

WORDS FOR THE WEARY

Finding Peace in Trials and Troubles



*“ . . . the trial of your faith, being much more precious
than of gold . . . ”*

B r o o k y R S t o c k t o n

Words for the Weary



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Freely Received, Freely Given

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” – Philippians 4:19

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Preface

Christ never promised us smooth sailing and sunny skies. He has been honest with us, *“In this world you shall have tribulation.”*

All men have trials to face in life, but no matter how much knowledge we have about pain and suffering, we seem ill prepared to deal with the winds of adversity when they blow our way.

It is so human to feel like “God is picking on us,” “punishing us,” or the He “has abandoned ship.”

Like all men, I have my share of financial trials, health challenges, relational struggles, and spiritual doubt. When God steered by craft into a storm, I would rummage through the Blessed Book until I found peace.

“Words for the Weary” is the result of my studies and meditations on the Holy Scriptures – holy insights “More to be desired than gold” – Psalm 19:10.

This work rests on the firm-belief that all Scriptures are inspired by God. I trust the comfort I received from His endearing Word will be a comfort and inspiration to your soul.

Blessed be the Lord for giving me troubles and trials so that I might go deeper into Christ and have something to share with those suffering with difficulties.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 1 Corinthians 1:3-7.

⁸I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. – Philippians 3:8-11

Who will profit from this work? (a) Any God-fearing Christian who has been stunned by a sudden reversal in prosperity; and (b) any God-fearing preacher looking for a message to comfort the afflicted. You can never go wrong when speaking to the troubled, because there is at least one in every audience.

You can't hurry your way to comfort . . . to understand His Word. Slow down. Read. Study. Think. Pray.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to Bob Von Spiegel of Canyon City, Colorado who on his death bed was able to warmly say to me in his shaky, quivering voice, "*O taste and see that the Lord is good.*"

Brooky R Stockton

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Notice of Gratitude

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Part 1
Scriptural
Perspectives on Trials



*“ . . . the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold . . . ” – 1
Peter 1:7*

1. Why is Life so Hard for Some

Difficult Paths

“Because of your words, I have kept the difficult path.” - Psalm 17:4



We face tough decisions in life, and many of them are compacted with difficulty.

Christians, especially, are called upon to make hard choices that result in a life of suffering.

A woman who refuses to have an abortion may have to face twenty years of parenthood as a mother to be a woman of God. A man may turn down a lucrative job that requires moral compromise and settle

for a job with long hours and less pay.

But, it is always honorable to carry a cross in life “Because of His words.” In fact, it is the mark of a maturity to suffer because of obedience to a clear command in Scripture.

The KJV translates Psalm 17:4 this way: *“by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.”*

The NAS translates it, *“by the word of Thy lips I have kept from the paths of the violent.”*

These translations are interesting but not very clear.

The Septuagint (LXX) has it correct, *“I kept the difficult path”* meaning I avoided the destructive habits of sinful men. The word *“destroyer”* or *“violent”* or *“hard”* or *“difficult”* is an adjective, not a noun and is correctly rendered *“difficult path”* or *“hard path.”*

What the psalmist is saying is that he was on a hundred miles of bad road because he made choices to obey God’s Word. This is an obedient man who feared God. He made a *“spiritual”* decision rather than a *“pragmatic”* one that resulted in hardship.

Modern believers also carry crosses, but they are usually padded with six inches of form rubber; that is, contemporary Christians are taught that if you

obey God you will have a smooth, comfortable cross to bear; you'll seldom suffer; and, you'll have health and wealth all of your life.

But, this is not what the Scripture says. Obedience requires a walk uphill from the Valley of Vice, and the one walking it will find himself huffing and puffing.

So, if you find yourself struggling, and those difficulties are the result of obeying God's Word, rejoice! You are in the company of saints.

It is better to suffer in the will of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season out of His will.

2. Called to Suffer

The closer you follow Christ, the more you will suffer

1 Peter 2:21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

Suffering is not on anyone's bucket list. Americans are in pursuit of money, ease, fun, parties, and good times. Because we underestimated the value of suffering and its purpose in our lives, American Christians unravel during times of sorrow and conflict. When suffering is under appreciated and unwelcome, Christians become superficial, trivial, hollow, and useless.

Suffering is the difference between being juvenile or mature; the difference between being shallow or deep; the difference between being weak or strong; and the difference between self-centered and a profitable servant.

Life is suffering. Life is not resistance to suffering. The point of life is to suffer. This is why we're here: We're here to suffer. I believe in a higher power that compassionately allows suffering for us as a race, to grow and mature. Rainn Wilson

Our Lord was a savior, teacher, prophet, shepherd, and lover of souls, but He was also a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. He was called a root out of



dry ground, but that that little sprig of life had the cures for the ailments of all men (Isaiah 53).

Likewise, God calls us to a life of suffering, not to hurt us, but to build into our lives those virtues that mark holy men; that is to produce “righteousness” (2:24). Therefore, when God calls us into seasons of suffering, don’t fight it. Heed the call. Accept it, and produce holiness under it.

To learn about the other calls in 1 Peter, see the “Five Calls of Peter” later on in this work.

3. Following the Steps of Christ

Changing our mindset



“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.” – 1 Peter 4:1

Step one: In His suffering, He “committed no sin” (2:22). Pressures and conflicts interfere with our pursuit of comfort; and, when suffering comes our way, we long to find an escape route. For many, the exit is a plunge into “former lusts” (1:13), and the “lusts of men” (4:2).

Our problem is that that we don’t hate sin enough. Pressures in this life often reveal our addiction to the pleasures of this life. The apostle reminds us that we are to pursue holiness (1:15-16) which has its own difficulties, and while under this tutelage, not to sin.

But, His suffering was more than not sinning. He seemed to accept suffering as part of the will of God for his life; that is, He embraced sleepless nights, pain in His joints, and unjust insults as the “good life” the Father chose for Him.

Step two: In His suffering, there was “*no deceit found in His mouth.*” The word “*deceit*” refers to guile, craftiness, and treachery. That is, though He was afflicted and mistreated by sinners, there was never a thought about disobeying and abandoning the will of His Heavenly Father. Furthermore, He never

accused His Father of a lack of love or of hating Him. Furthermore, He didn't lie or try to deceive those seeking His death and destruction.

Our problem is that when things don't go our way, we hit the highway. We begin to accuse Him of not treating us fairly. Because we don't feel loved, we want to "hit the road, Jack!" "Out of here!!"

Again, we see in these phrases our Lord's embrace of truth and the suffering that comes with it. Pain never touched a part of His life that caused Christ to rebel from the difficult will of God.

There is a verse in the hymn "*Bind My Wandering Heart to Thee*" which reads, "*prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; Prone to leave the God I love.*" Saints through the ages have discovered that pressures bring out treachery and rebellion in our own hearts.

Oh, how sweet it must be for God to see his afflicted children loving him under want, duress, and hardships. May we be one of them!

Step Three: In His suffering, "*when he was reviled, reviled not again.*" "*Reviling*" refers to insults, cut downs, slurs, cursing, and the like.

He did not lash out at God nor did He lash out those who called Him a "*winebibber and a friend of publicans and sinners.*" When He was mocked on the cross, He did not curse men or promise to get even with them. He told the Pharisees the hard truth without barbed wires and razor blades in His words; that is, he did not respond in like kind. Cursing, blasphemy, and profanity came from His enemies, but grace and truth was on His lips.

Our problem is that when our spouse hurts us, we retaliate. We return insult for insult, slur for slur, and put-down for put-down. *Lick for lick, pain for pain, and slam for slam* is the motto of modern man. Our raised eyebrows and death stares reveal the pride, anger, and bitterness resident within our souls. We are in need of grace.

Step Four: In His suffering, "*He uttered no threats.*" When men spit upon him, whipped him, and nailed Him to the cross, He did not rain down thunder and lightning upon His adversaries. Rather, He prayed, "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*"

"*He uttered no threats!*" Who can live such a life? Who can follow these steps? It's impossible for us, but it is possible when He commands our hearts.

Step Five: In His suffering, "He committed himself to him that judgeth righteously;" that is, instead of grabbing the helm, and taking charge, He went deeper and deeper into this thing we call "trust." He was born to die. His destiny passed through the cross. There was no escape . . . and He accepted it without anger or rebellion.

In facing those Roman spikes and the splinters on the tree, He committed the well-being of His soul to Him Who judges righteously.

Likewise, there are circumstances from which we cannot escape and people we cannot change and slander that will stick to us like an oil stain on carpet. Sometimes lies, exaggerations, and gossip ruin careers, damage finances, and wreck relationships. What do we do? Take up the hammer of vengeance? No, the text calls us to walk in His steps.

Step Six: In His suffering, *“You were healed” “by His wounds”* (2:24). The floggings and beatings included with his being staked to the cross became the source of our restoration to God. In His pain, He healed the wounds caused by our sin. In his agony, He provided all that we need for eternity. At the cross, he cleansed us, purified us, healed us, justified us, and sanctified us. At the cross wandering sheep discover the Shepherd of their souls (2:25).

Likewise, He calls us to be a wounded healer—to be an instrument to heal those who cause hurt in our lives. Think of it! Out of your pain and suffering others can find spiritual healing.

Those who injure us have the greater need. Predators need fixing because they break other people. Your pain is God’s message to you that your antagonist needs more of Christ. If you manage your pain correctly, it can be used to confront your adversary and lead him / her into a deeper walk with God.

Not all suffering heals. Certainly, Christ’s suffering didn’t heal the world . . . but, it healed you and me! And, in our suffering we too can become wounded healers. Perhaps, out of our pain, others can find help and hope.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to be a happy Christians.

However, when I meet another Christian man, I want to know how they have suffered. How did they come through their trial with their faith intact? How did they avoid the temptation to plunge into sensuality, and to avoid the call to quit or to flee or take revenge? How did they embrace their affliction? What did they see about Christ that caused them to endure?

The Guardian of Souls is God’s Suffering Servant. Likewise, there is no such thing as a useful Christian who has not been tempered in the fires of affliction! Without pain, how could we be compassionate? Those without empathy for others are like butterflies without wings. In fact, God’s finest servants have been in the fiery furnace: Abraham, Job, Jacob, Moses, David, Elijah, Peter and Paul come to mind. The dearest saints with the clearest perceptions have been refined by the pressures of life.

God’s greats are not pretty boys dressed in white suits dishing out cotton candy to congregants, but scarred souls with furrows carved into their brows,

pain on their cheeks, and a gleam in the eye saying, "Christ is worth it all! Follow in His steps."

Cruci Dum Spiro Fido

4. Suffering is NOT Evil

Coming to terms with pain and suffering

Psalm 119: 71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

It is so common for men to think that any kind of discomfort or suffering is bad and must be avoided.

But, the Biblical minds know that suffering is not evil.

Our text does not ascribe evil to suffering, but extols the benefits of affliction to those who would learn from their pain. Affliction is good . . . if it leads us to consult the law of the Creator and not the law of the strong.

Men are prone to link human suffering to a lack of money, the economy, or some political policy of a government administration. Humanistic psychology attributes suffering to poor self-esteem, a mental disorder, or the environment. Such sophistry is a misdiagnosis of the disease.

The malady is sin, not a psychosis. Sin is in not out there in the environment, it is in man. Only sin in man is evil, and there is no evil outside of sin's activity within the man.

While some affliction is due to the fall of man and his link to the Poisonous Tree, much of man's pain comes from willfully, revisiting the Poisonous Tree to taste of its sweet, but deadly delights.

It is sin that men must learn to fear, and not suffering. It is sin that destroys the man, the family, and the nation. It is sin at work in the mind, the emotions, and the will that defile the man and cause suffering within the man and others to whom he is related.

Suffering is the distasteful medicine man must swallow in order to heal evil. The sicker the man the more medicine he has to take. The more active the sin within, the more suffering that is needed to effect a cure.

At times it seems the cure is worse than the disease. Likewise, it appears that the bitter fruit of suffering is more harsh than the seeds of sin planted in the heart. But, this is only a deception because there is no subsequent suffering

that could be more dangerous and injurious to man than the antecedent sin that caused it.

Suffering is the Spirit's way of instructing us to fear sin more and adversity less.

All the sufferings of men and nations are tied to individual sins and the sins of state officials. All sin produces death whether it is in the man or the family or the nation.

But, for every sin, God offers a cure at Calvary. If God were not abundant in mercy to permit suffering, and to instruct men to judge sin, then the road of life would be packed with thorns.

Thus, every sin and the discomfoting drought caused by it can be overcome by the grace-filled waters flowing from the Rock which was smitten by God for our sin—"for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." (1 Corinthians 10:4).

The hard lesson to learn is to fear sin, and not affliction; to hate sin more and to fear suffering less.

Hebrews 12:11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

5. Do You Have a Scar

Hast Thou No Scar

by Amy Carmichael

Hast thou no scar?
No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land,
I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star,
Hast thou no scar?

Hast thou no wound?
Yet, I was wounded by the archers, spent.
Leaned me against the tree to die, and rent
By ravening beasts that compassed me, I swooned:
Hast thou no wound?

No wound? No scar?
Yet as the Master shall the servant be,
And pierced are the feet that follow Me;
But thine are whole. Can he have followed far
Who has no wound nor scar?

You can't pick up the cross to follow Jesus and not suffer a loss.

6. Poured from Vessel to Vessel

Profiting from the Trials of Changing Circumstances

Jeremiah 48:11 Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.



Ancient winemakers did not have the sophisticated technology involved with modern machinery today.

In Biblical times, the wine with its squashed grapes, a.k.a. "lees", were put through a purification process called "decanting." The skins settled to the bottom and became hard and crusted.

To separate the lees from the precious beverage, winemakers poured wine from one pottery jar into a decanter (pottery jar) preserving the liquor, separating out the skins, and aerating it for taste. Thus, we get the phrase "*from vessel to vessel.*"

All of God's servants go through a spiritual decanting process. The man God loves must be separated from his unusable lees.

Lees including dreadful, dreary habits that conform us into the ordinary, that clog the brain, and clutter our time with common patterns that prevent us from pursuing a higher life in Christ.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, the Great Russian Christian, observed this same deadly obsession with habit when he said, "It seems, in fact, as though the second half of a man's life is made up of nothing, but the habits he has accumulated during the first half."

Spiritually speaking, lees include "*the works of the flesh*" and "*all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking . . . with all malice*" (Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 4:31).

To purify the soul, the Lord changes a man's circumstances, jobs, friends, and locations. Winds shift. Sunlight disappears. Clouds gather. Thunder rumbles. Lightning strikes. Rain falls. The sea roars. Waves thrash the shoreline. Thus, His godly ones are "*poured from vessel to vessel*".

This decanting process results in clarity of thinking, purification of character, refinement of skills, adoption of a heavenly perspective, the polishing of ideas, the shedding of husks, and the purging of lees. God's decanting process retains the good and discards the dregs; replaces the bitter with the better; and, displaces the ordinary with things superior.

But, Moab would not submit to the process of refinement. Consequently, Moab remained an irrelevant, average, mediocre country that ended up in the graveyard of nations.

Thus, Moab represents the stubborn man that resists God's sanctifying process.

The secular mind has no room for suffering in his pursuit of pleasure. All difficulties are obstacles to his hedonistic desires. He sees suffering as unfair, unwanted, and unprofitable. To him, suffering is worthless . . .

. . . but to the Christian, suffering is the process that causes him to love God more and to love things less.

Only the best people suffer. Job and Christ come to mind. Perhaps, only the virtuous truly suffer; that only the innocent suffer wrong; and, that only the righteous profit from adversity. Evil men with evil deeds suffer no wrong.

Guilt is the ransom we pay for wrongs done, and joy the reward we reap for suffering unjustly.

However, the eye of faith does not look at suffering as punishment for past sins, but a tutor to prevent future ones; not a robber of riches, but a guide to true wealth in Christ; not a stumbling block to cheerfulness, but a stepping stone to holiness.

The cross-carrying Christian does not see suffering as a footnote in his story, but suffering as the theme that unifies his novel.

Our lives are full of contradictions, and if we are going through a decanting process, let us rejoice that God separates us from our lees . . . and our sleaze.

2 Corinthians 7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

If your circumstances have changed, and you feel like you are being poured from vessel to vessel, remember, the Wise Winemaker has a vineyard that produces age-worthy Cabernet Sauvignon to delight the palate – decanted souls rich in flavor capable of refreshing others.

7. Tutored by Trials

Suffering is a Master Teacher

1 Peter 5:10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast (NIV).

Many Christians don't have the strength of chocolate syrup. To grow stronger, the Lord gives us trials to endure.

We have to grow in strength and God has to tutor us in courage. The instructor for this course on strength training is Dr. Distress.

We live in an age which greatly underestimates the value of suffering. The American pop culture breeds people that feed on wealth and pleasure.

Book Titles abound with such subjects as, "How to get Rich through God", "Name it and Claim it", and "Unlocking the Secrets of Wealth." But, "How to Suffer Well," is not on the Christian Best Seller List.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, author of Crime and Punishment, made this observation about suffering:

"In the novel, Dostoevsky is taking aim at philosophies of progress and improvement – which were highly popular in his age (as they continue to be in ours). He is attacking our habit of telling ourselves that if only this or that thing were different, we could leave suffering behind. If we got that great job, changed the government, could afford that great house, invented a machine to fly us faster around the world, could get together with (or get divorced from) a particular person, then all would go well. This, Dostoevsky argues, is a delusion. Suffering will always pursue us. Schemes for improving the world always contain a flaw: they won't eliminate suffering, they will only change the things that cause us pain" ([The School of Life: Book of Life, Chapter 6](#)).

The term "**suffering**" first appears in the New Testament in Matthew 16:21 wherein Jesus announced to his disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and

suffer the indignities of slander and criminal charges of being a tax protester and traitor to Rome (Luke 23:2).

Let's face it: defending ourselves in court against trumped up charges is not anyone's idea of a happy life.

The stress of false accusations and economic hardships weigh heavily upon us. Everything in our soul screams for relief.

Trials have a way of revealing our superficiality and our lack of Christ-likeness. The holes in our net show us that we are not as spiritual as we think we are; not as devoted as we profess; and not as holy as we should be.

Notice the word "*restore*" in the text.

The term "*restore*" is same word used for "*mending nets*" in the gospels (Mark 4:21). The use of the word "*restore*" suggest the weighty trials that cause our suffering are so heavy that they are capable of breaking the delicate fibers of our faith network. Trials expose our weaknesses and we cry for relief.

Notice the title, "*The God of all grace.*"

The God of all grace mends the broken strings in our little lives. When our nets are broken, He "*restores to us the years that the locust have eaten . . .*" (Joel 2:25).

Notice the term "*after*" and "*a while.*"

The adverb (*oligos*) in the second clause is in the emphatic position indicating that God's grace goes to work AFTER suffering has accomplished its perfect work.

Like a thunder storm announces rain, suffering precedes the refreshing work of God's grace.

Cold, hard trials are the winter before the spring.

In other words, grace kicks in after adversity has tutored us in Integrity Training 101.

Peter informs us that affliction is God's appointed teacher, trainer, and drill sergeant.

Our Lord Jesus met the same instructor during His tenure on earth wherein, "He learned obedience **from** what he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8); that is, Professor Distress won't let us out of his class until we pass obedience training. We think we need wealth and ease, but our Heavenly Father knows we have a need to die to self with all its independence and ambition.

And, after we have suffered a little while, "*the God of all grace . . . will himself restore us and make us strong, firm and steadfast*"—strong, firm and steadfast in a

world full of spineless, flaky, cowardly weaklings lusting after passion and prosperity.

Let us be at peace with the trials in our life as they link us to God's grace and His work of mending nets in souls beautiful.

1 Peter 5:10

*And the **God of all grace**, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, **after** you have suffered a little **while**, will **himself** restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast (NIV).*

8. Out of Hope?

You will never exhaust His mercies

Lamentations 3:21-25 This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.

There is trouble in the world. Empty bank accounts, unemployment, unending debt, and reports about international Islamic terrorism storm our hearts and minds.

There is enough insanity in American politics to discourage a stadium full of optimists: fornicating, adulterous women are responsible for over a million baby-murders a year; the Supreme Court changed six-thousand years of history by redefining marriage and sanctioning same-sex perversions; the Naughty United Nations dropped hundreds of thousands of Muslims on our shores who want Americans to accommodate them, who can't assimilate, and who demand we submit to their gods and their laws. These are the people who have been shouting "Death to America" for decades. See <http://nikeinsights.famguardian.org/forums/topic/is-there-hope-for-godly-causes/>



We have a crisis at the Rio Grande with thousands of military age men invading our borders. It hurts to see our country unravel. One searches for hope in the evening news, and it is not there.

Jeremiah saw the slaughter of his countrymen, the destruction of the temple and his capital city Jerusalem, and thousands of aliens plundering his nation, Lamentations reads like the journal of a lynch mob survivor. In the middle of his list of woes, he proclaims his hope.

Hope is not a wish or pie in the sky, but an anchor connected to God's revelation about Himself in Scripture.

Even in the midst of the destruction of his country and the deportation of the survivors of the siege (585 BC), the prophet found a basis of hope. Even though he was depressed (3:20), and saw the carnage and downfall of Jerusalem personally (3:1-19), he could say, "*I have hope.*"

We would do well to tap into this reservoir of quiet confidence.

First, He had hope in the LORD's endless mercies (3:22-23). Jeremiah informs us of a rock-solid truth: "*the LORD's mercies never cease; His compassions never fail.*"

The Hebrew term for "*cease*" (*halah*) means "to come to end, to be spent, or to be exhausted." It is preceded the by negation, "never;" that is, the tearful prophet informs us that God's reservoir of mercy will never run dry.

Second, the root word for "*compassion*" (*racham*) is a reference to the womb, the source of new life. By changing the vowel structure, the word "*womb*" is translated "*compassions*" (plural).

In the New Testament (NT) we read about "*bowels of compassion*" in 1 John 3:17; that is, the Greeks saw the inner core of man from pelvic bone to collar bone as the source of empathy and sympathy.

Jeremiah is telling us that the womb of God's compassion will never miscarry or be empty of mercy and compassion.

Having denied the negative Jeremiah states the positive, "Great is your faithfulness."

The word "*great*" refers to the inexhaustible supply of a thing.

Unlike the reservoirs of California that sometimes dry up, God's aquifer of tender love is never depleted. It is like an artesian well that springs up "*new every morning.*" Therefore, there is always hope!

You will never exhaust his mercies. At the bottom of your barrel of hope, you will find the eternal sea of Christ's royal *hesed* (*love and grace*).

Second, he had hope because the LORD was his inheritance: "*The LORD is my portion,*" declared the prophet.

The word "*portion*" means "*allotment of land, or plot, or division of assets;*" that is, Jeremiah staked a claim and saw God as his real estate, his treasure, and his property.

Jeremiah was not "other worldly" or so "heavenly minded" he was of no earthly use. He did not deny the importance of the material . . . but, bottom line, He saw the LORD as his Source of wealth . . . and, that could never be taken away from him!

It is marvelous when a man can say the he is God's and God is his. It is one thing to possess golden eggs, it is quite another to own the golden goose. Jeremiah's eggs were stolen, but he owned the goose. Jesus put it this way, "*I know them . . . and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand*" (John 10:27, 28).

Therefore, the afflicted Christian has hope because of his relationship to his Savior and Lord.

Third, he had hope in the LORD because of God's character: "*The LORD is good to those who wait for Him*" (3:25). The Christian faith teaches that God is good; always good; and only good; that He is good when things are going right and that He is good when things are going wrong in our lives.

In fact, Jeremiah informs us in verse 37 that God is the Source of both good and evil in providence; that is, everything that happens to us has to gain his approval.

The Holy Scripture teaches that there is no evil in the Creator and that He does not tempt men with evil. But, He does permit, even ordain, bad things to happen to good people.

Further, the Scripture also teaches that good can come out of evil because God is at work in the midst of our suffering producing good (Romans 8:28). Goodness is an attribute of God and the condition precedent to experience that goodness is "*to wait;*" that is, waiting embodies all the assets of trust and obedience.

In summary, where is a man supposed to go to find hope when his bank account is in the red and he sees his nation unraveling before his eyes?

Jeremiah is called the "Weeping Prophet." His nation was demolished; Jerusalem ransacked; the temple destroyed; and its survivors deported to Babylon. He moaned that God made him walk in darkness (3:2); that God's hand was against him (3:3); that God broke all his bones (3:4).

Yet, he found hope in the One Who afflicted him. Because God is sovereign, everything was going wrong, just right. He knew that God's well of mercy never ran dry; that the LORD was his inheritance; and that God is good and will do good to those that continue to seek Him even in the midst of great affliction (3:25).

9. God is Good!

And, He is working good into your life now

"God never withholds from His child that which His love and wisdom call good. God's refusals are always merciful — "severe mercies" at times but mercies all the same. God never denies us our hearts desire except to give us something better." (Elizabeth Elliot: The Path of Loneliness)

Psalm 34:8. "Oh taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him."

Psalm 27:13 I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!

Many eastern faiths and those involved in pantheism propose that nature is god and god is nature; that is, god is both good and evil. Therefore, "God" is not only the source of goodness, but the source of all evil, all pain, and all suffering. Buddhism is not so much a religion as it is a philosophy about how to avoid suffering and how to cope with it when it slips into your life.

The Christian faith teaches that God is good; always good; and only good; that He is good when things are going right and that He is good when things are going wrong in our lives. The God of the Bible creates "evil," not in a moral sense (sin), but "evil" as opposed to prosperity and comfort – as a negative force corrective to a pleasure-centered society.

"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things." – Isaiah 45:7

The Holy Scripture also teaches that there is no moral evil (sin) in the Creator, but it also teaches that good can come out of present troubles because God is at work in the midst of our suffering producing good.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." – Romans 8:28

In the Christian system, we must be careful to define good and to distinguish between the good and the higher good!

Some observer said that American Christians don't mind dying for Christ, they just don't want to have to give up their stuff; that is, because we measure God's goodness in terms of how much we possess and how much pleasure we enjoy, we have difficulty understanding the true nature of God's goodness.

Consequently, Americans have little appreciation for suffering. Like Buddhist, we are more concerned about making the right choices – choices that produce the least amount of suffering and the most amount of wealth.

The trouble with conflict avoidance is that even though we are careful to make the "right choice," God seems to make sure we have an enemy, a thorn, a stumbling block to deal with at every turn in our lives.

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. -2 Corinthians 12:9.

To understand God's goodness, we must first learn to esteem what He values and how suffering becomes a tool in His hands to produce virtue in our lives.

For example: to God patience is good. Patience is a virtue and suffering can produce the goodness of patience.

Humility is good and adversity can strip a man of pride.

Pathetic pity is bad and political friction can produce a holiness in us that God admires (Deuteronomy 7:16)

Compassion is good and affliction has a way of weaving this virtue into our spiritual fabric.

If we define good only in terms of material comforts, then we are no different than the hedonist or Epicureans of Paul's day. Surely, moral virtue is more esteemed in heaven than success and wealth. Thus, virtue comes to us on the wings of suffering.

But to many avoiding suffering has become preferable to learning patience; and, immediate gratification more important than self-discipline; and, self-gratification more primary than sharing; and physical pleasure more essential than spiritual joy.

My wife has several beautiful pieces of ceramics, but I can tell you that at one time those valuable pieces went through a fiery furnace until they were heated to perfection. Because the curing process was a heated affair does not mean the artisan did not have a noble purpose. Let's keep in mind that though the furnace of affliction isn't comfortable, heat in our lives can produce a work of art.

10. Trials are More Precious than Gold

Do you like true riches?

1 Peter 1:6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

1 Peter 1:7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:



The text does not say your faith is more precious than gold, but that the *“trial of your faith”* is much, more precious than gold.

The word *“trial”* (*dokimion*) refers to those pressures and stresses you experience as a result of your faith in Christ.

These trials are seasonal (*oligos*); that is, they appear for a short time in our lives and

then go away.

These *“trials”* are *“manifold”* (*poililos*). They are numerous and of different kinds. These trials may be financial, political, or medical. The pain comes from a change of circumstances in life, from poverty to affluence, and from affluence to poverty.

These trials are *“heavy”* (*lupeo*) which means *“grievous,” “painful,” “sad,”* or *“tiresome.”* We get the medical term *“lupus”* from this word which is a painful inflammation of bodily tissues.

“Wherever change occurs in the external circumstances of life, there a man’s religion is put to the test, and there he should feel that God is trying the reality of his faith” (Barnes).

These trials are not only called *“precious”* (*timios*) but *“much” “more”* precious. The term *“precious”* is preceded by a prefix (*polu*) which increases the value and richness of the term – *“very valuable and costly.”* The word *timios* means *“honorable,” “esteemed,”* and *“valuable”* – much, more valuable than any of us really understand.

The main verb is *“might be found”* (*heurisko*) – an aorist passive subjunctive – a possibility or wish of the apostle that hopefully will turn into reality at a future time.

These tests drive men to Christ and to His Word; that is, these trials not only prove a man's faith, but improve the man and his faith. God provides these trials so a man may know if his faith is genuine or false. They are provided to perfect his faith, and to make it pure that his faith *"might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."*

Virtue is the golden-rod in all trials. Moreover, you will become the sum total of your trials.

If a Christian is made better by trials, then he has cause for rejoicing: *"Wherein, ye greatly rejoice."*

11. Life Reversals — A Precious Testing of Faith

There is joy in changing circumstances

A sudden change in circumstances whether from bad to good or good to bad is a precious opportunity to grow in piety.

James 1:9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

Both poverty and riches have their temptations. Worry about necessities can reduce a man to that of an animal and excess wealth invites the ugliness of pride to take up residence in the human heart.

Let both remember *"God putteth down one, and setteth up another"* (Psalm 75:7). *"I know thy poverty,"* said the Spirit unto the Church in Smyrna, *"but thou art rich"* (Revelation 2:9); and to the Laodiceans, *"Thou sayest, I am rich . . . , but thou art poor"* (Revelation 3:17).

That lowly, poor person without rank or status ought to rejoice that he is exalted to be a child of God, and an heir of eternal glory — *"To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you"* (1 Peter 1:4).

Likewise, the one made humble by his suffering for Christ ought to rejoice that he has been counted worthy to suffer for His Name. His prayer is not that affliction should be removed but for the wisdom to make a right use of it. He knows that God will reward his faith and that he can grow in piety by his troubles; that he must be improved by patience and not passion; by faith and not fear.

Moreover, there is no praise for the pride that apes humility nor the affectation which loves to be despised (Ellicott).

Let us remember the incredulity of Zacharias who in his privilege and hardship could not believe the promises of the angel, and remember the genuine humility of Mary who acknowledged that even in her poverty as a handmaid of the Lord that she was the undeserving recipient of grace (Luke 1:20, 24).

James 1:10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

The Spirit urges the rich to arrest pride and to remember the true Source of their dignity and wealth . . . that to whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48).

Matthew Henry reminds men that worldly wealth is a withering thing. The rich ought to rejoice in the One who has given them temporal wealth, and seek happiness in God and not perishing riches. Should his riches be taken away let him remember the Lord *“remembereth them: he forgetteth not the cry of the humble”* (Psalm 9:12).

Let the rich reflect on the fact that one day he will lose it all.

“No more simple and striking simile of human instability and vanity can be found than “the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven” (Matthew 6:30); and the thought suggests a picture to the mind of the writer, which he draws with strong and yet most tender lines (Ellicott).

Barnes reminds us that James is dealing with a particular kind of trial — an abrupt change of circumstances from poverty to riches and, or from riches to poverty . . .

“that there is a great and important trial of faith in any reverse of circumstances; a trial in being elevated from poverty to riches, or in being depressed from a state of affluence to want.”

Life’s reversals test the core of every man’s religion . . . the genuineness of a man’s faith or the lack thereof. The exhortation is to rejoice not in riches but *“because a test is furnished which will show, in the new circumstances in which he is placed, whether his piety is genuine”* (Barnes).

“ In fact, there is almost no trial of religion which is more certain and decisive than that furnished by a sudden transition from poverty to affluence from adversity to prosperity, from sickness to health. There is much religion in the world that will bear the ills of poverty, sickness, and persecution, or that will bear the temptations arising from prosperity, and even affluence, which will not bear the transition from one to the other; as there is many a human frame that could become accustomed to bear either the steady heat of the equator, or the intense cold of the north, that could not bear a rapid transition from the one to

*the other. See this thought illustrated in the notes at Philippians 4:12.”
(Barnes)*

The jewel in which we are to rejoice in the sudden reversals of life is that God has provided a test to improve our piety, and that God has provide a trial which enable a man to determine whether his faith is genuine (Barnes).

For “*without faith it is impossible to please Him*” (Hebrews 11:5); and, the presence of “*faith IS the victory that overcome the world*” (1 John 5:4); and, “*That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 1:7).

With the eye of faith let us see that we are being treated better than we deserve and that we sit higher than our gifts merit.

12. In the Day of Trouble

You are hereby ordered to Court to Plead your Case

Psalm 50:15 And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

Psalm 50:23 “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conersation aright will I shew the salvation of God.

Psalm 50 is a summons by the Judge for His people to come into the Court to plead their case while being in darkness where the white lilies grow. If you are a believer in covenant with God, you have standing in this court to plead your case.

You can have the deliverance, but God must have the glory.

You can have your health, but God must have the honor. You can have your win, but God must receive the worship.

You can have your pardon, but God must have the praise. If you are a thief of God’s glory, how can He honor His promise to deliver?

The only uncertain thing about this promise is the “When?” While we wait for God to work, we wait in darkness where the white lilies grow.

Does God delay?

He did with Mary’s prayer for her sick brother (John 11). But, maybe a resurrected Lazarus could bring Him more glory than a recovered Lazarus?

He waited 14 years to answer the prayer of aging Abraham? Maybe, a child from an old man and an old woman could bring Him more glory than the gift of a child to a young bride.

Did Jacob's plea for protection and prosperity happen in the first year of his departure from Canaan? Maybe, an impoverished patriarch with no commodities, two wives, and eleven children could bring Him more glory than a wealthy single bachelor.

After defeating Goliath, could not God have made David king of Israel? Maybe, an innocent but vilified fugitive seasoned by years of hardship would make a better king than a naïve boyhood-success king.

The Lord said, "*I form the light, and create darkness . . .*" – Isaiah 45:7.

Out of the Darkness

Out of the dark forbidding soil

The pure white lilies grow.

Out of the black and murky clouds,

Descends the stainless snow.

Out of the crawling earth-bound worm

A butterfly is born.

Out of the somber shrouded night,

Behold! A golden morn!

Out of the pain and stress of life

The peace of God pours down.

Out of the nails – the spear – the cross,

Redemption – and a crown! (Source Unknown).

Men dig deep in the earth under darkness to find gold, because they cannot find it in the light.

Matthew Henry on Job 28:1-11 . . . The caverns of the earth may be discovered, but not the counsels of Heaven. Go to the miners, thou sluggard in religion, consider their ways, and be wise. Let their courage and diligence in seeking the wealth that perishes, shame us out of slothfulness and faint-heartedness in labouring for the true riches. How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! How much easier, and safer! Yet gold is sought for, but grace neglected. Will the hopes of precious things out of the earth, so men call them, though really they are paltry and perishing, be such a spur to industry, and shall not the certain

prospect of truly precious things in heaven be much more so?

Truth, like gold, is often found in darkness. There is gold in your darkness, but you must search for it.

13. Jacob, the Man Who was 100 % Wrong

"all these things are against me"

Genesis 42:36 And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.

Have you ever had a day when you felt like everything including God was against you? If so, take courage, Jacob felt this way and he was 100 percent wrong!

Because of the extreme famine that hit that part of the Levant, Jacob's sons were forced to take a trek into Egypt to barter for grain in order to feed their tribe. The famine was pressing in on every family and aged Israel could smell the foul breath of starvation in southern Canaan. Upon their return, Jacob's sons gathered around their aged father. Their reports read like an obituary of doom and gloom from a Jail House Blues Publication (Genesis 42:1-36ff):

Maltreatment: *"the Lord of the land spoke harshly to us . . ." and, He accused us of being "spies."*

The Ruler of Egypt *"put us in prison for three days"* and, Let us out on probation: *"By this I will know you are honest men . . ."* Unless we appear in his court, we will *"die"* (42:20); and, *"He took Simeon from us and bound him"* in jail as a collateral; and, We will surely be indicted for grand theft because there was *"money in our sack"* (42:27); and, when we discovered the money, our *"hearts sank"* (42:28). We can't go down to Egypt again unless we bring our *"younger brother to"* the Vice Regent of Egypt.

No doubt, this was a dark day in Jacob's life, but *"I the LORD create darkness"* (Isaiah 45:7).

You can feel Jacob's faith slipping away like the air out of a punctured tire. The sunshine in his life disappeared behind clouds of despair. The cool winter of an arctic blizzard swept over his soul. *"All these things be against me"* he groaned.

But, **God's chosen one was 100% WRONG!**

Jacob thundered, *"You have bereaved me!"*

The smoke of evil canons thundering on his battlefield blinded him to the fact that God was in total command of his life and that he was going to live out his days in safety, happiness, and in honor.

Jacob groaned again, "Joseph is no more."

But, the prince with God had no idea that Joseph was the Ruler of Egypt, the Prime Minister of the richest, wealthiest, most powerful nation on earth. Ruler Joseph was not only going to save Israel from the bitterness of starvation, but all the nations impacted by the famine.

Jacob despaired: "*Simeon is no more.*"

But, Simeon was very much alive and never safer than under the custody of his brother Joseph.

Jacob rebutted: "*You would take Benjamin*" from me. Little did he know that he and all his sons would be reconciled and live out their days together as one happy family in the luscious green pasture land of the Nile Delta.

Jacob stated, "*All these things are against me*" not knowing that God was working all things together for good" (Romans 8:28); that soon, all his worries would turn into dust and all his hopes into nuggets of gold.

When Jacob said "*All these things be against me,*" God's man was 100% wrong.

Yes, evil was real, but so was God. Jacob was never more safe, more protected, or more provided for in his entire life than at the moment Jacob moaned, "*all these things be against me.*" Little did he know that he would soon look into the eyes of his living son, the most powerful man in the world, the Savior of Egypt.

"If God be for us, who can be against us?" - Romans 8:31.

"May the mighty God of Jacob defend you." - Psalm 21:1

Maybe, your trials are not as bad as you think.

14. The Jewel of the Nile

Prepared under Pressure

Psalm 105:8-9 Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him.

What does it take to make a diamond?



At age 17 the LORD came to this boy in a dream wherein he saw the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. The prophecy insured greatness.

But, God's prince ended up in a foreign country . . . locked up abroad . . . behind bars . . . falsely accused . . . in chains . . . bruised and bleeding with cold steel fastened around his ankles. Throbbing pain kept him awake at night. His name is Joseph, the eleventh son of the Patriarch Jacob. But, who cares about the name of felon. Charged by an important government official of moral wrong doing, every voice in the courtroom shouted "guilty!"

The facts in his case did not matter. The presumption of guilt blew through the court like dust on a windy day. The young man lost his job, his reputation, and his freedom.

Bruised ankles were not the only source of pain in Joseph's life. He had a camel on his chest. God promised Him honor, but he lived in shame; wealth, but he owned nothing; power, but he was impotent; greatness, but he lived the life of human rubbish as an inmate in Pharaoh's federal prison.

The one destined to rule the world slept on hay chained to a wall sharing space with common criminals in a stinkin', flea-infested jail. Who can imagine the pain from abrasive steel, the musty stench on a hot day, or the fish-flavored soup fed to the prisoners that was unfit for pigs? It was enough to turn any man's breath foul! Helpless and mistreated, Joseph had to question his journey on the road of life! Did God deceive him? Had His promises failed?

But, we know from this story that Joseph was indeed God's chosen one, the Jewel of Nile.

But, God's gem had to feel the pressure of false imprisonment, hard iron, bitter shame, and the cries of other inmates in the dark of the night so he could turn into the Lord's jewel. Experiencing the opposite of what God showed him, the "word of the Lord tested him."

When we experience pain instead of pleasure, demotion instead of promotion, sickness instead of health, poverty instead of wealth, we should remember the life of Joseph. God uses these things to produce gold and jewels.

Consider the fact that the path to greatness is paved with thorns.

- Joseph was a prisoner before he was a prime minister.
- Moses shepherded sheep, before he shepherded a nation.
- Gideon thrashed wheat secretly before he thrashed the Midianites openly.
- David survived in a cave before he thrived in a palace.

- Jesus carried a cross before he wore his crown.
- England considered George Washington a traitor before Americans considered him a hero.
- It took a civil war to produce a diamond like Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson.
- Thomas Edison failed 3,000 times before he manufactured the first successful light bulb.

Let us not give up on God's promises even though we are experiencing life's pressures.

Disappointments can be God's appointments.

Oaks grow strong in high winds. Diamonds are composed deep under the earth's mantle by crushing the atoms in carbon and forming a new lattice like structure; that is, diamonds are formed at 2,700 degrees Fahrenheit and the equivalent weight of 4,000 men standing on our big toe. These precious gems are pushed up to the Earth's surface by volcanic activity. Scientists call them "volcanoes of opportunity."

Joseph's feet hurt with fetters, and the Word of the Lord tested him. The intense pressures of imprisonment created a diamond of a man. Out of the ashes of violent political activity Joseph was suddenly promoted to conduct his life's work. The prophecies were true. The moon and the Sun and the stars did bow down to him. But, the road to honor was accompanied with chains and fetters.

When his feet hurt because of the iron shackles, God fused steel into his soul.

Through the wisdom gained under his affliction, Joseph emerged from the heat and pressure of his personal prison a pure diamond—the Jewel of the Nile that saved Egypt from the great famine.

15. Finding Wells in the Valley of Baca

Psalm 84: 6-7

There are Wells in the Valley of Weeping



Before us is a psalm written by a saint familiar with heartaches and headaches. He informs us that he went into a Sun-baked valley and found water; that is, not only is there comfort in the Valley of Baca, you can come out it a better, stronger Christian.

6 Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.

This architect of hymns is not a dreamy poet sitting on a lily-pad of luxury theorizing about utopian ideals. He understood the pilgrim journey in this life is not all song and no sorrow; all laughter and no tears; all smiles and no frowns.

The Hebrew word "*Baca*" means "weeping." It is not a place or location in Israel, but the human experience of suffering on earth.

The author understood there are days when the earthly pilgrim feels pain, grief, anxiety, trouble, trials, difficulties, setbacks, and heartaches on the sin-stained soil of this earth.

Therefore, the psalmist expands the meaning of the "blessing" in verse five.

Blessing does not infer the absence of affliction.

The "*blessed*" have many woes as they wander through the Valley of Weeping . . . but somehow, someway, with the help of God, the faithful are able to turn deserts into desserts, tears into thanksgiving, water into wine, troubles into triumph, resentment into refreshment, bitters into sweets, cursing into blessings, evil into good, poverty into power, rejection into correction, and setbacks into spiritual advances.

Though the arid basin is the lowest, hottest place in the human experience, there is rain that sustains life.

There is something that shines in sand, something that sings in that silence, something that refreshes thirsty souls in this valley of dry bones.

Did you notice the word "*through*?" He did not remain in this Valley. He passed through it.

7 They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.

Many of God's greats have staggered and stumbled through this desert gorge.

But, the psalmist observed that those near God, when passing through the Valley of Tears, got stronger instead of weaker, better instead of bitter, happier instead of sadder.

Because they dug deeper into Christ, they left wells of water to refresh thirsty souls traveling through this hot lowland. Songs came out of their sorrows; light peeked through the darkness; and, comfort came to the weary in this cactus wasteland.

"No pit is so deep that He is not deeper still; with Jesus even in our darkest moments, the best remains and the very best is yet to be." –

Correy ten Boom

There is an exit from this valley. At the end of this journey the Zion-dweller appears before God to the delight of the one longing to be in Zion near the House of God.

16. How to Be Strong

Strength in the Storm

Isaiah 30:15 For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not.

Rest and be Strong

There is something about us that as soon as we experience a storm of troubles, the wheels in our little minds begin to turn to all the human solutions that we can think of to find safety from the pressure of our struggles. Agitated, we fret and fret. But, this text is one of main texts that inform us on how to experience safety and greater power while swimming through dynamic undercurrents of life.

The background of this passage is the Assyrian invasion and the pragmatic decision of Jews to form an alliance with Egypt.

"ISRAEL always felt the difficulty of sustaining itself on the height of dependence on the unseen, spiritual power of God, and was ever oscillating between alliances with the Northern and Southern powers,

linking itself with Assyria against Egypt, or with Egypt against Assyria" (Maclaren).

The contract offer is from the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel to Judah who was unsettled by the politics of the time.

He called for repentance – “**returning**” (noun) is the word *shubawh* which means to retire or withdraw from your plans of desperation. The noun “**rest**” (*nachath*) means “quietness” or “rest.”

