

*Equipping God's  
People To Deal  
With Adversity*

Seventh Annual Lectureship  
Cold Harbor Road  
Church Of Christ  
October 30 – November 2, 2003















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# **Equipping God's People To Deal With Adversity**

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October 30 – November 2, 2003

Neal Pollard, Lectureship Director  
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Hosted by the  
COLD HARBOR ROAD CHURCH OF CHRIST  
6856 Cold Harbor Road  
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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to those who are struggling with life's burdens—sickness, grief, loss, and pain. At times, we all fit into this category, but for some these burdens are great. For those who have lost loved ones, who have family members with serious chronic illness, who have seen their families torn apart, we give pause to pray. We hope that if they have the opportunity to hear this lectureship or read this book, they might find a greater measure of strength, courage, and faithfulness. The greatest measure of comfort can be found in the words of Christ, "Come unto me, all *ye* that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). Our pain and suffering may not be our fault, but we can find comfort from the inspired Peter who says, "For what glory *is it*, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer *for it*, ye take it patiently, this *is* acceptable with God" (1 Peter 1:20). There is no greater comfort for the faithful child of God than to know that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

## FOREWORD

### "THE STORM BEFORE THE CALM"

Acts 27:14-26 records the traumatic incident endured by Paul and 275 others when the mighty Euraquilo arose near Crete. It is interesting to observe how they all got into this storm in the first place. The text reveals that the Centurion listened to the wrong source (9-11). Further, a choice was made for the convenient (12). Then, they were lulled into danger by a false sense of security (13).

In the account of the Euraquilo ("Euroclydon"), the storms of life are pictured. The ISBE describes it as a Greek and Latin hybrid term meaning an "east northeast wind." It was a specific term used by sailors to denote a harsh, driving, and destructive windstorm. It routinely wrecked ships and killed seafarers. Everyone on board was looking forward to reaching dry land, but immediate peril caused them all to forget what was not yet in sight. For Paul, death meant the end of physical life and the beginning of eternal bliss (cf. II Timothy 4:8). Yet, first, there was the storm before the calm.

Notice some intriguing elements in Luke's historical account.

First, the storm was tempestuous (14). It controlled the direction of the boat. The sailors were helpless (16). In the same way, the storms of life can arise and seemingly take control. Some, trying to live the Christian life, find that their conviction and faithfulness stir up tempests in the form of "enemies of the cross" (cf. Philippians 3:18)—who



may even be former friends or family. Round about the coming and mission of Christ was a tempest wind (Psalm 50:3). The Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, and other sects and individuals saw to this. As His follower, Paul expected that life would lead him through tempestuous seas, too. So, we should expect that we will have to endure tempestuous storms, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. The day will come when death will threaten our calm (Psalm 18:4). The day will come when fear will threaten our calm (cf. Romans 8:15; II Timothy 1:7). The day will come when the unexpected will threaten our calm. In tempest winds, trust and obey, remembering that the faith of some gets shipwrecked (I Timothy 1:19).

The storm also made work and determination necessary to secure the boat (16). How can we overcome grief and trials? By determining, with God's help, to get through the hurt. We cannot just hope that pain and sorrow subside. We must make efforts to overcome the heartache.

The storm caused many to lose all hope of salvation (20). In Acts 27, the ship's passengers felt sure they were going to lose their physical lives. Anyone who has faced the possibility of dying can attest to the fact that such is unnerving! What made the passengers' plot worse, there were no stars or sun for many days. In Paul's day, sailors were lost and incapable of navigation without them. They had no direction.

In the absence of guidance there is an absence of hope! Yet, so many die without their souls saved. Tragically, the majority does not think they are lost when they do die. The world offers no legitimate hope (cf. Romans 6:23). The

word offers all hope (Titus 3:7, etc.). The true tragedy in the storms of life is when the victim never grabs onto the only available Lifesaver (Acts 4:12).

The storm was weathered by trust in God (21-26). Paul was a godly voice in this calamity. He said, "Be of good cheer" (22). What an impact Paul must have made on the others. Maybe some were trembling, weeping, or incorrigible. Paul was the voice of calm. Though the text does not say Paul was able to convert anyone on the boat through his example, it is altogether possible he did. He told Timothy that we can win others by our example (I Timothy 4:12). Paul was confident that God was with him (24). He was quick to confess a trust in God (25). Then, his final message was "persevere" (26). He told the others on the boat that God would take care of them, but that they must first go through some real hardships. So it is today! We will be saved if we remain faithful, but first we must survive a sea of struggles. Trust in God!

Incidentally, in Acts 27, the storm ended. We, too, can be sure that no emotional or spiritual storm will arise but that can be handled as readily as Paul's storm was. The purpose of this lectureship is to encourage and challenge the saints to equip ourselves in the face of the certainty and severity of the trials all must inevitably endure (Job 14:1; II Timothy 3:12; Acts 14:22). The men and women who participate in this lectureship have prepared the foregoing written work to aid you, the reader, in coping with the storms of life. They are not perfect, nor do they perfectly perform in personal peril. Yet, the suggestions they make can help transform your thinking and reinforce your faith. To this end, we commend the material of this book as

equipment to assist in your personal battles with adversity.  
The Lord bless you with the willingness to endure!

Neal Pollard



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# **Chapter 1**

## **The Sovereignty Of God**

David B. Smith

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Brother Smith was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He preaches for the Northside congregation in Calhoun, GA and has worked with them for three and a half years. He has also been involved in debates, mission work, and teaching in a school of preaching/school of biblical studies.

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### **Laying The Foundation**

Some years ago, J.B. Phillips penned a book entitled "Your God Is Too Small." In it, Phillips addresses the growing trend evidenced in his own day of belittling God—a problem that has only escalated over the last forty or so years, since the first printing of the book. It is an excellent work for what it provides, at least in the first half. Not all of it is sound, but Phillips accurately identifies the root of most of the problems in the world today: a failure to understand properly the nature of God and the application to man. In fact, misunderstanding the nature of God or showing lack of respect thereto is the beginning of every problem. And in the following quotation, this is well conveyed:

It is ludicrous to suppose that any sensible God can wish adult men and women to crawl about in spiritual rompers in order to preserve a rather sentimental Father-child relationship. Indeed, experience shows that it is only the mature Christian man who can begin to see a little of the "size" of his Father. He may previously have thought

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that the comparison of the relationship between the toddler and his grown-up father with his own relationship toward God was rather an exaggeration of the gulf, in intelligence at least. But in his growing maturity, he is likely to see that Christ, in His kindness of heart, has certainly not exaggerated the awe-inspiring disparity between man and God. To have a God, then, who is as much, or more, our superior than we are the superior of an infant child crawling on the hearthrug, is not to hold a childish concept of God, but rather the reverse. It is only when we limit the mind's stirrings after its Maker by imposing upon it half-forgotten images of our own earthly parents, that we grow frustrated in spirit and wonder why for us the springs of worship and love do not flow. We must leave behind "parental hangover" if we are to find a "big enough" God."<sup>1</sup>

Now there is much more to be said in the context of the statement, and one should read the chapter to arrive at the full gist of his point here. Nevertheless, his statement of the principle is on target. Christians will not give God due honor and respect if they do not understand the greatness of the God they serve. The world has made every effort to debunk the biblical portrait of God in order to stunt man's service to Him. To be sure, the concept of God among most people today is foreign to the truth—so much so, that

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<sup>1</sup> J.B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small* (New York: Macmillan), 1968, p. 22.

the world has basically created a "new deity." A.W. Pink once summarized this by stating:

The concept of Deity which prevails most widely today, even among those who profess to give heed to the Scriptures, is a miserable caricature, a pathetic travesty of the Truth. The God of the twentieth century is a helpless, effeminate being who commands the respect of no really thoughtful man. The God of the popular mind is the creation of a maudlin sentimentality. The God of many a present-day pulpit is an object of pity rather than of awe-inspiring reverence."<sup>2</sup>

Now while neither of the men quoted above are Christians, they are exactly correct in identifying the nature of the problem. Despite the fact that God is immutable (Malachi 3:6), He has changed in the perspective of the world. He is now defined, not by the Bible, but by every whim of man. Accordingly, He is no longer the self-existent God who transcends the universe; He is merely a lofty idea created by generations of the long ago and therefore irrelevant to the current age. He is no longer the omnipotent God who spoke all things into existence from nothing, but like a fairy tale legend whose strength is received only from people believing in Him. He is no longer a God of indivisibility, who has no composition; now He is a part of nature and changes accordingly. He is no longer the God who has no potential, because He is absolute perfection; He is a thought

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1980). p. 21.

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that grows more full with time. But, of course, this is false and only presented to demonstrate the type of character assassination being rendered against God Almighty.

To establish the present point, that accepting the reality of God, as well as the truth regarding His nature, affects the total being of man, consider two cases from the Book of Romans. First, to deny God entirely ends only in a complete rejection of the concept of morality (Romans 1:18-32). The hideous list of sins including homosexuality,

...to deny God entirely ends only in a complete rejection of the concept of morality.

gossip, murder, et cetera (vv. 24-32) begins here with the rejection of God as Creator and Sustainer

of the universe. In spite of clear and decisive evidence from the creation itself (v. 20), men reasoned within themselves and concluded that they were self-sufficient. But how does this relate to morality? Jean Paul Sartre is quoted as once saying, "no finite point can have meaning unless it has an infinite reference point." He was right. In the biblical model, the truth, man learns from the creation that God is; in turn, he investigates the special revelation (the word) to know what he should and should not do. But in the case at hand, God had been shut out. Hence, men were left to derive morality for themselves—from creation alone and without God. Does it surprise the reader of the sacred text then to find these men brutish, animalistic, and beast-like?

The next case is taken from a universal perspective, but includes "religious" people to prove a point regarding the necessity for respect of God's nature (Romans 3:9-18).



Paul begins with several hyperbolic statements to establish that Jew and Gentile alike are in need of salvation. But it is the list of evil deeds that incites particular interest here. Venomous speech, disregard for the sanctity of life, and violence are the entire product of the last statement, "there is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:18). Now the "fear of God" includes not only reverential awe, but also dread and terror. And, it is sure that "by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil" (Proverbs 16:6). Additionally, "the fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (Proverbs 8:13). The point is simple: the "fear of the Lord" prevents the downward spiral. Without "fear of God," nothing can prevent the destructive path described in the context of this case. Note that this is not a case wherein men have denied the existence of God; rather, they have displayed improper regard for the nature of God. So, it is not enough to accept the existence of God. Without understanding and reacting properly to the nature of God, one is bound for failure.

Without understanding and reacting properly to the nature of God, one is bound for failure.

But why say so much about the nature of God and morality, or even the need to understand God's nature, when the thrust of this study is God's sovereignty? Perhaps the following quote from the *Humanist Manifesto II* will provide a basis for answer:

As in 1933, humanists still believe that traditional theism, especially faith in the prayer-hearing God, assumed to live and care for persons, to hear and understand their prayers, and to be able to do something

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about them, is an unproved and outmoded faith. Salvationism, based on mere affirmation, still appears as harmful, diverting people with false hopes of heaven hereafter. Reasonable minds look to other means for survival.<sup>3</sup>

Agendas like these seek the alternative method of destroying morality. If God is not sovereign, then how can He possibly help man through adversity? And if He does not help man through adversity, then how could it be said that He genuinely cares? And if He does not care, then why serve Him?

Like the initial point, it is now necessary to provide a biblical model for this also. The case of ancient Israel serves well in this regard. Their history is replete with doubt, even disgust, toward God. Such manifestations can always be traced to their allowance of situations and circumstance to become more powerful in their mind than the sovereign God who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. While this is not exhaustive, it is fair to say that the following examples all fall under the rubric of God's sovereignty.

*Only a few days out from Egypt, the nation of Israel murmured against Moses (and thus against God) about the lack of water in Marah (Exodus 15:23-26). But it is apparent that this occasion was so originated by God to "test" the people, for "there he proved them" (Exodus 15:25). Now it must be remembered that this occasion*

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<sup>3</sup> Preface, *Humanist Manifesto II*, 1973.

followed on the heels of the great Red Sea miracle. Had the people so soon forgotten that God is in charge and that He is able to do that which He wills? The supply of water to the people was coupled with an answer emphasizing the very sovereignty of God, "I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee" (Exodus 15:26). Any fear raised in the minds of the Israelites should have been quickly ousted by remembering that God is able; He had already proven His sovereignty in the matter of Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

*Early warnings are supplied in the Pentateuch about the desire of the people for an earthly monarchy once in the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Despite the promise of God through Abraham of such kings (Genesis 17:6), the people did as God foretold in the days of Samuel (I Samuel 8:1-22). What was their motivation? "That we also may be like all the nations" (I Samuel 8:20). The sin? "They have rejected me [God], that I should not reign over them" (I Samuel 8:7). The people's impatience and subsequent transgression was born out of their rejection of the sovereignty of God.*

*The descendants of Esau had made themselves an incredible nuisance to the people of God during the period just prior to and during captivity. The thought of bearing guilt for their actions was met with complete rejection; in building a complex system of cave and rock fortresses, they had obviously built and bolstered a haughty spirit too (Obadiah 1-16). In their own heart, they boasted at their seeming impregnability. The answer by God is the key, "thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord" (Obadiah 4).*

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Bitterness of spirit and pride, like a cancer, had eaten these people whole because of their rejection of the sovereignty of God.

Cases such as these from the Old Testament are simply too numerous to list here in entirety. But the list above serves the purpose of showing the need for the sovereignty of God to be accepted and respected by man. The sovereignty of God is the key to overcoming doubt, dismissing fear, marching through almost insurmountable obstacles to victory, and maintaining a healthy respect for the Creator of the universe.

### **On The Specifics Of Sovereignty**

The definition of the "sovereignty of God" cannot be gleaned from any study of the original languages; there is not a single occurrence of the word in the sacred text. Rather, the definition is built by principle on the numerous passages that reference either directly or indirectly the exercise of God's dominion. The following passages are but a sample of the many more that exist, but are here provided both to illustrate the concept and to help the reader further identify other passages that do the same. Consider these references:

But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased (Psalm 115:3).

This matter is by the decree of the watchers,  
and the demand by the word of the holy  
ones: to the intent that the living may know  
that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of  
men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will,

and setteth up over it the basest of men  
(Daniel 4:17).

That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will (Daniel 4:25).

For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations (Psalm 22:28).

Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen (I Timothy 6:15,16).

The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof (Psalm 97:1).

For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places (Psalm 135:5,6).

The "sovereignty of God" is therefore synonymous with "kingship," "supremacy," even "Godhead," and refers to the absolute right and dominion of God over all things. Even more, it equally encompasses the exercise of that right and dominion to the accomplishment of His own will and the good of man. Needless to say, sovereignty is inseparable from the very nature of God. After all, as Charnock succinctly echoes, "we cannot suppose God a Creator, without supposing a sovereign dominion to him."<sup>4</sup> He further comments, saying that it [God's sovereignty] "is such a dominion as cannot be renounced by God himself. It is so intrinsic and connatural to him, so inlaid in the nature of God, that he cannot strip himself of it, nor of the exercise of it, while any creature remains."<sup>5</sup> And every attribute of God facilitates this inherent sovereignty which He exercised in times past and still exercises today. But how does He do it?

The first part to the exercise of sovereignty is providence. Of course, there was a time when God worked miraculously. But such operation was for the singular purpose of confirming divine revelation and was brought to cessation at the completion of the written word (I Corinthians 13:8-10; Ephesians 4:7-13). However, the aim here is to focus on the divine economy of God—at His ability to accomplish those specific goals in the scheme of redemption without employing miracles. The reason should be apparent; providence is applicable today,

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Charnock, *The Existence And Attributes Of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997). vol. 2, p. 366.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*



whereas miracles are not. By definition, providence is the natural contrast to a miracle. The following should help:

*Whereas a miracle was a direct operation of God (utilizing no medium), providence utilizes the medium of nature and is therefore an indirect operation of the Almighty.*

*Whereas a miracle superseded, suspended, or broke the laws of the natural universe, providence works in perfect harmony with said laws. The Creator has power over His creation, and works on man's behalf through the material realm without performing a miracle.*

*Whereas a miracle wrought immediate and complete effect, providence works over time and the result can range in degree of completeness.*

*Whereas a miracle had observable results and appealed to the senses, providence is the work of God "behind the scenes" in indirect methods and through nature.*

Accordingly, this operation is unknown to the human eye or any of the other

...the fact that man cannot know what is and is not providence does not deny the fact that God so works.
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senses. But the fact that man cannot know what is and is not providence does not deny the fact that God so works.

The eighth through eleventh chapters of Paul's epistle to the Romans deal specifically with the scheme of redemption through the ages and address the principles of sovereignty and the providence of God. For example, before the foundation of the world it was determined how men would

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be justified before God (Romans 8:29). It was not a decision facilitated by input from man, but the right of a sovereign God to select the way men would receive atonement. Also, consider that in this scheme, God often utilized entire nations to accomplish His will. But the providential work of God in this fashion never violated the volition of man. Consider the two examples provided Jacob and Pharaoh (Romans 9:9-23). In the matter of Jacob it is said, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Romans 9:13). Now it must be remembered that the actual decision was made before the birth of the two sons, and Paul even qualifies the language of the text by adding, "neither having done any good or evil" (Romans 9:11). Hence, the choice was not a reference to the personal salvation of the two men or even of the two nations; rather, the reference is only to the choice made independently by God in His good pleasure of the nation through whom the seed promise would be carried. Then there is Pharaoh (Romans 9:17). And the working of God through the nation of Egypt is yet another example of the sovereignty of God wherein His will is accomplished. God had the right to bring His people out of Egypt, and He had the right to prove His superiority to a stubborn king. The ill return of both Esau and Pharaoh to God's choices was unjustified; neither of the two men stood condemned as a result of some arbitrary choice by God, but because they were "clay" speaking against the "potter" (Romans 9:20,21). Hence, within the providential affairs of God, He has the right to make choices in order to accomplish His will. These choices will never violate the free moral agency of man, but can certainly allow man to end in any number of different circumstances and situations (e.g., servant or

master; rich or poor; high or low; nations brought to ruin or exalted, etc.).

The second part of the discharge of sovereignty is the revealed will of God. How so? Clearly, man must have divine permission for all that he does or says; he needs Bible authority for all things (Colossians 3:17). And the Bible is the all-sufficient guide for man, furnishing him completely for every good work (II Timothy 3:16,17). Now notice the next two examples:

*Man, through his intellect, gathers the will of God from the pages of the Bible and begins to process the information.* Convicted of the truth, man obeys from the heart that which is right (Romans 6:17). In obeying the truth, he is made a part of the body of the Christ (I Corinthians 12:13) and placed into the ownership of the Godhead (Matthew 28:19,20). In this, he has accepted the reigning Christ as the sovereign of his life.

*New Testament Christians assemble on the first day of the week for the expressed purpose of partaking of the Lord's supper* (Acts 20:7). When this is done in "spirit and in truth," the sovereignty of God is evidenced in that He is directing the affairs of men on earth—but through the words of the Bible. Hence, the word is intrinsically fused with His sovereignty. To refuse His revealed will is to refuse the very sovereignty of God.

It is easy to see then how any departure from the truth of God, either to the left hand or to the right, is nothing more than a rejection of the dominion of God. To "add to" or even to "diminish ought" from it is to dismiss the lordship

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of Christ to the preference of self. This must never be the case, and man must ever view himself as "clay" and God as "Potter."

### A Few Words In Application

To say that man is unable to comprehend the full measure of the sovereignty of God is an understatement; this is true with any attribute of God. But it does not prohibit man from taking comfort in what he does know and understand.

...that man is unable to comprehend the full measure of the sovereignty of God is an understatement
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Yet, the sovereignty of God is usually the first doubted by those who should understand it best.

After all, how can a sovereign God who loves His church allow wicked men to prosper and the righteous to suffer? How is it that evil men seem to live with ease in the world, yet Christians seemingly fight for every breath? How can this be, if God is sovereign? How can Christians cope? The following are offered:

First, God knows better than man the proper answer to every situation. Nor does He forget the works of those who do evil. Simply because the Bible is complete does not mean that God no longer works in providence; He does. He offers care to His creation in general, but especially on behalf of those who are faithful to Him. In His infinite knowledge and wisdom, He provides always what is the best for His own will; He is sovereign.

Second, are not adversities designed in part to bring about better character in saints? "My brethren, count it all joy

when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience" (James 1:2,3). The sovereignty of God is such that He is able, in His providence, to arrange such situations for His people. Man should be careful not to complain, and remember he is only the "clay" to the "potter."

Third, when those situations occur that test the faith of the saint, is the saint doing his part in response of the sovereignty of God? Peter clearly records the duties of man, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (I Peter 5:6,7). "Casting" appears here in an aorist active participle. The active voice conveys the personal responsibility of man to place trials in the hands of God; the aorist tense emphasizes the need for man to do this "once and for all." But man can only do this as he believes in the sovereignty of God, His "mighty hand."

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this treatise is not to be exhaustive, but to establish the basic truth regarding the sovereignty of God. Here is the progression: God is sovereign; God can help; God does help; God is helping! "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

## **Chapter 2**

### **Addressing The Enigma Of Pain And Suffering**

Earl D. Edwards

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Brother Edwards was born in Moundville, Maryland. He is married to Lora, and they have five children and twelve grandchildren. They currently live in Henderson, Tennessee.

Brother Edwards has a BA in Bible from Lipscomb University, MDiv from Harding Graduate School and Doctor of Missiology from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He has taught at Freed-Hardeman University for twenty-one years. He spent sixteen years in Italy as a missionary and educator. He has also done radio announcing and radio and TV preaching.

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In the late 1980s, a delightful eight-year-old boy named James, of the congregation where I preached in Tennessee, was playing soccer in his front yard with other children while his grandmother watched from the porch. The ball was kicked into the street at the edge of the yard, and James suddenly darted out to retrieve it, oblivious to his grandmother's frantic screams. An oncoming car driven by a half-drunken man hit him at about 50 miles per hour (in a 30-mile zone). Despite all efforts to save him, within a matter of a few hours little James died. I still remember the feelings at the funeral I was called upon to preach. I especially remember those of the grandmother who blamed herself for not being more vigilant. This is one of the several faces of "evil" as it exists in our world.

J. L. Mackie, an Australian philosopher, says the existence of evil in our world is a proof that an all-powerful good God does not exist. Here are his words:

God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions so that if any two of them were true, the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions; the theologian it seems, at once must adhere and cannot consistently adhere to all three [...] (It seems) that good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. From these it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists and that evil exists are incompatible.<sup>6</sup>

No one (not atheist, skeptic, nor Christian) doubts that evil does exist; that is admitted by all. So, as Barney Boisvert says, the most obvious argument

No one (not atheist, skeptic, nor Christian) doubts that evil does exist; that is admitted by all.

against God as the Christian describes Him,  
[...] is all the pain and suffering in the world. The continual mindless killing,

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<sup>6</sup> Mackie, J. L., "Evil and Omnipotence," in Nelson Pike, ed., *God and Evil* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1964). p. 47.



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whether from war, terrorist attacks, or national disasters, shouldn't happen under the control of an omnipotent, benevolent God. There are four alternatives, God isn't all loving, He isn't all powerful, He doesn't exist, or He chooses not to prevent it.<sup>7</sup>

The atheist takes alternative number three: "He doesn't exist." In fact, this is probably his most effective argument against the Christian's belief in God. It may be true as Greg Welty says, that in recent decades some atheists have shifted the base of their argument from "the fact of evil" existing, to "the amount and diversity of evil that exists."<sup>8</sup> That is, some of them now admit that the existence of some evil is not inconsistent with the existence of a wholly good God, but they say if such a God existed, He would not allow "the amount" of evil which exists in our world. Be that as it may, the problem they pose still has its base in the existence of evil in this world. And frankly, on the surface, this argument seems to make sense.

But, the truth is, things are not always as they seem to be. It was the Proverbs writer who, by inspiration, said, long ago, "The way of the fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel" (12:15; NASB). Likewise he said, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end is the way of death" (14:12).

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<sup>7</sup> Boisvert, Barney, "On the Existence of God,"

<http://members.tripod.com/theseventhangel/exist.htm>, November 2, 1998. p.4.

<sup>8</sup> Welty, Greg, "The Problem of Evil,"

<http://www.ccir.ed.ac.uk/~jad/welty/probevil.htm>, July 19, 1999. p. 1.

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In other words, it may, on the surface, seem like God should simply prohibit all evil in our world. He, being all-powerful, should simply force man into a situation where no evil could occur. Such reasoning obliges us to address several problems.

### **How Does One Define "Good" And "Evil"?**

"Good" in most dictionaries is defined as "having the right qualities; admirable, desirable"<sup>9</sup> and "evil" is that which is "bad; wrong; sinful; wicked."<sup>10</sup> But what are "right qualities" and what is "wrong"? Would we want to accept Saddam Hussein's standard for defining these terms? You see, even the atheist, when he uses the term "evil" is, inadvertently, appealing to some universal code of justice which this "evil" he is lamenting is, according to him, contradicting or violating. But if, as he maintains, there is no God, where does he find that code? Will he take Hussein's, Hitler's, or some other man's? Until the atheist solves this problem, he should not even talk about "evil" because he has no standard by which to define it. So, it may seem right to say a "good, all-powerful God, if He existed, would prohibit all evil, and since He hasn't, we know He doesn't exist," but the truth is, with such a position, one can't even know what evil is!

### **Would Any Human Desire To Be Without Free Will?**

It is easy for the atheist to say that God should have programmed His creation in such a way as to have excluded all evil. But, in reflecting on that, one quickly concludes that the only way God could have accomplished

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<sup>9</sup> Barnhart, Clarence L., ed., *Thorndike-Barnhart Comprehensive Desk Dictionary* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1958). p. 345.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 285.

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that would have been to make us like a "puppet on a string" or like a "robot," controlled by God's impulses rather than our own. In fact, God's inspired Word, in the story of the creation implies that man was given the right to make choices. Adam was told in the day that he ate of a certain tree in the Garden of Eden that he would "surely die" (Genesis 2:17). He clearly had the choice of living or dying. Free will was there from the beginning. The same freedom of choice is found throughout the Bible. In the New Testament, Jesus made salvation available to man, but then we read, "let the one who *wishes* take the water of the life without cost" (Revelation 22:17). No one is forced to obey God. We do as we "wish" or decide. Will the atheist affirm that God should not have allowed men a choice? If he does, will he practice what he preaches with his own children as long as he is more powerful physically than they? Will he do the same with other races as long as he has greater power? Will not most of us agree that the *way of love* is to allow others, as they become adults, freedom of choice and try to persuade them about the proper choices to make? In fact, "God is love" (I John 4:18), and He made man in His "image" (Genesis 1:26), and therefore He made him with a free will. It may seem right, on the surface, to say God should have excluded the possibility of evil, but, on deeper reflection, even most atheists would not accept the necessary consequences of such a doctrine.

### **Free Will Necessarily Includes The Presence Of Evil**

But, now, let it be understood that if men are free to choose right or wrong, then one must necessarily accept the presence of evil. Why is that true? Why does evil beset us?

Sometimes it is *because of our own wrong choices*. Do not we all make wrong choices at times that result in evil? Are not we impatient with loved ones in such a way as to hurt them, sometimes harm, and even ruin our relationships with them? Do not some people even get drunk, kill small children, and end up in prison as a result?

And as we speak of our own wrong choices, we need to consider what Edward Myers calls "the nature of the universe." This universe operates according to a set of laws that some call natural laws. The earth orbits around the sun at a known, regular pace. Day always follows night. Near the earth's surface you always fall down, not up, because of "the law of gravity." Myers rightly says, "the only way a world can possibly work is for the laws of nature and order to be constant and faithful."<sup>11</sup> All of these laws or principles are a part of the rules of the game for all who live on the earth. Thus, if one ignores the rules, he loses, just like the basketball player who makes a basket in the wrong goal. That is, for example, if one ignores God's "law of gravity" and chooses to throw himself off a building, he brings suffering and possibly death on himself. In fact, the Proverbs writer even says, "he who pursues evil will bring about his own death" (11:19). The point is that as we ask, "Why does evil exist; why do we suffer?" we should recognize that it frequently comes upon us because of our own wrong choices. But since God has given us a free will, we are also allowed to make wrong choices.

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<sup>11</sup> Myers, Edward P., "The Atheist's Strongest Argument Against the Existence of God: A Response to Evil and Suffering," *Freed-Hardeman College Lectureship*, ed., W. Claiborne (Nashville: Williams Printing Co., 1990). p. 173.

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We also suffer *because of the wrong choices of others* whether in the past or present time. If my mother or father was an immoral person, even though I am not held accountable by God for his or her sins, I may have to suffer in some way. Some children are born blind because of the immoral lifestyles of their mothers which cause them to have syphilis. Other people are frequently maimed or killed because a person chooses to drink alcohol and drive while under the influence. The people of Judah suffered through seventy years of exile in Babylon because of the idolatry of their forefathers. God said, through Jeremiah the prophet, "I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (Jeremiah 25:10,11).

Evil came upon those who lived in the latter part of that seventy year period because of the sins of their fathers. In fact, even the evil of physical death has come upon the whole human race because of the wrong choices of Adam. Paul wrote that "by the transgression of the one the many died" (Romans 5:15). It was Adam's wrong choice that brought the evil of physical death on us all. But since free will is a part of the "human package," the possibility of wrong choices is always there and such choices bring evil on others as well as on those who commit them.

And while we are speaking about the evil brought on us by the bad choices of others, it is necessary to speak of tornadoes and earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and the like which also bring much human suffering. We know far too

little about the causes of such, but we do know they have to do with the drastically different geophysical conditions characteristic of our earth. But what has caused these different pressures and currents which precipitate "natural tragedies"? Many students of the Bible believe the flood of Noah's day brought about the conditions which cause such phenomena.<sup>12</sup> But every student of the Bible knows that the reason for that flood was "the wickedness of man" which the inspired writer says, "was great on the earth" (Genesis 6:5). No wonder Paul says, "the creation was subjected to futility" and then, he further affirms that "the creation groans and suffers the pain of childbirth together until now" (Romans 8:20,22). As J. W. McGarvey rightly says in his comment on this passage in Romans, creation "fell from its original design and purpose and became abortive, diminutive, imperfect and subject to premature decay."<sup>13</sup>

The bad choices of man caused the earth to be "cursed" (Genesis 3:17-19) as well as causing the flood of Noah, and these things seemingly provoked many, if not all, of the changes which bring about the suffering involved in today's "natural disasters." Thus, this part of the world's "evil" is also a necessary corollary of man's free will.

But there is at least a third reason why we suffer.

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<sup>12</sup> Whitcomb, John and Henry Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1972). p. 240ff.

<sup>13</sup> McGarvey, J. W. and P. Y. Pendleton, *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., n.d.). p. 363.

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Also, consider that *suffering in the hands of an omnibenevolent God may be beneficial*. The New American Standard translation of Romans 8:28 is: "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God." As Cottrell correctly says, "Whether or not this is the best translation, it surely is Paul's thought."<sup>14</sup> That being true, one must understand that God can and does take even evil things like loss of a job, or loss of friends, or even suffering and death, and He uses them for beneficial ends. In other words, as Myers says,

The man who spends some time on his back in a hospital room often sees things in a clearer light than he ever saw them while he was going through life without a care or a worry. This is not to say that when a man becomes sick there is rejoicing; but to accept illness in the proper manner can be a blessing, both to the person involved and to those with whom he comes in contact.<sup>15</sup>

Does not the Hebrews writer affirm the same principle as he speaks about "discipline"? In Hebrews 12:11 he says, "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

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<sup>14</sup> Cottrell, Jack, *The College Press NIV Commentary,, Romans* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996). Vol.,1, p. 500.

<sup>15</sup> Myers, Edward P., "The Atheist's Strongest Argument Against the Existence of God: A Response to Evil and Suffering," *Freed-Hardeman College Lectureship*, ed., W. Claiborne (Nashville: Williams Printing Co., 1990). p. 174.

The bottom line of this affirmation is that God disciplines us because he loves us: "whom the Lord loves he disciplines" (12:6). What seems evil to us, God uses as something beneficial for us.

Even David said, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn your statutes" (Psalm 119:71). Indeed, affliction does help me to develop spiritually if I have the proper perspective, that is, that God knows best. Surely, Thompson is correct in affirming that "Suffering and evil serve to remind us that this world was never designed to be man's eternal abode."<sup>16</sup> We are only strangers and pilgrims here, looking for a better place to live, that is, a place with God. In fact, as

Thomas B. Warren affirms, whether in persecution or

One must say, in effect, 'Even though I die, yet will I trust him.'

other suffering the faithful Christian "must trust God, as his Father, to have designed his environment so that he has some morally sufficient reason (providing him 'a vale of soul making') for having created a situation in which such events could occur. One must say, in effect, 'Even though I die, yet will I trust him.'"<sup>17</sup>

Notice Warren's description of this world as a "vale of soul making" where our sufferings, when approached with a proper attitude and prayer, can help us to develop our souls, preparing them for eternity where we can live with God

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<sup>16</sup> Thompson, Bert, "Does Human Suffering Disprove the Existence of a Benevolent God?" *Freed-Hardeman College Lectureship*, ed., W. Claiborne (Nashville: Williams Printing Co., 1990). p. 284.

<sup>17</sup> Warren, Thomas B., *Have Atheists Proved There Is No God?* (Memphis: Warren Publications, 1972). p. 73.



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forever in a place where "there will no longer be any mourning or crying or pain" (Revelation 21:4).

### **Conclusion**

Surely, no human here on the earth can understand every facet of human suffering, but it is clear to the objective person that trials and suffering are not incompatible with the love and goodness of God. God can, and does, use even those for our good. In fact, as we conclude let it be noted that our loving God used the sufferings of His divine Son ("even death on a cross," Philippians 2:8) for our spiritual good as He gave us the opportunity to be saved through those sufferings.

Likewise, He used the many sufferings of Paul the apostle (II Corinthians 11:21-29) for the good purpose of spreading the Gospel among the Gentiles. In addition, He gave Paul a "thorn in the flesh" to keep him from being *too proud*. Notice that it was such a burden that Paul "implored" God "three times that it might leave" him, but God refused to take it away saying, "My grace is sufficient for you" (II Corinthians 12:7-9). Please notice that even for this very mature Christian, God used evil to accomplish an ultimate good (greater spirituality) in his life.

