward "me". The idea is that if the outward "me" looks good then the inner "me" is also good. We all know this to be a fallacy.

It is my opinion that "the less we have, the more we are." I am not advocating a return to poverty or its exaltation. Far from it. I don't think any of us should desire to live in poverty. But I say this because in having less we are unable to avoid confronting ourselves. We are unable to hide behind the mask that stuff so adroitly, and almost imperceptibly, puts on us. Maybe this is why the church fathers believed in living lives of simplicity, silence and solitude. It was a way to get the focus off stuff and onto God and the depth of our inner life.

I think the world would be a lot more interesting if we really would be happy to take our next breath, to take one more step, to enjoy every meal, to accept the blessing of your home and enjoy your friends and family.

"The more you get, the less you are."

"The less we have, the more we are."

Quite a pull. Which is going to win. One of them will.

April 3, 2008

“The good I want to do I do not do.” Those are familiar words. The Apostle Paul spoke them. I live them. Now before we all get too worked up and melodramatic and you spend these moments waiting to read some juicy bit of gossip about my life just understand this: I’m not talking about sin here. I’m talking about my lack of consistency with my blogging.

Blogging is a good thing. I even enjoy it. So why don’t I do it more often? There are a variety of reasons I suppose. But none of them are, necessarily, good reasons. Though at the time they seem good enough. Be that as it may, I’m back!

I actually should have blogged last week as it turned out to be a great week.

It began on Monday. It continues even today.

It all started when I thought [more specifically God planted the thought in my mind; my mind is fertile after all!] it would be a good idea to report to the Canadian Embassy that I am now living here and to give them my contact information. You do this in case something bad ever happens and they need to contact you. Like if a meteorite was ever to crash into Panama City and destroy it they would know I was a likely victim and they would search for me under the pile of rubble that currently looks very similar to a building and is my home. You see, there are practical reasons for our government to know where I am. Our government is a bit like a parent who wants to know where we are going, how long we are going to be there and what we are going to be doing when we are there.

Three times I tried to find parking in the building in which the embassy is housed. Each time I was turned out and each time I thought I should just go home and continue on with my normal work day.

But I kept sensing this inner compulsion to keep trying. So around the block I would go. In this case the block is huge and it would take about 15 minutes to get back to the embassy. I was making a serious commitment of time to this endeavor.

On the fourth effort, with still no parking, I decided to park in a spot that required me to walk a significant distance to the embassy. I didn't mind as I felt compelled to be there. It really was an almost overwhelming sense. It was as though God had me on a mission. Indeed He did.

I noticed a couple on a motor cycle and they seemed to be in some degree of angst. I thought I would try to help them out if they were still there when I left the embassy. With complete calm I walked into the embassy only to find that motor cycle couple already there!! How that happened I do not know. All I know is that I should have been there first and I wasn't. Maybe God did one of those fancy transporter moves that Philip experienced in the book of Acts chapter 8. It was very cool.

I listened to the conversation they had with the embassy people. No, I was not eavesdropping. It was a small room where everyone could hear everyone's conversations. I hate those kinds of rooms. Ottawa should spring for some cash to make bigger rooms in our embassies. That's what I think.

I discovered that this couple had lost or had stolen their passports, credit cards and money. They had lost everything of value. Being thousands of miles away from home they were in an unenviable spot.

To make a long story even longer I invited them to our home so they could make contact with their families back in Quebec and to contact various agencies to get the necessary documents to gain new passports and credit cards.

Jean Luc and Emelie, who are from Quebec, turned out to be a blessing for me. I was able to show them the kind of hospitality Jesus would show those in tough situations. Jean Luc admitted over dinner one night that he is on a spiritual journey. What a privilege to help him along his journey by sharing my own journey of faith. For an entire week we shared and laughed and discussed.

I am so glad the Lord compelled me to go to the embassy that day.

This taught me, again, that little inconveniences are often part of God's bigger plan. Now when an inconvenience happens I might want to remember not to get uptight or I might go home and miss God's appointment. In missing His appointment for me I would also be causing

someone else to miss His appointment for them. This would not be good.