The verbal infinitive “**quietness**” (*shaqat*) is an action that requires quietness, rest, and abandonment of all human effort to finagle circumstances to their advantage.

The noun “**confidence**” (*bitchah*) means trust — a movement to a place of rest.

Ellicott: “The words describe a process of conversion, but the nature of that conversion is determined by the context. In this case it was the turning from the trust in man, with all its restless excitement, to a trust in God, full of calmness and of peace.”

MacLaren: “They had gone away from Him in their fears. They must come back by their faith. To them the great lesson was trust in God. Through them to us the same lesson is read. The principle is far wider than this one case. It is the one rule of life for us all . . .

‘**Returning and rest**’ correspond to ‘**quietness and confidence**,’ so as that ‘**rest**’ answers to ‘**quietness**’ and ‘**returning**’ to ‘**confidence**.’ In the former clause we have the action towards God and then its consequence. In the latter we have the consequence and then the action.”

We are not in charge of government, cultural trends, or the winds of ideology that sweep through nations. Rest, trust God, and be responsive to His Word.

17. Chrysostom on Rejoicing in Times of Testing

The Blessedness of Trials

James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

We have here a command for believers to start rejoicing when trials line up at their front door.

James is the first letter written in the New Testament and James 1:2 is, therefore, the first command given to the Christian community—a command that has been a challenge for believers in every generation.

John Chrysostom (349-407), early Christian theologian, said temptations are not a curse, but a blessing. We must not fear trials or temptations, but fear sin.

He preached, *“we should not be saddened when some evil befalls us, but rather when we do something evil.”*

We, however, have it backwards by being angry over troubles, and not being saddened by our transgressions.

When we are angry over our difficulties that cost us time, energy, or money, and are not ashamed of how our depravity sucks the joy out of those around us, *we are woefully lacking in spiritual maturity.*

Chrysostom went on to say we should not be saddened by the sorrow and damage caused to us by others, but for our sins by which we sadden God.

Trials do not come to make us bitter, but to make us better. They are courses in instruction on holiness — tools to make us Christ-like — instruments that drive us deeper into His Word to gain His perspective.

James 1:3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

Chrysostom has more to teach us,

“Let all partake of the feast of faith. Let all receive the riches of goodness. Let no one lament their poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed. Let no one mourn their transgressions, for pardon has dawned from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Saviour’s death has set us free,” Paschal Homily.

“God gives the crown to those who are kept from evil, not by force, but by choice,” On the Priesthood, Book II

“We are commanded to have only one enemy, the devil. With him never be reconciled! But with a brother, never be at enmity in thy heart,” Homilies on the Statues, Homily XX.

“For what advantage is it, that the world enjoys profound peace, if thou art at war with thyself? This then is the peace we should keep. If we have it, nothing from without will be able to harm us. And to this end the public peace contributes no little: whence it is said, ‘That we may lead a quiet and peaceable life.’ But if any one is disturbed when there is quiet, he is a miserable creature. Seest thou that He speaks of this peace which I call the third (inner, ed.) kind? Therefore when he has said, ‘that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life,’ he does not stop there, but adds ‘in all godliness and honesty.’ But we cannot live in godliness and honesty, unless that peace be established. For when curious reasonings disturb our faith, what peace is there? or when spirits of uncleanness, what peace is there?” Homilies on Timothy, Homily V

Also, let us consider the perspective by another Greek saint, Justin Popovich.

Let us determine to obey the command to rejoice in temptations . . . and to fear sin. Testing is an opportunity to grow in virtue, but a wrong reaction to trials is a vice.

We become angry over temptations because we love comfort and hate discomfort. Rather, let us love godliness, and hate naughtiness. Learn to hate sin more, and you will know the power of piety.

Chrysostom reminds us we should not be saddened when some evil befalls us, but to be grieved when we fall into evil.

Our joy is in the Victory of the Savior, and our sorrow is our evil behavior.

Let us strive to be Christ-like, and to fear being Devil-like.

18. God Uses Broken Things

Psalm 31:4-12 Pull me out of the net . . . I have hated them that regard lying vanities. . . . for thou hast considered my trouble thou hast known my soul in adversities. . . Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble: . . . For my life is spent with grief . . . I have been forgotten like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel . . . My times are in thy hand . . . But I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God.



The presumptive author is David, but the occasion for the hymn is unknown. The psalm is a rebuke to those who think that life is all sunshine and no shadow; all dessert and no greens, all wealth and no poverty; all peace and no war; all friendship and no loneliness; all joy and no grief; all health and no sickness; all healing and no brokenness.

Sometimes, the way up is the way down. Darkness precedes the dawn: "I form the light . . ." says the LORD – Isaiah 45:7.

The good news of the psalm is that triumph followed trouble, refuge followed flight, kindness followed grief; answered prayer followed bent knees.

The psalm concludes with the confident exhortation, *“Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart . . .”*

Psalm 34:18 The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

The background of this instruction is how to *“fear of the LORD”* (34:11).

The *“brokenhearted”* are God-seekers crushed by the evil from without. Before us is a saint struggling to live for God in a decadent society. Burdened down by the corruption around him and the chilly hearts of his brethren toward the Lord, the psalm ends with promises of companionship with God and deliverance from the recklessness and maliciousness of his enemies.

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

If Psalm 34 is about those crushed by sin around him, Psalm 51 is about a man crushed by sin within him. Broken by his own treachery with Bathsheba, David finds relief through contrition and confession. God forgives because His Son shed His blood to pay man’s debt.

Psalm 147:3 He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

This is one of the Hallelujah Psalms providing a list of reasons to praise the LORD. Let our lives begin and end with *Hallelu-jahs*.

The brokenhearted are those struggling with the burdens of this life: planting and harvest, health and disease, up and down markets, unpredictable weather patterns, uncertain politics, and the perils of war.

The psalmist admires the infinite power of this Creator, but he is refreshed that God is a personal Spirit involved with troubles of His creatures.

The One who calls the stars by name, knows his aches and pains.

The One Who has infinite understanding of the universe, understands the struggles in his finite life.

The one who calls for thunder and lightning in the sky so the grass can grow also provides healing so men can recover and praise Him.

Isaiah 53:5 But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.

He was crushed on Calvary's cross that we might be healed and comforted.

Likewise, the Lord orders our suffering that we might be an agent to heal those who wound us. Remembering always, those that injure others have greater needs than the wounded. Further, He grants grace to strengthen our character so that we do not become a stumbling block to those around us.

Isaiah 66:2 All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

The context of this verse is the kingdom of God with its blessings for the righteous and its curses for the lawbreakers. Judgment will come on the proud that "forsake the Lord" (65:11), but salvation comes to the humble.

God is not partial to the high status of men. Rather, he befriends the broken and those that tremble at His Word.

The word "humble" (*aniy*) means poor and afflicted.

The word "contrite" (*nekah*) can be translated smitten, stricken, lame, and crippled of feet.

The phrase "trembles at my word" (*chared*) refers to those who fear God and obey Him. If His eye is on the sparrow, surely he sees you and me!

Jeremiah 18:1-23 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. Then the word of the Lord came to me.

The word "spoiled clay" means marred or corrupted — probably referring to coarse clay that had to be sublimated and remolded. The great lesson here is that affliction is not punishment. Rather, it is designed to perfect us and to purge out the brutish aspect rooted in our human nature.

Hosea 10:12 Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.

The command is to “*Sow*” righteousness. Hosea compares the Christian life to the agrarian work of breaking up the field and preparing it for planting season.

Hosea informs us there are acres in our lives that are hard and crusted. In order to produce a garden, God plows these parcels of spiritual real estate so it can yield the fruits of the spirit. The steel blades of the plow hurt, but are necessary to harvest Christ-like character.

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

This is the key invitation verse in Matthew. “*Rest*” is Jesus’ term for salvation. Matthew does emphasize belief, but submission to Christ.

The requirement is . . . *come . . . take my yoke . . . and learn of me*. Jesus is Lord. Surrender! Submit! Yield! The invitation is to the exhausted and heavy laden; that is, to those crushed by sin in their own life. Jesus came to save sinners, not the self-righteous. Therefore, turn from your own will, and subject yourself to His will.

John 12:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Jesus compares his life to a seed that had to die on the cross in order harvest souls for the kingdom of God, but then immediately applies the principle to his disciples. They too had to die to all their natural wants and wishes in order to bear spiritual fruit.

2 Corinthians 12:9-12 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Plagued with an unwanted infirmity, the apostle had to go deeper into Christ to learn His ways in regards to suffering.

At the end of his course, he learned that weakness was a tool used by God to motivate him to release his grip on the strength of the flesh that he might be strong in the Spirit.

Likewise, adversity is God's way of strengthening the man; of turning a weakling into a hearty saint.

*"Hast thou no scar?
Thou has not traveled far,
Who has no scar."
Amy Carmichael*

19. Joni on Philipians 3:8-10



Joni Erickson Estrada gave devotion on this text:

Philippians 3:8-11 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, 9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

Joni, trapped in her physical tomb, provided this insight:

(1) When she read, "8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ," Joni said, "Amen! I want to explore the golden treasures of the knowledge of Christ . . . and, losing all things for Him is tough, but worth it.

(2) When she read, "9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:" Joni responded, "Amen, I want the righteousness that comes from God through the faithfulness of Christ to God's law which is received by faith."

(3) when she read, "10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection," Joni said her heart sang like a yellow-tailed cockatoo wanting to know Him and His power. Sounds good! Oh, to have His power! **But . . .**

(4) When she came to the section which refers to *“the fellowship of his sufferings,”* her enthusiasm turned from piano forte to pianissimo (soft and restrained);

(5) And then, when she considered the call: *“being made conformable unto his death,”* the music stopped!!

She doesn't want to die. She wants to live. Joni could embrace knowing the person of Christ and reach for His power, but *“being made conformable unto his death”* called for a whole new level of growth in Christian grace.

Embracing *conformity to His death* required enrollment in an advanced course in spirituality, faith, and following Jesus.

RC Sproul had this to say about the value of *being conformed to his death*:

“When God issues a call to us, it is always a holy call. The vocation of dying is a sacred vocation. To understand that is one of the most important lessons a Christian can ever learn. When the summons comes, we can respond in many ways. We can become angry, bitter or terrified. But if we see it as a call from God and not a threat from Satan, we are far more prepared to cope with its difficulties.” — R.C. Sproul, Surprised by Suffering

Possibly, the apostle refers to Christ and the . . .

(1) acceptance of death to self with all its desires for pleasure, comfort, and ease without revolt, retreat, reserve, resistance, regret, remorse, and rebellion; or,

(2) the fact the believer does not seek death; but, rather, he accepts death as part of the will of God for his life.

(3) to the character of our Lord's suffering on the cross without anger, bitterness, rage, feelings of revenge, defensiveness, regret, or outbursts of self-pity; or

(4) that in our death to self and suffering for the gospel we might be a source of healing, redemption, and salvation for others.

He could say on the eve of His death, *“Not my will, but Thy will be done!”* Likewise, we ought to be able to say, *“Not my will, but Thy will be done.”*

Moreover, Jesus died . . .

- Without having lived out all the natural years of a normal man;
- Without wealth, riches, or money – in poverty;
- Without owning any property on earth;
- Without having seen and enjoyed all there is to see on this earth;

- Without honor among men while being greatly misunderstood;
- Without having straightened out all his family's problems;
- Without marriage or having any physical children or grandchildren;
- Without solving the world's political problems;
- Without correcting all the injustice in the Roman theater;
- Without having exhausted his own powers to heal men of their physical diseases;
- Without fulfilling his potential as a man;
- Without writing a book;
- Without seeing the full manifestation of the kingdom of God.

In the eyes of the world He died a failure, a loser, a tax protestor, an apostate from Judaism, a rebel to Rome, a criminal, a delusional apocalyptic preacher, a pauper, a deceiver, a liar, and a powerless man.

Furthermore, it is our privilege to be conformed to his death.

20. A Contrast in Degrees of Suffering

Top Trials of Millennials

Here are the top 20 stressful trials reported by millennials:

1. Losing wallet/credit card
2. Arguing with partner
3. Commute/traffic delays
4. Losing phone
5. Arriving late to work
6. Slow WiFi
7. Phone battery dying
8. Forgetting passwords
9. Credit card fraud
10. Forgetting phone charger
11. Losing/misplacing keys

12. Paying bills
13. Job interviews
14. Phone screen breaking
15. Credit card bills
16. Check engine light coming on
17. School loan payments
18. Job security
19. Choosing what to wear
20. Washing dishes

The survey was conducted by the market research firm OnePoll.

Top Trials of the Men of Faith

Here are the top 20 stressful trials reported by men of God:

Hebrews 11: 32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:

33 Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

34 Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

35 Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:

36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;

38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

This survey was conducted by an early apostle.

21. Why Does God Permit Evil to Exist?

LORD, how long shall the wicked triumph?" Psalm 94:3

Eventually, the Christian thinker will ponder the question, "Why does God permit evil to prevail?"

Like the psalmist we ask, "*LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?"* Psalm 94:3

The answer is complex. Who can answer it?

Paul talked about "*the mystery of iniquity*" (2 Thessalonians 2:7),—and that's what evil is: **a mystery**.

Spurgeon has this to say:

"If we had been in Egypt at the time when Pharaoh started out to follow the Israelites to the Red Sea, we would have taken off their chariot wheels before they could get under way. But Jehovah did something better. He allowed the Egyptians to pursue and overtake and threaten, and then He allowed them in their pride to go down after Israel into the depths of the Sea.... It may be that God will allow error (or evil) to proceed further and let it seem to triumph, so that by its own presumption it may place itself where it is more effectually crushed..."

Surely, this question drives us to search everything we know about God. Like the psalmist who entered the sanctuary, we too will find the answer locked in the counsels of God (Psalm 73:16-18).

*But when I thought how to understand this,
it seemed to me a wearisome task,
until I went into the sanctuary of God;
then I discerned their end.
Truly you set them in slippery places;
you make them fall to ruin.*

Likewise, the psalmist in Psalm 94 reached a similar conclusion:

*"And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; yea, the LORD our God shall cut them off"
(94:23)*

Possibly, the great task in life is to trust Him to govern the universe, and to govern ourselves under what we know to be the will of God.

A man of God grows in knowledge, but he also content not to know all things; that is, God does not hold him responsible to know all things.

22. Relying on God's Grace

The Nature of God's Grace

"But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not found vain . . . " – 1 Corinthians 15:10.

Illustration of Grace

- When a person works and receives compensation for work, this is called a wage.
- When a person wins a race and receives a prize, this is called a trophy.
- When a person performs a great achievement and is honored for it, this is called an award.
- But when a person is not capable of earning a wage, or winning a prize, or deserving of an award—yet receives such a gift anyway—that is grace.

The Nature of Grace

- Because mankind is legalistic, we have difficulty understanding grace. Consider the following:
- Divine grace is the extension of the love of God to unworthy men because of the worthiness of his Son.
- Divine grace is the choice of God to redeem men because Christ made a choice to be the Redeemer.
- Divine grace is God's unmerited favor to man because Christ merited favor with His Father.
- Divine grace is God's offer of salvation to unworthy men because Christ proved himself worthy as a Son.
- Divine grace is the works and obedience of Christ credited to disobedient men because one man's act of obedience fully satisfied the claims of Divine justice.

- The primary work of Divine grace is not God's work exerted in us, but God's work outside of us in Christ at Calvary. God does not choose to be gracious to us because of a change in our heart, or the activity of faith in the soul, or because we are born again, or because we are gracious. God loves us not because of who we are but Who He is—a God of love. God so loved the world that He gave His Son.
- God is not gracious to us because we have been born again. But, because He is gracious, we are born again. We must distinguish the cause (Christ) from the result (regeneration). Secondarily, grace is given to individuals for sanctification. For this reason Paul says, "Grace and peace" to you in the introduction of his letters.
- Divine grace flows to man, not because God ignores His justice, but because He expressed His justice at the cross. In being gracious, God did not ignore sin, or ignore His law, or dispense with justice. The opposite is true. It is because God fulfilled His justice at the cross, that God is now able to extend mercy to sinners.
- Grace, therefore, is uncaused in the recipient. Grace cannot be earned because it is not a prize to be obtained. Grace is not given to good men; it is given to unworthy men. It is not bestowed because of human merit, but because of the merit of Christ. Because it cannot be gained by human merit, it cannot be withdrawn because of a lack of human merit. It is not bestowed because of a quality of faith in the heart of man. It is supplied because of the quality of the faithfulness in the heart of Christ. It is not given because of the quality of life, devotion of mind, or pureness of heart of men, but because of the life, devotion, and purity of our Lord. Grace is not conferred because man repents. Repentant souls may find grace, but repentance is never the cause of grace. The cause of grace rests wholly in the Giver!!
- Grace cannot be decreased because of unworthiness. Our worthiness is not the reason for an increase of grace, nor is our unworthiness the cause of what we perceive to be a withdrawal of grace in our lives.
- Grace triumphs in the presence of human weakness, and it ceases to be grace if it is withdrawn because of human failure. God will not dispense more grace if we sin less nor will he decrease grace if we sin more. It cannot be increased because of merit or decreased because of a lack of merit. It is not less if we sin less or more if we obey more.
- Grace is not an over payment of a debt. It is not a bonus thrown in as the result of a transaction. Grace is not treating a man as he deserves, or treating him better than he deserves. It treats him graciously without regards to his merits or demerits.

- Grace cannot be paid back because grace does not accumulate debt. God does not bestow grace in order to get something back from men. In being gracious no service is requested, no compensation expected, and no offering collected. All attempts to repay grace denigrate this beautiful act to a shabby barter & trade show. Service is rendered, not out of necessity among humanity, but out of the enormity of gratefulness within redeemed humanity. All acceptable service must proceed from thankfulness not debt.
- Grace takes no risks, because grace expects nothing in return. Any attempt to miserably compensate God for the gift of His Son is a slap in the face. It like being given a Lincoln Town Car, and then offering the giver a dollar for his kindness. Therefore, all service rendered to God must also be rendered graciously, that is, out of a thankful heart and not out of duty in the mind.
- Grace is not free. Though grace is given so that it does not cost us anything to us, men must keep in mind that it cost God everything. The result of God's grace is man's salvation. Salvation is given to believing men as a free gift, but it was secured exclusively through the costly sacrifice of God's only Son.
- Grace delivers the imperative, not so men can be accepted in God's sight, but because men are accepted in God's sight. The imperative does not define what saved men should be. Men are not defined by what they do, but by who they are. Because God has recreated men (2 Corinthians 5:17), his imperative appeals to the new creation, not to extract reluctant love, but to call a thankful heart into action. Service is the result of thankfulness, not necessity; of a proper response to grace, not law and punishment.
- God loves, not because of who we are, but because of who He is – a God of love and grace. Thus, the great secret in the Christian life is to consent to being loved though unworthy.

(1) See the ablative agency in Romans 3:22. The phrase "believe in Christ" is a subjective genitive (ablative of agency) and should be translated "faithfulness of Christ."

23. Faith Triumphs in Trials

Spurgeon's Devotional on Psalm 101:1

"I will sing of mercy and judgment."

Faith triumphs in trial. When reason is thrust into the inner prison, with her feet made fast in the stocks, faith makes the dungeon walls ring with her merry notes as she cries, "I will sing of mercy and of judgment. Unto thee, O Lord, will I sing." Faith pulls the black mask from the face of trouble, and discovers the angel beneath. Faith looks up at the cloud, and sees that

'Tis big with mercy and shall break

In blessings on her head."

There is a subject for song even in the judgments of God towards us. For, first, the trial is not so heavy as it might have been; next, the trouble is not so severe as we deserved to have borne; and our affliction is not so crushing as the burden which others have to carry. Faith sees that in her worst sorrow there is nothing penal; there is not a drop of God's wrath in it; it is all sent in love.

Faith discerns love gleaming like a jewel on the breast of an angry God. Faith says of her grief, *"This is a badge of honor, for the child must feel the rod"*; and then she sings of the sweet result of her sorrows, because they work her spiritual good.

Nay, more, says Faith, *"These light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."* So Faith rides forth on the black horse, conquering and to conquer, trampling down carnal reason and fleshly sense, and chanting notes of victory amid the thickest of the fray.

*"All I meet I find assists me
In my path to heavenly joy:
Where, though trials now attend me,
Trials never more annoy.*

*"Blest there with a weight of glory,
Still the path I'll ne'er forget,
But, exulting, cry, it led me
To my blessed Saviour's seat."*

24. The Day I Decided to Quit

One day I decided to quit...

I quit my job, my relationship, my spirituality... I wanted to quit my life.

I went to the woods to have one last talk with God. "God", I said. "Can you give me one good reason not to quit?"

His answer surprised me...



“Look around”, He said. “Do you see the fern and the bamboo?”

“Yes”, I replied. When I planted the fern and the bamboo seeds, I took very good care of them. I gave them light. I gave them water. The fern quickly grew from the earth. Its brilliant green covered the floor. Yet nothing came from the bamboo seed. But I did not quit on the bamboo.

In the second year the Fern grew more vibrant and plentiful.

And again, nothing came from the bamboo seed. But I did not quit on the bamboo.

He said. “In the third year, there was still nothing from the bamboo seed. But I would not quit. In the fourth year, again, there was nothing from the bamboo seed. “I would not quit.”

He said. “Then in the fifth year a tiny sprout emerged from the earth.

Compared to the fern it was seemingly small and insignificant...

But just 6 months later the bamboo rose to over 100 feet tall. It had spent FIVE YEARS growing roots.

Those roots made it strong and gave it what it needed to survive. I would not give any of my creations a challenge it could not handle.”

He said to me. “Did you know that all this time you have been struggling, you have actually been growing roots. I would not quit on the bamboo. I will never quit on you. Don’t compare you to others ...” He said. “The bamboo had a different purpose than the fern ... Yet, they both make the forest beautiful.

“Your time will come, “God said to me.” You will rise high! “How high should I rise?” I asked. How high will the bamboo rise?” He asked in return.” As high as it can?” I questioned. “Yes.” He said, “Give me glory by rising as high as you can.”

I left the forest and bring back this story. I hope these words can help you see that God will never give up on you. He will never give up on you. Never regret a day in your life. Good days give you happiness Bad days give you experiences;

Both are essential to life. A happy and meaningful life requires our continuous input and creativity. It does not happen by chance. It happens because of our choices and actions. And each day we are given new opportunities to choose and act and, in doing so, we create our own unique journey." Keep going...

Happiness keeps you Sweet. Trials keep you strong, Sorrows keep you human. Failures keep you humble. Success keeps you glowing, but Only God keeps You going!

Revised, Author Unknown:

courtesy of http://www.frtoommylane.com/stories/God/heart/fern_bamboo.htm

25. There is Light in the Darkness

Who turned out the lights?

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

First, He is the Father of light. Before us is a description of God, "*The Father of Lights.*" "*Lights*" is in the plural. The Christian God is not only the Father of natural light; He is the Father of moral light (ethos).

We know that natural light is a form of electromagnetic radiation in the form of a light wave that can be perceived with the human eye. There are all kinds of lights: star light, sunlight, flash lights, fluorescent light, etc. All natural light has its source in the God of Creation. He is the Father of natural light.



Second, He is the Father of moral light: "*He shall bring forth righteousness as the light*" (Psalm 37:6). Because He has revealed His law; and His law is a reflection of His character. His character is a light, the standard of righteousness, and the embodiment of all that is good and noble.

"The law is light" (Proverbs 6:23; Is. 8:20). Since the Christian religion is the source of morals, to reject His law is to reject God and all that is good. Because

He is good and always good, the text says He is the Source of “every good and perfect gift.”

Third, the text says about Him that “*there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*” While God is the Father of light, He is not the Father of shifting shadows: “*In Him is no darkness at all*” (1 John 1:5)¹.

While God is the author of all that is good, He is not the author of all that is sinfully evil. The problem is that man thinks in terms of dualities: good and evil, heat and cold, light and darkness, life and death. But, there is no such thing (entity) as cold, or darkness, or death. Darkness is not the opposite of light for darkness is not a substance. Darkness is the absence of light just as cold is the absence of heat and death is the absence of life.

Furthermore, our battle is not one of *good v. evil*, but of *truth v. lies*; of *righteousness v. sin*; of *God’s law v. man’s law*; of *God’s government v. man’s government*.

Morally speaking, there is no such object (entity) as evil. Evil is not a ghost in the darkness. It is not in the environment. Evil as a moral force is in men and it seen in man’s behavior. Evil is compared to darkness in the Bible. And since darkness is the absence light, evil is what happens when men do not have Christ ruling in their hearts. Evil is like the cold that comes when there is no heat or the darkness that comes when there is no light. You can have lots of heat, super heat, and scorching heat, little heat or no heat, but we don’t have any object called “cold.” Cold is simply a state where there is not heat.

Likewise, darkness is the absence of light. The great condemnation of men is that they “*loved darkness rather than the light*” (Jn. 3:19). Just as darkness is “*created*” when the lantern goes out, evil is said to be “*created*” when men reject light and God removes His lamp (Isaiah 29:10; 45:7).

The Scripture refers to this world as “*darkness*” —a place without the light of God. But, when Christ came, “*the light shineth in the darkness*” (John 1:5). In fact, Christ is the “*Light of the World*” and those who follow him will “*not walk in darkness*” (John 8:12); that is, they will have moral light and will not become factories of evil in the cosmos.

The point of James’s argument is that men should not blame God when they are tempted by sin. God is not the author of sin just as heat is not the author of an arctic blast. Just as bitter cold can result in frostbite, evil can rise up and bite men.

¹ Darkness here is a metaphor for sin and moral corruption.

Thus, all that is wrong with society can be linked to the absence of God in the hearts of men. Abortion, feminism, Sodomy, divorce, debt, murder, theft, and tyranny are the outcome of rejecting the Father of Lights. The list of sins in Romans one have a single source, the suppression of truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18, NAS).

To ban the Ten Commandments in the classroom or prayer in school is like turning out the lights. All that is good in society is a result of men walking in the light. All that is tragic among us can be linked to the rejection of the Father of Lights and the absence of His love at work in the hearts of men. Please turn the lights back on!

26. John Newton on Suffering

John Newton's "I Asked the Lord that I Might Grow."

*I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek, more earnestly, His face.*

*'Twas He who taught me thus to pray,
And He, I trust, has answered prayer!
But it has been in such a way,
As almost drove me to despair.*

*I hoped that in some favoured hour,
At once He'd answer my request;
And by His love's constraining pow'r,
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.*

*Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry pow'rs of hell
Assault my soul in every part.*

*Yea more, with His own hand He seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe;
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.*

*Lord, why is this, I trembling cried,
Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?
"Tis in this way, the Lord replied,*

I answer prayer for grace and faith.

*These inward trials I employ,
From self, and pride, to set thee free;
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou may'st find thy all in Me."*

27. If God Be For Us

Who can be against us?

Romans 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

This is arguably one of the greatest verses in the Bible.

It was John Calvin's life verse.

Furthermore, it was Melanchthon's favorite verse.

Two great men stood side by side in the early Reformation movement. One was Martin Luther, the thrashing activist, and the other was Philip Melanchthon, the refined scholar. Luther once said of their relationship:

I am rough, boisterous, stormy, and altogether warlike, fighting against innumerable monsters and devils. I am born for the removing of stumps and stones, cutting away thistles and thorns, and clearing the wild forests; but master Philippus comes along softly and gently, sowing and watering with joy, according to the gifts which God has abundantly bestowed upon him.

Where did Melanchthon get his strength? What made this gentle, retiring man stand with Luther against the crushing powers of the papacy?

The heart of the text, Romans 8:31, gives the answer:

If God be for us, who can be against us?

In his lectures and correspondence, that verse is quoted more than any other Scripture. It still hangs on his study wall in Wittenberg where visitors can see it.

As the record has it, when Melanchthon sensed he was dying he asked to be placed on a portable bed in his study because that is where he was happiest. When the pastor read Romans 8:31, Melanchthon exclaimed,

"Read those words again!"

The pastor by his side read,

“If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Melanchthon murmured in a kind of ecstasy, “That’s it! That’s it!”

This text had always been the greatest comfort to him. In the darkest hours of his life when death’s cold stare threatened, he comforted himself again by reciting, *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

Mounce:

“Nowhere in the annals of sacred literature do we find anything to match the power and beauty of this remarkable paean of praise.”

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown:

“This whole passage strikes all thoughtful interpreters and readers, as transcending almost everything in language”

William Newell explains our difficulty in appreciating our text:

Our weak hearts, prone to legalism and unbelief, receive these words with great difficulty: God is for us . . . They have failed Him; but He is for them. They are ignorant; but He is for them. They have not yet brought forth much fruit; but He is for them. (Romans 8: Expository Notes Verse by Verse)

You may assume that those of us who are always before the public speaking of the blessed promises of God are never downcast or heartbroken. You are mistaken. We have been there, and perhaps we know how to say a word in season to any who are now going through similar experiences. With many enterprises on my hands, far too great for my own unaided strength, I am often driven to fall flat on this promise of my God, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (see note Hebrews 13:5). (Unknown. Preceptaustin.org).

Newell is correct! We are legalists by nature with a performance-based theology. Men are too Armenian in their thinking. Life is not a matter of choices. There is a God who controls all things that we must come to know.

We feel like God is for us when we are dutiful to our Christian responsibilities, and we feel God is against us when we sin and fail Him. We feel God’s favor shines upon us when prosperity knocks at our door, and that God is against us when adversity storms our gate. With knowledge of His law our own weaknesses and failures fuel the furnace of doubt as to whether God is for us.

The marvelous truth in this text is that God is -

- greater than our weaknesses,
- greater than our sins,

- greater than our failures,
- greater than our disappointments,
- and greater than our adversaries.

It is no test of faith to believe God is with us when we succeed and have money in the bank, but it is a test of faith to believe God is with us when we fail and our purse is empty.

Thus, the great response of faith in Romans is to consent to be loved though unworthy; i.e., at all times, good and bad, to take sufficient comfort from the truth, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Observations About the Text

Literally, Romans 8:31 can be translated, *"If God for us, who against us?"*

This is the beginning of Paul's conclusion regarding his great treatise on the gospel of the Son of God (Romans 1-8).

"If God be for us" is a first class conditional in Greek and must be rendered, "Since God is for us . . ." *"If God is for us"* is not a question. The major premise is not in doubt. The question raised is whether an enemy can be equal to the power of Almighty God . . . and, the answer, of course, is a trumpet blast, "NO ONE!"

The *"us"* here does not refer to all men howbeit religious, or all Americans. It refers to Christians; that is, to His elect—to those who believe and are justified in His sight (See 8:28-30).

The word *"who"* can also be translated "what?" Since God is for us, there is no one or no circumstance that can be against us.

The word *"for"* (*hyper*) is a preposition meaning "above" or "around." If God surrounds us, who or what can break through His impregnable fortress to bury us? Nothing!

Note the word *"things."* It references our physical "weakness" (8:26) and "sufferings" in this present evil age (8:18).

All pain, agony, and terror connected with sickness and disease and poverty are simply summed up under the term *"these things."* All our mammoth concerns about life and death are shriveled into two words: *"these things"*—*"things"* which are degraded as having little weight in the big scheme of God's redemptive plan.

Denney adds:

The idea underlying all that precedes is that of the suffering to be endured by those who would share Christ's glory (Rom. 8:17-note). The

apostle has disparaged the suffering in comparison with the glory (Rom. 8:18-note); he has interpreted it (Rom. 8:19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 as in a manner prophetic of the glory; he has in these last verses asserted the presence through all the Christian's life of an eternal victorious purpose of love: all this is included in 'these things.' (Nicoll, W Robertson, Editor: Expositors Greek Testament: 5 Volumes. Out of print. Search Google)

This promise applies to legal matters. All the apostles faced false accusations by pagan accusers in man's lawless courts. All died under a court sentence.

When Chrysostom was brought before the Roman Emperor, the Emperor threatened him with banishment if he remained a Christian. Chrysostom replied,

"Thou canst not banish me for this world is my father's house."

"But I will slay thee," said the Emperor.

"Nay, thou canst not," said the noble champion of the faith, "for my life is hid with Christ in God."

"I will take away thy treasures."

"Nay, but thou canst not for my treasure is in heaven and my heart is there."

"But I will drive thee away from man and thou shalt have no friend left."

"Nay, thou canst not, for I have a friend in heaven from whom thou canst not separate me. I defy thee; for there is nothing that thou canst do to hurt me."

On this text, Ray Stedman illustrates as follows:

"Now, that is a wonderful statement, and, in times of doubt, I suggest that you try to answer these questions...Now, what is the effect of this realization? It is clear from this passage that it is the removal of fear. If God is for us, who can be against us? All fear of successful opposition is removed. It is not that there is no opposition. The Law is still there, the Sin nature is still there, the flesh nature is still there — there is still going to be opposition (1Pe 2:11-note Gal 5:16-note; Gal 5:17-note; Gal 5:18-note). But Paul is saying, "If God is for us, what difference does it make?" A few weeks ago at our elders' meeting, Barney Brogan was telling us about his grandson. His daughter has moved to Missouri with the boys. As some of you know, their father is Chicano, and the children look like their dad. Their 13-year-old ran into a tremendous nest of White Supremacy at school. Because of the prejudice against blacks and Chicanos, that little innocent lad began to suffer very unjust torment

and persecution. He didn't understand it; he came home weeping, beaten up because of his looks. His mother didn't know what to do, and so she wrote and asked us to pray for this situation, and we did. A week or so later a letter came back and described how one night the biggest kid in school appeared at their door and said that he was a Christian, that he knew they were Christians, and that he had come to tell them that he had gone to every kid in school who had beat up on the boy and told them that if they ever did anything like that again, they would answer to him. I don't know what that boy's name was, but let's call him Mike. I can imagine this little boy going back to school, walking in the shadow of Mike, with all his tormentors looking at him. He probably would be saying to himself, "If Mike is for me, who can be against me?" That is what God is saying here." (If God be For Us)

A Concluding Thought

The opposite of this thought is also true: *If God be against you, who can be for you?* If you are God's enemy, your blessings are temporary and your troubles are permanent. Your pleasures are like the dew which quickly disappears; and your pains are like boulders on your chest. Whether you have adversity or prosperity, so long as God is against you, you face eternal perils.

Consider this: *If God be against me, what then?* What will become of me when eternity knocks at my door? What will happen to me when I die? How can I stand in the Day of Judgment?

Just as there is certainty for the child of God that God is for him, there is certainty for the Christ-neglector that God is against him. Nothing he owns will shadow him from the fires of judgment.

"If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Though earth, hell, and all their armies come against you, IF the Lord of Hosts surrounds your camp, you shall scatter them like toy soldiers. When Hezekiah went to bed in Jerusalem with the Assyrian army around his throat, he woke up to vultures feeding on the dead bodies Sennacherib's soldiers.

Likewise, you shall know the favor of the Lord for all eternity.

Part 2
Scriptural
Perspectives on Specific Trials



*“ . . . the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold . . . ” – 1
Peter 1:7*

28. Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled

John 14:1

"Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me."

Trouble is like a thief that can rob our soul of peace. Financial reversals, a health crisis, and tattered relationships break the peace.

Our text was spoken by Christ at the Last Supper.

The disciples did not understand that in few short hours their world centered on Jesus would collapse. The Savior would soon to be indicted and executed. Their hopes would be dashed in the dust.

Our Lord knew the difficulties his disciples would face following His arrest. In His discourse, He prepared His followers to receive peace—His peace.

Because so many have the peace the world offers, they do not need His peace (John 14:27). But, Christ offered His special peace to those at war with the world and its pride and lusts.

First, peace comes to those who resist the world's attempt to control men. The word "*trouble*" in verse one is a general term for "anxiety and adversity." The verb "let not" is a present imperative commanding us to resist the relentless effort by our adversaries to capture our hearts through fear, terror, anger, and depression; that is, there are joy robbers seeking to plunder our delight and peace in Christ (v. 27). Resist, resist, resist. It is a command.

Secondly, Jesus prepared his disciples to receive peace by giving them truth. What truths in John 14 do you think would bring peace to the troubled hearts of the disciples? Notice that there is truth about Christ, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. If we truly understand the Trinity's deep commitment to us, we would not give into the enemies of peace so easily.

I once saw a prize winning picture with the theme of peace. It was a painting of a mother bird under a huge waterfall feeding her little birds. All around her was the crushing water that could have ended her life and the horrendous sounds of bone crushing torrents falling on the rocks below. But, she was safe doing her job as a mother. This is what we need—the ability to live in a turbulent world with "His peace." Let not your heart be troubled. He commands it twice in this chapter because he knew that trouble would come upon all men. But, even in the upheavals of life, we can enjoy His peace.

"The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man is perfected without trials." — Chinese proverb

29. Prone to Exaggeration

Man's overt concern about the affairs of this life

Romans 8:18 For I reckon (logizomai) that the sufferings (negative passions) of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed (apocalupto) in us.

The Problem with Christian Men:

Men tend to possess great concerns about this life, but minimize values in the life to come.

Men exaggerate the importance of present matters while diminishing the importance of future realities.

Men tend to relax their grasp on the eternal while increasing their grip on the temporal.

In pursuing the tyranny of the urgent men neglect the important things that are permanent.

Moreover, it is much easier to do wrong, than to suffer wrong – to pursue earth's pleasure than heaven's treasures– to praise prosperity, and to curse poverty – to do what is natural instead of what is spiritual.

The Spirit, however, teaches men to free themselves from these temporal chains. Biblical instruction summons men to calculate and embrace kingdom hope.

The word "*reckon*" (*logizomai*) in our text means "to consider," "to count," "to calculate," and "to think." It is a mental exercise; that is, start considering the glories of the age to come and rejoice now in our future inheritance.

The Blessings of Christian men

Think this way! Rejoice now! Take comfort in the promises of Christ.

Time can be compared to time; material things to physical things; but time cannot be compared with eternity. The pains of this life will come to an end; but the glory of the life to come has no end!

Moon light shall yield to sun light. Today's sorrows shall give way to tomorrow's glory. Though poor now, the riches of the kingdom belong to us. Let us stop exaggerating the importance of present matters, and let us be energized by future realities.

Luke 6:20 A Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.

Let No Man Mourn

*Let no one grieve at his poverty,
for the universal kingdom has been revealed.
Let no one mourn that he has fallen again and again;
for forgiveness has risen from the grave.
Let no one fear death, for the Death of our Savior has set us free.
He has destroyed it by enduring it.*

—John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople; sermon, ca. 400

30. Weary by Worry

Matthew 6:24-35

“No man can serve two masters.”



Our fatigue is often not caused by work, but by worry and frustration. It is true, “A day of worry is more exhausting than a week of work.”

The bad news about worry is that it is a sin. The good news about worry, if you can call it good news, is that it is a socially acceptable sin.

Let’s analyze the following text.

24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

The command “*take no thought for your life*” is preceded by a powerful enacting clause regarding the Source of authority: “*Therefore, I say unto you.*” The “*I*” refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. Man has no authority from heaven to worry.

“*Take no thought for your life*” is a 16th century translation that doesn’t resonate well with modern men. The better translation is, “*Be not anxious for your life.*” The old Shakespearian word “*take no thought*” contained the concept of anxiety; but, over time, the term “*thought*” shed its connection with worry.

The Greek verb for “worry” is *merimnate* — a present, active imperative meaning “do not be continually being anxious;” that is, live each minute of your life with a worry-free mind.

The verb *merimnate* comes from the Greek verb *merimnao* which means “to divide.”

Notice verse 25 begins with “*Therefore*” directing the reader to the previous statement; that is, verse 24 is also concerned about divided loyalties and the impossibility of serving two masters: God and money.

A worried person is divided between today and tomorrow; trusting God and possessing money; walking by faith and walking by sight; between believing God’s promises and believing one’s fears; between painful concerns about human needs and trusting God to supply all that a man needs.

Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows; it empties today of strength.

This command does not condemn planning for the future or preparing a list of goals. Jesus condemns anxiety. Our Lord pierces the proneness of men to be constantly agitated by life’s challenges and to doubt God’s tender, loving care. Worry is a sin that needs to be replaced with faith in God’s promises — a faith combined with responsibility and attention to duty — a faith empty of fear and doubt.

“*Is not life more than . . .*” grinding-work to meet our physical and material needs? Isn’t life about finding answers to the big questions: (A) How did I get here? (B) Where am I going? (C) Is there a God? (D) Is there life after death? (E) If there is a God, where is He? How can I know him? (F) If the God of the Bible is a true God, what does He require of me? (G) Can I trust Him?

To live a worry-free life takes a knowledge of God’s Word. Moreover, it takes an act of the will to resist the tyranny of the urgent.

If a problem is out your hands, don’t let it rent space for a jam session in your mind.

May the Lord help us all.

31. Managing Guilt in Your Life

Claiming the Benefits of the Cross by faith

Hebrews 10:14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Introduction

Do you have an elephant on your chest? Perhaps you are a Christian. You know that Christ died for your sins, but you still feel the weight of sin. If so, this message is for you.

Perhaps you do not feel any guilt at all . . . and that is also a concern.

Guilt is that voice in a healthy conscience telling the man that he has broken God's law. It is not psychological guilt, it is true guilt; that is, it is God telling the man that he will have to face God's bar of justice and give account for his actions.

What happened to sin? What happened to guilt? Pop psychology sends a message there is no right or wrong, no moral standards, and, therefore no guilt. Adultery? No problem if it's a meaningful relationship. Abortion? No problem, the United States has made it legal. Queer acts. No problem, it belongs to a stuffy ancient religious system that has been replaced by reasonable modern values. In other words, guilty has clearly been psychologized away by sophisticated pundits.

But, if you have an educated working conscience, you may hear that little voice inside telling you that you have violated God's law. If so, this message is for you.

In the Book of Hebrews, the author, probably Paul, taught the original readers about the superiority of Christ's sacrificial death to the entire Levitical system in the Old Testament (OT). Here is his message. It is powerful, but it can only be appreciated and appropriated by men and women of mature faith; that is, a simple heart that believes what God says is true.

The Reasoning of Hebrews Ten

The author informs his readers what the OT Levitical system could not do; that is, he asserts the defects of the system. Secondly, he informs the reader about the superior accomplishment of Christ and how guilt has been effectively dealt with at the cross.

Defects of the Levitical Sacrifices

Hebrews 10:1 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

First, the Levitical system was not a true remedy for sin. It was only a shadow or form or icon or type of what was to come; that is, the entire sacrificial system publicized the necessity of Christ's work on the cross.

Second, the Levitical system could not perfect the one seeking to draw near to God. The word "*perfect*" (*teleioo*) means "to mature, to make whole, or fully

effectively remove guilt." For every violation of God's law, the trespasser needed another sacrifice. One sacrifice was not sufficient to deal with the growing guilt in a sinner's life.

Hebrews 10:2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin?

Third, the Levitical system could not cleanse the conscience; that is, the shed blood of lambs and goats could not purify, remove, or cleans the conscience of sin. That little siren within was never silent.

Fourth, the Levitical system could not remove the memory of sin. The word "*conscience*" means with knowledge. Even after an OT worshiper offered his lamb, his conscience could still remember his sins; and, because he could remember his sin, his spiritual alarm clock kept ringing.

Hebrews 10:3-4 But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Fifth, the Levitical system required a yearly accounting of sins; that is, every year sins had to be recalled, recounted, and the debt reassessed. People were debtors. They thought like debtors; and, they had to appraise their debt every year. This was slavery and continual debt slavery. This was not imaginary debt, but real debt owed to the Creator.

Sixth, the author reminds us that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin from human beings; that is, there is not equity.

Some background is necessary. All religions around the world, including Judaism, Islam, and the Hindu faiths are religions of human achievement. Produce good, and you go to heaven; produce evil and you will be eternally punished. Christianity is totally different in that the Christian faith recognizes that debt to the Eternal Spirit must be paid for with blood; that blood is the currency of the spirit world. The man who sins must be redeemed from his debt with blood. Adam and Eve, Abel, Noah, Abraham and the nation of Israel recognized blood is the currency of the spirit world; and, therefore, brought animal sacrifices to the table of redemption. They were correct in that God required payment in blood. However, animal blood was insufficient to pay for sin's debt. This required the death of a perfect man.

Hebrews 10:6 in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.

Seventh, animal sacrifices did not please the Creditor. The sinner is in debt to God. His sin must be paid for in blood . . . but animal blood was insufficient payment and did not satisfy the debt. It would take the blood of a perfect man to discharge the complete debt.

Having discussed the defects of the Levitical system, the author eagerly moves on to discuss the sufficiency of the death of Christ. In fact, God abolished the Levitical system and replaced it with Christ and the Cross of Calvary.

The Supremacy of the Sacrifice of Christ

Hebrews 10:10 And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

First, the sacrifice of Christ accomplishes total sanctification. By "*sanctified*," the author is not addressing "Christian piety," but a **once for all** settling of the debt; that is, through the cross, the sinner's debt is wiped clean.

