

“Living Beneath Our Spiritual Blessings”
By Associate General Pastor Edward J. Thomas
Sunday, May 30th, 2010

We are living beneath our spiritual blessings. God has blessings for us, but some of them are out of our reach. God’s not going to lower the blessing to us, though, we’ve got to rise to the occasion. Imagine for a moment, at the point after your death, and when you arrive in Heaven. You are taken to a huge warehouse with your name on it, and the angels go into the warehouse and come out with a big package wrapped in white paper with a big red bow, and tell you that’s for you. Well, you unwrap it excitedly, and what’s inside the package is just incredible. But then, you start looking at this huge warehouse, and they only brought you one package. You can’t help but wonder what else is in there. You ask the angels, but they tell you that you don’t want to know. After some arguing back and forth, eventually they take you inside and there are shelves and shelves of big packages, all wrapped in white paper with big red bows. “What are all these?” you ask, and the angels tell you, “Those are the blessings that you could have had.”

Every one of us could do better. How many of you are heavier than you want to be? How many of you know that you could be thinner with a combination of exercise and eating the right things? How many of you have started such a program, but then, after a while, you found yourself in front of the TV instead of on the treadmill? You didn’t make a conscious decision to quit the program, you just drifted away from it.

Many of us have resolved to be saved, but have ended up eating at the same pig trough as the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Some people are still getting dressed up every Sunday morning and coming to church, but aren’t really saved (Luke 6:46). The Kingdom of Heaven isn’t about going to church; the Kingdom of Heaven is bound together by love.

Conforming to God is an inside-out job. The standard of holiness that we must live is not imposed by the church. It’s not about obeying the rules and regulations of the church. There was a scientific study done several years ago: These researchers put some monkeys in a cage with a tall pole, and put some bananas on the top of the pole. Whenever one of the monkeys would try to climb the pole to get the bananas, they would hose down all the monkeys with cold water (not just the one that tried to climb the pole, the whole group). After some time, the monkeys quit trying to get the bananas. So, they brought in a new monkey, and took one out. As soon as the new monkey started to climb the pole, they hosed down all the monkeys again. Eventually, they got to the point where they could put a new monkey in, and the other monkeys would keep the new one from climbing the pole. Then they began swapping out monkeys on a regular basis. Eventually, they got the cage populated with monkeys that had never been hosed down, but still wouldn’t climb, or let each other climb, the pole. I don’t want us to be a church that does things without knowing why we’re doing them.

How many husbands do we have here today? When you got married, was that something that the law required? No, it was something you did by choice. Even after you got married, the law didn’t require you to stay married, but you have made that choice. Pam and I have been married for thirty-five years, and we have never had a disagreement. And if you believe that, I have a bridge I’d like to sell you. But, because

we love each other, we choose to stay together. God now expects all of us to be faithful to Him; not by law, but by choice.

You should ask yourself, "What am I wrestling with?" Thoughts come into your mind; that happens. You should bring every thought into captivity (2 Corinthians 10:5); not because the church says to, but because God says to. Unless you want to deal with the church police, like they do in some of these Muslim countries.

One of Pastor Paine's favorite stories is about three men interviewing for a job as a truck driver. The man doing the interview has some pictures of a very dangerous curve on the route that the new hire will be driving. There is a steep drop-off at this curve with a bunch of wrecked trucks at the bottom. He asks the first man how close he can get to the edge without going over. He says he can get within a foot of the edge and not go over; he's a good driver, and he knows how to control his rig. The second man looks at the pictures, and is asked the same question. He says he can get within six inches, for the same reason. The third man looks at the pictures, and says that he is going to stay as far away from the drop-off as he possibly can. The third man got the job. This is the way our Christian walk should be. You shouldn't be trying to see how close to danger you can get, you should be trying to stay as close to God as you can get. You need to be on your guard; one unguarded moment is all it takes.

In Ephesians Chapter 6, where it talks about the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18), did you ever notice which part of you is unprotected? your back. You should never turn your back on your enemy. The Bible says, "Died Abner as a fool dieth?" (2 Samuel 3:33) We don't live in a bed of roses. Satan throws moments at us all the time.

There's a story about a Boy Scout who found a cocoon and took it home. Every day he checked that cocoon to see if the butterfly was coming out yet. Finally, one day, the butterfly had poked a hole in the cocoon, and was struggling to get out. The scout took his pocket knife, and, very carefully, enlarged the hole so that the butterfly could get out easily. Unfortunately, what he didn't know is that when the butterfly is working its way out of the cocoon, the stress and strain increases blood flow to the wings, and strengthens them. Because he "helped" the butterfly, the butterfly was never able to fly. God is not going to come just because you are going through a struggle. He'll be there with you while you are struggling, but He wants you to struggle so that you will get stronger. Some of you get into a situation, and just give up, instead of seeing it through. When the storm is raging, God comes to us, walking on our problems. Remember that tribulation worketh patience (Ephesians 5:3). You know Daniel was not afraid of the threat of the lions' den (Daniel 6:1-24). I won't say that he wasn't afraid of the lions, but he wasn't afraid of the threat. When the law was passed that made it illegal to pray to God, he went, and opened his windows, and he prayed to God anyway (Daniel 6:10). He didn't pray to Nebuchadnezzar, the way the law said, he prayed to God. When they threw him into the lions' den, the angel Gabriel came and shut the lions' mouths and protected Daniel (Daniel 6:22). God won't stop you from being threatened, and He won't keep you from struggling, but He won't give you more than you can handle, and He will help you to get stronger through your situation.