Good morning cousin Lisa. I hope you have a great day with an inconvenience or two along the way.

March 20, 2008

I am not lying. I am not prone to lie. And I don't care for those who do.

Here is my story.

I got home last Sunday in the early evening. I had been gone for about 9 or ten days and was eager to get home. All went well till I left Houston, Texas to go to Panama.

The trip began innocently enough.

I settled into a seat beside a 20-something brother and sister who were going to meet up with the rest of their family in Panama for Spring Break. All was good. We enjoyed each others company and had a few good laughs. We would have more.

Then we got our meal. Now, normally, meals are rather uneventful occasions on an airplane. Sometimes I eat. Sometimes I don't. It depends on the mood and how long I've been sitting throughout the day. The ambience wasn't good but the company was great. The food you ask. It was airline food. No need to expound more upon this "delightful" subject.

I looked at the platter jiggling on my fold-down tray in front of me. It looked reasonable. I thought I would indulge in the pleasant past-time of nibbling on airline food.

This is where the problem began.

Again, normally, I don't play with my food. Moving it around on a plate and mixing it all together does not count as play! That is known as "plate couture". What does that mean you ask. It just means I like to put a little pizzazz onto the plate before me. I like mixing colors and textures. I'm a bit of an artist when it comes to food. Not.

However, on this occasion, I was a bit bored with the food so I grabbed the

container of yogurt. I do not even like yogurt. I learned not only that I don't like it but I don't know much about it either.

I figured I'd try it. I thought how bad could it be? It was a blueberry yogurt. I like blueberries. This was not the problem.

As I was pondering what to do with this gruel that poses as healthy food I found myself shaking the container of yogurt. I liked how it felt in my grasp so as I talked to my friend in the next seat I kept shaking it. I shook it a lot.

My friend feels the same way about yogurt so he was shaking his, too. As it turned out we shook our containers of yogurt quite a bit more than we should have. I didn't know! He didn't know! I never eat yogurt! Neither does he!

Now, I'm not much of a chemist. I had no idea how bacteria might react to my shaking it for so long. They never taught me what not to fool with yogurt in school. I don't even remember having it back then.

I decided to dig in.

I took the container firmly in my left hand. Here is where the lesson began to take hold of me. I should have left that shaken container of healthy food on my fold-down tray. I should have left it alone! I should not have shaken it! I should not have opened it! But I didn't know that yet! Nobody had ever taught me how to deal with yogurt.

I continued in a state of ignorance.

With the container firmly in my left hand I took hold of the little aluminum tab on the lid. You know the kind. It's there to help people open the lid and get at the yogurt.

There was no warning label.

Why would yogurt not come with a warning label? Other things have warning labels. I stopped at a bridge the other day with a warning clearly marked on it. It said, "Warning. Do not jump off this bridge." I looked down about 150 feet. "Warning. Do not jump off this bridge." 150 feet down! "Warning. Do not jump off this bridge." No kidding! Hello! I did not need that warning!

But why is there not a warning label on yogurt containers?

I gripped the tab firmly. I peeled it back. As the seal was broken a trillion (give or take a couple hundred) bacteria bugs assaulted me! I felt like Gulliver in the land of the Lilliputians. At least my shirt was blue. Just like the yogurt. I was covered in critters that cannot be seen but are seen by everyone (this would make a good riddle)! I proceeded to wipe off my shirt. I shouldn't have wiped. I should have dabbed. Anyway, I was a mess. As it dried the blue mess had become a white mess? I looked like a slob. Nowhere to hide.

My friend was still shaking his yogurt.

Apparently he knew even less about the chemistry of bacteria and yogurt than I did. As he leaned in my direction, He said how sorry he felt. It made me feel less embarrassed but not less foolish. It couldn't happen twice.

He reached for his yogurt tab. BOOM! Microbes on both of us. This time I dabbed. He wiped. We both offered condolences.

Sometimes life's like that.

I found life is a lot more fun when you live it with others. We walked off the plane proud. Smiling in fact.