The word "*sanctified*" means "holy, or pure, or clean." The ledger is zeroed out, the debt abolished. With sin paid for, there is no deficit, no liability. The sinner can start thinking like a creditor instead of a debtor.

Hebrews 10:14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Second, the one-time sacrifice is said to make the seeking sinner whole. The word "*perfected*" means to "make whole" or "to complete the payment."

For example, if you are in a car accident and you total the other driver's car, you have to make him whole; that is, you have to replace his automobile. If you pay for the damage done, he is made whole and you are no longer on the hook for a debt. This is what happened at Calvary. In a human sense, Jesus paid the debt to satisfy His justice.

With the debt eliminated, the debtor is no longer a debtor; he is free from debt duty. Notice the verb "*perfected*." It is a perfect, active indicative referring to something in the past that has present effect. Furthermore, it gets even better. The debtor is no longer a debtor, he is a creditor. That is, due to the wonders of the cross, the sinner can never be in debt again. The blood cleanses and continues to cleanse. His standing before God is secure.

Hebrews 10:16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,"

Third, the sacrifice of Christ enabled God to regenerate the man. Christ not only cleanses the sinner, he creates a righteous man. The phrase "put my laws on their hearts . . . minds" is a reference to the regenerating power that is at work in men who come to Christ as their remedy for sin. He not only eliminates debt, he enriches the believer with a capacity and longing to do what is right. This is regeneration, the new birth.

Hebrews 10:17 then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

Fourth, as a result of the death of Christ, God forgets sins. So effective is the death of Christ at removing sin the stain of sin, God announces His forgetfulness. If God has forgotten our sin, why do we still remember it? Oh, to be more Divine and less human. Yes, we may have an elephant of guilt on our chest, but it is there because we are not taking sufficient comfort in the promises of God.

Thus, the Spirit is calling us to perfect our faith; that is, to believe in Christ's work of redemption on Calvary and to take comfort therein. If the perfect sacrifice of the perfect man is sufficient to remedy our debt before a holy, perfect God. Moreover, the believing man can not only be comforted by Christ's accomplishments but to fully, truly, completely rejoice as a forgiven man.

Hebrews 10:18 Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Sixth, the sacrifice of Christ cancels our debt to God. The word "*forgiveness*" means "to send away." What was sent away was the elephant on our chest, our sins and our debt. Our sins were taken off us and place on God's Lamb. He not only paid for our sins, but the pain it caused the Father. Our debt completely discharged, we have no duty to the debt.

Our sins are no longer our responsibility, so stop fretting. Enjoy the blessings of forgiveness. **Know it; believe it; enjoy it!**

Hebrews 10:18-23 Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Seventh, the accomplishments of Christ infuse us with assurance. No longer are we filled with fear. Rather, there is a boldness to approach God because of the cleaning power of the blood. His blood inspires confidence. His blood was the currency the Spirit required to pay for the debt of sinners.

With the debt paid, and the Creditor satisfied, there is confidence to approach God . . . something which OT people did not have. Everything in the Levitical system said God is holy. Stay out! But, the cross inspires men to pray and seek God and serve Him.

Managing guilt? It has been legally dealt with at the cross? Feelings of guilt? These are softened and silenced by the knowledge of cross, and the kind of faith that takes comfort in the promises of God.

32. Dealing with Disappointments

Opportunities in Disguise

"We want to avoid suffering, death, sin, ashes. But we live in a world crushed and broken and torn, a world God himself visited to redeem. We receive his poured-out life, and being allowed the high privilege of suffering with Him, may then pour ourselves out for others." Elizabeth Elliot

Psalm 34:19-20 "Many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivereth him out of them all

- Disappointments hurt . . . but in them all, there are opportunities to go deeper into Christ.
- Disappointments hurt . . . but God can use them to help a man grow in pursuing the will of God.
- More Christians suffer at the hands of men because they are righteous than for any other reason.
- God will both support His people under their trials, and will also put an end to those trials when He has accomplished His holy purpose thereby. "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." (Author unknown).

"The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit"
- Psalm 34:18

- Trials will come . . . but He will not allow a trial to enter the sanctuary of the soul to destroy the foundations of a man . . . "He keeps all his bones, none of his bones will be broken." (34:20).

2 Corinthians 4:8-10 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

- The promises in Psalm 34 are preceded by an exhortation to fear the Lord (34:9). Trusting God in the furnace of affliction is always hard, but it is the most important thing a man can do.

"We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God"

(Acts 14:22).

- If the Captain of our salvation was “*made perfect through suffering*,” how much more are trials necessary to make us whole and complete (Hebrews 2:10).
- The hopes in this age are always less than the marvelous promises in the age to come.
- “Seeking first the kingdom of God” is sadly less important in the minds of men that food, shelter, and clothing; therefore, men experience great grief when they experience setbacks in this life (Matthew 6:33).
- Great grief awaits those who pursue the power and pleasures of this life.
- The most powerful people on earth are givers and not takers: “*Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength*” (Psalm 29:1).
- True men accept disappointments as His appointments because they are in hot pursuit of His will: “*Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done!*”

“Disappointment to a noble soul is what cold water is to burning metal; it strengthens, tempers, intensifies, but never destroys it” – Elizabeth Tabor.

- Disappointments are necessary for men to stir their affections for the perfections of Him Who is Altogether Lovely.
- Show me a man who has never been disappointed, and I’ll show you a man who has never taken a risk. *They best way to avoid disappointment is to never believe God for anything.*
- Show me a child that has everything it wants, and I’ll show you a child that no man can live with.
- What a divine dilemma! God is a giver of good gifts from Heaven; but, men pursue godawful stuff on earth; He wants us to have that which lasts for eternity while we are easily satisfied with things that belong to time. Men want better stuff while God wants us to have the best of His Spirit (Luke 11:13).
- The poorest men on earth want everything. The poorest women on earth complain about all the things they don’t have. Who can live with a person who wants the best the world has to offer or is only aware of what they don’t possess?

The poorest saints are often the happiest people because they thank God for everything.

- It takes no spirituality to turn down the worst the world has to offer, but it takes faith and maturity to turn down the best the world has to offer.
- Disappointment is God's way of weaning us from the love of the world that we might increase our affections for the kingdom of God.
- Experiencing darkness enable us to appreciate the light.
- Let no man be sad that he does not have the riches of this world because the riches of kingdom of heaven is available to him.
- Christ is able to give us all that we want, but if we received all that we want, would we be of no use to Him?
- God may say no to the good we want in order that we may experience the best of what He wants.
- Why pray if you have everything you need? The poorest saint has need of nothing because the Lord is his everything (Revelation 3:14-22)
- Timing is critical. God may want to give you what you desire, but not yet. "Ask . . . Seek . . . knock." Goals obtained by hard-prayer will be more appreciated than wants obtained by easy cash.
- Note the precious optimism of Christ about the possibilities of prayer: "Ask and it SHALL BE GIVEN . . . Seek and you SHALL FIND . . . Knock and it SHALL BE OPEN UNTO YOU!"
- To be disappointed with self is to have trusted in self.
- Jesus denied himself the necessities of life (bread) in the desert (Matthew 4:1ff), but provided luxuries (wine) to others in a small town (John 2).
- Poor men want good gifts; but, spiritual men give sacrificial gifts; poor men want more in their pockets, while the pockets of God's men are often empty.
- The poor man wants it all – big houses, fast cars, and fast-women, while God's man forsakes all to follow Christ.
- Good men take their disappointments to God while seeking to enrich those around them. They endure the pain of disappointment in order that others may enjoy pleasures in Christ.
- Less is more!
- A man that is happy with little is better than he that can only be happy with much " . . . because one's life is not in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15).

33. Loneliness in Lonely Times

"No man careth for my soul" - Psalm 142:4

"Loneliness!" Just the word sounds lonely.

Loneliness is not the same as being alone. Loneliness is feeling alone. Though you are in a crowd of people you feel like a leper. It is the feeling no one cares . . . of being isolated, out of touch, and disconnected.

There are several reasons pious people feel alone.

1. Feeling lonely may not be all your fault.

We live in lonely times where people are swirling in a pool of self-interest. When is the last time you had a conversation with another where that person asked you a question about you . . . your life . . . and the condition of your soul? Probably, years or never!

We are alone, born alone, die alone, and live life with companions who know how to make us feel like an abandoned toy soldier stuffed away in an attic. The truth is that the world cannot love anyone but its own. The world cannot give, it can only take. David said of his own generation, *"No man careth for my soul" (Psalm 142:4)*.

The remedy is to "hang around" true Christian people — people who have been delivered from self-centeredness by the redeeming power of the Lord Jesus Christ. These communities are not easy to find, but they are out there.

2. The more self-centered you are, the more lonely you will feel.

The more you get sucked into the vortex of your inner self by the magnet of self-interest, the lonelier you feel. You are lonely because no one is as interested in the subject of your "me, my, and I" as you are.

The remedy to loneliness caused by overactive self-interest is to dive into the universe of God's love in order to become a person of love . . . to cut wood and stoke the fire of love; that is, to start taking a true interest in other people; to be friendly; to ask them questions about themselves . . . to listen . . . and to unplug your ears while you bite your tongue to keep yourself from talking about your "me, my, and I."

Ask people questions about their experiences and what they know and they will think you are the greatest conversationalist on earth!! (Dale Carnegie).



Proverbs 18:24 "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly."

3. There is a type of loneliness caused by your choice to walk with God.

"And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." - Genesis 5:24

*"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹
If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." - John 15:18-19*

The more you walk with the Lord, the fewer people will appreciate your pursuit of God. The higher your calling, the lonelier you will feel. The closer you get to the top of the mountain, the fewer people you will meet on the trail. The more dignified you become, the more the beer and pretzel crowd will avoid you. The more you know, the less people will know what you know. The older you get, the more the youth cult will ignore you.

The compliant have many friends, but lonely are the brave. Jeremiah had many people in his audience, but only One Fan.

"And do not enter a house where there is feasting and sit down to eat and drink. . . . Before your eyes and in your days I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in this place." - Jeremiah 16:1-5, 8-9

The key here is to enjoy drawing near to God . . . to make Him your all in all . . . to walk by faith knowing that God knows and sees:

"Cast all your care upon Him for He careth for you." - 1 Peter 5:7

A second key to unlock the doors of loneliness is to lower your expectations of other people. The more unrealistic your expectations of others, the lonelier you will feel. Who can live up to your designs? Lower your expectations and you will feel less disappointment.

A third key is to vigorously pursue a few close friends. These kinds of people are as rare as diamonds on the sidewalk, but if you find one, treat this person as a precious treasure.

"A man that hath friends must show himself friendly, and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." - Proverbs 18:24

34. Anxiety Over Politics

Psalm 37:1-2

"Fret not"

Mark Twain observed that the tendency of politics is

"to lodge all power in one party and keep it there is to insure bad government and the sure and gradual deterioration of the public morals. (Autobiographical dictation, 24 January 1906. Published in Autobiography of Mark Twain, Volume 1 (University of California Press, 2010)

During these days when we are bombarded with negative news, it is a challenge to be calm.

It seems impossible to escape the clenching jaws and grinding teeth of Demonrats news organizations determined on turning American into a third-world hellhole.

Again, Mark Twain's insights seem relevant:

"I am quite sure now that often, very often, in matters concerning religion and politics a man's reasoning powers are not above the monkey's" (Ibid).

Political primates dizzy with utopian dreams advocate legalization of all drugs, open borders, catch and release, increase in taxes, a grant of privileges to Queers, normalization of transvestitism, and the death of all white men in the United States.

Who has not been shocked by the vulgarity, F-bombs, finger signs, and sewer slurs of political opponents coming across the airwaves in America? It is so bad that even CNN had to censor Tom Arnold, one of their own, for his denigrating loin language of Donald Trump (June 23, 2018).

Is there hope for godly causes?

How should a Christian respond to the enemies of goodness and the vitriol he can't control?

God's Word provides an answer:

Psalm 37:1-2 "Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb."

The Command: "Fret not because of evildoers"

The word "*fret*" (*charah*) means "to burn, to be angry, or to beat oneself with vexation." It is translated "wax hot with anger," "very wroth," and "anger was

kindled." It is a Hithpael verb meaning "*don't cause yourself to burn with anger.*"

The cause of anger is the words and actions of evildoers in positions of political power.

This is a problem common to righteous men who care about their country.

If a man is not grieved by the malice and X-rated contempt flowing from the acid tongues of men (and women) something is wrong with him.

Peter Fonda's vulgar tweet comes to mind:

"We should rip Barron Trump from his mother's arms and put him in a cage with pedophiles" (June 20, 2018)

A righteous heart will be pricked by tasteless promotion of cures by those who spit out profanity against their opponents. While righteous hearts react to the blasphemy and arrogance of these gutter-sippers, it must be controlled.

Thus, we have the command, "*Fret not.*" The order is clear: don't allow yourself to burn with anger over the actions of the poly-tics or envy their cavalier boldness and rooster strutting.

God gives us the reason we should not stoke the fires of anger.

The Promise: "*for they shall be cut down like grass.*"

The word "*cut down*" is the same word translated "*circumcise*" -- a rather graphic image of severance. The wicked grow like pigweeds, but God promises they will be chopped down like unwanted thistles.

Think of a few of the bizarre politicians and nasty power brokers that have been lopped from power due to corruption and sex scandals in recent times.

The following are in the news (2016-2023): Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, Producer Harvey Weinstein, FBI Director James Comey, FBI Agent Peter Strzok, Representative Al Franken, German Chancellor Angela Merkle, Syrian President Suddam Hussein, journalist Matt Laurer, Journalist Charlie Rose, CNN host Larry King, Journalist Geraldo Rivera, Actor Kevin Spacey, U.S. Congressman John Conyers, Hunter Biden et al., and Representative Tim Murphy.

The LORD is sovereign and He will wield his sickle to circumcise these proud stalks in His own good time.

Rest in the Lord . . . and study how He is plucking up the weeds now.

35. God's Sovereignty Over Pandemics

Isaiah 54:16 "Behold, I have created the smith

We live in a world where the leaders of countries are releasing their injections of death upon unsuspecting people.

We ask, "Where is God in this mess?"

As the death-cult progresses and we experience the struggles of a plandemic, it is important to remember the following Scripture:

First, God creates destroyers.

Isaiah 54:16 "Behold, I have created the smith (blacksmith) that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument (weapons) for his work; and I have created the waster (destroyer) to destroy.

The smith is the blacksmith or craftsman with skills to create weapons of war: swords, battle axes, and hammers.

The "*waster*" or "*destroyer*" refers to ancient kings like Tiglath-Pileser, Sargon, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus who used their armies to conquer and control the nations.

The "*I*" in this passage refers to the LORD God who creates the craftsman who fashions weapons and the destroyer who uses them — armies of soldiers who wield the sword to kill and maim.

As we face nations governed by psychopaths hell-bent on injecting every man woman and child with the Covid blood-clot jab, let us remember "None can do a hurt that God does not allow" (Pulpit Commentary).

Let us recast this verse in light of the Covid-plandemic perspective:

Isaiah 54:16 "Behold, I have created the medical engineer that manufactures serums, syringes, and needles; and I have created medical practitioners to injure and kill many.

Second, God protects the righteous.

Isaiah 54:17: "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.

The "*thee*" or "*you*" in this passage refers to the remnant of Israel, the surviving exiles, or the new Israel re-fashioned by the severity of the Babylonian deportation.

The term "*weapon*" refers to the weapons of war. Bioweapons are weapons of war against the fake problem of over-population

The word "*tongue*" is a metaphor for legal-accusers with criminal accusations against God's people.

This is a promise of protection for the exiles; i.e., the Lord did not appoint a destroyer to decimate them nor did he subject the remnant to accusation and courtroom prosecutions.

The security of the new Israel did not rest in the wisdom or prowess of the remnant, but in their righteousness. Because the remnant was right with God, He protected them from the wasters, destroyers, and military killers.

The lesson for us is clear. Medical destroyers are created by God, but God will protect the righteous from the wasters, destroyers, jabbers, killers, Pollyanna doctors, mass murderers, and federal prosecutors.

Stand strong in the Lord, and emphatically refuse to have your temple (body) injected with the blood-clot jab (Proverbs 1:10)!

Likewise, political and financial destroyers are created by God, but those who are right with their Creator will be protected from the decimators.

More Texts on the Sovereignty of God

Genesis 50:20 "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

God is greater than the evil intents of man, and exercises veto power over the plans of sinners. Joseph's brothers hated him and sold him as a slave to a caravaner headed for Egypt. In this instance, God used their treachery as integrity training for Joseph, exalted him as Vice Regent of Egypt, and used the Hebrew to not only save Jacob's family from famine, but the whole nation of Egypt from starvation.

Deuteronomy 32:39 "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand."

The first word in the sentence is the imperative "See." And, we would do well to obey it!

In contrast to the idols of the day, the Spirit emphasizes the solitariness of the true God. While there are many pretenders, the LORD is the only self-existent,

self-contained, self-satisfied God in need of naught. His creation adds nothing to him.

The adverb "*no*" in the second sentence is in the emphatic position! What a rebuke to modern man that views all religions as equal . . . as good . . . as one of many roads to Heaven. Few, however, talk about many roads to hell.

The pronouns "*I*" "*I*" (*ani ani*) are in the emphatic position in this sentence. While He is, others are NOT! He is the Great I Am. He was, IS, and will be what his children need him to be.

Are we too quick to attribute death to the Devil and healing to nature? God kills and so can men. But, only the LORD can make men alive. He wounds (shattering bones - Numbers 24:8), and so can men, but only the LORD can heal broken hearts and broken bones. The Great "I Am" claims exclusive agency over death and life, injury and healing.

To his people, the Great "*I Am*" is the Arbitrator of life and death; the Source of prosperity and adversity; the Wounder and Healer of men. But to his enemies, the Lord's hand is an invincible fortress from which rebels cannot escape. There are no fugitives from his omnipotent eye and vice-grip grasp.

1 Samuel 2:6-8 "The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world."

Comment: Death and life, heaven and hell, riches and poverty, fame and obscurity come from the same sovereign LORD. Nothing in the affairs of men is left to chance. Caring Providence administered by the God to whom Hannah prayed is universal. He is not far from any of us (Acts 17:27). Because we know the sweets and the bitter of this life belong to Him, believers can rely upon His wisdom, love, and power to guide them. He can change circumstances in a moment: "*He lifts up the needy.*"

"*pillars of the earth*" is a metaphor for the stability of a flat earth. While circumstances change, the limited cosmos does not.

1 Chronicles 29:11-12 "Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all."

In King David's state of the union address he announces the completion of his plans to build the nation a temple for God and offers this prayer to the Lord.

"Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty:" David attributes all that men admire to the Lord: greatness and fame, power and strength, glory and beauty, victory and supremacy, majesty and honor.

for all that is in the heaven and in the earth [is thine]; Because all things are made by Him, they belong to Him. He exercises exclusive rights over all things just as the creator of a thing has every right to do.

"thine is the kingdom, O Lord; David attributes ownership and authority over all creatures to the Lord. He rules as the One and Only Sovereign."

"and thou art exalted as head above all;" Headship, authority, dominion, and right to rule angels in heaven and men on earth belongs to God alone. The NT informs us that Christ is the Head of man, the Head of rulers, and the Head of the church (Colossians 1:25-18; 2:8-12; Revelation 1:5).

"Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all:"

Wealth, fame, political power, and strength are given by God to the noble and ignoble, that in the end God may be glorified in His dispensation of justice and mercy throughout history.

Perhaps God is more glorified by our obedience to Him in times of poverty, defamation, and ill health than He would be if we were healthy and wealthy; and, that the glory of His justice on the rich and famous on the day of judgment will be more apparent to those who have been greatly grieved by their wickedness and blasphemies.

2 Chronicles 20:6 "And said, O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?"

When the Moabites and Ammonites marched their armies from the east sea into Judah to plunder Jerusalem, lips trembled and knees knocked. Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast and prayed. Relying upon the omnipresence, authority, and sovereignty of the LORD God, he trusted the destiny of his people to infinite hands infused with unstoppable, unmovable, iron power. The results of faith in God's love for them, the invaders were knocked dead by songs of faith sung by a Levitical special operations corps who formed the tip of the spear for Israel's armed forces.

Job 12:10, 13-14 "In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind . . . With him is wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding. Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening."

Job's theology confessed God's disposition over the souls of mankind. Paul said, "in Him we live, move, and have our being." In his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," Jonathan Edwards' theology taught God holds sinners over the fires of Hell in the same way a mischievous boy holds a spider over a fire . . . that the miscreants are powerless to escape God's prisons.

In the course of life, men face two problems: (1) they don't know what to do; and, (2) they know what to do, but don't have the power to do it.

But, God? He knows what to do (wisdom), and he has the power to do it (strength). He knows what works ("counsel") and why it works ("understanding"). Though His infinite and unsearchable wisdom descends to the deepest sea and ascends to the highest stars, He is the fountain of all blessing and the river that delivers it at the feet of men.

What God ruins, no man can restore! Whether He breaks the Tower of Babel, Sodom, Thebes, or Tyre, who can rebuild it to its former glory?

The doors that God shuts, no man can open! Whether it be a government prison, the chains and fetters of sin, the Gates of Eden, the cycle of poverty, the unyielding grave, the doors of heaven or the doors of hell, who can open it? (Psalm 88:8; Psalms 142:7; John 11:43; Matthew 25:10-13; Genesis 3:23 Genesis 3:24; Luke 16:26).

Psalm 103:19 The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.

God's kingdom is not of this world nor does he appeal to man-made jurisdictions to establish his rule on earth. His kingdom is based on His authority. It is not limited by time and space; He reigns over all of nature, all men, all the time, in every place. All governments, therefore, are responsible to acknowledge His authority and to surrender to it.

Psalm 115:3 "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases."

Unlike idols made of earthen clay that can only be in one place at one time, the LORD is in the heavens. The Dogmatics of the psalmist informs us that Elohim is not limited by time, space, and matter. There is no limit to God's knowledge, presence, or power. His pleasure controls the destiny of all mankind. What he wills blossoms in the garden of history. His will cannot be frustrated, stonewalled, or defeated. God runs the universe! Christ "upholds all things by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3)! Just as a dime cannot stop a turbine diesel Pacific Union Coal DTEL running from Chicago to New Orleans, all the

nickel and dime schemes of rebels, renegades, and revolutionaries cannot derail the locomotives pulling the boxcars of God's will from eternity through time.

Proverbs 16:1 "The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord."

Who can fully comprehend man's "free will," and the intersection of God's sovereignty? What a paradox!

That our thoughts are always our own is a fallacy (Matthew 16:23); that we are responsible to manage our thoughts is sensibility. Evil thoughts remind us of our accountability to Him, while good thoughts cause us to rejoice in Him. Let us thank God for the good in our hearts, and depend on Him for the grace he imparts. His commands not only demand we forsake disobedient thoughts but provoke our dependence upon Him for the grace of willing obedience.

Success in life does not merely depend on our choices but upon the sovereign will of God. We are not "the master of our fate" nor "the captain of our ship!" Under His hand, we rise and fall.

Proverbs 16:9 "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps."

Comment: The man referred to here is not the wicked, but the good man with a golden heart to please God and do what is right. The junkyard devices of the wicked are an abomination to Him. He has no interest in prospering rebels except to heighten the intensity of their judgment.

The righteous man can plan to succeed in an enterprise, but only God can make him successful. The industrious can develop a program, but God determines the outcome. The Lord calls a man to be faithful, not to manipulate the results. Plan, pray, and push, but trust God for the harvest.

The Lord directs the successes and failures of a man's life. Sometimes it is better to fail, than to succeed. Men often learn more from their losses than their gains. Beware of the fallacy of praising God for the sweets and cursing the Devil for the bitters. Even the ground is cursed "for thy sake." Let us give Him glory during all seasons of life.

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.

"*Like rivers of water*" is in the emphatic position in Hebrew stressing the simplicity of turning the heart of the king to do the bidding of Almighty God . . . for good or evil.

Many in the media treat political leaders as mini-gods with all kinds of divine powers. But, this text paints a different picture. All of the king's motives, thoughts, intentions, plans, schemes, deceptions, wishes, demands, lusts,

cravings good or bad are compared to a river of wants controlled by the hands of the LORD.

Kings are not gods. They are not omnipotent. They face limitations and resistance, and they are often the most angry, frustrated men on earth. They put their pants on one leg at a time. As a hand moves a glove, God controls rulers. *"Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain"* (Psalm 76:10).

"He turneth the king's heart withersoever He will!"

The Pharaoh of the Exodus thought he was in control, but God hardened his heart in order to showcase His power and authority over all Egypt (Exodus 7:13; 9:16). Ten times Pharaoh said, "No!", and then the LORD broke the back of Egypt. Shattered, Pharaoh said, "Yes!"

King Ahab did everything in a king's power to protect himself from the death sentence God pronounced upon him. But, the Lord used a lying spirit to entice Ahab into battle against the Syrians. Even though he took off his royal apparel and disguised himself as an ordinary soldier, he met his appointment with death by a random arrow that lodged between the seams in his armor into his rib cage. (1 Kings 22:22, 34).

Resin, King of Syria: *"and all the people will know, Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, who say in pride and in arrogance of heart: 'The bricks have fallen, but we will build with dressed stones; the sycamores have been cut down, but we will put cedars in their place.' But the LORD raises the adversaries of Rezin against him (Ephraim), and stirs up his enemies . . . So the LORD cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch and reed in one day"* (Isaiah 9:9-12, 14).

King of Babylon: *"Behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the LORD, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants (Judah), and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation"* (Jeremiah 25:9).

Pharaoh Hophra (Jeremiah 29:4): Great kings think they are in control of their destiny. Herodotus says of King Pharaoh Hophra (589-570 BC) (Jeremiah 44:30), that he was so lifted up with pride, and so secure of his happy state, that he said there was no God who could deprive him of his kingdom. But the LORD compared him to a crocodile with fishhooks in its jaws and compared his generals and princes to fish on or near the scales of a crocodile drawn out of the safety of the Nile to the killing fields of Cyrene (N. Africa) where they were fatally defeated by Amasis who then ruled Egypt from 570-526 BC. . [Note, the word pharaoh means "crocodile" in Arabic].

Governor Pilate expressed His humanistic perspective when he told Jesus, "Do you not know that I have power to crucify you, and have power to release you?"

Christ corrected Pilate's shriveled view of Providence saying, "*You could have no power (authority) at all over me, except it were given you from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee has the greater sin.*" (John 19:10 Pilate and the Extraordinary Perceptions of Jesus)

America: "How the mighty have fallen! . . . *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him . . . How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?*" (2 Samuel 1:19b; Psalm 2:12; Hebrews 2:3).

Ecclesiastes 7:14 "*In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.*"

The context of this Scripture is the command, "*Consider the work of God*" in the previous verse.

Man has a private interest in forecasting the future. Cultists invest much of their spiritual energy attempting to divine the future through the stars, but God alone knows and controls tomorrow.

"*Consider*" is a command. Humanity tends to think good things come from God, and bad things come from Satan; that the Lord is the source of good luck; and, that the Devil is the source of bad luck. But, this text sets the record straight: God controls today and tomorrow. He is the Cause of adversity and prosperity. Because both are from Him, both require a godly response. Both require acknowledgment of His Providence and obedience to Him.

Isaiah 40:23 "*. . . who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.*"

The "*Who*" refers to the LORD God Who created the heavens and earth ex nihilo (Is. 40:22; Gen. 1:1-2). He regards rulers (politicians / bureaucrats) as less than nothing -- zero, zilch, nada! The Hebrew word "*nothing*" (*ayin*) is translated "barren" in Genesis 11:30.

He makes them as "*emptiness*" (*tohu* = void in Genesis 1:2); that is, they are nonessential, expendable little creatures in the accomplishment of His will upon the earth.

We think too much of politicians and credit them with too much power. Who remembers the names of the rulers of Italy, Germany, Norway, Austria, or Bolivia in the 1950s? Who remembers the Speaker of the House or the Senate Majority leader in 1890? Unless you have a triple Ph.D. in history, you don't

remember the names of any of these miscreants. Likewise, Isaiah reminds us that God humbles the proud and "brings princes to nothing."

Isaiah 46:9-10 "Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'"

Comment: Twice the voice from Heaven says, "*I am God.*" Opposing idolatry and the belief that government is god, the Spirit calls upon his people to remember their history (the miracles and passage out of Egypt) and the uniqueness of their God -- a remedy for the "*double minded*" man who thinks we live in a multi-universe with multiple gods and multiple law-orders. Nothing is more apostate than the notion that man is at liberty to choose his own god, his own religion, and his own law-order.

The triune God declares his solitary existence. "*Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one.*" He does not change, evolve, or degenerate. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He is above all, below none, and available to many. We need everything, but He needs nothing. We need to obey him, but our obedience adds naught to him. Our plans stumble, his counsel stands. His purpose is the unmovable object that cannot be jarred by the force and fury of men.

We are always learning, but He has never learned anything: "Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear" (Is. 65:24). He declares the end from the beginning and things present from ages past. Out of the former he declared the future. No doubt the text is referring to Cyrus whom God called by name before he arrived in history to free his people from the jaws of Babylon (Isaiah 41:2).

Isaiah 54:16 "Behold, I have created the smith (blacksmith) that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument (weapons) for his work; and I have created the waster (destroyer) to destroy.

The smith is the blacksmith or craftsman with skills to create weapons of war: swords, battle axes, hammers.

The "*waster*" or "*destroyer*" would refer to ancient kings like Tiglath-Pileser, Sargon, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus who used their armies to conquer and control the nations.

The "*I*" in this passage refers to the LORD God who creates the craftsman who fashions weapons and the destroyer -- armies of soldiers who wield the sword to kill and maim.

As we face nations governed by psychopaths hell-bent on destroying mankind, let us remember "*None can do a hurt that God does not allow*" (Pulpit Commentary).

Begin to collect your own verses on God's sovereignty and be blessed.

36. The Saddest Life

Proverbs 15:15 All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast.



Think you have troubles?

Apparently, living a long life is not the key to happiness.

If you think you have hard times, consider the life of Koku Istambulova of Russia, a survivor of Stalin's repressions and a Muslim.

The Mirror reported that the "World's 'oldest' Woman Died at the age 129

(2/2/2019).

In the last year of her life, she stated, she "had never lived a single happy day in her long life."

Such grievous reflection should cause us to consider (1) the horror that Marxist communism brought to the Russian people, and (2) how truly sad it is go through life without Christ "for in Thy presence is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11).

37. Augustine on Profiting from Calamity

Hebrews 12:6, 10, 15 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;"

Because our Heavenly Father loves holiness and hates sinfulness, no Christian can escape the chastening hand of his Heavenly Father –no man!

Are you made bitter or made better by your afflictions; that is, are you reaping the benefit of the trials that have come into your life?

Sin is a strange adversary. What is it about the heart of man that he is so easily depraved by good fortune and not improved by misfortune?

Augustine, the bishop of Hippo, lived after the sack of Rome by the Barbarians (390, 410, 455), and observed that the severe destruction of the city did not stop their vices nor improve the virtue of the Romans.

Book I, Chap. 33

That the overthrow of Rome has not corrected the vices of the Romans.

“Oh infatuated men, what is this blindness, or rather madness, which possesses you? . . . Depraved by good fortune, and not chastened by adversity, what you desire in the restoration of a peaceful and secure state, is not the tranquillity of the commonwealth, but the impunity of your own vicious luxury. Scipio wished you to be hard pressed by an enemy, that you might not abandon yourselves to luxurious manners; but so abandoned are you, that not even when crushed by the enemy is your luxury repressed. You have missed the profit of your calamity; you have been made most wretched, and have remained most profligate.”
(Augustine, “City of God”)

The great tragedy of the Christian life is not that we suffer, but that we fail to profit from our pressures.

What a wonder it is to see a man capitalize on chastisement rather than collapse under the pressure of calamity.

Why are we spared? Again, Augustine has this insight:

Book I, Chap. 34

Of God’s clemency in moderating the ruin of the city.

“And that you are yet alive is due to God, who spares you that you may be admonished to repent and reform your lives. It is He who has permitted you, ungrateful as you are, to escape the sword of the enemy, by calling yourselves His servants, or by finding asylum in the sacred places of the martyrs . . .”

May we not be men that bite the hand that feeds us . . . or ones that buckle under the belt of his chastisement! May our adversities wean us from ungodliness and wed us to holiness.

38. Death of a Loved One

Death is an enemy.

"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." – 1 Corinthians 15:26



Death is man's fundamental problem. Is there any proof that death can be overcome? Yes, there is in death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Jesus came to solve man's fundamental problem

If you have lost a loved one to death, you know that it is a painful experience. Jesus understood the pain of losing someone close to His heart.

In the book of John (11:1-44), we learn that Jesus lost a loved one named Lazarus. Jesus was deeply moved and wept at the loss of His friend.

This story, however, doesn't end in tears. Our Lord had no fear of death. Jesus knew He possessed the power needed to raise Lazarus from the dead.

He could say,

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die"
(John 11:25).

"And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" -- John 11:26.

The key to comfort is faith, "**Believest thou this?**" Believe and be at peace; doubt and be in despair.

Jesus overcame death through His resurrection. It is comforting to know that death is not the end for those who believe.

Those who know Jesus as Savior will have eternal life (John 10:28). God has prepared a new home for us where there will be no more death, tears, or pain (Revelation 21:1-4).

Deuteronomy 31:6, "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not leave you or forsake you."

What if you are not sure your relative is a believer. My friend and mentor Jean Gibson told me, *“While people are alive, I am a doubter. After they die, I am a hoper.”*

Believe the best; hope for the best; do your best.

Rest on the pillows of His power. He is able to raise your loved one from the dead.

Rest on the pillow of His just and merciful character:

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” – Genesis 18:25

Rest in His mercy which endures forever – Psalm 118.

Rest on the pillow of His love – He cares for you! – 1 Peter 5:6, 7

Andrew Rivet’s Perspective

Andrew Rivet (1573 - 1651) was a devout theologian at the University of Leyden who died in 1651 at the age of 78. The approach of his death after Christmas became a tutor for his soul. Instead of being depressed, this man discovered death to be a heavenly friend that brought him near to the Lord

The sense of divine favor increases in me every moment. My pains are tolerable, and my joys inestimable. I am no more vexed with earthly cares.

I remember when any new book came out, how earnestly I have longed after it—but now all that is but dust. You are my all, O Lord; my good is to approach to you. O what a library I have in God, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge!

You are the teacher of spirits—I have learned more divinity in these ten days that you have come to visit me, than I did in fifty years before.

(Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 207)

39. A Prayer for the Sick

Psalm 6

9 The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer

Here is a wonderful psalm to consider when one is physically and spiritually sick.

Every word in the hymn is a powerful anti-oxidant that restores health to the soul.

We are being lied to. If you are looking for reality, you won't find it at parties and parades. Reality is found on battlefields, hospitals, and old folks homes. The truth is that we live in a world stalked by angels of death. There are no safe places, safe spaces, or safe faces.



"Be safe" is a utopian myth . . . an ideal of the snowflake generation. People get sick and they suffer. Some survive to live another day; others fall into the hands of the Grim Reaper.

The joy of this psalm is that we are permitted to gaze into the heart of a sick saint, and see him rise from his bed of tears a new man with a renewed commitment to fight the Lord's battles.

Psalm 6:1 To the chief Musician on Neginoth upon Sheminith,

Though there is a placement issue regarding the inscription of this psalm, we believe that it was delivered to the chief Musician to compose a melody fitting with the themes of grief, repentance, and assurance of answered prayer.

According to Albert Barnes, the phrase "*upon Sheminith*" occurs here for the first time, and modifies the meaning of the title. The word *Sheminith* - שמינית *shemiyniyth* - means properly "the eighth," and corresponds exactly to our word "octave," the eighth. It appears the psalms began in the minor key on the lower notes on the scale to enhance the gravity of the theme and the triumphant chorus at the end of the psalm (8-10).

This is **the first penitential psalm** which fits into the family of Penitential Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143.

Before us is a frail man burdened down with his sins. Sick in body and soul, the psalmist cries out to God for mercy and relief from the rod of His chastisement.

In the first seven verses, we hear the groans of a troubled and grieved saint. In verses 8-10, the psalmist lifts his head with confidence that his penitent prayer is heard.

The key changes from the minor key to a major key; from a funeral hymn with soft tones and long notes to a military march with in-step sounds of triumph and glory.

In the first seven verses we are attracted to a master violinist drawing us in emotionally to feel the pain of the psalmist's crisis; in verses 8-10 we hear an

army marching band, blazing trumpets, and the shouts of soldiers marching off to war.

A Psalm of David. O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.

David cries out to the LORD, the covenant-keeping God, who was pleased to tabernacle among men.

The personal name of God, the Tetragrammaton (LORD), is used seven times in this hymn. The LORD is David's God, and David is God's troubled child.

The Lord Jesus taught us to pray "*Our Father Who art in heaven . . .*" Who disciplines all His children with words . . . and sometimes a whip (Hebrews 12).

The psalmist is conscious of his sins and feels like he deserves the rod of reproof—not for punishment, but for instruction and sanctification. Pots and pans are cleansed by wool and brush; the soul by the washing of the blood (salvation) and with the water of the Word (sanctification); and, the body by fasting, detoxification, and restoring balance.

The petitioner did not rebel against the rod of God's correction (Micah 6:9). He understood the LORD's greatest saints are forged on an anvil by hammer and heat. Nor does he plead that God should abandon His fatherly duty to discipline His children.

Rather, he prays for tenderness -- that the rod would not turn into a sword that severs and slays; that God would remember mercy in the mess and misery of His discipline. He wants to be corrected, but not crushed; improved, but not impoverished; better, but not bitter. If God rebukes us because of our sins, this is good; but, if He shames and humiliates us because of our foolishness, we shrink into despair.

Thus, we pray that if God's rebukes cannot be removed, that at least they would be delivered in tender love and not in terrifying anger.

"A lark! A spree! It's very clear to see that. A Spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.

The medicine go down-wown." (Mary Poppins lyric)

2 Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I am weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed.

The psalmist knows he deserves a thrashing, but he prays for a generous measure of mercy. This is the right way to pray. All saints clothe themselves in humility knowing they are less than what they ought to be.

This is a prayer for tender warmth because he feels terribly cold. He describes his crisis as vexed: "*vexed*" means "feeble," "alarmed," and "terrified."

He needed *rapha* (healing) from Jehovah-Rapha because a health challenge chilled him to the bones.

Possibly, the psalmist was old and his frailty reached the skeleton on which the whole of his being depended. He feared being cracked and crippled by the chastisement he deserved.

Spurgeon noted that David did not seek God's left hand of justice, but his right hand of mercy.

"Oh, Lord, correct me, but crush me not. Help me, but don't hurt me! Steer this ship away from the rocks and reefs. Trim this tree, but not to a stump; shear this lamb, but carefully; weed this field, but leave the wheat; launder this garment, but not with lye; belt this child if You must, but bruise me not. "

Calvin's favorite exclamation in Latin was, "*Domine usquequo*"—"O Lord, how long?" This is the cry of all the saints under the altar where minutes seem like hours; hours like days; and days like weeks: "*How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*" (Revelation 6:10).

Thus, we pray, "O, Lord, how long must I be sick; be poor; or, be on a broken vessel without a mast on a windy sea?"

3 My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O LORD, how long?

The reader should notice **the two pressing evils** that afflicted the psalmist.

First, David was physically sick and spiritually sick. The weight of his own sins and his physical malady weighed heavy upon him.

Second, the spirit of the age and the sins of his adversaries was like an elephant on his chest (6:7).

The psalmist prays for personal healing, not just the removal of the symptoms, but for a total cure of his spirit, soul, and body. His troubled bones troubled his soul. Likewise, a health crisis awakens our deepest fears where faith is the only antiseptic.

Quite possibly the seriousness of his sins alarmed his soul, but not only his soul, his spiritual infirmity touched the core of his being—even to the bones. When our bones are shaken, our humanity, our manhood, our total existence is threatened.

A frail body is one concern, a frail soul is quite another. A man can endure shaking bones, but not a shattered soul. There are circumstances that can wear a man down and shred him into bits and pieces. And, it is this fear that causes the psalmist to cry out, "***Oh, LORD, how long?***"

When physically ill, people will take off work to see a doctor; but, the somber truth is that when people are soul sick, they will ignore the malady and delay seeking a remedy for their spiritual infirmity. They will go weeks and months without prayer, reflection, and soul searching. What we call mental illness is really the failure of men to seek God's remedy for soul-sickness in the Word of Life.

To the child of God, God's delays chill the soul to the core of one's being. This poor saint waited for the sun to rise and worried that he might not live to see the light of day. He longed for the warm touch of God's tender hand, but the bitter cold of night caused his bones to shudder.

His prayer reveals a whisper of hope. "Oh, Lord, how long till sunrise, till you heal, till you speak, till you guide and lead?" Though afflicted, the psalmist looks to God alone for help and healing.

4 Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake.

This saint feels like God's Dove departed from him; that the absence of God's Spirit was the cause of all his problems. The eclipse of the Son painted his life black. Ravens stalked all hope. He knew not where to look. "Return, O, Dove. Roost on my shoulder. Come back and make your home with me again," cries the psalmist.

Why should the LORD heal him and return to him? David gives **two reasons**: (1) the character of God, and (2) the silence of the grave.

No doubt this psalmist had days of victory and spurts of growth in holiness, but he pleads none of it. The answer is within God and His character. It is His nature to show mercy to the contrite: "*As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His mercy to those who fear Him*" (Psalm 103:11).

Seven times the name of the LORD is mentioned in this prayer. His hope is not in fickle man, but in his faithful Creator . . . the Master of the Universe. He rests his head on **three pillows**: (1) the pillow of God's omniscience (He knows his troubles); (2) the pillow of God's omnipotence (He is able to heal); (3) and the pillow of God's love and goodness (God will do what is best for him):

"Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19).

5 For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?

Hearing the footsteps of the Grim Reaper with sickle in hand searching for its next victim, David trembled in fear of death.

Now the psalmist offered a second reason God should help and heal him -- the silence of the grave. If he dies, there will be one less singer in God's choir on earth (the church militant) giving praise to the LORD – one less witness testifying to the jury of the world of the greatness of God. There are no choirs in church graveyards. An eerie silence rules the night as well as the day.

David argues, *“LORD, preserve me and I will praise thee. Save me, and I will sing to thee.”* He reasoned with the LORD, “that if I perish, my earthly praise will cease with my passing. If I survive, I will “lift up my hands” to thee. If I live, songs of praise will flow out my grateful soul to my precious Savior.

How can God resist an argument like this?

6 I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears.

This terrified saint swims in salty drops of water due to his troubles. He tried to pray, but out came groans . . . and tears. Spurgeon called these “liquid prayers” -- rivers of weeping flowing uphill to the throne of grace.

Focused on a God solution, David would not retreat from his dependence on God until he answered his prayer. “I water my couch in tears” is a future tense – a hyperbole -- more of an expression of what it might be if God delayed rather than of what actually happened.

God's people may pray, but not pout; groan, but not grumble; weep, but not whine.

7 Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies.

The psalmist describes the results of his long ordeal -- “consumed with grief.” Under the chastening hand of God, He was old before his time. Wearied with weeping, his grief cut wrinkles and circles around his eyes. His hair twisted gray; the stars and moon turned dark; the clouds returned after the rain; the keepers of the house trembled; and his strong men stooped (Ecclesiastes 12 – an allegory of old age).

One of the griefs that weighed down his soul was the work of his enemies – evil men, thieves, liars, defrauders and murderers in high places of government recruiting soldiers for their cause and spreading lawlessness among men. Toxic feminists, abortionists, Sodomites, shifty politicians, corrupt judges, bully cops, lying reporters, gender-bender propagandists with tax-and-spend liberals come to mind.

Oh, that more Christians were afflicted because of the sins of the age!

8 Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping.

The song changes from the minor key to the major key; **from a dirge to a battle hymn.**

Tears are a universal language. God heard the “eloquence of sorrow” in the psalmist’s liquid prayers. Now, he arises from his knees with a new attitude. Committed to holiness, he heads to the battlefield with commanding authority warning all his enemies, *“Depart from me all ye workers of iniquity!”*

Up until this verse, David pined away due to the distance between him and God. There are times to pray, and a time to practice faith; a time to weep, and a time to work. *If you must offer to God liquid prayers, let them be in thimbles and not cattle tanks.* Get off your bed! Walk out of your tomb! Unravel the grave clothes! Put off the sackcloth! Clean the cellar! Drive out the money changers! Adorn yourself with holy garments! Trust God anew! Face your enemies with sword in hand and chin up.

How do you know when you are healed? When you are back on the battlefield charging the enemies of the Christian faith with your sword swinging and guns blazing!

