

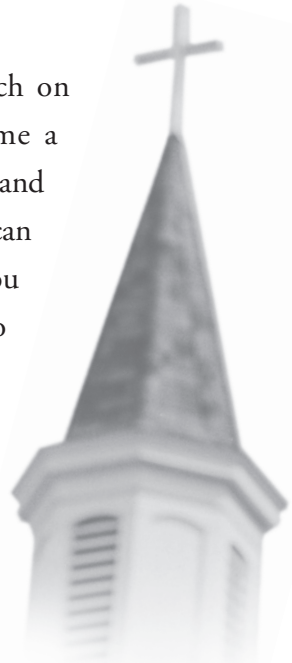
# Contents

Foreword .....	9
Preface .....	13
Attendance .....	17
Baptism .....	21
Boy Scout Troop 34 .....	25
Candlelight Service .....	29
The Children's Sermon .....	33
The Choir .....	37
The Christmas Pageant .....	43
Communion .....	47
Covered Dish Suppers .....	53
Easter Best .....	59
Easter Sunrise Service .....	65
Elmer Sensabaugh .....	69
The Family Pew .....	75

Flowers, Coffee, and an Occasional Smoke .....	79
Footwashing.....	85
Funerals .....	89
Glossolalia.....	93
Halloween.....	97
Hymnbooks .....	101
Laying on of Hands .....	107
Miss Ora Hopkins .....	111
Money .....	117
Revival .....	121
Rock and Roll Heaven .....	125
Softball .....	131
Sunday Movies.....	137
Sunday School .....	141
Vacation Bible School .....	147
Visitation .....	151
Weddings.....	155
The Church .....	159
Epilogue .....	162

## Attendance

Getting up and going to church on Sunday mornings can become a habit the same as staying in bed and reading the paper on Sunday mornings can become a habit. A habit is something you do without thinking; something you do without a lot of effort; something you feel guilty about if you don't do it. Ask any regular churchgoer and he/she will tell you that on the Sundays they don't go, their whole week is upside-down. Mondays



feel like Wednesdays. Thursdays feel like Fridays. And that Sunday feels like a Saturday.

On my way to church every Lord's Day morning (notice I didn't say Sabbath — I know we Presbyterians don't remember the Sabbath and keep it holy), I always have to drive through town to pick up my mother. On my way, I see sights you would expect to see any of the other six days of the weeks. At 9:30 a.m., people are mowing their yards, weeding their flowerbeds, and cleaning their gutters. On down into the heart of the commercial part of town, there is hardly a summer Sunday morning you don't see an office building being painted or a parking lot being re-lined, or a driveway being hosed, or a plate glass window being squeegeed. Sunday mornings are just not important to everyone or maybe they have just never developed *the habit*.

On the other hand, once you get to church, there are people there who will be there in spite of rain, hail, sleet, flood, or sickness. Only death can keep them away and then only *their* death. When I was a kid, our Sunday school department used to give out attendance pins. I think they started with three months of perfect attendance and then went to six months and a year. And then with each year thereafter, you got a little attachment that hung down and hooked on the one above it and if you wore it on your coat lapel, after about five years, you looked like a member of some Middle-Eastern army. We had one older gentleman, Mr. Kyle Foster, who had a string of gold

attachments that reached almost to his waist and he would change it from coat to coat each Sunday morning. He was regular and proud of it. He had *the habit*.

I recently read an article on the U.S. Presidents and their religions. It told what denomination each was and their church-going habits. I was surprised to find that not all of them had *the habit*. Three had no church affiliation at all. Never attended with any regularity in or out of office. And the number three was not so much the shocker as to who they were.

One was Andrew Johnson. I think he was brought up on impeachment charges after the Civil War if my high school history memories don't fail me. He doesn't surprise me much.

Another was my fellow state-mate, Thomas Jefferson. This doesn't surprise me as much as it disappoints me. Author of the Declaration of Independence. Father of the University of Virginia. Congressman. Secretary of state. Vice president. And finally president. And yet he couldn't find time to go to church every once in awhile.