Have fun with life. It's worth it.

By the way, don't shake yogurt!

March 18, 2008

I'm nervous. Confident. But nervous. No doubt about it.

The reason is the huge vision we have received from God regarding Latin America and Caribbean. It is so big that God has to be the one to do it. The fact God has to be involved is good. But it is also so far beyond me that the whole enterprise makes me nervous.

Don't confuse nervous with fear. I'm not afraid that the vision will not come to pass. My concern centers entirely on me. I know I do not have the ability

to “pull it off”. It may sound trite but I am totally dependent upon God for the outcome of the vision. And that is uncomfortable as He may “do the vision” a bit different from the way I would. Only He can deliver the process and the product.

I suppose I’m nervous because it is totally out of my control. Do you ever feel nervous when something is out of your control?

But isn’t this the time I should be most calm and confident? You ask, “Why?” Because when I am out of control God is in control. When I am weak He is strong. Seems we have heard that somewhere before.

So, I’m nervous. What will the next few years look like for us. But, I suppose, what it looks like to us is not as important as how it looks like to God.

I just realized, again, this is a great time to check out if I really do trust God. In all things.

I believe. Confident. Believing. No doubt about it.

March 16, 2008

Life got more interesting this morning.

It started when I read an article asking how we would describe our life if we were allotted the grandiose total of 6 words. Just six words! Think about it. When we think of our life we usually think in terms of a book, a movie or a nap. But never 6 words.

So, if you only had 6 words what would they be. I’m going to muse upon this for a while and see what I can come up with. In using just 6 words can I sum up my life in a way that people will have an understanding of who I am?

Now that I think of it God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit have all done a remarkable job of this.

Any of these ring a bell?

alpha and omega  
bright morning star  
I Am  
wonderful counsellor  
prince of peace  
comforter  
redeemer

Putting it another way: God. This one word kind of sums things up.  
Or to put it another way: Jesus Christ. These two words sum things up quite well too.  
Putting it still another way: Holy Spirit. Again, a great summation of a grand subject.

It doesn't take much to describe God. Now, thinking of all the nuances involved in our description of Him is another thing altogether.

Since I am so much less than God I should be able to figure out how to describe my life in 6 words or less.

I'm going to try. It should be a fun exercise.

March 10, 2008

The airport blues. I wrote this "wonderful" tune over the course of 2 1/2 weeks.

Drive. Walk. Stand in line. Wait. Walk. Stand in line. Wait. Walk. Stand in line. Walk. Wait for boarding. Wait for take-off. Sit a long time. Walk. Stand in line. Wait for baggage. Stand in line. Walk. Drive. Strange bed. Weird sounds. Fitful sleep.

As you can tell from the above paragraph travel is exceptionally exciting! Not. If you figure out a real tune for this paragraph let me know. We'll call it a collaboration and maybe get rich off of it.

Well, apart from the obvious excitement involved traveling does have its joys. I enjoy meeting missionaries I have never known before. I enjoy seeing projects that impact lives. I enjoy seeing how a partnership with churches in Canada works in different countries. I enjoy tasting food that makes you nervous. Sometimes I seem to make the food nervous; it

seems to vibrate for no reason. At such times I give thanks (the Bible seems to say something about that), look away from the food, place it in my mouth. Take one or two chews then swallow, hoping I do not feel something march up the length of my throat and then out into the big world beyond my teeth.

Travel is good. It's fun. It's beneficial and part of God's task for me. I am forever grateful for it. Except for the stuff in the first paragraph. But then I am reminded I am to be thankful for everything.

Even the airport blues.

February 19, 2008

For 213 pages Charles Handy, one of today's great managerial thinkers writes about [Myself and Other More Important Matters](#). Now, I haven't read the book so I really shouldn't make any comment but, come on, nobody can pass on a title like that! Of course, the title can be taken a couple of different ways. One view is that he understands other matters as being more important than himself. The second view is that he sees himself as more important than most other matters. Which of these thoughts are accurate depends on which syllable one puts the emphasis.