The workers of iniquity are lawless men in society encouraging the growth of big government, the capture of men under the umbrella of state control, and the spread of every vice known to man. The obstacles in the path of Christians are liars and deceivers. Know them. Confront them. Expose them. Rebuke them.

Every generation must learn war or accept chains of slavery (Judges 3:1-3). Healthy saints enter the contest to winnow the wicked and to win souls.

You will never be a victim fighting the Lord’s battles. Dr. Bill Bright said he never met a discouraged witnessing Christian. *“If you are not fishing, you are not following”* (Marion Michaux, personal evangelist). If you are not contending, you are surrendering. If you are not protesting, you are promoting. If you are not fighting, you are retreating.

“If ye love wealth better than liberty, the tranquility of servitude better than the animating contest of freedom, go home from us in peace. We ask not your counsels or your arms. Crouch down and lick the hands which feed you. May your chains set lightly upon you, and may posterity forget that ye were our countrymen” (Samuel Adams).

9 The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer.

Knowing that he’d poured out his heart to the LORD, the psalmist arises from his knees with a confidence that God heard his prayer. If God hears your prayers, you are successful indeed.

10 Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed: let them return and be ashamed suddenly.

Healed and off his sick bed, David straps on his sword and rides his mount to the battlefield eager to spill blood. Healed, he is now God's killing machine. When the giant slayer arrived on the killing fields, fear pierced the hearts of Israel's enemies.

David did not fight the air or joust with windmills. His enemies were not merely phantom spirits and vapors in the distant landscape, but flesh and blood human beings feasting under the Poisonous Tree and spreading lawlessness across the land.

Notice what health looks like when you see it. Healthy Christians have steel in their soul and garlic on their breath. They are beacons of light, ministers of mercy, bloodthirsty as vampires, abrasive as sandpaper, unyielding as an anvil, soldiers enduring hardship, warriors for the gospel, combat veterans, front-line marines protecting their families, the church, and their nation with words of truth against the evils of the age: fraud, lies, propaganda, liberalism, Sodomy, lesbianism, toxic feminism, pride, arrogance, slander, gender neutrality, theft in the name of taxation, and the total subjugation of the total man to total government (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Romans 1:21ff).

Notice the authority of David. He commands his enemies to be ashamed and vexed. His enemies are God's enemies. They are plural in number. Because of their lawlessness and naked deeds, they should be red with blush and crippled with shame.

The word "*ashamed*" is used twice in this verse. The first time the word "*ashamed*" is used in Scripture is in relation to the nakedness of Adam and Eve after they ate the fruit from the Poisonous Tree (Genesis 2:25).

Now healthy, David sought to denude his enemies, strip them of their pride, and expose their lawless deeds. Not only did David want to humiliate his enemies, he sought to vex and terrify them with his terrible swift sword (Psalm 149:6).

The words "*ashamed*" and "*vexed*" are in the emphatic position in the sentence. The hammer of David's determination sounded the doom and defeat of God's enemies.

When Christians confess their sins and are fully healed, promiscuous and lawless men tremble like skeletons on a snowy day.

O, that all Christians were healthy and armed for the gospel. O, that the world might "tremble" when preachers come to town as in the days of David and Samuel (1 Samuel 16:4)!

Arise, and be God's attack lamb. When evil comes your way fight, snort, kick, bite, and show some grit.

40. Minding Our Minds When Our Faith is Tested

1 Peter 1:13

Gird up the loins of your mind

1 Peter 1:13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

When we travel through the Valley of Despair, Peter commands “*aliens and strangers*” to gird up the loins of their mind on this prickly path lest faith get snagged on thorns of doubt –

Doubt that God loves us – for how could a loving Father let us suffer such painful affliction?

Doubt that God is good – for how could a good God let us suffer this loss and defeat?

Doubt that God is wise – for how could a wise God lead us into the heat and drought of these wilderness temptations?

The first step toward victory is to cinch up the mind with a truth knot that our “*manifold temptations*” -

- are strength builders to increase our resolved to resist sin (Hebrews 12:4);
- are evidence that we are true children of God (Hebrews 12:6, 7);
- are never penal for Christ absorbed the wrath of God for our sins at Calvary (1 Thessalonians 1:10);
- are for our good and not for our harm (Romans 8:28);
- are wisely chosen by the Father to perfect us (Hebrews 12:10); are not as heavy as they could have been (Hebrews 12:11);
- are not as severe as we deserve (James 3:17; 5:11);
- are not motivated by the anger of God, but by His love (Hebrews 12:6);
- are not valueless for the “testing of our faith is more precious than gold” (1 Peter 1:7);
- are not without purpose, for every trial offers an opportunity to glorify Christ (1 Peter 1:7);

- are not without joy, for there is joy knowing we are beneficiaries of Christ's passion as well as partakers in His suffering (1 Peter 1:5-11; 4:18).

The exhortation to "*gird up the loins of your mind*" was an effective metaphor to the early Christians who wore garments that needed cinching — that needed to tether their thoughts to "*sure word of prophecy*" (2 Peter 1:19).

The Word teaches us to stride through the Valley of Despair with the loins of our minds cinched tight with truth knots enabling us to avoid being snagged by thorns of doubt that prevent us from taking sufficient comfort in the "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1:5). This girding is necessary that hope might enable us to receive "*the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls*" (1:9) "*which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto us*" (1:10).

Therefore, while "*girding our minds,*" Peter instructs us to be "*sober minded*" and to diligently obey the command to "*hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*"

Amen.

41. Beware of a Root of Bitterness

Hebrews 13:15

Bitterness – the failure to lay hold of grace

Hebrews 12:15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

NIV Deuteronomy 29:18 Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison.

Acts 8:23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall (wormwood, hemlock) of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Do you have a root of bitterness that comes out in anger against your spouse, certain acquaintances, or government? Many people do.

What is a Root of Bitterness?

Bitterness is hemlock in the soul — the result of sin at work in the heart.

A “*root*” of bitterness is like the root of a tree that grows underground undetected by the human eye.

Emotions like anger, resentment, and complaining are the trunk and leaves of a bitter root.

The Effect of Bitterness

“fail of the grace of God:” The defection of one member of the community of God’s people brings loss and danger to the whole body of Christ. Consider the last words of Hebrews 10:26 which show what is implied by “falling back from the grace of God.” This is not loss of one’s salvation, but a theological (mental) departure from the system of grace . . . and a transition into idolatry.

“Defile:” Bitterness is a socially transmitted disease. It can infect the whole church or family.

Causes of Bitterness

- Bitterness is a defection from the grace of God . . . the failure to value the Father’s disciplines in one’s life.
- Bitterness is caused by undervaluing God’s chastisements to make the man or woman a better person: *“My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:”* The purpose of chastisement is to make the man better, not bitter.
- Bitterness is caused by idolatry; that is, by adopting the values of the world whose gods are money, fame, and pleasure. Study Deuteronomy 29:18; James 4:1-12. If one’s goal is to have money in the bank and not love in the heart, bitterness may find a place to grow.

James 4:4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

Deuteronomy 29:18 Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods (values, teachings, philosophies, theories, statutes, principles) of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison

- Bitterness is caused by “stinkin’ thinkin’” thinking that adversities is evidence God does not love us; thinking that money is the answer to all things; thinking you deserve more than other men; and, not distinguishing between chastisement and punishment; or, not distinguishing being “poor” and being “penniless.”
- **Jesus was a penniless man, but He was not poor in character, knowledge, or power.** *“He being rich became poor (penniless) that we might be made rich.”*

Likewise, many a rich Christian has lived the life of a pauper in order to serve their fellowman. Poverty is not evidence of a lack of character, diligence, or talent. It is a circumstance; not a state of being.

- Bitterness is caused by having too high of expectation of other people. If your standards are perfection, you will definitely be disappointed in others.
- Bitterness is caused by apostasy — by rejection of the authority of God and his law (Deuteronomy 29:18), and “*going my way*” (self-will) (Isaiah 53:6).

Those Susceptible to Bitterness

- Bitterness grows in the man who is proud and defiant: “*My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.*” Somehow, someday this person must grow in appreciation of God’s training program and gratefully surrender to it.
- Bitterness arises within people who have delicate, “snowflake” character: “*My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, . . . nor faint (quit, resign) when thou art rebuked of him.*” This person must grow up and toughen up.

The Remedy for Bitterness

Appropriate, appreciate, and apply the grace of God: “ Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God . . . ”

1. Know, understand, and accept God’s disciplines. Develop an appreciation for difficulties. He disciplines those he loves; that is, difficulties are evidence that the Spirit is seeking to turn trials into triumph. Learn to appreciate trials, adversities, troubles, and distress as evidence God is training you to be his servant.

“*Look diligently*” means to study the grace of God revealed at Calvary.

2. Know that God loves you NOT because of who you are but because of Who he is — a God of love.

3. Lower your expectations of other people . . . and government. Do not trust the State or place your hope in those running the government. You will always be disappointed (Psalm 118:8-10).

4. In everything give thanks. Be thankful, grateful, and appreciative (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

5. Apply grace: God forgave you for all your sins: forgive those who sin against you. Perceive in your heart how God is using your present difficulties to help you grow spiritually.

6. Look at Christ continually:

Hebrews 12:2-3 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

42. The Power of Realistic Thinking

Get Out of La La Land

Isaiah 53:3 "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief . . ."

The text informs us that the most pure man that ever lived was the Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief. Sorrow and grief are negative terms we usually don't associate with success . . . but, who is more successful than the Lord?

In pushing the power of positive thinking down our throats, psychologists and social engineers have given us hemlock to drink. Leading us into the dreamy world of fiction, they capture us. You will spiritually die in La La Land near the river Utopia.

The theory of generating positive brain waves buys into the deception that positive thinking attracts the positive things we covet. But, the opposite is true. In the world of physics, two magnets will be attracted by their opposite poles.

In the New York Post, Sara Stewart exposed the fraud of team-building exercises, life coaches, and the stream of positive brain waves calling it "inspirational terminal illness" (December 1, 2009).

In his study, *Think Negative*, psychology professor Joseph Forgas, stated,

"Mild negative mood and sadness have definite advantages when it comes to dealing with certain kinds of problems that require vigilance, concentration and careful attention to the world around us." (Email from the University of New South Wales).

"Our studies," he says, "specifically suggest that those in a mild negative mood remember more details in their environment, have better eyewitness memories, are less prone to judgmental errors, are less gullible, and are better communicators and persuaders."

Who would you rather have as an investor: (a) a super positive broker that is willing to gamble your money on stocks his positive thinking believes will rise

in value; or (b) a critical thinker about a negative market that is scared to death of losing your money?

A Canadian psychologist published a study in *Psychological Science Today*, saying that when we repeat statements like “I am a lovable person,” or “I will succeed,” that it makes people feel badly. These mantras actually produce the opposite effect and make things worse instead of better.

Books like *Think and Grow Rich* by Norman Vincent Peal, and *How to Win Friends and influence People* by Dale Carnegie were meant to inspire us to think success and do the same.

But, one salesman placed on the conveyor belt of positive thinking noticed the most successful people in his company were also the most selfish, self-centered, aggressive, pushy, and lying salesmen he ever knew.

They became convinced in their heads they were entitled to success and would do ANYTHING to achieve it including lying and manipulating their customers. These top salesmen would convince people they needed something and were “helping” their customer where in reality they were being guided by their own self-interest.

He went on to say the most “successful” salesmen were the most desperate and greedy people he knew. Furthermore, if reported that if he didn’t repeat these positive mantras he would have been fired. Bosses want sales, not truth (Reported by John Sanidopoulos).

Millions of adherents of positive thinking have yet to experience increase in wealth, health, and happiness. If positive thinking attracts positive results then why haven’t they experienced the results they visualized? Why? Because they followed a lie!

Psychologist Paul W. Andrews wrote in *Scientific American* that depression is actually an indicator of how much intellectual energy one is applying to resolve a problem . . . and that intellect has been in short supply during the emotional brainwashing of positive-psychology years.

What people need is critical thinking, not positive mental lies circulating in their brain.

“Vigilant realism is probably a better recipe for success in life than the unrelenting pursuit of positive thinking, which by definition distorts reality,” stated Andrews.

According to the Word of God we live in a fallen world—a maximum liability universe. The Second Law of Thermodynamics is always at work. We live in a negative world with negative people with negative circumstances. It is not unspiritual to acknowledge this reality.

Thinking positive in order to attract positive energy is a flight from reality, and borders on insanity.

People brainwashed with positive thinking religion are delusional and cultic.

We are NOT gods that can “think it” and “create it.” Positive thinking is idolatry.

We are sinners living in a body that is decaying and dying. We are surrounded by sinners filled with self-interest. All the positive thinking in the world is not going to change this fact.

However, God is! Christ is risen from the dead, and sitting at the right hand of God . . . and, this is positive. Think about this!

Perhaps the best way to live life is to think realistically and to follow the advice that Robert E. Lee gave his son:

“Do your duty in all things. You cannot do more. You should never wish to do less.”

Thus, the Biblical Christian trusts God and prays for things he cannot change; at the same time, he marshals his resources to do those things that duty requires . . . leaving the results with God.

The most successful man that ever lived was the Man of Sorrows. Think positive about Christ. Think realistically about the world and other people. Don’t manipulate people. Do what is right. Trust God and leave the results to Him. Accept suffering, and rejoice in all the good things that He has done for you.

43. Feeling Forsaken By God

Psalm 44

“Awake, why sleepest Thou, O Lord?”

Dear Sister Kate,

You are not alone in your observation and befuddlement on Psalm 44. While the structure of the Psalm is not too difficult to grasp, what is difficult to understand is the spiritual shift that takes place in verse 9, *“You have rejected us.”*

What Christian is comfortable with that thought? Does God really forsake His people?

Psalms has five sections. Psalm 44 is in Book Two of the Psalms. Book two is compared to the Exodus in that it carries a redemptive theme. In this psalm, the author finds his nation in some quagmire and wants God to act like He did in Moses' day and to lead His people out of their political bondage into freedom.

Psalm 44 is a lament over political vassalage (44:9-16) and a prayer for deliverance (44:23-26).

The psalmist remembers what God did for His people during the period of the exodus (1446 BC) and is strengthened by reflecting on it (44:1-3). Consequently, he devotes himself to the God of deliverance and boasts of God's grace and redemption (44:4-8).

But, in verse 9, the psalmist grieves over a present political calamity that engulfed his people. Apparently, the nation was a target of ridicule and plunder. And, he charges God with misfeasance—deliberate neglect of His people.

9 But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies.

Swamped with calamity and humiliation, the psalmist pours out his heart to the Lord like the breaking of a dam.

All of this baffles the mind of this Hebrew. He doesn't understand why a nation redeemed by the Lord and under His law would be subject to so many horrific trials (44:17-22). Why has Israel become the punching bag of the nations?

And, isn't this our problem? Many Christians who have followed the Lord are experiencing so many difficulties (like you sister). We think, "If God loves me, why am I being tested beyond my limits to endure? I gave my heart to the Lord. Why do I feel such despair . . . such fear . . . such depression?"

The answer is in verse 22: *"Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter."*

Most people are in love with plastic, whitewashed, sanitized Christianity and intuitively think that if they believe in Christ with all their heart, they will always be accepted and prosperous.

NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH!!!! Bad premise; bad theology!

"Who supposed godliness is gain" - 1 Timothy 6:5.

The truth is "men hate God and His law" (Rom. 3:10ff). Yes, even many so called "Christian men" are in rebellion against the law of God and the God of law. And, they will take out their animus against God upon His people.

One key in this psalm is "*for thy sake;*" i.e., the afflicted were **not** suffering because they did something wrong, but because they did that which right . . . "*for thy sake.*"

The more we take up the cross and the closer we follow the Savior, the more we will become the target of man's hostility to Christ. Men will hate us, persecute us, reject us, and if they could, kill us (John 16:1ff). This does not happen to every Christian, only to those who follow Christ and dare to do the truth and tell the truth!! Don't be deceived, even fellow Christians will reject you.

Where Christ is not Lord, and the cross not carried, Christians cannot be trusted to care for you. When government is god, Christians cannot be trusted not to betray you. And, if they are on the government dole, they will not be sympathetic with your puny struggles to make a living.

Finally, the psalmist feels God is "asleep at the wheel" (v. 23). The stagecoach is weaving all over the road. The Driver has abandoned His post. The psalmist prays . . . and God is silent. Like a corpse in a casket, there is no response. He cries and shouts . . . but the Lord slumbers on.

This is unbearable to this saint, "*Awake, arouse yourself . . . Rise Up, be our help and redeem us*" screams the psalmist at the top of his lungs (v. 23 & 26).

The application: Like the psalmist, many Christians study the redemptive history of the cross (44:1-3) and give their lives to Christ and devote themselves to following Him (44:4-8).

But, in the course of following Him, they find themselves in the most difficult of trials and the target of political destruction (44:9-19). Rejected by men, they are considered a pariah. How can this be? They are perplexed and go through a period of deep introspection (44:17-21). They were following the Lord. Why are they suffering?

Why? Because "*for your sake*" (v. 22).

Sometimes we suffer not because we did something wrong, but because we did something right! Selah! (stop and think about this!)

It is easy to boast in God when He gives us the victory over our foes, but it takes iron faith and bulldog strength of character to not defect when God permits victories for the enemy. We are quick to praise God for sunshine and slow to praise God for shadows. Christians are good at crediting God for triumphs, but clumsy at recognizing setbacks, breakdowns, debacles, destructions, defeats, failures, losses, and downthrows as from His hand "*for his name's sake.*"

Providence is the handmade of God's Sovereignty. He ordains defeat as well as victory for His glory and the benefit of His people. We must learn to serve God

when He leads us through the Arch of Triumph on a sunny day with crowds cheering, and when he orders us to march alone in the mud and snow on dark, cold, windy nights with wolves howling and frost biting our cheeks.

Men are prone to think *that if something goes right, they did something right; and if things go wrong, they did something wrong.* It takes maturity to recognize that your suffering may not be in place because you did something wrong, but because your affliction is wrapped up in the mystery of God's will -- **that He is the Cause of your grief.** Blessed be His name! Roses come with thorns. Both warm days and cold days are from Him.

God is not a good-luck charm. He received more glory by sending His Son to the cross than He would have if legions of angels had delivered our Savior from its cruel fate. And, He may receive more glory through your pain than through your pleasure.

God loved Elijah when he was hiding from King Ahab as a refugee in Phoenicia as much as He did from Elijah's contest of Gods on Mt Carmel (1 Kings 17-18).

Confessedly, we are human and are baffled by God's leading and sometimes feel that He is asleep at the wheel of lives. This is not true, but we feel this way . . . and this is O.K.

Thus, our prayers are screams from within, "*Awake . . . help us.*"

Sincerely,

Pastor

44. Wounded by a Good Man

God's men can hurt others

Luke 22:51 And Jesus... touched his ear, and healed him.

A wounded Pentecostal pastor who had just received the right fist of Christian fellowship by his fleshly board walked into my office to talk . . . and to be encouraged. But, in the end, it was me who was encouraged. He taught me one of the greatest lessons of my life: "Wounded by a Good Man."

It was a ghastly sight—a loud shriek, a body hunched over in pain, and eyes wide with disbelief. Terror furrowed on the brows of men as streams of blood were rushing down the neck and shoulder of the household servant. It happened so suddenly. Fear rushed through every heart and men stood frozen

with indecision. Like stalagmites embedded in time, no one moved. All eyes were upon the Master to see what He would do.

Late at night, a northern breeze whistled through the branches of the olive orchard, and a misty chill nestled in the Kidron Valley. Anomaly filled the air as Jewish officials and Roman soldiers marched up the Mount of Olives to arrest the Lord and his wary disciples. Light from the dimly lit torches exposed the swords and spears, and the tension that lined the guilty foreheads of the nervous mob.

Leading the way was a familiar face. With the countenance of a lamb and with a heart of treachery, Judas stepped forward to place a hypocritical kiss on the cheek of Jesus. Knowing all that was about to happen, our Lord stepped forward to query their intent. Identifying Himself with, "I Am He", the conspirators collapsed like a stack of dominos. Half-awake and threatened by the mob, an impetuous disciple whipped out his cutlass from under the left side of his cloak. With a single stroke, Peter severed the right ear from the head of Malchus, the chief servant of the high priest. He was wounded by a disciple of Jesus.

I introduce to you Malchus, the servant of the High Priest, Caiaphas. He was carrying out the malicious intent of a man who despised Jesus for His popularity, for His preaching in the temple, and for ransacking the bazaars of Annas (the father-in-law of Caiaphas). Malchus aided Annas who embezzled shekels from worshippers by charging inflated prices for money exchanges in the temple (John 2:13ff).

Malchus' jealous boss ordered him to follow Judas to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus. Little did he know that one of the disciples would try to decapitate him, miss, and clip off his ear! Bowed over in pain, bleeding profusely, and clutching his injury, he was wounded by a good man.

Have you ever been hurt by a good man? Maybe you have been slapped by a mother or belted by an angry husband. Maybe you have been accused wrongly by a jealous brother or been the target of a critical attack by a distinguished preacher who misunderstood your ministry. Like Malchus, maybe you have been hurt and damaged with a painful wound that aches in your soul. Like Malchus, you feel betrayed, hurt, and rejected.

I introduce to you Peter, a good man. He was not an ordinary disciple. He was the leading disciple of the Lamb of God, one of the twelve, one of the inner three, the possessor of the keys to the Kingdom of God. He was being trained to be an apostle, an evangelist, a preacher, an elder, and an author in the Canon of Scripture. He was not in the habit of chopping off people's ears, nor is it ever recorded that he did so again. Peter was a good man, but sometimes good men think they are doing the right thing. They think they are serving Christ. They

think they are advancing the Kingdom of God. But, they lose perspective and wound people.

Do you know any good men like that—good men who in a moment of weakness, lost control, struck out, and injured an innocent soul? Maybe that soul was you.

I introduce to you Jesus, the innocent victim in the sinister plot; the calmest person in the crowd on that eerie night; and, the only One in control of His soul. Anxiety settled in the hearts of the mob. Satan controlled the heart of Judas. Fear possessed the heart of the disciples. But, the *“peace that passes all understanding”* ruled the heart of Jesus. He was obviously in command. The Scripture says, *“Jesus, therefore, knowing all things that should come upon Him, went forth . . .”* (John 18:4).

Seeing the distress of Malchus, Jesus reached out his hand and with a single touch, He healed Malchus wounded head.

Maybe you are like Malchus, hurting and wounded. Day after day, the throbbing pain pierces your soul like desert thorns. The pain will not go away. Your soul bleeds and bleeds and bleeds, and you want to hurt back!

It is important not to play the victim in these circumstances. We are not interested in multiplying victims in the church. The kind of hurt we are talking about is not the petty, fleshly child-like reactions (hurts) that arise because sensitive people are “easily offended.” The wounds we are discussing here are real violations of a trust—something serious—an offense or “stumbling block” (a scandal) due to sin as discussed in Matthew 18:7, 8, 9, 15.

If a good man has wounded you, it is very important that you receive healing from Jesus. If you are not healed, bitterness will infect your spirit. Gangrene of the soul will poison your heart, and pride will blind your perceptions. You will soon find yourself unable to enjoy fellowship with other believers or rejoice in the Lord. Like a wounded animal, you may lash out at those who love you and sin against the Lord. By multiplying hurts, you create pain in your spouse, or your children, or fellow brothers in Christ. Losing all hope, you may show contempt for spiritual values and fall into a bed of sensuality (Hebrews 12:15-17).

Healing is the ability to be Christ-like. Until one is healed, he will be unlike Christ-like, sinning against God, and multiplying hurts and wounds.

You can be healed by Jesus, if you will receive His touch.

First, receive the touch of understanding:

“Jesus knowing all that was going to happen . . .”

The Lord knew that Judas would lose his heart to the Devil. He knew a mob would come to arrest Him. He knew that his impetuous disciples would lose

perspective. He knew that Malchus would lose his ear. He knows all about your wounds.

The Scripture says that, “He is touched with the feelings of our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15). He hurts when you hurt, He grieves when you grieve. He is not aloof and distant. What touches you touches Him. Jesus knew that Peter, the reactionary, would wound Malchus, and He could have prevented the whole incident. But He did not. Likewise, the Savior could have prevented you from being hurt. In His wisdom, He also knew that you would never mature, never grow in empathy, never understand His grace unless He had given you your wound. He can be glorified even in your pain.

Though wounded, your healing can glorify Christ. The hurt and healing of Malchus is recorded in all four gospels. We know more about this event than almost any story in the Bible. The amount of detail written about this incident is incredible. Why was this written? Why did He heal an enemy? Because this healing magnified His grace!

Can you imagine what Malchus said to Annas, “Boss are you sure we have the right man?”

Annas must have been bewildered by the whole story. He saw the blood on Malchus coat and surely he studied Malchus right ear. The healing of his servant was a final witness to the retired priest of the presence of the Son. Likewise, if you will receive the touch of understanding, you can glorify God. In fact, suffering can enhance your ability to love those who have hurt you.

St. Valentine was of this sort. Under the rule of Emperor Claudius II Rome was involved in many bloody and unpopular campaigns. Claudius the Cruel was having a difficult time getting soldiers to join his military leagues. He believed that the reason was that roman men did not want to leave their loves or families. As a result, Claudius cancelled all marriages and engagements in Rome. The good Saint Valentine was a priest at Rome in the days of Claudius II. He and Saint Marius aided the Christian martyrs and secretly married couples, and for this kind deed Saint Valentine was apprehended and dragged before the Prefect of Rome, who condemned him to be beaten to death with clubs and to have his head cut off. He suffered martyrdom on the 14th day of February, about the year 270. He did not question God’s love during his trials or ask why he was suffering. It was said of St. Valentine that the more he suffered, the more he loved. Consequently, he became the patron saint of love. Valentine’s Day, the day of romance, is commemorated in his honor.

Second, receive the touch of grace.

Our precious Lord reached out with His love to restore the servant’s ear. Our Lord’s touch was a gift of grace. Though Malchus was a victim of Peter’s impulsive foolishness, Malchus was an unworthy recipient of Christ’s love. He

was not a disciple. He served a malevolent High Priest, and on the eve of Christ's crucifixion, Malchus led the temple police to arrest the Son of God. Yet, in His mercy, Jesus healed him.

In order to receive His healing, you will need to admit your throbbing pain. Malchus knew that his right ear was missing, but wounds of the spirit are not so easily acknowledged. Men, especially, have a difficult time managing hurt. Many prefer to "macho" their way through life suppressing emotional pain. If this is so in your life, you will need to recognize the fruits of woundedness. If you have bouts with anger or fear, then you may be wounded spiritually and need to be healed by His grace.

It is O.K. to be wounded. All of God's great vessels have wounds that have been healed by a touch from Jesus. Even our Lord, the perfect man, was wounded by careless men (Isaiah 53:3-6). *It is not how you are hurt that matters, it is how you handle the hurt that counts.*

The one who did the hurting has the greater need. Immediately after Malchus was wounded, Jesus dealt with the major problem first—the fleshly reaction of His leading disciple. Turning to Peter, Jesus rebuked him saying, "*No more of this!*" And then, He proceeded to heal Malchus' ear. Peter lost perspective, and under pressure, in a moment of weakness, he became of wonder of men instead of a healer of souls.

Little did Malchus know that the One he was sent to arrest, could not only heal him physically, but could heal him spiritually! Within a few hours Christ was stripped naked, crucified, and staked on the cross. In those moments He released his malefactors and prayed, "*Father, forgive them, they don't know what they do.*" He went to Calvary alone to pay for the sins which you could not pay; to bear the punishment you could not bear; to heal sins you could not heal. You cannot be healed by ignoring your sin-wounds, nor by trying to merit His healing. If you will receive His forgiveness for your sin, you can be healed. Grace must be received for what it is—grace.

Third, receive his touch of grace so you can love others.

When you are hurt, you will be tempted to retaliate rather than to be a wounded healer. The way of the flesh is to inflict revenge upon those who hurt you. However, this is not the way of grace. Grace forgives those who wound and the pain they cause!

When Christ confronted Malchus and the detachment of soldiers, He said, "If you are looking for Me, then let these men go."

Likewise, if you have been wounded, you need to release those who hurt you and "let them go." Surely, if Christ can extend forgiveness to you for your sins -- sins that are infinitely more numerous than those against you, you can

release others from their debt to you. You can afford to do this because Christ has been punished, not only for your sins, but the sins of those who wounded you.

If a good man has wounded you, reach out today and touch him with grace. Release him from your anger and bitterness with the power of forgiveness. You will not only release that “good man” to become a “better man”, you will be released from the bitterness of woundedness.

[Note: the use of woundedness in this article does not imply that Christians should support victim psychology. Most people are not victims; they are careless, aggressive, predatory sinners that injure others. In this case, however, Malchus was the victim of Peter’s impulsive sin.]

45. Fired from a Job

Looking at the Day Jesus was Fired

“They began to implore Him to leave their region” - Mark 5:17

When Jesus arrived in the “*country of the Gadarenes*” early in the morning on the eastern shores of Lake Galilee, He was met by a wild, screaming maniac running naked through a graveyard practicing self-mutilation with sharp stones. Having broken free of his chains, he raced toward Jesus from the mausoleum shouting obscenities and begging Jesus not to torment him.

Our Lord immediately recognized the man was demon possessed, questioned the spirit whose name was “*Legion*”, and performed an exorcism by ordering the evil spirits to depart and leave the man alone. High pitched voices shrieked from the man. Without warning, hundreds of squealing, screaming pigs stampeded toward the sea cliffs kicking up dust, terrifying the sea gulls, and diving kamikaze style into the sea. The disciples stared at the corpses of pork wondering what in the world just happened! What a scene!

Immediately, the tender disciples began to minister to the man and to comfort him. Curious about the noise and commotion, local tenants marched toward the band of men with sticks, ropes, and chains. When they saw Jesus, the twelve disciples, and the man named “*Legion*” sitting calmly on a rock, clothed, and in his right mind, they were seized with fear—a strange reaction for sure!

Immediately, the locals decided they didn’t want this preacher in their home town and “*implored Jesus to leave the region;*” that is, they fired the Lord as they did not want him for their pastor . . . and Jesus left.

Think about it. Jesus, the Son of God, the most competent, powerful preacher who ever lived was ordered to turn in His resignation and to leave the country! This community preferred to have their swine and a naked madman in their corporation rather than sweet Jesus!

We are living in crazy times where evil is good and good is evil. Madmen control government. Maniacs protect baby killers and promote Sodomite marriages. The bloated State demands more and more taxes to feed its insatiable appetite for money while banks are foreclosing on millions of homes because families have lost their jobs or don't make enough money to pay the bills. Parasitic lawyers serve the will of wealthy corporations. Depraved politicians get elected to office. The Navy and other military divisions are firing Christian chaplains because they pray in the name of Jesus. Feminists eager for power and the authority to kill babies have manufactured a war against women. Pharisaical legislators pump out trillions of new laws, destroying freedom, eliminating rights, creating criminals out of every man, and enslaving Americans.

Instead of punishing criminals, panicky politicians beg their peers to confiscate guns from innocent gun owners. IRS agents threaten the poor with incarceration for not paying protection money. Cops patrol our streets as uniform gangs ready to execute non-conformists who disobey a barking donut cruncher. And, if this is not bad enough, half-naked, cheering college students parade through the streets praising our new police state. But, it is worse! Sugar sweet Christians have lost their salt. Thus, they are irrelevant amid a cultural revolution.

If you have not been fired from a job or two in your lifetime, you may not be following Jesus very closely.

If you have not been asked to resign your employment, either you are blind and ignorant about the criminal activities around you, or you are treasonously committed to being politically correct in the midst of corruption. We simply have too many nice, "get along" and "go along" Christians. Compromise is built on give and take, but there can be no give and take on the Ten Commandments or the gospel. Christ is King of the Nations whether men like it or not (Jeremiah 10:7; Revelation 1:5).

Further, if you have not been kicked out of a government church, you are probably not following Jesus closely. The American church has lost its vinegar and salt because of moral and Biblical compromises. When government is god in the minds of churchmen, deacon boards cannot be expected not to betray soldiers of the cross.

Silence in the midst of a cultural revolution is unacceptable.

A follower of Jesus cannot trade in his integrity for peace or money or job advancement. He is not to make an idol out of his job or ministry. Rights are non-negotiable. The great question is not whether we live in a sick, corrupt, compromising, legalistic society governed by rebels against King Jesus and His law-order, but whether there is enough health in the body politic to resist the Godlessness of our age?

If you have never been fired ... maybe you aren't following Christ closely enough.

46. Out of a Job and Scared

Philippians 4:6

Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

From a human perspective, being out of job is scary; but, from a Divine perspective joblessness is an opportunity to experience the power of trust.



It is easy for the prosperous to give advice to the troubled, but what one needs is encouragement from those who have tested God and found Him to be true to His Word. And, this is what you have here — an afflicted apostle advising his troubled flock to go deeper into trusting the Lord.

Paul is not eating hot-baked bread while others are scrambling for crumbs off the master's table. He is not sleeping in air-conditioned barracks while other soldiers are sweating it out on the battlefield. He too has been naked and afraid.

Being without a job or source of income is humbling, but you can turn your job-search into a spiritual challenge by following the admonitions of the apostle.

Seize the opportunity

Philippians 4:6 Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

The first verb *“be careful”* comes from the Greek word *meimnao* which means “to be troubled.” It is translated “take no thought” in some texts. The word is a present, active imperative. The adverb *“nothing”* (*medeis*) negates the action; that is, *“do not be troubled . . . anxious . . . or worried.”* It could be translated, “Stop being troubled, right now!”

The subordinate conjunction *“but”* (*alla*) is a strong adversative. In contrast to being worried, God gives an order: *“Let your requests”* (prayers and supplications) be made known to God because necessity is already pressing you to do so. He is not asking men to sink below the crested waves of anxiety, but to sail above the surf and foam until their ship reaches port.

The second verb *“make known”* (*gnorizo*) is a present, active imperative meaning “make known and keep on making known your needs” to God through prayers and petitions.

In praying about pressing needs, it helps to add incense to supplications. Requests adorned by the sweet incense of “thanksgiving” have more power at the throne of grace.

He is not saying the future has no troubles or that you are to deny the gravity of your circumstances.

He is not saying to not do your duty to search for employment, nor is he saying “do not plan” your day. Rather, he seeks to purge nervous anxiety from the soul that sweats over all potential problems so common to humanity.

The Old Testament example of this is wearing wool. Priests were not permitted to wear wool lest they sweat. Soul-sweat hinders effective service (Ezekiel 44).

He is not asking men “to make believe” and “pretend” everything is good. He is ordering men to lay hold of God with one hand and to do their duty with the other . . . to let go of worry, trust, and to accept responsibility.

Claim the promises

Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

While doing a job search and waiting on God for His supply, you need shalom. Fear grips our hearts when we think we are alone left to our own skills.

Stop being worried and pray with thanksgiving means that you can enjoy God’s presence . . . and have a peace from God . . . a peace that surpasses human understanding . . . a peace that will keep (*phroureo*) your heart and mind.

The word *“keep”* (*phroureo*) means “to guard” or “garrison.” A future, active indicative, Paul assures the Philippians that God has sentinels guarding their future.

The noun “*peace*” refers to “tranquility” and “rest of soul” in the midst of a storm; that is, a man can have peace in bad weather as well as good weather; in winter as well as the summer. God is not only on duty during the day time, but at night time.

The participle “*passes*” refers to something superior; or “of more value” than money. It is a peace that surpasses all thought, thinking, emotion, and reason; that is, God’s peace can’t be explained because there is nothing that “sight” can see to sustain it . . . yet, it is there working underneath the hustle and bustle of this world to settle and quiet our souls.

The Grounds of Confidence

Philippians 4:19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

The statement “my God shall supply all your need” is applied to the supporters of Paul’s ministry.

“Shall *supply*” is in the indicative mood and NOT the subjunctive, optative, or the imperative mood – moods that express potential or possibility; that is, this is a statement that corresponds to reality . . . to truth . . . to facts.

The verb “*supply*” (*pleroo*) means “full” or “to make full” or “cause to liberally abound.”

“*Need*” refers to necessities, not wants, wishes, and lusts.

“My God” is in the emphatic position in the sentence; that is, Paul’s confidence is emphatic – it will be done! God will do it! Because the Philippians sacrificed to help Paul in the ministry, the apostle expresses confidence that God will reward the Philippians who sacrificed their resources to support him.

Paul banks on God’s credit (credibility). The promise rests on His character and not man’s merit; on the riches in glory in Christ and not upon the business skills of the Philippians. God is no man’s Debtor. He is a Creditor that gladly supplies the needs of men.

But, there is more. Paul adds the pronoun-adjective “*my God*.” So sure is Paul that God will supply their needs he puts God’s credit on the line and His own credit down as surety for the promise. In his heart of hearts and mind of minds, he gives ultimate assurance that God will do what Paul promised.

Out of a job? Let go of worry, and strengthen your reliance on the Lord.

1 Peter 5:7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

How else are you going to learn about the trustworthiness of God unless you have a need and pursue Him to supply that need?

Why should I feel discouraged,

*Why should the shadows come,
Why should my heart be lonely,
And long for heaven, heaven and home,
When, when Jesus is my portion,
My constant Friend is He;
Oh, oh-oh, his eye is on the sparrow,
And I know He watched, watched it over me.*

Be refreshed and listen to Mahalia Jackson sing, "His Eye is on the Sparrow."

Be refreshed and listen to Ethel Waters uniquely sing, "His Eye is on the Sparrow."

47. A Prayer for the Destitute

Psalm 102

A psalm for distressed saints

Introduction:

This is a psalm written by a distressed saint who draws a lesson from one of the great acts of God in history—the return of the Jews from Babylon (536 BC).

The occasion is due to the unexpected command of Cyrus for the exiles to return to Canaan and to rebuild their temple. Afflicted and alone in his personal trial, he submits his petition to the unchanging God of history. See Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah.

Psalm 102:1 A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the LORD. Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee.

Satan would have us believe that there is no God, no hearing, and no answering.

If such be the case, it would be more desirable for the atheist to execute our death warrant than for us to ramble on about the case for the existence of God. To the soldiering saint, it would be better to die than to be denied access to His mercy seat.

The Hebrew word for “hear” is *shema*. It is a command, and it is the same word used in the “*Shema*” of Deuteronomy 6:4. “*Hear*” is root word for Ishmael. Hagar, in the crisis of her life as a runaway, pregnant teen learned that God sees her (Genesis 16). [For more on Hagar, see “Where is God When I Need Him” in this work.]

I know you hear prayers, but hear my prayer pleas the psalmist. Though my prayer is flawed and I am broken, hear me!

The pleading of the psalmist is so flawed it is more like a “cry” than a prayer. The first use of the term “cry” is when Israel cried over the bitterness of bondage in Egypt. When sorrow fills the heart and words fail, the urgency of our conditions begs that our groans reach the ears of Him who has the power and grace to arrest our conflict.

If our cries do not enter the veil of Him who rules over true Israel, we are the most miserable of all men.

2 Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily.

The psalmist deals with a truth: that God is . . . but that God also conceals himself. Where is God when I need Him? Why does He seem so near in His temple, but so far away in trouble? Why does God feel so close in times of prosperity, but so distant in times of adversity?

The secretive ways of God tests all men, and the psalmist fears His evasiveness. Sometimes the Lord is more difficult to find than Big Foot: “Hide not . . . “. Do not ignore me. Do not pretend You do not know me. Do not be truant when I am in trouble. At least raise your eyebrow and acknowledge my presence. If my sins have so offended You deal with them latter when I can better bear it. But, now, in my distress, overlook the weakness of my faith and see its sincerity.

Troubles are difficult enough, but a silent God in the midst of trials is a double tragedy. It is a great blessing for God to send a gift, but for the gift to arrive in time to avert disaster is a double benefit that bolsters confidence in God.

Answers that come on the heels of prayer are the medallions of the saints. But, who can boast about a silent God in the midst of screaming troubles? What faith can endure the bombardment of doubts due to God’s abandonment of the man in the midst of his field of battle?

The psalmist employs a set of effective metaphors to describe his condition.

A Description of His Suffering

3 For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth.

The metaphor is well chosen. Smoke is illusory, intangible, and immaterial. Fire is a fearsome destroyer. Smoke disappears into the midnight sky never to be

seen again. It cannot be retrieved. It cannot be harnessed. It cannot be saved for usefulness at a later time.

Not only were the psalmist's days disappearing like smoke, his bones burned away like coals in a hearth. Likewise, his feeble faith and piety passed before him like vapors amidst the charred ashes of his precious all. His righteousness that stood like a proud cedar in the forest was stripped of its bark and all that remained was black charcoal of a once noble tree.

What a plight: a child of God with an empty bank account; his energy spent; his youth past; his dreams a flame in pillars of smoke! But, this is the state of many a dear child of God.

*4 My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread.
5 By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin.*

The term "*smitten*" refers to an aggressive blow with the intent to slaughter. It is translated "*kill*" in Genesis 4:15. It refers to God's act of flooding the earth to destroy humanity in Genesis 8:21. It is the term used to describe Moses killing an Egyptian in Exodus 2:11.

The psalmist sees himself as a tender plant that wants to live but is smitten by the intense heat under the desert Sun. He struggles to survive but his beauty and freshness is spent. Burnt, dehydrated, and under intense heat, the psalmist exposes himself as God's withering flower. God's blossom is so distressed he can't even eat. Sorrow stole his appetite. Regret ruined his routines. Weakened by the spiritual drought, God's faded flower shrinks into despair, dismay, and depression.

Gaunt and thin, he looks more like an Eisenhower German POW death camp survivor than one of God's well fed sheep. Pale and gray, he resembles a living, emaciated corpse. Where is God?

His Comparison to Three Birds

6 I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert.

The psalmist likens himself to **three miserable birds**. What is a **water fowl** doing inhabiting the parched, blazing wastelands staring at cactus and sand dunes?

What is an **owl** doing moping alone in a desert clinging to solitude? Stunned and disorientated, all hope is abandoned. Isolated and depressed, he is face down in the sand. Fluttering for breath, he awaits his final fate.

I stare at the sand
Where is His hand?
My prayer not heard,
Alone like a bird.

Having once flown high,

Is it time to die?

7 I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top.

The psalmist sees himself as a tiny **sparrow** perched on a housetop as a sentinel keeping watch over a city he cannot defend, he cannot protect, and that will not heed his chirping. He is the lone patriot watching the nation. Where is the flock?

Maybe this little bird has lost its mate or its little chicks. Maybe the other members of his clan are safely roosting in their nests.

This is not a cheerful sparrow, but a bird chirping in a minor key warning his nation of impending doom. He is only one bird. No other guards are seen on the rooftops. Where are the kindred spirits? What can a single, weak, depressed, exhausted sparrow do to save his sleeping city? He looks; he sees; he chirps out his warning, but no one hears; no one cares; no one wakes. The church slumbers on.

8 Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me.

God's little bird watching his city was surrounded by predatory hawks, coyotes, and snakes. Clever politicians and government bureaucrats plotted his downfall.

The psalmist found himself confronted by canons of criticism and the sword of slander "all the day." Whereas leaders should have a sworn oath to uphold God's law, these rulers were under oath to crush God's sparrow. In the hunt, the demagogues acted with insane intensity to trap God's little bird and to break its wings.

A Description of His Personal Distress

9 For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping,

Ashes were the mourner's cosmetic choice in times of great grief. Lying in ashes symbolized humility and havoc. When people in the East wanted to express bereavement, they adorned themselves in sackcloth and wept face down in a pit of ashes. Drinking only water, he could taste the salty tears in his cup.

10 Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.

The nation was under judgment. Loyalties were divided.

In the cloud of confusion, opportunists rose to power. Madmen ruled the nation.

The rabble used that power to oppress this servant of God. His enemies had provoked the Lord and were cause of the distress. When men idolize political power, Christians cannot be trusted not to betray one another. The sharp effects of justice now touched this patriot and he felt its bitter impact personally. The wrath of God poured out upon the nation splashed upon God's little bird. The grief and suffering of God's people pierced his own soul. Though he had done all within his power to avert the calamity that reached the nation, he found himself on his face mourning in ashes.

Possibly, his own political or financial distress was the judgment of God against the psalmist for his own personal sin. With his welfare deteriorating, he saw God as the Source of his calamity. It was God that lifted him up, and it was God that cast him down. God promotes; and, God demotes. He is the cause of the rise and fall of men. The psalmist agonizes because he is among the fallen.

11 My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass.

Grabbing two more metaphors, the psalmist compares his life to a shadow that appears in the morning and disappears in the evening under the cover of darkness.

Like a tender, green blade of grass that appears in the spring, his vitality faded to a dry, pale yellow under the summer heat. Scourged by the blazing Sun, the positive passion of youth shriveled into depression.

