

MAINTAINING THE LIFE OF FAITH

Ron Christian, Compiler

**“Growing A Godly Life” - Devotional Series
Book 13 - “Perseverance”**

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BOOK THIRTEEN

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‘GROWING A GODLY LIFE’ - Series (13 Books)

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**SUMMARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS ON
'PERSEVERANCE OF BELIEVERS'**

**LIST OF WRITERS AND THEIR RESPECTIVE CONTRIBUTED
DEVOTIONALS.**

INTRODUCTION

By

Ron Christian

During the early days of Christianity, when a bitter persecution was being waged against many Christians, Polycarp (the aged and godly bishop of Smyrna) was brought before the Roman proconsul who commanded him to deny Christ, saying, “Consider thyself, and have pity on thy own great age.” The Roman proconsul urged Polycarp to ‘swear by the fortune of Caesar’ - to ‘repent’ that he was a follower of Christ. Said the proconsul to this aged and influential Christian bishop: “Swear, and I will release thee; - reproach Christ..” With unflinching and steadfast faith in the living Christ, Polycarp gave his never-to-be-forgotten answer: “Eight and six years have I served him, and he never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, who hath saved me?” The proconsul again urged him, “Swear by the fortune of Caesar.” Polycarp replied, “Since you still vainly strive to make me swear by the fortune of Caesar as you express it, affecting ignorance of my real character, hear me frankly declaring what I am - I am a Christian - and if you desire to learn the Christian doctrine, assign me a day, and you shall hear.” Hereupon the proconsul said, “I have wild beasts; and I will expose you to them, unless you repent.” Replied Polycarp: “Call for them, for repentance with us is a wicked thing, if it is to be change from the better to the worse, but a good thing if it is to be change from evil to good.” Then the proconsul said: “I will tame thee with fire since you despise the wild beasts, unless you repent.” Then said Polycarp, “You threaten me with fire, which burns for an hour, and is soon extinguished; but the fire of the future judgment, and of eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly, you are ignorant of. But why do you delay? Do whatever you please.” After his persecutors had gathered wood for his burning, they next planned to fasten him to the stake, but Polycarp said: “Leave me as I am; for he who giveth me strength to sustain the fire, will enable me also, without your securing me with nails, to remain without flinching in the pile.” His persecutors bound him without nailing him, and this courageous old man prayed: “O Father, I bless thee that thou hast counted me worthy to receive my portion among the number of martyrs.” As soon as Polycarp had uttered the word “amen”, the officers lighted the fire. It is then recorded: “The flame, forming the appearance of an arch, as the sail of a vessel filled with wind, surrounded, as with a wall, the body of the martyr; which was in the midst, not as burning flesh, but as gold and silver refining in the furnace.” (Foxe’s Book of Martyrs; pages 22-24)

Promises the Lord of the Church: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life!” Polycarp left his burning flesh behind, to take his place at the feet of the Saviour, along with all the Christian martyrs of the ages. The aged bishop of Smyrna enjoys the ever-enlarging company of those who have chosen to sacrifice their earthly lives for Christ, rather than denying their Lord. It is reported that there were more Christians who died for ‘the Faith’ in the twentieth century than in all the other centuries put together! Recently it was reported that there were more than 150,000

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Christians who died because of their faith in Christ - in one year alone!

One of the great modern martyrs was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a key German figure who arose as a witness to Christian faithfulness against the evil onslaughts of Hitler during the Second World War. Because of his bold stand against the Nazi regime, he was imprisoned along with many other uncompromising believers among the “confessing Church” (of which Bonhoeffer was a ‘key figure’). In the gray dawn of Sunday, April 9, 1945, just before the end of the War, Dietrich Bonhoeffer whispered to his fellow prisoners as he left his cell to be hanged on the Flossenburg gallows, “This is the end-for me, the beginning of life.”