But, how does that play out with me today? How should I regard what seems evil? I well remember the day my wife and I discovered scoliosis (lateral curvature of the spine) in our thirteen-year-old daughter. I remember suffering with her through hospitalizations and heavy casts that covered all of her upper body and even fitted under her chin to push it upward. I remember with great pain her tears and feelings of inferiority because others made fun of her. I

remember how my heart went out to her because she could not participate even in physical education activities. I remember how for a while she tended to be sullen and a little bitter. This led to many late night talks, studies, and lengthy prayers together. Little by little God helped her to see that the "inner" woman was much more important than the "outer" one. Little by little she blossomed spiritually and today, twenty-five years later, she has become an outgoing and caring wife and mother who is interested not only in her family, but in many persons in a very large congregation where she is known as one who truly cares about all who need help or encouragement. I am convinced

Not only does evil and suffering not disprove His existence, it sometimes becomes one of the strongest proofs *for* His existence!

that she is much stronger spiritually than she ever would have been had she not had her own "thorn in

the flesh." Indeed, what a wonderful God we have! Not only does evil and suffering not disprove His existence, it sometimes becomes one of the strongest proofs *for* His existence!

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,  
praise him all peoples here below, praise  
him above ye heavenly hosts, praise Father,  
Son and Holy Ghost.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ken, Thomas, "Praise God From Whom All Blessing Flow," 1709.

### Chapter 3

#### Studies In Habakkuk

Roy H. Lanier, Jr.

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Brother Lanier was born in Abilene, Texas. He is married to Patricia, and they have one daughter, Lee, and two grandchildren, Will and Laura.

Brother Lanier has a BA degree from Abilene Christian University. He has also worked in Denver at Bear Valley Bible Institute and in Norman and Midwest City, Oklahoma. He now lives in Lakeland, Florida. He was founding editor of *Rocky Mountain Christian* and continues to write regularly for a number of brotherhood publications. He has written a commentary, *The Epistles of John*. He now does year round work in evangelism, college and congregation lectures, and preacher training classes.

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And Jehovah answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tablets, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it hasteth toward the end, and shall not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay. Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him; but the righteous shall live by his faith (Habakkuk 2:2-4, ASV).

"Habakkuk is eminently the prophet of reverential awe-filled faith."<sup>19</sup> There is only one theme that God addresses to his people, and that theme is their lack of faith. Habakkuk challenges them with the word of God: "I am working a work in your days, which ye will not believe though it be told you" (Habakkuk 1:5).

Yet, to the people of Judah in 605 BC, it seems that "Truth was surely on the scaffold and wrong upon the throne."<sup>20</sup> This prophet is styled the "'freethinker among the prophets,' and in a sense the 'father of Israel's religious doubt'; but he was also a man of strong faith, just the sort of man whom God customarily commissions to usher in new epochs of church history."<sup>21</sup> In the midst of a terrible and evil nation coming against them, Habakkuk calls for the Israelites to be a people of faith.

Robinson goes on to portray Habakkuk as a "philosopher, earnest and candid, and possessed of unusual originality and force, sensitive, speculative, 'the suppliant' among the prophets, and the preacher of theocratic optimism."<sup>22</sup>

Instead of taking Jehovah's message directly to the people, he takes the complaint of the people to Jehovah, representing them in the complaint...The book opens with a cry to

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<sup>19</sup> E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers, 1885). Vol. II, p. 165.

<sup>20</sup> Raymond Calkins, *The Modern Message of the Minor Prophets* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947). p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> George L. Robinson, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1965). p. 119.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

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Jehovah...In response, Jehovah points to the rising Chaldean power as His instrument of judgment against Judah's sins.<sup>23</sup>

"There is no Old Testament book that is able to do more for the burdened souls of men or to raise them to higher levels of hope and confidence than the brief prophecy of Habakkuk."<sup>24</sup>

### **The Book Of The Twelve**

In order to understand this little three-chapter book, one should take into account the entire scope of the twelve books of "Minor Prophets," as they are styled. This title, due to its brevity is owed to St. Augustine (circa 354-430 AD). However in Hebrew literature, they were uniformly called, "The Book of the Twelve." Originally, the Minor Prophets were collected in four volumes until about 200 BC when it seems some questions of canonicity were solved. In the Hebrew Bible, they come after the Pentateuch and the historical books. In the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek version of the Old Testament, the arrangement of their order is slightly different than in English versions.<sup>25</sup>

There were usually three ways God communicated with men during this time. One was through speech, another was by written word, and yet another was by symbolic actions. So far as is recorded, symbolic actions were not

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<sup>23</sup> Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972). p. 272.

<sup>24</sup> Calkins, p. 92.

<sup>25</sup> Calkins, pp. 3-4.

used during the period of the Twelve, but such was well known in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Three things should be kept in mind when one studies the prophets of this period. *First*, one should keep in mind the political, moral, social, and religious conditions and how the prophet proposed to meet them. *Second*, God's relations with the heathen nations had a major effect on each prophet. *Third*, major points about the future kingdom and king were much in evidence and should be considered.<sup>26</sup> "Among the writings of the prophets are to be found some of the most beautiful, majestic, and artistic expressions of all literature. Although the prophet was inspired and spoke as the Spirit directed, Jehovah allowed the personality and background of each man to shine through his message, making the book throb with both the life of man and of God."<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps during this time, one of the worst evils was the people's perception of God. They paid tithes, observed Sabbaths, held prescribed festivals, and made pilgrimages to sacred places. Yet, in spite of such devotions, they seemed not to know Yahweh. They sought His sanctuaries, offered His sacrifices, but it seemed that they did not seek or know Him.

To the mass of the people, to their governors, their priests, and the most of the prophets, Yahweh was but the characteristic Semitic deity—patron of His

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<sup>26</sup> Hailey, pp. 21-24.

<sup>27</sup> Hailey, p. 12.

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people, and caring for them alone—who had helped them in the past, and was bound to help them still – jealous as to the correctness of His ritual and the amount of His sacrifices, but indifferent about morality.<sup>28</sup>

One notices during this prophetic period how different were the men God used.

Amos was a herdsman and Micah a countryman. Zephaniah was an aristocrat of royal blood, and Zechariah a leader of his people in Palestine; Zephaniah was a young man and Haggai an old man. Habakkuk was sensitive and introspective. Nahum was a thunderbolt, the whole force of whose invective was let loose against Nineveh. The author of the Book of Jonah is one of broad charity and humanitarianism. Joel seethes with an intense nationalism. Hosea, we say, tells us of the love of God. Obadiah is the incarnation of hatred. No set of men could have been more dissimilar in outward circumstances.<sup>29</sup>

The era of "The Book of the Twelve" speaks of the experiences and personalities of each prophet. These are days of dark tragedy, the impending doom of Judah, and its captivity. This is a picture five hundred years of unbroken

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<sup>28</sup> George Adam Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928) p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> Calkins, p. 11.

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calamity, with but fleeting glimpses of prosperity and

These men were cast into the depths of darkness, but they never wholly despaired.

peace. These men were cast into the depths of darkness, but they never wholly despaired. Even the saddest and sternest

of these great men always issued a call for hope, a call for trust in God.

Though it seems these books are overcome with dire words of doom and damnation, it must be remembered that such warnings were relevant to the moral and religious situations of their day. In spite of changing times and new gadgets of today, the teachings of these prophets still speak to the issues of today.

Men still trust in material strength and delight in wealth and luxury while they forget God. There is nothing particularly new about lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery. Oppression and injustice are rampant. Men still tend to heed the speaker who presents the pleasant message and assures them that their deeds are satisfactory. Men prefer to make amends by sacrifice rather than to do right.<sup>30</sup>

So, properly interpreted, these twelve books still speak vividly today. They still insist that God is the final arbiter of history.

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<sup>30</sup> Jack P. Lewis, *The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1966). p. 8.



### **The Unsatisfied Prophet**

The first question Habakkuk asks of God is "How long?" It is a complaint to God who seems to be letting lawlessness go unchecked. Destruction, violence, strife, and contention abound, the wicked seem to be in control, and justice is being perverted (1:2-4). God answers that He is raising up the Chaldeans to take care of these evil doers (1:5-11).

This does not satisfy the prophet. His next plea is one of puzzlement. How can God use a more wicked power to punish a people less wicked? It would make God's tool of judgment seem to be righteous while God's own people would seem to be the most wicked (1:12-17). The answer is found in that the wicked shall not last, regardless of race or nation, for evil is self-destructive. The righteous shall live by faith (2:1-4). The "appointed time" (2:3) is not yet come for judgment upon the Chaldeans. The Lord is still aware of all the evil that people do; therefore, let the earth keep silence since "Jehovah is in his holy temple" (2:20). He is still on His throne; He is still in His habitation; the place for mankind is to keep respectful silence.

Any human being, prophet or otherwise, is out of place to question the judgments of God. After the Lord's rebuke, Habakkuk stopped complaining, changed his disposition, and waited "quietly for the day of calamity to come upon the people who attack us" (3:16, NRSV). Now he had come down from his "watchpost" on the "rampart" where he had challenged the Lord (2:1). He began living "by faith," not "by sight," and would never again, no

matter what troubles came, question the Lord...On the contrary, he said "I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation"<sup>31</sup> (3:18).

### **Affliction And Prosperity**

The main subject of the book seems to be how to handle affliction when the wicked prosper. Habakkuk takes his complaints and questions to the Lord in a time when it seems the Chaldeans prosper in spite of their wickedness. The little book deals with three major steps in its structure.

*First*, Habakkuk speaks of a "burden" (1:1). That burden is faith struggling under the oppressive sight of the suffering of God's people. He complains that God seems not to hear his cry (1:2). He feels there is a divine indifference to wrongs and sins running rampant in Judah. They disregard the Torah, the law; destruction, violence, strife, and contentions are everywhere. The case is that wickedness beleaguers the righteous (1:2-4). Why does not God intervene? "Why does God do nothing when evil is abroad in the land?"<sup>32</sup>

Habakkuk seems to be faced with a question, "Is God inactive?"

The terrible plight of Judah is portrayed as "Truth was surely on the scaffold and wrong upon the throne."<sup>33</sup> Habakkuk seems to

be faced with a question, "Is God inactive?"

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<sup>31</sup> Hugo McCord, *The Spiritual Sword*, article entitled "The Justice of God," Getwell Church of Christ, Memphis, Tennessee, 1995, Volume 26, Number 4, July, 1995, pp. 30-31.

<sup>32</sup> Calkins, p. 92.

<sup>33</sup> Calkins, p. 93.

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Jehovah responds, "I am working a work in your day" (1:5). "He is doing a work that is beyond the scope of the prophet's mental horizon."<sup>34</sup> Jehovah has a drastic method: He is raising up the Chaldeans to scourge His own people. This is a terrible nation, bitter, destructive, dreadful, powerful, violent, and swift to conquer. They gather captives as the sand, scoff at kings, take cities, and even dare to deify their own might as their god (1:6-11). "This answers the one half of Habakkuk's questions, as to the prosperity of the wicked among his people."<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that "It was not the intent of the Chaldean to serve Jehovah's purpose; but because of his cruelty and fierceness, God was able to use him, leaving him guilty of his deeds."<sup>36</sup>

*Second*, the prophet now has a moral dilemma: how can a holy God use such an unholy nation as His tool of judgment? Where is divine providence? God's eyes are purer than to behold evil; He cannot look with approval on perverseness. How then can God hold His peace "when the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more righteous than he"? (1:13). "It is the problem of the strength of the wicked versus the humiliation of the just....In other words, how can God reconcile the cruelty of the Chaldeans with his own purity and holiness (v. 13)?"<sup>37</sup>

Further involved in this dilemma is that the heathen nation seems able to continue its expeditions of rape and

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<sup>34</sup> Lewis, p. 63.

<sup>35</sup> Pusey, p. 165.

<sup>36</sup> Hailey, p. 279.

<sup>37</sup> Robinson, pp. 122-123.

destruction without any interference from God. When will God intervene, when will God stop this plunder? Will the Chaldean be able to "slay the nations continually"? (1:17).

For Jehovah's answer, the prophet takes his place upon the watchtower to wait (2:1). Habakkuk seems to have patience for the reply, but how often it is the case that those seeking answers from God often do not have a listening ear? By sitting on the tower, He takes himself away from the ordinary events of the day and is willing to wait for an answer. God's train is never late, and the counsels of God are always on time, though not necessarily on man's timetable.

God's train is never late...

God comes directly to the point. Habakkuk is to write down the vision and make it plain, so plain that it could be read even by those in haste (2:2). The unrighteous man will not stand; he will fall. Wickedness will destroy itself. The future belongs to the good folks! The destroyer will be destroyed. "The righteous shall live by his faith" (2:4).

The future belongs to the good folks!

This tells the prophet that God still runs the universe. God still tends to His business. Running the world is not the task of the prophet. The burden belongs to God.

We suffer because we cannot see "how" or "when." But God knows. It is all predetermined. So let us be patient. It will not tarry. It hasteth toward the end. Wait for it, for it will surely come. That was

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God's message to Habakkuk, and it is  
God's message to us.<sup>38</sup>

The righteous man has his own tasks, and by them, and in light of his faith, he will live.

God then pronounces five woes upon the Chaldeans, none of which they will escape.

In a measured dirge he pronounces a five-fold woe on the five great sins of the Chaldees, their ambition, covetousness, violence, insolence, and idolatry. It closes with the powerlessness of the Chaldee idols against God, and bids the world be hushed before the presence of the One God, its Maker, awaiting His sentence.<sup>39</sup>

Jehovah reigns! He is in His holy temple, not the sanctuary in Jerusalem, but "Jehovah is in his holy temple; Jehovah, his throne is in heaven" (Psalm 11:4). Zephaniah cried, "Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord Jehovah" (1:7), and Zechariah had declared, "Be silent, all flesh, before Jehovah; for he is waked up out of his holy habitation" (2:13). Silence, reverence, and awe are the only responses man should give.

It is much similar to that which occupied Asaph's mind in Psalm 73. Seeing the prosperity of the wicked, Asaph declared his feet slipping when he was envious of the arrogant (vv. 2-3). He went to the "sanctuary of God, and considered their latter end" (v. 17). Thus, he could

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<sup>38</sup> Calkins, p. 96.

<sup>39</sup> Pusey, p. 166.

conclude: "Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee?...It is good for me to draw near to God: I have made the Lord Jehovah my refuge, that I may tell of all thy works" (vv. 24-25, 28).

*Third*, the prophet now pens his anthem of praise, one of the most beautiful and trusting of all to be found in the Old Testament (3:1-19).

### **A Rhapsody Of Rejoicing**

"The third chapter of Habakkuk is one of the most beautiful anthems of praise in the Old Testament."<sup>40</sup> It is a psalm with musical notations separated by the term "Selah," a term that is common in the Psalms. It is bold, majestic, and sublime in its rhetoric. It is still used in the synagogues on Pentecost Day.

This chapter naturally divides into three parts: a prayer, a theophany, and a declaration of abiding faith. The prayer (vv. 1,2) is for a revival of work by God in the "midst of the years" as He had worked in former years. The prophet was deeply afraid and pleaded that God in His wrath would remember mercy. Though Jehovah needed to punish His people, Habakkuk pleaded for works of mercy.

The term "shigionoth," seems to refer to an irregular poetic form, most likely musical, and a term that might refer to a prophet wandering in adversity. It is similar to the title of Psalm 7. Some commentators believe that verse 1 was added by later copyists, and it does seem to be a break in

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<sup>40</sup> Robinson, p. 125.

### Chapters 3: Studies In Habakkuk

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the thought begun in verse 20 of the previous chapter: "But Jehovah is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him...O Jehovah, I have heard of the report of thee, and am afraid..." The superscription, "For the Chief Musician, on my stringed instruments," though not part of the inspired text, and possibly added by the prophet as an instruction as to its use, adds to the idea that this third chapter was musical in its purpose.

The theophany (vv. 3-15) has God coming from Teman and Mount Paran. Both of these terms refer to places in the south, perhaps where God had evidenced His power so wonderfully in the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. The prophet calls for like deliverance. His argument is for deliverance of Israel in the same way God had always cared for and delivered His people. The prophet stands in suspense, fear, and awe, but will conclude with joyous expectation.

The chapter closes with a declaration of faith, one of the greatest ever to be found in biblical literature.

Too many people's faith is "Lord, take care of me and I will take care of you." In contrast, the prophet who has raised such searching questions in the early part of the book declares that come the worst if it will, he will hold steadfastly to the Lord (cf. Job 13:15).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Lewis, p. 64.

When the prophet understood God's impending punishment, he trembled, quivered, and rottenness entered his bones (v. 16). Yet he said he would "wait quietly for the day of trouble." In spite of a failure of all harvests and the loss of flocks and herds, Habakkuk intended to "rejoice in Jehovah" (v. 17).

Habakkuk's faith in time of adversity was such that he would rely upon the Lord for his strength, for he believed God would "make his feet like hinds feet," and he would "walk upon my high places" (v. 19). The Lord would not let his feet slip on the precipitous mountains of life. His expectations and faith concluded that God would emphatically affirm His abiding love and care for His people.

The prophet is resigned to the fate of Israel, but his confidence in God remains. Evil is unavoidable, God's punishment is at hand, but Habakkuk submits to God's hand. He believes God is gracious, merciful, and righteous; therefore, his confidence in Jehovah is unfailing and unshaken.

God's will shall be done, good will ultimately prevail; therefore, "I will rejoice in Jehovah."

### **Some Lasting Conclusions**

*Faith is the greatest condition of life.* "...but the righteous shall live by his faith" (2:4). This meant simple trust in God, particularly in times of stress, adversity, and trouble. Unswerving loyalty will survive, no matter the circumstances that may come one's way. This means steadfastness, endurance, persistence, patience, firmness,



### Chapters 3: Studies In Habakkuk

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and unfailing belief in God's faithfulness. Paul used this passage to show the antithesis of justification by law-keeping (Romans 1:17).

*There is divine discipline.* The record of the Old Testament seems to be the "suffering of the innocent." In Job's case, it was the individual, but in the case of Habakkuk, it is the suffering of the nation of Israel.

*Evil will not survive.* In spite of God's use of evil men and nations, there will be ultimate destruction for them. The Chaldeans were doomed, as are all other evil persons and nations, due to wickedness. God's timetable may not be understood, but tyranny and evil are self-destructive.

*Justification is by faith.* The major principle on which God shall accept a person's supplications is faith. Persons come into fellowship with God upon this principle, and persons continue in that fellowship on that great theme. Salvation is by faith, not by perfect keeping of God's laws. Though obedience to the conditions of God has always been necessary, God is willing to justify a person upon the quality of that person's faith. This does not mean faith is the only thing necessary, nor does it mean that upon the

...no one can work their way into God's grace.

first sign of faith, God will justify a sinner. Yet, it does mean that no one can work their way into God's grace; it

takes a quality of trusting faith like that of the closing psalm of Habakkuk. Regardless of adversity, he trusted in God for his security.

*Courage in the time of crisis.* The prophet was in dire circumstances, perhaps cut off from all outward possession. Yet, he maintains courage when given God's answers to his queries. His confidence in the Almighty is not dampened; his happiness with God's plans will continue, and he exhorts Israel to accept the workings of the Omniscient One. Jehovah would bring about salvation for His people; therefore, let the nations now rejoice. Selah!

*Faith is triumphant.*

His faith triumphs most, when all,  
in human sight is lost.  
Ill which Thou blessest is most good,  
And unblest good is ill;  
And all is right which seems most wrong,  
So it be Thy sweet Will."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Pusey, p. 177.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Studies In First Peter**

William Woodson

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The Book of First Peter was written in a time of great difficulties for Christians, difficulties to be faced and overcome by the brethren in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1:1). The exact circumstances under which these problems would arise are not specified, but it seems that they would be those that arose during the reign of Roman emperor Nero (54-68 AD) or shortly thereafter. If this is the case, the shock waves set in motion in Rome by this abusive emperor would be felt by Christians in Asia Minor and elsewhere.

For our day, this book dealing with the spiritual trials faced in the first century and the help available to overcome them can strengthen us as we face and overcome the spiritual difficulties we experience. In this first study, we give attention to some of the trials noted; the second study will discuss some of the means presented in I Peter to cope with these difficulties.

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*There was "heaviness through manifold temptations" (1:6).* "Heaviness" translates a present participle in Greek denoting the continuing presence of sadness, distress, or sorrow; the word expresses not so much the suffering as the mental, perhaps spiritual, state resultant thereon. Specifically, this troubled state of mind and heart was present "through" or "by" the "manifold temptations" present among them. "Temptations" renders a word meaning to test something so that its true nature may be discerned; in this case, the discerning of the faith and steadfastness of the Christian is considered (cf. James 1:3). These trials or temptations were "manifold," that is of many kinds and varieties. [This word was used in the LXX (Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) to designate Joseph's coat of "many colors" (Genesis 37:3,23,32—KJV margin "pieces")]. Interestingly, Peter says of the grace of God that it is "manifold" (4:10), thus indicating the grace of God is and will be as varied in its benefits and blessings when needed as the trials of faith may be or become (cf. I Corinthians 10:13).

These varied and many-faceted "temptations (*peirasmois*)" are gathered into the singular "trial (*dokimon*) of your faith" (v. 7). Proverbs 27:21 refers to "the fining [refining, NKJ] pot" for silver; the LXX uses the same word as in I Peter 1:7. The thought was the placing of stress, a proving, an effort to extract the best from the rest in the "trial" being experienced.

One may regard these two verses (6,7) as designating the general nature of the difficulties that are noted in the rest of the book. If so, the remaining difficulties will ultimately

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link back with these particulars. Accordingly, each difficulty is presented by the devil (5:8) as means of effecting the grief consequent on spiritual failure and a challenge to remain steadfast with a faith that has been proved genuine and refined.

*"Fleshly lusts, which war against your soul"* (2:11). The "lusts" are the desires, cravings, or longings, which may be proper (as the desire for food or the craving for water when one has been in a barren desert for several days with little if any water); or the desire may be for that which is evil, or which is satisfied in an evil way. The desire itself is neither wrong or right per se—God made us with this sense of desire. The desires in this verse, however, are those of the flesh: the desires that arise from the physical part of our nature and are proposed to be satisfied by regard only for the physical (Galatians 5:19-21), and not the spiritual nature we also possess.

These fleshly desires are said to "war" against the soul. "War" translates a participle in the present tense, denoting a continuing strategy designed to keep relentless pressure against what is being opposed. The term arises from the practice of arranging a group of soldiers to engage in a battle. The troops march out, find the enemy, and arrange themselves as the commander directs—some here and some there to lead the charge, some in reserve for defense, if the enemy is stronger than expected, or to provide mopping up actions near the end of the battle.

The strategy of Satan, with the fleshly desires arranged in spiritual battle array, seeks the immediate capture of the soul, knowing that over time all but the bravest and most

determined soldiers may well be worn down with the various schemes the devil is able to use (II Corinthians 2:11). The first few successful assaults on the soul make clear any weaknesses of the defenses of the individual; if a weak link is found, the battle becomes fiercer. If not checked, in time one may become such as "cannot cease from sin" (II Peter 2:14). Satan never calls a truce, never gives up. The danger from him is perhaps greatest when

If not checked, in time one may become such as "cannot cease from sin."

one erroneously thinks that the enemy has not surfaced in such a long time that the "all clear" is sounded and the war is

over! Not so! The devil never rests; his minions are always seeking to assault the righteous again and again. A victory today does not necessarily exempt one from another fight with evil tomorrow, and perhaps an even more frantic struggle tomorrow, with the added hardship of any wound received today.

*Being made to "suffer for righteousness' sake" and being thereby made "afraid of their terror" and being "troubled" (3:14). Suffering is a frequently mentioned word in I Peter: "suffering wrongfully" (2:19); doing well and being made to "suffer" for it (2:20; 3:17); the fact that Christ "suffered for us" (2:2 1; 4:1); "for our sins" (3:18); the present passage (3:14); being made to suffer as a murderer, thief, evildoer, busy body in other men's matters (4:15); the ones who "suffer according to the will of God" are to "commit the keeping of their souls" to God (4:19); and after Christians "have suffered a while," God will "perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle" them (5:10).*

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The present verse (3:14) shows by the use of the present optative verb that the suffering contemplated is not absolutely going to occur, but there is a possibility that it will. If, and, possibly when, it does, there likely will be fear and trouble of heart as to what will occur and how one will bear up under the problem. Because the righteousness of the Christian is known, by the tormenter, and this is the basis of the wrong suffered, the Christian is to be "happy," or to consider oneself to be "blessed" (cf. Matthew 5:12). By resisting the trial, one is made more aware of spiritual strength and ability to stand against the devil. This causes one to be aware of the blessedness he has from Christ.

The "human" way is in sharp contrast with this instruction, and this makes such compliance difficult. This tendency to follow the flesh in such matters provides an opening for Satan to lead one further away from God—the very point to be guarded against because the attack will force its way through this opening if possible.

*Non-Christians "think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" (4:4).* In the preceding verse, Peter stated that those addressed had once walked in "lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries" (4:3). Now, as the family of God those they had left to become Christians brought what we would call "peer pressure" against them for their new life-style.

Christians were considered to be "strange." The word translated "strange" refers to that which brings surprise at the novelty of something, being surprised by a new turn of events, and taking offense by an unreasonable resentment

at anything that does not fit into the normal pattern of life with which one is acquainted. A more contemporary difficulty for Christians today can hardly be imagined!

Further, the people of God would no longer "run with" those with whom they had once been associated. The word so translated meant to run with, be associated with, and had the added thought of rushing into something rashly or without thought, as some would say "running head-long" into something! Interestingly, the present participle with the negative makes it clear that such "head-long running" had once been true of the Christians; their current refusal to continue so doing was offensive to their former companions. The adjective "same" confirms this interpretation.

The "head-long running" had as its goal one's engaging in an "excess of riot." The "excess" derives from a word meaning to pour forth, to pour out, an overflowing; it was used to describe rock pools filled and thus overflowing by the high tide of the sea or a swamp formed by overflowing of water. The overflowing or excess was in "riot," a Greek word meaning not saved, thus an abandonment of moral conduct and values. A recent lexicographer gives the following meaning: "reckless abandon, debauchery, dissipation, profligacy, especially exhibited in convivial gatherings; flood of dissipation." One must stand amazed that such practitioners of this gross immorality had been converted; some are being converted now. What "power" there is in the gospel (Romans 1:16)! Once left behind, such a way of life must never be reentered, but some even did so then (II Peter 2:20-22).



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The offense taken by the former associates of those who were now born again in Christ (1:22-25), and conducted themselves accordingly, expressed itself in "speaking evil of you." One should note the italicized word "you" inasmuch as there is no Greek word for it in the text—the reference therefore being either to blaspheme against God or against the Christians, exactness being not possible. Either way, the pagan opposition spoke reproachfully, slandered, defamed, or expressed disrespect of or about the Person(s) they used to vent their displeasure. Former companions are exasperated when former participants in evil refuse to continue such conduct and denounce all their friends of former days!

Jesus Himself warned of just such a possibility:

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household (Matthew 19:34-36).

That said, as well as the present warning from Peter and of others (cf. James 2:7), the danger of being led again by old companions back into the former lifestyle of wrong doing may linger for a long time with even the most resolute Christians and must be coped with and firmly overcome by faithful allegiance to God and his cause.

*A final difficulty noted in this letter is "your adversary the devil [who], as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking*

*whom he may devour*" (5:8). The word "*devil*," comes from a word meaning to throw a hindrance over or across a way taken, by means of slandering, accusing, or defaming; is designated as the false accuser, slanderer, who seeks to estrange men from God by any means at his disposal—lies, falsehood, misinformation, deceptive methods, or whatever. Truth is never safe in His hands. Jesus said:

[He] abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

The devil is the "adversary" of the people of God, i.e., "your adversary." The picture in the word so rendered is that of a dangerous adversary—a determined and capable opponent who brings a serious charge or accusation against another person in a formidable legal battle. One may understand the charge as brought against the individual to intimidate and dominate him so as to lead him to unwisely give in to the devil and sin. Or, one may see the charge as leveled before God to seek to turn God against His own. Either way, the effort is dead serious and calculated to cause spiritual discouragement and defeat of the Christian.

Three identifying characteristics of the devil's method are noted: The devil moves about as a "roaring lion." His "roaring" denotes his frightening, intimidating sound. The sound, although giving an alert that danger is present, also can and does frighten the hearer and may paralyze the victim in fear for a time—allowing, if not causing, a time of confusion and vulnerability. He goes about "seeking" victims. Never tiring, the devil is constantly on the lookout to find another person who can and will be led to serve

him. His devilish goal is to find those "whom he may devour," that he may consume them so as to destroy them completely.

There is no time in the Christian life that one can decide, "I have no further need

to be wary of the devil; I am now immune to his work and power." In Job's day, God asked Satan,

There is no time in the Christian life that one can decide, "I have no further need to be wary of the devil."

"Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (Job 1:7). John observed concerning his work, "...for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night" (Revelation 12:10).

Other spiritual dangers and difficulties that troubled Christians in Peter's time, as well as our own, can be noted in this lovely book. Those identified in this study alert us that we are never to forget that we face the same difficulties that worthy men and women of long ago faced. But, there was and is available the means by which these difficulties can and will be resisted safely by those who learn not only the danger, but the way of victory as well.

### (PART II)

The first portion of this study of First Peter set forth several difficulties that were being faced in the first century by those Christians addressed—difficulties that we face as well. This study will note some of the means available to

them and to us whereby these difficulties can be overcome. Three means of overcoming spiritual difficulties will be discussed: the promise, the privilege, and the opposition.

### **The Promise**

The assurance of a living hope, reserved by faith, is *the promise* 1:3-5.

Peter begins his discussion with the thrilling assurance that the Christian has a priceless hope of an eternal inheritance with God and that he is kept to receive this assured blessing by a faith that is centered in Christ.

This hope, an earnest desire and expectation of what one will be blessed to receive, has its origin in the mercy of God. These brethren were born again: their souls had been purified in their obedience to truth (1:22), as directed by the incorruptible seed, the word of God that lives forever, the word which by the gospel is preached to the world (1:22,23,25). As Peter had preached on Pentecost, they repented and were baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:36-38,41,47).

The validity of the hope thus produced was guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This supreme miracle, so far beyond any human ability, demonstrated the deity of Christ and assured all that with God life after death is possible.

The fact of the resurrection assures the truth of being born again (3:21,22) as well as the certainty of the resurrection (1:3).

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The "inheritance" has three enduring qualities that enhance the joy of its anticipation: it is "incorruptible," "undefiled," and "fadeth not away" (1:4). A grim awareness of the nature of all physical things in this world is evidenced by the three negative words which are used to portray the unending bliss of the inheritance of the saints. Flowers wither and die, parents and friends grow old and die, the most costly monuments ultimately wear away and are no more—nothing remains in this world forever. This awareness focuses the contrast between things of this world and the words Peter used to describe the unending bliss of heaven.

That the inheritance is "incorruptible" means there is nothing within it that leads or will lead to its decay or dissolution. "Corruptible things" such as silver and gold (1:18) do not characterize it; it is not material, but spiritual; it is not of time, but of eternity. That it is "undefiled" means there is nothing to corrupt or stain with evil. There are knowledge without error, holiness without sin, love without hypocrisy, and possessions without coveting. That it "fadeth not away" means that, unlike the most beautiful flower that springs from earth but soon withers and loses its beauty, no such decay or withering will occur in the enjoyment of heaven. Not only will its beauty never fade, the beauty of heaven will never cease to give happiness to its possessors.

The inheritance is "reserved in heaven." The Greek verb translated "reserved" means to keep, guard, hold, preserve, or reserve; its tense means that the process of its being kept or its being reserved began in God's plan long ago and it still continues to be kept or reserved. God has "reserved"

the angels that sinned unto judgment (II Peter 2:4; Jude 6); those who have been and are continuing to be sanctified have been and are being kept in Jesus (Jude 1).

The reserving of the heavenly inheritance is guaranteed by the power of God and is conditioned on one's being "kept...through faith" (1:5). The words "are kept" translate a present tense construction referring to "the ones who are being kept." The Greek verb is a military term that refers to a guard of soldiers; here, it refers to a spiritual watch or guard to preserve one's standing with God—a continuing alertness and guarding. This protective guard or keeping is maintained "through faith" that is directed "unto salvation." God's power makes such protection possible; the faithful observance of His will through faith is the responsibility of His people whereby they are protected. One may compare Jude's words: "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 20,21). The goal of this work of God and the faithfulness of His people is the attaining of salvation, prepared and ready to be revealed in the last time (1:5). Jesus spoke of this eternal inheritance as follows: "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

In this continuing skein of truth, extending from their being born again to the eternal inheritance reserved for his readers, Peter stresses the awareness his readers should have and maintain. By so doing, they can overcome the difficulties they face by the assurance that the "manifold

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temptations," the "trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1:7). Seen against the backdrop of the outworking of God's plan and assurance, the difficulties encountered can be faced and overcome since they are only temporary and fleeting, only for the present, and must not be allowed to cause God's people to swerve aside from their eternal spiritual goal.

### **The Privilege**

Christians are a spiritual priesthood who offer spiritual sacrifice to God (2:4,5).

Inasmuch as these brethren had purified their souls in obeying the truth (1:22,23), they have tasted that the Lord is gracious (2:3); that is, they had come to be well aware that the Lord is kind, loving, and benevolent. This graciousness of the Lord has made available to them and to us a supreme spiritual responsibility that must be carefully preserved—namely, to serve in and maintain their spiritual priesthood in offering sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (v. 5).

They came to Christ from Judaism and paganism: in time past they were not a people, but now they are the people of God (2:10). Christ is the living stone that is now laid in Zion—the new Jerusalem of prophetic promise that is now known and is to be consummated in the heavenly new Jerusalem to come (Isaiah 28:16; Revelation 21:2). He was indeed rejected by men, but He is now God's chosen to be the chief corner stone of His temple and is elect and precious (2:6; Isaiah 28:16, 8:13,14; Matthew 16:18).

As "living stones" partaking of Christ the "living stone," they are now being built up a spiritual house (2:5) and have the privileges and duties pertaining to this status. The individuals are built into the house of God, all together constituting under Christ His church (Colossians 1:18), His kingdom (Colossians 1:13), His temple (I Corinthians 3:16,17; Ephesians 2:19-22). The emphasis is on the combined strength of the group under Christ, not individuals working separately in isolation. (One thinks of the priesthood under the Old Testament temple service wherein all of the priests acted in concert rather than as isolated workers, while each had legitimate individual responsibilities.) This priesthood is "holy" because God is holy (1:15-16; Leviticus 11:44,45; 19:2; 20:7) and it is therefore set aside from evil and dedicated to His holiness.

The priesthood in this spiritual temple is to "offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable unto God by Jesus Christ" (2:5). To "offer" here alludes to the offering of priests under the tabernacle scheme (Hebrews 7:27; 8:3) and to Christ's offering of Himself to God (Hebrews 7:27,28; 9:28). After this pattern of offering, the priesthood under Christ has the exalted privilege of making spiritual sacrifices, not those of bulls and goats, which ascend to the pleasure of God and are thus acceptable, i.e., that which in coming to God will be accepted favorably by Him (cf. Ephesians 3:20,21).