The psalmist is made to feel the brevity and temporariness of life. He wants to live. He wants a full life. But, poverty and death is at work robbing him of joy and happiness.

His Description of the God He Serves

12 But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance unto all generations.

Turning from his personal affliction, the author reflects on the true source of consolation. God's name is YHWH or "I am". I will perish, but You remain. I fade and change, but You are permanent. My life is a variable, but You are the Constant-One. My nation crumbles, but You are imperishable. My generation will disappear, but You are indestructible. Because You reign as the eternal King, all is well.

Men will forget me, but there will be new generations who will remember You. Evidence of thy presence will cause future generations to seek your face. All things are vanishing, but you remain forever. You are the Creator and your creatures will always remember You.

13 Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come.

What is our view of God? What kind of God is He? Is He a scrooge grasping tightly to his pennies or is He a benevolent Father eager to give? Do we see Him as a warden holding us in prison, or as a Governor that can grant us clemency and freedom? Do we see Him as some kind of unfaithful beau that abandons His sweetheart to lustily pursue another, or do we see Him as a devoted Lover that will “never, never, never, no never forsake us” (Hebrews 13:5)? Our sticky trials often taint the truth of His character.

Surely, there must be a key that unlocks the steel vault that hides the presence of God from us.

He does not know when, but the psalmist expresses confidence that God will act soon to comfort His people.

He believes the silent, inactive God will arise from His concealment, speak, and revive His work in the psalmist’s day; that the sunshine of His presence would cause the shadows of judgment to retreat and the flowers to bloom.

The disasters of yesterday are past. Today offers new hope. He may hide Himself for a while, but He cannot restrain His desire to bless for long. The dark gray storm clouds and thunder claps must surely contain rain. He may withdraw His affections so His people will repent of their transgression, but he cannot restrain His love forever.

The time has come, yes, the time has come! After a dark night, there is the light of sunrise; after the cold winter, there is the warmth of spring time; and, after bitter discouragement, there is sweet encouragement. The God of love must love; the God of wealth must give; the God of grace must show mercy.

The jailed must go free; the rejected must be accepted; and life must prevail over death. God is never continually at war with His people. Peace must be declared. Surely His frowns are temporary. Fasting must end and feasting must begin: For the time to favor her is come; yes, it is come!

14 For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.

Zion refers to Jerusalem and its Solomonic temple. Zion was not only the religious center of the nation but the hub of civil authority. Zion was Gods throne as well as God’s altar. Every devout heart yearned to be near the temple. The cold hard stones delighted the servants of God. So great is Zion even the dust had value to His people. Every aspect of God’s work is precious . . . and every task in service to Him a privilege!

Likewise, the servants of God take great delight in the church, the true temple of God. The youngest child in the smallest church has great importance to deacons in the family of God. Everything is significant, from preaching of the Word to the moping of floors. Nothing is without significance and no task below our dignity.

15 So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory.

When God has mercy on his church, even the heathen take notice. When sincere hearts gather to light a candle to honor Christ, even the pagans come to see the light and enjoy the warmth. When Zion rejoices in the accomplishments of Christ, heathen are converted. Even kings are attracted to simple, happy faith of genuine believers. The restoration of Jerusalem following the captivity was a marvel to all the surrounding nations. Likewise, a revived church cannot escape the notice of civil rulers. There is nothing more riveting to pagans than to see humble Christian delighting in Christ and joyfully serving their Master's interest.

O', God, revive me and start a fire in my own heart that sheds light on the glories of Christ.

16 When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory.

Young's translation has the tenses correct: "*For Jehovah hath builded Zion, He hath been seen in His honor.*" A post-captivity psalm, God's house was rebuilt and His presence manifested among the people.

Kings take great pride in their palaces and public projects. Likewise, when God revives his work and rebuilds His church, He is honored among men. When pagans are converted and trained to serve Him, the Lord is glorified.

A united church growing in holiness and love is like a setting of silver at a king's banquet. Who can resist genuine Christians bound together to honor Christ and to serve the gospel in the energy supplied by the Holy Spirit?

When Christians surrender themselves to the cross, little candles create a bonfire for all to enjoy.

Building up Zion is God's work and must be energized by His Spirit. While man can participate in it, and appreciate it, men can add nothing to it. Likewise, building the kingdom of God is God's work. It can only expand by a supernatural supply of power. Man can preach the kingdom (sow the seed), but only God can cause the seed to grow (Mark 4:26). Both seed time and harvest are supernatural works of God.

The Great Lesson in the Psalm

17 He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.

Again, Young's translation has the tenses correct (Qal Perfect): "*He turned unto the prayer of the destitute, and He hath not despised their prayer.*"

Historically, the poor were those left in the land to forage for food and those among the captives of Babylon that returned to rebuild the House of God. The

pioneer exiles came back to a wasteland in order to rebuild the infrastructure of the nation.

What an encouragement that God hears the prayer of the destitute! The term “destitute” (*ar’ar*) refers to a small bush in the desert with tiny leaves—a condition brought about by a combination of acidic soil and drought conditions.

In Jeremiah 17:6, the term “*ar’ar*” is translated “heath” which refers to a dwarf-shrub—a low growing woody plant in arid regions of the earth. Jeremiah specifically mentions salty, parched lands. Perhaps, the psalmist is referring to vegetation near the Dead Sea. The principle the psalmist seeks to convey is God hears the prayer of his dwarfed afflicted people.

What an encouragement! God answers prayer! Thousands of saints will testify to it!

Israel’s King does not hear men because of their wealth or their status in society. God is not moved by riches or reputations. He is moved by faith.

God is love and He loves because of Who He is and not because of who we are or what we have accomplished.

Great kings are surrounded by powerful and wealthy men. The common man has no access to a prince. Unlike arrogant judges who cite petitioners with contempt for violating some esoteric rule, there is a King that is ready to bend his ear to those stripped of wealth and health. He hears beggars! As a King he has the wealth to pass out more than crumbs; as a gracious Being He can overlook the great faults of the petitioners. He will not despise the weakness of the prayers or the prayers of the weak.

18 This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD.

Having experienced such direct and intense answer to prayer, the psalmist shares his intent: Let this be written for future generations. Take a lesson from history. The rebuilding of the Second Temple was an act of God in answer to prayer. Take note, for there shall be future generations who will be poor and destitute. Let them be hopeful! There is a God in heaven who hears the prayer of the poor.

19 For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the LORD behold the earth; 20 To hear the groaning of the prisoner; to lose those that are appointed to death (YLT: “sons of death”); 21 To declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem;

The lesson from history continues: the destitute in Babylon are called “sons of death” because it appeared they would die bondman in a foreign land. Exiled and without a temple, they poured out their hearts to the Lord. The God of

Heaven heard their cries for spiritual and political freedom (prisoners of Babylon). When Cyrus came to power, God stirred the heart of Cyrus to grant freedom for political prisoners. He gave the order for volunteers among the exiles to return to Israel to rebuild God's temple.

To the captives, the order seemed like a dream. Political prisoners in Babylon, Cyrus ended their bondage. Such political reversals are rare in history. Jolted, the nation came to life. In the graveyard where nations are buried, Israel's casket was opened. Like Lazarus, a nation in grave clothes hobbled out of their tomb.

The psalmist teaches a profound truth: When forsaken by men, there is a God in Heaven that hears the cries and groans of those in shackles and chains.

22 When the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD.

How great was the sudden political reversal and the return of the captives from Babylon to rebuild the temple? The psalmist answers. When the final act of history closes, and saints are gathered around the eternal campfire telling stories, the return of the Jews to the land of Israel from the refugee camps in the State of Babylon will not be eclipsed. As a miracle of history, it parallels Israel's deliverance from Egypt.

His Return to His Personal Struggle

23 He weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days.

Having secured the grand fate of the temple and announced the miracle of the release of the Jews from Babylon, the psalmist now returns to his personal stress.

The verb "weakened" is a Piel perfect indicating intense affliction that caused him to hobble as a lame man toward the finish line. He was so afflicted; the stress was killing him – even shortening his expected life span.

24 I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years are throughout all generations.

The psalmist did not fear death, but he loved life. With an elephant on his chest and struggling to find strength to breathe, he begged the Almighty for a full life. Because God lives, he wants to live.

Knowing God infers a man wants to personally experience all of Jehovah's mercies and graces.

Because God answered the prayers of the destitute under Babylonian oppression and because he feels like a desert plant stripped of its leaves, he begs God to be to him what He was to the exiles – a God of resurrection.

25 Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. 26 They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: 27 But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.

It is reasonable to expect God to answer his prayers because God has not changed. What he was to destitute Israel in Babylon, He can be to the destitute psalmist now!

28 The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.

The psalmist seemed confident that godly seed will continue in future generations, not because of virtue in them, but because there is an unchanging God who creates and sustains them in every age.

What encouragement! We can expect the truth and mercy of God to prevail in all seasons of history. While it seems things are always getting worse and worse, there is this promise to claim: “the children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.”

(1) This psalm may have been written during the captivity following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, or it may have been written in a season after the Return.

48. My Peace I Give unto You

A Peace that Triumphs



John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.

The world is in search of peace. There is even a Nobel Peace Prize. But, it is a peace offered on its own terms and values — values that do not include the Law of God.

The world is all about conquest: about the conquest of man over his environment; about health over disease; about men over women or women over men; about business over the market; about wealth over poverty; about controlling territories, systems, and states; about

the government’s control over its citizens (See the first horsemen in the Apocalypse).

The world offers peace to men on its terms: (*“in this world you shall have tribulation,”* said Jesus.)

- The state offers us peace if we are compliant with its ten gazillion laws and willingly support its freedom stealing, money grabbing legislation.
- The state offers us peace if we accept its abortion mills, welcome homosexuality as a protected lifestyle, and tolerate a government manufacturing money out of thin air.
- The police offer us peace if we obey their commands, sign their tickets, and pay fines for “crimes” *mala prohibitum*.
- The IRS offers us peace if we cooperate with its presumptive tax system, agree to be treated as a government debt slave, fill out 1040 forms, and give Caesar whatever Caesar demands.
- The courts offer us peace if we will accept their presumptive *in personam jurisdiction* over us, agree to have a corrupt, money-hungry lawyer represent us, and submit to their process as they seek to indict, convict, fine, and imprison us.
- The organized church offers us peace as long as we show up, pay up, and shut up.

But, Jesus offers His people His peace

- a peace gained by His triumph over Satan, sin, and death
- a peace rooted in self-sacrifice and love—a peace that enriches man and sets him free to be God’s child
- a calm, undisturbed spirit that is at rest in Christ’s acceptance before the throne of God and His accomplishments on behalf of all of those who trust Him
- a peace that accepts Christ’s righteousness as God’s free gift to sinful men
- a peace that rests in the victory of Another.

We are not called to accept the world’s terms for peace for we are at war with the cosmos (world) that kills babies, enslaves men, and steals man’s property under color of law (Isaiah 48:22).

Twice Jesus had to clarify a truth—the truth that he did not offer any peace to the world, but a sword . . . the sword of judgment, justice, and execution (Matthew 10:34).

To His own, however, He offered them the gift of His peace. And, we are called to enter into his peace and be at rest while we wage war against the principalities and powers of this evil world.

Back in the sixties, I heard John Walden tell this story.

There once was a King who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace. Many artists presented their work. The King looked at all the pictures, but there were only two he admired and he had to choose between them.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror, for peaceful towering mountains were all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains, also. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky from which rain dropped and in which lightning lit up the sky. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall—not very peaceful at all. But when the King took a second look, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest in perfect peace. Guess which painting the king chose?

His peace is a heart at rest in the perfections of Christ midst the roaring imperfections of our age.

May we enter into His peace today!

49. Grabbing God's Attention

Humble and Broken

Isaiah 66:1-3 Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations.

Perhaps you've been feeling neglected lately and that God does not care about you—a common affliction among saints.

He who spread out the heavens declares the universe to be His throne claims the tiny blue dot in the Solar system as His footstool. Israel attempted to build Him a temple, but the Creator cannot be walled in. He cannot be contained, controlled, or commanded.

But, there is a creature on this earth that grabs his attention—possibly because he is as rare as a silver dollar on a city sidewalk.

Strangely, this transcendent, majestic God seeks a rare jewel among men.

God seeks the poor man (and woman).

We are impressed with the rich and famous—those people burgeoning with self-esteem and pride—the James Bonds and Carry Grants of the world. We marvel at their wealth and how they obtained it. We write books about them . . . mimic them . . . make movies about their lives, and seem to break-a-leg trying to obtain an autograph from them.

God balks at worldly wisdom, and shrinks at boasting success.

Drawn to a rarity among us, the Lord takes great interest in the poor, humble, afflicted man—one who has no righteousness of his own; one awakened to his own spiritual poverty; one that realizes his deficiency without Christ; one lacking the ABC's of pride: Arrogance, Bigotry, and Conceit so common among men.

The LORD takes great interest in the man who knows he is a poor sinner in need of a Savior; that man that does not launch a defense when the Spirit accuses him of sin.

Be humble or stumble!

God seeks the contrite man.

The word "*contrite*" can be translated "kill", "smite", "stricken", or "broken."

By "*broken*," the text is not referring to the "sick" or "injured" or those "ground to powder" as a human being by the adversities of life. There is nothing virtuous about a fractured, shattered, divided soul.

"*Broken*," I believe, is a condition precedent to being made "whole" or "healed" of man's fundamental spiritual infirmity. It implies the abandonment of self-determination, self-assurance, and self-promotion. Closing the door on his "*own way*," the broken man seeks God's ways. His hope is not in self, but Another. Forsaking a law unto himself, he seeks God's law. Abandoning self-rule, He recognizes God's authority over him.

The “*contrite man*” is the exact opposite of Maslow’s hierarchy which reflects a linear pattern of growth depicted in a direct pyramidal order of ascension; that integrates congruently the “real self” and the “ideal self” thereby cultivating the emergence of the “fully functioning person.”

Brokenness is like a dutiful stallion ready to be saddled or a glove that has been oiled, massaged, and molded to catch a baseball. A broken man has come to the end of himself wherein he is ready to seek God and to take up his cross to follow Christ; to conduct his business according to God’s laws and God’s rules.

“*Brokenness*” overcomes a spiritual defect in men—a defect that enlarges a man’s addiction to self-importance where life is all about advancing the “I”, “me,” and “my.”

Addiction to money or power or anger or lust or pornography or violence or self-pity deforms the man. Such a spiritual condition requires that God break sin’s growth plate in his spiritual skeleton. Breaking the man and the pain it causes brings no joy to the Lord, but resetting the fracture so that the human spirit grows straight in holiness delights Him.

Thus, the broken man is a whole man, a healthy man, a man pursuing godliness — a regenerated man growing strong, upright, and erect in his spiritual posture; a man that is no threat to others.

This Scripture does not require the “*contrite man*” to be a clergyman. They too have great need of brokenness. Rather, the verse informs us that God seeks men emptied of self whether they are students, teachers, engineers, or business professionals. The text focuses the man on his character, not his career; his spiritual state, not his public status.

God seeks a man who trembles at His Word.

The term “*tremble*” refers to “fear”, “reverence,” and “powerful respect” for the Holy Scriptures. Contrast a man who trembles at God’s Word with a spirit intoxicated with pleasure, power, and property. A Bible student values the exact opposite of a man who follows his feelings, friends, and frustrations.

Modern man seems to admire the power of money and politics. God’s man (or woman) is moved and motivated by kingdom values. He does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. The Scriptures which the worldly-wise deem foolish are the Source of wisdom for God’s man (Deuteronomy 8:3; Psalm 119:98).

The Spirit contrasts the lover of Scripture to the callous soul who goes his own way and feeds on abominations (Leviticus 18; Isaiah 53:6); the kind of person that makes up his own religion and his own laws (Judges 21:25); the hypocrite that nullifies the Word of God by creating his own rules (Isaiah 65:2-5; 66:3).

We live in an age where people are glued to their computers and televisions. People text friends. Sports, money, and pleasures busy the minds of men. Opinions of the rich and famous blare across the airwaves.

The vast majorities of people have no time for God; no interest in the Divine; and no hope but human government. Most ignore Scripture and God's purpose for their lives. These kinds of people have no promises except, "I will chose their punishments."

If you want God's attention, be a humble person, a human being empty of pride and self-ambition, a student of the Holy Scriptures. Listen to Him, and He will listen to you. Seek the Lord Jesus Christ meek and lowly, and you will have God's attention.

50. Puritan View of Pain and Suffering

Suffering as a means to holiness



We are struck by the usefulness of our trials and the loving hand of a Father guiding, directing, correcting, re-focusing us along the way. Sometimes the hand feels heavy. There is a sense of solemnity, sobriety, and conviction that rests on us. These aren't always easy times. But, the end result is the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

For those of you who asked about that list of "reasons" produced by John Flavel, the Puritan. . .

here it is.

#1. Your pain, your suffering is not an accident. There is a reason for it, because God did it. And He has a reason for everything He does. And it is good. And it is for His glory. And you have to trust that He knows what He is doing.

#2. God would rather our hearts be heavy under adversity than careless under prosperity. Men and women who are far more sanctified than you and me, have been exercised with the sharpest suffering . . . and the most severe tortures. And those who now shine as stars in heaven have been trodden under foot as Dung on the Earth. What does Paul say? "*We have been made as the filth of the world, the off scouring of all things until now.*"

#3. Here is one of the greatest wonders in the world. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fourth man in the fire. God demonstrates His glory by providing a Supernatural, Spiritual Asbestos suit in the fire. Turn aside, and see this great sight! How is it that the church burns, and burns, and burns. . .but it still isn't consumed? How is this possible?

#4. Troubles are ordered so one way to mortify the corruptions that are in our hearts. The winter weather kills the weeds.

#5. Our sufferings have a unique way of clearing away the doubts and fears. . . One sharp trial will do more to put our fears to rest and resolve our doubts that all the sermons that we ever heard in our lives.

#6. Intense sufferings and trials in the church always seem to have a way of establishing the real, the authentic, the steadfast, and the sincere worshipers of God. The sacrifices on the altar remain.

#7. The church's sufferings are there to endear us to one another. Times of commons suffering are times of reconciliation and greater endearment. The intense fires of persecution and suffering burn away our pride, competition, and bitterness towards one another. Never was there more love than in the torture chambers of Romania. Silly differences between denominations and petty disagreements just sort of melt away.

#8. And finally, these sufferings have an amazing way of awakening us to duty, to pray more frequently, spiritually, and fervently. What is really important in life begins to manifest itself to us in the midst of the fire.

It is in trials that our faith is strengthened, our commitment to fight the good fight more steeled, and our dependence on the Strength only He can provide made more consistent.

Labor on in prayer. In due season, we will reap, as we faint not.

Hope, Wait, Look Up. (Author Unknown)

Part 3

Going Deeper Into Scripture

More Perspectives on Trials



*“ . . . the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold . . . ” – 1
Peter 1:7*

51. Your Trials are a Gift of God

Do you like God's Gifts?

Psalm 55:22 Cast your burden on the LORD (the protasis), and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved (the apodasis).

Have you ever considered that your trials are a gift from God, not to make you bitter, but to make you better?

"We want to avoid suffering, death, sin, ashes. But we live in a world crushed and broken and torn, a world God himself visited to redeem. We receive his poured-out life, and being allowed the high privilege of suffering with Him, may then pour ourselves out for others."- Elizabeth Elliot

Most of us see difficulties in life as a road block to our goals. But, in reality, the rock block to joy in life is our detour into carnal pleasures and our failure to embrace suffering as a gift of God.

However, the Bible tells us that trials are appointed by the Sovereign LORD God (Psalm 29:10) who loves us so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins . . . and it was at the cross our sins and sorrows were transformed into gifts (John 3:15, 36; Matthew 1:21; Romans 15:1-4)

Cruci dum spiro fido

PART I

THE TROUBLED SOUL

In Psalm 55:1-2, David prays, *"Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication. Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise;"*

Forced to flee Jerusalem during the Absalom revolt, David is unsure if God is pleased with him. Fearing that God might ignore his pleas and turn away from him in his troubles, he pleads with the LORD to not shut His eyes nor close His ears to his fractured prayer.

The Hebrew word for "mourn" is *ruwd*.

The word is used in Genesis 27:40 to describe an animal that has broken loose from its tether and then wanders about the countryside. The word *ruwd* is used in Jeremiah 2:31 and Hosea 11:12 to describe one wandering restlessly before God in the wilderness. The term expresses a condition of a lost soul skirting around trying to find his way back to the stall. Deeply distressed and having lost his way in life, he looks in every direction for help to lead him back to the fold . . . back to God -- back to His Owner and Keeper.

In using the term "*complaint*," the psalmist is not referring to a caustic criticism of God's dealings with him, but of describing the distress of a soul that loses perspective and direction in life. What is a king doing abandoning his throne and a father fleeing from his thankless, hate-filled son? Under so much stress, David calls his prayer "*a noise*" to God. This is no longer an orderly prayer, but a roar, a groan, the incoherent chatter of a city in an uproar (See the word's usage in Deuteronomy 7:23 (confusion); Ruth 1:19; 1 Kings 1:45 (rang or uproar)).

So bitter is the Absalom revolt that David wishes he was a little bird that could immediately flee the hunter's snare . . . but, he was trapped and his scared soul fluttered like the flapping wings of a captured dove (Psalm 55:6).

David describes his political state as one of "oppression of the wicked" (55:3). The Hebrew word for "*oppression*" is *aqah*. It comes from a verbal form that means to be crushed under a wagon wheel bearing its full capacity – Amos 2:13: "*Behold, I am "pressed" under you as a cart is "pressed" that is full of sheaves.*"

Most burdensome for this afflicted soul is the "oppression" against him which we know as a slanderous smear campaign taking place against him through the gossip columns of his day.

David describes his heart as "*sore pained within me*" where "the terrors of death are fallen upon me" (Psalm 55:4).

The Hebrew word for "*sore pained*," (*chuw*) means "to turn round; to twist like a woman wringing water out of a towel; to dance in a circle; to be whirled round; and then to twist or writhe with pain. *Chuw* is especially applied to a woman in the pains of childbirth. See Isaiah 13:8; Isaiah 23:4; Isaiah 26:18.

Moreover, the psalmist feels like the shadows of death enveloped him as a shroud covers a corpse (Psalm 55:5), and as being trapped in a tornado our hurricane (Psalm 55:6).

He even describes the pain of the treachery by Ahithophel, a trusted friend in verse 12-14.

Like David, we too may feel trapped in trials from which we wish to escape. Like David, many of our desperate prayers have only the dexterity of a moan or groan – a cacophony of unpitched, indeterminate noise.

The good news is that God heard the clash and clangs in David's heart and marvelously delivered him. So impressed was the king with God's answer to his pain-filled prayer, he penned a lesson for future generations who feel trapped in terrifying trials:

PART II, THE REMEDY FOR A TROUBLED SOUL

Psalm 55:22 Cast your burden on the LORD (the protasis), and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved (the apodasis).

The Hebrew word for "*burden*" is *yehab* and it means "lot" or "what is given."

God handed a grievous burden for king David to bear. The background of Psalm 55 is the Absalom Revolt including the treason of Ahithophel, and David's flight from Jerusalem during the *coup d'état* — a wretched revolt against his administration that led to a ghastly civil war.

Here the sweet psalmist of Israel shares a valuable lesson learned during the uncertainty of the chaos: trials are a gift of God!

Barnes says, "This may be regarded as an address of the psalmist to his own soul — an exhortation to himself to roll all his care upon the Lord and to be calm." But, it is the lesson of the psalm which applies to us.

The Hebrew word for "*cast*" is *shalak* — a Hiphil imperative calling for intense, deliberate action of the will: "Stir yourself and cast" your burdens on the LORD.

The Hebrew verb *shalak* means "to cast," "to put," "to throw," or "to hurl." It is translated

"put (*shalak*) under one of the bushes" in Genesis 21:15;

"throw (*shalak*) him into one of the pits" in Genesis 37:20;

"cast (*shalak*) into the Nile" in Exodus 1:22;

"throw (*shalak*) it on the ground" in Exodus 4:22;

"they spread a cloak, and every man threw (*shalak*) in it the earrings of his spoil" in Judges 8:25; that is, just as the men of Israel threw (*shalak*) in their gold trinkets on to the cloak as a gift, we are to throw (*shalak*) our lot in life on to the LORD.

The word "*burden*" (*yehab*) is a noun which refers to one's lot or what is given. It is translated

"give" (*yehab*) in Genesis 29:21; 30:1; 47:15; Joshua 18:4; Judges 1:15; 20:7;

“take or choose” (yehab) in Deuteronomy 1:13; “ascribe” in Deuteronomy 32:3; Psalm 29:2;

“make me a gift” (yehab) in Job 6:22;

“grant” (yehab) in Psalm 60:11; “give” and “give” in Proverbs 20:15;

“give (yehab) me my wages” in Zechariah 11:12;

and *“burden” (yehab) in Psalm 55:22.*

It could easily be translated throw your ‘lot,’ or throw “what is given to you’,” or throw “the gift of your trial” upon the LORD.

In the New Testament, the word *“burden”* is translated *“cares of this life”* (1 Peter 5:7; Luke 21:34), and the word *“cast”* is translated, *“throwing their cloaks on the colt”* (Luke 19:35).

The first promise (apodosis) is that the one who *“cast what is given to him”* upon the LORD will be *“sustained.”*

The condition is *“cast your burden on the Lord”* (the protasis).

The Hebrew word for *“sustain”* is *kul* and a rare Pilpel verb form (like Piel) which implies intense action. It means *“to contain,” “to sustain,”* and *“to maintain.”*

The Hebrew word *kul* (sustain) in English is translated:

“There I will provide (kul) for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come,” in Genesis 45:11;

“and Joseph provided (kul) his father, his brothers, and all his father’s household with food” in Genesis 47:12;

“do not fear; I will provide (kul) for you and your little ones” in Genesis 50:21;

“He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher (kul) of your old age . . . ” in Ruth 4:15;

“those officers supplied provision (kul) for King Solomon” in 1 Kings 4:27;

“I have commanded the ravens to feed (kul) you there” in 1 Kings 17:4;

“I have commanded a widow there to feed (kul) you” in 1 Kings 17:9;

“Forty years you sustained (kul) them in the wilderness” in Nehemiah 9:21; and,

“he will guide (kul) his affairs with discretion” in Psalm 112:5.

The second or complementary part of the apodosis (the conclusive part of the promise) is that “He will never permit the righteous to be moved.”

The noun “*moved*” (*mote*) means “to totter, shake, or slip.”

The verb “*permit*” means “to give, bestow, grant, ascribe, employ, devote, deliver, stretch out, extend, or designate.” It is preceded by a negation “*never*,” that is, our God will never permit us to “be moved.”

There is a kind testing that could destroy our faith and demolish our God-confidence. The promise here is that God will never let that happen. He will not permit the “righteous” (Romans 5:1) to totter and fall, but He may permit storms to enter their lives that cause them to tether themselves tighter to the promises.

Barnes puts it this way,

“He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved – literally, “He will not give moving forever to the righteous.” That is, he will not so appoint, arrange, or permit things to occur, that the righteous shall be “ultimately” and “permanently” removed from their steadfastness and their hope; he will not suffer them to fall away and perish.”

Need protection, provision, or navigation? “Throw what has been given to you” on to the LORD. Roll your lot upon your Creator.

Notice what Christ said to Peter in John 18:11 – “ . . . shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

Just as Jesus saw the cross, the redemption of humanity, as His “lot,” we should see the trials of life as “our lot” and “His gift” to us --

- not to impair us, but to prepare us;
- not to make us bitter, but to make us better;
- not to hurt us, but to convert us from our ways to His ways;
- not to destroy our faith, but to cause us to trust in His faithfulness;
- not to damage us, but to give us an advantage in the race we call “life” (Hebrews 12:1).

See 1 Peter 5:7 Casting All Your Care Upon Him

Peter instructs us “to *cast*” our burden on the Lord because “*He cares (melo) for you.*” The Greek word *melo* is translated “care” ten times in the New Testament and six times in reference to Jesus in the gospels . . . but each time it is negated by the negative particle “*ou*” either in a negative like “*you do not care*” or a question, “*do you not care*” (Mark 4:38; Luke 10:40); that is, all the references to “*care*” are negated creating a question about His love: “Lord, do you not care for me?”

It is so easy for us when going through difficult circumstances to accuse the Lord of not caring for us. Lest we question His love, Peter removes all doubt when he says affirmatively, "He cares for you!"

52. How to Suffer Well

1 Peter 3:8-18

Suffering is a necessary part of the Christian life in that it is a tool to release us from our idols and to bind us to Christ.

No one says *when I grow up I want to learn to suffer well*. But, when one grows up he learns he must learn to suffer well or fail.

Christ did not suffer that we might not suffer. He suffered that we might be made whole. Likewise, our suffering is not to make us bitter, but to make us better; not to make us less, but to give us more; not to make us poor on earth, but to make us rich in heaven.

Before us is a passage on how to suffer well (1 Peter 3:8-18):

8 Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

10 For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:

11 Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.

12 For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

13 And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

14 But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

16 Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

17 For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

The word "*call*" or "*called*" is used five times in 1 Peter; that is, God has called us to five vocations. This passage is about the call to love (3:9) even when we are suffering under some unwanted affliction.

The word "*suffer*" (*paschoite*: 14, 17) means "to be acted on" by the will of another;" that is, it refers to fierce pressure and stress due to some unwanted difficulty--an irritation out of our control.

We cannot see clearly until tears are shed; and, we cannot love accurately until pain pierces our heart.

Since the whole context is relational, Peter addresses political troubles.

The word for "*trouble*" in verse 14 refers to agitations and pressures caused by men: bullies, inconsiderate people, irritable neighbors, proud government agents, demanding debt collectors, deadly slanderers and the like. These people--pressures arouse fear (phobia).

When we suffer we want to escape, relieve the pain, even to strike out against the ones we love spreading the pain and grief we feel (3:9).

In looking at the remedy for stress and fear, the man who fled when the cock crowed instructs the scattered elect (1:1) on how to suffer well.

1) Say "NO!" to evil.

When we are hurt we become angry tend to lash out at others and whip them with our tongue.

The adverb "*not*" negates the verbal participle "*rendering evil*" in verse nine. Under the hammer of injustice, Peter calls us to vigorously reign in the urge for "*rendering evil for evil*" (3:9). When evil knocks on our door, slam it shut! When evil begs entrance, say "NO!" When evil kicks in like cruise control, turn it off!

2) Focus on loving actions; that is, to be vigorously committed to our call to love one another. There are five calls in 1 Peter, and love is one of them (3:9). Holiness and suffering are two more (1:25, 2:21).

In every dark trial, we need to light a candle and ask "who needs my love and warmth today?" and, "How can I be a blessing to others while I am being transformed into a diamond?" After all, the purpose of suffering is "sanctification" (3:15).

3) "Refrain the tongue:" The Greek verb "*refrain*" means "to stop" now! Stop talking; stop complaining; and stop criticizing. Shut up! The aorist imperative DEMANDS the afflicted hackamore his wild tongue by tying it down with ropes and fetters; that is, Peter wanted the readers to take his advice and to act on it immediately.

The context informs us that if we want an unruffled life during our bumpy pilgrimage on this earth, we must control our words (3:10, Proverbs 18:21).

4) Be kind (3:11). The word "*eschew*" means "to turn away from" or do an about face. The opposite of gripping, complaining, and barking out orders to irritable people is turn away from evil and "to do good."

Truth be known, we do not hate sin enough! One reason God gives us trials is so that we might hate our personal sins more and love righteousness always.

When we learn to hate sin, we sin less. But, the emphasis in this passage is not instruction on virtue, but doing that which is kind while under diamond-producing pressure.

The Apostle gives us a promise: God hears the prayers of "the righteous" (those who do well) and He is against those who do evil. The whole law is summed up in do your neighbor no harm. If you are harmless, what public official is going to hurt you?

(5) Be happy as there is happiness to be found in suffering, if you look for it (3:14).

The Puritans reminded us:

"Your pain, your suffering is not an accident. There is a reason for it, because God did it. And He has a reason for everything He does. And it is good. And it is for His glory. And you have to trust that He knows what He is doing.

God would rather our hearts be heavy under adversity than careless under prosperity."

There is a whole new level of spiritual development that occurs when a troubled saint seeks to be a blessing to others under his grief. The question is not, "How do you feel?" but "Who needs your kindness today?"

(6) Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts (3:15): Sanctifying the Lord God in verse 15 is the opposite of being afraid and troubled in verse 14!

We are called to glorify the Lord (1 John 3:9-10), magnify Him (Psalm 34:3), to justify God (declare righteous), Luke 7:29, and here we are called to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts.

The word "*sanctify*" means "to set apart" or to give weight to his words, his commands, and his presence; to truly honor him and treat him with ALL DUE RESPECT as Lord and God.

"But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel" (Isaiah 29:23).

Israel had Immanuel, "God is with us," in the sense the Lord was with the whole nation. But, in this passage Peter instructs us about the awesome reality that each believer has the Lord God in his own heart.

This command to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts does NOT mean "with your hearts" or "from your hearts" but to sanctify the Lord God *in that part of your soul where God meets man . . .* in that part of your soul where holy business is conducted.

The title "Lord" provides an additional emphasis on the necessity of arranging our inner man around the authority of Christ.

To cure fear, revere God more!

From the word "*answer*" in this verse we get the theological term "apologetics." Let us learn to give an answer to every incrimination by studying to answer well.

(7) Be a wounded healer: *"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God . . ."*

As his suffering was not without purpose, our suffering is not without purpose. As we were brought to God by his suffering at the cross, may many around us be brought to God by the pain we endure and the goodness we do.

When we learn to suffer well, we become like Christ -- a wounded healer.

53. Where is God When I Need Him?

"Thou God seest me"

Genesis 16:6-15

6 Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.

7 And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur.

8 And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai.

The Trauma of a Runaway Pregnant Teenager



God's lesson for learning how to respond to deferred hope came through Sarah's servant Hagar. Hurt, and overcome with despair,

Hagar ran away from home and headed back to Egypt. She jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire. Can you imagine what would have happened to her and her baby among pyramid builders — the seat of Vanity Fair?

The worst day in the house of God is better than the best day in the world! Better to be mistreated in the family of God than to be pampered in the house of the wicked.

Like most human messes, it takes God's light to heal the wounds caused by darkness. On the road to Shur, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar. This is the first mention of the "*Angel of the Lord*" — the Angel of His presence who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

While God did not prevent the Patriarchal couple from making the defective decision to use Hagar to be a surrogate mother, He did step in and prevent Sarah's run-away servant girl from making a disastrous decision to flee to the Nile basin. How could a pregnant, teenage girl survive in Egypt?

Why did the Angel of the Lord appear to Hagar and not to Abram?

There are at least two reasons: (a) God loved Hagar and knew she was the victim of the fleshly decision by His own covenant-people, and (b) it was God's will to heal the antagonists (Abraham and Sarah) by the wounds of His little lamb (a true victim — Hagar). Are not we "healed by His stripes?" (Isaiah 53:5-7).

The most hurt among us (Jesus) became the greatest Healer. Therefore, it behooves us to follow His example and to heal those who hurt us (1 Peter 2:23, 24).

The LORD instructed Hagar to go back and to submit to Sarah's abuse (16:9)! And, she did! God did not reverse her pregnancy, but he did reverse her fate. The lesson Hagar learned about the LORD, "the One Who see" her, she was able to share with Abram and Sarah for their healing and good. The perpetrator of a wrong has a greater spiritual need than that the victim of the wrong.

But, how could she go back and submit to maltreatment? Surely this is not politically correct. No government paid counselor would advise an abused woman to return and submit to her abusers. But, God ordered Hagar to do so and she obeyed.

What did she learn in her encounter with God that would enable her to return to this difficult situation?

First, she learned that God knew all about her and her burdensome domestic troubles; that God knew where she was (near a spring in the desert: 16:7); that God knew her name (Hagar: 16:7); that God knew who she was and what she did for a living (“Hagar, servant of Sarai”); and, that God knew where she came from and where she was going.

The Angel of the Lord asked her, “Where have you come from, and where are you going?” He did not ask her these questions because he did not know the answer, but to let Hagar know that He knew all about her abuse.

So impressed was Hagar by God’s personal knowledge and concern for her that she named the place, “*Beer Laha Roi,*” — “*the well of the living One who sees me*” (16:14) because “*she saw the back of him who sees me*” (*ra’i’ti a’har’e roi*) (16:13). Not only did she give God a special title which He was pleased to record in His Word forever, she called her son “*Ishmael.*” The proper noun “*Ishmael*” is made up of two words, “*God*” (*la*) and “*hear*” (*shema*) which means “*God hears.*” Isn’t this the reason why the sons of Ismael pray five times a day?

Genesis 16:9 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.

Surely, Hagar shared her story with Abraham and Sarah. Most likely, Sarah and Abraham learned a valuable lesson and began to treat Hagar properly. Possibly, Abraham and Hagar apologized to their servant, and treated her quite differently.

The paradox astounds us. On one hand, we see the tender love the Angel showed Hagar, and on the other hand, how can God can make good come of the legacy of this carnal union?

Second, God knew all about Hagar’s child and his future. God gave Hagar special insight into the destiny of the child she was carrying. From Ishmael came the great Arab nation.

Genesis 16:10 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.

Genesis 16:11 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction.

God announces the baby's destiny as a "wild donkey" of a man . . . and this status was a gift of God.

This is foreordination — a decision of the Divine will: a wild man . . . independent . . . despising cities loving the wilderness . . . alone . . . licking up every blade of green grass . . . in constant search of water . . . wandering . . . untamable . . . evading the mule driver's whip . . . plundering . . . living the freewheeling life style of a desert pirate. Can anything be more descriptive of Arab history?

Being a "wild ass" of a man means Ishmael was endowed with rugged independence. He could not be controlled by contract. His was a hard life, but a free life.

And your life? Free? A matter of choice or foreordained?

What is the lesson for us? Sometimes, *knowing that God knows is all that we need to know!*

Bob Richards, former Olympic pole vault champion, shared a moving story about a wannabe football player. He gave everything he had, but he just wasn't big enough to star on the football field. Though he always sat on the bench, his dad came to every game. Though the boy never missed a practice, he was not allowed to play. One day the young man received news that his dad died, and asked to be excused from practice. The coach told him to take the week off and not even bother to show up for the game on Saturday. During the 3rd quarter when the team was behind 10 points, the boy arrived at the stadium and suited up. He begged the coach to let him play. Insistent, the coach gave in.

It was not long before everyone was aware of his presence on the field. Making key tackles, he stopped the opposing team's top running backs. Soon, the score was tied. With a few seconds before the game ended, the kid intercepted a pass and ran it back for the winning touchdown. In the locker room, the coach came up to the young man and said, "That was quite a performance out there, son. How did you do it?" With tears in his eyes, the young man responded, "Dad came to all my games, but did you know that my dad was blind? Today was the first time he could see me play, and I wanted to show him I could do it."

He played well because he believed His father was looking on. But, unlike the player's father, God always sees. He never misses a single event in our lives.

A little baby named David was riding in his Dad's jeep when his father had to swerve in order to miss an oncoming car. When the jeep hit a pot hole, David popped out of the seat and hit somewhere on the busy highway. Terrified,

David's father slammed on the breaks and went back to search for his dead son. To his surprise, David sat on the yellow line in the middle of the highway. Dad quickly grabbed him and began to inspect him. Not a scratch on the infant, the inscription on his Son's T-shirt hit home, "God loves me so much, He can't take His eyes off me."

The fact that God knows us is all that we need to know.

Abram and Sarai eventually gave birth to a son. God fulfilled his promise to them, but in a way and at a time they never imagined. His delay, though it appeared to be without purpose, brought glory to God and greater joy and greater depth to Abram and Sarai. Little did either know that their lives would be used to encourage millions who have ever had to wait on God for a promise to be fulfilled.

If you are unsettled by deferred hope, you are not alone. Waiting for God is the most laborious duty you will endure under His tutorship. While waiting, remember the best about God, review the promises, rely on the promises, respond in the Spirit, and rest in the fact that God knows all about your needs and wants.

54. Don't Worry About the Future

That He knows is all that I need to know

Revelation 2:9-10 I know your tribulation . . . Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

The future looked bleak and barren.

The Lord forecast days of blistering heat for the church in Smyrna — a bitterly hot season of political suffering, pain, and distress.

We don't know the details, but we know the source of their troubles came from the Jews whom our Lord says were members of the synagogue of Satan (2:9).

These Satanic agents slandered the Christians before the civil authorities who arraigned them into their secular courts under Roman civil law. Many were fined, subject to asset forfeiture, and thrown into prison. Such injustice



resulted in the loss of their freedom and possessions as well as their sense of well-being and security (2:9-12).

Being plucked like a bird and cooked in the oven of these Roman courts like a naked turkey was not anyone's idea of fun.

The purpose of our text is to comfort those about to be cast into the furnace of affliction.

You can find comfort in your affliction by grasping three soothing facts in this passage.

First, do not fear the future because it is the Lord Who came to give His people comfort and assurance so they could endure the trials and be faithful to Him during their affliction.

The "I" in the text is the Lord Jesus Christ. By His suffering our Lord eases our suffering. Because He experienced the "contradictions of sinners against himself," and endured the great injustice of Roman crucifixion, He can encourage us in our lesser sufferings.

He did not flee from the splintery cross. He did not dismiss the daggers of difficulty. Nor, did He have any counselor present who could alleviate his pain.

We were not there at Golgotha to comfort Him, but He stands alongside each one of us to comfort us in our cross bearing. He endured the rejection, slurs, hate, cursing, agony, loneliness, misunderstanding, injustice, and excruciating lying madness of false accusers in the corrupt Jewish courts. He faced the cross and its shame with no fear. This is the reason he says to us, "Do not be afraid."

Second, do not fear the future because our Lord knows all about anguish and adversity that will terrify us and rob us of peace of mind.

Rest your head on the pillow of His omniscience. He knows. He cares. And, He is wise.

Jail time was not the result of negligence or breach of law on the part of these believers. Being thrown into prison was the Devil's doing.

The text says, "*I know your tribulation . . .*" He knows the hardship of it; the misery of it; the stress and fear of it. He not only knows the thorns on our path, He permits them to grow there . . . and, if we can be so bold, He ordains it!

He knew about the false witnesses, the mock trial, the perjury of the Jews, the guilty verdict, and the fact that people would choose Barrabus, a career criminal, over himself. He knew about the nails and nakedness of the Roman cross.

He endured its pain. This is why He urges us, "*Don't be afraid.*"

Third, do not fear the future because our Lord limits our suffering.

In stating the faithful at Smyrna would suffer “ten days” is another way of saying our Lord limited the wrath of man and appointed an end to their trials.

He has been where we are . . . and where we will one day be. Even if our suffering results in death, and is the cause of death, He instructs us “to not be afraid.”

Fourth, do not fear the future because the Lord rewards those who are faithful under the Devil’s whip and rod.

Prison time for things *mala prohibita* are not the result of breaking God’s law, but the result of a tyrannical regimes that believe in the total subjugation of the total man to total government. Prison time, fines, and asset forfeiture is often the Devil work accomplished by the Devil’s agents: State accusers, State prosecutors, and State judicial administrators who get paid by the State for punishing the non-compliant for violating one of their State statutes.

Our duty is to God’s law, not State statutes. State statutes are only for those in contract with the State. The State has no authority to place a duty upon its Citizens . . . unless the Citizen applies for a franchise privilege (See Hale v. Henkel, 201 U.S. 43 (1906) where the Supreme Court said the private citizen has no duty to the State.

The Devil uses the judicial system to torture Christians. With so many statutes on the books it is not possible to go through life without violating one of the State’s codes.

We live in a country where the government believes in “no criminal left behind.” One in three black men and one in ten white men will be incarcerated in their life time (Bureau of “Justice” Statistics).

“The number of Americans with criminal records today is larger than the entire U.S. population in 1900,” and “As many Americans have criminal records as college diplomas”(Brennan Center for Justice).

Living in America is terrifying. A man can be accused, arraigned, charged, prosecuted, jailed, or shot by today’s military police state. Even though one is mindful of God’s laws, he can face horrific legal battles with a satanic regime.

It is good news and a comfort to know that He promised the martyrs a “*crown of life*” to those who make the ultimate sacrifice for Christ. He honors those who honor Him.

But, there is another way to receive the crown of life and that is to live for Him; that is, to be faithful to Him under all of life’s trials. He promises a crown to all who are “*faithful unto death*” and to all who are faithful in life.

Are you going through difficulties? Don’t try to wiggle out and escape. Don’t seek comfort in sensuality and cowardly retreat to flesh and senses. Don’t be

afraid. Do your duty in all things. Be faithful to Him under pressure knowing that He will deliver you and reward you in His time

55. My Times are In Your Hands

Psalm 31:15; 2 Kings 5:1

“My times are in your hand.” - Psalm 31:15

A study on the beautiful faith of a casualty of war

Do you ever feel like things are out of control; that your ship is adrift on the North Sea without a rudder?