And the third was our saintly 16th, ole Honest Abe himself. America has done everything but give him wings and a halo, but Abe wanted no part of it. Sunday morning worship service and church membership was not on his weekly agenda.

Of course, I realize that none of us are going to be judged on how many pews we filled and how often we filled them. What we got out of the experience and how we used it is what is going to count in the long run.

## Sunday Morning Memories

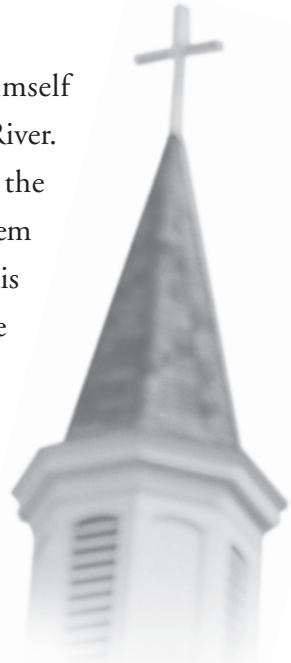
Seeing the same faces every Sunday is a comfort to me. And even when I visit other churches, I still see the same faces. I identify them with the ones I know from my home church. Church people and congregations are the same all over the country. They have the same hearts and the same purpose. They have the same goal and the same concerns. They have the same spirit and the same God.

They have the same *habit*.

COME TO THE CHURCH IN THE WILDWOOD,  
O COME TO THE CHURCH IN THE DALE.  
NO SPOT IS SO DEAR TO MY CHILDHOOD  
AS THE LITTLE BROWN CHURCH IN THE VALE.

# Baptism

John made quite a name for himself baptizing people in the Jordan River. He served so many, he earned the name “The Baptizer.” He would hold them at their back with one hand and put his other hand on their forehead and ease them over until they were completely submersed, and then say the words over them that would prepare them for a God-fearing life on earth and heaven. But of all the many people John baptized, and



I know Jesus was one, there is no record in all biblical history that any of them was a Presbyterian.

Stand in a cold, murky river fully dressed and let someone bend you over backward and run water up your nose? It has never as much as crossed our minds. And what kind of shoes are they wearing down there? Barefooted maybe with river mud squishing between their toes? No, thank you. We don't wade. Even when we fish, Presbyterians sit on the bank with a long line.

Our baptizing is a very simple sacrament. No great planning goes into it. You don't have to book it weeks in advance so that you and the preacher can wear your old clothes that morning or wait till spring for the water to warm up and have everyone meet down at the river after the service. You don't have to put on a robe or towel dry your hair in public and you don't have to fear coughing up water in front of a hundred and fifty people. It's very simple with us.

We just walk up front and the minister dips his fingers in a sliver cup and dabs a little bit of water on our heads while we cringe and fear that he's going to mess up a hairdo it took all morning to fix, comb, or curl. Then he'll say a few words over us and we're back in our seats and ready for our nap before you can say "heavenly dove."

We can do four, five, six, seven; however many you want right in a row and never cause a problem or a puddle. We do babies, old ladies, teenagers, newcomers, and latecomers. We



don't care. Everybody gets the same treatment. John baptized with water. Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit. But Presbyterians baptize with comfort. No wrinkles. No mess. And it's just as good as anybody else can offer.

Baptizing in the river? Full submersion? Not for us. We'll take a little sprinkling and that will do us just fine, thank you. My wife is a Baptist and she's been promising for years to take me along to the river some summer Sunday to watch it all done as only the Southern Baptists can do it. I've made her the same offer, to take her with me to watch how we do it, but her only reaction is, "What's to see?"

Things happen. Babies squirm. Elders spill water. Preachers forget the subject's name. And babies squirm. And sometimes yell to the top of their voices and to the ends of our nerves. But no matter what church you're in, when it's all over and your clothes are dried and our hairdos are fluffed, we're all baptized. We all have personally and publicly become a member of the body of Christ. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

YES, WE'LL GATHER AT THE RIVER,  
THE BEAUTIFUL, THE BEAUTIFUL RIVER.  
GATHER WITH THE SAINTS AT THE RIVER  
THAT FLOWS BY THE THRONE OF GOD.