Those who trust in Christ, the One who fulfills prophecy and is the "high priest of our profession" (Hebrews 3:1), recognize Him as God's chief corner stone, as His elect, and as precious in God's sight (v. 6). As Christians, those



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in this divine priesthood, founded on the unshakable truth of the divine Christ, have no reason to be and are not "confounded" ("put to shame" ASV; RSV; Phillips; NEB). It is worthy of mention that the denial of their being ashamed is underscored by a double negative (used for strong denial in Greek) and is translated from a word that indicates the combined thoughts of not being in despair, not being under shame brought by divine judgment, and not having a sense of being disillusioned.<sup>43</sup>

The awareness of this high privilege should alert Christians to the need of personal and group consecration that will enable them to serve properly as the priesthood of God. This privilege calls forth the best of discipline to remain holy and active in the temple, the church; such effort recognizes and resolves to maintain the requisite priorities and to refuse the difficulties that otherwise would hinder or destroy the ability to so serve. Yes, difficulties are to be faced, but the nobility of their high calling in Christ focuses their resolve to face and overcome such problems.

### **The Opposition**

The steadfast work of the devil against the faith is *the opposition* (5:8-10).

Earlier study called attention to the danger posed by the devil to the unwary and unequipped child of God. In this study attention is called to the vigorous resistance, the stubborn opposition, directed to and exerted against the devil. The following insights summarize the opposition to be given to this adversary.

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<sup>43</sup> Theological Dictionary of the NT, I, 189,190.

*The Alertness* (v. 8).

The alertness consists in being "sober" and "vigilant." To be "sober" (I Thessalonians 5:6,8; II Timothy 4:5; I Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8) is to have all of one's spiritual senses and capacities in full exercise (Hebrews 5:14), to be self controlled and self-possessed in all circumstances so as to cope with spiritual dangers and beguilements. Such is neither arrogance nor over confidence, but is the unperturbed readiness to recognize and bear up under difficult times. To be "vigilant" (Matthew 24:42,43; Acts 20:31; I Corinthians 16:13; I Thessalonians 5:6; I Peter 5:8; Revelation 3:2) is to be awake, watchful, to be on the alert, to "keep one's eyes open," and thus a spiritual wariness that issues from self-control, a condition of moral, not merely mental alertness. One writer has observed that "confidence in God must not lead to slackness; the spiritual warfare that we wage demands vigilance." In the opposition to the devil, we must be sober and vigilant. One must be wary that danger can befall one at any time and place, and one must not allow himself to be caught unawares in negligence.

*The Action*, v. 9.

Christians are to "resist [the devil] steadfast in the faith. The tense of the imperative verb suggests the sharpness, the rigor of the opposition given to the devil. One is, therefore, to vigorously set himself against, to oppose the efforts of the evil one. Paul stressed this in urging the Ephesians to take the whole armor of God to "withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand" (Ephesians 6:13). James gave the assurance: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

The term "in the faith" may be understood as either to resist or—as seems more likely to me—to resist in the strength and protective shield of the body of truth in the gospel (Ephesians 6:16).

Resistance is to be offered with vigor, with reliance on the truth of the word of God, and the awareness that by so doing one can parry the jabs and thrusts of Satan as did our Lord in the resistance He gave to the devil (Matthew 4:1-11).

### *The Awareness, v. 9.*

Christians are aware that they are not alone in this world, either in service or in resistance to the evil one. The same "sufferings" are occurring and working their way to complete subduing of their faith, wherever possible. Whether overt, as in persecution, or in the taunts and provocations given by troublesome individuals, all of the brotherhood experience many of the same difficulties. All should remember, however, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Corinthians 10:13).

### *The Assurance, v. 10.*

In the presence, in the midst of the attacks of the roaring lion, there is the firm assurance of a beneficial outcome—however difficult it is to see at the beginning. God, whose grace called one through the gospel to salvation, provides grace to "help in time of need"

(Hebrews 4:16). The grace of God provides for the Christian the assurance that (1) The ultimate result for the faithful child of God will be to enjoy His eternal glory by (or in) Christ, and that (2) the difficulty measures by eternity is "awhile" and not forever, and through the difficulties God will bring one to the requisite preparedness to resist further difficulties, will confirm one's internal resolve to remain faithful, will make one strong (with an intensification of the thought of the preceding word "settle" so one is made more capable of resisting the danger faced), and will thus supply a strong foundation for the maturing of the inner life that is well grounded and stable.

The means of resistance to the strategies and attacks of the devil noted in this study are expended or amplified in the rest of this great book, but space does not allow for such consideration. Sufficient it is to note that God not only alerts His people that there are spiritual dangers to be faced, but He also provides remarkably effective means for the opposition to and victory over these difficulties. Of primary emphasis as we close is the awareness also that this provision of such strength and fortification is not by some mysterious, supposed inner working of the Holy Spirit, but "in the faith" (5:9) of the gospel matched and manifested "through faith" (1:5) on the part of the individual Christian.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Blessed Assurance**

Roy Meyer

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Brother Meyer was born in Merced, California. He is married to Virginia, and they have six children and eight grandchildren. They met and married while serving in the U.S. Army in El Paso, Texas. They currently live in Tuscola, Texas.

Brother Meyer is a graduate of the Northside School of Preaching in Harrison, Arkansas. He has a BA from Fresno State and a Masters from Abilene Christian University. He currently preaches for the Lawn congregation in Lawn, Texas. Brother Meyer was one of the founding members of the Cold Harbor Road congregation and preached for us for eleven years. He was minister of personal evangelism at the Hermitage Road congregation in Richmond for nine years and a founding member of the Southwest congregation in Richmond. He has participated in Campaigns for Christ (Ivan Stewart) in Pennsylvania, Oregon, Illinois, New York, Virginia, and Africa.

Brother Meyer taught Industrial Arts in public schools for twelve years. His special interests include cabinet making, finish carpentry, and home remodeling. He was one of the primary carpenters when the Cold Harbor Road building was first built.

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### **Introduction**

Life is uncertain. We do not really know what a day will bring forth. James says, "Come now, you who say, 'Today

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or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business, and make a profit.' Yet, you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away" (James 4:13,14).

Most people, it seems, like to have the assurance that when life throws unexpected difficulties their way, they will be able to overcome them. For example, when one is diagnosed with cancer, it is reassuring to know that surgery will remove the tumor, that chemotherapy and/or radiation will kill any remaining cancer cells, and that one's insurance will take care of the medical bills.

We live with two certainties: death and judgment. The Hebrews writer states, "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment..." (Hebrews 9:27).

Because of the many trials that life may present, including sickness, loss of loved ones, injury, loss of jobs, as well as persecution in some form for one's faith, some may have doubts and concerns arise in their hearts about their relationship with God. Some may feel that God is punishing them for some sin in their lives when something

Some may feel that God is punishing them for some sin in their lives when something tragic happens to them.

tragic happens to them. In John 9:2, Jesus' disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he

should be born blind?" The truth of the matter was that neither had sinned to bring on this blindness.

## Chapter 5: Blessed Assurance

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When trials and tribulations enter some Christians' lives, they may begin to wonder whether or not God really loves them. They may even begin to have doubts about their own salvation.

In the eighth chapter of Romans, the apostle Paul writes to Christians who have experienced suffering in their lives. He writes to give them a "blessed assurance" of their salvation, of their adoption as God's children, and of God's purpose and love for His elect.

Christians today need this message of assurance, just as the Christians in the first century needed to hear that message when the apostle wrote it. Let us notice the "blessed assurances" that the Holy Spirit has given to us through the apostle Paul in Romans 8.

### **The Blessed Assurance Of Salvation In Christ (Romans 8:1-11)**

The apostle Paul states, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Let us notice some facts concerning this first blessed assurance. The condemnation spoken of by Paul in this verse and in the previous seven chapters has to do with spiritual death and eternal punishment. In Romans 1:18 we find that, "The wrath of God is revealed against man's unrighteousness." In Romans 2:2, Paul says that the judgment of God "rightly falls" upon those who practice such things as Paul mentions in chapter one (vv. 28-32). The fate of the disobedient is listed as incurring God's wrath and indignation, as well as having tribulation and distress (Romans 2:8,9). Paul says in Romans 6:21-23 that the result of sin, referred to as the

wages of sin, will be death, in contrast to eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There is no condemnation for those who are "in" Christ Jesus. Why? Because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has brought freedom from the law of sin and death. Whether a person sinned under the Law of Moses, or sinned without the Law of Moses, the result would be death. Paul states in Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." How is this freedom from sin obtained? By obedience to the gospel. Paul states in Romans 1:16 that the gospel is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes. In Romans 6:17,18, he says, "you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."

When one obeys the gospel, he comes "into" Christ by baptism. In Romans 6:3-11, Paul states, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ have been baptized into His death?" Again, in Galatians 3:26,27, he adds, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." With baptism comes the forgiveness of sins as Peter states in Acts 2:38 and the washing away of sins as seen in Acts 22:16.

There is no condemnation for those who have Christ in them. Notice some facts: Paul speaks of the "Spirit of God," the "Spirit," and the "Spirit of Christ" in an interchangeable way, as he refers to having Christ in us. He points out in Romans 8:9, "But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." To have



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Christ in us is to "walk according to the Spirit." The Spirit is promised to those who obey God (Acts 2:38, Acts 5:32). Paul refers to the Christian's body as the "temple of the Holy Spirit" in I Corinthians 6:19. In Ephesians 3:17, he refers to Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith.

The Christian, realizing that God dwells in him, will want to set his mind on the things of the Spirit rather than the flesh. To set one's mind on the flesh is, according to the apostle, hostility towards God, not able to please God, not being subject to God, and will result in death. However, the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace. In Romans 6:5-14, Paul shows how that the Christian is to consider himself dead to sin, but alive to righteousness. He is to no longer present his members as instruments of unrighteousness, but as instruments of righteousness to God. In this way, he walks according to the Spirit. If God's Spirit, who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us, He who raised Jesus will also give life to our mortal bodies through His Spirit. This gives us not only hope, but also assurance of our resurrection.

### **The Blessed Assurance Of Newness In Our Lives (Romans 8:12-17).**

Freedom from condemnation brings new things to our lives. What things? It brings *a new outlook*. In verse 12 Paul states, "So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh..." In Romans 1:28-32, Paul lists some works of the flesh, as well as in Galatians 5:17-21. The mindset of the world is filled with unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, envy, murder, strife, arrogance, unloving behavior, dishonesty, and a lack of mercy, to name a few. We have not so learned in Christ.

Paul says in II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new Creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." The Christian is to put to death the deeds of the body.

Freedom from condemnation brings *a new strength*. Paul states in Romans 8:13, "But if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Paul again refers to the help of the Spirit in Ephesians 3:16, saying, "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." This is not some miraculous work, but rather through our faith in Christ and trusting in His word which we have received into our hearts.

In Galatians 2:20 Paul affirms, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me." Again in Titus 2:11-14, we read, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age..."

Freedom from condemnation brings *a new relationship with God*. What new relationship does the Christian now have with God? Christians are the children of God. Paul says in Romans 8:14,15,

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of

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adoption as sons by which we cry out,  
"Abba! Father!"

God has brought us into His family through our obedience

...we have the privilege of  
addressing Him as our Father.

to the gospel of Christ.

His love for us has  
made this possible.

Now because we love

Him in return, and have become His children in the faith,  
we have the privilege of addressing Him as our Father.

In addition, Paul says "the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16). How is this possible? The Spirit does not audibly speak to us today and tell us something in addition to His written word. But when the Spirit has directed us through the word what we must do to become a child of God, and we have done that, then our spirits are in agreement with God's Spirit that we are children of God. And when, as Christians, we continue to follow His word, being led by the Spirit through that word, to do what He teaches us to continue doing, in order to remain faithful children of God, then our spirits are in agreement with God's Spirit that we are children of God.

Freedom from condemnation brings *a new inheritance*. Notice some facts. As children of God, we have become heirs of God. Romans 8:17 says, "And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him." Earlier, in Romans 2:7, Paul described the reward of the righteous: "To those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal

life." (The apostle Peter, in I Peter 1:3-9 speaks also of our inheritance, "which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

### **The Blessed Assurance That God Is For Us (Romans 8:18-39).**

What does the apostle say that assures us that God is for us? God is for us because He has saved us in hope, according to Romans 8:24. We look forward eagerly to the "redemption of our body," our resurrection at the return of Christ. While many Christians have suffered persecution in this life, Paul states that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (8:18). Paul was well acquainted with suffering, as he records his own ordeals in II Corinthians 11:23-28. All of creation is pictured as anxiously longing for the revealing of the sons of God (at the Lord's second coming) because it has been "subjected to futility" and enslaved to "corruption." Since sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, death and corruption have reigned in the world. In the new heaven and new earth, there will be neither death nor corruption. Because we have this hope, which Peter describes as a "living hope," and the Hebrews writer calls the "anchor of our soul," we are encouraged to persevere in the Christian life. When Paul looked forward to the resurrection in I Corinthians 15:58, he gave this encouragement, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."

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God is for us because He helps us in our prayers. Paul states, "We do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (8:26,27). We know that we are to pray in faith, and to pray according to God's will, and in the name of Jesus, but there are times when we are just not sure what to pray for. Sometimes it is hard to put into words the deep needs of our souls. It is reassuring to know that God knows our need in prayer and has provided us with the Spirit as an intercessor.

God is for us because He "causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (8:28). Paul is not saying that God will make everything in our lives good or that we will have no problems. We know that many of God's faithful were persecuted and killed from our reading of scripture as well as our observation in history. But God has an eternal purpose. In His foreknowledge, He predestined that there would be a body of believers who would be conformed to the image of His Son. He called these people through the gospel, according to II Thessalonians 2:13,14. Those who loved Him and in faith obeyed His will, He justified (5:1-5) and will glorify when the Lord returns.

God is for us because nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (8:39). Look how God has demonstrated His love for us. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (8:32). Earlier Paul stated, "But God demonstrates His own love toward

us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). We have the highest power in the universe who has loved us and justified us through His Son, and even has His Son at His right hand interceding for us. With all this going for us, there is no one to bring a charge against us or to condemn us. Only our own sinful rebellion could cause us to be separated from God. Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and the sword will not cause a separation between us and the love of Christ. When such things come, some may cry out, "Why me?" They may say, "God doesn't love me or He wouldn't allow these thing to happen to me!" Yet, God does love us and wants us to love Him and keep trusting in Him. Paul states that "in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." We will conquer if we keep faith in God during times of trial and tribulation. In addition, Paul affirms his conviction that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus Himself encourages us in Revelation 2:10, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."

## **Conclusion**

We are encouraged by God's "blessed assurances" to keep faith in times of suffering through the trials and tribulations of life. The apostle Paul affirms, "*There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1). There are some new things to consider in our lives. God loves us and is there for us.

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Let us continue to trust in our God, love Him, and continue serving Him, knowing that our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

## Chapter 6

### God's Promises To The Hurting

Eddie Cloer

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Brother Cloer is married to Susan, and they have two children. He holds BA, MTh, and DM degrees from Harding University, Oklahoma Christian University, and Harding Graduate School of Bible and Religion.

Brother Cloer began preaching when he was fifteen years old and has preached for thirty-three years. He has preached locally in Arkansas and in gospel meetings in thirty-five states, London, England, and Singapore.

Currently, brother Cloer teaches Bible and preaching classes at Harding University. He also edits and publishes *Truth For Today*. In 1990, he was a part of the beginning of *Truth For Today Printed Preacher School*, expository Bible studies.

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In the December 4, 1956, edition of *Time* magazine, an article appeared about a schoolteacher in Kitchener, Canada. His name was Everet R. Storms.<sup>44</sup> He had read the Bible through twenty-six times and was preparing to read it through a twenty-seventh time. He had heard or read that some 30,000 promises are mentioned in the Bible, but he was a little skeptical of that figure.

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<sup>44</sup> Herbert Lockyer, *All the Promises of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 10.

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Wanting to add a little novelty to his Bible reading, he resolved that he would count for himself the number of promises that the Bible contains. The article relates that, at the conclusion of his reading, he had counted 7,487 promises that God had made to man. His tabulation, of course, included the promises that God had made to man during all the ages of Bible history—the Patriarchal Age, the Mosaical Age, and the Christian Age.

The schoolteacher's calculation of how many promises God has made to man is intriguing to us, but we must raise a question that he apparently did not try to answer. It is the query, "How many promises did God make to His children in the New Testament that are applicable to those of us who live today, in the Christian Age?" I have not seen a figure on this question, and I have not taken the time myself to count them and come up with a statistic.

Nevertheless, anyone who reads the New Testament will observe numerous beautiful promises God has made to His faithful children. One that is especially touching and meaningful is the affirmation that He will answer the prayers of righteous people.

Here is a sampling of His promises regarding prayer:  
Jesus said,

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you (John 15:7).

Peter wrote,

For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer... (I Peter 3:12).

James declared,

The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much (James 5:16).

Years ago, one of our brothers in Christ, N. B. Hardeman, was preaching a sermon at a meeting in the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee. In this sermon, he said,

If it is true that the effectual prayer of a righteous man avails much, then it is reasonable to believe that the effectual, righteous prayers of righteous men will avail more.

What brother Hardeman concluded by logical deduction, Jesus clearly stated as being true in Matthew 18:19:

Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.

In other words, when two or more decide upon a request that should be made to God and join together with one heart and soul in making that request, God will give special attention to that request.

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The New Testament does not teach us to believe in prayer; it teaches us to believe in God. It tells us that He is gracious, kind, loving, and eager to listen to the prayers of His children.

Of course, for one to be heard when he prays, he must pray in harmony with the spiritual laws of prayer that are given in the Scriptures. What are these laws?

The first is the law of sincere faith. James said,  
But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind (James 1:6).

The second one is the law of genuine obedience. John wrote,  
...and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight (I John 3:22).

The third law is the law of divine authority. Jesus said,  
Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name (John 16:23).

The fourth law of prayer is the law of God's will. John also said,  
And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us (I John 5:14).

Upon the authority of God's word, then, we can say that when anyone prays according to the spiritual laws that God has for prayer, something is going to happen that would not have happened had he not prayed.

These New Testament teachings about prayer raise a question that we often ask ourselves: How does God answer our prayers? It is a foredrawn conclusion that He answers the prayers of His faithful children, but how does He do it?

Let us use the book of Psalms to answer the question that we have raised. Psalm 102:17 says, "He has regarded the prayer of the destitute and has not despised their prayer."

The book of Psalms is an anthology of praises and prayers that were written for the Jewish people. Some of them were written to be prayed, and some of them were written to be sung.

Reflected in these psalms are the different ways that God answers the prayers of His people. We will notice the ways in which the psalms say God answers our prayers.

Let us remember, however, that the Christian cannot pray every praise or prayer in the psalms. These were written almost totally for the Mosaical Age—but we will let them remind us of how God treats our requests today. After observing the way God answered prayers then, we will search the New Testament for confirmation that He answers our prayers in the same way in the Christian Age.

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How does God answer our prayers?

Positively—He Says, "Yes!"

One of the types of psalms that we find in the book of Psalms, a genre within the genre of Hebrew poetry, is the thanksgiving psalm. Most of the time, these are psalms that give thanks for God's answers to prayers. One sample of this type of psalm is Psalm 30:

O Lord my God, I cried to You for help,  
And You did heal me.  
O Lord, You have brought up my soul from  
Sheol;  
You have kept me alive, that I should not go  
down to the pit.  
Sing praise to the Lord, you His godly ones,  
And give thanks to His holy name (vv. 2–4).

All of us can utter a psalm like this. We can think of times when God has answered our prayers in the affirmative, and we can rejoice in His wonderful grace that has been given to us.

Jesus said,

Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened (Matthew 7:7,8).

Jesus followed His statement with an illustration that we would call a "much more" argument. He said that if a son went to his father and asked for bread, the father would not

give him a stone. If that son asked his father for a fish, the father would not give him a snake. He then said, "Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone?" (vv. 9, 10).

Jesus concluded His illustration by saying, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more* shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" (7:11, emp. EC).

James described Elijah as being a man like us. He said that Elijah prayed and received a positive answer to his prayer.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit (James 5:17,18).

I do not believe that God answered Elijah's prayer miraculously; He answered it through the laws of nature. James used this episode from the Old Testament to encourage us to pray in the Christian Age.

Someone has said, "The tragedy is not that we do not pray; the tragedy is that we do not see the need to." Perhaps one reason that we are told that God will hear our prayers is to help us see the need to pray.

Yes, God answers our prayers positively—He says, "Yes!" However, we must remember that there are other ways God answers our prayers...

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Negatively—He Says, "No!"

Another type of psalm is the lament psalm, a kind of complaint. The writer may have been concerned about the enemies around him, or he may have been upset with his circumstances in life. Perhaps he was even arguing with God about something that had come into his life.

Psalm 13 is a case in which the writer believed that God had not heard his prayer. This fact troubled him.

How long, O Lord?

Will You forget me forever?

How long will You hide Your face from me?

How long shall I take counsel in my soul,

Having sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long will my enemy be exalted over me? (vv. 1,2, NASB).

This writer was concerned about the fact that God had not, at least at the writing of the psalm, heard his prayer. His experience reminds us of the truth that God sometimes, for reasons of His own, says "No" to our prayers.

God says "No" to our prayers sometimes because He *has to*! Remember Jesus praying in the garden in Matthew 26? He had taken His apostles with Him into the garden. He had dropped off eight of them and had taken Peter, James, and John a little deeper into the garden. Then He had left these three and had gone a stone's throw from them. There He prayed one of the most fervent prayers in all the Bible.

And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father,

if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me;  
yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matthew  
26:39).

Jesus was so intense in praying this prayer that sweat, as though great drops of blood, fell from His head to the ground (Luke 22:44). Why would God say "No" to such a prayer as this? We all know why He did, don't we? He had to! Someone has said that bound up in the word "yet" is the salvation of the world. Had the Father said "Yes" to the first part of Jesus' prayer, and had Jesus not said "yet" in His prayer, there would be no hope for the world. The only way God could offer salvation to the world was through Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross.

It has been said, "If God said 'Yes' to all our prayers, no one would ever die." Usually, when someone is lying on his deathbed, someone is praying nearby for that person to live. Indeed, God says "No" to our prayers sometimes because He *has to*.

He says "No" to our prayers sometimes because it is *best to*. It would not be in our best interest for Him to say "Yes" to some of our prayers. A "Yes" to our request might hurt us instead of helping us.

We have all lived long enough to know that if God had said

We have all lived long enough to know that if God had said "Yes" to all of our prayers, we would be in trouble.

"Yes" to all of our prayers, we would be in trouble. One preacher told of an experience he had while he was in



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college. He had attended a Christian college, and one day he met a beautiful young lady. He immediately went back to his room and prayed that God would give that young lady to him as a wife. He said he tried to get a date with her, but he could not. Finally, he realized that God had said "No" to his prayer. It bothered him, but eventually he got over it. He said fifteen years went by. Fifteen years is a long time. He encountered the same woman fifteen years later, and just as soon as he could get off to himself, he prayed, "Thank You, Lord! Had You said 'Yes' to my prayer fifteen years ago, it would have been tragic for me!"

I believe all of us would agree that if God said "Yes" to all of our prayers, it would be dangerous for us to pray. We would be afraid to pray! We simply do not see what we need clearly enough to know what to ask God to give us. We cannot understand all the implications and ramifications of the requests that we might make. For this reason, I John 5:14 is precious to us.

John also said, "And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."

We cannot help but notice those first five words—"And this is the confidence." In other words, we can relax and pray. We have the assurance that our heavenly Father will not grant our requests unless such an answer would be in our best interests and be in accordance with His holy will.

How should one respond to God when he says "No" to our prayers? Let us go back to Psalm 13 for the answer. The writer illustrated how one should react to a negative

response from God. At the point of the writing of the psalm, the writer had not seen any answer to his prayers. He was troubled about this fact. First, he said he would continue to pray (v. 2). You may have heard about the man who said he had asked God to spare the life of a loved one. God did not seem to hear his request; therefore, that man said that he was not going to pray anymore. The writer of this psalm said that he would continue to pray. Second, he said that he would trust in God's loving kindness. He knew that he could not see everything, but he believed that God would be gracious. Third, he said that he would remember the past. God had always been good to him. Why would God betray him now? Thinking of how God had acted in the past would help him to remember that God would respond in goodness to him in the present.

God answers some of our prayers positively—He says "Yes!"; He answers some of prayers negatively—He says "No!"

Furthermore, He answers our prayers...

Belatedly—He Says, "Later!"

Another type of psalm is the imprecatory psalm. It is a song or prayer that calls down God's vengeance upon the enemy. One of these is Psalm 137:

Remember, O Lord, against the sons of  
Edom

The day of Jerusalem, Who said, "Raze it,  
raze it, To its very foundation."

O daughter of Babylon, you devastated one,  
How blessed will be the one who repays you

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With the recompense with which you have repaid us.

How blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones against the rock (vv. 7-9).

This psalm is obviously one that we cannot pray. Jesus taught to have a loving spirit toward our enemies (Matthew 5:46,47).

This psalm was written in a time when many people had been taken into captivity. God had used His people in the past as His instrument of judgment upon wicked people like those in Jericho. In this psalm, the writer was asking God to deal with Babylon, the pagan nation that had destroyed Jerusalem. It was appropriate in that setting and age to pray such a prayer.

The point I wish to notice is that God would answer their prayer—but not right then. Babylon fell in 539 BC, when the Medo-Persian army destroyed it. The prayer of the captives was answered years after they prayed it.

One of the most beautiful prayers ever prayed is found in Luke 23:34. Jesus had been nailed to the cross. The cross had been lifted, with Jesus feeling the horrible pain as the weight of His body came down upon the nails for the first time. He saw below Him the Roman soldiers who had crucified Him, the Jewish leaders who had argued for His crucifixion, and other Jews.

But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

This is the most beautiful prayer in the Bible. The first Christian martyr, Stephen, prayed for himself and then prayed for his enemies (Acts 7:60); Jesus prayed for His enemies, His friends, and then for Himself (Luke 23:34).

Have you noticed that God could not answer this prayer at the time Jesus prayed it? The time was not right for the divine answer. On the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, the prayer was answered. At that time, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles and the gospel was publicly announced to the Jews who had gathered. In the key address delivered by Peter, the evidence for believing that Jesus was the Messiah was laid before the multitude. Many cried out, saying, "What shall we do?" Peter told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Three thousand received his word and were baptized. Thus our Lord's prayer, at least in part, was answered on the Day of Pentecost.

We have all seen times when God answered our prayers belatedly. I have been praying now for twenty years for God to bless my two children with Christian mates and children of their own. I started praying this prayer shortly after they were born, but I have not wanted God to answer that prayer until now.

There is another prayer that I have been praying, which God will not be able to answer until later. It is the prayer implied by the Psalm 71:18:

And even when I am old and gray, O God,  
do not forsake me, until I declare Thy

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strength to this generation, Thy power to all  
who are to come.

I believe many others are praying this prayer as well. Some prayers that I am praying, God cannot answer until I am dead.

God answers some of our prayers positively—He says "Yes!"; He answers some of prayers negatively—He says, "No!"; He answers our prayers belatedly—He says, "Later!"

In addition to these ways, He answers our prayers...

Substitutionally—He says, "I'll give you something better."

The longest psalm is Psalm 119. This psalm is also the longest chapter in the Bible. It is an acrostic poem, arranged according to the Hebrew alphabet. The writer included eight lines for each of the twenty-two letters of the alphabet, making a total of 176 verses. Each line is about the word of God.

In Psalm 119:71, the writer of the psalm said that he was glad he had been afflicted:

It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I  
may learn Thy statutes.

When the affliction first came to him, he must have said, "I do not need this affliction right now." However, after the affliction had passed and he could see what had happened to him during the affliction, he was able to rejoice that it had come.

No doubt, when he prayed, he did not pray for an affliction. Probably, like us, he prayed for good health. However, God substituted affliction for good health, because God knew that he would learn some important lessons that he could not learn any other way.

We see Paul acquiring the same attitude in II Corinthians 12:8–10:

Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong (II Corinthians 12:8–10).

Paul earnestly prayed for God to remove the thorn in his flesh. God said, "No, I will give you something better. I am going to give you My strength." Had God not allowed Paul to have the thorn, something he did not want, Paul could never have understood God's strength.

God answers some of our prayers positively—He says "Yes!"; He answers some prayers negatively—He says, "No!"; He answers prayers belatedly—He says, "Later!"; He answers prayers substitutionally—He says, "I'll give you something better!"

Still further, He answers our prayers...

Compassionately—He Says, "I know what you need."

Sometimes when we pray, we do not know what to request of God. We just have to say, "Do what You think is best." The writer in Psalm 25 was in trouble, and he did not know the way out.

To Thee, O Lord, I lift up my soul.  
O my God, in Thee I trust,  
Do not let me be ashamed;  
Do not let my enemies exult over me.  
Indeed, none of those who wait for Thee  
will be ashamed;  
Those who deal treacherously without cause  
will be ashamed.  
Make me know Thy ways, O Lord;  
Teach me Thy paths.  
Lead me in Thy truth and teach me,  
For Thou art the God of my salvation;  
For Thee I wait all the day.  
Remember, O Lord, Thy compassion and  
Thy lovingkindnesses,  
For they have been from of old.  
Do not remember the sins of my youth or  
my transgressions;  
According to Thy lovingkindness remember  
Thou me,  
For Thy goodness' sake, O Lord.  
(Psalms 25:1-7)

The writer did not know the answer to his trouble. He just said, "Teach me what is right in this situation." Have you ever prayed that prayer?

The early church prayed this kind of prayer in Acts 4.

And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said,  
O Lord, it is Thou who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Thy servant, didst say, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ." For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur. And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence, while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:24–29).



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The church had enjoyed the favor of the people, and now the first persecution had come against them. They perhaps knew that persecution was coming. After all, the prophets and Jesus had been persecuted—but how did they pray about it? Did they ask God to take it away?

They prayed, it seems, "Lord, we do not know what to do, but we know that You know. Therefore, we ask You, 'Watch their threats.'"

Jehoshaphat was one of the best kings of the Southern Kingdom. His army was going into battle against a much larger force. He did not know what to do, so he went to God in prayer and asked Him to do what was best.

Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord before the new court, and he said,  
O Lord, the God of our fathers, art Thou not God in the heavens? And art Thou not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Thy hand so that no one can stand against Thee. Didst Thou not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Thy people Israel, and give it to the descendants of Abraham Thy friend forever? And they lived in it, and have built Thee a sanctuary there for Thy name, saying, "Should evil come upon us, the sword, or judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before Thee (for Thy name is in this house) and cry to Thee in our distress, and Thou wilt hear

and deliver us." And now behold, the sons of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom Thou didst not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt (they turned aside from them and did not destroy them), behold how they are rewarding us, by coming to drive us out from Thy possession which Thou hast given us as an inheritance. O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on Thee. And all Judah was standing before the Lord, with their infants, their wives, and their children (II Chronicles 20:5–13).

He did not know what to do, and maybe that means he did not know what to request of God. He said, "Our eyes are on Thee." Have you ever been in this situation?

In these situations, God answers our prayers compassionately. He gives us what we need.

God answers some of our prayers positively—He says "Yes!"; He answers some prayers negatively—He says, "No!"; He answers our prayers belatedly—He says, "Later!"; He answers our prayers substitutionally—He says, "I'll give you something better!"; He answers our prayers compassionately—He says, "I know what you need!"

In addition, he answers our prayers...

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Variously—He Says, "I'll do it my way!"

Does God work miracles in response to prayers? No, but he has in the past. Moses, who wrote Psalm 91, saw God's miracles. He saw the plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, and many other wonders.

Solomon, who wrote Psalm 72 and 127, saw the miracles of the Lord. For example, he saw the glory of the Lord when the completion of the temple was celebrated.

Solomon offered 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep in celebrating its completion.

And King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the people dedicated the temple of God (II Chronicles 7:5).

The people observed the Passover around the new temple.

When Solomon finished his prayer, the glory of the Lord came down:

When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks

to the LORD, saying, "He is good; His love endures forever." (II Chronicles 7:1,3)

We should not expect God to work a miracle in response to our prayers today. Nevertheless, He does answer our prayers. How?

Let me mention one way: He answers them through His providence. That means that He answers them by working within the laws of nature. It is sort of like this: Picture a book standing on its end. It can fall to the right or to the left, in harmony with the laws of nature, depending on which side I tap it. God works within the laws of nature; God does the tapping.

Sometimes God answers our prayers by using one law of nature to overrule another law of nature. You know the maxim: "What goes up must come down." Suppose I threw

I do not know all the ways that God works, but if we think that He has to work miracles to answer our prayers, we are limiting God terribly.

a knife toward the ceiling. If the knife stuck in the ceiling, we would have one law overruling another law.

There are two aspects to God's providence: His obvious providence and His silent providence. Sometimes we can see what God is doing, and sometimes we cannot. Sometimes He puts His providence out in plain view, and sometimes He works behind the scenes—silently, if you please—accomplishing His will.

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I do not know all the ways that God works, but if we think that He has to work miracles to answer our prayers, we are limiting God terribly.

### **Conclusion**

We have seen that God will not leave those who trust in Him destitute. He hears their prayers. He answers some of their prayers positively—He says "Yes!"; He answers some prayers negatively—He says, "No!"; He answers their prayers belatedly—He says, "Later!"; He answers their prayers substitutionally—He says, "I'll give you something better!"; He answers their prayers compassionately—He says, "I know what you need!"; He answers their prayers variously—He says, "I will do it My way!"

We need to remember two phrases about prayer. These two phrases will help us to see the attitude that we should have toward prayer.

The first phrase is found in Genesis 18:25: "Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?" Abraham had heard that God was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. He pleaded with God. He said, "Lord, if there are fifty, forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, or ten righteous people, will You destroy them?" God said, "No." However, ten righteous people could not be found. In this conversation, Abraham used the phrase, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?"

As we apply this phrase to prayer, we could say, "Let us live by the Lord's will and pray, for God will always give us the answer we need. He will do what is right."

The second statement is not an inspired statement, but it presents a wonderful thought that I believe is in harmony with the word of God. It is this: "When I cannot trace His hand, I can trust His heart." Sometimes you may not be able to see God's answers to your prayers, but you can always trust His heart. You know that He will always have your best interests at heart and will always give you what you need.

## **Chapter 7**

### **"I Will Never Leave You Nor Forsake You"**

Gary Workman

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Brother Workman was born in California. He is married to Katrinka (Sunny), and they have four children, six grandchildren, and one great grandchild. They currently live in Mesquite, Texas.