Again, I have not read the book so shouldn't make a lot of comments. But I will anyway. "Why?", you ask. To which I reply, "Why not?" Obviously, with a title like that Charles wants some discussion.

I'm in the mood to be cynical so I choose to believe the second view of the title. That being the case, if nothing else, I like the man's honesty.

In reality, though, this reminded me of the fact we are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. At least that is what Paul said and I tend to believe that Paul got most things right. I find it is hard to live as though others and their issues are more important than me and mine. As

usual, I'm trying to get it right. I get it right. Then I fail. Fail again. Get it right. Get it right. Get it right. Fail again. Fail. Get it right again. And again (by my count that is 6-4). As least I'm getting ahead and doing some conquering.

Of course, you know this means everything I do has to be done from the mindset that God actually cares about how I live my life. And He does! Not because He likes looking over my shoulder and criticizing me and the odd time encouraging me. He cares about how I live because the way He wants me to live is the best way to, in fact, live! Living the way He wants me to actually brings me a sense of contentment. You see, when I think of myself in a right manner I'm not worried about "me and mine". I am more concerned about others and God.

So, it is a matter of where my eyes and thoughts are. Where are they?

February 13, 2008

I am all for learning. Lifelong learning. Stuff that makes you a better, stronger and motivated person.

Some things, though, aren't worth learning. For instance, today, I learned that it is considered lucky in Venezuela to wear yellow underwear. I was never taught, ever, that underwear could be lucky. I was taught that it should be clean. But lucky underwear. That was never talked about. Not even inferred. If yellow underwear is lucky then I am without a doubt determined to be the most unlikely guy to ever experience this nebulous thing called luck. Lucky yellow underwear. I have learned a lot of stuff that I have not since used. I have learned a lot of stuff that could be termed irrelevant. Only on occasion does one have the privilege of learning something totally useless. Lucky yellow underwear, though, might qualify.

Today we were awoken by lots of shouting and the shooting of tear gas containers. There was a minor riot going on. A small contingent of riot police were there and we were barricaded in our condo. Little damage was

done though I am sure there were some frayed nerves. It all took place on the roadway directly beneath our condo. We were able to get some video of it and experience the sting of tear gas in our eyes and noses as the smoke from the tear gas containers rose to the height of our condo. I'll try to get the pictures downloaded so you can see it and hear my commentary.

One of the good things about getting older is that you don't eat as much. In my way of reasoning this means that I should not lose weight or, at least, it should be easier to lose. I have discovered, to my chagrin, that this is not the case. This is part of lifelong learning.

Talk to you again soon.

February 6, 2008

It seems to me that bugs are afraid of heights.

I hadn't really thought of this bit of biological/neurological/psychological bug behavior before. In fact, I never really cared what bugs thought about life.

I was focused when it came to bugs. I didn't like them! Period. Full stop. Mine was a "can't be convinced otherwise" kind of dislike of bugs.

They (these bugs) tried to convince me otherwise. They would show their fancy colors. Do cool things that only bugs could do. But, still, my dislike and disregard held true. I did not like bugs!

My attitude may be changing. Why? Because it appears they don't like heights. At least, since we moved to Panama this observation seems to be true. And because we live on the 17th floor of a condo complex I have not been bothered by any of them. Nor them by me. Now, though, I feel a bit sorry for them! I still don't like them. But it seems they do possess a degree of fear. This is welcome news to me. For my entire life it didn't appear to me that bugs had any fear. Check your windshield on a summer drive through the country. They seemed not to fear a careening 3000lb bucket of bolts, cloth, glass, plastic and steel hurtling itself toward them. They seemed eager to jump up and face this rather large intruder in their world. Fear is not one of the things I had associated with bugs. Think the tiny bedbug. They are barely noticeable yet they curl up beside you, or on you, without the least fear that I could roll over and squash them like

a...well, a bug. "No fear". This was part of a bugs character before it ever became an advertising slogan. "No fear". That applies to every bug I know. Except now. At least in Panama they seem to have lost some of their swagger. Their self confidence seems to have taken a hit here. Where is their cockiness? I don't know why they don't like heights here. All I know is that I am happy for me. And I feel kind of bad for the bugs. But not bad enough to pray fearlessness into them. I kind of like the way things are. I hope they stay this way. Me up high and bugs down low.