With terrors on every side, David stated, *“My times are in Your Hand”* (Psalm 31:15).

Let’s turn in our Bible to 2 Kings 5:1 and look at the hand of providence in the life of a little girl whose life was turned upside down by what we would call “a great tragedy.”

We know this story as the Healing of Naaman, the leper.

Let us consider the political upheaval in her life and the hand of God over her circumstances in this story.

2 Kings 5:2 And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman’s wife.

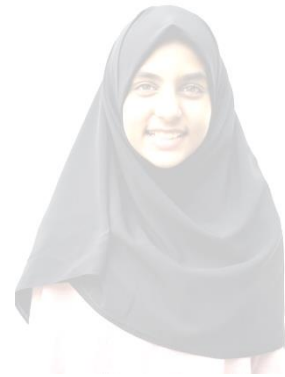
Consider the circumstances of our story.

This little girl was taken captive by Naaman, the great general of Syria, and abducted into service as a maidservant to his wife.

Apostate Israel under the judgment of God, He employed Syria as the rod of His chastisement.

We learn that though Namaan was well respected and a great man in Syria, he was stricken with leprosy, an incurable disease. God had this maid in his hands, and He graciously placed her in Naaman’s service to witness to Namaan regarding His prophet Elisha and a potential cure under his instruction.

Consider the human tragedy of this event.



One day the girl was having breakfast with her family when she heard the screams of villagers and the pounding hoof beats of horses. Running hither and thither, women screamed, children cried, goats bleated! Syrian looters broke into her home, ripped her away from her parents while snatching all the valuables they could grab.

Carried out of her village, she was bound and forced marched back to Syria. Huddled together with a few others, she was among the spoils of war in a foreign land among aliens speaking a strange language. General Namaan chose the maid as a servant for his household.

Think of the human tragedy: A home desolated; parents broken and stricken with terror and grief; villagers dealing with their own grief; and the stunning shock and fear that invaded this little girl's heart. Just imagine the whole painful event.

And, God? Where was He?

Consider the spiritual confusion that must have erupted due to these events.

Oh, the terror and doubt that must have tested the girl and her family. The parents must have prayed and asked God a hundred times for the safe return of their daughter. No doubt the little girl squeaked out prayers of her own. Imagine how helpless they must have felt.

Where was God in this whole affair?

Consider the legal and political impotence of the Israelites.

The little girl's family was not millionaires that could buy back their kidnapped daughter. They were not a trained militia or navy seals possessing the capacity to organize a stealth operation to retrieve the captives. They were not politicians that had international leverage. She was just a little girl, and her own government could have cared less . . . and they were not going to go to war against the Syrians to retrieve a young child and a few captives over a border dispute.

Why the tragedy? Why the kidnapping? Why our village? Why now? Why the dagger of pain in the heart of the parents—a bitterness they would be with them the rest of their lives? Why the shock . . . the anguish . . . the feeling of utter hopelessness?

And, we don't even know the name of this little girl.

Consider the only consolation available for our lives:

"My times are in your hand" (Psalm 31:15).

He *"hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation"* (Acts 17:26).

Consider the will of God.

God, not man, controls the stormy seas of politics. The war, the border dispute, the military raid, the kidnapping, the terror, the dividing of spoil was all under the direction and supervision of the LORD God of Israel.

Consider the state of this little maid.

Her life was turned upside down by the raid, kidnapping, and human trafficking. She was sold as a slave. Yet, you don't get the idea she was bitter or resentful because her change in circumstances.

Her response is so different than American free blacks whose great, great, great, great grandfathers were kidnapped by African blacks and sold as slaves to slave masters.

In fact, not only was she not eaten up with bitterness, she was moved with compassion toward her new slave mastery, leprous Namaan. She actually hoped the best for him.

I don't think this girl would understand why black athlete millionaire football players take a knee during the national anthem because they feel like victims of "white privilege," whatever that is.

Fortunately, this Hebrew girl wasn't forced to endure a lifetime of victimization training, propaganda, and indoctrination that women and free black people in America experience today.

Consider Divine Providence.

In His providence, Namaan raided this particular village. In His providence, the Syrians captured this little girl—a girl of faith; a girl who had heard about Elisha; a girl who believed that there was a God in Israel who could do anything.

- In His providence, the little maid ended up in Namaan's house.
- In His providence, the little maid told her mistress about the powers of Elisha and expressed them with such faith that she believed and told her husband.
- In His providence, Namaan believed the little girl and went in search of a cure for his leprosy in the land of Israel.
- In His providence, Namaan obeyed Elisha; found healing; and came to know the truth about the God of Israel.
- In His providence, Namaan the Syrian, became the only recorded healing of leprosy in the Old Testament;

- In His providence, this story and the faith of this little Hebrew maid became part of Holy Scripture. In His providence the faith of this little girl came before kings to challenge their faith and knowledge of the Most High.
- In His providence the faith of this little girl would rebuke the skepticism and expose the madness of the king of Israel who ripped his clothes out of unbelief and frustration.

Though there is nothing in the text about “the rest of the story,” it is reasonable to presume that there was much joy in Namaan’s household following his recovery . . . and, don’t you think Namaan went to this girl and thanked her? I can see him showering her with thankfulness and gifts of appreciation. Further, she spent the rest of her service in the home of a true believer in the God of Israel.

Consider the language of our text.

“My times are in Your Hand.” (Psalm 31:15)

The word “*times*” (*ayth*) refers to stages and events in our lives. It is first translated “evening” in Genesis 8:11; that is, the mornings and evenings of our life *and everything in between* is in His hands.

The word “*times*” (*ayth*) is translated “season” in Psalm 1:3; that is, the seasons of our life are in His hands: the seasons of childhood, youth, marriage, parenthood, and old age. The good times, the bad times, the hard times, the prosperous times including the famines and feasting, war and peace, sickness and health are in His hands.

A wealthy man once said to a preacher, “You seem to live from hand to mouth.” The preacher responded, “Yes, but it’s His hand and my mouth.”

Consider the context of Psalm 31:3.

The psalmist is surrounded by enemies. He hears their slander and is even aware of plots to dethrone him. The seasons of our life, both good and bad, are “*in his hands.*”

We are **not** victims of climate change . . . or even political change. All of these things are permitted by Him . . . and good things can come out of the worst of circumstances.

In conclusion, there is nothing more frightening than life’s sudden reversals. In this case, the magnitude of being kidnapped, ripped out of one’s family, and transported to another country is about a 9.0 on a spiritual rector scale. Few things could be worse.

Yet, in all of this, God was in control — *making good come out of evil* (Romans 8:28).

Our problem is compounded, not only because negative things happen to us, but because we do not take sufficient comfort in the Scriptures.

Oh, that we might be able to say with the saints of old, "*My times are in thy hand.*"

56. The Greatest Faith-Comeback in History

Psalm 137

A lesson for those who are disappointed with god



Before us is a backslider, a true believer under severe discipline. With his dreams crushed, he faced a choice between leaving the faith or clinging to the hope of his faith.

Most psalms involve a conflict and a resolution. This Post Exilic Psalm does the same.

Crushed by despair, this Hebrew leaves us with a poetic record of

his struggle and the triumph of his faith -- arguably one of the greatest spiritual victories in the Inspired Hymnal.

Psalm 137:1 By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

Babylon? What are God's people doing in Mesopotamia by the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers? Isn't this the birth place of Abraham? Jeremiah answers the question, "all that were carried away captive of Jerusalem and Judah, which were carried away captive unto Babylon" (40:1).

The term "*remember*" (*zakar*) is a key word used three times in this psalm. In one sense, it is the psalmist's key response to his suffering -- the singular duty of this saint -- his invitation term for salvation -- the prescription for backsliding -- the remedy for a broken heart.

Weeping? Why are rivers of tears running down the sun-burned cheeks of God's people? The psalmist answers, "*we remembered Zion.*" These liquid sorrows are caused (1) by remembering the joy of having God in the capital city, or (2) by remembering the fall of Jerusalem, or (3) by remembering the sins of the people that led to the fall of Zion.

Tears about beautiful Zion? Shouldn't the sweet thoughts about Jerusalem and its beloved temple fuel the fires of joy in the hearts of these Hebrews? Wet cheeks are good when the sweet thoughts of Zion cause us to remember Christ and motivate us to repent of our sins.

Oh, the daggers that pierced the souls of the remnant: prisoners suffering; comforts stripped; Israel devastated; Jerusalem broken; the temple demolished; ceremonies halted; the land ravished; homes destroyed; crops burned; friends killed; parents dead; hope buried; love frustrated; happiness poisoned; faith doubted; hope lifeless; body exhausted; and, a thousand miles from home surrounded by Chaldeans speaking gibberish in a foreign language.

Oh, the pain of remembering the sweetness of Zion and her yearly festivals: pilgrims camping; men praying; women dancing; children laughing; Levites singing; priests serving; kings ruling; teachers instructing; people trusting; venders bartering; friends hugging -- Oh, the joyful sounds! Silent forever? Sing? How could they sing? Impossible!

2 *We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.*

"*Harps upon the willows*" informs us that musical instruments were unemployed; that the captives had stopped singing, stopped composing, stopped hoping, stopped celebrating, and even stopped praising the LORD God.

Everyone loves a festival with bands, guitars, violins, base fiddles, drums, pianos, and coronets, but the laws of nature instruct men that hearts filled with sorrow and doubt cannot sing.

3 *For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.*

Can anything be crueler than for tormentors to require "*mirth*" and songs from the acidic hearts of prisoners who have lost their families, land, and religion?

How can you sing a song in a vacuum where you can't hear the sweet sounds of His presence moving in your heart?

4 *How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?*

"*In a strange land*" - The feeling expressed in this question is too natural to need any such explanation (Ellicott). "The Lord's song(s)" are for redeemed and freed sinners. It is totally contrary to the laws of human nature to sing a sacred song in a strange land, among strange people, amidst a strange language with their future in the custody of pagans.

5 *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.*

Forget Jerusalem: Forgetting Zion is a mark of unbelief and rebellion that causes all men to spiral downward. Forgetting starves the soul of life (Romans 12:1-3).

*Jeremiah 2:32 Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?
Yet my people have forgotten me days without number.*

Though Jerusalem was the City of the Living God, it was now in ruins having been reduced to rubble by the Babylonians. Though destroyed, Jeremiah commanded the survivors to remember Zion and what took place there . . . for their good . . . for their spiritual survival.

*Jeremiah 51:50 Ye that have escaped the sword, go away, stand not still:
remember the LORD afar off, and let Jerusalem come into your mind.*

Though remembering her former glory and her present gloom depressed the remnant, they had to remember Zion. An archeological ruin, the holy city becomes a metonym for the LORD, the throne, the presence of God, the priesthood, the Levitical sacrifices, and reconciliation.

What a paradox! Every thought about Zion inflamed sorrow, yet; at the same time, the psalmist couldn't bring himself to forget Jerusalem, the temple, the Lord, or His promises. Pulled in two different directions, the dove of peace found no rest in his conflicted heart.

What a place to be! He couldn't go forward, nor backward; looking behind crushed him and looking ahead smashed him; forgetting Zion hurt and remembering Zion pained his soul; leaving the LORD was too painful to contemplate, and loving the LORD became complex and confusing.

Decision time: Both forgetfulness and remembrance of the LORD were clashing swords producing sparks in his soul. At a crossroad in his faith, he had to make a decision. He had to choose between looking at his distressing circumstances or looking at the foggy mirage of God's promises; to doubt God's love or to believe God's love; to walk by sight or to walk by faith; to look at his cold chains in Babylon and embrace the frosty presumption of being abandoned by the LORD, or to embrace the chilly pledges frozen to icy texts in Holy Writ.

He couldn't control his captors, his circumstances, or his future, but he could control his beliefs. Therefore, this man chose the path of faith, the path of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He chose to cling to the hope found in the Holy Scriptures -- a frosty belief that seemed frozen in an ice age of the past -- a belief so contrary to his conflicted feeling due to his captivity.

He decides to error on the side of hope; to never forget Jerusalem or his Lord. Better to have a stroke that paralyzes the right hand, than forget Him Who sits at the right hand of the Father.

*Psalm 27: 13 I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living!*

Thus, remembering the LORD and the Levitical practices is a holy exercise. The term remember (*zakar*) is used three times in this psalm as the key response required of the Lord. "**Remember**" is a work of faith. The action "**forget**" is the product of doubt.

*Psalm 20:7 Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will
remember the name of the LORD our God.*

*Psalm 77:10-11 And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the
years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of
the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old.*

*Luke 22:19-20 "And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it
to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance
of me.' In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This
cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'"*

Those staring at crushed hopes and feeling the chill of cold circumstances would do well to learn the lesson conferred in this psalm. If presented with a choice to give up the faith, or to go deeper into the faith, choose the struggle associated with believing "*that all things work together for good to those who are called according to His purpose*" (Romans 8:28).

6 If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

The chastised psalmist pounds in the stakes of his commitment. He chose to go deeper into the faith and to make Jerusalem (the LORD) his chief joy.

- Better to never speak another word than to have a mind void of hope in Christ;
- better to be alone sitting on the iceberg of His promises than in the chains of unbelief by a sparkling fire; and,
- better to remember Christ than forget his love at the cross.

The diamond-triumph of this psalmist must be romanced against the black fact that these captives were beaten down, bewildered, and befuddled by their dark circumstances. Their feelings were all wrapped up in the suffering; and, they could not escape pounding drums of their defeat to acknowledge must less rejoice in the love of the LORD their God.

This may be one of the greatest comebacks in history. Like base drums, everything about his circumstances pounded home the message: God has forsaken you! But, this man ignores the cadence of abandonment, and stakes

down his claim found in the pledges of Holy Scripture. In remembering Zion, he was healed.

Psalm 42:6 O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar (Mt Hermon).

There will be a day when the cold circumstances of a Christian shout, God has forsaken you! And, when that happens, you will need to follow the model of this chastened saint; to invest all that you have in the promises of the gospel: "the Lord reigns!" And, he "will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Psalm 97:1; Hebrews 13:5).

7 Remember (zakar), O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.

Having done his duty in remembering Zion, the psalmist prays that God would do his duty and judge the enemies of Zion.

When the Babylonians seized Jerusalem and began their campaign of destruction, the Edomites cheered the Chaldeans.

Knowing and identifying your true enemies is almost as important as knowing the Lord.

Having identified the black flag of the Edomites, the psalmist continues to sail his cargo-ship through the storm toward the harbor of holiness. In his tossing on the waves of faith and doubt, this stricken Hebrew was forced to identify the real pirates of faith. The marauders were not only the Babylonians, but those with an Edomite spirit who cheered on the Chaldeans as they ravaged the Holy City.

These descendants of Esau hated God; and, God hated them (Malachi 1:3ff). Like Esau, the Edomites were sensual, fleshly, worldly men with an ambition to kill the descendants of Jacob. They represent the battle between the lost and the saved; between Amalek and Joshua; between Haman and Esther; between the un-regenerated man and the regenerated believer, between the flesh and spirit in Galatian 5.

This is a battle to the death, and this psalmist chose to "to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; *Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Babylon: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.*" (Hebrews 11:25-26).

Now, this psalmist transitions out of spiritual neutrality to become a hated man because he testified that the works of the world (Edomites) thereof are evil (John 7:7).

8 O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

With the eye of faith, the psalmist joins hands with the prophets and announces the doom of Babylon -- a nation destined to be destroyed by the Persian Messiah, Cyrus the Great (Isaiah 45:1); -- a judgment on Babylon that was fast approaching (Isaiah 13:1, 16).

Here is a chastised saint that returns to the LORD standing on the pledges of Holy Scripture. Choosing to believe rather than doubt, he rises above the clangs and gongs of Babylonians challenging his faith. Though he could not feel the presence of God, he believed the sure Word of God. Eventually his feelings followed his faith. That the Christian must find his hope in something other than Scripture is denied.

9 Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

This psalmist was forced to see the dashing of Israelite infants against a stone in the Babylon raid on Jerusalem. Having returned to the LORD, he envisions a time when the Judge of Mankind would execute His perfect justice against the Babylonians and all enemies of restored Israel.

Remembering the mercy upon the remnant, he also reflects on the destiny of the wicked. Their seed shall be destroyed in judgment - Psalm 37:28.

Let us remember His mercy on us . . . and, the Day of Judgment coming upon all men (Hebrews 9:27).

"Far be it from us to avenge ourselves; we will leave it to Him who has said, Vengeance is mine. Those that are glad at calamities, especially at the calamities of Jerusalem, shall not go unpunished." - Matthew Henry.

The songwriter predicts that "Happy" will be the man who conquers Babylon. And, indeed he was. Isaiah informs us that God went before Cyrus, His servant, to reward his campaign and to make him the most successful monarch in history -- a Persian "messiah" who was given "the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that he might know that I am the LORD" (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-3ff).

No discipline is pleasant (Hebrews 12). We see here a man under chastisement who strengthens his faith and not his doubts; who became a better man instead of a bitter man; a lawful man instead of a lawless man; a hoper in Scripture, rather than a doubter of God's Word; a recovered backslider, rather than a wretched apostate.

With his dreams crushed, this psalmist faced a choice between leaving the faith or clinging to the hope of his faith. He chose hope, and his faith triumphed over his despairing circumstances.

1 John 5:4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh (nike) the world: and this is the victory (nike) that overcometh (nike) the world (Edomites a type), even our faith (the nike).

"Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger men!" - President John F. Kennedy

Oh, that backsliding Christians would respond so well.

Moreover, God is calling sinners around the world to remember Zion, Christ, and the cross as his remedy for transgressors of His law.

57. When Afraid I Will Trust in Thee

Psalm 56

No Permission to be Afraid



Before us is a rock-hard lesson to learn — a lesson taught in the darkness and not the light: to walk by faith and not by fear during the stormy seasons of life.

Psalm 56:1 To the chief Musician upon Jonathelemrechokim, Michtam of David, when the Philistines took him in Gath.

In the title "*upon Jonath-elem-rechokim,*" the first word — "*Jonath*" — means a "dove," a favorite emblem of suffering innocence (Ellicott).

In fleeing from the wrath and jealousy of King Saul, David found himself at the gates of the Philistines (Gath) acting like a madman (1 Samuel 21:10-22:1). Ashamed of his behavior, David sought the Lord.

During this low point in his life, he learned his greatest lesson.

Somewhere in this act of desperation, David came to his senses and shifted his trust from man to God. Later, he penned this prayer that we might learn the lessons of dependence on God.

Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me

Instead of mentioning Saul or the Philistines, David refers to man individually or to fallen man collectively. The Hebrew word for “*man*” is *enosh* – a reference to frailty of mortal man.

In this fight, David depends upon God’s mercy, not upon his own merit; upon the mercy of God, not upon the mercy of man (*enosh*). The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel (Proverbs 12:10); but, the endless mercies of God are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23). The man who receives the mercy of God obtains all that he needs to be safe and happy.

Merit gives a man what he deserves (judgment); mercy does not give a man what he deserves. Mercy gives a man what he needs (relief).

The Hebrew word “*oppresseth*” (*lachats*) means to press or squeeze.

The reason for this shift in trust is that David suddenly realized that not only does Saul want to kill him, but the heartless, Philistines feeding on their own bitterness would swallow him up like starving wolves; that is, these callous brutes (*enosh*) would find pleasure in seeing him suffer.

2 Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High.

So, anxious is young David about his predicament at the Gates of Gath, he mentions their intent a second time: “mine enemies would daily swallow me up.”

The word “*swallow*” can also mean “to pant after,” “trample on,” or “bruise” as dogs panting after a rabbit in a chase eager to devour the helpless animal. This event is not just a chase, but a passion driven hunt for David’s life.

David impresses us with his plight by using the term “*many*” (*rab*) which means “abounding.” His friends were few; his enemies were many. Alone, he felt chased after by a pack of panting, slurping wolves eager to devour him.

The term “*O most high*” is one Hebrew word (*mar’om*) and not a phrase. It means “elevated” referring either to the elevated attitude of his enemies or to God Who is in heaven. There are many gods in this world, but Melchizedek, Abraham, and David raised their hand to the LORD, the Most High God.

Some expositors note that the word *mar’om* translated “O thou most high” (elevation) is not in the vocative, and therefore, does not refer to God. Rather, they believe the “most high” refers to the attitude of his pursuers. His enemies were not only passionate, but proud and arrogant acting as if they were archers shooting arrows at him from a high tower. Jamieson-Fausset-Brown recognize the possibility of this meaning.

Other expositors such as Barnes believe “O thou most High” is an appeal to the God of Heaven to look down and see his plight. Likewise, Gill adopts this view.

The term “High” (*mar’om*) is used of God in Psalm 92:8. Whether this is how we should interpret this word, the next verse definitely shows David looking upward and not around at his enemies.

3 What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.

Trust: As far as we can tell, David was the first to give the word “trust” (*batash*) a religious meaning. The word “*trust*” is used in the Bible in reference to the corrupt leadership of Abimelech where he is alleged to say, “*put your trust in my shadows;*” that is trust my government (Judges 9:15). Boaz observed that David’s grandmother (Ruth) trusted in the shadow of His wings (Ruth 2:12); and, it was David, Ruth’s grandson, who advanced the principle of trusting God as a rock, shield, horn, and tower (2 Samuel 22:3).

David did not begin his flight from Saul with raging confidence in God. This is the lesson he learned and the commitment he made after he played the madman at Gath – an essential discipline to learn on the pilgrim path to the Celestial City.

Fear & Faith: David announced, “When I am afraid,” I will trust. This is no fair-weather trust; that is, I will trust God in the darkness, not just in the light; in difficult times, and not just easy times; in rough seas as well as smooth seas; at midnight and not just at high noon; during cloudy days and not just in the sunshine; during the cold winters of life and not just in the warm summers of this pilgrimage. As a man bundles up under his winter coat during a blizzard, so I will cluster my precious all under His protection during the bitters of life. This is the lesson. This is the principle David learned to apply the rest of his life: Faith, not fear, will be my guide. When I am afraid, I will trust!

Some men learn this sooner than others. May the Lord help us all to apply this during periods of darkness!

Lamentably, this lesson can’t be learned in the sunshine. It is learned after midnight . . . after an unwanted trial . . . after a spiritual failure. But, better learned in the darkness than never learned at all.

4 In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.

This verse contains a textual challenge: The KJV says, “*I will praise his word.*” The LXX says, “I will praise God with my word.” “The obvious treatment of the verse is to take the construction as in Psalm 44:8, “*I praise God with my word,*” i.e., in spite of all my enemies I find words to praise God” (Ellicott).

But, other scholars believe David trusted God’s Word and not the words of his enemies.

Both positions are true: We have respect for His Word, and we praise Him with our words.

"I will not" should be translated: *"I fear not."* What can flesh do? The text is not so much a promise or commitment as it is a settled position of reliance on the LORD.

5 Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil.

David returns to the tactics of his enemies. The *"wrest"* (*atsab*) means to twist and to distort his words to the injury of the man. Personal enemies are incapable of speaking the truth in a fair and balanced way. All the reports about David to Saul were designed to incense Saul's anger against David. Likewise, today! The media twists, distorts, and perverts what good men say in order to ruin them politically. Slander is a form of murder and it is the favorite weapon of hidden hands.

6 They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul.

What David experienced from his enemies is true in our time. The enemies of the righteous are like snipers hiding in the bushes looking for the right time to launch their invectives against God's attack-lambs. The lesson for us is to be wise and avoid nativity. Beware of wire-pullers and kingmakers. When government is god in the minds of men you cannot expect men not to betray soldiers for Christ.

7 Shall they escape by iniquity? in thine anger cast down the people, O God.

The meaning of this text is obscure. Ellicott says the meaning here is *"for iniquity thou wilt requite them;"* that is, since there is a God in heaven who umpires the threats of men, how can they escape? The psalmist asks with earnestness and amazement whether, under the divine administration, people "can" find safety in mere wickedness (Barnes).

8 Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?

The word *"tellest"* means to count, recount, or number.

From David's conquest over Goliath to the death of Saul, David lived the life of a fugitive wandering from hide-out to hide-out. Barnes recounts David's wanderings: *"My wanderings,"* to Gath, 1 Samuel 21:10; to the cave of Adullam, 1 Samuel 22:1; to Mizpeh, in Moab, 1 Samuel 22:3; to the forest of Hareth, 1 Samuel 22:5; to Keilah, 1 Samuel 23:5; to the wilderness of Ziph, 1 Samuel 23:14; to the wilderness of Maon, 1 Samuel 23:25; to En-gedi, 1 Samuel 24:1-2."

According to the rule of parallelism in Hebrew poetry, the term "*wandering*" is coextensive with the word "*tears*." "*Wandering*" (singular) is a metaphor for "mental anguish;" "tossing to and fro of the mind;" "confusion and the feelings of distress" caused by the slander of his enemies.

"tears into thy bottle" is not literal, but a metaphor claiming that God knows all David's pain, anguish, and depression caused by the malicious criticism of his adversaries. What a comfort to learn that God knows and treasures all our sorrows.

9 When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me.

Cries occur when people are hurt. "*Cry*" is a synonym for liquid prayers by those carrying crosses. The first two verbs (Imperfect) indicate that David has confidence that his enemies will be defeated the next time he prays instead of flees.

The wandering shepherd could say, "*this I know; for God is for me.*" David knew God was on his side because he was on God's side.

10 In God will I praise his word: in the LORD will I praise his word.

Because faith banished fear, David praised the LORD for His promises and acts of deliverance. David was not a forgetter but a grateful praiser. *The presence of praise means the absence of fear; and, the presence of fear means the absence of faith.*

11 In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.

David repeats the main lesson of the psalm and the hardest lesson to learn for pilgrims awakened by the cries at midnight.

The sentiment in this verse is the same as in verse six except that the word "*man*" is used here instead of "*flesh*." Since God was his friend, the young prince adopted a position that he would not fear what mortal man could do to him. *Faith in Heaven defeats foes on Earth.*

12 Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee.

Deliverances cause thankful men to go deeper into the Divine will. Vows imply commitment. Freedom from fear and foes ripens resolve and acceptance of responsibilities. Freedom from future failures appears to be grounded on present promises. David determined to trust God and to never again let his fears dictate his destiny.

13 For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?

The sentiment in this verse is the same as in Psalm 56:6, except that the word "*man*" is used here instead of "*flesh*."

“Wilt thou not deliver . . . ” is better translated “Hast Thou not delivered . . . ?”

We have here a greater to lesser argument. Since God delivered him from death, David believed he could trust the LORD to deliver him from lesser difficulties. The fact that God rescued him in the past gave him confidence to trust God for the future; salvation from yesterday’s difficulties gave David confidence that God would deliver him from today’s adversities.

“that I may walk before God in the light of the living?” shows the purpose of God’s salvation in our lives. He delivers us not for our pleasure, but for His Divine plan — that we might walk with Him every minute of every day.

Having been delivered from darkness, let us walk in the light. If He is in the light let us walk in the light. If Christ took the high road, let us take the high road. Since He is holy, let us be holy. If he delivered us in our weakness, let us walk in His strength by faith that we might enjoy freedom from fear and savor the favor of God.

58. Faith That Endures Hardship

Hebrews 11:32-40

The most difficult faith-truth to grasp in Hebrews 11 for modern man is that faith does not always end in triumph over adversaries.

Americans love winners and despise losers.

Thus, developing a proper perspective of the place of suffering in the Christian life can be a struggle for serious pilgrims.

Two sides of faith’s coin

Yes, there is a faith that obtains victory over enemies; BUT, *there is also a faith that triumphs even though the believer may lose his battle to his adversaries.*

Yes, there is a faith that leads to health and wealth, but more common is the faith that keeps the believer true to Christ while having to endure sickness and poverty.

That the exercise of faith always leads to prosperity is the heresy of the money-conscious American. It is impossible to embrace the cross and not suffer a loss.

Note the subtle change in subject matter that takes place between verse 34 and verse 35!

Up until verse 35, we have faith that enables a man of God to “escape the edge of the sword” (injustice in the courts of men) and to gain victory in some political battle.

In verse 35-37, we have faith that enables a child of God to suffer the indignities of “torture,” “mocking,” “scourging,” “imprisonment,” death by court-ordered “stoning,” execution by “the sword,” homelessness, ragged economic times, “afflictions,” agony, and dire living conditions.

The Victories of Faith in Action

Hebrews 11:32-33 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:

33 Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

Think of Joshua, the judges, David, Samson, Daniel, and the Maccabees.

34 Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

The Triumph of Faith that Endures Difficult Trials

35 Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:

“Women received their dead” refers to the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17) and to the great Shunammite woman to whom Elisha imparted life (2 Kings 4).

The verb “tortured” “*tumpanizo*” refers to the repeated beatings of a drum or torture by beatings with a stick.

“not accepting deliverance” refers to the rejection of a contract offer for freedom in exchange for pledges of loyalty to a political-religious agenda.

36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

Think of Elisha in 2 Kings 2:23, Micaiah in 1 Kings 22:24, and Jeremiah in chapter 22.

37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;

The last prophet, Zechariah, was stoned by a judicial order of thankless King Joash in 2 Chronicles 24:1. Joseph experienced the misery of being imprisoned

and chained causing his feet to hurt because he ran from Potipher's seductive wife (Genesis 39: Psalm 105:18).

Tradition informs us Isaiah was sawed in two by miscreants under the persecution of King Manasseh.

Many prophets were executed with the sword during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 19:10).

The word "*tempted*" (*peirazo*) could refer to the rigors of a court trial, a long period of testing circumstances, or the temptation to relieve suffering by compromising their stand against political pressures due to their religious faith.

"*Wandered about*" refers to the life of an outcast or fugitive running from "the long arm of the law." Think of those people who have been unlawfully prosecuted by powerful officials operating under statutory authority in defiance of God's law.

Sheepskins and goatskins describe clothing of one who is destitute. This was not a choice of attire, but outerwear forced on men and women due to necessity.

The word for "*destitute*" is *hysteroumenoi* in Greek. We get the word "hysteria" from the root word; that is, these men of faith lived in extreme circumstances that would drive most people insane.

The word "*oppressed*" (*thelibo*) means "to press" or squash or "to narrow." It refers to the persecution of men and the deliberate harassment of those practicing their religious faith.

The word "*tormented*" refers to ill-treatment or bad dealings — the restraint of common courtesies and honest dealings with people.

38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

"*Worthy*" means "weight." The presence and suffering of these saints was worth more than the whole world. "I'd rather have Jesus than anything" or everything" – George Beverly Shay.

Forced into isolation, many people of faith lived the life of hermitage.

And us? The key to the Christian life is not happier set of circumstances, but faith in Christ living in me (Galatians 2:20)

39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

These saints were men of faith, yet they did not receive the ultimate answer to their prayers. Their "*faith*," **not** their deliverance, is the victory (*nike*) that overcomes the world (1 John 5:1-3).

40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

The goal for all the people of God is "*perfection*" or maturity in Christ-likeness.

Do you want to be Christ-like? Then accept the difficulties Providence has handed to you. Exercise patience, goodness, righteousness, and love even though you are weighed down by personal adversities or by the corruption in a decaying society.

This is the Spirit's way of informing us that the godly of this age must suffer in order to achieve excellence. Excellence can be achieved by exercising faith that devotes itself to a life of obedience in these stressful times against all manners of injustice.

This obedience expresses itself in fearless living, bold confrontation of secularism, love toward the brethren, and sound decision-making (2 Timothy 1:7).

There is a faith that overcomes sickness and death; but there is a faith that accepts sickness and death as from God.

There is a faith that escapes the cruel "justice" of the courts; but, there is a faith that accepts the privilege of being tried by the corrupt black-robed imposters pretending to offer justice under color of law, color of due process, and color of righteousness.

A key to the faith battle is to reject the presumption that real faith results in deliverance from every trial of life, or that suffering is the consequence of a lack of faith; BUT, to accept your circumstances from God responding to the call to happily rejoice in those difficult circumstances for His glory.

Understand this and you will overcome the heresy and distortions of modern faith preachers.

59. Drinking Wormwood in the Valley of the Shadow of Death

Lamentations 3

Have you been drinking wormwood in the Valley of the Shadow of Death?

Do you ever wonder why you are still alive or why God gives you tears to drink?

All of us at times are stunned by ruts in the road we travel and wonder why God sends us down such ghastly paths.

Who hasn't experienced melancholy over life's sudden reversals and thought he deserves better?

There was a day in the life of Jeremiah when affliction pierced his soul like a thousand daggers . . . where He was in the Valley of the Shadow of Death and God gave him wormwood to drink.

Let's look at his experience so we can learn one of the great lessons of life.

Lamentations 3

1 I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.

2 He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light.

3 Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day.

4 My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones.

5 He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail.

6 He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old.

7 He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out: he hath made my chain heavy.

8 Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer .

The background to this chapter is the rebellion of Israel against the law of God, the conquest of the Babylonians over Jerusalem, the death of so many Israelites due to war and disease, the deportation of the surviving remnant to Babylon (586 BC), and the patriot's grief over the fall of his nation.

Before us is an idiographic, problematic, pathetic, epileptic, hypertonic, dramatic, melancholic, presynaptic, histrionic, kinetic, volcanic, unromantic, authentic, catalytic, titanic, thermic, spasmodic, seismic, fantastic, acerbic, frenetic, isotonic, heuristic, calorific, vitriolic picture of a suffering of a soul feeling the weight of his sin and the piercing pain of God's disciplines on his pilgrim journey through this Valley of Death.

Words like "affliction, rod, darkness, broken bones, gall, dead, hedge, chain, cry and shout" expose the pain twisting the perspective of this beloved saint. He wonders, "Why am I still alive?" "Why did God leave me here in this Valley of Death without water to quench my thirst and shade to protect me from the burning sun?"

Blinded to the love of God, this bereaved saint sees God as “as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places” (3:10).

All his dreams and hopes . . . yea, even his inner veins were pierced by God’s flaming arrows (3:12-13). He feels like he has been hit in the teeth with a sack of rocks. His friends mocked his frail frame and staggering gate. He stumbled down the road like a drunken man clutching his nauseated innards. Instead of finding water to drink, he found wormwood. Wanting to vomit, he wobbled through the barrens looking for a place to puke (3:14-16).

And God? He was nowhere to be found. His faith and confidence evaporated like the dew on a hot summer day. He traveled this journey in Valley of Death with his mouth dry, panting, and longing for a drop of hope. But, he could not find it. Instead of sweets to quench his thirst, God gave him the bitters to drink (3:17-19).

It is a mistake for suffering saints to think that their difficulties are unique among men; that they are the only ones who have staggered through this Valley searching for hope; that because their circumstances have changed, God has changed.

What this Saint Found in the Valley of the Shadow of Death

And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD:

19 Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall.

20 My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me.

21 This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.

22 It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

23 They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

24 The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

25 The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.

26 It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.

27 It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

Why, why, why? The crying prophet had asked that question a thousand times . . . finally . . . he discovered the answer.

Staggering over a sand dune in the heat of the day while reflecting on his affliction, Jeremiah wandered into a tiny oasis of truth which quenched his demanding thirst. The burning sensation in his dry throat grew less intense as

he sipped the cool water with his dry, cracked lips. Reflecting on his affliction, he discovered the truth that satisfied his thirst.

(1) His trials humbled him.

Humility is good if it forces us to our knees in search of the Living God.

19 Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. 20 My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled (shuwach: bowed down) in me.

Deep trials have a way of exposing deep sins . . . and, seeing our sins can depress the soul. However, the realization that we are afflicted with the Adamic nature can be a reason to seek Christ:

“They that are whole need not a physician” (Luke 5:31).

Jacob introduces us to the first great confession in the Old Testament: “ I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant” (Genesis 32:10).

It was this inner perspective and sense of unworthiness that made Jacob great! Wherefore, the LORD was pleased to call Himself “the God of Jacob,” the God of the humble man in need of Him.

Think of all the sin in our lives that stink to high heaven. Sin’s malodor can be found in our thoughts, our words, our dreams, our prayers, our habits, our reactions, and our meditations. All of us reek with imperfections and transgressions.

The number one sin on God’s hate list is a “**proud look**” (Proverbs 6:17-19). Who can detect all the odoriferous tinctures of pride contaminating his soul-life that stink up his relationship with the Almighty?

Think of the foulness of spiritual pride, intellectual pride, educational pride, accomplishment pride, appearance pride, relational pride, and status pride that ooze out of pours that repel God and man.

No matter how humble we think we are, troubles have a way of exposing our naked sins which tend to deflate the airship of arrogance that hovers above our heads.

Humility is good. No clothing is more becoming to a Christian than an undergarment of spiritual humility. This vestment never goes out of style. Be humble or stumble.

And, it was this reflection on the gall of his humbling circumstances that drove him to the oasis of truth that refreshed his soul: “This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope” (3:21).

The “**this**” is what follows in 3:22-23:

22 It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

23 They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

(2) At this oasis in the Valley of Death Jeremiah was refreshed by "The LORD's mercies."

The term for "*mercy*" is the Hebrew word *hesed* which refers to the LORD's reservoir of love for His people.

It has been said that justice is getting what you deserve, mercy is not getting what you deserve, and grace is getting what you don't deserve. "Mercy" and "grace" are included in His royal *hesed*.

The psalmist said that "Your royal *hesed* is better than life." Men value life above all things . . . but, this man valued God's lovingkindness more than life itself; and, if he was forced to choose one above the other, he would choose the favor of God (Psalm 63:2).

Not only did Jeremiah not end up in Jerusalem's Auschwitz in 586 BC, he survived the Babylonian holocaust! As he reflected on all his countrymen who died of starvation, disease, and the sword of Nebuchadnezzar, he began to realize that he was alive!

Suddenly, it dawned on Jeremiah that his being alive and not dead was an act of mercy "new every morning."

Instead of counting his miseries, he started counting the LORD's mercies. Instead of making a list of what he did not have, he started making a list of the mercies that met him each morning.

Because he could still see, hear, and feel Jeremiah was a thousand times better off than his fallen brethren. When the prophet woke up, he began to count the mercies of God: water, food, a warm bath, a bed, simple clothes, companions, health, sunshine, and clean air.

By way of reflection, turn to Jeremiah 24 where the LORD showed Jeremiah two basket of figs: a good basket of figs delightful to the eyes and delicious to the taste, and a basket of rotting figs repulsive to the eyes and revolting to the taste.

The two baskets of figs represented the (a) captive prisoners in Babylon and the (b) balance of citizens left in Jerusalem and Judea.

Those prisoners who were forced-marched to Babylon had their property seized, their belongings stripped from them, and their wealth stolen. Scattered throughout Babylon to live among pagans, EVERYONE in Jerusalem thought the prisoners-of-war were cursed of God.

When Jeremiah preached his sermon on the good and bad figs, his dead-in-the-head audience thought the deportees were the “bad figs” and the remnant in Jerusalem were the “good figs” blessed of God because they that still had their homes, donkeys, shekels, and temple services.

But, God gave Jeremiah His perspective:

“Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

5 Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good.

6 For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up.

7 And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.

8 And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the LORD, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt:

9 And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them.

10 And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers.”

And, when Jeremiah reflected on this truth and realized that his companions were dead and he was still alive, the lights came on:

“It is of the LORD’S mercies that we (survivors of the destruction on Jerusalem) are not consumed, because his compassions (womb) fails not.”

Oh, the lessons for us:

(1) We need to count our blessings. It is because of the mercies of God that we wake up every day and are alive. Like Jacob, we need to say, “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant;” like Jeremiah we need this perspective, *“It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed . . .”*

God is not only good to believers, He is good to the unregenerate. Everyday a pagan wakes up and is not in hell is a good day.

(2) We (believers) need to have faith that His mercies will never fail.

The word fail (*kalah*) means “to end,” “to finish,” or “to spend” down to nothing; that is, we cannot exhaust His mercy. His womb of mercy will never miscarry. Neither our failures, transgressions, frustrations, or sins can weaken, consume, crush, damage, end, eradicate, impair, ravage or drain his reservoir of mercy toward us

*No matter how dark the night or black the pit from pole to pole;
Or how bloody the head, and the horrors that invade the soul;
Whether I be knee deep in a floodgate of tears,
I will not succumb to the terror of my fears;
Though my prayers be hindered by the thickness of the veil
I will remember that His mercies never fail.
When I wake at night in grief and mourning,
His Mercies “are new every morning;”
Though I am tempted His law to transgress;
I will remember, “great is Their faithfulness.”*

Even in the holy calling of death, there is mercy.

Romans 8: 35, 38-39 “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

(3) We need to realize that true riches is not in fame or wealth, but in in a man’s relationship to God: *“The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.” (3:24).*

“I’d rather have Jesus than silver or gold I’d rather be his than have riches untold

I’d rather have Jesus than houses or land

Yes I’d rather be led by his nail pierced hand”

The word “**better**” is used four times in Ecclesiastes 10. If a man has to choose between the defense of wealth or defense of wisdom, Solomon says it is better to choose wisdom: *“For wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it.”* Jeremiah woke up one morning in a foreign land (Egypt) without wealth; but, because he had wisdom, he was richer than all his contemporaries.

(4) We need to grasp the fact that enjoying the mercies of God depends on our faith:

"The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him." (3:25).

By waiting, Jeremiah is not telling us to twitter our thumbs and to tap our fingers, but to wait in hope . . . to believe . . . to wrestle with the promises of God.

If truth be known, Christians take too little comfort in the promises of God. When we fuel faith by reading the Scriptures, we can find comfort in the mercies of God.

Romans 15:12 "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."

(5) We need to redefine what is good. When the modern American thinks of good, he thinks of health and wealth. But, Jeremiah came to understand what is really good. He uses the term "good" three times in this chapter and three times in Jeremiah 24.

3:25 "The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him."

3: 26 "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.

3: 27 "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke (of tribulation) in his youth.

Jeremiah 24:5 Like these good figs, . . . whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good.

Jeremiah 24:6 For I will set mine eyes upon them for good . . .

Holy men learned a new way of defining good:

Psalms 52:9 " . . . I will wait on thy name; for it is good before thy saints."

Psalms 54:6 " I will praise thy name, O LORD; for it is good."

Psalms 53:28 "But it is good for me to draw near to God."

Psalms 119:71 "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes."

Psalms 147:1 "Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely."

In Conclusion: If you are drinking wormwood in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, carefully consider that affliction is good if you value wisdom more than wealth, righteousness more than riches, His compassion more than comfort, and humility before God more than honor among men. At His oasis of truth in this Valley you will find mercies to sustain your soul.

60. Assurance of Answered Prayer

Matthew 7:7-11

PUBLIC NOTICE ON THE POWER OF PRAYER

By Jesus

Matthew 7:7-11 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

We think we know how to pray . . . we even go through the motions from time to time. But, we really haven't touched the power of prayer. Prayer is what we do between brushing our teeth and combing our hair. We need to learn to pray better. And we can do so by paying attention to Jesus' prayer NOTICES. They are his assurances that the Father answers prayers.

NOTICE the authority of this sermon-prayer.

It comes from the Son of God who never lied and never exaggerated. Coming from the presence of His Heavenly Fathers, He publishes a Notice on the Assurance of Answered Prayer.

NOTICE how positive and optimistic Jesus is about the possibilities of answered-prayer:

"it shall be given you . . . you shall find . . . shall be opened unto you . . ."

He expresses no doubt, no distrust, and no skepticism.

Even though later Jesus declares men are evil, Jesus announces to us here the certainty of answered prayer. This is a promise better than the winning lottery

ticket. Oh, to be this positive!! Oh, to possess the confidence that God gladly hears flawed sinners and their defective prayers. Our Heavenly Father is pleased to answer our prayers! This is what the Son is teaching us about prayer. He should know. He came down out of heaven to teach men what happens in the throne room of His Majesty.

In Luke 11, the positive promise is preceded by a story of importunity — that unblushing persistence, unashamed pertinacity, and never give up spirit. And the exhortation concludes with a “how much more” promise that God will give to them that ask him; that is, God gives out of love and is not effected by a sense of trouble.

NOTICE the military orders regarding prayer.

The verbs “ask,” “seek,” and “knock” are present, active imperatives; that is, they are commands—the language of prayer. Prayer is not an option or a suggestion or a childish activity. Praying is manly. Christian soldiers are ordered by the Commander to pray . . . and it takes brute force and military discipline to pray correctly.

NOTICE the different types of prayers: “ask,” “seek,” and “knock.”

There are simple and pure prayers; seeking and searching prayers; knocking and pounding-at-the-door type prayers. Prayers are for the needy, the wanting, and the desperate. Prayers are progressive. There are stages to prayer—simple request type prayers; complex and complicated prayers. Intense prayers that demand time and commitment and urgency. How are we responding to our triple calling?