Brother Workman has a BA degree in Religion and Biblical Languages and did graduate work in the field of Middle Eastern Religions. He has been preaching for forty-four years. He has preached locally in California, Nevada, and Texas. He has held gospel meetings in many states and in several foreign countries. He served as a missionary in Beirut, Lebanon for three years and was dean of the Middle East Bible Training College there. He has served as an instructor of Bible and New Testament Greek in six preacher training schools including the Preston Road School of Preaching in Dallas, Brown Trail School of Preaching in Bedford, and the International Christian College in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine.

He has edited and published *The Restorer* and *Search*. He is the author of various tracts and booklets and has written chapters in more than forty lectureship books.

Since 1993, the Workmans have devoted most of their time to mission work in the former Soviet Union, especially in St. Petersburg, Russia and Poltava, Ukraine.

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The words in the title of this message are found in Hebrews 13:5. That is not where they originated. The inspired writer was quoting from the Old Testament. When Moses was 120 years old and, in his own words, could "no longer go out and come in" (Deuteronomy 31:1), he gave a farewell speech to the nation of Israel. They were about to cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land, but it was a land of enemies and God's people were apprehensive. Moses told them, "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6).

Then Moses spoke to Joshua, the assistant who was to become his successor, and told him the same thing: "And the Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 31:8). This was not an empty promise. After Moses died, God himself said to Joshua, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you" (Joshua 1:5).

These promises from long ago come echoing down the stream of time to us today. Just as they were given to God's people in a bygone age and a far-away land, they are also given to God's people in the "here and now" where we live. The inspired writer to the

—to give us courage and hope, something powerful to hang onto in a world of hurts and fears.

Hebrews passes these words along to all of his Christian readers—to give us courage and hope, something powerful to hang onto in a world of hurts and fears. And Jesus adds



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to it by saying, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). But, sad to say, many do not avail themselves of these wonderful promises. They just "go it alone," leaving God out of their lives. And by so doing, they miss out on so much that could relieve their pain.

### **The Lord Sees And Hears And Understands**

No one likes to feel insecure, vulnerable, or in need of help when none is available. Some have posted alert guard dogs to keep watch over their property. Some have employed servants and caregivers to help with various needs. Many have stocked their medicine cabinets with every conceivable remedy for those times when pain strikes or

Would you like to have a faithful guard standing over you day and night to help you with every difficulty you may encounter?

panic sets in or an emergency comes their way. But how would you like to have a greater blessing than any of these? Would you like to have a

faithful guard standing over you day and night to help you with every difficulty you may encounter? You can! God wants the job. Would you like to have the Lord's unblinking eyes and undimmed ears trained on your every movement and every need through every second of the day and night? Hear these words from Peter's great treatise on the Christian and human suffering:

...You were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For he who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do

good; let him seek peace and pursue it. *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers...* (I Peter 3:9-12, emp. GW)

By deciding to follow the Christian way of life, we automatically inherit a blessing—a tremendous blessing: the faithful eyes and ears of the Lord. And the Lord never sleeps! God sees our tears and understands our pain. The Old Testament passage from which Peter quoted in I Peter 3:12 is Psalm 34:15—"The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry." He sees every pain. He hears every cry. He knows every whisper. And He hears the groaning in our souls when we cannot even whisper. Crying hearts will reach the eyes and ears of God.

Early in the Old Testament God told Moses, "I have surely seen the oppression of my people...I know their sorrows" (Exodus 3:7). In the middle of the Bible we read, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19). On the last page of the Old Testament, a prophet wrote: "Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name" (Malachi 3:16). God hears; God sees; God knows and understands, and God puts it all in His book.

### **The Lord Cares And Helps**

An old spiritual said, "My Lord sees all you do, and my Lord hears all you say, and my Lord keeps a-writin' all the time." But there is more to it than that. Our Lord keeps on

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*caring* all the time! The psalmist David said, "Put my tears into your bottle; Are they not in your book?" (Psalm 56:8). Yes, God keeps a book of remembrance, but God also keeps a bottle of tears. God knows our grief and heartaches, and He has the bottle to prove it.

David went on to say,

When I cry out to You, then my enemies  
will turn back; this I know, because God is  
for me...In God I have put my trust; I will  
not be afraid. What can man do to me?  
(Psalm 58:9,11).

Oh yes! "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Psalm 118:6). Does it sound familiar? Our theme verse again: "For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5,6). The "man" may even be us. Sometimes we are our own worst enemies. We can do worse things to ourselves than everybody else put together has ever done. But no one, not even our own minds and bodies, can overpower the Lord—if we will just let Him have His way with us.

*Pain can be an enemy* of Christians, but the presence of the Lord can overcome it. Paul had his "thorn in the flesh" and kept praying about it. The Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." And Paul responded by saying, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (II Corinthians 12:9). God did not take away the affliction, but he made it

tolerable. Better than any sedative is the powerful presence of Jesus. To the Christian with Jesus by his side, whatever we suffer here is just "light affliction, which is but for a moment" (II Corinthians 4:17) and "not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed" (Romans 8:18). Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). Jesus did the hardest thing of all in order to make it easy and light for us. We can make it if we keep our eye on the One who endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2).

*A very common enemy is worry.* Worry, if left unchecked, can lead to depression, and depression can have disastrous results. Jesus said, "Do not worry about your life...do not worry" (Matthew 6:25,31). But people tend to worry anyway. It becomes like a real enemy with which we must do battle—but not all by ourselves. Jesus steps in to lift our spirits: "Be of good cheer! It is I, do not be afraid" (Matthew 14:27). "Be of good cheer! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). As we are doing our best, trying to "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (II Corinthians 10:5), the Lord comes to our rescue with divine aid. The secret is to be "anxious for nothing," but rather turn to God in prayer (Philippians 4:6). When you do that, something happens. The living presence of Jesus provides the peace of God to "guard your hearts and minds" (v. 7). Peter said: "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God...casting all your care [or worry] upon Him, for he cares for you" (I Peter 5:6,7). Worry is a burden that should be cast on the Lord.

*Another enemy is grief.* Sometimes we think grief over the loss of a loved one or the loss of a relationship will last forever. When Jacob thought he had lost his son Joseph,

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"he refused to be comforted." He said, "I shall go down into the grave to my son mourning" (Genesis 37:35). But he lived long enough to find out that he was wrong. Yes, we cry for the loss of loved ones, but comfort comes from God. And sometimes it comes in surprising ways. Who would have thought that Jacob would find his son on a throne in Egypt? And who would have expected the crucified Jesus to walk out of the sealed tomb? Jesus said to His disciples, "You shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy" (John 16:20). Yes, grief can be overcome. So let us take the advice of the apostle Paul and not "sorrow as others who have no hope" (I Thessalonians 4: 13). Loved ones may leave, but God will not. And God will sustain us. Remember the One who said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

*Yet another enemy is guilt.* People often pray to God for forgiveness, but then they will not forgive themselves. Jesus said that if we do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will God forgive ours (Matthew 6:15). And "men" includes us. If we will not forgive ourselves, we cannot expect any forgiveness from God. A continuing sense of guilt is a fiery dart from Satan. But Jesus came to "destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3:8). Do not let the devil tempt you to carry a burden of guilt. Just enlist the aid of Jesus in getting rid of it. "For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). Yes, Jesus is able to do it. Remember, "I am with you always!"

Whether our problem is pain, worry, grief, or guilt, God is "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (II Corinthians 1:3). He can heal broken bodies, and He can

also heal broken hearts and minds and souls. He "comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (v. 4). There is a lot of comfort in that verse!

And then there is "*the last enemy*"—death. It is the last enemy for Jesus (I Corinthians 15:26), but it is also the last enemy that you and I will ever face. But here again, we do not need to face it alone. Fear of death is a tool of Satan. But Jesus came to deal with Satan and his power. Jesus took on flesh and blood "that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14,15). If we let the Lord take care of our sin, we do not need to worry about death. God is with us! Jesus is with us! "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me" (Psalm 23:4). And when we emerge on the other side, He will be with us yet. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13).

### **The Lord Never Leaves Us Alone**

God said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Jesus said, "I am with you always." But in spite of these precious promises, many do not utilize the presence of God and Christ in their lives. How sad! They may sing, "Blessed Jesus, hold my hand," but days without number go by in which they never give Him a thought, never stretching out a hand for Him to take.

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If we want God to be with us and if we want Jesus to be with us, we need to get our knees on the floor and get our hands in the air. There is One in heaven who has been where we are, One who was "in all points tempted as we are" and who can "sympathize with our weaknesses" (Hebrews 4:15). "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (v. 16). Then, getting up off our knees and into our daily tasks, we hold out a hand to the triune God, who walks with us all through the day. And when night comes, He is with us still.

As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God...The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me, and my prayer to the God of my life (Psalm 42:1,2,8).

Do you sometimes feel that the pains or cares of this life are getting you down and blocking your road to heaven? Listen to these pertinent promises: "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (I Corinthians 10:13). "Now may the God of peace...make you complete in every good work to do His will, *working in you* what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ" (Hebrews 13:21, emp. GW). "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen" (Jude 24,25).

Depending on deity in our daily lives is the secret of success. This is what will get us along to heaven—"strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:16,17). But we have to ask for it. We have to look for it. We have to seek Him out. "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6). God is always ready to be found. "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). And guess what? The Lord will do even more than we ask. God "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the *power that works in us...*" (v. 20, emp. GW). Deity is powerful, and deity is with us!

The song "You'll Never Walk Alone" by Rogers and Hammerstein (1945) has been a favorite of many. "Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart, and you'll never walk alone," the song says. But it never gets to the reason for it. It takes a Bible reader to hear the words of God: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." This beloved verse has spawned more than one gospel hymn. Charles H. Gabriel penned the enduring "Sweet Is the Promise."

The Christian sings:

Sweet is the promise "I will not forget thee,"  
Nothing can molest or turn my soul away;  
E'en tho' the night be dark within the valley,  
Just beyond is shining an eternal day.

Trusting the promise "I will not forget thee,"  
Onward will I go with songs of joy and love,



## Chapter 7: I Will Never Leave You Nor Forsake You

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Tho' earth despise me, tho' my friends forsake me,  
I shall be remembered in my home above.

When at the golden portals I am standing,  
All my tribulations, all my sorrows past,  
How sweet to hear the blessed proclamation,  
"Enter faithful servant, welcome home at last."

And the Lord answers:

I will not forget thee or leave thee,  
In my hands I'll hold thee,  
In my arms I'll fold thee,  
I will not forget thee or leave thee;  
I am thy Redeemer,  
I will care for thee.

"I will never leave you nor forsake you." The promise is powerful because its words are true. God never goes back on His word. No matter how lost our lives have been, no matter how dark the way home, an almighty arm reaches down to save and an unseen presence joins our path. One of the most moving songs ever written on this theme is "Where No One Stands Alone," by Mosie Lister (1955):

Once I stood in the night with my head bowed low,  
In the darkness as black as could be;  
And my heart felt alone and I cried, "O Lord,  
Don't hide Your face from me."

Like a king I may live in a palace so tall,  
With great riches to call my own;  
But I don't know a thing in this whole wide world  
That's worse than being alone.

Hold my hand all the way,  
Ev'ry hour, ev'ry day,  
From here to the great unknown.  
Take my hand;  
Let me stand  
Where no one stands alone.

Walking hand-in-hand with the Lord will take us up the strait and narrow path to the very gates of heaven. *He* will never leave us or forsake us. May *we* never let go of His hand!

## Chapter 8

### Weeping May Endure For A Night, But Joy Cometh In The Morning (Psalm 30:5)

Don Blackwell

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Brother Blackwell has a BA in Bible from Southern Christian University and is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He currently works for Truth For The World as a TV and radio speaker. He has also done local work in Alabama and North Carolina.

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Brother Blackwell is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force.

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Psalm 30:5 says, "weeping may endure for a night, but joy *cometh* in the morning." The force of these words is that suffering will not last long. Despite this fact, in the night of our mourning, the pain seems unbearable. Think about Joseph and the first night he spent among his Ishmaelite captors. I imagine that night to be one of loneliness and weeping. He had been betrayed and sold into slavery by his own brothers. He did not know where he was going or what the future might hold for him. Seeing his father again was only a hope for which to grasp. That night must have been one of the most miserable he had experienced, and yet four chapters later (Genesis 41:38), Joseph is second in

command to the King of Egypt. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

On a certain night, Job lay down his head having just lost all of his children to death. His wealth was gone. His health was severely suffering, and his wife had suggested that he curse God and die. What went through Job's mind on that night? Was he unable to sleep? Maybe his pulse raced, and he was too disturbed for rest. Maybe he cried himself to sleep. Soon he opened his mouth and cursed the day he was born (Job 3:1). The book however closes with Job being greatly blessed and "his latter end...more than his beginning." "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

The Lord agonized in the garden. Luke says, He "being in agony...prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). His old familiar friend was soon to betray Him with a kiss of hypocrisy, and He knew that crucifixion awaited Him in the morning. Likely, there had not been a more painful night in all of history, but it was not long until He gloriously ascended to heaven and sat down on the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33). "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." These words touch a universal chord in mankind. Who among us has not tossed and turned in a night of mental anguish only to see it fade away with the rising of the sun?

It is believed that the words of our text were originally written by David on the occasion of the dedication of the threshing floor of Araunah after the plague that followed his numbering of the people (II Samuel 24:25; I Chronicles

## Chapter 8: Weeping May Endure For A Night...

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21:26).<sup>45</sup> If this is correct, then "the anger that endureth but a moment" and "the weeping that endures for a night" is likely a reference to the punishment of the plague. Hebrews 12 teaches us that the Lord chastens and scourges His children (v. 6). The plague was a direct form of chastening. As the psalmist tells us that "weeping endures for a night and joy comes in the morning," we learn that the pain of his punishment has now passed, and his joy has returned. He has been brought to his senses and knows spiritual relief. Now at the dedication of the threshing floor he has joy in the Lord. His grief, though intense, has passed, and happiness has again filled his life.

Every man who has lived has seen this cycle repeat itself many times. Pain comes and goes, and happiness returns again. But this verse may hold a deeper meaning beyond the peaks and valleys of this life. This verse may be looking to the joy of eternal life to come. This life is the period of pain and weeping. Eternal life is the morning of joy. If this meaning was not intended by the author, we are reminded of it nonetheless. Certainly it is a spiritual truth taught throughout the holy scriptures. Job wrote, "Man *that is* born of a woman *is* of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). Though life is full of pain, the days of life are few, and great joy awaits the faithful on the other side. It is from this thought that I want to draw the lesson.

### **The Universal Nature Of Suffering**

The first point that I want us to observe from our text is the universal nature of suffering. Many people in the world

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<sup>45</sup> James Burton Coffman, "Commentary on Psalms 1-72, vol. 1," in *The Coffman Commentary Series* (Abilene, TX.: ACU Press, 1992), p. 226.

have had the idea that bad things happen only to bad people. Job's three friends assumed that one suffering as intensely as Job was must be guilty of horrible treachery. Eliphaz asked, "Who ever perished, being innocent? Or where were the righteous cut off?" (Job 4:7). In John 9, the disciples of Jesus encountered a man who had been blind from birth. They asked the Lord, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" They mistakenly assumed that the man's handicap had to be the result of someone's evil doing. Still today, we have people of a similar mindset. Let some terrible tragedy befall someone, and he will ask, "What did I do to deserve this?" Or someone else may even suggest to him, "You must not be living right!"

Let some terrible tragedy befall someone, and he will ask, "What did I do to deserve this?"

The fact of the matter is that pain, suffering and grief are universal realities. One may wonder where I find this lesson in Psalm 30:5. I find it in the author of the verse. David made his share of mistakes, but few would fail to recognize that David was a good man. Early in life, he is described as a "man after God's own heart" (I Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). In the New Testament, he is included in the great "Hall of Faith" (Hebrews 11:32). Although David was a good man, he knew weeping and grief. Bad things do happen to good people.

We should however understand that *sometimes* we do suffer because of sin. Sometimes suffering is the consequence of our own sin. Some suffering may be chastening from God. This seems to be the case in our text.

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God taught Paul humility with his thorn in the flesh (II Corinthians 12:7-9).<sup>46</sup> Some suffering comes simply because God allows us to suffer the consequences of our actions. Men often do foolish things, and God allows us pay the price. No doubt, the consequences of our own sins account for a great deal of our suffering.

Some suffering comes because of the sins of others. Many wives and children have suffered extraordinary pain because of sins of an alcoholic husband. Many lives have been destroyed because of one man's loose tongue. The sin of Cain cost Abel his life. Achan's sin cost his entire family (Joshua 7:24-25).

Some suffering is no one's fault. Sometimes men just become the victims of natural laws. A family may be left homeless as the result of a tornado. A fire may make a woman an early widow. Who caused it? Who was guilty of some evil that merited these tragedies? No one.

We certainly make a grave mistake to assume that every time someone is suffering, he deserves it. We also err when we try to blame God for all suffering. Job's wife tried to do this very thing. She believed God was the cause of Job's suffering and foolishly advised him "to curse God and die" (Job 2:9). People today make a similar mistake when they blame God for hardships they experience. Someone will die, and one will explain, "God took him!" Or perhaps worse, he will suggest, "It was God's will." Brother Guy N. Woods wrote an article years ago entitled, "God Takes The Rap." He points out in that article that natural disasters are

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<sup>46</sup> Bobby Dockery, Tract, "Why Do Bad Things Happen To Good People?", (Gospel Tracts International).

often times deemed as "acts of God." Truly God is blamed for many things that are not His doing.

The fact of the matter is innocent people often suffer without deserving it. Jesus suffered and died between two thieves, while being completely innocent. We know godly men and women in our time who have endured intense tragedies. Faithful servants of the Lord have battled physical afflictions, endured financial struggles, suffered losses of those close to them and have even been persecuted for their faith. But none of these things convict them of sin. In fact Paul tells us, "all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Timothy 4:12). Again as Job said, "Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble." That is about as universal as it gets!

### **The Temporary Nature Of Suffering**

This lesson assignment is the third part of the series entitled "God's Promise To The Hurting." This point deals with the temporary nature of the suffering and is perhaps the most comforting promise to the one in pain. The promise is, "It won't last long!" David said of his suffering "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Somehow knowing that our suffering will be short lived keeps us going. A child goes into a doctor's office for a shot. The experienced doctor comforts the youngster with the words, "It will only hurt for a minute." I remember joining the military and being separated from my newly wed bride. One of the things that helped me endure our separation was the counting the days until we could be together again. A man in prison will mark the days off his



## Chapter 8: Weeping May Endure For A Night...

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calendar looking forward to the day of his freedom. Seeing the end is one of the great motivators to help us press on.

This is one of the reasons that hell is so horrible. There is no end. "And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night..."

This is one of the reasons that hell is so horrible. There is no end.

(Revelation 14:11). The thought of an eternity with no relief from suffering is more than the mind can bear. The Christian on the

other hand is promised that his pain *will* end, and it will be in a relatively short amount of time. Paul speaks of "our light affliction, which is but for a moment..." (II Corinthians 4:7). Someone may puzzle over this remark having personally suffered many years with some serious illness. "How could he suggest that our affliction is light and for but a moment?" It must be remembered however that though one may suffer his entire life, it is still just a moment in the span of eternity. James writes, "For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14). It seems harder for young people to grasp the brevity of life, but each year that passes makes us more aware of the fact that we will not live on this earth very long. There is a website that some view as morbid and others as sadistic. Actually it is quite sobering. Visitors to the site type in the date of their birth, and based on the law of averages, the site tells you when you will die. It gives a date and a year. Below the date, it has a counter ticking off the seconds you have left until that date. It makes one's life appear as it really is...passing quickly.

A popular method used to help those with addictions is "to take one day at a time." The reason this works is that a goal seems more achievable when I look at only a short time. This principle also helps the child of God to endure the cross that he bears. He reminds himself that his weeping will last but a night. He constantly reaffirms that his suffering will last but a moment. God's promise to the hurting is, "It will only hurt for a moment!"

### **The Strengthening Nature Of Suffering**

We mentioned that *one* of the greatest motivators to help the Christian endure suffering is to remember that it is temporary. The greatest motivator is the joy that awaits him when it is over. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. We are told that one of the reasons the Lord endured the suffering He did was because of the joy He knew was coming when it was over. Hebrews 12:2 says about Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame..." I am stronger to face temptation when I think of the reward to come. When I am tired, my zeal is rekindled by calling to mind the joy of heaven. I have often times been encouraged to press on by remembering the words of Galatians 6:9, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." I am encouraged not to give up by reminding myself that it will be worth it. "Heaven will surely be worth it all!"

We have already observed a great deal about suffering and sorrow. It is universal. All men face it. It is temporary in nature. No matter how severe it may be, it will not last long. The hope of heaven helps us endure it. But still remains the question that has troubled the minds of men for

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ages, "Why?" "Why does a good God allow bad things to happen to His people?" There is no one answer. We have already mentioned that some suffering is the result of our sin. Some is the result of the sins of others. Some suffering comes by the process of natural laws. Sometimes "we...get caught in the machinery that drives the universe."<sup>47</sup> But at this point I want to suggest one more reason why God allows his people to suffer, and that is the fact that some suffering is beneficial. We can actually be made better by the trials that we endure. Notice some of the many benefits of suffering.

*It strengthens my endurance.* James 1 teaches us that we should rejoice when we face various trials knowing that the testing of our faith produces patience. In other words, my endurance is strengthened as I pass each test. Trials are unpleasant, but they will come (II Timothy 3:12). A Christian can either agonize over them or do as James commanded and view them as beneficial. Until one does this, he will never be able to receive trials with joy (James 1:2).

*It moves me to righteousness.* The writer of Hebrews speaks of the chastening of God and describes it as an unpleasant thing to endure. He writes, "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous..." (Hebrews 12:11). It is something to be endured or suffered. The result of it however, is something great indeed. He continues, "afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness..." Discipline is given to bring righteousness. Godly parents recognize this principle in the

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

rearing of their own children. Punishment is inflicted in hope that righteousness will follow. "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother shame" (Proverbs 29:17).

*It turns me to God.* The psalmist wrote, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes" (Psalm 119:71). Likewise many individuals have turned to God because of trials in their life. It is common to find those who have not opened the Bible in years pour over its' pages when struck with some severe tragedy. Funeral homes are filled with those who at least for a moment will look to God when they will not at any other time.

*It presents me with opportunities for service.*

Some of the most courageous deeds, most noble acts of service and kindness, and displays of generosity have been toward those in pain. It is very interesting to reflect upon the judgment scene of Matthew 25. Many deeds could have been cited to reflect the events of that day. The Lord says to the righteous, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me" (34-36). The righteous were presented with opportunities to help those who were suffering. They are counted righteous in having answered those opportunities.

*It makes me appreciate blessings.* A common fact among mankind is, "You don't appreciate what you have until it's taken away." We do not truly appreciate our good health

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until we become sick. We do not appreciate our jobs until we lose them. We do not appreciate our freedom until it is threatened. My needs help me to appreciate the generosity of others. My pain makes me more highly value compassion. My sins make me value the blessing of forgiveness. Who feels the greatest debt, but he who views himself as the chief of sinners (I Timothy 1:15)? Jesus said of the sinful woman of Luke 7, "Her sins which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the *same* loveth little." Adversity makes me more highly value the blessing.

*It makes me long for heaven.* The pain and sorrow of this world make me discontent to stay here. They make me long for home where there will be "no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain..." (Revelation 21:4). It is not difficult to understand why aged Christians who are suffering the discomforts of the years seem the most eager to go home. The hardships of this life intensify my hope of heaven. Paul, a man acquainted with pain, wrote about his time on this earth and that he had the "desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Philippians 1:23).

*It generates understanding and magnifies compassion.* Many have trouble appreciating another's pain until they experience the same. Few understand the pain of a widow until they lose their spouse. Our own suffering makes us reach out to others. It creates in us an understanding heart. Herein lies the beauty of our Savior. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

## **Conclusion**

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." All men, good and bad will endure suffering and affliction. Some of it is deserved. Some of it is not. The promise to the Christian however, is that it will not last long. In the mean time, we must endure it, seeking the benefits hidden in the trials and most of all keep our minds set on that morning of joy.

## Chapter 9

### When Bad Things Happen To God's Children

David Sain

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Brother Sain was born in Fountain Head, Tennessee. His father, Harold Sain, was a preacher, and his brother, Paul Sain, is also a preacher. He is married to Phyllis, and they have two children, Rhonda and Aaron, and five grandchildren. They currently live in Florence, Alabama, where Brother Sain has preached for the Wood Avenue Church of Christ since 1977.

Brother Sain received his formal education from Freed-Hardeman University. He preached his first sermon on November 10, 1952. He began preaching full time while he was in college, and he has preached full time for churches in Kentucky, Illinois, Michigan, and Alabama. He speaks annually in five to six gospel meetings and on various college and church lectureships. He has twenty-seven years of experience as the speaker on weekly television programs. He has forty-one years of experience as the speaker on weekly and daily radio programs.

Brother Sain writes frequently for *Spiritual Sword*. He has written seven study guides for adult Bible classes, and he is the author of the tracts, "Searching For the Church That Jesus Built," and "The Time To Get A Divorce."

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On December 2, 2000, the *Times Daily* newspaper, printed in Florence, Alabama, reported the results of a Zondervan Poll. Among the many questions one would expect a religious publishing company to ask in such a poll, there

was one question that especially caught my eye. People responding to the poll were asked what question they would ask if they could spend time face-to-face with God.

Before telling you what the people responding to the survey said, take a moment and think about what question you would ask God if you could spend time face-to-face with Him.

As you might guess, some of those who responded to the survey said they would ask God whether they are going to heaven or hell, and others said they want to know when the world will come to an end. But, according to the newspaper article, the question that most people said they would ask God is, "*Why do good people have to suffer?*"

Why *do* good people have to suffer? That is a question commonly asked because trials and troubles are common to all people. All people have bad things happen to them. It may be heart disease. It may be a financial crisis. It may be a tragic accident that leaves one paralyzed for life. It may be the death of a loved one. It may be something else—but one thing is for certain, everyone suffers. Everyone has troubles. Everyone must, at some point in life, endure a hard time. No one gets through life without something bad happening to them. As someone, unknown to me, has worded it: "*Something bad happens every day to someone, and something bad happens to everyone someday!*"

Soon after Job's life was shattered with the rapid succession of one tragedy after another, his friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, visited him. In the verbal sparring that took



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place between them, one of the things which Eliphaz said to him is this truth, "...man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7, KJV). Picture yourself, on a starry night, standing with friends around a campfire. As you watch the flames shooting up from the wood, you see sparks flying upward from the flames. Build a hot campfire and you can be certain that is what will happen, and Eliphaz said that is also how certain you can be that man will have trouble in his life.

When the apostle Paul wrote the Corinthian Christians, he encouraged them with some well-known words. He wrote, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Corinthians 10:13). Now, obviously there is great strength drawn from the Lord's promise that He will not permit His children to be tried above what we are able to bear, but will make a way for us to deal with it and be able to bear whatever trouble or suffering comes upon us.

However, in the context of this lesson, note a part of this scripture that is not always emphasized. Paul said, "There hath no temptation taken you but *such as is common to man*" (I Corinthians 10:13, emp. DS). In other words, the trials of the Corinthian saints were not unusual, but common to all people. And that is a point that Peter also emphasized.

In his first epistle, Peter wrote,

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you...  
(I Peter 4:12).

A careful analysis of this verse, in context, clearly shows that Peter was referring to the persecutions so common to Christians in the early history of the church. Of course, that which he wrote carries a broader, generic principle. In other words, it is not "strange" for a Christian to have to endure persecution, and it is not unusual for a Christian to experience other types of trials, e.g., sorrow, disease, family problems, etc.

So, both Paul and Peter declared that everyone experiences suffering and trials—that bad things happen to everyone, including Christians.

#### **Four Common Responses When Bad Things Happen**

*First, many believe that when bad things happen to a person, it is because of that person's sins.* Recently, a sister in Christ sighed while telling me about all the troubles which she was going through. Then she declared, "I don't know what I have done, but God is getting me for something."

Such a reaction to calamities has been around for a long time. As mentioned earlier, when Job lost his children, his livestock, and his health, he was visited by three friends who took turns addressing his situation. Each of them told him that such would not and does not happen to the righteous, with the obvious implication that the presence of

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Job's afflictions was proof that he was a sinner. For example, Eliphaz said to Job,

Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished,  
being innocent? or where were the  
righteous cut off? Even as I have seen, they  
that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap  
the same. (Job 4:7,8).

Their point to him, again and again, was that the Lord was chastening him for his iniquities (Job 5:17), and that God would restore him to a position of prominence and prosperity if he would only repent. Much of what Job's friends said to him was right, but their charges against Job were misplaced. Job, as the first part of the book verifies, was a righteous man in God's eyes, and his miseries were *not* the result of his sins.

Now there is no denying that bad things are sometimes the result of one's sins. For example, a young man may have a wreck while driving under the influence of alcohol and suffer the loss of one of his legs. In that case, he will suffer for the rest of his life because of a sin that he committed by getting drunk.

Sometimes, bad things happen to a person because of another person's sins. A little baby may be born with a birth defect and suffer for a lifetime because the mother had a disease contracted while committing the sin of fornication. In that case, the innocent suffers due to the sins of another.

However, some bad things happen that have absolutely no connection to sin. To illustrate, consider another little baby

who is born with a birth defect that is the result of a genetic problem. The child may suffer for a lifetime because of the genetic deficiency, but it has nothing to do with sin.

His disciples asked Jesus about a similar situation. When they came upon a man who had been blind from birth, they asked him, "Who sinned? This man, or his parents?" Now, the very fact that they asked the question implies that they assumed that such a physical malady surely indicated a sin on the part of someone. However, Jesus immediately and succinctly answered that neither the man nor his parents had sinned (John 9:1-4).

Make no mistake about it. Bad things may happen to someone because of his own sins, and one may suffer because of the sins of another. However, the presence of suffering in one's life is not, necessarily, the result of anyone's sin.

*Second, some people get angry with God and lash out at Him when bad things happen to them.* There is a story, which illustrates this point quite well. After hearing a sermon about the love of God, a grieving mother asked the preacher, "If God is as loving as you say that He is, then where was He when my son died?" According to the story, the preacher kindly and compassionately answered, "I suppose that, when your son died, God was the same place that He was when *His* son died."

Many have been the people who, in their grief and suffering, have been so angry at God that they abandoned God and declared that they could not believe in a God who would permit terrible things to happen to them. Although I

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am no psychologist, it seems that when we are hit with disasters, we must have someone or something to blame for it, and God is often the object of our ventilation.

*Third, some people react to bad things by attributing such things to "God's will."* I am confident that you have heard people comment about some "natural disaster," such as a tornado, as being an "act of God." (Your Homeowner's Insurance policy likely contains the words, "act of God.") In such a setting, I have heard people comment about the death of a little child with the words, "God needed another angel in heaven, so God took him."

When a loved one dies from some disease or in an accident, it is not unusual to hear the phrase, "It was the will of God." Now, I realize that those who say such things mean well and are trying to find helpful words. But, dear reader, let me caution you. Be careful what you accuse God of doing. Not everything that happens is according to God's will! Be careful what you say. Be careful where you lay the blame.

Not every bad thing that happens in this world is an act of God! To illustrate, do you think it was "the will of God" for those planes to be deliberately guided into the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001? Is it the "will of God" for an Islamic man to be so devoted to Allah that he decides to strap bombs to him and kill him and innocent bystanders? Is it the "will of God" for some man to be so wicked that he preys upon little children and sexually molests them, and then mutilates their bodies? Surely, no one would say that he believes such to be the will of God!

We need to be more thoughtful about what we say in time of tragedy.

*Fourth, the atheist responds to the bad things of this world by attacking our faith in God.* The atheist reasons like this, "If there is a God, why doesn't He stop all the suffering?" Oscar Wilde reportedly said, "There is enough misery on every street in London to disprove God."

Dear reader, how would you answer the question, "If there is a God, why doesn't He stop all the suffering?" Is it because He does not know about it? If that is the case, how can we believe that He is omniscient (Hebrews 4:13; Matthew 10:29)?

Is it because He knows about all the suffering, but cannot stop it? But, if that is the case, how can we believe that He is omnipotent (Revelation 4:8; Matthew 19:26)?

Does God know about all of the suffering and does He have the power to stop it, but simply does not care what happens to us? If so, how can we believe Him to be the God of love (John 3:16; I John 4:8)?

I offer the following very brief treatment of these important questions.

### **Why Does God Not Intervene And Prevent All The Suffering And Bad Things?**

In answering this important question, there are three things to consider:

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*First, consider how God made man and why He made him that way.* As God created the earth, the Bible says that God saw that it was "good" (Genesis 1:4,10,12,18,21,25). Then, after creating man on the sixth day, the record says God called it "very good" (Genesis 1:31). At that point, there was no suffering, no disease, and no death.

However, as we well know, all of that changed. When God made man, He made him with the ability to choose, including the choice to obey or disobey God. And when man chose to disobey God, everything changed. No longer was man in paradise. The earth was cursed, and suffering and death became a reality. In other words, when man chose to sin, suffering and death resulted.

At this point, someone may be thinking, "Well, if it was man's choice to disobey God that introduced suffering and death, then why did God make man to have the power to choose?" When God made man, he made a "man" and not a "machine." And the way that man was created demonstrates God's wisdom and love. If man had no freedom of choice and were only a machine, man's actions, with him programmed like a computer, would bring no glory to God.

Also, consider that one of the most unloving things that one can do to a person is take away his freedom to choose. Think how miserable people become when their lives are controlled and manipulated by someone else. And, in that light, we see God's love for man by giving to man the ability and power to choose to obey or disobey.

*Second, consider the results if God did intervene every time something bad were about to happen.* If God were to intervene every time some tragedy was about to happen, the result would be chaos. For example, suppose a man were perched on a ladder, and he is cleaning out the gutters on his house. Then, he begins to lose his balance, is about to fall, is going break a leg, and is going to suffer a concussion. If God were to set aside the law of gravity and prevent that man from falling, think of the chaotic results all around that man.

One can only imagine the confusion that we would experience if that scene were to occur hundreds of times every hour throughout the world. If God were to suspend His laws of nature and disrupt His perfect order in creation every time something bad were about to happen, there would be no predictability—nothing upon which we could rely.

Now, I realize that the nature of the previous thoughts leads to a discussion of the providence of God, and our prayers to God for safety and protection would be an exercise in futility if God never intervened in the affairs of men, but that subject is a matter that is beyond the scope of this written message.

Indeed, God's infinite wisdom is seen in the mind-boggling order of His amazing creation, but His infinite wisdom is likewise seen in His not intervening every time some bad is about to happen.