This leads me to one more thought about bugs.

I don't trust them! Do you think this fear of heights thing is just a ruse? A way to get me to relax before the attack? The calm before the storm? I'll let you know as time goes on. In the meantime, I am on the alert. For bugs. Bugs of any kind.

February 1, 2008

It would appear that we have settled into our new home in Panama. It took us a while but we are finally in. The only thing we have to do now is set up my office and get a few aesthetic things for the walls. Now, these walls are a bit of a challenge. They are solid concrete! So putting up a picture is no simple deal. I have to get the right drill bit. Drill a hole. Then get a bigger drill bit and repeat the procedure until the hole is the desired circumference. I had never broken a sweat putting up a picture before. I do now!

The traffic here is a bit much at times, as it is most places outside North America. They are quite courteous but there are so many cars in such a confined space that there is nothing to do but creep along. A simple errand can turn into an ordeal. Right now we are trying to figure out when is the best time to go on errands. Of course, everyone else is doing the same thing so, at the end of the day, it won't make much of a difference. We just have to get used to it and use travel times as "relax moments". This may take some effort!

I just got back from Cuba a couple of days ago. While there I met with the national church leaders and laid groundwork for future relationship with them. In just a short time I felt a real sense of compassion for the people as they are still in a nation where it is not popular to be a Christian. In fact,

the current leaders have been persecuted for their faith throughout the years. Their perseverance, though, has helped them gain a level of respect from the government that they have not seen since Castro's revolution in 1959.

It would be wise to keep them in your prayers.

Be alert for some videos and picture I will put on the website from Cuba! I will get them on as quick as I can. I know this is a simple procedure. But remember I am not a technological genius. In fact, I'm doing well to do word processing. How about praying that God would give me great ability as a "techie". I'd appreciate that.

I have been called to run an errand.

Talk to you again.

January 23, 2008

Still getting the condo ready for our occupancy. It is a lot of work but Colleen really enjoys it as it involves shopping and spending. Those two have become more than passing acquaintances with my wife. In fact, they have become her companions.

It looks like we will be spending our first night in the condo on the 24th! This is definitely exciting.

We are still working on getting a mortgage. Everything, about a mortgage, seems a bit convoluted here. As such, it may be a couple more months before things are finalized. In the meantime...we are still able to live in what will be our condo. Sound strange? Don't worry about it. It works.

I was reminded the other day about the Tommy Tenney book which was published a number of years ago. You know, the one called Pursuing God, or something to that effect. That title still bugs me. Especially when I stumble upon Psalm 46:10 when enjoying my devotions. I'm not sure God is always into us pursuing Him. The whole pursuit thing, though, certainly appeals to our generation: go, go, go, don't stop till you get what you want, when you get what you want keep going and get something else, etc. Our generation doesn't seem to be into the contentment teaching. It is all about pursue, pursue, pursue!

But, on the other hand, I think we need a rear end collision with God from time to time! What do I mean? Just this. We need to learn to stop! To stop short! To stop on a dime! To stop now! After a lifetime of having to chase us our “stop!” might surprise God enough that He runs into us. He is kept so busy chasing us that He might not notice when we stop abruptly.

On the other hand, (how many “hands” are there? I promise this is the last.) I actually don’t think God is taken by surprise in anything we do. And He certainly isn’t klutz enough to run into us! You know what I think? Do you want to know? No?! Well, I’ll tell you anyway. I think He does watch us. He sees our pursuings. And He just watches and waits. And He invites. Invites us, when we get tired of all our pursuings, to come to Him and rest. To let Him handle our lives for a change. Actually, hard as it is to believe, He is a lot better at it than we are. How am I doing this? I try to deliberately stop and pray and/or read the Bible when I feel as though I am overwhelmed. Why do I do this? Because, it is “reckless” decision to simply trust God. It is saying, I am not in charge. But God is. Does this actually work, you ask? Only if I let it.