NOTICE how bluntly and simply Jesus states the negative truth about men.

He says, “*If you being evil (poneros) . . . ;*” that is, Jesus taught that men are radically and diabolically depraved—a first class conditional in Greek; i.e., “if and it is true that your being evil . . . “. We often classify men as “good” or “great” or “wonderful”, which is an idealistic view of people. But, our Lord has a different theology regarding men. People are evil! Rulers and politicians and men of power are common sinners!

If Jesus were to proclaim the depravity of elected officials today in America, He would receive the hatchet by the media for not being politically correct. If He were to insinuate our current president as being evil, he would be charged with a felony for hate speech (HR 347 2012). Jesus does not deny that men are made in the image of God or loved by the Father, but he is real about human nature. Evil is at work in and through men. Evil is not out there in the environment. It is within us.

“If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate

them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?" Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956.

But, our Father graciously answers prayer to sinners who make requests to Him! God answers prayer not because we are good, but because He is good. The lesson here is clear. Effective prayer begins with men who agree with God that they are evil and unworthy to have prayers answered; that when we come before the throne, we seek His grace. We appeal to His goodness, not our own.

Are we realistic about men? Perspective is critical. When we think that we are good enough for God to answer our prayers, we dance with pride. Are we fearful that God won't hear us because we are cracked and flawed? This promise assures us that God hears sinners. He Who answers also justifies and forgives. Oh, the wonders of this revelation from the Son!

NOTICE how Christ uses a "reduction absurdum argument" to prove that God answers prayer:

The reasoning behind a *reduction absurdum argument* is a pricking of the mind by drawing a ridiculous conclusion from a legitimate premise.

In His lecture, Jesus sought to inspire confidence in God's willingness to answer prayer by focusing on the human father-son relationship. By drawing an absurd conclusion from a legitimate request, He appeals to human reason to confirm the truth about God and His willingness to answer the prayers of His creatures. Even bad fathers do not give their children rocks and scorpions when they ask for fish and bread. For a father to respond so callously is radical and absurd.

Likewise, it is insane and unreasonable to think that the Heavenly Father will not grant the legitimate requests of His people. Is God stingy and poor? God does not throw us bones when we ask for bread.

"The blessings of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it" (Prov. 10:22).

He does not cast us a spinning lure with a hook in it. If there is "a hitch" with an opportunity, it is not from God. If there is "good news" and "bad news" scenario, it is not from God. God is a Father who only gives good gifts to His people. Evil things are from Satan, not the Father.

Perhaps, the most difficult part of life in which we need perspective is when trials that come into our life—the loss of a job, a sudden sickness, a crushed relationship. When bad things happen, our tendency is to think God has changed; that He is angry with us; and, that He is punishing us. But, God is

good and always good. He does not change. Even the most difficult trials are appointed of God so that good things can be planted in the soil of heart.

After 8 years in the Gulag of a Russian prison, Solzhenitsyn was able to say,

“Bless you prison, bless you for being in my life. For there, lying upon the rotting prison straw, I came to realize that the object of life is not prosperity as we are made to believe, but the maturity of the human soul.”

Solzhenitsyn is correct. Life is not about things and stuff. God seeks the greater good for our life. Difficulties come, not to deprive us, but to deepen us in the things that really count.

NOTICE how Christ uses a “fortiori argument” to prove that the Father answers prayer generously.

The reasoning behind a fortiori argument is if something less likely is true, then something more likely is true as well. The language of the fortiori argument is “*how much more*”— **a lesser to greater type reasoning** designed to establish certainty.

If evil men know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more does our all benevolent, all wise, all caring, all knowing, all present, all powerful Heavenly Father know how to give what is good to His children. “Much more” is an adverb defining the type of giving God does. He is superlative at gift-giving. The word “gifts” is plural. God is not stingy. He does not provide one time gifts. He gives more abundantly and more bountifully than loving, human fathers.

Before us is a contrast between the explicit goodness of evil men and the implicit goodness of a holy God. Man is depraved . . . and though evil is at work among fathers, they can give good gifts! And, if evil men can give good gifts, how much more will a good God give excellent gifts to his children? Stop and think about this.

Christ does not say that God answers prayers because we are good, or because our prayers are good, **but because God is good**. Prayers are answered because God is good, always good, and only good; therefore, His gifts are always good. Do you share His positive view of Father?

NOTICE the phrase, “your father which is in heaven.”

At the time Jesus said this, He dropped a bombshell on Jewish theology. The Jews believed in a holy, transcendent God; but, a happy, condescending Father was a unique and strange view to them. Possibly, men saw God as holy and aloof; some may have seen Him as miserly and stingy. But, Jesus announces God as a caring, benevolent, involved Father. The Father is **not** a creative

engineer that abandons His children to grind out an existence alone under the raw laws of nature (deism). He is not a critic pecking on our every weakness. The Transcendent condescends to meet the needs of his attentive children. Heaven's ears are tuned to earth's cries! He is able to hear; willing to hear; and present to hear.

Please do not hear what is not being said. Jesus is not teaching that God is some kind of blind, sappy, sugar-sweet creampuff that ignores the sins of men. Yes, He is good; but, He is also holy.

NOTICE that Jesus did not say all prayers are answered.

There are many gods and many prayers in the name of those gods. But, there is only one God that answers prayer, and that is the God of the Bible – the one, true, infinite personal triune Spirit—the God of Creation, the God of Israel, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. His name is YHWH, the “Great I Am.” God is not a force or “the first cause” nor is He all that exists (pantheism).

Jesus offers no assurance that prayers offered to man-made gods have the same wonderful result as that of a Christian praying to his Heavenly Father. He offers no assurance that the prayer of rebels receives a hearing. He offers no pledge that prayers offered to Zeus or Athena or Allah are answered. But, he does offer God's children the assurance that their Heavenly Father delights in being a good to His children.

NOTICE that God's view of good is different from man's view of good.

Jesus taught that God gives “good things.” God is good all the time and only gives good gifts to His sons. But, only God can define what is good.

An anomaly arises because we define “good” in terms of the material and the sensual, but God defines “good” in terms of the spiritual. In Luke 11:3 in a similar sermon, Jesus adds, “***how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?***” Men tend to define “good” in terms of “stuff.” But, Jesus sees the greatest good as the gift of the Holy Spirit. “*He blesses us with every spiritual blessing*” says the Apostle (Eph. 1:3).

Even our suffering produces good (Rom.8:28). Our daily concerns are about paying bills, buying cars, and accumulating more cash. It's the economy, stupid!” said the Clinton administration. Christians are intensely concerned about the money, the stock market, jobs, inflation and gas prices, ***but who is concerned about a shortage of the Holy Spirit? What is the real crisis in America? “It is a want of Holy Spirit-filled Christians!”***

Surely, we should be coveting more of the fruits of the Spirit like “Love, joy, peace . . .” (Gal. 5:22-23) and be less concerned about “stuff.”

All believers have the Holy Spirit, but not all are filled with the Spirit or yielded to His work of transforming them into the image of Christ.

Some of us are sugar cubes; some of us are ice cubes; but, God wants to make us salt cubes—the type of Christians that are a mixture of salt and light; that confront evil and heal men. For this task, we need a greater portion of the Holy Spirit.

Our goals are too worldly; our vision too murky; our ambitions too paltry; our expectations too beggarly; and, our wants too earthly. We need an expanded view of God; an enlarged expectation; a brighter light; a sharper vision; a greater discernment; a change in priorities; a more positive view of possibilities; and, a more intense commitment to prayer.

We are served NOTICE by Jesus. **Be assured, God answers prayer!!**

61. Golden Silence in Trials

Habakkuk 2:20

“But the LORD is in his holy temple . . .”



What comfort Habakkuk must have felt knowing that God was going to judge corruption within Babylon!

Habakkuk was wonderfully blessed by God’s revelation to him. His message concludes with this thought:

The Holy Temple

Habakkuk 2:20 “But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.”

The conjunction “*but*” presents a contrast between the nothingness of the nations, and the everything of God . . . between dinky idols, and the uttermost of the Almighty . . . between gods that don’t exist, and the God Who does exist . . . between deeply flawed men, and the infinite perfections of the LORD.

Having declared the powerless of the nations and all that is not God, Habakkuk summons the nations to enter His Court and to shut their mouths before Him Who is the great “**I am**” (YHWH).

His temple refers to Solomon’s temple which is a giant metaphor for the Presence of Sovereignty. “*He reigns*” is the gospel of the Old Testament (Psalm 97:1).

The Lord is in His holy temple with gavel in hand. *"The temple of God"* is an icon for God's rule . . . His throne . . . His authority . . . His universal jurisdiction over mankind . . . His law-order . . . His justice . . . His courtroom chambers where He permits the ancients to study Him. Only repentant, devout men can gain a hearing before His Majesty.

This presentment is not a contrast between heaven and earth. He is not more present in heaven than on earth. Nor is He more available to angels than to men. *"God is wholly everywhere, and the whole of Him is nowhere."* His temple could be damaged, but God's care for His people could not be destroyed (1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 79:1).

When David declared, *"the Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven"* he meant Court is in session 24 hours a day, seven days a week (Psalm 11:4; and, Psalm 18:6, Psalm 18:9).

His eyes see the sons of men. Not only did the LORD know about the evil among His people, He planned to use the Chaldeans as His chastening rod. Israel's Judge would severely chastise Israel, but He would not crush them. Not only did God know all the horrific crimes the Babylonians would commit, He had already pronounced sentence upon them! Unlike Israel, they would be utterly ruined and buried in the graveyard of the nations.

The great message of the Book of Habakkuk is that the LORD reigns. Court is in session. International complaints against nations are heard in His chambers.

Parties summoned, charges are presented. Matters are serious. He knows the facts of each case. He prosecutes. He defends. He judges. He commands. He executes. Destinies of nations are in His hands. He makes judicial decisions and nations are shattered (Psalm 75:7).

Therefore, *"let all the earth keep silence before Him."*

"Keep silence" means *"Hush!"* The object of the interjection *"Hush!"* is addressed to all the faces of men on earth. Quiet, court is in session.

Like Habakkuk, we are often tangled in knots over the mysteries of our age. What good man has not been bewildered by the spread of lawlessness during his time (1:2-5)? In His presence, the problems regarding the mystery of our being are solved (Barnes).

Therefore, *"let all the earth keep silence before Him."* Since the all-wise, all-present, all-powerful God is in Heaven beholding the deeds of His people, *"let all the earth keep silence before Him."* The Spirit is telling us get into His Presence, *"shut up and put our ears on."* *"Shema, O Israel . . ."*

Let us come into His Presence, and let Him release us from the chains and shackles that bind our souls and minds with the sins of our own heart and the contradictions of this world.

We are investigating the meaning of Habakkuk 2:20. Disturbed by the wickedness of his people, the prophet fell to his knees to pray. God's Answer disturbed him, so he prayed again.

In the Lord's second answer, he learned that the LORD knew about the wickedness of his people, and about the horrific crimes of the Babylonians. He had already pronounced a sentence against the greatest city-state in the world. The LORD reigns!

Habakkuk 2:20 "But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."

The great message of the Book is that the LORD reigns. Court is in session. Matters are serious. Charges against defendant peoples are heard in His chambers. He knows the facts of each case. He judges. Destinies of nations are in His hands. Show respect. Be silent and learn.

The command "*keep silent*" is preceded by the protasis, "*the LORD is in His holy temple;*" that is, because the Court is in session.

Men need to enjoin the wisdom of silence. We are surrounded by shrieking sirens, roaring engines, 18 wheelers thundering down interstates, honking cars, alarm clocks beeping, cell phones invading your day, and TV enticing us with zillions of commercials. These disruptions and demands on our souls are unbearable! Connectedness is the curse of our times. The tyranny of the urgent requires our immediate attention. Fluffy stuff takes precedence over weighty matters. The need of the hour is silence in order to focus on the important things.

Silence is golden in the presence of God, Yes I believe it is true, Because in that golden silence, my thoughts are filled with You.

Habakkuk accused God of going sub silentio in regards to his prayer (1:2); now, the LORD commands him and "*all faces*" to be silent.

We need to find God, but we cannot find him in the noise of the city, or the rearranging of chairs at a school pep rally. He is in His temple as King and Judge. Court is in session. The Spirit whispers to us, "*Shhhh! Hush! Silence in the gallery! These matters are serious. Listen and learn!*"

The idea here for "red necks" is slow down, shut up, shush, zip the lip, chill out, cork it, and get your ears on. But, the LORD is not this crude or rude. He simply posts His rule, "Silence. Court is in session!"

A fool is known for his many words, but a man of wisdom for his silence.

Proverbs 18:2-3 Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions.

When you are in the Divine Library of wisdom and knowledge the rule is “**Quiet Please!**” The great enemy of the Christian is the boom and buzz in the beehive of life. A broken wheel makes the most noise. A broken Christian has turned his back on silence. He is so busy running computers and punching buttons that he drowns out the voice of the Spirit. Busyness keeps him from prayer; noise deafens him to the sweet sounds of the Word of God.

Francis Bacon said, “*Silence is the sleep that nourishes wisdom.*” Listen to the sun, moon, and stars making their journey across the heavens. Without clamor, clangs, and clatter they bless man with light for his journey through life. As a well-mannered gentleman is known by the noise he doesn’t make when sipping his soup.

Likewise, a wise man is known by the lack of hullabaloo in his heart. Like a rainbow arches in the sky after the thunder claps of a storm displaying its glorious color, wisdom comes to men when silence returns to the heart.

There is too much clamor in the world.

In His Presence, the mysteries of our being are solved . . . and . . . all the miseries of humanity can be attributed to the inability of men to be alone . . . silent . . . with Bible in hand.

Silence isn’t empty; it is bursting with answers for the man who “keeps silent before Him.” The quieter you are, the more you hear. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isaiah 26:3).

Moreover, the “*Holy, Holy, Holy*” LORD God is in His Holy Temple! Selah (Isaiah 6:1-6).

Barnes observes regarding the “repetition” of a name, or of an expression, three times, was quite common among the Jews. Thus, in Jeremiah 7:4, the Jews are represented by the prophet as saying, ‘*the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these.*’ Thus, Jeremiah 22:29 : ‘*O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord;*’ Ezekiel 21:27 : ‘*I will overturn, overturn, overturn;*’ see also 1 Samuel 18:23 : ‘*O my son Absalom! my son, my son;*’ see also the repetition of the form of benediction among the Jews, Numbers 6:24-26. (Isaiah 6). In light of NT revelation regarding the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, how can it be doubted that this is an allusion to the Holy Trinity?

See the triple use of *Hashem* (the Name) in the Aaronic Benediction, the *barakh*.

Numbers 6: 24-26 The LORD (YHWH) bless (barakh) thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto

thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

Because Israel's Great Lawgiver, Judge, and King is in His holy temple, silence is the order of the hour (Isaiah 33:22).

As, Habakkuk sat silently digesting the Word of God, what did He learn about the LORD as Lawgiver?

As Israel's Lawgiver, the LORD was the nation's Source of law. The LORD announced His law to the nation, and the people accepted it; that is, they consented to be governed by the law of the LORD God.

Furthermore, His law formed the basis of His judgment (Exodus 20:1ff). His law is a product of His sovereignty . . . and His love for His people. Because the LORD God loved them, He gave them His law . . . not to save them but to create a safe, orderly society. The enacting clause reads, "*I am the LORD thy God (Sovereignty in action), which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt (love for His people), out of the house of bondage (for the love of freedom) . . . (1) Thou shall have no gods before me*" (Exodus 20:1-3). His law or Torah is an indirect reflection of His character; Jesus is the Living Torah, the direct representation of His character. Because He is eternal, His law is absolute (Psalm 105:10; 119:42; Hebrews 1:1-3).

Habakkuk knew that God's law was not only good for Israel, but good for all nations — not only good for him, but good for all men and all of man's institutions.

As, Habakkuk sat silently digesting the Word of God, what did He learn about the LORD as King? Let us consider the following texts.

As Israel's King, the LORD is the one and only Sovereign subject to none. The temple complex was not only a religious center administrated by priests, it was the center of Israel's civil government where the King's court executed justice. Not only is the LORD the King of Israel, He is the King of the Nations. As the Spirit of God summons Israel to acknowledge the LORD's authority over them, so the Spirit calls the nations to acknowledge the LORD's authority over them. We hear much about the Christians duty to obey "God-ordained authorities" (Romans 13:1), but seldom do we hear preachers calling heads of State to obey Habakkuk's God.

Consider the following texts:

Jeremiah 10:7 Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for to thee doth it appertain: forasmuch as among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like unto thee.

Deuteronomy 4:39 "Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no

other.

1 Chronicles 16:31 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; And let them say among the nations, "The LORD reigns."

1 Chronicles 29:11 "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all."

Psalms 29:10 The LORD sat as King at the flood; Yes, the LORD sits as King forever.

Psalms 47:2 For the LORD Most High is to be feared, A great King over all the earth.

Psalms 135:6 Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

Daniel 4:35 "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'

Psalms 2:6, 9-12 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

That the LORD is King of Israel means He is in control. Though things seemed out of control to Habakkuk, silence taught Him that the LORD reigns. With mouth shut, and ears open, Habakkuk came to a place where he was content to know that he was not in charge of the world. The LORD reigns — a tough lesson to learn for proud, liberal, independent, self-willed, autonomous, Armenian men.

The prophet must have found rest in the following Scriptures:

Psalms 46:1 "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."

Isaiah 41:10 "fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Proverbs 16:4 The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.

As Israel's Judge, He dispenses justice to the nations. He knows the facts; and, He judges justly. As Habakkuk waited in silence he learned that the LORD's Court is in session 24/7 and never in recess. His judgment is without bias, without prejudice, without error, and absolute. All must appear before Him. As Israel's crimes came before the LORD's Court, so did Babylon's . . . and so does the sins of the United States. And, there are no appeals. (There is a difference between God's judgment on individuals and His judgment on the nations; individually, all men must appear before Him after death (Hebrews 9:27). But, the sins of nations as a whole are judged in time.)

Psalm 9:8 And He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity.

Psalm 9:19-20 Arise, O LORD, do not let man prevail; Let the nations be judged before You. Put them in fear, O LORD; Let the nations know that they are but men. Selah.

Psalm 110:6 He will judge among the nations, He will fill them with corpses, He will shatter the chief men over a broad country.

Joel 3:12 Let the nations be aroused And come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, For there I will sit to judge All the surrounding nations.

Daniel 7:9-10 "I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool His throne was ablaze with flames, Its wheels were a burning fire. "A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened.

Jeremiah 17:10 "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.

In conclusion, the message of Habakkuk is that the LORD is on His throne as King of the Nations. Court is in session. Take off your shoes. You are on holy ground. Be silent. The Judge knows the facts, He will render a judgment, and the gavel will come down on the side of justice against the wicked. Trust the LORD to do what is right. When politics becomes burdensome, trust and obey!

Golden Silence

Silence is golden in the temple of God, Yes I believe it is true; Because in that Golden Silence, my thoughts are filled with You.

Your throne is above the stars, that shimmer and shine; In this Golden Silence, I learn that I am Thine.

You are greater than the thunder storm, that causes me to quiver; No greater love than Calvary, that excites my heart forever.

You are my paradise, my oceans wide, My mountain standing tall, So in this golden silence, I understand Your call.

Silence is Golden in the temple of God, Yes I know it is true; I have riches greater than gold, As my thoughts are filled with You.

62. Double Peace

Shalom, Shalom from our Lord



In 2 Kings 2:1-15,19-22, Elisha prayed for a double portion of the spirit of Elijah.

Because we live somewhere between sheer terror and the soft patter of rain upon our windows, some of us need to pray for a double portion of the Lord's peace.

Who can serve God in this unstable, maddening world without peace?

(1) The kingdom of God is characterized by peace.

Where Christ is recognized as the King-Messiah, there is peace. Shalom marks his reign (Isaiah 9:6-7).

"The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the goat . . . they will not hurt or destroy on my holy mountain" (Isaiah 11:6, 9)

"The LORD, thou wilt ordain peace (shalom) for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us." (Isaiah 26:12)

Because God will punish the Leviathan (hostile nations to Israel), God urges men to make peace with him. The exhortation to seek peace with God is repeated twice (Isaiah 27:1- 5):

"Let him make peace (shalom) with me; Let him make peace (shalom) with me" (5).

All of God's children can enjoy peace (Isaiah 54:13); But, there is no peace offer to the wicked (Isaiah 48:12; 57:20-21)).

-Peace comes to those who accept the reign of Christ and His authority.

-Peace comes when just men embrace God's Son by faith (Romans 5;1).

The pardoned have the certainty of double shalom (Isaiah 57:19), but there is no peace (shalom) to the rebel.

" . . . Peace (shalom), peace (shalom) to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him." - Note God offers peace to them that are near (Jews), and to them that are afar (Gentiles); to Jews in Babylon and to Jews in Jerusalem; to front row Christians and to back row Christians.

Isaiah 57: 20-21 But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

-Peace comes to those who forsake lawlessness and embrace God's law-order:

"Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend (stumble) them" (Psalm 119:165).

-Peace comes to men who mind the things of God:

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isaiah 26:3).

(2) On the night of the Last Supper (Tuesday), Jesus announced:

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you:

Note: One could make an argument here that Jesus left them with objective peace (Romans 5:1 - peace with God) and His subjective peace (John 16:33 - the peace of God).

(3) In the evening of Resurrection Sunday Jesus comforted His disciples:

John 20:19 "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you."

20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.

21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

Our texts deals with two different occasions where the Lord had a double message of peace for his troubled disciples.

The first occasion where the disciples needed peace was on Tuesday night at the Last Supper before the Lord's all night trial and passion.

Who can fully grasp the whirlwind of emotion swirling within the hearts of the disciples at the Passover Supper? Something was wrong! Tension filled the air. Satan entered the heart of Judas. Jesus stripped down to his essentials to wash the feet of the disciples. Peter rudely objected. Jesus reported treason in their midst. Winds of doubt rushed through the hearts of the disciples. Jesus identified Judas as the traitor by giving him the sacred portion of the meal (the sop). Jesus announced He was going away; and, then he told Peter that He was going to betray Him three times.

Jesus silenced the wind and the storm while in the boat on the Sea of Galilee, but the gale tossing and twisting the faith and fear of these seminary students on this Passover night hit land like an ominous category 3 hurricane.

Double peace: Twice Jesus used the word "*peace*" to calm the storm stirring up doubt and fear in the heart of the eleven: "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.*"

The **second occasion** where the disciples received double peace was on the evening of Resurrection Sunday.

Think of the waves of emotions that must have swamped the boat where the disciples birthed their hope on Passover Week: Jesus's arrest; Peter slicing off the right ear of the servant of the high priest; Jesus' healing touch; Peter's denial of Christ before a handmaid; The Lord's all night trial; the Sanhedrin's guilty verdict; Jesus' beatings before Herod; Pilate's condemnation and death sentence; His crucifixion on a cross; His death; His burial in the tomb; disciples hiding; and then . . .

Peter and John's shocking announcement the tomb was empty; Mary Magdalene's stunning report that she saw the risen Christ near the garden tomb; the chatter of doubt, wonder, and mystery by a small band of disciples gathered together on Sunday evening; the shutting of the doors while hiding from Roman authorities; and, then the sudden appearance of a dead man (Christ) standing in the middle of the frightened crowd.

Can you feel the unruly seas of fear, the lawless waves of doubt, doomed hope, sputtering faith, swells of unbelief, impetuous distrust, stern skepticism, and chaotic chatter colliding with sanguine hope, storybook faith, and intangible dreams of the followers of Christ?

Can you feel the calm reaching the shores of every soul in that room when the risen Christ appeared alive "in the flesh" behind shut doors saying to the stunned Galileans, "*Peace be unto you*"?

With those words, the Lord softly quieted the thunder of doubt and the roaring waves of fear crashing on the beach of the disciples' souls.

But, no sooner was the cold storm over that a tropical storm surfaced. When the Lord showed the paddling disciple his hands and side the mood shifted. Suddenly, the hearts of the mariners burst with wonderment!!

Paralyzed with happiness coupled with self-loathing the Lord said, "*Peace be unto you.*"

When the bitters of life pound upon the shores our lives, we need His sweet peace.

When disappointment rushes in to fill an empty room of lost hopes, we need His peace.

When clouds of doubt darken our day, we need to bask in the light of His peace.

"If God be our God, He will give us peace in trouble. When there is a storm without, He will make peace within. The world can create trouble in peace, but God can create peace in trouble" - Thomas Watson (Puritan).

" . . . Then were the disciples glad."

When the sweets of life excite our tastes with ecstasy, we need His clarifying peace.

When the dreams of life are realized and the smiles of angels overwhelm us, we need His calming peace.

"Double your peace, to my soul, Oh Lord!"

Part II

How Do We Get Peace?

We all need peace at various stages of our lives.

There are no 12 step programs to obtain peace, but obtaining peace does involve our consent and cooperation.

Here are a few actions we can take that will create a climate for us to enjoy the peace of God

(1) Distinguish between "peace with God" and the "peace of God."

Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Colossians 3:15 And let the peace of God rule (act as judge, umpire) in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

Peace with God is a benefit of believing the gospel. When a person hears and believes in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, the war between the man and God is over. Our Armistice Day is the day of our salvation.

It is not a feeling, it is a fact all Christians possess. It is an objective in nature, and represents a change in status from condemned to justified (Romans 5: see the benefits of justification, forgiveness, regeneration, reconciliation).

The peace of God is needed when unwelcome events barge into our lives. The peace of God is a subjective feeling that all is well under His providence. It is the calm we receive from the Spirit when we trust God and believe that "all things are working together for good" (Romans 8:28) and that His "grace is sufficient in all things" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

(2) Distinguish between the peace of Christ and the peace of the world.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

The world offers peace to those who accept its temporal, earthly, fickle, superficial, sensual political views, control, and statutes. The peace that Christ offers is a gift of heavenly grace to those who believe His promises, trust Him, and are in a right standing with Him.

The world's peace comes by eliminating suffering; Christ's peace comes to those in the midst of suffering. The world offers peace to the complaint, Christ offers peace to the defiant - to those that defy the world with its lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and self-sufficiency (pride).

(3) Peace is a gift . . . and it must be received by faith. See John 14:1 and John 20:19

(4) Resist anxiety:

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Fear (anxiety, worry, anger, cowardice) and trouble (agitations, irritations, and disturbances) are the opposite of peace.

The Greek verb "Let not your heart be troubled" (*tarassesthō*) is a present, middle imperative negated by the adverb "not" (me); that is, when trouble stirs up anxiety in our heart, we are under command to trust Christ for His peace and to participate in resisting the temptation to worry and fret.

Philippians 4:6 Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. 7

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

The verb "be careful" (*merimnate*) is another term for anxiety. It is present active imperative negated by the direct object adjective "nothing" (*mēden*). The Spirit forbids the believer to be anxious, troubled, agitated, irritated, and disturbed. Peace is king and it must reign in the tabernacle of the human heart.

(5) The opposite of anxiety is prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving.

Instead of worry and fret, the Spirit calls agitated Christians to pray (*proseuché*: general prayer and worship), make supplications (*deēsei*; formal, genuine, specific pleadings), and give thanks (*eucharistia*; gratitude) in the midst of troubled seas. See 1 Timothy 2:1-7.

(6) Claim the peace that passes all understanding that shall keep your heart and mind.

Note the definition of peace in Philippians 4:6 above: a peace that "*passeth all understanding*."

The Greek word "*passeth*" (*huperechó*) means "to rise above," "to be superior," and "to govern," It is translated "higher powers" in Romans 13:1.

The noun "*understanding*" (*nous*) refers "to reason" and one's "intellect." The promise is that a pious Christian can have a supernatural peace, a calm restful spirit, without a direct change in circumstances -- a peace that defies explanation. It is a peace that calms the soul without calming the sea upon which one's ship is sailing.

The verb "*keep*" (*phroureó*) means to guard as on a military patrol; that is, God's peace stands guard over one's mind and emotions to keep the soul from doing something foolish and irrational.

(7) Think on holy things:

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

"Great thoughts of your sin alone will drive you to despair; but great thoughts of Christ will pilot you into the haven of peace" - Charles Spurgeon.

(8) Develop holy habits:

Philippians 4:8 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

"Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit;

sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny" (R.W. Emerson).

A minor disturbance happened in an Italian village, and a woman came running into the chapel chattering away as fast as she could jiggle her tongue. The priest held up his hand and stopped her prattle. Closing his eyes, the priest slowly spoke, "May the Lord bless you and keep you and give you peace!" Dropping his hand, he spoke to the roused woman, "Now, you can speak."

2 Thessalonians 3:16 "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all."

63. Facing the Headwinds of life

Mark 6:45-52

"Immediately He constrained His disciples to get into the boat, and to go before Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He sent away the people. And when He had sent them away, He departed into a mountain to pray. And when evening was come, the boat was in the midst of the sea, and He alone on the land. And He saw them toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them. But when they saw Him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out: for they all saw Him, and were troubled. And immediately He talked with them, and said unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I, be not afraid. And He went up unto them into the boat, and the wind ceased: and they were sorely amazed among themselves beyond measure, and wondered. For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their hearts were hardened." Mark 6:45-52.

Are you facing headwinds on the sea of life?

You can find strength in your battles by grasping the faith-building truths contained in this story.

Mark provides two stories about the disciples struggling in a storm.

The first is in Mark 4:35-41 where Jesus fell asleep in the boat on the Sea of Galilee, and the second in Mark 6:45-51 where our Lord ordered the disciples to travel in the boat back to Capernaum while he stayed on the mountain to pray for them.

Only Mark includes both events in His gospel account.

These stories are here for our edification. *Therefore, we can strengthen our faith when we tap into the spiritual truths in Mark's account of the disciples' struggle against the headwinds on the Sea of Galilee.*

First, we strengthen our faith when we discern the difference between these two accounts.

The difference between the two stories is the difference

- between Jesus being near, and Jesus being afar off;
- between being in a storm with Christ, and being in a storm without Him;
- between seeing His presence in a crisis, and not knowing and feeling His presence on a sea of troubles;
- between our frustration with a passive Jesus that seems asleep and indifferent to our battles in the storm, and our inability to perceive an active Jesus praying for us and coming to us as we combat powerful headwinds.

Sometimes we feel that Jesus is with us but asleep at the wheel; at other times we feel abandoned during life's storms. Neither is true. Our feelings deceive us.

Second, we strengthen our faith when we perceive that our difficulties are the result of our obedience to Christ.

The text says, *"He constrained His disciples to get into the ship."*

Surely, they wanted to stay with him on the land, and the only reason they were in the boat rowing all night facing adversarial winds was because they obeyed their Lord; that is, they were right where they were supposed to be. They were at the right place at the right time—smack dab in the middle of the will of God.

Consider this: Headwinds are not always evidence we are out of the will of God, but often proof we are in the will of God.

These disciples faced blistering gusts of winds, roaring waves, and cold sea spray that chilled to the bone, but they were right where our Lord wanted them to be.

Trials are not evidence we are out of His will, rather difficulties are evidence we have followed Him.

Christ never promised us smooth sailing and sunny skies. He has been honest with us, *"In this world you shall have tribulation."*

Let us remember, the same Lord that ordered the disciples to get into the boat to face gusts of cold is the same Lord who enabled them to arrive at their destination secure and warm. Surely, he will do the same for us.

Third, we strengthen our faith when we believe that Jesus is more involved with our circumstances than we perceive.

It was only after the journey they learned that He was on the mountaintop praying for them. His mind and heart were with them. He knew. He understood. Nothing was out of control. Every wave of difficulty was managed by Him.

The disciples thought they saw a spirit. But, He assured the frightened men that they were gazing at Him, a living breathing man, and not a disembodied spirit.

There is great comfort knowing that He is a partaker of flesh and blood; that He understands are humanity; and, that He understands what we can endure.

His message to the disciples is still the answer for every boatload of believers facing winds of adversity today, *“Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.”*

Fourth, we strengthen our faith when we believe sticking with our task is the will of God.

The Lord ordered his men to go to the other side, and in obeying Him they rowed, and rowed, and rowed making no progress against the contrary winds.

Pundits say if you are not “going forward,” you are going backward. But, that is not always true. Who can blame the disciples for not going forward. It wasn’t their fault they made no progress. The apostolic dozen rowed like hard-charging sailors. Sometimes, it is all a man can do to keep rowing. “Stand fast” is as much a virtue as “press forward.” Resisting evil is as much a virtue as conscious obedience in doing good.

Fifth, our faith is strengthened when we realize our Lord is near.

The Savior walked on the water toward the rowing disciples. He came to them in the midst of their chilling struggles. The form of His presence troubled them, but He was there with them. Surely, He will be with us even though we are unable to perceive His presence.

Sixth, our faith is strengthened when we learn that difficulties are for our good.

While the disciples exhausted themselves pulling oars, our Lord was on the mountaintop praying for them. When He appeared to them the text says, “the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.”

As the disciples grew in their understanding and appreciation of Christ, they marveled at His attributes: “they were sorely amazed among themselves beyond measure, and wondered.” Surely those unwanted struggles that we face on the sea of life will yield a greater appreciation of our Lord. Need drives us to seek Him. No trials, no triumph; no junk, no joy; no adversity, no advantage!

Finally, our faith is strengthened when we take comfort from Biblical stories.

The text informs us the disciples did not reap the benefit of seeing the miracles of Christ like they should. The text says, “*For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened*” (Mark. 6:52).

By “*hardened*,” Mark is not saying the disciples were stubborn and wicked, but that they struggled as mortals to learn and grasp the divine lessons each miracle was designed to convey.

In this account, the disciples failed to take sufficient comfort from the miracle of the loaves. The text does NOT say they failed to learn the lesson of their last boat ride with Jesus (Mark 4:35), but that they failed to reap the benefit of our Lord’s power exhibited in the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:52). Selah!

The feeding of the multitude shows us that Christ is Lord over space, time, and matter; and, that all natural processes on earth, sky, and sea are under His command.

The disciples should have reasoned that if our Lord ordered the multiplication and reproduction of bread and fish on the shore, that He is also Lord of the Sea; that the One who controls physical matter commands the cosmic powers of wind and surf; that is, their marine obstacles were measured, limited, and under His authority.

If there is a problem on board the shipload of believers, it is that passengers don’t take sufficient comfort from the promises in Scripture.

(Note: Mark does not include Peter’s bid to walk on water, though this is the same story. Mark leaves it out because it distracts from the main lesson he wants all believers to grasp . . . *that the Jesus who controlled the bread and fish, controls the sea and the surf.*)

Facing head winds? Believe and keep on rowing.

64. Seeing Behind the Scenes of History

Seven Miracles of Elisha

2 Kings 6

Must our emotional struggles come because we don't understand Providence.

We have before us the Syrian War against Israel and the Seven Miracles of Elisha.

Because we are too often impacted by negative circumstances and news, we need spiritual insight.

This powerful event takes us behind the scenes of history.

Perhaps, the best approach to this marvelous account is to just read it and let its simple facts stir our hearts.

Background: Joram, the son of Ahab and Jezebel (the murderers), is the pagan, idolatrous king that rules Israel, the Northern kingdom with its capital in Samaria. Ben-Hadad, serves the Rephidim, the Sun god, with border disputes and political interest in parts of Israel. Because his raiding strategies always seem to be foiled by Joram (King of Israel), Ben-Hadad II (Syrian King) feels he has been betrayed by one of his generals. Confronting his military staff, he learns that his movements are reported to King Joram by Elisha the Prophet. Enraged, Ben-Hadad orders a small Syrian force to go to Dothan to arrest Elisha and to bring him back to Syria to be interrogated or worse. And, this is where our story begins:



Miracle One:

God reveals to Elisha the military maneuvers of the king of Syria so he could warn the king of Israel.

8 Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp.

9 And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down.

10 And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice.

The Syrian king fears there is a traitor in their midst

11 Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel?

12 And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.

13 And he said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan.

The Order to Capture Elisha

14 Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about.

The servant of Elisha trembled with fear seeing the Syrian army with its troops and chariots surrounding his village.

15 And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?

The faith of Elisha and the truth all Christians must grasp.

16 And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.

Miracle Two:

God answers Elisha's prayer immediately.

17 And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man;

Miracle Three:

God opened the eyes of Elisha's servant to see the armies of God behind the scenes of history.

and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

The miracle here is not that angels were present with the prophet, but his young servant was granted spiritual insight to see the armies of God at work behind the scenes of history.

Miracle Four:

God answers Elisha's prayer to blind the Syrian army (amaurotic state).

18 And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

19 And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria.

Miracle Five:

God answers Elisha's prayer and opens the eyes of the blind Syrian soldiers who are now smack-dab in the middle of the capital of Samaria, the king's palace and Israel's military headquarters.

20 And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.

21 And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them?

Miracle Six:

God moves in the heart of the king to offer grace and mercy towards Israel's enemies by providing a feast for the Syrian army.

22 And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.

This is God's capture and release program at work.

Miracle Seven:

The border disputes stopped and there was peace for a time between Syria and Samaria.

23 And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.

Lessons for Us

First, this story ought to stir in our hearts a desire to explore prayer as a means of accessing the power of God.

"Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God's infinite grace and power." R.A. Torrey

Elisha did NOT pray, "Lord, be with us!" He was already with them.

We learn that angels were the manifestation of God's presence with the man of God. Angels assume a character relevant to the age, in this case, chariots of fire. In our time it could be a manifestation of a modern army.

Second, we should contemplate the meaning and power of this Old Testament truth, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them."

The New Testament equivalent of this truth is found in 1 John 4:4 –

"Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he (spirit of Christ) who is in you (plural) is greater than he (the spirit of the antichrist) who is in the world."

Psalm 91:1, 11 "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. . . . For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways."

Third: Somehow, somehow, we need to grasp with the eye of faith that the things we see and feel are not what they appear, but that there are real, unseen, hidden angelic-forces for good at work behind the scenes of history.

"If you believe in a God who controls the big things, you have to believe in a God who controls the little things. It is we, of course, to whom things look 'little' or 'big'." –Elisabeth Elliot

"Every disability conceals a vocation, if only we can find it, which will 'turn the necessity to glorious gain.'" — C.S. Lewis

"My trust is in the mercy and wisdom of a kind Providence, who ordereth all things for our good." — Robert E. Lee

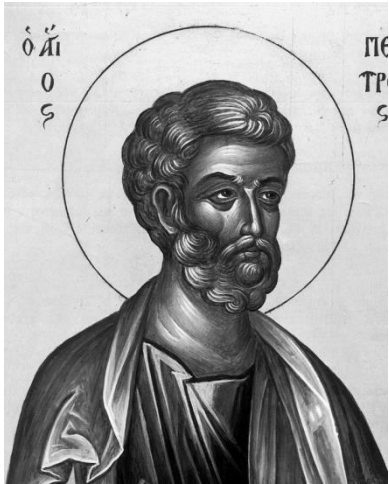
Fourth: We would do well to remember mercy and to love our personal enemies.

Possibly, the greatest miracle of all was when the king of Israel fed his enemies – a peace flag hoisted on the flag pole of grace between the two warring nations.

65. The Five Calls of 1 Peter

Learning to suffer well

If I am worthy, I would like to have this sermon preached at my funeral; that is, may it be said of me that I fulfilled the five callings of God as taught by the Apostle Peter.



Likewise, there are five calls of God concerning you. Have you responded to them, or does He receive a busy signal?

The call to be saved

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

The word “*darkness*” is a metaphor for sin and all the fruit connected with the Poisonous Tree.

It is a wonderful day indeed when a man hears God’s call to salvation . . . to repent and to believe the gospel. Man is so stubborn, He cannot come to Christ unless God call him and gives him the grace to repent; the grace to see; the grace to believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord (Acts 17:30).

Salvation is a rags to riches experience. Bankrupted by Adam’s sin, God in His mercy, reaches down to the children of darkness, sinners by nature, and calls some into His kingdom. He then takes these paupers and makes them “*a chosen race*” (a new creation), a “*royal priesthood,*” “*a people of His own possession*” (children of God). What honor! What privilege! What joy!

By his grace, God called me to himself while I was a teenager. When I was in high school, I went out and bought me the biggest Bible I could find. God was calling. I read the Bible every single day during my high school years . . . but, it wasn’t until I heard a man talk to me about the literal, physical, tangible, historical resurrection of Jesus Christ did it all make sense. If He conquered death, He solved my fundamental problem (death). I gladly accepted Christ as my Savior. Over the next two months, while in college, I read the Bible through again . . . and boy did the lights come on.

Sometimes, strangers will ask me, “What do you do?” I tell them, “I am a priest of Almighty God. What do you do?”

The call to be holy

1 Peter 1:14-16 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

The text calls us “*to be holy*” as obedient children. No one is justified by being holy, but all of God’s children are called to be sanctified. Holiness is to the LORD God what beauty is to men.

The word “*holy*” means to be separated or to be “set *apart*.” The idea of holiness is cleanliness and devotion to the will of God. God loves clean, and He appreciates wholehearted devotion to Him.

We are called “*from*” our former passions of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander (1:14; 2:1); and, we are called “*to*” sweet reasonableness (1:13), to hope (1:13), to conduct our lives in the fear of God (1:17), to purity and sanctification (1:22), to a life of love (1:22), and to nurture ourselves on the endearing milk of God’s Word as dear children (2:2).

When God called me, He prodded me to repent of my sin. I did the best I could. I knew I was a sinner, but as I grew I learned very quickly that repentance was not a onetime deal, but a lifestyle that had to be lived out one sin at a time. Sin stared me in the face, and had to be dealt with like a dead raccoon tied around my neck. Holiness, on the other hand, was like a distant friend that I had to intentionally choose to pursue.

Unlike salvation which is a free gift based wholly on the merits of Christ, holiness takes my cooperation, my pursuit, my effort, my choice, and my obedience to resist being conformed to former passions and my agony to pursue holy conduct. The old rags had to go. New thoughts, new values, new ambitions had to be hung in the closet of my soul. Holiness is a joint venture between me and the Lord. I cannot do what God must do, but God will not do what I must do. There is progress, but the task is never finished and the finished line never crossed . . . in this life!

The call to suffer

1 Peter 2:21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

Suffering is not on anyone’s bucket list. Americans are in pursuit of money, ease, fun, parties, and good times. Because we underestimated the value of suffering and its purpose in our lives, American Christians unravel during times of sorrow and conflict. When suffering is under appreciated and unwelcome, Christians become superficial, trivial, hollow, and useless.

Suffering is the difference between being juvenile or mature; the difference between being shallow or deep; the difference between being weak or strong; and the difference between self-centered and a profitable servant.

Life is suffering. Life is not resistance to suffering. The point of life is to suffer. This is why we're here: We're here to suffer. I believe in a higher power that compassionately allows suffering for us as a race, to grow and mature. Rainn Wilson

Our Lord was a savior, teacher, prophet, shepherd, and lover of souls, but He was also a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. He was called a root out of

dry ground, but that that little sprig of life had the cures for the ailments of all men (Isaiah 53).

Likewise, God calls us to a life of suffering, not to hurt us, but to build into our lives those virtues that mark holy men; that is to produce “righteousness” (2:24). Therefore, when God calls us into seasons of suffering, don’t fight it. Heed the call. Accept it, and produce holiness under it.

1 Peter 3:8-9 Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

“*For to this you were called*” is a life of love. With all the talk and hype about love in the media, in songs, in daily conversations, I am convinced most people know absolutely nothing about Christian love.

The average American sees love as some kind of zap feeling that enables the twitter pated to perform bunny hops around the opposite sex.

In the world of Biblical agape, love has to do with denying self, taking up the cross, and living out a life of self-sacrifice for family and friends . . . and, even personal enemies. It is the kind of love that blesses when other curse, and prays when others misuse us. Love is hard, not easy; arduous, not effortless; onerous, not painless.

Notice the words and phrases associated with love in this passage: unity, sympathy, a tender heart, humility of mind, a careful tongue that blesses and does not curse. There are six or seven sermons in this text. The point is that a mature Christian has empathy and feeling towards his fellow man; and acts in a way to be a blessing to others. Does this describe you and I?

The psalmist complained, “*No man cared for my soul*” Psalm 142:4); that is, in the course of life men expressed no real concern about him. Oh, they would talk to him; use him; and, manipulate him into buying their products; but, no one truly cared about his soul.

In the Academy Award-winning 2002 film “Chicago,” Amos Hart sings the musical “Mister Cellophane” wherein “what’s his name” sings the following lyrics:

*If someone stood up in a crowd
And raised his voice up way out loud
And waved his arm
And shook his leg
You’d notice him*

If someone in the movie show

*Yelled "fired in the second row,
This whole place is a powder keg!"
You'd notice him*

*And even without clucking like a hen
Everyone gets noticed, now and then,
Unless, of course, that personage should
Be Invisible, inconsequential me!*

*Cellophane
Mister cellophane
Should have been my name
Mister cellophane
'cause you can look right through me
Walk right by me
And never know I'm there!*

Poor Amos, nobody knew he was there.