*Third, consider God's infinite wisdom and knowledge in allowing us to experience sorrow and going through*



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*unpleasant and trying times.* When we wonder why God does not act differently, we need to remember that He sees and knows things that we cannot see or know. Let me illustrate what that means by comparing it to a common scene involving a boy and his earthly father. The son may ask his father for some privilege and be denied. Because the father has lived longer and has experienced things which the boy has not experienced, he sees potential harm and danger in the privilege for which his son asks permission, so the dad says, "no." On another occasion, the dad may see the son headed into a situation that will bring the boy pain, physically and/or emotionally, but allow it to happen. Why? Because the dad sees it as a circumstance that has the potential for his son to learn an important lesson that will help prepare him for adult life.

If an earthly father can perceive things that well and make good judgments like that with only a limited view of things, how much more the heavenly Father! He is all knowing and unlimited in His view of things. He has the whole picture, past, present, and future, and because of that, He can see something good coming from a terrible experience. When we ask Him to protect us from some painful or dreaded experience, He may grant our petition, but on another occasion, He may not grant our petition because He sees in it the potential of a good lesson for life (and, ultimately, for His glory through us).

Therefore, we are taught to count it as a joy when trials come our way.

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall  
into divers temptations; Knowing this, that

the trying of your faith worketh patience.  
But let patience have her perfect work, that  
ye may be perfect and entire, wanting  
nothing (James 1:2-4).

And the apostle Paul practiced what James commanded. As one might expect, Paul rejoiced over the hope that he had because of the grace of God, but he rejoiced in something else. He wrote,

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings,  
knowing that suffering produces character,  
and character produces hope (Romans 5:3,4,  
ESV).

These, and similar passages, teach us to see trials as having the capability of teaching us valuable lessons and as opportunities to grow and become mature Christians.

Also, as we consider why God does not intervene and prevent all the suffering and bad things, remember the words of Joseph. You recall how his brothers, out of jealousy, came to despise him so much that they sold him into slavery. Yet, years later, when a severe famine was about to starve his father's family, he came to their rescue when Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy food. In the emotional moment, when he revealed himself to his brothers, Joseph spoke the profound words,

But as for you, ye thought evil against me;  
but God meant it unto good, *to bring to  
pass, as it is this day, to save much people  
alive* (Genesis 50:20).

## Chapter 9: When Bad Things Happen To God's Children

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Something terrible happened to Joseph, but years later he understood that God had brought good out of his bad experience. And we must remember, when struggling with some bad circumstance or trial, that God still has the power to take something bad and bring about something good.

Always remember that God is in control, and He is working a plan that he knows far better than you and I will ever be able to comprehend, regardless of how long we live on earth. We must trust Him. He knows what is right, and all that He does is right (James 1:17).

Finally, in the midst of these thoughts, blend in the reassuring divine promise,

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted *above that ye are able*; but *will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it* (I Corinthians 10:13; emp. DS).

Also, remember the encouraging words written to the saints in Rome,

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).

Of course, that text does not say that all things that happen to God's people will be good. It does, however, promise that all things work together *for* good.

When bad things happen to us, as they surely will (Job 5:7), let us (1) view them with a biblical perspective, (2) trust our heavenly Father who is faithful and will not forsake us, and (3) use the experience as an opportunity to grow in patience and hope!

## Chapter 10

### Overcoming The Elijah Complex

Jason Moon

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Brother Moon enjoys golf, volunteer youth coaching, and spending time with his family.

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Great mountains, great men, and great moments of the Bible seem to go together. Remember Ararat, Noah, and the flood? Who can forget Sinai, Moses, and the giving of the law? Or what about Olivet, Jesus, and the ascension? But one of the most fascinating stories in all the Bible revolves around another great mountain, great man, and great moment.

Great mountains, great men, and great moments of the Bible seem to go together.

On the western coast of Palestine, a range of hills about six miles long protrudes from the landscape and culminates in Mount Carmel, a peak about 1,600 feet above sea level. In I Kings 18, we read about this great mountain, the prophet Elijah, and his victory over the false prophets of Baal.

Most Christians are familiar with Elijah's great victory on Mount Carmel. What great lessons can be learned from this familiar story! But there is much more to understand about Elijah's ministry. Particularly, Elijah serves as a great example of how God's people can blow their problems out of proportion, and, consequently, fail to be all they can be for God. To better understand Elijah's experience and to help us make application, we will observe the events of I Kings 17-19 by noting four key incidents.

### **Elijah's Call (17:1)**

Elijah has been compared to Melchizedek since the text does not indicate his father and mother nor does it give his genealogy. Also, like Melchizedek, we have no record of his "beginning of days nor end of life" (Hebrews 7:3).<sup>48</sup> It is almost as if Elijah is dropped out of a cloudy chariot, and, then after his work is done on earth, it picks him up and transports him on to heaven (II Kings 2:11).

Although there are questions we would like answered about Elijah's background, one thing about which we can be certain is Elijah's calling. We know his ability to forecast a drought (17:1) was not due to his meteorological skills. So, the only reason Elijah knew that it was not going to rain was that God told him.

About as quickly as Elijah comes into Ahab's presence, he is removed. God called him to leave Ahab and go to the brook Cherith where God would sustain him with ravens

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<sup>48</sup> All quotations will be taken from the NKJV unless otherwise noted

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until the brook dried up (17:2-6). This time is followed by Elijah's stay with the widow of Zarephath (17:8-24). While there, it was obvious God's Spirit was upon Elijah. As the chapter ends, the widow affirms Elijah's call as she states, "...by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth" (I Kings 17:24).

Like Elijah, Christians are also called by the gospel (II Thessalonians 2:14) to serve God in our times. We should observe that it will not always be easy for us to do so, but like Elijah, we should answer the call. When Elijah prophesied to King Ahab, he did so under taxing times. From a political perspective, the nation of Israel was in chaos. Of the six kings who preceded Ahab, half had been murdered or expelled from the throne by usurpers. Also, at the time, foreign wars were being fought with the Syrians and Philistines. From a spiritual perspective, things were even worse. Elijah was called to prophesy to the most wicked king Israel had ever known (I Kings 16:30).

Perhaps you find that you have a unique opportunity to serve God. Do not wait for the times to be perfect. Accept your call and make the most out of that wonderful opportunity to serve God! Even though the world may call you a trouble-maker (I Kings 18:17), do the right thing! Remember Elijah rose to the occasion, and you can too. Never forget, "Elijah was a man just like us" (James 5:17, NIV).

### **Elijah's Conquest (18:20-46)**

The first time Elijah appeared before wicked King Ahab, he prophesied of the famine to come, and then he vanished (I

Kings 17:1-3). In the meantime, Ahab, according to I Kings 18:10, had searched high and low for Elijah. But now it is time for Elijah's big test and his crowning conquest, and the Lord tells Elijah, "Go present yourself to Ahab" (I Kings 18:1). The drama that unfolds is so intriguing! After Elijah and Ahab meet face to face again (I Kings 18:17), the stage is set for the challenge between God and Baal (I Kings 18:20,21). The humorous behavior of the false prophets of Baal ends with a convincing victory for the Maker over the masqueraders (I Kings 18:22-38). The people of Israel, possibly even their king, are temporarily brought back to their senses (I Kings 18:39,40).

This victory, as impressive as it is even to us today, must have been even more powerful for the people who saw it in person and in the culture of Baal. Baal was believed to be the god of farms and storms. The people even believed that Baal's voice could be heard in the storms, particularly the thunder that accompanied the rain.<sup>49</sup> Is it any wonder that God brought a three and a half years drought on the area?

To the casual observer, it appears that Elijah has never been stronger. There was no doubt God was with him. As noted earlier, some even believe that Ahab might have responded to Elijah's appeal to choose God and follow him. Coffman suggests some kind of reconciliation had occurred between Elijah and Ahab.<sup>50</sup> This assumption is based on the command Elijah gives to Ahab and his obedience of such (I Kings 18:41,42) and the fact that Elijah suddenly has a

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<sup>49</sup> Getz, Gene A. *Elijah: Remaining Steadfast Through Uncertainty* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995). p. 101.

<sup>50</sup> Coffman, James Burton. *First Kings* (Abilene: ACU Press, 1993). p. 239.



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servant who was presumably provided by Ahab. Furthermore, Elijah's ministry continues to enjoy the favor of God as he prays for the end of the drought and it is granted (I Kings 18:41-46). The Lord even strengthens or supernaturally empowers Elijah to be able to outrun Ahab's chariot to Jezreel, a distance of about twenty miles. Some have even suggested Elijah became Ahab's runner before his chariot in order to be there in support of him when he faced Jezebel.<sup>51</sup>

### **Elijah's Crash (19:1-4)**

Elijah's victory at Mt. Carmel reminds us of one of the great ironies of life. Our highest moments are often followed by our lowest. One day Elijah was on the mountaintop defeating false doctrine surrounded by thousands shouting in favor of God, and the next he was alone out in the wilderness feeling sorry for himself. We are reminded that the best of men are still men at best. Elijah was a hero who becomes a zero. From the pinnacle of success, he found himself in the valley of distress. It was prosperity to pity. Thus, we are introduced to the Elijah complex.

From a man who courageously stared evil in the face, suddenly Elijah wilts at Jezebel's threat. If God had protected Elijah from Jezebel's 450 false prophets, could he not protect Elijah from one woman? The rational mind answers in the affirmative, but Elijah suddenly begins to behave irrationally. His emotional state would have made a great case study for a psychiatrist. Elijah is threatened with death and flees, yet when he reaches his destination in the

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<sup>51</sup> Getz, Gene A. *Elijah: Remaining Steadfast Through Uncertainty* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995) p. 132.

wilderness, he asks God to take his life. He was fleeing from death, but asking to die. What a strange paradox! As Davis notes, Elijah was "fleeing from death, praying for death, and yet destined never to die."<sup>52</sup>

Remember that James states that Elijah was a man "with a nature like ours" (James 5:17). Therefore, Christians today can suffer from the Elijah complex. As with Elijah, this complex often affects God's most faithful. How often do you fear the face of evil? Because of your busy lifestyle, with work and your spiritual duties, are you burned out? Do you feel like you are a failure because what seems to be your best effort seems to do little good? Do you ever feel like you are alone in your fight for what is right while it seems many of your brothers and sisters have conformed to the world? If you feel this way, there is inspired therapy which provides a cure for the Elijah complex.

### **Elijah's Cure (19:5-18)**

Generally, we would diagnose Elijah's problem as depression. Elijah is actually a classic case of what can lead to depression. According to Dr. Bill Flatt, Elijah exhibited some of the classic symptoms of depression such as a depressed mood, exhaustion, feelings of worthlessness, recurrent thoughts of death, low self-esteem, and withdrawal.<sup>53</sup>

Remember the Old Testament is written for our "learning," but it was also written to provide "hope" (Romans 15:4). If

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<sup>52</sup> Davis, M.M. *Elijah*. Restoration Reprint Library (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1898). p. 112.

<sup>53</sup> Flatt, Bill. *Restoring My Soul* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 2001). pp. 80,81.

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you have reached your breaking point, this story gives some hope! Elijah's crash can actually help us to avoid the Elijah complex. Elijah's story demonstrates some of the actual causes and cures of the Elijah complex. In fairness, it should be noted that overcoming depression might not always be as simple as following a biblical pattern like the one we are about to observe. As Flatt notes, one of the myths of depression is "the Bible has all of the answers I need."<sup>54</sup> In fact, one of the first things a person may want to do (especially in the case of a faithful Christian) is to go see his or her doctor.<sup>55</sup>

But in the case of Elijah, there are some things worthy of observation which may help prevent or even cure a perplexed child of God's depression.

*If you have fear, you need some reassurance.* It is interesting to read of the varying opinions about Elijah's state of mind. Some argue that based on the ASV and KJV renderings that Elijah was not afraid, but only getting out of a hopeless situation.<sup>56</sup> Recent translations certainly lend the interpretation that Elijah was "afraid" (RSV and NIV) and "ran for his life." Regardless of the varying translations, do you think a man would be frightened if someone threatened to kill him? Besides, I Kings 19:10,14 seem to suggest that Elijah was bothered by the fact that his life was threatened. The point is, God's people have fear too and often need reassurance. Elijah's reassurance came in the form of God

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<sup>54</sup> Flatt, p. 78.

<sup>55</sup> Toler, Stan and Smith, Debra White. *The Harder I Laugh, The Deeper I Hurt* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2001). p.39.

<sup>56</sup> Coffman, James Burton. *First Kings* (Abilene: ACU Press, 1993). pp 242,243.

taking care of his physical, emotional, and spiritual needs as he gave him food and water, instructions, and counsel.

Christians have been given the wonderful assurance that God will be with us as we do his will. In fulfilling His mission, Jesus promised He would be with us "always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Furthermore, Paul reminds us that Christians have a *promise* that "all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28). He reminds us that we have *provisions* since, with Christ, God "freely gives us all things" (Romans 8:32). And yes, he reminds us of God's continual *presence* since nothing can "separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39).

*If you have become fatigued, you need some rest.* Elijah must have been exhausted. He had come off an adrenaline rush at Mount Carmel, he had run around twenty miles before Ahab's chariot, and he had retreated a day's journey into the wilderness. God's answer was some rest and relaxation. He provided Elijah with sleep, food, and water to reenergize him for his journey ahead.

God's people should take note. Sometimes we need a break from the rigors of ministry and service. A preacher needs an occasional Sunday off to refresh his batteries and perspective. Bible school teachers may need to take a quarter off from teaching. I have even heard of elders taking a brief sabbatical from their duties. Sometimes deacons may not be able to handle their assignments at the moment and may ask to be relieved or reassigned. Do not be afraid to go rest under your juniper tree. If you have

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been working hard, you deserve it! Do like the Lord and find a place of solace and "rest a while" (Mark 6:31).

*If you have failed, you need some responsibility.* Elijah's statement in I Kings 19:4 about not being "better than my fathers" is very enlightening. It appears that Elijah was questioning his worth as God's prophet. Perhaps Elijah thought that the victory at Mount Carmel would have forever ended Israel's idolatrous practices. Perhaps he thought Ahab would have

Did Elijah look for the harvest too soon after the seed-sowing?
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stood up to Jezebel and reinstated worship to only Jehovah. Did Elijah look for the harvest too soon after the seed-sowing? Perhaps the miraculous wind, earthquake, and fire that were displayed before Elijah were meant to remind Elijah that "rebellious human children cannot be solved quickly."<sup>57</sup> The "still small voice" (I Kings 19:12 ) could also suggest that although "force and spectacular demonstrations are sometimes necessary, God's real work is accomplished by the 'still small voice' calling men to do God's will."<sup>58</sup>

Elijah was no failure, but he certainly believed he was. As a result, God gave him some tasks that offered discernable results. His tasks were threefold. First, anoint a new king over Syria. Second, anoint a new king over Israel. Third, anoint a prophet to take his own place (I Kings 19:15,16).

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<sup>57</sup> Coffman, p. 249.

<sup>58</sup> Coffman, p. 248.

There is a lesson for Christians. Do not ever underestimate our influence and work! Also, do not always expect immediate, visible results. Remember that we may sow the seed and someone else may water, but God will give the

...do not always expect  
immediate, visible results.

increase (I Corinthians 3:6). Also, always be mindful of other things that need to be done.

Depression may be solved by simply getting busy and doing something else. Elijah felt like he had failed, but he needed to change his focus to some new work. That could be the answer for you!

*If you have "forfeited," you need some "reinforcements."* One of the most obvious mistakes that Elijah made was to believe that he was really the only one left to speak for God. Even in his courage, he made this claim (I Kings 18:22). Thinking such was so, the pressure finally got to Elijah when he crashed (I Kings 19:10,14). As a result, God did two things to give Elijah the reinforcement he needed. First, he told Elijah to anoint a replacement for him in Elisha (I Kings 19:16). Then he reminded Elijah that he was not alone, and there were 7,000 who still had not "bowed to Baal" (I Kings 19:18).

Sometimes there is the tendency even among God's faithful to think we are the only ones left. Sometimes that may drive a person to give up. More often, it may drive God's people to false notions that they are really the only ones left to faithfully defend the faith. Such misconceptions make brethren leery of everyone else, and they even write off those who do not fit into their ever shrinking circle of fellowship. Thinking this way, some have drawn their

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circles so small that the Lord Himself could not be in fellowship with them. In their efforts, they have moved beyond the biblical command to "contend... for the faith" (Jude 3), and they have become contentious. As Kasarjian states, "They do these things because they apparently assume the worst, and that of their own brethren...In the name of truth, they have completely disregarded the part of God's truth that commands us to think the best things (Philippians 4:8, I Corinthians 13:6,7)."<sup>59</sup>

When Elijah became guilty of thinking he was the only one left, God reminded him that was not the case. The good news is there are people all over this world who are staying faithful to God's word. The church is not as corrupt as some would have us to believe. The home is not on the verge of ruin in all places. There are many faithful preachers in our brotherhood despite the rumors and writings of some. There are still faithful men in the Bible departments of many of our Christian schools and preacher training institutions. Do not ignore the obvious problems, but never become oblivious to all the good!!! Despite what you might be thinking, you are not alone!

### Conclusion

Elijah recovered from the Elijah complex. Around six years later, Elijah appeared once again to Ahab when he coveted Naboth's vineyard (I Kings 21). After a few more years, Elijah rebuked Ahab's son, Ahaziah, for calling upon Baal-Zebub for a cure for an accidental injury (II Kings 1). No, neither Elijah's fear nor desire for death ever came

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<sup>59</sup> Kasarjian, Keith. *Stability In A Land Of Confusion*. "An Argumentative Culture: Is It Influencing the Church?" Ed. Greg R. Elliott, M.D. (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 2000). p. 264

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about. Instead, he was ushered into heaven in a fiery chariot in the midst of a whirlwind (II Kings 2:11). Finally, Elijah is seen by Peter, James, and John on the mount of transfiguration as he talked with Jesus and Moses (Matthew 17:1-3).

God, give us more men and women like Elijah! People who will serve despite evil and, even when they get down, will get over it, and never give up!



## **Chapter 11**

### **Equipping Shepherds For Pastoral Care**

Randy Keeling

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Brother Keeling holds an AS degree in Electrical Engineering Technology from West Virginia Institute of Technology in Montgomery, West Virginia. He has worked for Dominion (Virginia Power) for twenty-six years.

Brother Keeling has served as a Bible class teacher, assistant minister, deacon, and elder. He is currently teaching a Bible Fundamentals class and serves as an elder at the Cold Harbor Road Church of Christ in Mechanicsville, Virginia. He preaches once a month for the church in Marlinton, West Virginia.

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#### **Introduction**

God's shepherds care, rule, shepherd, tend, and care for His sheep. God has decreed that qualified Christian men, His shepherds on this earth, will take care of His flock. God's will is that each individual flock will have a group of shepherds providing the needed pastoral care. Who are God's "shepherds" today? What is the "pastoral care" that God wants provided for His sheep? How does God go

about "equipping" these shepherds for pastoral care? These questions are the outline for our lesson today and we will end with practical principles for shepherds from the Scriptures.

### **Who Are God's "Shepherds" Today?**

In I Peter 5:1-5 Peter exhorted the "*elders*" to "shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight" (NASB95).<sup>60</sup> The Greek word for "*shepherd*" means "to act as a shepherd."<sup>61</sup> It comes from the Greek word translated as "*pastors*" in Ephesians 4:11 which means "shepherd" and most often is translated as shepherd. Also, in Acts 20:28, Paul told the Ephesian elders, "the Holy Spirit has made you overseers." Therefore, the shepherds of the church in the New Testament are called elders, pastors, and overseers. These terms all refer to the same office and individuals. They are all one in the same.

A summary of I Peter 5:1-5 shows that the elders (older men of the church) are to act as shepherds (pastors) of the flock of God, exercising the oversight (looking after and caring for) them by being examples (leaders) to the flock. When the chief shepherd (Jesus Christ, the head pastor) comes, the elders who shepherd (act as pastors) and oversee the flock of God "will receive the unfading crown of glory." The younger men, as an example, are not to assert authority, but be subject to their elders.

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<sup>60</sup> All Scripture quotes are from The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996, (NASB95) unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas, Robert L., Th.D., General Editor, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries, Updated Edition*, (Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1999).

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In Ephesians 4:10-16, we can see that in verses 11 and 12 Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers *"for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ."* We have the words of the inspired apostles and prophets recorded in the Bible for the building up of the church. We have evangelists/preachers to preach the word; we have pastors/shepherds/elders/overseers to lead in the word through teaching and example, and teachers to teach the word, all for the benefit of the church which is the body of Christ (Colossians 1:18,24).

### **What Is The "Pastoral Care" That God Wants Provided For His Sheep?**

Ezekiel 34:1-6 sums up what God expects from shepherds in the negative form:

Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord God, Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. They were scattered for lack of a shepherd,

and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them.

God's shepherds are not to seek "shameful gain" (I Peter 5:2; ESV) from the flock by greedily taking advantage and feeding themselves from the flock. Shepherds are to be feeding the flock. Shepherds are to strengthen the sickly, heal the diseased, bind up the broken, gather the scattered, and seek the lost. They are to do this without dominating the flock "with force and with severity." Rather, as says I Peter 5:3, "not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock" (ESV).

In Matthew 9:36, we find that "sheep without a shepherd" are "harassed and helpless" (ESV). So a shepherd must watch, guard, and protect the flock. In Luke 2:8, the shepherds stayed with the sheep and kept watch. In John

"sheep without a shepherd"  
are "harassed and helpless"

10:3, we have the example of Jesus the good shepherd who calls the "sheep by

name and leads them out." In John 21:15-17, Jesus tells Peter to "Feed my lambs," "Tend my sheep," and "Feed my sheep" (ESV). In Acts 20:28 elders guard, oversee, and shepherd the flock.

These scriptures give a good overview on the expectations God has for shepherds. In essence shepherds provide,

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within the bounds of scripture, whatever is necessary to help the sheep make it to heaven.

### **How Does God Go About "Equipping" These Shepherds For Pastoral Care?**

Elders are equipped for pastoral care by meeting the qualifications given by God, by being students of God's word, and by following the example of the great shepherd, Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God. Qualifications are given in I Timothy 3 and Titus 2. An important consideration given in I Timothy 3:4,5 is:

He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)

The family is like a small flock and is a training ground for future elders. If a man has a Christian wife, manages his household well, raises his children to desire and become Christians, and they all remain faithful these men are a long way toward being trained for the work of shepherding an even larger flock. Considering the expectations of shepherds in the previous section there is not much difference in being a husband and father than being a shepherd. The family must be fed, strengthened when sick, healed when diseased, bound up when broken, gathered when scattered, and gone after when lost. The father must watch, guard, protect, and otherwise shepherd the family. First they must prove themselves to be capable with a smaller flock, the family, before they can consider shepherding Christ's flock.

## **What Are Some Practical Principles For Shepherds Otherwise Called Elders Or Pastors?**

One particular passage of scripture that is full of practical advice for shepherds is Paul's address to the Ephesian elders as recorded in Acts 20:17-28. While preparing for a seminar on leadership a few years ago, I "discovered" the importance of this passage for the leaders of God's flock. Paul's example and teaching to the Ephesian elders are prime instructions for all elders since that time.

"From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church" (Acts 20:17). How plain, simple, and telling! Paul called for the elders of the church of Christ in Ephesus. He did not have to modify church with any adjectives because there is only one body (called out assembly) of Christ: the church. These elders were the shepherds and overseers of the flock (v. 28). It should be noted that Paul did not call for the deacons, the evangelist(s), or anyone else. Paul only called for God's appointed leaders. This combined with Paul's comments in verses 28 and 35 makes it clear that this message was uniquely for the elders.

And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time" (Acts 20:18).

### **Shepherds Principle #1 — *Be with the flock.***

An important point: Paul spent time with them and looking at verse 19 it was quality time "serving the Lord." This is like a shepherd being with the flock. If a shepherd is never or cannot be characterized as being with the flock at a

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given location then they cannot be serving as a shepherd of that flock. Elders serve the Lord (v. 19) right along with the rest of the brothers and sisters.

**Shepherds Principle #2** — *Remember your place and who you serve.*

**Shepherds Principle #3** — *Be humble and caring.*

Continuing with verse 19 "serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews." We see that humility is an important Christian quality. Paul's humility, combined with compassion and perseverance through trials, sets a powerful example of caring service for the elders to follow. An apostle's work was "serving the Lord," and so elders should remember they are serving the chief shepherd (I Peter 5:4) and not try to gather a flock for themselves.

**Shepherds Principle #4** — *Teach God's word both publicly and privately.*

**Shepherds Principle #5** — *Teach everything that is profitable, i.e. all the scripture, to everyone.*

How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:20,21).

Elders are not to hold back, but rather to give the flock all the food they need. They will not want some of the

teaching and instruction, but that is not a reason to hold back. Sometimes it is difficult to get the sheep to eat what they need when they are looking for what they want! This is sort of like eating your spinach or whatever your mom said was good for you, but you wanted to skip on to dessert. Elders may even have to go into homes to deliver the needed food for the soul. Elders by their qualifications are students and teachers of the word. The eldership must be a teaching and preaching eldership. These qualifications are not a one-time attainment but are to be exercised and kept fresh in order to feed the flock. Also we see that Paul's example was to teach "both Jews and Greeks," which in effect means he taught everyone. Elders cannot leave anyone out or show any kind of favoritism. If the elders show favoritism or participate in cliques then they are dividing the flock.

**Shepherds Principle #6** — *Do not shy away from the tough jobs. Trust in God.*

And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me (Acts 20:22,23).

Here we see the steadfastness of purpose and the trust Paul placed in God for working His purpose. Paul knew "that bonds and afflictions" were waiting for him in Jerusalem; yet that did not deter him from his journey.

**Shepherds Principle #7** — *Do not give up teaching "the gospel of the grace of God" no matter what the cost.*



But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).

A large part of the ministry of the elders involves feeding the flock. Feeding the flock is an ongoing service they perform and is never finished. The dynamic nature of the flock requires repeatedly going over first principles as well as the deeper subjects.

### **Shepherds Principle #8 — *Declare to all the "whole purpose of God."***

And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God (Acts 20:25-27).

The leaders who watch over the church and have authority are the elders also called overseers, bishops, pastors, and shepherds. These shepherds must give an account to the chief shepherd.

"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account" (Hebrews 13:17a). This is how elders can be found "innocent of the blood of all men"—by "declaring...the whole purpose of God." Those outside of the eldership may not know the heavy burden of having souls in your

care. If elders wish to sleep in relative peace, this is the only way.

**Shepherds Principle #9** — *Watch yourselves and the whole flock that you are a part of.*

**Shepherds Principle #10** — *Guard, oversee, and shepherd the church that Christ "purchased with His own blood."*

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

Elders have divine authority to guard, oversee, and shepherd the church. The church was purchased at a high price, the blood of Christ the Son of God. The realization of the value of the church is a humbling thought for any conscientious eldership.

**Shepherds Principle #11** — *Watch for trouble coming into the flock.*

"I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29). Elders are to be watchful for problems coming into the flock. These savage wolves will probably initially masquerade as sheep. Later, in order to accomplish their goals, they must show themselves for who they really are. Elders must be watchful and seek to stop problems early. Elders must not develop tunnel vision and only pay attention to the internals, but the externals as well. Having a general idea of what is going on in other flocks will give them a "heads-up" on being watchful for the wolves.

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**Shepherds Principle #12** — *Watch for trouble from within the leadership.*

"And from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). This is additional confirmation that Christians can fall. Even elders are not immune. They may decide they want a flock for themselves instead of Christ's flock. Here is where elders have to police and watch each other. No one elder should be allowed to monopolize the eldership or otherwise subvert the eldership as a whole. If one elder seeks all the public interaction with the flock, seeks to array the sheep against the other elders without just cause or proper proof, seeks to be the only person to interact with the preacher or deacons, or in whatever way seeks personal power and control, then there exists a problem. When a man wants his own flock, he has ceased to be a servant of Christ.

**Shepherds Principle #13** — *Elders must be alert (know what is going on within the leadership, within the church, and also outside of the church).*

**Shepherds Principle #14** — *Elders must not cease to admonish each one with tears.*

Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears (Acts 20:31).

When alert elders detect a problem it is a heart-wrenching thing to know that there is sin and

Dutiful elders will not wait and hope the problem goes away...
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danger in the flock. Dutiful elders will not wait and hope the problem goes away, but out of a saddened heart they will admonish each one as appropriate. When the Master's flock is sick then the shepherds have to work to restore the flock to a healthy status. When elders cease to admonish the members, the ruin of the flock is underway.

**Shepherds Principle #15** - *Elders must point to "God and to the word of His grace" because it is God's Word that can save.*

And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified (Acts 20:32).

By example Paul showed the elders the following principles:

**Shepherds Principle #16** — *Elders must not be a burden on others.*

**Shepherds Principle #17** — *Elders must work hard.*

**Shepherds Principle #18** — *Elders must help the weak.*

**Shepherds Principle #19** — *Elders must give, give, give!*

**Shepherds Principle #20** — *Elders must pray.*

I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I

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showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all (Acts 20:33-36).

This bears repeating. Paul gives to the elders this command: God's shepherds are not to seek "shameful gain" (I Peter 5:2; ESV) from the flock by greedily taking advantage and feeding themselves from the flock. We have many recent examples of leaders, both religious and otherwise, who pillage those they are leading, and it is indeed a shameful thing.

And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship (Acts 20:37,38).

Finally we see the evidence of a loved leader. We will all do well to follow Paul's example in any avenue of life in which we are in a position of leadership.

### Summary

God's shepherds today are also called elders, pastors, and overseers. The most common term used today is elders, with pastors and shepherds being used occasionally. The pastoral care that shepherds are expected to provide is everything that is necessary to feed, care for, and protect

the flock. Shepherds learn to provide pastoral care by reading the word, seeing the example of other godly shepherds, and putting what they have learned into practice. Leading the family is basic training for an elder. Finally, for practical advice for elders, Paul's address to the Ephesian elders is prime reading material. Acts 20:17-28 should be read by elders on a regular basis.

## Chapter 12

### What God's People Can Learn From Adversity

David Sain

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Brother Sain was born in Fountain Head, Tennessee. His father, Harold Sain, was a preacher, and his brother, Paul Sain is also a preacher. He is married to Phyllis, and they have two children, Rhonda and Aaron, and five grandchildren. They currently live in Florence, Alabama where Brother Sain has preached for the Wood Avenue Church of Christ since 1977.

Brother Sain received his formal education from Freed-Hardeman University. He preached his first sermon on November 10, 1952. He began preaching full time while he was in college, and he has preached full time for churches in Kentucky, Illinois, Michigan, and Alabama. He speaks annually in five to six gospel meetings and on various college and church lectureships. He has twenty-seven years of experience as the speaker on weekly television programs. He has forty-one years of experience as the speaker on weekly and daily radio programs.

Brother Sain writes frequently for *Spiritual Sword*. He has written seven study guides for adult Bible classes, and he is the author of the tracts, "Searching For the Church That Jesus Built," and "The Time To Get A Divorce."

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Question: *When can a bad thing be good?* Answer: *When the bad thing results in something that is good.*

Have you ever gone through a difficult time that really tried your patience and endurance? Most likely, you have because all of us experience hard times. As already mentioned, *something bad happens everyday to someone, and something bad happens someday to every one.*

When people are hit hard with something terrible, they are often heard to say, "This is just about the worst thing I have ever gone through. I don't know how in the world I will get through it." Yet, somehow they do "get through it" and later, in a moment of reflection, say, "You know, I would not go through that again for any amount of money, but you know that was good for me. It really taught me some important lessons."

Some years ago, I heard the story of a lone survivor of a shipwreck who was stranded upon an uninhabited island. He built a small hut to store what little he was able to salvage from the burning ship. Daily he prayed for rescue, and kept looking for a ship but none came. One day, as he returned from hunting for something to eat, he was horrified, as he got close to his crude camp, to see his small hut and all his possessions going up in smoke.

I am sure that you can easily imagine that he thought, "Why did this have to happen to me after all that I've endured? The worst has happened." Yet, the following day a ship arrived at the island upon which he was marooned, and rescued him from the island. The captain of the ship told him, "We saw your smoke signal." It was then that the man realized that something bad had resulted in something good.



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Of course, he was not the first person to learn that something good can come from a bad situation. As a matter of fact, the apostle Paul wrote about something good coming from his trials. To the Philippians, he wrote,

Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace...But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear (Philippians 1:7-14).

Although being in prison was a trying experience that had to be hard for him to endure, Paul saw the good that resulted from his being imprisoned, viz., the brethren had increased in their courage and were much bolder to teach the gospel during a time when doing so carried the risk of persecution.

At the time when something bad happens—while in the middle of the trial—I realize that it may be hard to see anything good about it, or anything good coming from it. However, we *can* learn things in adversity that we may not learn any

we <i>can</i> learn things in adversity that we may not learn any other way
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other way, and it is my purpose in this study to present seven ways that adversity can benefit us and be of great value to us.

### **Ways That Adversity Can Be Of Value To Us**

*Adversity can help us see God more clearly.* Hard times can remind us of our need for God and our dependence upon Him. As the psalmist realized, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Psalm 119:71).

What a great attitude that is! Oh, that God would help all of us to see the need for learning the laws of God, albeit through adversity. Long ago, Jeremiah verbalized a great truth that we are prone to forget. He wrote, "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

And when in the grip of adversity, when we are not sure which way to turn, we realize that we need the guidance of the all-seeing and all-knowing Jehovah. He is able to do more than we can think, or even imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

*Adversity can help us see ourselves more clearly.* In this technologically advanced society, it is easy to be independent. If anything goes wrong, we flip a few switches or punch a few buttons, or make a quick phone call and "fix it." With our eyes on tomorrow, we routinely go through the day's schedule and activities. Then, in the blink of an eye, something bad happens. With the sudden chest pain that signals a heart attack, or the disruptive sound of a siren from an emergency vehicle, or a phone call that tells of a tragedy, our daily routines come to a

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screeching halt. Then, when smothered by adversity, we are reminded how frail we are as human beings.

It matters not how intelligent, how rich, or how influential one may be, no one is exempted from trials and tragedies. It matters not how physically strong one is; one is never immune to disease and death. In the words of Solomon,

All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath (Ecclesiastes 9:2).

With that same fact in mind, Solomon earlier wrote, "The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all" (Ecclesiastes 2:14).

It is important to remember that we are mere human beings, and that we are destined to die and face God in judgment (Hebrews 9:27). And the invasion of adversity into life helps us to know and remember that.