As he awaited his own martyrdom in a Roman prison, the apostle Paul wrote the following words to Timothy, Paul’s ‘son in the Faith’: *“And so I solemnly urge you before God and before Christ Jesus - who will some day judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom - to preach the Word of God urgently at all times, whenever you get the chance, in season and out, when it is convenient and when it is not. Correct and rebuke your people when they need it, encourage them to do right, and all the time be feeding them patiently with God’s Word...Stand steady, and don’t be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Bring others to Christ. Leave nothing undone that you ought to do. I say this because I won’t be around to help you very much longer. My time has almost run out. Very soon now I will be on my way to heaven. I have fought long and hard for my Lord, and THROUGH IT ALL I HAVE KEPT TRUE TO HIM. And now the time has come for me to stop fighting and rest. In heaven a crown is waiting for me which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And not just to me, but to all those whose lives show that they are eagerly looking forward to his coming back again.”* (2 Timothy 4: 1-8, Living Bible)

What is the ‘key’ to a truly successful life? Remaining TRUE to the Lord Jesus, amidst all the changes and chances of life, amidst all the trials and tests and temptations and persecutions of daily living! Not only starting the race for Christ, but also finishing the race with Christ! Exhorted Paul to the Corinthian believers: *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”* (I Corinthians 15: 58)

Perhaps I will never forget that period of time in my pastoral ministry when I purposed to preach a long series of messages on the great ‘Faith Chapter’ of the Bible - Hebrews 11. I prepared long and hard and believed that - as the weeks came and went and I came to the end of chapter 11 in my series of sermons - my congregation of attentive listeners was growing by ‘leaps and bounds’ spiritually in the ‘Faith of Christ’ - partly because of my ‘great sermons’ on Biblical Faith (faithfulness). As I finished the last message in that long series, I returned to my home after the Late Morning Worship Service, exuberant though weary as a result of preaching in both services. The telephone rang, and one of my parishioners - distraught and angry and accusing - was

on the ‘other end of the line’. He said something like this to me: “My family and I are leaving your church!” I was dumb-founded! Here was a parishioner who (with his wife) became a believer as a result of a ‘Home Bible Study’ which I had conducted in his home a few years before! Grappling for words, I finally was able to respond to his declaration. I said, “Why, what is wrong?” He said, “We’re leaving the Church because you don’t preach ‘Faith’! I wasn’t present at the Service this morning, but my wife told me that you declared in your message on Faith that it is not always God’s will to heal a person! I believe that if one has enough ‘Faith’, God will always heal a believer. It is never God’s will for one of His children to be sick! The only reason why Christians are sick is because they haven’t exercised enough ‘Faith’, or because they have unconfessed sin in their lives, or because they haven’t been taught to ‘bind Satan’. We can no longer be a member of a church that doesn’t practice ‘Faith’!” No amount of reasoning on my part, and no quotation of Scriptures (especially Hebrews 11: 35b-40 and 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10) could convince my angry friend that it is not always God’s will to physically heal Christians. I pled with him not to leave our local church, where he had attended for several years. I reminded him that he had not even heard my sermon on ‘Faith’ earlier that day, and that he was reacting to information that was reported to him ‘secondhand’ by his wife. I told him my family felt ‘close’ to him and his family, and that I felt God led him into my life (after all, was it not I who took time ‘to lead him and his wife to Christ’?) I reminded him that some of the greatest ‘saints’ throughout history - persons of abounding ‘faith’ - were persons whom God had not willed to heal physically. Was not even the great apostle Paul - ‘a giant’ in the Faith - inflicted with a ‘thorn in the flesh’? When I mentioned Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh’, my now-estranged ‘friend’ launched into a ‘verbal battle’ with me, as he tried hard to convince me that Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh’ was definitely not ‘physical’. That conversation took place several years ago. I learned that a ‘charismatic’ friend, with whom he had been daily ‘car-pooling’ to work, shared with him some tapes on ‘Faith’ - tapes with a strong emphasis on the ‘Name It-Claim It’ brand of ‘Faith’. Yes, that friend and his family left our local church and he never returned. As far as I know, for some time, he attended a large, independent, ‘charismatic’ church where “faith is preached”, “prosperity is claimed”, and “wonderful miracles regularly happen”. After all these years (since he left the church I pastored), I occasionally see that former friend. We hold no bitterness towards each other, so it is rather easy to talk to one another and to express ‘Christian love’ to each other.

