As I started writing this [on May 15], it was raining in southern California! The storm brought some relief from the long drought we are enduring. Here in San Diego County, the storm made May, 2015 the wettest May on record. However, it takes more than one wet month to overcome four years of below-average rainfall. Obviously, as the last week in May demonstrated, many of you who live back East have had much more rain than you need!

California is known as the “Golden State,” but the years of drought have made it more “brown” than “gold.” As we Californians have been frequently reminded recently, the state relies on two major sources of water: the runoff from the snowpack that collects in the Sierra Nevada mountains which stretch for hundreds of miles along the eastern side of California, and water from the Colorado River. Much of the Colorado River part of the supply comes from Lake Mead, which is impounded by Hoover Dam, east of Las Vegas on the Arizona-Nevada border. In the pictures at left and below (which I took in March of this year), the “bathtub ring” shows how the water level has dropped approximately 150 feet from capacity.

Hoover Dam was built in the early 1930s, and at the time it was the biggest dam in the world. As a result of a 15-year-long drought that has desiccated much of the Intermountain West, Lake Mead is currently at 38% of capacity, the lowest since it was first filled, thus accounting for the white “bathtub ring” you see at right. The surface of the lake these days is only 75 feet above the point at which the pumps will be
unable to send water to the many places in southern California, Nevada, and Arizona that depend on it for life.

For a brief look at the building of the dam—along with some glimpses of Lake Mead when it was at full capacity—watch this 4-minute video: http://www.history.com/topics/hoover-dam. The website also includes an interesting article describing the challenges facing those who built the dam.

Back to the snowpack in the Sierra Nevada: the runoff from the eastern side of the range flows into the Owens Valley. In the early decades of the 20th century, Wm. Mulholland, a Los Angeles engineer and some of his influential friends infamously managed to divert the Owens River so that the then-small city of Los Angeles could become the megalopolis it is today. The story of the “Owens Valley War” makes interesting reading and can be found at: http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/i_r/mulholland.htm

Sierra snowpack runoff that flows westward is collected in several large reservoirs to slake the thirst of northern California, the cities of the San Francisco Bay area, and California’s Central Valley—sometimes called “the salad bowl of the world,”—which produces the majority of America’s fruits and vegetables. One of these reservoirs is Lake Folsom, a few miles east of Sacramento. The pictures below show the water level in 2011 (left) and 2015 (right). Earlier this year the reservoir was at determined to be at 17% of capacity.
At 770 feet high, the tallest dam in the United States is Oroville Dam, 125 miles NNE of San Francisco. It impounds the second largest reservoir in California. A May 14 NBC news video taken by a drone flying over Lake Oroville shows the dire nature of the situation. The dramatic footage lasts just a few seconds more than 2 minutes:


This all points up the issue of “climate change,” regardless of whether it is anthropogenic—caused by humans, a term authorities have started using to encourage us to take the matter seriously.

**Mandatory water cutbacks** are kicking in this month in California, so our pocketbooks will soon be affected if we don’t take the water situation seriously. Many of us have already cut back on water usage, including removing our lawns in favor of desert-type vegetation in the landscaping around our homes. [I replaced my front lawn with less-thirsty landscaping over a decade ago.]

SonRise Christian Fellowship, our church here in Fallbrook, recently moved in the same direction. We were able to take advantage of a state rebate program that can help us to feel better about becoming more “water-wise” in the way we live. The rebate has pretty well paid for the removal of several thousand square feet of water-thirsty grass that was primarily decorative and replacing it with xeriscape plantings that are more appropriate for people who inhabit a “Mediterranean”-type climate such as southern California has. The rebate also
enabled us—as part of the new xeriscape—to put in a gravel “prayer path” around the buildings that will help us to make better use of the property. The process has created a fine serendipity: we have already begun saving several hundred dollars per month as irrigation costs get increasingly hard to justify with water becoming more and more expensive.

Most of us who reside here have come (belatedly) to realize this isn’t the “blue-grass state” of Kentucky, and we actually DO live in a desert. This awareness is gradually prompting us to adjust to what I have come to call the “more severe beauty” of the Desert Southwest.

* * *

Before we leave the topic of drought, we would be remiss if we didn’t draw a parallel with spiritual drought. Haven’t we all gone through those “dry spells” when it seemed our prayers got no further than the ceiling, and regardless of what we tried, life just wasn’t “working right”?

I don’t know what you’ve found in those times, but I have to confess that at such times, I couldn’t honestly pray as the psalmist did: “I stretch out my hands to you; my soul longs for you, as a parched land” (Ps. 143.6). Nor could I say, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for you, O God” (Ps. 42.1,2). When those dry periods come, I still sometimes find I’m trying to exert control of my life at the expense of trusting God as I should.
Occasionally I need to remind myself of Jesus’ words to the woman at the well in Sychar: “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst. The water I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life” (John 4.13,14).

My goal is to be like the person described in Ps. 1.2,3: “His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither, and in whatever he does, he prospers.” May it be true, of both you and me.

* * *

If your yard is like mine, the back lawn turning brown and a couple of fruit trees having already died of thirst, while I’m trying to decide what my new home xeriscape will look like and also contemplating taking the state-suggested 2-minute showers, here is some vicarious relief: a reader reader sent me a link to a video of the $2 million swimming pool a Springville, UT homeowner had built in his back yard. Here’s the link:
https://www.youtube.com/v/jn0M9qQJEuw&rel=0&fs=1&autoplay=

* * *

If you need some inspiration to “stick with it,” consider two recent examples of seniors who have set the pace for us. The first is 92-year-old Harriett Thompson, who on Sunday, May 31, ran the Rock ‘n’ Roll Marathon in San Diego. Thompson ran her first marathon when she was 76, and on Sunday crossed the finish line in 7 hours and 24 minutes—the oldest person ever to finish a marathon. Appropriately, a large crowd was waiting at the finish line to celebrate with her.

The second senior to deserve our commendation was a “senior” in more ways than one. Lora Lois Hardy was one of last month’s high school graduates in Anderson, IN. She became 100 years old on May 8! Hardy had to drop out of school, 4 credits short of graduation, in 1933—during the deepest part of the Great Depression—to get a job and help support her family, which included 7 younger siblings. Now, she’s completed the education she cut short so long ago.

* * *
. . . and on a lighter note: Some (mostly) humorous thoughts about aging—

Wouldn't it be great if we could put ourselves in the dryer for ten minutes; come out wrinkle-free and three sizes smaller!

Last year I joined a support group for procrastinators, but we haven't met yet.

I don't trip over things; I do random gravity checks!

I don't need anger management. I need people to stop annoying me!

Old age is coming at a really bad time!

When I was a child I thought Nap Time was a punishment . . . now, as a grown up, it just feels like a small vacation!

The biggest lie I tell myself is . . . "I don't need to write that down, I'll remember it."

Lord, grant me the strength to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the friends to post my bail when I finally snap!

I don't have gray hair. I have "wisdom highlights." I'm just very wise.

If God wanted me to touch my toes, he would've put them on my knees.

The kids text me "plz" which is shorter than please. I text back "no" which is shorter than "yes".

I'm going to retire and live off of my savings. Not sure what I'll do that second week.

Of course I talk to myself, sometimes I need expert advice.

Oops! Did I roll my eyes out loud?

Chocolate comes from cocoa which is a tree . . . that makes it a plant which means . . . chocolate is salad.

—to which I might add, 

*Trader Joe’s 72% Dark Chocolate* is the best! I always make sure I
have a ready supply to help my brain stay young! May this month be a good one for you. –chuck

* * *

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