*Adversity can help us see Satan more clearly.* Take your mind back to the Book of Genesis and the account of creation and the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. When God made man and woman, He made them with the ability to choose, including the choice to obey or disobey God. And when they chose to disobey God, everything changed. The earth was cursed, and suffering and death became a reality because of their disobedience;

but, do not forget to focus your mind upon the one who tempted them to disobey. (Adam and Eve are not to be excused for their evil choice, for God did not excuse them (Genesis 3:16-19).) But, let us not overlook the one who enticed them, for God did not overlook his role (Genesis 3:14,15).

The apostle Paul in his letters to the Romans and Corinthians addresses the cause and presence of sin and death in this world. To the Romans, he declared,

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned (Romans 5:12).

To the Corinthians, he explained,

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive (I Corinthians 15:20-22).

When we are hurting over the death of a loved one, or when we are angry about the things we have to endure because of the wickedness that surrounds us in this world, we should remember that Satan is the cause of all the evil, suffering, and death!

*Adversity can help us to be more compassionate.* When a friend or loved one goes through a trial or faces some severe problem that we have gone through or faced, we

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find it easier to relate to what they are experiencing and to be compassionate.

Now, I am not, for a moment, intending to imply that you and I have to experience exactly what someone else experiences before we can be compassionate, but I do contend that when we have been through something at least similar, it is easier to understand the burden they are bearing (Galatians 6:2). For example, I spent a lot of hours in an ICU waiting room while my mother and my mother-in-law were dying in the spring of 1993 and the summer of 1994, respectively. And I know that changed the way I view people when I visit with a family today while they wait anxiously in an ICU waiting room.

Paul exhorted us to "comfort" others with the same kind of "comfort" we have received.

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, *by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted* of God (II Corinthians 1:3,4, emp, DS).

Indeed, we are taught to be tenderhearted, i.e., touched and moved by the circumstances of others (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-14), and adversity can help us grow in such Christian qualities.

*Adversity can help us see our blessings more clearly.* Think about it. Would you not agree that most of us need

to be more aware of how richly blessed we are, and would you not also agree that one thing of which most of us are guilty is taking our blessings for granted?

Some time ago, I read a question that intrigued me, and it still does. The question is, *if everything were perfect, would everything be perfect, or do we need the imperfect in order to appreciate the perfect?*

Now, I personally think that question gets to the heart of one of the reasons God does not intervene and protect us from problems and trials. If everything were perfect and we never had to deal with imperfections, we most likely would lose our appreciation for the perfect.

You see, it is when our blessings are interrupted that we quickly have a fresh appreciation for them. For example, after six consecutive days of sunshine, the shining sun is hardly noticed. But, after four consecutive days of clouds and rain, a clear sky and the sun are such a welcomed and appreciated sight. When a storm comes and we lose electricity in the house for just a couple of hours, suddenly we are made to think about how easily we take the forefinger and flip that toggle switch and, wah-lah (viola), the light comes on. Yet, day after day, when the electricity is always there, we don't even think about it.

These examples and thoughts could be expanded dozens of times, but these surely suffice to illustrate how adversity *can* help us to see our blessings more clearly.

*Adversity can help us develop strength of character.* The brother of our Lord wrote, "...that the trying of your faith

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worketh patience" (James 1:3). Enduring some trial produces patience, which means the ability to endure and persevere.

In Paul's epistle to the Romans, we find these informative words about this matter,

And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope (Romans 5:3,4).

Some of the strongest Christians I have ever known are people who have been through a lot of adversity. As we might say, "They have had more than their share," and it seems that it has only made them stronger in Christian character, in "...love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22,23).

I have heard some of them express the fact that adversity taught them some things that they might not have learned otherwise.

This poem expresses the sentiment quite well:

I walked a mile with Pleasure  
She chatted all the way,  
But left me none the wiser  
For all she had to say.  
I walked a mile with Sorrow  
And ne'er a word said she,  
But, oh, the things I learned from her  
When Sorrow walked with me!

Robert Browning Hamilton

*Adversity can help us have a greater desire to go to heaven.* The trials and troubles of life can make us long for a place where such do not exist. And the Bible tells us that in heaven there will be none of the things that hurt us and that are so hard to bear down here on earth.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Revelation 21:1-4).

Now wonder, the faithful apostle Paul looked upon dying as being better than living here on earth (Philippians 1:21-23). No wonder he considered the afflictions of this life to be "light" compared to that which awaits the faithful.

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a



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far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (II Corinthians 4:16-5:1).

There is little doubt that the adversities that we endure here on earth *can* make us long for heaven. Such things remind us that this world is not our home.

Yes, adversity can benefit us in many ways. Bad things can be of value to us, teaching us many important lessons! As I have said already, we *can* learn things in adversity that we may not learn any other way. Adversity can make us *better* or *bitter*. It really depends upon our attitude.

## **Chapter 13**

### **Helping Children & Young People Deal With Death, Grief & Loss**

Leisa Williams

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Sister Williams was born in Trenton, Michigan, but was reared and lived in the south most of her life. She is married to Don. They have two sons. Matt is a senior at Freed-Hardeman, and Ben is a freshman at Freed-Hardeman. The Williams currently live in Killen, Alabama.

Sister Williams has a BS degree from Freed-Hardeman and a master's degree from UNA. She is a high school math teacher. She has taught school for sixteen years and says she has been a preacher's wife forever! Her father was also a preacher (John W. Robertson), so she was also a preacher's daughter. She was a homemaker for eight years, giving up her career to stay home with her sons.

Sister Williams loves to read, teach math, and teach ladies' classes.

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#### **Introduction**

In Matthew 18:1-6 Jesus talks of His love for little children. He further admonishes us to become like little children and warns that anyone who hurts a little child will be punished severely. In Matthew 19:13-15 Jesus asks for the children to be brought to Him, and He then compares them to the kingdom of heaven. I feel that the subject we are discussing today is one of great importance. When death, grief, and loss invade a child's life, someone has to be ready

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to help them understand and deal with the emotions they are dealing with. Many times this task falls to the woman closest to the child. Questions will be asked, and we need to have answers ready. I hope the ideas presented will help us all better understand how to help those we love deal with some of these difficult emotions.

"If you're old enough to love, you're old enough to grieve." Children and young people experience death, grief, and loss in different ways than adults. Perhaps you can try to

"If you're old enough to love, you're old enough to grieve."

imagine what it would be like to deal with the death of a loved one, the break-up of a family, or any other major loss as a

child! (Some do not have to try to imagine what this emotion feels like because they did experience this feeling when still very young.) Many times a child who had to deal with death early had to "grow up" too fast as reality crashed through the door. Circumstances may have demanded that the child act as an adult, and perhaps they were told they had to "be strong." This kind of thing can affect the way a child views the rest of his life.

Why is "grief" different for the child? Children have all the sadness, fear, anger, and other emotions that adults have, but do not have the vocabulary to express the way they may be feeling. Their limited exposure to life leaves them with little understanding of what is happening to them. Also, children are used to being "blamed" for things, so many times, the child will assume that they are probably to blame for whatever has happened. This is especially true in the case of divorce.

There are some false assumptions that need to be dispelled concerning children and grief. Children should not be sent away while the rest of the family "deals with" the loss. When they ask questions, someone needs to answer their questions. Children have the ability to sense (even when very young) that something is wrong with Mom or Dad, and these feelings need to be explained. Adolescents and pre-teens will often experience anger over the death of a loved one. The death and burial of a family pet can help a child deal with the ideas surrounding death, grief, and loss.

There are differing opinions as to whether children should be allowed to attend the funeral or view the body in the casket. When children are going to be a part of this experience, they need to be prepared beforehand as to what to expect. In my opinion, the best way for children to learn to deal with this is to be "taken" to the viewing of someone they hardly even know...perhaps the neighbor down the street, the elderly person at church they didn't know...so they can learn about what happens at funeral homes, what the body looks like in the casket, etc. without the emotional ties that accompany the loss of someone they loved. I firmly believe that the first body your child sees in a casket should not be someone he loves dearly. This could prove too traumatic. After the funeral home experience, answer any questions the child may have. One thing you may want to talk to them about beforehand is the fact that only the person's upper body shows in a casket. Many children are confused because of this fact and even think that the legs have been cut off or some other idea! A child should also be prepared ahead of time for the "closing" of the casket. That bothers them greatly because they feel that the person

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will not be able to breathe! (Other questions that children ask about death will be discussed in the class, such as "When someone dies, are they being punished?" "Where do dead people go?" "Why did they die without telling me goodbye?" "Why did God allow them to die?" and others...)

There are many "Do's & Don'ts" to follow when explaining death to children. One is do not ever tell a child not to cry or be sad. Do not say that the dead person has gone "away." Do not say that God or Jesus "took" someone. Do listen to the child's actions and feelings. Do face and admit your own feeling in front of the child. Do answer any questions the child may have. A child will often act out his feelings in the way he behaves, possibly misbehaving and seeing what he can get away with. Also, often in playing, actions will represent feelings or emotions. A young child cannot deal with grief in large segments, so he will deal with his feeling on his own time schedule. Many times a child can deny things have happened and is very good at "make believe." During our session, we will spend some time looking at how children grieve depending on their ages, using a time line to help us. A child's age has a lot to do with how he or she perceives death.

One thing we as adults must do is give the children the freedom to grieve. We also have to give them permission not to be sad if that is not what they are feeling at that moment. This is especially hard if we feel that they "should" feel sad. Young people may not always "look" sad when they feel that way inside. In the same way we have to be careful because sometimes we can say something thinking it will make the child feel better, when

in reality, it makes the situation worse. An example is "You must always be a good little girl because Daddy is now watching you from Heaven." This can cause paranoia, followed by a feeling of lack of privacy. As a result, a child may fear trying new things, afraid if he makes a mistake that Daddy will be disappointed.

Teenagers are a very special group of people. Rules change when dealing with teens. They need permission to feel "however" they are feeling. They are old enough to express their grief in other ways such as the writing of a poem, doing some kind deed for the family of the deceased, etc. In our discussion, we will look at several tips to follow when helping a teen deal with this difficult time in their life.

Because of the recent events in our country since September 11, 2001, the "world" of our children and youth has been violated. The children must know that good people are still in charge in our government and our world. They must be assured that God is still in control of all. Children need to feel safe again. However, we must tell them the truth about what has occurred in our world. One thing to remember, though, is not to allow small children to stay "glued" to the television set continually during times of national emergency. Experts say that this can be unhealthy for them. It is important to return to your normal routine as soon as possible. This is reassuring to a child.

Isaiah 11:6 says, "a little child shall lead them." The interesting thing about children and grief is that many times they have the ability to "cut to the chase" (so to speak) and simplify what for us adults may be a difficult concept. We

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should be prepared to help our youth and children deal with these difficult times of life, but in the same way, we should prepare ourselves to learn from them along the way.

## **Chapter 14**

### **Dealing With Divorce**

Kyle Butt

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With approximately one out of every two marriages ending in divorce in the United States, a person does not have to look far to come in contact with men, women, and children who have been affected by this social malady. With the same 50 percent rate prevailing in religious circles, most members of the Lord's church have close friends or family members grappling with the effects of divorce.

The Bible leaves no room for doubt when it relates God's feelings toward the severing of the marriage bond: "For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce..." (Malachi 2:16, NKJV). Jesus Christ further defined God's position on divorce when He stated, "Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:9). God's design from the beginning of creation has always been for one man and one woman to be married until death



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should part them. His will for the marriage relationship has not changed.

Any brief reading of the literature describing the destructive effects of divorce quickly reveals some of the most obvious reasons for God's abhorrence of the practice. Emotional trauma sustained by the innocent children of broken homes ranks high among the negative effects of divorce. Studies have shown that children may carry emotional scars for years, often blaming themselves for their parents' break-up. The adults involved do not get off much easier. Many have reported severe depression, thoughts of suicide, extreme loneliness, and a host of other heart-rending emotional problems.<sup>62</sup> Harmful consequences compound when tumultuous fights occur about who gets the kids, who gets the house, how much alimony will be paid, etc. Some divorcees insist that divorce is worse than a spouse's death, leaving many more emotional problems with which to struggle.

God, from the beginning, has understood the pain involved in divorce, which is one reason He hates it. God does not, however, abandon His human creations, even when they make life-altering mistakes. Neither does God ever say that He hates the *people* who are divorced. He hates divorce because, in most cases, it is sinful and causes undue pain to the *people He loves*. Those who have been divorced are no farther away from the Lord's invitation than those who have not been divorced are. In fact, divorcees can find special, personal relief in Jesus' statement in Matthew 11:28-31:

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<sup>62</sup> Olsen, David (1999), *Marriage & the Family: Diversity & Strengths* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield). pp 519, 523.

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Come to Me all you 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.

### **The Christian's Pattern For Dealing With Divorce**

How, then, does a Christian deal with those who have been divorced? Fortunately, I believe that God foresaw this problem and specifically supplied a pattern to be used in dealing with those who have been divorced. In John 4:1-42, the Bible relates the story of Jesus and the Samaritan women. The text states that the woman had five husbands in her life, and the man with whom she was living at the time was not her husband. I think that it can be safely assumed that the woman had not outlived her five husbands, but had, in fact, been divorced several times. That being the most likely case, Jesus' interaction with her provides an excellent example of how to deal with those who have been divorced.

### **Treat All People With Respect**

According to most human standards, if any person had a legitimate right to "look down his nose" at another person, it was Jesus in the case of the Samaritan woman. Most of us are familiar with the stigma attached to the Samaritans by the Jews of the first century. We are probably equally aware that the gender situation during Jesus' day did not encourage free communication between Jewish men and Samaritan women. When the disciples found Jesus talking with the Samaritan, the Bible says, "they marveled that He talked with a woman" (John 4:27). Furthermore, Jesus was

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the sinless son of God, while this woman was a sinful, sexual offender.

Yet, in spite of all the differences between Jesus and the woman, He made a special effort to engage her in a conversation defined by respect and compassion. Jesus did not treat her as a second-class citizen, a social outcast, or a hopelessly lost sinner. He treated her with His characteristic attitude that indicated her individual worth and value.

In the same way, every Christian has been given the responsibility to show honor toward all people (I Peter 2:17), specifically, in this case, toward those who have been divorced. We should never treat any person as a second-class spiritual citizen who has faltered beyond God's reach. Neither should we avoid all contact with divorced people. Instead, we should follow the example of Christ, maintain an attitude that shows our personal respect for the fact that all men and women are created in God's image, and realize that every person, regardless of past decisions, has a place in the kingdom of God.

### **Focus On The Spiritual**

Sometimes, in the desire to help alleviate another person's suffering, we neglect his or her greatest need—spiritual reconciliation with the Father. Jesus never neglected this need. Jesus understood that the only road to true happiness is the one that leads to fellowship with the Father. Jesus uncompromisingly directed the thoughts of all people He contacted toward their spiritual well-being. Only a chapter earlier, Jesus had confused Nicodemus with His allusions to being "born of the spirit." On numerous occasions He

confused His disciples by referring to the spiritual, while they focused on the physical. His comments about "the leaven of the Pharisees," the sower's seed, and removing mountains, often went misunderstood due to the physical focus of His hearers. Yet, even though His hearers often misconstrued the message, Jesus continued to bring their minds back to the spiritual.

In the same way, the goal of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman was to bring her mind into focus on the spiritual water of life. Therefore, we as Christians should be ever diligent to bring the minds of all people (specifically those who have been divorced) into focus on the spiritual. There will be many emotional, physical, and social problems with which divorcees need assistance. And we should be ready to help in these cases. The greatest of these needs, however, will always be their spiritual condition. Our goal should be to focus their minds on their most important need, which is not a nicer house, a better school for their children, a better job, or another spouse. They need Jesus. Let us remember that.

### **Do Not Gloss Over A Sinful Situation**

When Jesus forthrightly commented to the Samaritan woman, "You have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband" (John 4:18), He simultaneously accomplished several things. First, He let the woman know that she was in a sinful situation. Second, He informed this woman that He was fully aware of her sinful situation. Third, He showed her that He loved her enough to care that she was in a sinful situation.

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The teaching of Matthew 19:1-10 and Mark 10:1-12 is straightforward and clear. "Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery" (Matthew 19:9). Little commentary is needed on such concise teaching. If any person divorces his or her spouse for some reason other than adultery committed by that spouse, then he or she can never get married to another person. Unfortunately, the biblical teaching on this subject has been twisted to the destruction of many (II Peter 3:16) because erring teachers and preachers have not had the courage or true *agape* love to inform people who are in adulterous situations that they are lost.

Sadly, especially in the United States, it has become unpopular, and has even been considered offensive, to inform any person that he or she is engaged in a sinful practice. On countless occasions, Christians, and even preachers of the gospel, have informed adulterers that "they might be all right" or that "God would want them to be happy." On other occasions, those living in adultery have been urged to continue in their adulterous union because children have been born into this union (see Ezra 10:44). None of these excuses, however well intentioned, comprehends the magnitude of adultery. Just because a couple may be acceptably married in the sight of the majority of Americans, does not mean that God accepts their relationship. The New Testament insists that adulterers will not enter the kingdom of heaven (I Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 5:19; Hebrews 13:4).

Think about the heinous neglect of which a preacher would be guilty if he refused to inform a couple of their sinful, adulterous situation. Leviticus 19:17 states, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him." In this passage, God equates hatred of one's neighbor with a refusal to inform that neighbor of his or her sinful lifestyle.

The mistaken notion that to love a person means to overlook sinful behavior is absolutely foreign to biblical teachings. The Hebrew writer said, "Whom the Lord loves, He chastens" (Hebrews 12:6). Jesus, who publicly denounced the sinful behavior of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and lawyers (to name a few), showed His love for these people on numerous occasions (Matthew 23:37-39)—a love that was clearly manifested in His sacrificial death on the cross.

The Corinthian brethren were guilty of this very thing—overlooking their brother's sin—with the intention of showing how loving they were. The Corinthians not only accepted into their fellowship a man who was living in an immoral relationship with his father's wife, but they also boasted about their acceptance (I Corinthians 5:1,2). How many times have we seen congregations today in the same mental state as the Corinthian church, boasting that they will accept anyone into their loving fellowship without asking them to change sinful behavior such as adultery? Yet, the apostle Paul quickly put an end to the boasting of the Corinthian brethren by informing them that they should be mourning and weeping, separating themselves from the sinful brother for his own spiritual good. These very instructions should be heeded today. We must stop laboring

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under the false notion that it is unjust or unloving to inform a person of his or her sin. In a loving, compassionate way, just as Jesus did with the Samaritan woman, we must make people aware of their sinful situations so that they will know the truth which can set them free (John 8:32).

Let us be reminded of God's instructions to Ezekiel:

Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: "When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand." So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me. When I say to the wicked, "O wicked man, you shall surely die! and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall

die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul (Ezekiel 33:2-9).

### **Give People A Job**

After Jesus informed the Samaritan woman that He was the Messiah, their conversation was interrupted by the disciples. The woman, so excited about Jesus, left her water pitcher at the well and went into the town to bring others to the Christ. Although Jesus did not specifically instruct her to do this, the knowledge that He gave her of His identity as the Messiah equipped her for the task of bringing others to Him. Through her evangelistic efforts, "many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman" (John 4:39).

While it may be necessary to inform many of the permanency of their divorced status, and of their inability, according to God's word, to ever remarry, we must direct them into areas of ministry in which they can bring others to Christ and find purpose apart from another sexual union. Divorcees must be made to understand that they are useful to the kingdom of God. In fact, not only are they useful, but they also might be able to reach certain people who otherwise might not listen to the wonderful story of Jesus. It is interesting to note that in John 3, Nicodemus came to Jesus by night as a ruler of the Jews—important and prestigious. Yet, no record is given that His testimony ever led anyone to the Christ. The Samaritan woman, on the other hand, brought almost an entire city to the Lord.



## **Chapter 15**

### **When Family Members Fall Away**

Keith Kasarjian

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Brother Kasarjian has a BA in Bible from Faulkner University and is an MBS candidate at Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver. He currently preaches for the Main Street congregation in Pikeville. He has also preached in Tennessee and Alabama. He has preached in gospel meetings, lectureships, and campaigns in several states and five foreign countries (Scotland, Russia, Ukraine, Canada, and Tanzania).

Brother Kasarjian enjoys flying, golfing, and camping with his family.

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For the faithful Christian, one who fully understands the necessity of faithfulness, perhaps there is no greater pain in life than to watch as a family member leaves their first love. With our love for that parent, child, spouse, or sibling comes an inherent abiding love for their soul as well. We are related physically *and* spiritually. We are members both of the same human family as well as God's family (I Timothy 3:15, NASB). Indeed, we hurt when family members fall away.

### **Losing Loved Ones**

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So many emotions and difficulties are common to mankind, and unfortunately our subject is one of them. To a large degree our level of commitment determines our level of grief over a lost loved one. For the lukewarm Christian, that hurt is perhaps not as deep. In fact they are not far from apostasy themselves (Revelation 3:16). But for most of us, the hurt and betrayal will run deep, and thus we must find a way to cope with this loss. Consider these facts about falling away.

### **The Danger Of Falling Away**

The Bible is replete with both warnings about the possibility of falling away and examples thereof. From the beginning, there was Adam, a son of God (Luke 3:38) who was made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), yet transgressed God's laws (Genesis 3:3) and therefore sinned. We remember Judas, an apostle and preacher (Matthew 10:2-4,7) who sinned and died impenitent and was lost (Acts 1:25).

Additionally, the many warnings we read, such as II Peter 2:20-22 reveal that falling away from God is a very real danger of which we must be aware. We should understand that *possibility* does not equal *probability* because we maintain a choice in the whole matter. Nevertheless, for us all there remains the danger of apostasy.

### **The Decision To Fall Away**

The apostate makes choices all along the way that ultimately leads to their falling away. Since the ability to choose is always present, perhaps we should not use the phrase "fall away" as it sounds almost accidental. The examples we read in the Bible, however, were anything but

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accidental. On one occasion "many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore" (John 6:66). There is also Demas of whom Paul said, "having loved this present world, has deserted me" (I Timothy 4:10).

One of the painful things about a loved one leaving God is that we often must painfully watch as they begin making choices that are unwise and unscriptural and that will, if left unchecked, eventually lead them away from God. Without exception, no one accidentally leaves God.

Without exception, no one accidentally leaves God.
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### **The Devastation Of Falling Away**

There is nothing in this world more devastating than for one to leave "the light" (I John 1:7) and the blood of Christ that it appropriates to go back into the darkness of Satan's kingdom (I Peter 2:9; Colossians 1:13).

*Falling away is devastating to the apostate.* The Holy Spirit intentionally used words of repulsion and disgust to describe the condition of the one who has left the fold of safety to go back into the world (II Peter 2:20-22). Who can erase from their mind the picture of a dog returning to its own vomit? We read also, "You have been *severed* from Christ...you have fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4). Whether he is conscious of it or not, the one who leaves God has chosen a path of devastation like nothing he could have imagined!

*Falling away is devastating to the church.* Let us not forget that when the now infamous Hymenaeus and Alexander "suffered shipwreck of their faith" (I Timothy 1:19,20), the first century church also lost two workers. Every time a brother or sister falls away, a soldier in the army of the Lord goes AWOL, a sheep in the fold of God leaves the pasture of security, and a laborer in the vineyard chooses unemployment. Only God knows how much more influential and how much stronger the church would be today were it not for so many that have gone the way of the prodigal.

*Falling away is devastating to loved ones.* One can hear the pain in his voice as David cries out for his son who died in rebellion to him and to God (II Samuel 18:33). In fact, spiritual death is in many ways more difficult for loved ones to bear than physical death, which has an ending and therefore offers some amount of closure. I have on more than one occasion listened as a brother or sister, with tear-saturated eyes and a heart broken in a million pieces, speak of their wayward loved one. Oh that the prodigal had some idea of the devastation they have caused!

*Falling away is devastating to God.* Hurt most of all, when one goes astray, is the One to whom they used to belong. When we read passages such as Zephaniah 1:4-6 we gain some measure of insight into God's feelings when one who was found becomes lost again. Invariably His feelings are a conglomeration of disappointment, disgust, and displeasure. One has vividly written, "We hit God in His

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heart when we decide to turn back to a worldly life from which He had delivered us."<sup>63</sup>

### Restoring Loved Ones

All hope is not lost! When a loved one has chosen the prodigal path, we must proactively seek to lead them back in a tender and timely manner. Restoring the erring is one of the church's greatest needs, and yet it is one of our greatest collective weaknesses. Notice what Galatians 6:1,2 tells us we need to restore an erring loved one.

*We need a proper view of sin to restore the erring.* We must take seriously their plight before we will be motivated to reach out to them. They are "caught in a trespass" or "overtaken in a fault" (KJV). The phraseology is from the Greek *paraptwma*, which is "the results of stepping aside"<sup>64</sup> and is no doubt made in reference to the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). The same word is found in Ephesians 1:7 and 2:1,5 and in these contexts sheds even more light on the critical nature of being overtaken in a trespass.

*We need a proper view of self to restore the erring.* "You who are spiritual" are to seek to restore the erring. One who is not himself spiritually minded and himself faithful, cannot restore those who are erring. Sometimes parents, for example, of wayward children wonder what went wrong when they are themselves only marginally faithful in their attendance and service. To be involved in the great work of restoration, we must first be faithful.

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<sup>63</sup> Holland, Tom. *The Ways of Wanderers* (Brentwood, TN: Penman Press, 1990). p 17.

<sup>64</sup> Reinecker, Fritz. *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980). p. 518.

*We need a proper goal to restore the erring.* "To restore such a one" is the worthy goal of restoration. Our desire is not to ridicule, display our intelligence, gloat over their shameful condition, or to make them feel good in their sin. Our goal simply is to bring them back to their first love. We want to help mend what has been broken. If we have any other goal than this, we are not qualified for the great work of restoration.

*We need a proper attitude to restore the erring.* Paul tells us to go about this good work with a "spirit of gentleness." A haughty spirit or a condescending attitude will do nothing but drive them further away from God and entrench them deeper in their sin. Additionally, such an attitude may make it more difficult for another to bring them back. We must be meek and humble in our approach. A parallel passage to this is II Timothy 2:24-26. Here we see five qualities of a soul winner/restorer:

*Must not be quarrelsome* — This refers to "those who engage in a war of words, to quarrel, wrangle, and dispute."<sup>65</sup>

*Be kind to all men* — "If you're not kind, you're the wrong kind."

*Apt to teach* — We must know how to show them their error.

*Patient* — In Galatians 6:1 the tense of "restore" is continuous present, "suggesting

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<sup>65</sup> Thayer, Joseph Henry. *The New Thayers Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1981). p. 3164.

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the necessity for patience and perseverance in the process<sup>66</sup>

*With gentleness instructing them that oppose themselves* — Anyone that has chosen to live in rebellion to God's will is actually hurting themselves.

*The result* — We help them out of Satan's trap!

Restoring the erring, as with so many things in life, begins with the right attitude.

*We need a proper view of our own fallibility to restore the erring.* "Each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted." Peter made a grave error when he brashly stated that he would never deny his Lord, and we make the same mistake if we think we are somehow above ever being mired in the pit of sin (I Corinthians 10:12). The proper view of our own fallibility will take care of an arrogant, holier-than-thou attitude!

*We need a proper view of our obligation to each other to restore the erring.* Galatians 6:2 plainly states, in the context of restoration, that we are obligated to "bear one another's burdens" and that when we have done this we have "fulfilled the law of Christ." It is easy to say, "He's made his bed, let him lie in it!" We are tempted to exclaim, "Well, she got herself into this mess, let's see if she can get out of it." And it is terribly convenient to throw our hands in the air as we say, "There is nothing I can do about it."

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<sup>66</sup> Vine, W.E. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1981). p. 290.

But as God's children, and brethren one of another, we have an obligation to seek those who have strayed. The stronger have a God-given obligation to the weaker (Romans 15:1-3; Hebrews 12:12), and when we properly love our brethren, we will care far too much to stand idly by as they choose the prodigal path!

Restoration brings joy! Three times in Luke 15, one that was lost (sheep, coin, son) was found and every time there was great rejoicing. Let us commit, individually and collectively, to the great ministry of restoration. May in the Day of Judgment no one be able to say, "they didn't care enough to try to bring me back."

### **Living With Lost Loved Ones**

Try as we might, sometimes our efforts to bring back those who have strayed will prove to be unsuccessful, at least for the while. Not because we have failed, but because they have failed by their choice to leave God. And though it breaks our hearts, we must be able to maintain our own spirituality, our own sanity, and our physical family in spite of it all.

*We must find a way to cope with a living loss.*

*Pray.* Pray daily for your loved one. Pray that their heart will be softened and that they will come to their senses (Luke 15:17) and return before it is too late. Pray for yourself, that you will have the strength to cope with this difficulty. *As long as we*

Prayer is not "the least" we can do.
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*can pray, we have hope.* Prayer is not "the least we can do," as we sometimes hear; it is perhaps the greatest thing we can do for our loved ones and for ourselves in this situation.



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*Maintain an amicable relationship.* If it is possible, do your best to keep a friendly, civil, and loving relationship with your erring loved one. Refuse to let your feelings of disappointment and betrayal cause you to treat them in an unkind manner, not consistent with one who is dedicated to Jesus (Ephesians 4:15). And even though the church withdraws its collective fellowship, the physical, familial relationships still exist and must be nurtured and fulfilled.

To refuse to be in the same house with or at the same family gathering as our lost loved one will not encourage them to come back to God. It may, in fact, cause you to appear to be a spiteful person and in turn have the opposite of the desired effect. Only an amicable relationship will allow you the opportunity to remain close enough so as to be a positive influence upon them and to offer periodic encouragement to return to their first love and to "admonish him as a brother" (II Thessalonians 3:15).

*Lean on your brethren.* Thank God that we are not in this alone! We have one another (John 13:34,35; Romans 12:5,10; I Peter 3:8; I John 4:7) to strengthen us, especially in times of loss and grief. Too, we are likely not the only one in the congregation who knows what living with a lost loved one is like. There are other spouses, parents, children, and siblings living every day with the heaviness of heart that comes only from coping with a living loss.

### **Supporting Those Living With Lost Loved Ones**

In every congregation there are erring members and that usually means there are yet faithful members trying to cope with a living loss. How can we help and support them?

*Respect their privacy.* They are probably embarrassed about the behavior and choices of their wayward relative and may not want to discuss it much, especially in the days and weeks immediately following the departure. Respect those feelings. Additionally, it would be a violation of not only their privacy, but also of scripture to be involved in idle talk and gossip about the waywardness of their erring loved one. A good rule of thumb is to not say anything to someone about the erring that you would not say in the presence of their faithful loved ones.

*Understand their emotions.* As with any loss, emotions are often just under the surface for those grieving. Certain songs can stir up deep feelings, so be sympathetic when they hurriedly leave the assembly in tears. Feelings of depression, embarrassment, and guilt can plague the person suffering this great loss and as a result they may appear to be unsociable or otherwise not themselves. Give them time and space, and try to understand their emotions.

*Lend your shoulder and ear.* Be there to support them whenever they choose to talk about their loss and grief. Though we all grieve in different ways, most people will eventually want to open up and talk about it. Be there to listen. Regardless of how strong or stoic one appears to be, there will probably be a time for an emotional breakdown. As brethren, it is both our privilege and responsibility to be there during this need for support.

*Volunteer to go to the erring.* While the close ties of a blood relationship offer many advantages, sometimes the relative is *too close* to be able to reach the erring loved one.

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Perhaps they need someone with some distance and perspective to reach out to their loved one. Ask if you can be that person. One suggestion: gather all the information you can before going to this person.

Sometimes a little knowledge regarding extenuating circumstances, what to say, what *not* to say, etc. can be very helpful and can go a long way in making the right impression. And even if it is decided that now is not the time for you to go to them on behalf of the Lord and their loved ones, the gesture will still have been greatly appreciated.

### **Conclusion**

To our sadness, it is inevitable that some of God's children are going to fall away. And sometimes those who fall away hold a special place in our hearts and lives because we are related by blood. When this happens grief strikes our lives, often in a more devastating way than if they had lost their physical life.

Yet all is not lost. As long as they are capable of coming back to their first love, we continue to pray for them and encourage them in every way to return home while they still have time and opportunity. And in the intervening time, through the strength that God provides, there is a way to cope with this loss and to not lose hope.

## **Chapter 16**

### **Coping And Living With Chronic Illness**

**Greg R. Elliott**

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Brother Elliott was born in Paragould, Arkansas. He is married to Carolyn, and they have two children. Laura is a freshman at Freed-Hardeman, and Robert is a senior in high school.

Brother Elliott is a Pediatric Pulmonologist (specialist in children's lung diseases). He received a BS in Science from Harding University. He received an MD from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. He did a residency in Pediatrics at UAMS and Arkansas Children's Hospital and a fellowship in Pediatric Infectious Diseases at the University of Minnesota. He did further training in Pediatric Pulmonology at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. He currently is the Edwin Lawrence Kendig, Jr. Professor of Pediatric Pulmonary Medicine at Virginia Commonwealth University Heath System and head of the Pulmonary Division.

Brother Elliott has preached when the opportunity has arisen for thirty-five years. He is the deacon in charge of education and worship at the Cold Harbor Road congregation in Mechanicsville, Virginia, where he also teaches an adult class.

Brother Elliott's hobbies include coin and stamp collecting and cooking. He enjoys travel, fishing, and golf.

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## Chapter 16: Coping And Living With Chronic Illness

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How do you cope with a chronic illness? How do you deal with others who have to cope with chronic illness?

As we consider this subject, we should consider what the Bible has to say about chronic illness. Let us also consider how the Bible teaches us to cope with any adversity. How an individual copes is very much related to their faith, personality, and experience. Many in this group have had to cope with chronic illness. You likely have had someone in your family with a chronic illness, or perhaps, a good friend, brother or sister in Christ, or a neighbor.

My premise is going to be that you live with chronic illness much the same way that you live without one. Having practiced medicine for over twenty-five years, my perspective may be somewhat different from yours. Let me give you my background.

I started out in college to be a preacher, majoring in Bible and speech. One of the things that concerned me a lot was the difficulty I noticed in preachers' discussing science particularly as it relates to the origin of man and evolution. The preachers knew the truth, but were not always prepared to discuss the error in this so-called science. Therefore, I began to study science. As time went on, I thought of being a medical missionary. Well the story goes on, but here I am an academic medical doctor having been on faculty at two university medical centers. I have continued to preach intermittently and teach in the local congregation, but my life has followed a different path than initially planned. To make a long story short, I have spent the last twenty-five years caring for chronically ill children and young adults.

The major burden of patients I care for have a life-long, life-shortening, and life-threatening disorder, cystic fibrosis. How can one deal with this, as a Christian or a doctor? How can anyone cope with such a situation? I also deal with many other life-shortening chronic respiratory illnesses. I have many patients who require life-support (mechanical ventilators) at home for many years. Although the majority of my patients are children, we take care of them throughout their lifespan. Many are in the third or fourth decade of life.