If you live in a typical American neighborhood, you are probably Mister Cellophane to your neighbors. No one knows your name or that you are even there.

I have lived in my present neighborhood for over ten years, and while I have gone around and met neighbors, not one person has ever taken the initiative to come over and expressed interest in my wife and me. We feel like Mister and Mrs. Cellophane.

Did you hear the story of Hedviga Golik, who sat dead in front of her TV for 42 years before anyone ever discovered she was dead. What kind of neighbors did she have? Yikes! She was Ms. Cellophane. Nobody knew her name. It took 42 years for anyone to discover her skeleton.

Christians talk about love, but are weak on a walk of love. If you attend an average church in America with over 200 people you'd be Mr. Cellophane where nobody knows your name. Very few Christians go to church saying, "Who can I minister to today?" Grow in Christ and be one of them.

Hell is being absolutely alone, and what a tragedy when people experience hell in church. But, they do. "*No man cares for my soul!*" I am Mr. Cellophane.

The call to glory

1 Peter 5:10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Life is fragile and short—a vapor that appears for a little while and then disappears. He suffered much, but we suffer for a little while.

One day, He will call His own to glory. What a wonderful day that will be. We don't deserve to be there, but by His grace He will call us out of the temporal into the eternal. Let us make sure that our name is on that list.

Those on the list are the people who have responded to God's call to believe in Christ's death, burial and resurrection; and, accepted His authority over their lives. To be in His eternal kingdom, you must believe in His redemptive history, and accept Christ as your Lord and Master now.

All who know the Lord will one day be called into His presence. Until then let us be restored (mended); be confirmed (fixed); be strengthened (vigorous); and be established (stable).

May the Lord help you fulfill the Five Calls of God in 1 Peter.

66. Christ, Our Inspiration

Philippians 2:5-12

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ."



This is one of the loveliest passages in the Crown Jewels of Sacred Literature.

It is my favorite, and the one that has impacted my life more than any other. It challenges us to think like Christ, to be swallowed up with greatness of His humility, and to adopt His humility. Yet, in a world grasping for health and wealth, few Christians seem to value the attitude of our Savior.

If I were to advertise a seminar on "How to Triple Your Money in the Stock Market this Year," or "How to Develop Self-Esteem in your Child," the auditorium would be packed. But, if I offered a seminary course on "How to Have the Attitude of Christ," who would show up?

The problem is, we don't esteem what God esteems. Men want to be like sports heroes, movie stars, and rich like John D. Rockefeller, but who wants to be like Christ? Nevertheless, let's take a look at the thinking of our Lord Jesus.

Philippians 2:5-12 – Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant,

being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The Command: *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ”* (2:5) begins with a present imperative enjoining us to continually strive to cultivate the mind of Christ; that is, to think like Him.

By *“mind”* the apostle is referring to the thinking of Christ and the lack of selfish ambition in his walk through life. The command to esteem (to place first) the concerns of (2:3) and to look (scope out) out for the interest of others is an imperative. It is not a great suggestion or good choice, but a command.

The mind of Christ is illustrated with the seven downward steps of His humiliation.

STEP ONE: *“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God”* (2:6)

Selfless Attitude: *“Being in the form of God”* is a direct statement regarding the deity of Christ. The word *“being”* is from the Greek verb (*huparchein*) which is not the common Greek word for *“being.”* This word describes the immutable essence of a man and that which cannot be changed. It describes that part of a man which, in any circumstances, remains the same.

Paul begins by saying that Jesus was essentially and unalterably divine. It is not possible to think of Jesus just as a good teacher. Our text verifies Jesus was truly of the same substance as God. A good teacher, you can ignore. Being Divine, no man can afford to neglect.

What is it like to be a king dressed in royal apparel, a golden crown, and universal respect? In eternity, in His Father’s Heavenly Palace, Jesus knew the glory, radiance, and honor of being the Son of God. A rainbow of colors flashed before his angels like stage lights on a performer. Choirs with a hundred thousand voices lent their talent to sing His praises. So bright was the flashing display of glory, seraphim covered their faces.

In the eternal state, the Father commissioned His Son to surrender it all, to leave the beauty and comfort of heaven and descend to earth to be a man in order to save sinners from their sins. Lacking in the Son was any sense of greed, covetous, selfish ambition, jealousy, competition, or aspiration. He chose the finite over the infinite; the limitation of man rather than the limitlessness of God; the cloudy perspective of humanity over the clarity of the Divine perspective.

“Mind” (*phroneo*) refers to the basic orientation, bent, and thought patterns of one’s thinking process, rather than to the intellect itself. When announcing this in the present tense (continuous action, lifestyle) active voice (personal decision of the will) imperative mood (command not suggestion), Paul calls us to be humble like Christ.

Someone has said the hardest instrument to play in the orchestra is second fiddle. Pride is essentially competitive. Pride is not content with having wealth and honor. It must have more wealth and honor. Pride is not content with a piece of the pie, it must have a larger piece of the pie. There was no pride in Jesus.

“Bits & Pieces” illustrates the futility of greed in Leo Tolstoy’s story about a peasant farmer who was not satisfied with his portion in life. He wanted it all.

One day he received a generous offer. For 1000 rubles, he could buy all the land he could walk around in a day. The only catch in the deal was that he had to be back at his starting point by sundown. Exhausting himself in a mad dash marathon to cover as much territory as possible, the farmer realized he was far from home. In the afternoon, he picked up his pace. Sweat rolled down his forehead. His heart raced. As the sun began to sink below the horizon he came within sight of the finish line. Gasping for breath, his heart pounding, he called upon every bit of strength left in his body and staggered across the line just before the sun disappeared. He immediately collapsed, blood streaming from his mouth. In a few minutes, he was dead. Afterwards, his servants dug a grave. It was not much over six feet long and three feet wide. (“How Much Land Does a Man Need?”)

STEP TWO: “He Emptied Himself”

Divestiture: From the verb *“emptied himself”*, theologians have developed “Kenosis Theories.” A question arises, “What did Christ give up when He came became man?” Some errantly concluded that He gave up his deity; that is, in becoming man, He gave up omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence. Others have concluded He did not know that He was the Creator of the world; or that He did not realize who He was until His baptism. Such speculation boggles the mind.

My understanding of this passage is that in becoming man, Christ did not give up His deity as much as He gave up the glory and honor associated with deity. In becoming man, Christ did not give up His Divine attributes as much as He assumed the nature and status of a man. This is called the hypostatic union. Christ was truly God and truly man. While on earth, our Lord did not cease to be God; but, He did live His life without adorning himself with external robes

of the Divine nature. For a glimpse of that which He divested Himself, consider the amazing events on the Mount of Transfiguration.

To grasp this, let's look at an illustration from Today in the Word, April 3, 1992. A reception honoring musician Sir Robert Mayer on his 100th birthday, elderly British socialite Lady Diana Cooper fell into conversation with a friendly woman who seemed to know her well. Lady Diana's failing eyesight prevented her from recognizing her fellow guest, until she peered more closely at the magnificent diamonds and realized she was talking to Queen Elizabeth! Overcome with embarrassment, Lady Diana curtsied and stammered, "Ma'am, oh, ma'am, I'm sorry ma'am. I didn't recognize you without your crown!" "It was so much Sir Robert's evening," the queen replied, "that I decided to leave it behind."

When Messiah came to earth, he left his crown (glory) behind. In becoming man, there was no regret and no envy of the Father by the Son.

STEP THREE: *"Taking the form of a servant."*

Service: The text refers to the "*form*" of God and the "*form*" of a servant. Both are the same word ("*morphe*"). There are two Greek words for form, "*morphe*" and "*schema*." Both must be translated "form" because there is no other English equivalent, but they do not mean the same thing.

Morphe describes a condition that never alters; *schema* describes a state which can change from time to time and from circumstance to circumstance. For instance, the *morphe* of any human being is humanity and this never changes; but his *schema* is that part of our humanity which is continually changing. A baby, a child, a boy, a youth, a man of middle age, an old man always has the *morphe* of humanity, but the outward *schema* changes all the time (Barclay).

In Matthew 17: 2, Jesus was transfigured before them. This is the word *metamorphoo*, which was a revelation of the essence of Jesus and His unalterable Divine nature.

The text says our Lord took the form of a servant. One of the questions my grandparents use to ask me as a boy was, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" My answer included being a big football star. This question is asked every boy and I do not know of any that would include the answer: "I want to be a servant or a butler or a bellhop." Even as Christians we want to do big things for God. We live in a success driven, corporate world where men are dominated by trivia. But, Jesus? He took the form of a servant.

Dr. Samuel Brengle of the Salvation Army loosely translated this verse, "*He girdeth Himself with a towel.*" Our Lord was not just any servant; He was the Servant of the Lord. Most of us serve our own desires, but Jesus could truly say, "*Not my will, but Thy will be done.*" Many of us serve, but we lack a servant

attitude. Not so with Christ. The Savior not only served, He possessed servant attitudes. When He was tempted on the Mount of Temptation by Satan and urged to take leave of the fast commanded by the Father, He responded, "It is written."

In Philip Keller 's marvelous book, "Sheep Dog," Keller tells the story of a stray Australian sheep dog on his ranch. Though Keller needed a dog for his ranch, the dog was a stray and avoided any contact with Keller. Keller decided to feed the dog and not compel him to submit. After several weeks, the dog put his nose in Keller's hand and gave himself to the rancher. Keller trained the dog. Perfectly trained the dog would heel, sit, bark, and herd sheep. Often the dog would go into a thicket to chase out wayward sheep and come out with all kinds of thorns in his side and paws. He was the perfect dog. When it came time to sell the ranch, Keller put his dog to sleep. In explaining why he did this Keller explained that "the dog had given himself to me completely." The ranch was sold and the dog's work was finished. He was mine and the dog trusted me. It was my decision to end his life. End of the answer.

Likewise, Jesus was God's Sheep Dog sent to earth to round up strays. Ordered to the cross, Jesus obeyed. He was the *doulos* of God who from first to last. From beginning to end the Son was fully, wholly, totally dedicated to the will of God. What? One man on earth wholly committed to the will of God? What a delight to Heaven's eyes!

STEP FOUR: *"Was made in the likeness of men . . ."*

Humanity: On that first Christmas morning, the Son of God lay in that manger with two eyes, two ears, ten little fingers, and ten toes. He was truly man subject to all the incumbencies that human beings face. This was a gigantic step down for the Son. For you and I to become an ant would not be half the step it took for the Son to become a man. As a man, he experienced all the irritations that men feel in life: fatigue, hunger, and pain. He understood heat, cold, sweat, and the tears of humanity. He learned how to crawl, to walk, to speak. He went through the growth stages of humanity: birth, growth, puberty, and adulthood.

STEP FIVE: *"Being found in the fashion of man, he humbled himself."*

Humility: From the word "*fashion*", we get the word schematic. It is the same word we use to describe the electrical circuit on the back of a washer or dryer. Like all men, Jesus walked, talked, ate, and slept. He was fully man. And, as a man, he endured all the frustrations and difficulties of manhood. He knew what it was like to be hungry, tired, and weary. Yet, he did not shrink back from the task.

Not only was Christ a man, he was a humble man! Unlike the rest of us, Jesus had a choice of what kind of man to be.

He could have been born in Jerusalem, the City of Kings, but he was born in Bethlehem, the smallest of Jewish villages.

He could have been born into a family of wealth and privilege, but he was born a carpenter's son.

He could have been born in a sterile hospital surrounded by nurses, but he was born in a stable surrounded by farm animals.

He could have grown up in the city with all its fun and excitement, but he was raised in Nazareth, the "other side of the tracks" so to speak.

He could have been a doctor or lawyer or statesman, but he chose the occupation of a carpenter.

He could have owned a wardrobe, but at the cross soldiers gambled for his only garment.

He could have been born rich, but when giving an illustration he had to borrow a penny.

He could have entered Jerusalem on a white stallion, but he entered on the back of a donkey.

Our Lord could have embraced a life of pleasure; rather, he embraced a life of hardship for our good.

Consider the wonders of our Lord's attitude in contrast to this question: If you could change ten things about your life, what would it be? Jesus had that choice, and He chose to be an ordinary, Hebrew boy raised in a poor Jewish home in the "hillbilly" country of Northern Galilee. Chew on this cud for a while.

STEP SIX: *"He became obedient unto death . . ."*

Obedience: The test of obedience is to surrender to God's will when things do not go our way. It is not easy to obey the will of another, but it is even more difficult when death stares us in the face. Death has many indignities including sounds and smells and fears and pain. In surrendering himself to the Father's will, he faced the most common plight of all men. There is no pride in death. All powers to save life are taken away. All control is stripped from a dying man. He has no choices. All rights are taken away. The final prayer for salvation from death is answered with a "No." So aware of the Father's resolute will, Jesus prayed with great drops of blood streaming from his forehead, *"If it be possible, let this cup pass from me."* The Father said, "No!" and Jesus accepted it. What a man! What a Son! What a Savior!

STEP SEVEN: *"Even the death of the cross."*

Shame: The final humiliation of Christ was the kind of death he died. If I could choose my own death, it would be a hero's death — an instantaneous death — something like the death of actor Bruce Willis in the movie "Armageddon" where the only hope for earth was for Commander Willis to blow up the asteroid with self-detonation. Instant death. No pain. Dying a hero! But, Jesus had none of these ambitions nor any of these fantasies. His was the most difficult death a man could die.

The cross is the Christian's most sacred symbol. We often wear smooth, silver crosses around our necks. However, we need to remember that there was no status connected to crucifixion. The wooden cross had splinters and knots that scraped the skin. Accusation, charges, incrimination, damning verdicts, beatings, stripping of clothes, impalement, nakedness, agonizing pain, and public humiliation choked all optimism out the victim. Crucifixion is a death by tetanus poisoning where in the latter stages gripping thirst screams for attention while muscles contort and cramp causing a person to die of toxic asphyxiation.

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (2:10-12).

Humble in life and humbled by death, the Lord Jesus waited on the Father to raise Him from the dead. Today, that babe in Bethlehem is called "the Christ," "the King," "the Son," "the Savior," that at the name of Jesus every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

A long time ago, a good king ruled in Persia. Because he wanted to know how they lived, he dressed in the clothes of a working man and went to the homes of the poor. No one knew he was their ruler. On one occasion, he met a very poor man who lived in a cellar. He ate the man's simple food. He spoke cheerfully and kindly to him. Then he left. Later he visited the poor man again and disclosed his identity by saying, "I am your king!" The king thought the man would surely ask for some gift or favor, but he didn't. Instead he said, "You left your palace and your glory to visit me in this dark, dreary place. You ate my simple food. You brought joy to my heart! To others you have given your rich gifts. To me you have given yourself!

Likewise, Heaven's King has visited us on earth. Let's remember the seven downward steps of Jesus. Because He took steps downward, we can be assured of walking on the streets of gold in Heaven's celestial city. If we truly understand the glories of our eternal destiny, we can afford to give up our pride and prejudice, and take steps to be humble. Because of His humiliation,

we have salvation. God was among us and has risen above us to save us, to guide us, and to deliver us.

Let me encourage you to develop more Christ-esteem and less self-esteem. We don't need to be thinking more about ourselves, we need to be thinking less about me, my, and I. Our problems are not related to poor self-esteem, they are busy eating away at our core because we have TOO MUCH SELF-ESTEEM! Let us think more of Christ . . . and less of self! The problems in the Christian community are due to one defect: We think too little of Christ!

The text informs us that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. "Jesus" is the sweetest name I know. Don't use His beautiful name and drag it down into the gutter. Stand up to those who abuse His name. Shame them with being so banal and blasphemous. Do you love Jesus? Then stand up for Him! Stand up to those proud, filthy men who dare take Heaven's sweetest name and dip it in a human cesspool. Show some teeth. Bark at the blasphemers . . . in nice Christian way, of course . . . or, maybe not.

All men will bow the knee to the Lord Christ — some willingly in this life and others by force in the age to come. If you have not bowed the knee to Him and surrender to His authority, I encourage you to forsake your neglects of God and start a new life under His authority and His management. If you confess Him as your Lord and believe in your heart that He died for your sins and rose from the grave now, He will be your Savior for all eternity (Romans 10:9, 10).

67. Christ, the Wounded Healer

The Grounds of Christian Forgiveness

Ever been hurt by the others? Much of life's suffering involves the wrong doing of others to us. This too is of God that we might learn to be a wounded healer.

When Jesus was hurt on the cross, He didn't think like a victim.

He turned his injuries into an opportunity to heal those who afflicted Him. Consider the following:

1 Peter 2:24 *"By His wounds you have been healed" (ESV)*

On Love: The Father loves us not because of who we are but because of Who He is — a God of love. Likewise, we love not because of how people perform but because of who we are and what we are becoming — a person of love (1 John 4:10).



On Pain: Christ died that we might live. It is through his eternal and incomprehensible sufferings that we are made whole; that is, He accepted our condemnation that we might experience the consummation of His salvation. He is the Wounded Healer! It is through His pain, that we are healed. And, it is through our pain and suffering that we have the capacity to make others whole; that is, a person who is like the Savior—a Wounded Healer.

On Betrayal: If you have never been deeply betrayed, you will have little capacity to empathize with people who have been divorced, or fired, or slandered, or abused. Without the pain of a broken trust, you will become a self-righteous legalist demanding perfection from sick and defective sheep. If you are not a person of principal, you can never be betrayed, you can only betray. Because Jesus is not Lord in the hearts of most Christians, they can only multiply pain. However, if you are a person of integrity, you cannot expect carnal minded men not to betray you. Even the best pastors are sheep bit (Luke 22:47).

On Propitiation: On the cross, Christ not only took our sins, but he took the Father's pain and sorrow that our sins caused the Father. Not only did Christ pay for our sins, He paid for the price of the Father's offended justice. He not only took our sins, He took the brunt of the Father's anger and wrath for our sin. Thus, God's justice was fully satisfied . . . and, we know the debt has been paid through blood currency of the spirit world.

On Hearing Pain: Christ felt the pain in His Father's heart caused by our sin, and He bore that pain on the cross. Demanding forgiveness from an offended (spouse) before the offended been permitted to share their hurt and pain caused by the offense is like asking a man who smashes his thumb with a hammer to be totally silent in his pain. No man can truly understand the wretchedness of his offense until he understands the hurt caused by his actions. Therefore, listen well . . . and listen long. Maturity demands we hear the pain of the ones we hurt in life; that is, do the difficult thing and listen to those you hurt . . . then do all you can to relieve that pain.

On Forgiving Pain: Christ not only has authority to forgive sins, He forgives the pain our sin caused him on the cross. Selah! True forgiveness not only forgives the act, but the pain it caused! Forgiveness is costly because the offended has to tap into His spiritual core and give up the right of revenge. When the woman with an issue of blood touched the corners of the Lord's Tallit, Jesus said, "Who touched me, I felt power go out of me . . ." Likewise, to forgive means the forgiver must expend energy and pay the cost of forgiveness.

Freedom: When our Lord forgives, He sets us free to go into the future free from the fear of punishment (I John 4:17). True forgiveness not only forgives a debt, but releases the offender from the offended's anger. Forgiveness releases

the offender from one's right to justice so the offender can have a future free from the fear of retaliation.

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

Grace: Grace can solve any problem!

Add grace and wounds heal. Forgiveness is an act of grace, not a right to demand. In a covenant relationship, a serious breach of contract, like adultery, the offender can be released from the contract if the offended will not forgive; that is, the victim of adultery has no duty to the contract in the case of betrayal like adultery. Forgiveness does not mean an offended spouse is obligated to keep his or her end of a contract once the contract is broken. To be forgiven of a blatant betrayal is a privilege and not a right. Justice is a right; the extension of forgiveness is a gift of grace. In such a case, forgiveness can be requested, but if received, should be regarded as a sacred trust. But, there is no grace to the unrepentant for the Scripture places **a condition on forgiveness**: "*if he repent, forgive him . . .*" (Luke 17:3).

Granting forgiveness is an opportunity to be a wounded healer. The offender has the greater need; that is, not only does the offender need forgiveness, the offender needs to repair the damage produced by his own lack of integrity. The goal of forgiveness is to repulse the source of unfaithfulness as well as remove the guilt. Grace can not only forgive but it can heal the sinner and make him whole. Only the forgiven can be a wounded healer.

Luke 7:45-47 . . . but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet . . . hath anointed my feet with ointment. . . . Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

Integrity: to be forgiven is an act of grace that must be received with thankfulness. When thankfulness completes its finished work, the offender will grow in integrity; that is, when under pressure, the cords of duty will not snap. To be a person that does not snap under pressure, it to be like Christ—a person of integrity "who swears to His own hurt . . . and is not shaken" (Psalm 15:4-5).

Opportunity: When you become a person of integrity, you can expect to be betrayed and then given the opportunity to be a wounded healer—to "heal others by your stripes."

When you become like Christ, you begin to love because of who you are and what you are becoming—a person of love.

68. Surviving the Storms of Life

Acts 27

Survival At Sea

“ . . . and they were brought safely to the land.”

Have you ever been in a storm where you thought your life was threatened and all hope was lost? In the area where I live, forest fires are a constant threat to our home. In Florida, one must know what to do during hurricane season. In California, earthquakes threatened city life. If we do not know what to do when a storm hits, we can lose not only our possessions but our lives. It is essential we have a disaster plan.

Spiritually, all of us will face storms that threaten our wellbeing. Whether it be a marital conflict, a loss of a job, the death of a loved one, or the news we have cancer, we would do well to know how to survive a stormy sea. If we are not in a storm now, we will be—and, we can survive storms on the sea of life by preparing ourselves to sail on wintry seas.

Background

In Acts 27, a terrible storm swallowed up Paul and all his shipmates at sea. Falsely accused, Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea. As a Roman citizen, he appealed to Caesar to judge his case. Sometime after August 60-61 A.D., Paul was escorted to Rome to face trial before the emperor.

During his voyage, his ship encountered a fierce storm that called for the lives of 276 persons on board an Alexandrian ship. The third and fourth winds broke the ship in pieces and left the crew to battle for their lives. It seemed that no man could come through thunder and lightning alive.

Forty-four verses are dedicated to this horrific trial because God wants to teach us about how to survive life's great storms.

What is a storm?

We all know about hurricanes, tornadoes, and snowstorms that halt traffic, destroy homes, and that wash corpses ashore on an unsuspecting beach. Likewise, there are spiritual, physical, financial, health, and relational storms that plunder our peace and threatened life itself. What are the characteristic of storms and how do we know when we are in one?

Storms begin at “*Fair haven*” (27:8). When relationships are sweet, the job secure, the financial forecast is bright, health is pleasant, storms may strike with all their fury and thunder. Peace is replaced with turmoil; courage with

fear; hope with despair; faith with doubt; and confidence with timidity. Beware! When your ship lands at Fairhaven, a storm is brewing.

Storms are characterized by violence. Luke says, “*a violent wind called Euraquillo*” arose at sea (27:14). The word “*Euraquillo*” means “northeaster.” “*Euro*” means east, and “*quillo*” is Latin for “northeast wind.” Apparently, it was a splitting wind that came from the northeast that pushed the ship in circles. The word “*violent*” comes from the Greek word “*typhonikos*” from which we get the word “*typhoon*.” So powerful was this storm the ship “could not face the wind.”

Likewise, spiritual storms are characterized by unruly winds and angry waves that sabotage our footing and threaten to pull us to the bottom of the sea. We are off balance, pushed to and fro, and pounded on by the relentless crashing waves of some fierce trial.

In storms things are out of our control (27:15-16). The captain could not steady his course and let the ship drift with the winds.

In a spiritual storm, circumstances are beyond our control. We are a prisoner to the will of others and to our circumstances. Powerlessness sets in. We cannot go where we want to go. Do what we want to do. Be where we want to be. We are trapped. All our effort to change directions fails. We are left to the mercy of the crashing wind and the inflamed seas. A sense of deathly helplessness settles like a fog over our spirit.

Storms arouse our fears (27:17, 24, 29). Fear is used three times in this chapter. Fierce storms touch our emotions. The fear of death or loss of a job or loss of relationship or financial ruin paralyzes us. Life suddenly becomes totally subjective. Our world shrinks. Survival is our only concern—self-interest our only occupation! We are afraid to stay where we are, afraid to try something new, afraid to make a decision.

Storms create losses (27:18). In order to keep the ship afloat, the captain ordered the crew to cast the cargo overboard. This was a huge financial loss—a loss of capital. You know you are in a storm when suddenly you must liquidate your assets, sell your stocks, empty your savings to survive. There is a Grinch that steals Christmas. Oh, how terrible it is to feel like you are going to lose everything you own and everyone you love!

Storms are dark times (27:20): “Neither sun nor stars appeared.” When the gray, charcoal skies settle over our lives and there is no light, we are in a storm. Storms eclipse the sunshine. The blackness sucks hope from our soul. No light comes in. There is no direction, no guidance, and no compass upon which to rely. Adrift on the sea of uncertainty, we cannot see where we are going. We cry for the salmon-pink sky of the morning, but it does not appear.

Storms smother all hope: “all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned,” (27:20). The cold winds did not cease. The darkness did not depart. The waves did not stop their swell. Prayers were unanswered. Things got worse, not better. The sky burst open and the thunder roared. There was no sight of land. Everything that the sailors knew to do failed. There seemed to be no way out. Man could not help, and God? Where was God?

It is said a man can go 30 days without food, 3 days without water, and only 3 seconds without hope. Hope is the belief that there is a way out, an answer to our deepest problem, a solution to our crisis. Despair is the opposite of hope. Despair is the belief that we are doomed to destruction. In this story, the wind and waves swallowed up hope and its corpse disappeared beneath the savage waves of the deep blue sea.

Storms affect our appetite. Paul notes the sailors did not eat for 14 days (27:21, 44). When we go through trials, some eat nervously as a form of comfort. Others are so focused on the fight for survival they cannot eat.

Storms seem endless. For fourteen long, difficult days and nights, the storm beat down on the ship and ordered all its passengers to the grave. There was no relief, no ease, and no calm. All day and all night men wished for relief, but salvation did not come. Raw were the nerves and emotions of all the passengers.

You know you are in a storm when there is no end in sight.

Storms are characterized by abandonment (27:30). Some of the crew went AWOL and attempted to abandon the passengers to whom they had a duty to protect. Heavy trials pressure us to go independent, to leave the ones we love, to save ourselves, to divorce those under our care, to abandon responsibility, to quit our assignment.

We should not be surprised that in storms, friends and loved ones desert us. When Christians are lured to think all of life is supposed to be a Disneyland, they are unprepared to sail heavy seas.

Storms permit irrational thinking. In this case, some of the soldiers wanted to execute Paul and the other prisoners. How would killing men save this ship?

Macabre intentions surface during trials. Thoughts of suicide, death, and even murder can seize our thought life—yes, even Christians lose hope and fall into the clutches of despair. We need a centurion in our ship that will not let death be a solution to our problems.

How can I handle a storm?

First, heed the warnings – if you can. Notice that in the text the winds were contrary to the port of destination (27:4, 7). The captain of the ship failed to heed the warning winds.

Second, listen to experienced, godly men. Paul was around sixty years of age. He advised the captain and his crew to avoid going to sea during the winter months. The fact that he was a prisoner having the least social status on board this ship did not curtail his leadership. Having been a victim of other shipwrecks, he hoped to persuade the centurion of the folly of leaving port. But, Paul's advice seemed pessimistic, negative, bleak, and dismal. It was not what the centurion wanted to hear. He listened to the positive, over-optimistic sea captain.

Over optimism about a financial investment, a job opportunity, or purchase can launch our ship into storm seas. Treacherous storms are unaffected by positive thinking. At other times, negative reports from carnal Christians can bleach faith of its color and power. This happened when spies came back from the land of Canaan and instilled fear into the hearts of their brethren. Here the Captain tried to go against nature and the course of life. This was unwise, and Paul's experience affirmed the folly of pulling up the anchor to sail into the snowy seas.

Third, control yourself. The ship was out of control (27:16). Paul was a prisoner. His fate was in the hands of another and the storm they feared. There may not be much you can do about controlling the storm or your ship, but there is much you can do to control your own fears, doubt, and unbelief.

Do all you can to control yourself and bring yourself under command of the Lord Jesus Christ. When going through a stormy trial there is a temptation to obey our fears, believe our own predictions, plunge into sensuality, to jump overboard, or leave our post. Notice that out of the 276 passengers on this ship, only Paul seems to have any serenity in this deadly storm.

Fourth, rely upon the revelation God has given you in the past. Notice that Paul was able to exhort the captain and his crew because he received a word from God (27:22-26).

God may not speak to you in a storm like he did with Paul, but you can rely upon His Written Word. Do not trust your feelings and fears. Do not believe yourself. Rehearse the promises of God. Let the admonitions of His Word anchor your soul to hope.

Fifth, fight for courage and do not be afraid. Paul urged the crew "*to keep up your courage.*" The King James translates this text, "*Be of good cheer.*"

It is difficult to see how anyone could be cheerful when lost at sea. But, we can fight for courage. The worst that can happen is that we die—and to die is to be in the presence of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5).

Storms exhaust our resources and fray our emotions. Like ghosts in the night, fears haunt our soul and frighten us.

We are all intimidated by financial ruin, the loss of a loved one, a diagnosis of cancer, or a challenge beyond our skills and abilities. But, at no time does God give us permission to follow our fears. Again and again, the Scripture commands us “to fear not.” We must do all we can to face our storms with courage and not run from the thunder and lightning that threatens our life.

Sixth, believe God: “*For I believe God . . .*” (27:25). Faith is the opposite of fear. We can feel the spray from the cold sea, see the darkness, and feel the hopelessness.

But, somehow, someday, we must believe the promises of God above our cold, wet circumstances. This is not easy, especially when we are trapped by a tornadic super cell and drenched by chilling, colliding waves. If we have no word from God, trust His character. Do all we can to believe, trust, and obey. There is simply no other way to go through storms.

Furthermore, notice that Paul did not command others to believe, but simply believed himself. People who are drenched in rain, shivering from the cold sea spray, and astounded by the dark, gloomy skies do not need a lecture on faith, they need to see it in us. We need to believe when others cannot.

Seventh, stay in the ship: “Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved.”

There is a temptation to resign, abandon ship, and divorce in the middle of the storms. Storms arouse self-interest. Flight, not fight, commands our attention. God is telling us not to leave our post or the ones we love. It is O.K. to die rowing towards shore, but it is not O.K. to disobey His orders and to abandon those in need of our care.

Eight, take care of you physically. Paul commanded the crew to eat (27:33). Storms are unsettling. Our appetites diminish when we are in a crisis mode. When we do not eat or exercise, we become physically weak and cranky. When we are not spiritually and emotionally strong, we must do all we can to be strong. The physical is as important as the emotional and spiritual in surviving a storm.

Nine, give thanks: “he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all” (27:35). Can you imagine the swearing, the filth, the complaining, and the negative reports and predictions made by the crew and passengers? Suddenly, a man gives thanks for something—for bread. What a stunning display of faith.

There is something about thankfulness that spreads hope. When we are in storms it is so human to be in touch with wind and waves of our storm. Somehow, someway, we must find something for which we can give thanks. Thankfulness prepares the way for God to work:

“Whoso offered praise glorified me: and to him that ordered his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.” (Psalm 50:23).

Ten, lighten your ship: “they began to lighten the ship.”

When we are going through trials, we need to lighten our burdens, rid ourselves of the frivolous, and unload unnecessary financial obligations. We need to be slim and trim. Simplicity is a key to keeping our ship afloat during difficulties.

What is Success?

Sometimes, it is difficult to define success. It would be nice if the storms would just go away, but sometimes they do not. It would be wonderful, if our bank account did not drop and our investments remained intact. But, storms drain resources.

First, we must not define success totally in material terms. In Paul’s case, they lost their ship and their cargo, but not their lives. They lived to sail another day.

Possessing nothing but life itself was a success.

Secondly, Paul’s faith was exonerated. All on board knew that though Paul suffered the same affliction as the crew and passengers, yet he did not share in their gloom and doom. The temptation is to forsake our faith, give into our fears, and plunge into hopelessness.

Sometimes, if we can come out of storms with our life and integrity intact, this is success. It was success to have God glorified and Paul’s calling affirmed.

Psalm 107

*They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters;
These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he
commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves
thereof They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths;
their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger
like a drunken man, and are at their wit’s end. Then they cry unto the
Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He
maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are
they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired
haven. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for all
his wonderful works to the children of men!*

In conclusion, let us remember that Paul was in this storm because he chose to follow Christ. He was not there because of his own stupidity or errors in judgment.

Likewise, many of us may be in storms because our faith led us down a certain path. We do not ask for our storms, but we must certainly learn how to survive them.

Americans are ill prepared for storms. We are trained to sail around the harbor on smooth seas. Because we are indoctrinated by prosperity doctrines, we are stunned and shocked when waves threatened to sink our boat. If you are not now in a storm, you will be—and, you are now better prepared to survive than those who not studied survival at sea.

69. How to Die Well

The Ars Moriendi and the Art of Dying Well.

Self-talk to my soul

Embracing death as the will of God

"*The just shall live by faith*" and die by faith. Die with faith and not in fear. Wait on Him. While I wait, I wait in darkness. But, I wait for the light that is sure to come.

Psalm 130:6 My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.

Dying well is an art that cannot be learned until I am showered with grace to let Him pick up the brush to paint the final scene in my life.

"VERY soon your life here will end; consider, then, what may be in store for you elsewhere. Today we live; tomorrow we die and are quickly forgotten. Oh, the dullness and hardness of a heart which looks only to the present instead of preparing for that which is to come!" (Thomas A Kempis)

Death is an enemy to be fought, and I will keep on fighting to the end. But, Jesus is the ultimate Victor. He longs to usher me more deeply into a life of "no condemnation" (Romans 8:1) and of abundance of grace.

If I have a good conscience, I will not fear death very much. It is better to avoid sin than to fear death. I must prepare for death by seeking a pure heart. Prepare today, tomorrow is uncertain.

My pilgrim walk will end when I step into the cold, chilly waters of Jordan.
Keep your eye on the Savior, and pray this prayer:

When I'm growing old and feeble
Stand by me (stand by me)
When my life becomes a burden
And I'm nearing chilly Jordan
O Thou "Lily of the Valley,"
Stand by me (stand by me)

When the storms of life are raging
Stand by me (stand by me)
When the storms of life are raging
Stand by me (stand by me)
When the world is tossing me
Like a ship upon the sea
Thou Who rulest wind and water
Stand by me (stand by me)

In the midst of tribulation
Stand by me (stand by me)
In the midst of tribulation
Stand by me (stand by me)
When the hosts of hell assail
And my strength begins to fail
Thou Who never lost a battle
Stand by me (stand by me)

Soul, death of the body is the will of God for you. Embrace His will now as you have embraced His will all your life. Live now as if I was going to die tomorrow.

*"It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgment"-
Hebrews 9:27.*

*"Father, hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done now
on earth as it is in heaven." -- John 6:9-10*

The Lord gave you the gift of life. Now commit the keeping of your soul-life to your faithful Creator.

*1 Peter 4:19 Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God
commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful
Creator.*

*John 11:26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.
Believest thou this?*

Know that God endowed you with life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness on this earth as a man upon the land, those rights are being withdrawn so that you might receive the glorious inheritance of the saints to enjoy full benefits in the kingdom of God. Therefore, enjoy the light and be thankful:

Colossians 1:12, NIV: "and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light."

Know that death, though an enemy, will be your servant. Death was the servant that opened the door of heaven for Stephen to see the Lord Jesus.

Acts 7:55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

Live by the power of the Spirit; and, die by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 7:55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost,

Know that in death you lose nothing, but gain everything

Paul: "for me to live is Christ, to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

In death, be a blessing to others through prayer.

Jesus- "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Acts 7:60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Soul, rejoice in the Lord for the power of the blood of Christ which cleanses you "from all sin" (1 John 1:5). Rest, soul, rest! "The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold" (Psalm 45:13).

"My heart is indicting a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men" -- Psalm 45:1,2

Soul, accept death with courage . . . be a man . . . be a fearless woman. You have a Champion on the other side of Jordan.

Soul, it is time to let go of duties . . . of things . . . of responsibilities. Rest, soul, rest!

Lord, take care of my loved ones with whom my soul is bound. Provide for them. Protect them. Show them the beauties of Thy Son.

Oh the deep, deep love of Jesus
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free
Rolling as a mighty ocean
In its fullness over me

Underneath me, all around me
Is the current of your love
Leading onward, leading homeward
To your glorious rest above

Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus
'Tis heaven of heavens to me
And it lifts me up to glory
For it lifts me up to thee

Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus
Spread his praise from shore to shore
How he loves us, ever loves us,
Changes never, nevermore

By Samuel Trevor Francis

Cruci dum spiro fido

Supplement from the Greek Orthodox Church on Prayers for the Dying

There are seven sets of Epistle and Gospel readings and prayers.

- a. James 5:10-16; Luke: 10:25-37
- b. Romans 15:1-7; Luke 19:1-10
- c. I Corinthians 12:27-31;13:1-8; Matthew 10:1,5-8
- d. II Corinthians 6:16-18, 7:1; Matthew 8:14-23
- e. II Corinthians 1:8-11; Matthew 25:1-13
- f. Galatians 5:22-6:2; Matthew 15:21-28
- g. I Thessalonians 5:14-23; Matthew 9:9-13

Each of the seven prayers asks for the remission of the our sins, for the healing of our souls and bodies and for life everlasting.

A Greek Prayer for the Sick (modified)

(A public ceremonial anointing of Oil service)

*In mercy, O God, cast Thine eyes upon us who are come together today
in a holy assembly to offer up these sincere prayers for healing of the*

infirm among us.

Thou who alone art a healer of all disease. On the wings of eagles, send forth your healing power to swiftly comfort and care for your sick servants. Deliver them from their infirmities, and cruel pain.

O Thou who lovest all men, through the Helper of our infirmities, raise them up again to sing praises unto Thee, and to glorify Thee.

Oh Fountain of Life, Our Creator and Savior, Our Jehovah Rapha, You are the One "Who forgiveth all our iniquities; who healeth all our diseases." From Thy Throne of Grace where Christ reigns, send your healing power to all in need here today.

Hear Lord. Overlook the flaws of our person, and the defects of our prayers. You granted power to your holy Apostles saying, "Behold, I have given you authority over unclean spirits, so that you might drive them out and cure every disease and illness." O Lord, do it again in our time that our praises to thee might be anointed with the incense of wonder and awe.

to freely heal.

Look down , O risen Christ at the right hand of the Father. Look upon your mortal servants, and crush the assaults of our enemies. Deliver us from all discouragement and despair. You and you alone are our Provider and Protector. Our desire is for healing, but you are Master of the ages. Strengthen our struggling faith on this pilgrim journey, for you also taught us to pray, "Not my will, but Thy will be done." Amen!

And, if this is the end of their journey, and your calling home of this beloved saint, received this child as one of your beloved sons; and, comfort all hearts by the power of your Holy Spirit to live out our lives in devotion to Thee with full confidence of our riches in the kingdom of God. My history will not end in ashes, but in glory. Amen!

70. Finding Joy in Troubles

The Source of True Joy

Habakkuk 3:17-18 Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut

off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.



The question before us is, “Why does God allow troubles to enter our lives?”

The text in Habakkuk references crop failure, commercial depression, and the terror of famine.

Habakkuk was living in a time of rapid moral decline. Bewildered by it all, he went to the Lord to inquire about what God was going to do about the nation’s apostasy. The LORD God informed him that He was going to judge the nation through a Babylonian invasion. War would naturally destroy the nation’s prosperity and usher in an era of misery and destitution. In wrestling with the impending invasion of the Chaldeans and the imminent distress, Habakkuk leaves us with some answers to our question on why God permits horrible things to happen to His people.

First, troubles come into our lives because of sin and judgment as was the case with Habakkuk.

National sins came before the Supreme Judge of Mankind and He decreed judgment.

Habakkuk suffered because of the sins of others and God’s judgment of those sins. Likewise, much of our suffering is due to our own sin or the sins of others.

Lessons

First, troubles are designed to show us the moral reason behind human suffering.

It our Christian duty to identify transgressions and iniquities that cause those difficulties and to repent of them where we can.

(Note: Secular man never identifies the sins behind human suffering. For example, after the horrible Umpqua Community College shooting circa October 1, 2015, President Obama and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called for more gun control. Not once did these spiritually deficient politicians see sin in the heart of the shooter as the problem. Not once did they suggest that the lack of moral training, or the government’s ban of the Ten Commandments, the

Bible, and prayer in public schools might be the problem. In their mind the murders were the result of evil guns, not evil in the heart of the heart of the shooter. To modern man, people are born good. It is the environment that corrupts, not evil in the heart of man. Thus, government solutions end up terrorizing innocent men and stealing their freedoms.)

Second, troubles help us find the Source of true joy.

After listing the distress, Habakkuk declares, *“I will take joy in the God of my salvation.”* The word *“salvation”* comes from the Hebrew noun *“Yeshi”* which can be translated *“my Savior.”* The NIV translates the text, *“I will be joyful in God my Savior.”* But, I like the Catholic Duay-Rhelms version the best, *“I will joy in God my Jesus.”* Jesus name means *“Savior.”* And translating *“Yeshi”* as *“my Jesus”* is truly accurate. In the desert of affliction there is a fountain of joy in Jesus. *“Jesus is the sweetest name I know. Fills my every longing, keeps me singing as I go.”*

Matthew Henry said it this way,

“Joy in the Lord is especially seasonable when we meet with losses and crosses in the world.”

Once you find the joy of the Lord, you cannot lose what He is and has for you.

Third, God uses trials and difficulties to deliver us from false hopes.

When we are addicted to the temporal, we lose sight of the eternal. Because we chase after the sparkle and glitter at vanity fair, we often miss the true riches in *“fairest Lord Jesus.”*

*“Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature,
O Thou of God and man the Son,
Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor,
Thou, my soul’s glory, joy and crown.*

*All fairest beauty, heavenly and earthly,
Wondrously, Jesus, is found in Thee;
None can be nearer, fairer or dearer,
Than Thou, my Savior, art to me.”*

We are bound to frauds, but trials can free us to pursue truth found only in Christ. Spurgeon put it this way: our last shekel binds us to pretenders, but at the bottom of our purse we can find Jesus. When we lose our all, we can rejoice in all of God.

Fourth, God uses troubles to deepen our faith.

Habakkuk cried out to God how to respond to the storm of judgment hanging over his nation. God gave him this word:

Habakkuk 2:4 "Behold, his soul is puffed up (the Chaldeans); it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

The text tells that the soul of the proud and self-reliant are not right within them. Further, the text informs us that the just shall walk by faith. The LXX translates it, "the just shall walk by faith in me." The verb "walk" (*bamunto*) means "just, steadfast, and faithful." But, it also means "to touch, take hold of, and to cleave to." I don't know about you, but whenever I am on a boat in the middle of a storm, I cling to the rail. Likewise, trials and troubles have a way of causing us to cling more to God and his promises. In troubles, the man of faith "touches, takes hold of, and clings" to his God.

Fifth, God uses trials and troubles to teach us that man shall not live by bread alone.

Matthew 4:4 But he answered, "It is written, "' Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Good men are often all wrapped up in putting break on the table for their family. Their cupboards are full, but their hearts are empty. "Stuff" cannot satisfy the spiritual needs of man. God sometimes takes away "things" so that we might find true riches in Christ, the King of kings. Habakkuk introduces us to true bread, the "God, my Jesus." Again, Matthew Henry is helpful: "Bread alone when provisions are cut off, to make it appear that man lives not by bread alone, we may be supplied by the graces and comforts of God's Spirit."

Sixth, God uses troubles to deliver us from our fears.

It is easy to boast about the greatness of God when we have a full bank account, but what about rejoicing in Christ with zeroes on the ledger? Truth be known, most men are driven by a fear of destitution. Fear, not faith, is driving us in Christian service . . . and it drives us to take rough, rugged trails to safe havens. We are not alone. Fear also drove the prophet.

Though Habakkuk ended prayer with joy that is not where he started.

When God announced that He was going to use the Babylonians to judge his nation, Habakkuk trembled, uttering, "*O LORD, do I fear*" (3:2). The fear of the Babylonian invasion knocked the wind out of him and left him breathless. But,

he didn't stay there. As Habakkuk devoured the bread of God's Word and composed his prayer according "to *Shigionoth*," he discovered the cupboard where true joy and hope was stored, "*Though the fig tree does not blossom . . . I will rejoice in God my Jesus.*"

My greatest losses are not my crosses, but my failure to pick up golden nuggets around the cross in times of darkness.

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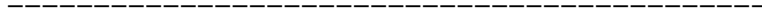
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