That’s something I have been relearning the last while. Eventually it will sink in. I hope!

I’ll talk again soon.

January 16, 2008

Colleen and I are sitting at the Saskatoon airport awaiting the call to board. The last couple of days have been the quintessential "agony and ecstasy". We have said all our good-byes to family and friends which was really hard as we don't really know the next time we will be with them. Then last night we said good-bye to our kids and our new granddaughter. My heart was in my throat all evening long. It was a very emotional time for all of us. Though I think it is good for our son, Josh, to finally be free from our "shadow". Are we ever going to miss them!!!!

It was cool, though, being in our last Saskatchewan blizzard yesterday. I enjoy blizzards and will actually miss experiencing them. Will I ever experience another one? I hope so.

The boarding call has been heard. See you in a few weeks.

January 13, 2008

Remember this one thing: death is always fatal!! I'm not sure where that came from but it can't be original as I'm not quite that bright. Go ahead and think about it for a while if you like. If you don't like it, it won't hurt my feelings.

Today was a great day. I had the privilege of dedicating our grand-daughter, Taija-Lynn Arvada to the Lord. It is a wonderful privilege to dedicate any child to the Lord but it is especially poignant when it is one's own grand-daughter. After the dedication I was able to hold her for most of the rest of the regular service. She is precious and I enjoy coddling her.

Finally!!!! We are leaving for Panama on Wednesday morning. It has been a long wait but we are really excited about it and are eager to get into our new home and paint it and fill it with furniture. We have to buy everything as we are only bringing two suitcases each to start our new life in a strange nation. We actually think this is kind of exciting. We will find certainly find out if this is the case. Now we just pray that there are no surprises when we get there.

All this means, of course, is that you get a reprieve from my ramblings on this blog. I suspect it will be a couple of weeks before we can get hooked up to the internet in Panama. In the meantime, thank you for taking the time to pray for us. We really appreciate the effort you put forth in this area and we do not take it for granted.

Now it is time to get back to choosing what to bring and what to leave behind. If it won't fit into the suitcase it isn't coming! This has really helped us to simplify our lives. It is interesting how little you actually need when you are limited as to how much you can carry in a couple of suitcases and carry-ons.

We have been staying with good friends while in our period of transition. They have been very kind toward us, as have their children. It must not have been easy to have their personal space invaded for such a long time. You don't know their names but pray that God would bless them abundantly for their selfless sacrifice.

Tomorrow night we say good-bye to our family. Certainly everyone has

been preparing for this inevitable moment, but it is still hard. I'm not sure what else to say about that. It is just hard.

I'll talk to you from Panama!

January 7, 2008

I think I was a good son the past 10 days. You see, my Dad wanted to go out to Kelowna, B.C. to visit his oldest sister. She is losing her memory and Dad wanted to see her while she is still able to carry on a reasonable conversation. I didn't feel comfortable with Dad driving through the mountains so I volunteered to be his chauffeur.

I had never spent this much solo time with Dad ever! It turned out that we had a good time together. We didn't harm each other and we still like each other. I am glad I took this time or I might have lived to regret not doing it.

The result was that I had a great 10 days with my Dad. And with some cousins I hadn't visited with for many years. I discovered it is a good thing to get in contact with family. Even if we haven't been together for years. I regret not making more of an effort to connect with my extended family when we have been in their neck of the woods. I think I have missed some significant growth moments because of it. Don't we all wish we were better in this area. Or maybe I'm the only one who feels this way. But I doubt it.

Well it looks as though we may be able to fly to Panama sometime in the next 7-10 days. We can hardly wait. Please continue to pray that there would be no more delays as it imperative that we get there.

I got a "Grandpa fix" tonight! It felt good to hold Taija-Lynn in my arms and have her relax and then fall asleep. These are great moments and quite difficult to explain. All I know is that, like the old Tim McGraw song, "I like it, I love it, I want some more of it".

Life is cool! I'm glad i've got one. See you later.