With cystic fibrosis, a genetic disorder which affects approximately 1 in 2,500 Caucasian newborns from European descent, life's stresses are particularly great. From the first days of life until death, numerous therapies and medications are necessary to maintain life. In the 50s, most of these patients died before school age, in the 60s, they lived into school age, and in the 70s, they lived to be teenagers. When I first became involved with these patients in the late 70s, they did not live beyond 19 years of age. Now many live into their 30s and 40s. How would you as a parent or patient deal with the knowledge when you are a teenager that you have little hope of living beyond 30-35 years of age? Well—I think that is the key—little hope, but hope nonetheless. As a doctor caring for these patients, the only thing that really keeps me going is hope. I could not do what I do every day, day after day, without hope—hope that a cure will be found, hope that if not a cure, improved quality of life. However, the hope that we have in Christ far exceeds the hope for a cure. The hope we have in Christ is the hope of eternal life. You see, there is another chronic illness/condition: spiritual illness.

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Fortunately, this condition has a cure. The etiology of the disorder is sin; the cure is the blood of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Both spiritual illness and physical illness began on the same fateful day. In Genesis 2:17, we read, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Look at Genesis 3:16, "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception..."

Both spiritual illness and physical illness began on the same fateful day.
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Today we will focus on physical illness, but the way to cope is the same as how we cope with spiritual illness.

As a pediatrician, I have an advantage as the young children are innocent. "But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14). However, the improvement in our practice of medicine has led to many children with chronic illness living into adulthood as mentioned previously. These patients are experiencing all the same things that all kids and young adults do and, often times, much more. Many are mature beyond their years and others the opposite. How would you handle a disease that you knew would shorten your life by forty years!

When we look at the scriptures, we find all types of illness and chronic conditions. We find "...wounding ...wounded ...hurt ...palsy ...fever ...leprosy ...a bloody flux ...lame ...blind from birth ... dumb ...deaf ...scabbed ...scurvy

...broken ...maimed ...halt ...sores ...boils ...bowels with an incurable disease ...infirmity for thirty and eight years ...lame ...torn ...divers diseases..." and many other disorders and diseases.

### **Chronic Illness/Conditions**

There are a variety of chronic conditions from a variety of sources. They can be genetic, congenital, accidental, self-induced, and acquired. These conditions may lead to handicaps, dementia, depression, pain, or addiction. The conditions may arise by "chance," or from a certain life style. The medical approach will vary with the condition and its cause. But in the final analysis, the one living with the condition requires certain similar steps.

If you had a chronic life-shortening illness, would you have the "run for your life" attitude? Would you eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you may die? Or would you keep your life in ship shape every day and be ready to meet your Maker?

As a doctor, would you offer hope when there is no hope, offer promises that cannot be fulfilled, or offer compassion, love, and care?

### **How Some Cope With Illness**

Some cope with illness by suicide and suicide attempts, others by denial or anger, and others by a method of passive suicide—carelessness. An example might be smoking with underlying chronic lung disease or drinking with chronic liver disease.



## Chapter 16: Coping And Living With Chronic Illness

Still others cope by more healthy (spiritually and physically) means such as distraction, humor, activity, or displacement.

### **So How Should One With Chronic Illness Cope?**

#### *Take care of your body*

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? (I Corinthians 6:19).

#### *Prayer*

Pray without ceasing (I Thessalonians 5:17).

#### *Meditate on the word*

O how love I thy law! *it is* my meditation all the day. (Psalm 119:97).

#### *Worship*

God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth. (John 4:24)

#### *Share*—the truth, your love, your things.

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with *his* hands the thing which is good, that he may have to *give* to him that needeth (Ephesians 4:28).

#### *Care*

One of the most beautiful characteristics of a handicapped or sick individual is a person that does for others when they are the one that is truly in need.

### **What Did Jesus Do?**

#### *Had compassion*

Then Jesus called his disciples *unto him*, and said, I have *compassion* on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way (Matthew 15:32).

*Prayed*

And it came to pass, that, as he was *praying* in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples (Luke 11:1).

*Showed his love*

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye *love* one another; as I have loved you, that ye also *love* one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34,35).

*Healed*

And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with *compassion* toward them, and he healed their sick (Matthew 14:14).

**What Can You Offer To Those Trying To Cope With Chronic Illness? You can:**

*Comfort and support.*

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all *men* (I Thessalonians 5:14).

*Care/Help/Assist.* Look at the Samaritan.

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And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave *them* to the host, and said unto him, Take *care* of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee (Luke 10:35).

*Visit.* We can look after, go to see, look upon with a view to help or benefit, look out for others.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me... Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me (Matthew 25:34-36,45).

*Love*

Owe no man any thing, but to *love one another*: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law (Romans 13:8).

*Serve*

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love *serve* one another (Galatians 5:13).

**Furthermore, you can:**

*Be there*

*Listen*

*Sit quietly*

*Look for the positive*

**More importantly, you can:**

*Pray together*

*Read God's word together*

**You can even encourage them to:**

*Pray for someone else*

*Help another person.*

**Remember at least two things:**

First, be patient and kind. One of the things I do, as mentioned earlier, is care for chronically ill people as opposed to acutely ill. The chronically ill often never fully recover. They may have good and bad days, but are never whole. It is easy to forget they have major, often life-shortening, handicaps especially when we see them "appear" to function

They may have good and bad days, but are never whole.
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so well. Let me assure you that many with life-threatening diseases walk and talk among us with often only subtle evidence of their illness. They may even be the ones we see visiting the sick and helping those in need. These individuals do not need your pity, but they do need your prayers and kindness.

Second, they too have the same commandments as those of us who have fewer infirmities. Therefore, they too should serve to the best of their ability. In doing so, they, like us, will reap bountifully.

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And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:9,10).

Persons living with chronic illness may face many problems, such as fear, loneliness, loss of function, loss of purpose, pain, malnutrition, financial hardship, and loss of privacy.

In the final analysis, in dealing with an individual who has a chronic illness, you can offer them the greatest gifts of all—faith, hope, and love in Christ.

### How Not To Cope? How To Cope?

The only way any of us can really cope is with hope! But hope for what? Let us look at the word of God.

The only way any of us can really cope is with hope!

Saul fell on his sword along with his armourbearer in I Samuel 31—they did such when they thought that their battle against the Philistines was hopeless.

Ahithophel, the king's (Absalom) counselor whose advice had been against David, hung himself when he saw that his counsel was not taken in II Samuel 17.

In I Kings 16:18, we find that Zimri had slain the king of Judah and taken over, and the Israelites came to besiege him. He enters the king's house, set it afire, and died.

In Matthew 27:5, after Judas came to himself and realized he had betrayed the innocent blood, he threw down the thirty pieces of silver in the temple and went and hanged himself.

This is the *final* outcome of those that have no hope. However, we can look forward because there is hope.

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil (Hebrews 6:19).

An eternal hope is found only in Christ Jesus. Christianity is a religion of hope. Hope has elements of desire and expectation.

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth why doth he hope for it? (Romans 8:24).

We hope in view of eternal life.

In hope of eternal life which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began (Titus 1:2).

That being justified by his grace, we should be heirs of the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:7).

We hope in view of the resurrection. Paul states in II Corinthians 15:17 that

...if Christ be not raised your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.

Note also I Corinthians 15:12-20, 55-58.

We hope with a view to avoid destruction.

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power... (I Thessalonians 1:7-9).

We can expect hope because God has promised it.

And this is the promise he hath promised us, even eternal life (I John 2:25).

Christ is our hope.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope (II Timothy 1:1).

We can know that Christ has an eternal interest in us.

According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 3:11).

He has given us the promise of eternal life.

And this is life eternal that they might know thee the only true God and Christ whom thou hast sent (John 17:3).

The source of eternal life is Jesus Christ, given by Christ to His followers.

And thou hast given him power over all flesh that he should give eternal life (John 17:2).

He has prepared a place for us.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my fathers house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am you may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know (John 14:1-4).

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son (Revelation 21:4-7).

## **Encouragement Of Hope**



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Buildings burn, the earth can burn, "heaven and earth will pass away but God's word will not pass away" (Luke 21:33) Hope is present in a mortal life, but will not be needed in heaven.

### **We Desire A Better Home**

Blessed *are* they that do his commandments,  
that they may have right to the tree of life,  
and may enter in through the gates into the  
city (Revelation 22:14).

## Chapter 17

### Dealing With Depression

Ron Williams

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Brother Williams was born in Amory, Mississippi. He is married to Bonnie, and they have two sons, Jon who is twenty, and Stephen who is fifteen. They currently live in Huntsville, Alabama.

Brother Williams has AA and BA degrees from Freed-Hardeman University and an MS in Counseling from Southern Christian University. He currently preaches for the Lincoln congregation in Huntsville. He has also preached in Alabama and Tennessee. He is chaplain for the Alabama State Trooper Office. He is the co-author with his twin brother, Don, of *Walking With Those Who Weep: A Guide To Grief Support*. He has taught grief support classes in congregations, communities, funeral homes, and hospitals.

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*"I don't want to see anybody-what's the point?"*

*"No one really wants to see me anyway, and why should they?"*

*"I am so miserable. Sometimes I just want to sit and cry."*

Such statements as these are examples of what many of us would say are reflections of "blue Mondays" or "bad days at work." While it is likely that most of us feel depressed at some time in our lives, some individuals are more vulnerable to depression than others. Symptoms vary, but sufferers often describe depression as a feeling of lethargy, almost like having the flu. It is often likened to being

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"stuck in a dark tunnel," "in a black pit," or "seeing the world through dark glasses." Mr. Webster defines the term as "a psychoneurotic or psychotic disorder marked by sadness, inactivity, difficulty in thinking and concentration, and feelings of rejection."<sup>67</sup>

In a recent article from the National Institute of Mental Health entitled "Men and Depression," the article suggests, "depression is a serious medical condition that affects the body, mood, and thoughts. It affects the way one eats and sleeps, one's self-concept, and the way one thinks about things. A depressive disorder is not the same as a passing blue mood. It is not a sign of personal weakness or a condition that can be willed or wished away. People with a depressive illness cannot merely "pull themselves together" and get better. Without treatment, symptoms can last for weeks, months, or years. Appropriate treatment, however, often involving medication and/or short-term psychotherapy, can help most people who suffer from depression."<sup>68</sup>

Depression can strike anyone regardless of age, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, or gender; however, large-scale research studies have found that depression is about twice as common in women as in men. In the United States, researchers estimate that in any given one-year period, depressive illnesses affect twelve percent of women (more than twelve million women) and nearly seven percent of men (more than six million men). The National Institute of Mental Health reports that clinical depression

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<sup>67</sup> *Webster's Dictionary*, (G & C Merriam Co., Philippines, 1975). p. 305

<sup>68</sup> National Institute for Mental Health, Online, April 2003.

affects over nineteen million adult Americans each year. This represents one out of every ten Americans.

At some point in their lifetime approximately twenty to twenty-five percent of Americans will have a diagnosable depressive disorder. Each year the United States spends \$43.7 billion dollars on direct and related costs of clinical depression. Some experts believe if the cost of untreated depression, including factors such as absenteeism and lack of productivity in the work place, were factored in, the cost of clinical depression would be as high as the cost of heart disease and AIDS. Depressive disorders are the leading cause of disability in the world today.<sup>69</sup> These statistics indicate the probability that we and/or someone very close to us will suffer from depression at some point during our lifetime. The statistics also emphasize the importance of everyone learning more about depression and ways to best respond to individuals and families who suffer from the condition.<sup>70</sup>

Depression is a word loosely used today in conversations in our society. For example, we use the same word to describe a minor disappointment ("I'm depressed that they did not have my favorite movie to rent.") as we use to describe someone so severely depressed that they are contemplating suicide. All of us experience "normal" depression at times (sadness, the blues, "down in the dumps") and can relate to the emotions and moods associated with it.

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid*

<sup>70</sup> Beene, Lisa M. "Out of the Valley"—Understanding and Responding to Depression. 2003 Freed-Hardeman University Bible Lectureship, February 2003.

It is important that we understand the distinction between "normal" depression and "clinical" depression. Understanding this distinction prevents us from making comments such as, "Everyone feels like that sometimes. You just need to snap out of it." While the person making such a comment may have had the best of intentions, the comment reflects assumptions that are not accurate about clinical depression. In general, clinical depression is distinguished from "normal" depression by assessing the criteria of severity, duration, and degree of impairment in the individual's functioning.<sup>71</sup>

Depression is often caused by a combination of factors. There might be a number of predisposing factors and then several "trigger" factors. The predisposing, or vulnerability, factors might include:

*Biological Factors* – One may have a chemical vulnerability caused by low amounts of the brain chemicals serotonin and noradrenalin.

*Inability to Express Feelings* – One may be prone to depression if they are unable to communicate openly and confidently their thoughts and feelings, especially anger and frustration. Many people believe from experience that depression is anger turned inward.

*Low Self-Esteem* – If, as a child, one did not internalize a good feeling about self from their parents, one may feel

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<sup>71</sup> *ibid*

unhappy about who they are and doubt their own self-worth.

*Beliefs and Attitudes* – Certain ways of thinking can possibly contribute to depression. For example, if a person has a perfectionist personality and feels that they have to get everything just right to avoid failure, or if they constantly seek approval and believe "I must work extra hard to prove my worth," then they may be prone to depression.

*Social Modeling* – If a role model, such as a parent, was often depressed during a person's childhood, one may find that as an adult they have to follow the same pattern.

### Depression Checklist

- ☐ A persistent, sad, anxious or "empty" mood
- ☐ Sleeping too little or sleeping too much
- ☐ Reduced appetite and weight loss, or increased appetite and weight gain
- ☐ Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- ☐ Restlessness or irritability
- ☐ Persistent physical symptoms that don't respond to treatment (such as headaches, chronic pain, or constipation and other digestive disorders)
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- ☐ Fatigue or loss of energy
- ☐ Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless
- ☐ Thoughts of death or suicide

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See your doctor or a qualified mental health professional if you experience four or more of these symptoms for longer than two weeks or if the symptoms are severe enough to interfere with your daily routine.<sup>72</sup>

Depression is a real medical illness that cannot just be wiped away by trite comments, thoughtful prayers, or even by one's own willpower. In our lecture to be delivered on Saturday, November 1, 2003, attention will be given to Bible scriptures that discuss the matter of depression. Practical matters of help will also be mentioned as we deal with an illness that inflicts tremendous pain, worry, and anxiety on every Christian that deals with clinical depression.

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<sup>72</sup> Narsad Research, "*Conquering Depression*." November 1996 publication.

## **Chapter 18**

### **Dealing With Distrust**

**Katrinka "Sunny" Workman**

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Sister Workman is married to Gary Workman, and they have four children, six grandchildren, and one great grandchild. They currently live in Mesquite, Texas.

Sister Workman is an experienced Bible teacher and writer. She frequently speaks for ladies' day programs and women's lectureship lessons. She and her husband are former missionaries in Beirut, Lebanon and the Middle East. Currently they are engaged in full-time mission work in Ukraine and Russia.

Sister Workman is also a professional musician; she teaches piano, violin, and voice lessons.

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The kitten tightly clutched the high branch. Long after the dog had given up and gone on its way, the kitten hung onto her distrust and fear. She perceived it as her only safe choice. No amount of coaxing could convince her that she could trust those below who waited with food and a warm blanket. The kitten had lost her sense of trust. Stranded "up a tree," she was crippled with distrust and fear. The growling dog still hounded her mind, if not her trembling body.

Sometimes you and I resemble that little kitten. Wounded and scared, savagely chased from our familiar comfort zone, we climb into our high tree and huddle there in a miserable bundle of insecurity and fear. We have been

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hurt, betrayed, used, and/or terribly disappointed. Promises made have been broken. Our window of security has been shattered by a person we trusted. Perhaps it was done by someone close to us whose role it was to protect and shape our lives for the better. Instead, they betrayed our trust, misled us, and damaged us physically and/or spiritually.

Circumstances may vary, but the painful condition is the same. Whether bad things happened to us by evil design or by foolish ignorance, the results to our fragile psyche leave scars. Distrust, suspicion, and cynicism can take root in the soul and make it difficult for us to again be a trusting and open person. Our peace and innocence are gone. Unless something changes, we will be crippled for life.

The sad thing is that a person who has been "chased up a tree" often transfers their lack of trust far beyond those who

The sad thing is that a person who has been "chased up a tree" often transfers their lack of trust...

caused it in the first place. The kitten not only fears the dog that chased her, but also those who are trying to help her. Tragically,

because *humanity* has caused harm to us, our trust in God is sometimes eroded, as well. Someone in this position is figuratively "up a tree" spiritually. Confidence has been lost, not only in this world, but also in heaven itself. In this tragic circumstance, the question is: "What can a person do to regain trust, confidence, and firm footing in life again?"

### **"Come Down!"**

One day in the city of Jericho, Jesus came across a little man named Zaccheus who was literally "up a tree."

Looking up at him, Jesus commanded Zaccheus to "make haste and *come down*, for today I must stay at your house" (Luke 19:5, NKJV). What great advice this is for us when we are "up a tree" spiritually. Before anything can be done to comfort and feed the kitten, it must first *come down* out of the tree. We can begin to deal with despair in our lives when we "*come down*." Like Zaccheus, we need to bring Jesus to the place in our hearts where we live. Sometimes

We can begin to deal with despair in our lives when we "*come down*."

it only takes some reassurance and coaxing to restore our ability to move in the right direction. But in this often brutal world, where Satan

"walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour" and chases us up to the highest branch of distrust and fear, our only true salvation is the fireman, Jesus Christ (I Peter 5:8).

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:16,17).

When my pain is all on the inside with no visible bandages to betray me, I may think that no one can see that it is there, inside, eating my heart out. But there is one who sees. He watches me very carefully. My panic, my loneliness, my hurt—He sees them clearly. Jesus came down from heaven to rescue me, to bring me to His safety, love, and peace. Sometimes it is hard for me to see Him when I am

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frantically hanging on for dear life and looking at the distance between where I am and where I want to be. But He is always there, stretching out His powerful, loving hand and pleading, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

When my eyes and my heart search to see my rescuer, He can easily be seen. He describes Himself in His word so that I can be *certain* that I will see Him. When I start watching Him back, my rescue has already begun. Like a small child calling out for help, "in the day of my trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me" (Psalm 86:7). As plainly stated in Psalm 119 (NAS), the word of God is my *first line of defense*, my first lifeline to peace and safety. "My soul weeps because of grief; strengthen me according to Thy word" (v. 28). "Remember the word to Thy servant, in which Thou hast made me hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, that Thy word has revived me" (vv. 49,50). "I entreated Thy favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to Thy word" (v. 58). "I am exceedingly afflicted; revive me, O Lord, according to Thy word" (v. 107). "Sustain me according to Thy word, that I may live; and do not let me be ashamed of my hope" (v. 116).

Stranded and tired, the bedraggled kitten watches the kind fireman climbing up toward her. He gently stretches out his hand and grasps her quivering little body. With strength and care, he pulls her away from the branch and into the refuge of his strong arm. Still terrified, she tries to hide her head under his arm as he makes his way down the tree, holding her with strength, yet tenderness, all the way to safety.

Yes, the Lord is watching me and coming to answer my calls for help. When I look at Him, tentatively at first and then more boldly, I become aware of my urgent need for His help and His healing. After the terrors of my plight, how thrilling it is to gaze into the eyes of one who can rescue and save! The cry of my soul reaches His heart, "Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust" (Psalm 16:1)!

### **"Come Forth!"**

Once we are in the arms of Jesus and down from our proverbial tree, Jesus our rescuer can provide the care and attention we require to get our lives back on track. We are far too weak and terrorized to take control of our own destiny at this point. We still need a lot of help and reassurance before we can take on Satan again.

Years ago, my husband and I were serving the Lord as missionaries in Beirut, Lebanon. One of the colorful characters that we met there was my husband's barber. When my husband, Gary, would try to make some suggestion or request about how his hair should be cut, this barber would announce in no uncertain terms, "I know what to do. I am the doctor of your hair!" His claims turned out to be true. The haircuts he gave were outstanding. My husband learned to relax and trust his barber.

What wonderful things can be said of Jesus our Lord! He is not only our Savior sent from the Father who rescues us from our spiritual woes; He is also "the chief doctor of our souls." Yes, Jesus is our great physician. He has the know-

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how and the power to fix us when we are broken—physically, mentally, and spiritually. In Matthew 9, we read that the Pharisees were criticizing Jesus because He dared to cross their self-righteous, social traditions and eat with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus answered them by saying, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick...For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Matthew 9:12,13).

According to the four gospel accounts, during His earthly ministry Jesus often healed those who had *physical maladies*. He also healed those who were *sin-sick*. Our great physician is clearly seen in action on one particular occasion when a paralytic man was lowered down through the rooftop in order to reach Jesus. The first thing the Lord said to Him was, "Son, your sins are forgiven you" (Mark 2:5). This statement caused a furor of indignation among the scribes who were present. Jesus knew their hearts and asked the revealing question, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house" (vv. 9,10).

The power of Jesus not only healed the sick while here on the earth, He raised the dead. His dear friend who lived in Bethany died. Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, were among the closest people on earth to our Lord. He often stayed in their home and received wonderful hospitality there. That is why it was such a disappointment to Martha when Jesus did not drop everything and come quickly at the first news that Lazarus

was sick. When Jesus did come, Lazarus had already been in the tomb for three days. Approaching the tomb, Jesus called out:

"Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:43,44).

Our lives are often bound up in grave clothes that prevent us from true living. Jesus takes our helpless condition and relieves it. Yes, Jesus is our personal great physician, and "you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins..." (Ephesians 2:1). His call brings us forth from despair and distrust, and His followers here on this earth also render aid when we are all bound up and blinded by our own condition. In Ephesians 5:14-16 we are admonished:

Our lives are often bound up in grave clothes that prevent us from true living.
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Therefore, He says: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

The wound of betrayal is deep and ugly. When a person is "stabbed in the back," it is a painful, serious injury. Someone dear, someone we trusted, someone we confided in—how could this one backstab us in such a calloused

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way? Our dear friend or loved one has taken up the knife and assaulted our very heart. Often such a one is a trusted friend, a beloved relative, or a Christian sister or brother. Oh, the pain! We usually do not even see it coming. We trust right up until the moment when we are struck.

On the night that Jesus was betrayed by one of His own close and chosen apostles, He was seated around a table sharing the Passover meal with them. Then, out of the blue, Jesus made the startling statement, "But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with me on the table. And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed" (Luke 22:21,22). Because Jesus knew the hearts of those around Him, He was aware of the exact moment that "Satan entered Judas" (v. 3). How terribly that must have hurt the heart of our Lord! Yes, Jesus experienced the worst kind of betrayal and had to deal with it just as you and I must today. There was the betrayal, the joke of a trial, the cruel taunting of the Roman soldiers, the cries of His own people calling out, "Crucify him! Crucify Him!" What was His response? From the cross where He agonized and died, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Bound up in distrust, suspicion, cynicism and pain, our own heart and soul become mummified and out of circulation. Figuratively, if not literally, we have become "dead to the

How can the "one betrayed" again become "the one who trusts"?

world" in the worst sense of the phrase. How can the "one betrayed" again become "the one who trusts"? Is it possible to

overcome such a wound? Being unbound requires cooperation and willingness on our part. Lazarus did not battle those who unwound him and took away his grave clothes. We can be sure that he welcomed their help and cooperated to the utmost. Just as Lazarus *came forth* at the voice of Jesus, you and I need to *come forth* and listen to the voice of our great physician as well. In the words of Jesus on the cross, we have a living example of the *only* prescription that really works to heal our deep wound of distrust—*forgive and forget*.

Our *conscious decision* to lance the boil of pain in our hearts and let it flow out with our tears, once and for all, is the first step of forgiving and forgetting. We have to face the stench of the grave clothes we are wearing with honest perception. Only until we can fully realize the horrible after-effects that have resulted from the wound we suffered can we be motivated to unwind ourselves from these binding attitudes which are crippling life. Yes, Jesus calls us to "*Come forth!*" Take the prescription: forgive our attacker and forget about it. Weep for a time: then let it go. Be free and whole again. After all, the great physician can heal all wounds.

### **"Come Home!"**

The kitten still shivers. Now she has come down out of the tree. She has been stroked and checked out for scratches and cuts. But she is still far from her home. Nothing can be truly right again for her until she finds her way *home*. How fondly she remembers her warm hearth, her doting human, and that delicious cat food. But, where is home?



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The well-loved parable of the prodigal son is found in Luke 15. The youngest son foolishly asks for his inheritance in advance, then leaves his old father, his brother, and his home to pursue worldly pleasures. For a while everything about this new dissipated life seems rewarding. He has friends, fun, and food for the taking. Home seems far away and insignificant, all but forgotten in his current environment. That is, *until* the money finally runs out. Then his picture changes radically. The sun had always been shining. Now the cold rains of reality drench him to the skin. Where are the fun friends now? And, a more important question, where is the food? The only food available for him at this low point in his life is husks that are left after a herd of pigs has finished eating. And what about spiritual nourishment? The "wages of sin" do not buy food for the soul (cf. Romans 3:23).

With "poetic license" let us imagine the scene back at home where the old father *waits*. Day after day, month after month, his eyes anxiously scan the horizon in hope. His heart is heavy and tears often well up in his eyes as he searches for the sight he so longs to see—his son returning again. One day as he looks out into the distance a speck appears on the horizon. Straining his eyes, the old father rises from his chair and limps to the door. The speck has definitely become a person. Can it be? Stumbling ahead, the old man pushes his arthritic legs to the limit. As quickly as he can move, he rushes forward. His eyes shine with joy and tears. Yes! It *is* his son! His son is *coming home!*

In the parable, the old father never asks the accusing question, "Why did you do it?" No recriminations are

rendered: "What a mess you made of your life!" "You should have known better!" "Just think of all that money you wasted!" Instead, tears of joy fall like rain. The dear old face is graced with a huge smile of relief and welcome. Mercy is the father's response to repentance and return. His first thought is about delicious, nutritious food! The fatted calf is ordered. A "welcome home" party commences! The ache in the father's heart, "Come home, my child!" has at last been satisfied. His boy is home again!

Now, and *only* now, the healing of the son begins. Thinking of home did not accomplish it. Resolving to leave behind the pigpen was a step forward, but not enough. Stepping onto the road that led toward home brought him closer, yet was not enough. Seeing his father coming toward him in the distance was an uncertain moment because he did not know what the reaction to his return would be. When the moment came that he felt his father's arms around him, heard the welcome words, and felt the salty tears his father shed, *then* he began to heal. Love lifted him off of his knees and made him stand again.

When you and I are wounded and distrustful—alone in the world—our soul is in a similar condition to that of the prodigal son. After we allow the great physician to unwrap us from our rags of rage, hate, hurt, depression, resentment, etc., that have paralyzed our life, it is time to "come home." How do we do that?

First, we begin to "head for home" by consciously refocusing our thoughts and emotions on our heavenly Father and our heavenly home:

For You are my hope, O Lord God;

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You are my trust from my youth.  
By You I have been upheld from birth;  
You are He who took me out of my mother's  
womb.  
My praise shall be continually of You  
(Psalm 71:5,6).

Satan the subtle serpent is always right there on the job. When he sees us heading back toward the heavenly Father, Satan redoubles his efforts to keep us from making it back home. Our focus on God must be strong. No delay or detour can be allowed to distract us on our way home to Him. Our heavenly Father is waiting and watching for us. We must not disappoint Him any longer.

One way that Satan tries to draw us away from our trust in God is by perverting the way we view the *character* of our heavenly Father. When we look at *authority figures* in our lives—dads, teachers, preachers and elders, political leaders—we may assume that God is like them. Therefore, when we witness immoral, unethical attitudes and practices in our authority figures, we are tempted to turn away from God as well. In such a case, we have erroneously projected a distorted and *flawed human* character onto God's *flawless, perfect character*. In Eden, the serpent accomplished this very thing by distorting Eve's perception of God's true purpose in giving one restriction in a perfect paradise. Beware! We must stand guard against the same distortion blinding our perception of God.

When we come to the realization that God would never do anything to destroy or harm our souls, and that whatever He does or does not do in our life *is in our best interest*,

then we will freely hurry "home" to Him. The promise of Jesus becomes our personal invitation: "Come to me...and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). My free-will decision to totally commit myself to the love of God and Christ makes all the difference. I must focus my thoughts on His love, His mercy, and His grace so that I can sincerely pray at every turn in the road. "I trust You even though I don't understand." Like Job, we will trust Him completely, even when the circumstances may seem to indicate that He has forgotten us or does not care about our predicament.

We are given the wonderful assurance that "The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit" (Psalm 34:18). Our heavenly Father never forgets about his child: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Isaiah 49:15,16). Our love for God and our trust in Him gives you and I the ability to "get a grip" on life. No storm can ever be so strong that it moves us away from Him unless we deliberately let go of His hand. We can sing the old song with new understanding:

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

### **Practical Suggestions**

All of us have experienced times of distrust in our lives, to one degree or another. If you are one who continues to be *crippled* by a spirit of distrust because of something or someone in your past, perhaps these few practical

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suggestions may help you overcome it. Our goal is to apply the prescription that Jesus demonstrated "to forgive and forget." Then, and only then, can you move on and enjoy life to the fullest.

First, place your hand in the Lord's hand by praying about your sense of insecurity and resentment. As you kneel, in body and in spirit, bring to mind the faces of those who have wronged you. Ask the Lord to help you release these people—one by one—from blame for what they have done to you. Forgive each one personally—name by name.

Second, mentally erase the name of the offender from your mental slate with a *permanent* eraser. Ask God's help in doing this. We must try to avoid at all costs being the person who states, "I'll forgive, but I *won't* forget!" In order to get past this large obstacle that has fallen onto our path of life, it needs to be permanently demolished, never to appear again. As God forgives us and shows mercy, we are obligated to forgive others of their trespasses toward us (Matthew 6:12,14). Without this attitude of mercy and forgiveness, you and I cannot receive forgiveness from our Father for our own offenses (v. 15), which are many.

Third, sincerely pray for those individuals who have hurt you. Pray that God will help them to see the damage they have caused in the lives of others and repent of it. Pray that they come to this awareness before death takes them and it is too late. It is extremely important to pray for our *enemies* as well as for our friends. Jesus emphasized this point in Matthew 5:43-48. The complete (perfect) love that is required of us is one that loves both friend and foe alike.

Fourth, after you pray, write down the names of those you mentioned. Make a note of the date on which you made the decision to forgive them. When bad feelings and distrust pop up in your mind at a later time, go back to your journal and remind yourself of your decision to forgive and forget. Be reminded that you have already asked God for help in this matter and that His grace is stronger than your weakness. Be bold and fight the good fight of faith and trust. Do not roll over and play dead to Satan. Writing it down engraves it on your heart.

Fifth, when you come to the point that you are adequately enabled by faith and love, go to those who hurt you, if at all possible. This is difficult and sometimes not feasible. However, in most cases this will help to finally close the wound for you. Remember that you are going to the person to reconcile for *their benefit*, as well as your own. Again, Jesus taught on this very subject in the sermon on the mount. In Matthew 5:21-25, we read that being angry with our brother or realizing that our brother is angry with us calls for *reconciliation*. If we go in a spirit of humility and peace, the outcome is a victory for us whether or not that person reacts favorably. At least we have given it "our best shot" and done what the Lord instructed in the effort to correct it in His eyes.

### **The End Of The Story**

The little kitten is still wishing for home. She does not know which way to turn. She is lost. Notices are posted around the neighborhood, announcements are written up in the newspaper, but no one comes forward to claim the little kitten. I am happy to tell you that the story has a *happy* ending. The caring fireman who climbed up into the tree

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and brought the kitten down finally *adopts* her and takes her home to live with him. His little boy and girl are so happy! They give her a loving welcome and help take care of her. How happy she is now, at home with the kind fireman and his family!

Jesus Christ, our wonderful Savior, has rescued and strengthened us. When we were baptized into His body, we were adopted and became His child. Those who are faithful Christians can "be at home" with Him forever! We are part of a loving church family here on this earth. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are here to encourage us to stay close to Jesus all along life's way. And as a child of God, we have the hope that when the minutes of our life run out and we fly away, Jesus' promise to you and me will become our new reality:

In My Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also (John 14:2).

The Christian's actual home is heaven, but at this point of our lives, we are "sojourners and pilgrims" here on earth (cf. I Peter 2:11). But as we travel through this world, we have been blessed with the gift of the Bible to light our path. The beauty of God's creation witnesses to us every day and every night. We have the gifts of sight, sound, and sensory perception. Our minds can reason, plan, and evaluate our situation so that we are able to do good and bring spiritual light to those yet in spiritual darkness. Yes, here on this earth there are flaws in even the best people we

know, and we ourselves are far from perfect. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). However, there is one who lived a sinless life here on this earth – Jesus. He will never let us down or stab us in the back, and we can follow Him all the way home to heaven.

There are many songs that praise and proclaim His name. One line is a favorite of mine: "*Jesus, what a beautiful name!*" And, we Christians are all little lost children who have been rescued, healed and taken home in the arms of Jesus. Fanny Crosby penned the words to a wonderful poem that William Duane set to music back in 1870. We sing the song, "Safe In the Arms of Jesus." The words are simple but true. They warm the lonely, hurting heart of the child of God. The opening lines of the poem have given countless people comfort:

Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe on His gentle breast,  
There by His love o'ershaded, sweetly my soul shall  
rest.

Who could be more vital to our happiness? The one most important relationship, necessary security, and joy in this life is a *close relationship* with our Father through His Son and our Savior, *Jesus*. In gratitude and praise for the love and sacrifice that presented our opportunity to be in this priceless relationship, you and I should exclaim, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised" (Psalm 48:1)!

I will praise You, O Lord, with my whole heart;  
I will tell of all Your marvelous works...  
The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed,  
A refuge in times of trouble.



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And those who know Your name will put their trust  
in You;  
For You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek  
You (Psalm 9:1,9,10)

## **Chapter 19**

### **Dealing With Death And Terminal Illness**

**Don Williams**

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Brother Williams was born in Amory, Mississippi. He is married to Leisa, and they have two children, Matt who is a senior at Freed-Hardeman University and Ben who is a freshman at Freed-Hardeman University. They currently live in Killen, Alabama.

Brother Williams has a BA from Freed-Hardeman University and an MAR from Harding Graduate School of Religion. He also has a Thanatology degree from the University of Alabama. He currently preaches for the North Carolina congregation in Killen, Alabama. He has preached for twenty-five years in Missouri, Alabama, and Tennessee. He is a hospice chaplain, has taught grief classes and is chaplain for the Lauderdale County Sheriff's Department.