Allow me to share a few ‘points’ from the message on ‘Faith’, preached many years ago, to which my previously-mentioned ‘friend’ reacted so strongly, resulting in his leaving my church. The following are a few ‘quotes’ from that message: Faith means trusting God regardless of whether or not our prayers to Him give us the results that we desire. Notes Paul Rees, “No faith is mature if it thinks only of answers to prayer that come in the form of escape from loss and sorrow and pain...If this shakes us and threatens to turn confidence into cynicism, we should review the Bible’s magnum opus on faith, the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. True, it tells of those who ‘through faith escaped the edge

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of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens’ (verse 34). But have you noticed the significance of a little phrase of two words that occurs twice - ‘and others’? ‘And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance. And others had trials of cruel mocking and scourging, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword.’ (Hebrews 11: 35-37)

I continued in that sermon on ‘Faith’, preached several years, to which my ‘friend’ so negatively reacted: Problems come to the greatest Christians. Those in Hebrews 11: 35-38 remained faithful to God, even unto death, without judging God or holding God responsible for their difficulties. Remember, when faith and prayers do not remove the mountains, God intends to use the mountains to strengthen our spiritual ‘muscles’ while we are climbing over the mountains! The problems may cause many tears and bring many questions to mind. But remember, God never allows His children to shed ‘needless tears’. God is a God of perfect love - He wants what is best for you. When my brother lost his 15 year old daughter so tragically and suddenly, on August 14, 1981, he said, the very night of her death, “God makes no mistakes.” His faith in God did not prevent his daughter’s terrible death, but my brother did not judge his God. His faith enabled him to believe in a good God, in spite of adverse circumstances. That is the greatest miracle of all! To believe, even when circumstances defy reason! Faith enables us to accept difficult circumstances, as God’s gymnasium for character development! If faith seems to go unrewarded on this planet and in this life, there will be an ultimate reward granted to the persons of faith after this life (Hebrews 11: 39, 40).

I continued that sermon on ‘Faith’ with great fervency, as I neared the climax of the message: Faith means being faithful to God and never judging God, regardless if the prayers of faith do not change the circumstances of the faithful one. The faithful one can be assured that faith will be ultimately rewarded in heaven and that God will be close to the faithful one during his pilgrimage on earth. *“God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you...’* So we say with confidence, *‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’*” (Hebrews 13: 5, 6) If you are going through difficult times, keep your faith in God. He won’t forsake you. He loves you. He is not removing your mountain or problems for a reason - a loving and redemptive reason. Don’t fall from God. Don’t start judging God or become bitter towards God. *“So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to PERSEVERE so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, ‘He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.’ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.”* (Hebrews 10: 35-39)

John the Baptist’s faith resulted in John being beheaded by a wicked king! His faith did not deliver him from adversity, but his faith did keep him true rather than denying the

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Master, and his faith ushered him into heaven with all the rewards that heaven alone can give to the man of faith! We too often see only today with today’s problems, and we fail to see the ultimate victory promised to persons of PERSEVERING FAITH. God’s purpose may be to deliver his children from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3: 16-18), or it may be to allow His children to burn up in the fiery furnace. Either way, the man of faith is victorious! Paul said, “*For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.*” The man of faith can’t lose! It may be God’s will to change our circumstances, or it may be God’s will that we simply remain faithful to God in the midst of our difficult circumstances. Perhaps the greatest heroes of faith are not those who saw mighty feats through their faith, but those who remained true to God even when their faith resulted in their persecution and eventual death (Hebrews 11: 35-38). Whatever the immediate result of faith, the ultimate victory always belongs to God’s people of faith!

I then concluded my message on ‘Faith’ with these words: Faith can move a mighty mountain or faith can enable us to climb over our mountains! Faith can remove the darkness, or faith can give us a song during our nights. Faith, in brief, is faithfulness to God, whether or not circumstances change and whether or not we can understand the purposes in the present God-allowed circumstances. Faith does not judge God. Faith in God reassures one that God ultimately rewards all persons of faith - partially on earth and totally in heaven!