Brother Williams' special interests include playing tennis and basketball.

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As I was preparing for this manuscript, I ministered to a young man in our congregation whose father had been in the hospital for almost four months. An accident on Christmas day had caused his father to have to enter the hospital.

I just left the son, his mother, and his sisters. The doctors have told them they have done all they know to do and that he probably has less than twenty-four hours to live.

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Friends and family stop by to visit with the family. One lady tells the story of the death of her husband, speaking in graphic details about his final minutes and what happened. Although well-intended, her "story" brings no help to the family at this time, and I was glad when she finally left. I wonder what families must think when their minister finally leaves them after a visit.

As ministers, we seek to see the good in any situation. Some are uncomfortable at hospitals and nursing homes and seek to leave them as soon as possible. Sometimes, we think we are doing good by trying to cheer up the family, even making them laugh, when in fact what they need is for someone to walk with them in the approaching valley of death that is just ahead for one they love so much.

This lesson will seek to deal with death from two aspects. First, we will look at what we can do to help families and loved ones who have a terminal illness. Secondly, we will seek to give insights on what can be done after the death of that loved one.

### Dealing With Terminal Illness

A motto for Special Olympics is "Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."

"Let me win, but if I cannot win,  
let me be brave in the attempt."

"You have terminal cancer. You have \_\_\_\_\_ to live." Imagine how one must feel when they hear those words. In some cases, they may have been expecting this message. I have found that often patients are a lot more in tune with what is going on than friends (and family) think they are.

In other cases, these words are a complete shock. They thought that medical advancements could heal them, or at least postpone the inevitable for a long time. Shock, numbness, denial, and anger may have to be worked through for some length of time. Terminal illness is often made harder when some family members deny the doctor's words, and insist that "Daddy" or "whoever" will get well.

What part does the minister play in all of this? He may be asked to break the news to the patient and/or family members himself. What can he do to help this family, as they "walk through the valley"?

As Randy Becton says in his book, *Gift of Life*, "We are all terminal." God tells us in Hebrews 9:27 these words, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (KJV).

Randy Becton, who himself has suffered through two bouts of serious cancer, told of the fears he felt. He said the strongest single emotion he felt was the loneliness caused by suffering and the uncertainty of facing the unknown. What is true of him is also true of others. Ministers can be of great help by letting the patient and their family know that this journey through grief will not be traveled by them alone. A nursing friend puts it this way, "In order to be there for hurting others, we do not have to have all the answers. Neither do we need to know all the questions. Suffering others are going on a trip; what they need is a community to travel with them."

It is important that we allow the family to know of our love

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and care for them. This is often demonstrated in actions, as well as in words. This can be done by extending care for children back home, offering to stay with the sick in the hospital or nursing home, taking food to the family, or seeing to the needs of the caregiver as well as the patient.

It is also important to try to understand what the patient and family will have to go through. Fading away is the term used to suggest that the patient's physical condition has worsened and that he will not recover. Redefining is the process of adjusting to the way things used to be and the realization of how the patient is now. Once the patient has redefined his situation in his own mind, it is often easier for the family to accept the present situation.

It is also important to know that families may have many difficult choices as the patient continues to digress. Decisions about continuations of aggressive treatments, perhaps at the expense of pain and/or nausea, may have to be made. What about tube feeding, in the event the patient can no longer swallow? Will the terminally ill patient be resuscitated if they stop breathing? What about the use of respirators or other artificial means of preservation of life?

Ministers may be asked to give an opinion as to what the family should do. Listening to the family and supporting them in their decision is most important. As Lucretia Mott says, "When in doubt, listen!"

It is also important that the minister try to offer hope to the family and/or patient. This hope is not that the patient may overcome this illness, but rather that he might have some good days ahead. The hope may be found in upcoming

events to which the patient may be able to look forward. The hope may be spiritual in nature, if one is a faithful child of God. This is the greatest hope that anyone can have, and it is as an "anchor to the soul" (Hebrews 6:19) for one of God's elect.

This hope is illustrated in the words of Paul found in II Corinthians 4:8,9, "We are handicapped on all sides, but we are never frustrated; We are puzzled, but never in despair. We are persecuted, but we never have to stand it alone. We may be knocked down, but we are never knocked out!" (Phillips). For the faithful child of God, one's future is as bright as the promises of God.

Folks with terminal illness may have unfinished business that needs to be attended to. Today, I heard of an acquaintance of mine who recently died of cancer. Before he died, he set up a scholarship to help graduating seniors attend the college of their choice, and he even finished his income tax papers!

The gift of each day becomes important as death draws nearer. Someone has said that each sunrise is a message from God. A good prayer for those who are sick might be, "Teach me, Father, when I pray, not to ask for more, but rather let me give thanks for what is at my door—for food and drink and gentle rain, for sunny skies above, for home and friends and peace and joy, but most of all for love."

...each sunrise is a message from God.

### **Dealing With Death**

Charles Williamson writes, "We need to call death out of

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the shadows and make its acquaintance. It is not death that many fear; it is the pain and suffering before death. Living, dying, and death are not divisible."

In Romans 12:15, Paul writes, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." It is natural to express tears in times of sadness and death ("Jesus wept," John 11:35). Contrary to what many believe, it is not weak or timid to express one's sorrow in death. As one man stated, "I rarely cry like a baby, but I often cry like a man." Walking "in the valley" with family will show them our humanity as well as give them the opportunity to vent their true feelings to us.

Sometimes, after death, the question of faith comes up. Why did God allow such a good person to die? In times of death, many will often question their faith. The Indian philosopher Tagore once said, "Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings while the dawn is still dark." Ministers can be there for the family in such times, telling them of a God who does care, who can provide comfort (II Corinthians 1:3,4), and who has promised never to leave His children (Hebrews 13:6).

*Sorrow is the great schoolroom on earth.* Families and friends will need their time to grieve, and a loving church and friends will give them that time to do so. Being there for them, providing them love, warmth, and security, is vital when families are trying to work through their grief. They will not get over their loss; they will have to go through the grief process and grow through it. What they need to know is that loving significant others will be there for them at the beginning of their grief journey, when they

struggle in the hard times, and finally, when they come out "on the other side" a changed person.

People who properly grieve realize that in helping others, they help themselves. The best way they honor the one who has died is to serve the living. As Randy Becton writes, "Whoever among us has, through personal experience, learned what pain and suffering really are, belongs no more to himself alone. He is the brother of all who suffer." May God help us to be the servants to those who are hurting, so that we might be comforted when we, too, must walk through the valley.



## Chapter 20

### Whose Fault Is It?

Sheila Keckler Butt

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Sister Butt was born in Rockford, Illinois. She is married to Stan, and they have three sons, all grown, married, and currently gospel preachers. They have four grandchildren. They currently live in Columbia, Tennessee.

Sister Butt has a BS in English and History from East Tennessee State University and is a graduate of the Bear Valley School of Biblical Studies, Women's Program. She has also done graduate work in Greek and Hermeneutics at David Lipscomb University. She has taught young ladies at the Horizons program at Freed-Hardeman University for the past thirteen years. She has taught Bible classes for young children and women of all ages for twenty-six years. She has spoken on the Caribbean Lectureship for five years and has traveled abroad teaching ladies in Panama, Honduras, Cuba, and Alaska. She speaks for numerous ladies' days, lectureships, and seminars.

She has authored two books: *No Greater Joy* and *Seeking Spiritual Beauty*. She co-authored *We Bow Down*.

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He was only four years old. How could he know whose fault it was?

Our youngest son, Kyle, had gotten into some mischief right before bath time and I had spanked him. As soon as he got into the warm water in the bathtub, he looked down and saw a large red welt on his leg.

"Mama, look what you did to me!" he cried, really trying to push my guilt buttons.

"Oh, I didn't do that," I calmly explained. "Who do you think did that?"

"God did!" He immediately answered.

"You know God didn't do that, Kyle," I reassured him. "Who do you think *really* did that?"

"I did, didn't I, Mama?" he meekly replied.

I am constantly reminded and amazed at how often and how at almost every age of our lives we tend to rationalize our problems into being anyone else's fault but our own! Over the centuries, it seems that God has been the constant entity who catches much of the blame for pain and suffering which has been a result of the choices and decisions of mankind.

There are glaring examples throughout the scriptures of men and women who were more than willing to shift the blame for their own problems onto someone else. Adam and Eve were the first created human beings, and with them originated the blame game. It remains a popular pastime to this day. When God confronted them in the garden for having eaten from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Eve claimed that she ate because the serpent deceived her. Did she have a choice?

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Adam told God, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I ate." Not only was Adam suggesting that it was the woman's fault, he was insinuating that it was God's fault because He gave Adam the woman! Did Adam, however, have a choice?

When God created us, He determined that we should have free will. He obviously did not want a congregation of robots merely going through the acts of praise and worship to Him. One cannot help but believe that He longed for the hearts of His people just as Christ did in Matthew 23:37 when He lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" It sounds here as if Christ wanted to keep His people from much of the pain and suffering they had brought upon themselves! I have no doubt that Christ wants to do that for us today.

Just recently, I watched a two-year-old little boy push his grandmother away as she was reaching down to pick him up. I couldn't help but think that here was a grandmother who loved that little boy so much she would die for him and here he was because of his immaturity, ignorance and self will, pushing her away. I know it hurt her. I picture us often doing the same thing to the very person who *did* die for us!

However, God loved us enough to let us make our own choices. Atheists and agnostics have tried for years to use the argument that because there is pain and suffering in the world, God does not exist. "If God exists," they claim,

"and if He is good, how can He allow pain and suffering in the world?" They conclude that if He did exist, He would have to be evil. Their conclusions would be the same as saying that because people are electrocuted, that electricity is inherently evil, or because people drown, that the oceans and rivers are inherently evil. One can easily see the absurdity of these deductions.

The fact of the matter is that much of our suffering and what we believe to be the injustices of life are brought upon us by the choices and decisions we make every day. Unfortunately, many of those choices have far reaching consequences. For example, Cain, when he decided not to follow the direct commands for worship directed by God, set in motion a lifetime of pain and suffering. His parents lost their beloved son, Abel, and ultimately lost Cain too, because he became a fugitive and a vagabond. Cain may have thought his offering was *good enough*. He may have offered it sincerely. However, an important lesson for us to learn from this biblical account is that sincerity and good intentions do not replace the instruction given to us by God. We have other glaring examples of this in the scriptures such as Nadab and Abihu in Numbers 26:61 and Uzzah in II Samuel 6:3-11. Take time to read these accounts and remember them the next time someone tells you that something God has instructed is "no big deal." Probably with his heart breaking, we read in Genesis 4:13 that Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." Could Cain blame God for all of the pain and suffering that was initiated by his jealous heart? Just like our four-year-old son, he had no one but himself to blame!

## Chapter 20: Whose Fault Is It?

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How many men and women are in unhappy marriages because of a decision they made ten, twenty, or even thirty years ago? How many of us have unfaithful children because we let the day-to-day activities of life overshadow our ultimate goal of sharing eternity with them? How many of us let sports, homework, and school activities extinguish our time of Bible study, prayer, and fellowship with the saints? Just yesterday I was passing by an elementary school playground and saw a little girl who could not have been over ten years old walking around the

I wonder how many of us  
are making our children  
too *rich* to get to heaven?

playground while talking  
on her cell phone! I  
wonder how many of us  
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We must honestly look at our lives and make sure that every decision we make is in view of eternity, or as Christians, much spiritual pain and suffering will follow.

Anyone who has studied the life of David understands that even a person *after God's own heart* can make choices that will ultimately lead to heartache. What we can also learn from David is that we are responsible for those choices. When he was confronted by Nathan the prophet with his sin in II Samuel 12, David did not make excuses. He did not blame anyone else. He did not say he was sick or blame his actions on his genetics. Instead, he responded with an honest heart: "I have sinned against the Lord." The result of his long gaze of Bathsheba turned into adultery and then cold-blooded murder. David may never have fully recovered from his remorse. The first child born to him by Bathsheba was struck with illness and died. In Psalm 6:6

we read, "I am weary with groaning; all night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch in tears."

There is no doubt that those who lust and engage in promiscuity even today suffer much pain and heartache. Often, through books, television, and advertisements, we only see or read about the lifestyles of the rich and famous and their latest exploits. We only see the third or fourth beautiful wedding of the beautiful brides and grooms and do not see the ugly, broken, and battered lives strewn along the way! Satan loves for us to make selfish and worldly choices, for he is the prince of this world!

After forty-five years of smoking, my father died of lung cancer. After two years of sleeping with her boyfriend, our neighbor's daughter had a child out of wedlock. The mental hospitals are full of people who have let guilt permeate and ruin their lives. We have thousands of young ladies who are literally *dying* to be thin. Eating Disorder clinics are packed with and have waiting lists up to one year long. The hospitals are full of infants born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, AIDS, and drug addictions every day.

What did we expect? That in some way we would be immune to the consequences of our choices? The word of God plainly teaches that many of our afflictions are brought upon us by our own choices and the characteristics of our human nature such as pride, jealousy, arrogance, selfishness, greed, and hatred. One of the things that a mature spiritual person has learned is that many of our choices and decisions must be made contrary to our human nature if they are going to conform to the will of God!

## Chapter 20: Whose Fault Is It?

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People used to believe in something called *the theory of retribution*. It simply means that all suffering comes directly as a result of and proportionate to the sins one has committed. For example, not many years ago, Stan and I had begun a congregation of the Lord's church meeting in our home in a mission field in upper east Tennessee. When we were out of town one weekend, our water heater valve popped off, and when we returned home, our entire basement was flooded. Many of the people there, as well as some in our own congregation, said that we must not have been living right or that would never have happened! Does that sound familiar? It sounds just like Job's friends! They just knew that Job was being afflicted because of some great sin in his life! Thankfully, the book of Job disproves that theory. The only thing Job had done to deserve such pain and suffering was that he was "blameless and upright and one who feared God and shunned evil!" (Job 1:10).

It is very important in our Christian lives not to confuse *life* with *God*. We understand that much of our pain and suffering is a result of our own free will. There is also proof that random things happen in the universe and are not a direct result of God's intervention. In Ecclesiastes 9:11 we read, "...the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but *time and chance happen to them all*" (emp. SB).

It is very important in our Christian lives not to confuse *life* with *God*.

When I first became a Christian and someone would say "good luck!" I would smugly tell them to save their luck for the heathens and just pray for me! And then you might say *life happened*. Some things were not fair. Some things happened which seemed to be no one's fault...random accidents. Even our insurance agencies call them *acts of God*. But the truth is that God makes it to rain on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45), and *time and chance* happens to every one of us!

Something that Christians need to understand regarding the pain and suffering in our lives (whether it be a result of our own choices or something over which we have no control) is that it is not what happens *to us* that is the most important thing, but what happens *in us*! Yes, there is no

It is not what happens *to us* that is the most important thing, but what happens *in us*!

doubt that we should study, pray, and make our decisions based on what God would have us to do. That would certainly alleviate many of our problems. The truth is

that we still have to live in this world and there are some things over which we have do not have control. Things are going to happen to us that do not seem fair. What should our response be as Christians? Will that pressure push us closer to our God and Father or further from Him?

We read in Mark 6:45 that Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida. Do you think He knew a storm was brewing? Could He have calmed the sea, when in verse 48 we read that He saw them straining at rowing? I wonder why He did not just make it easy for them right then. Do you think Jesus had a



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purpose for sending His disciples into the storm and then taking His time about calming the wind?

When His disciples saw Him walking on the water, they cried out to Him. They surely did not expect Him to be there! He said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." He says the same thing to us today when we are in the throes of the storms of life. It may be that in some cases God may not calm the storm, but rather He will calm the sailor. Whatever the case, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, therefore, we will not fear..." (Psalm 46:1).

Will you run to Him for shelter in the storms of life or will you turn away from the one who loves you and is trying to carry you through? We have a God who cares and who can help. We need to live our lives in such a way that we are not afraid of the storms of life.

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

## **Chapter 21**

### **Help That Is Not Helpful**

James Jones

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Brother Jones was born in Orlando, Florida. He is married to Tabbetha, and they have three children, Jay who is four years old, Jenna and Jayna who are two years old.

Brother Jones has preached for the Durham, North Carolina Church of Christ for two years. Previously, he preached for the Collinsville Church of Christ in Collinsville, Illinois.

His interests include reading and drawing.

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It is truly a blessing to be a part of the Lord's body, the church, the family of God. What a great joy to have those who sincerely love and care about your soul to be involved in your life. Christians are a special people, zealous for good works (Titus 2:14). Christians employ the mind of Christ, seeking to help one another in their times of need (Philippians 2:2-4). Sometimes, in the process of trying to help a brother or sister, a Christian can offer help that is not helpful. In other words, they think, in all good conscience, that they are giving the brother or sister the best advice possible. Maybe it is advice they feel has worked for them or for others. However, this advice sometimes can be contradictory to the word of God. When it violates the will of God, it is help that is not helpful. We must be aware of the cunning tools Satan uses in an attempt to drag us down. A few of the ways Satan uses, in the form of help, to hurt us are: congregations of the Lord's people ignoring sin in hopes of restoring a brother or sister to Christ; putting one's

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own interests before considering the needs of others; excessive recreation (abusing the blessings of rest); and overindulging in comfort foods and using other means of "escape." By no means are these the only ways Satan tries to hurt Christians. However, Satan has successfully employed these things in trying to win our battle against him. If we can be made aware of these devices, then it can help us in resisting the devil.

### **Ignoring Sin**

The fact that "...God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (I John 1:5), makes it evident why God cannot fellowship darkness (sin). It is against His very nature. God has called us "out of darkness" (I Peter 2:9). His plan is for us to "...walk in the light as He is in the light" (I John 1:7). If we will do this, and not walk in darkness, our sins can be forgiven, and we can be in fellowship with God.

Christians are instructed to "...be patient with all" (I Thessalonians 5:14). There can be things in the lives of babes in Christ that are not in harmony with the will of God. That is why it is vital that they should "as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (I Peter 2:2). As young Christians grow in the word, they will discover there are things in their lives that they need to change. This process takes time.

What should not be tolerated in the church are Christians willfully living in sin without any corrective action being taken. Whether dealing with fornication, dishonesty, abandoning the assembling of the saints, an evil tongue, etc., elders do not have the right to just ignore it. It has been said, "Give them time, they will come around."

Though this type of advice may work for the world, it violates God's teaching on correcting sin in the church. Considering this is one of the problems the Corinthian church had in the first century, we need to be diligent in adhering to God's plan. Paul penned,

What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness? It is actually reported among you that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles – that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us (I Corinthians 4:21-5:7).

Paul was dismayed by the situation that was taking place in Corinth. What made it worse is that it was shocking even

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for the immoral Gentiles. He noted that they had not even mourned over the situation. He did not want them to ignore this sin, or to condone it, any longer. He wanted them to deliver the erring brother to Satan so that his spirit could be saved. Paul cared about the spiritual welfare of this Christian. Notice that Paul did not tell them to ignore it, and it would go away, or that it would take care of itself. Rather, he wanted them to take action against the sinner. He was very clear in his instructions to the Corinthian church concerning what they had to do to deliver this brother to Satan.

But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolator, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. Therefore, put away from among yourselves the evil person. (I Corinthians 5:11,13).

God wanted the brother to be "put away" from among the brethren. He did not want the church acting as if everything was acceptable in his life. Even brethren that are divisive must be confronted. Paul wrote,

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple (Romans 16:17,18).

But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you (II Thessalonians 3:6,7).

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." (Matthew 18:15,16).

This instruction, which was given by inspiration, is not followed by all Christians. While well-meaning in their intent, they fall short of doing things God's way. They have their own ideas of why it may not be a good idea to do what was instructed by Paul. Some feel that if they took action they may lose the erring member. It may also be thought that if we lose him, how can we ever help him? Concern may also be shown that if this action is taken, the person may feel alienated. Usually it is implied that it would be unloving to rebuke them.

What needs to be remembered is that repentance of sins is necessary. John made that clear when he penned, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). Before a babe in Christ, or a seasoned Christian, can

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repent of a sin, they need to be made aware of it. How can this happen unless someone shows them? Is it an act of love to avoid telling a brother or sister what they need to hear in order to be right with God?

Jesus said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Revelation 3:19). It is an act of love to correct a brother, no matter how "young" in the faith. In Acts 8, you can read of Peter's stern rebuke of Simon. Simon had committed a sin. Peter knew that if Simon were to be right with God, he would need to correct matters. Peter said to Simon, "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you" (Acts 8:22). Peter understood that ignoring Simon's sin was not going to help his soul. It is important for Christians to understand that they are not helping a brother or sister's soul, or their own, by ignoring sin. Remember the words of Paul recorded in Galatians 6:1, "Brethren, if any man be overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted."

### Putting Self First

More and more people are emphasizing their own "personal happiness" as their top priority. When situations in life become difficult, dull, or unfulfilling,

More and more people are emphasizing their own "personal happiness" as their top priority.

they are told to get out of those situations that are dragging them down. Sadly, this philosophy is applied to all aspects of people's lives, including careers, marriage, and family. According to this idea, if you think marriage will make you

happy, go for it. And, if you find that it just isn't working out for you, then it is okay to get out of it. Although this may or may not destroy the other person, scar your children for life, and sorrow the heart of God. What matters most is the person's *own* happiness. In the long run, this philosophy is not helpful to yourself or others. The troublesome consequences of this way of thinking have taken their toll on the work ethics and honesty of our nation. Yet, its destructive force is probably most evident in the decay of the home. Jesus said,

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this you will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34,35).

Christians are characterized by love. The idea of putting self first is selfish and ungodly. Pay attention to what Paul recorded about love in I Corinthians 13:4-8.

Love suffers long and is kind...does not seek its own...bears all things...endures all things. Love never fails.

Those who justify leaving their spouses, children, and/or the church usually like to think of themselves as loving. However, their fruits will prove otherwise. When times get hard, love stays in God's authorized relationship; it does not get out. When we hurt God time and time again, He does not abandon us. Isaiah wrote,

I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts (Isaiah 65:2).



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God commands,

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her...husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies...let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband (Ephesians 5:25,28,33).

Christians need to make others' happiness a priority. Sadly, this is twisted by some to say that their families would be better off without them. Maybe the current situation is

Christians need to make others' happiness a priority.
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terrible; however, leaving is not the answer—Christ is! God's plan for man is, "...what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6). God wants couples to stay together through thick and thin, not just when it is easy. It is also not God's plan for parents to abandon their children when things get difficult. God's instruction is, "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). It is difficult for parents to follow this admonition if they are not present for the day to day nurturing and training their children while they are young. God's purpose in life is, "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Man would find true joy in his life if he would be faithful to God's intention for his life—serving Him. The idea

people have of putting their own interests first is usually not helpful at all.

### **Excessive Recreation**

Rest is not wrong. The Lord encouraged His apostles to "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest for awhile" (Mark 6:31). This passage has been used many times to illustrate the appropriateness and the recognized need for rest. Sadly, as with any other passage, it can and has been misapplied. The majority of the time, when this verse is misused, it is used in an attempt to justify one's excessive recreation. After working forty or more hours during the week, they feel that they need the remainder of the time for rest and relaxation. They believe they are too tired for the works of the church. Whenever Mark 6:31 is used to "justify" their inaction, they always fail to bring up the last part of the verse. The remainder of Mark 6:31 reads, "For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat." They were so busy doing their work that they did not take the time to eat! Now, compare their "hectic" schedule to many today. Some of the busiest people in the kingdom work full-time secular jobs, and they take the time to eat at least one or two meals a day. Sometimes they may have more time on some days than on others yet they are able to find the time to do the work.

Those misapplying this verse to justify their abuse of recreation are really comparing apples to oranges. Is it wrong to take time out for sports? No. Is it wrong to take a vacation with the family? Again, a resounding no. But, as with all things, there must be a balance. Pay attention to the following instructions:

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Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (I Corinthians 15:58).

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:9,10).

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if one died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again (II Corinthians 5:14,15).

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14).

God wants us to enjoy our blessings (Ecclesiastes 9:7-9). Rest can be very helpful, especially after times of extreme pressure and stress. But, rest is not helpful if it is being abused. If we are abusing our times of recreation, then we are hurting our souls by disregarding the previously mentioned passages.

Just as people find release and recreation in their sports and hobbies, they *can* find enjoyment in the work of the Lord. This writer believes too many have deceived themselves into thinking that the work of the Lord cannot be just as fulfilling as their other ways of "escape." Carefully consider the following statements:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But *his delight* is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper (Psalm 1:1-3, emp. MJJ).

I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word; Make me walk in the path of your commandments, for *I delight in it*; And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love; Unless your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction (Psalm 119:16,35,47,92).

According to the inspired penman, it is possible to find delight in the law of the Lord. Why will people stay up to watch the late night shows on a work night? Because they find joy in them. The blessed man can find delight in the law of God, and as Psalm 1:2 made clear, he meditates on it day and night. He does this because he delights in it.

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Resting to the point that we neglect our duties in the kingdom is truly not helpful.

### **"Comfort" Foods**

I have heard the term "comfort foods" used a lot lately. People use this term for the foods in which they indulge themselves when times get tough. When their minds get stressed, they turn to their tasty treats and lose themselves. They do not have to think, just escape. A lot of times when this topic is discussed, it is done so in a light, humorous atmosphere. However, it can have serious, spiritual consequences. How so? Basically, people are looking for quick fixes. They get too much on their minds, and they want to "forget" about their problems. Comfort foods aren't the only things people overindulge to forget about their problems. Prescription drugs, illegal drugs, cigarettes, alcohol, etc. are also used to provide an escape, albeit temporary. Yet, these things never give the individual true comfort. They only bring more problems (physically and emotionally). Besides the physical problems people find themselves in by using these varied escapes, how can they be harmful spiritually? Simply put, we replace God with the substance. A repeated message throughout the scriptures is that God is always there for His people. He will always care for us and protect us. As long as God is with us, we *will be* okay. I have heard many Christians express this sentiment. It is one thing to say we will be okay, but another thing to live by it. However, we must have faith that God will take care of us. Remember, "...without faith it is impossible to please Him..." (Hebrews 11:6). There are many examples listed in Hebrews 11 of great characters of faith. Why are they examples? They demonstrate how to live by faith. And,

because of their faithful living, God was able to demonstrate His faithfulness to them. When it comes to stress and the problems of this life, Christians should run to God, not things.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6,7).

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you (I Peter 5:6,7).

Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and

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tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Matthew 6:25-34).

When His disciples thought they were going to die in a storm at sea, Jesus said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" (Matthew 8:26). God has given us so many promises about His care and protection. It is important for the Christian to put down the dozen donuts, get on his knees, and go to God. The peace of God will guard our hearts and minds (Philippians 4:7), but it will only happen if we have faith in His power. There are some Christians that have looked at those in the world who depend on alcohol and other drugs for their "escape," shook their heads, and commented "how sad." Yet, how sad it is when God's children seek to find more comfort in food and prescription pills than they do in the God of heaven. This "help" is not helpful at all. It takes away from our learning to depend on God.

## Conclusion

The world offers a lot of self-help books and ideas on ways to help you in life. This writer does not allege that all of them are bad. As a matter of fact, a lot of them can be good when they are using biblical principles for their ideas. However, when their ideas conflict with the help that God supplies, we must abandon their humanistic philosophies. Christians need to remember how vital the Bible is in helping us in all areas of life. Paul penned,

*All scripture* is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (II Timothy 3:16,17).

If man wants to be complete, then he can get all the help he needs from the scriptures. Our brothers and sisters can help us greatly as well. Not by offering worldly help that is not truly helpful, but by edifying with the word of God (Acts 20:32). Remember, any "help" that is contrary to the will of God will never be helpful to one's soul.



## Chapter 22

### Struggles And Strengths Of Being Single

Owen D. Olbricht

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Brother Olbricht was born in Thayer, Missouri. He has never married.

Brother Olbricht has a BA in Speech and an MA and MRE in Bible from Harding University. He now teaches at Harding University. He is also supported by the Sylvan Hills congregation to lead campaigns in the northeastern and southeastern United States. He helped to begin a singles retreat at Camp Manatany in Pennsylvania. He has preached in thirty-four states and led campaigns in thirty-two states. He has done mission work in Canada, Russia, Ukraine, Jamaica, Haiti, Venezuela, Australia, Scotland, and England.

Brother Olbricht has written the books: *Baptism—New Birth Or Empty Ritual*, *God Is The Audience*, *Beyond Death's Door*, *Baptism—Response Of Faith*, *Holy Spirit—Person And Work*, *Light From God's Word*, *Woman—A Biblical Quest*, *Worship—Life's Greatest Moments*.

Brother Olbricht's hobbies include writing religious books, articles, poems, and religious songs, gardening, physical fitness, cooking, fishing, mechanical work, carpentry, home repair, and bicycle riding.

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Everyone is either single or has been single. Singles fall into two categories: never married or single again. "Single again" includes two categories: those who want to get married and those who do not. There are those who are single parents and those who are not. Some have been single longer than others have. Unmarried people are usually not considered singles until they enter the twenties.

Because of this diversity among singles, they do not all have the same needs.

Because of this diversity among singles, they do not all have the same needs. Older singles have different needs than younger singles.

Never married singles have different needs than those who are divorced or widowed. This is also true concerning younger and older widows (I Timothy 5:9-15).

As with every condition in life, so also with being married or single, each has its advantages and disadvantages.

### **Advantages**

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul gave advice to singles. He presented the following advantages of being single: (1) *Without the difficulties* of having a marriage partner. "Yet such will have trouble in this life" (I Corinthians 7:28), thus without the problems of married couples. (2) *Freedom from concerns*. "But I want you to be free from concerns" (I Corinthians 7:32), because of difficulties that arise in marriage relationships. (3) *Concerned with how to please God*. "One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord" (I Corinthians 7:32), since they are without the divided interests of the married. (4) *Holy in*

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*body and spirit.* "...she may be holy in body and spirit" (I Corinthians 7:34), because body and spirit can be dedicated completely to the Lord. And (5) *Serve without distraction.* "And this I say for your own benefit...to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord," (I Corinthians 7:35), which is true because of freedom from the demands of another.

Married people are free from many of the difficulties faced by singles, but singles are free from many of the concerns of those who are married. This is true because singles:

- Do not have to deal with many of the problems of married people.
- May have more time to become involved in service to the Lord.
- Have freedom to follow their own interests and goals.
- Do not have distractions of family matters.

Married people can excuse their actions because of their partners. Adam blamed Eve (Genesis 3:12). A man excused himself from following Jesus because he was married. An unmarried person cannot make the same excuse. "I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come" (Luke 14:20).

Singles who are well organized and dedicated can have freedom to serve God with single devotion.

### **Disadvantages**

Solomon pointed out advantages of two people over one person who is alone.

Two are better than one because they have good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three stands is not quickly torn apart. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

Singles have challenges that are not faced by the married. Their disadvantages can include the following:

- Loneliness has been reported to be the greatest problem facing singles. Finding compatible companionship may pose a problem.
- The feeling of being a failure
- e can be real. If this is not their attitude, it can be that of friends, relatives, and acquaintances.
- They might have to defend being single. They are often asked why they are not married.
- Since most people are married, singles at times seem to be a misfit. Many activities are planned for those who are married or have children. Singles are reluctant to invite families into their homes. Women who are single should not feel free to invite men, especially married men, into their homes. Single men have the same restrictions in relationships with women.
- Married people have difficulty understanding the life that singles live. Sometimes they are insensitive or too sympathetic of their singleness.
- Having a confidante can be a problem for many singles.

### Struggles

Singles have struggles that many married people do not have. You may not be accepted in certain settings because you are single, thus you may have difficulty accepting yourself. You, as a single, need to learn the following:

*Accept who you are, what you are, and where you are.* Enjoy each of these. If you are not pleased with your situation, do what you can to change it, but in the meantime, learn to be content with your situation (Philippians 4:11). Do not live in the past or be haunted by it. Neither despair of the future nor think that only the future can bring happiness. If you are depressed, you will have difficulty seeing anything bright in the future. You should realize that you do not know what the future holds, but you do know who holds the future.

*Live now with hope for the future!* Make the most of the present, and be challenged to seek to obtain the high mark Jesus has set before you (Philippians 3:13,14). Have challenging goals and reachable dreams. Rely on God to help you, but realize that you have the responsibility to do your part to achieve your aspirations and expectations.

*Be aware of the value of time.* Fill each hour with what is worthwhile and eternal. Avoid doing only what seems necessary, but seek what is most worthwhile.

Sexual desires can be a problem. All singles, to a greater or lesser degree, have them. Everyone must learn to control them, even the married. You must learn to be true to your

own body, realizing you must bring it under your control (I Corinthians 9:27).

Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body (I Corinthians 6:18-20).

### **Strengths**

Evaluate your life for your strengths and weaknesses. Place God first in your life. Give yourself as completely as you can to the Lord. Through doing this, He will see that you will have what you need in life to serve Him (Matthew 6:33). Be the person God wants you to be, so that, if someone is looking for a partner like you, he will be able to recognize that he is looking for a person like you.

You have something of value you can do for God. Evaluate what you can do for the following:

- *For God.* Become a vital part of the church family. Consider the following: Most church leaders do not understand the single life because they have not experienced the life of most singles. They may not know how to use singles in the work of the church. Most situations require singles to go to the leaders to arrange their involvement. Each single should spend some time with the leaders so you can understand each

## Chapter 22: Struggles And Strengths Of Being Single

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other. Help them determine how to make you an integral part of the congregation.

Every single should have his own special time to spend with God. This should include prayer, Bible reading, meditation, and reading of spiritual books, magazines, and papers.

- *For others.* Reach out to all, especially other singles, children, and elderly. Find those with needs. Exchange your abilities with others who can help you. Find another single or other singles with whom to share moments of devotions, prayers, Bible, and spiritual discussions.

You can serve others through sharing hobbies, visiting in hospitals, becoming involved in mission work, reaching the lost through the internet, and teaching through Bible correspondences.

If you give yourself in service to others, it will come back to you many fold (Luke 6:38).

- *For self.* As a single, you have a chance to develop your own spiritual relationship with God. It is up to you as a single to become your best for God.

If you do not enjoy life now, do not get married. You probably would make someone else unhappy if you did!

Do not become self-centered. This is a danger because you have only yourself to handle your needs. You do not have to

consider how your decisions and actions will effect others, like a married partner or children.

### **Conclusion**

You, as a single, have something you can do to develop your individual spiritual life, to offer others, and to do in service to God. You have many exciting and challenging things to do. Do not think "Poor me!" If you do not enjoy life now, do not get married. You probably would make someone else unhappy if you did.

Find joy in the simple and beautiful things around you. Learn to develop a good relationship with God, others, and self. Make thinking on what is important your major goal.

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things (Philippians 4:8).



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