It was these above quoted words (and others like them) which I preached on that Sunday, at the conclusion of my long sermon series on ‘Biblical Faith’, which were the ‘occasion’ of my ‘friend’ to decide to ‘leave my church ‘ (and never return).

I continue to believe that ‘faith in God’ means ‘faithfulness to God’ - amidst all the challenges and troubles and losses of life. I continue to believe that it is ‘persevering faith’ in God and in God’s wisdom and power and love which will ‘carry’ a believer throughout his life, until he passes through ‘the pearly gates’ of heaven!

Amidst all the severe trials of Paul’s life, he was able confidently to declare (at the end of his courageous life): “*That is why I am suffering here in jail and I am certainly not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to safely guard all that I have given him until the day of his return.*” (2 Timothy 1: 12, Living Bible)

Paul believed that divine enabling power was sufficient to keep every believer from falling away from God, in spite of the great suffering which believers are called to endure. Wrote Paul “*And he (God) is able to keep you from slipping and falling away, and to bring you, sinless and perfect, into his glorious presence with mighty shouts of everlasting joy.*” (Jude 1: 25, Living Bible)

**“I know not what of good or ill
May be reserved for me,
Of weary ways or golden days,
Before his face I see.
But ‘I know whom I have believed,
And am persuaded that he is able
To keep that which I’ve committed
Unto him against the day.’”**

(I Know Whom I Have Believed)

During my lifetime I have known many godly persons who have consistently followed the Lord for many years, whose lives have ‘stood the test of time’. They learned the ‘secret’ of daily victory - through prayer, and meditation, and obedience, and resistance of temptation. These precious ones demonstrated to me that they were ‘single-minded’ in their devotion to Christ, ‘whole-hearted’ in their commitment to a lifestyle of holiness. As a pastor for 27 years in one local church, it was my privilege to serve several hundreds of persons, most of whom were earnest believers, persevering in their ‘daily walk of faith’. At the funeral services of many older ‘saints’, I experienced great joy as I offered ‘tributes’ regarding the unusual faithfulness of these followers of Christ. Yes, I have known so many persons who ‘lived well’ and who ‘died well’! They ‘crossed the finish line of life’ with the love of God as the constant and unwavering and driving ‘force’ of their lives! They remained faithful to their Lord, until physical death separated their spirit from their body, and now they are crowned with the ‘crown of eternal life’ in heaven!

Even though the trials are severe, the persecutions are bitter, the temptations are strong, the losses are great, the mysteries and inequities and injustices in the world are widespread, and the sorrows of life are deep, God’s grace is all-sufficient and His power is unmatched and His love is unconditional. God is able to guard His children from the onslaughts of the ‘evil one’ (devil). Wrote Paul, *“The Lord is faithful; he will make you strong and guard you from satanic attacks of every kind.”* (2 Thessalonians 3, 4, Living Bible) *“No temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can’t stand up against it, for he has promised this and will do what he says. He will show you how to escape temptation’s power so that you can bear up patiently against it.”* (I Corinthians 10: 13, Living Bible)

A few months ago, one of my newest friends wrote to me and asked if I would explain what I meant by my reference to the ‘Perseverance of the Saints’. The following is my written reply to her request:

Dear.....,

I have read considerably (and written quite a bit) on the subject of the ‘Perseverance of the Saints’ (as it is called in Christian Theology). Suffice it to say at this point (in this brief communication) that the Bible emphasizes at least three features (regarding Salvation) - (1) Promises to be claimed, (2) Conditions to be met - in initially receiving salvation and in maintaining a vital saving relationship with God, (3) Warnings - addressed to truly saved persons - to be heeded (or ‘traps’ of sin to be avoided). The faithfulness of God and the ‘keeping power’ of God are NEVER to be questioned or doubted or debated, but the on-going faithfulness (obedience) of the believer is, of course, always to be ‘questioned’ (i.e., the Christian must, throughout his/her entire life, continue to ‘abide’ in the Son). The Lord declares, *“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”* As long as a human (including a believer) has the capacity to choose (because of free will agency which God grants to all believers), there is always the possibility (if not the probability) that a believer could ‘fall from grace’ and go back into a life (practice) of willful sinning (called backsliding or apostasy). That is a ‘horrible’ thought, but the Bible definitely teaches (through the countless warnings to believers) that such is a ‘possibility’. (Otherwise the many warnings addressed to believers do not make ‘any sense’.) I definitely believe in ‘eternal security’ for believers (but only for ‘believers’ - i.e., those persons who CONTINUE to believe and trust in Christ as their only Saviour and who keep up to date in their confession of any sins in their lives). Therefore, I do not believe the Bible teaches UNCONDITIONAL (or ‘automatic’ or ‘irrevocable’) eternal security - but instead CONDITIONAL ETERNAL SECURITY. Of course, the Bible teaches that backslidden persons (who were one-time believers) can ‘come back’ to Christ in deep repentance and faith (trust), and thereby be wonderfully restored to both relationship and fellowship with Christ (I John 1: 7, 9 and 1 John 2: 1-2). However, it is possible for a believer to drift away from God through negligence (Hebrews 2: 1-2) or through outright rebellion (continued disobedience) and eventually to sever his/her relationship with God (John 15 teaches that branches which no longer abide in Christ the Vine are eventually severed because they are withered and dead - and cast into the fire!). John 15 teaches that good branches are pruned (chastened and disciplined, etc. in order to produce even more fruit), but that fruitless branches (i.e., branches that no longer abide in obedience - no longer attached in vital union to the Vine) are cut off and destroyed. So, fruitful branches (which are vitally attached to the Vine) can become barren and severed and destroyed branches! A fearful possibility, but hopefully not a high probability. I want to emphasize the importance of abiding in Christ and maintaining faithfulness (in response to God’s constant faithfulness and keeping power). I want to emphasize the importance of a life

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of continuing abiding in the Son - finding ‘staying power’ in living the Christian life to the very end. There are many, many other Scriptures (nearly a hundred Scriptures altogether in the New Testament) which deal with ‘conditional eternal security’. Again, the grace of God or the keeping power of God or the forgiving love of God - none of these truths are questioned at all. The only thing that is always open for ‘change for the worst’ is the free will of man/woman (including the will of believers). God treats believers with the greatest of dignity by allowing believers (Christians) to daily exercise a positive volition (saying ‘yes’ with one’s will to God’s daily call to ‘deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me’). None of what I have said is intended to ‘take away the peace and security and confidence’ of true believers, but with the multitude of Promises in God’s Word, there are also Conditions listed (for the fulfillment of those God-given Promises), as well as many Warnings addressed to Christians. Always remember: ‘The faithfulness of God cannot cover for or take the place of the unfaithfulness of man’ (even a Christian). A believer need never ‘Fall from Grace’, for God is able to keep him unto the end - and preserve him unto eternal life (glory!) - but a Christian must take, not only the Promises of God seriously, but must also seriously accept the Conditions and the Warnings of the Holy Scriptures. It is this ‘Biblical balance’ which I am ‘after’. Thanks for letting me briefly share this aspect of Biblical insight with you. God bless you richly as you victoriously live for your wonderful Master.

With Christian Love,

Ron Christian

Someone said that the ‘biggest word in the English language’ is IF. The following illustration vividly demonstrates the truth of this assertion.

Freeborn Garrettson, an American-born, itinerant Methodist preacher who traversed the Atlantic seaboard on horseback, kept a journal that contains the following record of his heavenly vision, dated July 30, 1780. “Sunday 30, brother Cromwell and family accompanied me. At seven o’clock we had a love-feast; about two hundred of brethren were present, and our Saviour was in the midst. Afterwards I preached in the Dutch church. About thirty of our friends accompanied me about eight miles to another Dutch church, where I preached to many with freedom. Many went with me three miles further to Mr. Vaun’s, where we had a watch night. The labors of this day were wearisome to the body, but I was strong in faith, and willing to give my little all to God. The next day a crowded audience assembled at the same place; some time before, and whilst the people were gathering, my mind was uncommonly exercised: but I found great freedom whilst enforcing, ‘Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.’ The cloud was dispersed, and I

felt myself uncommonly sweet and comfortable. This dear family drink deeply into the blessed Spirit. I went to bed very happy: but my night visions were uncommonly strange: I thought I was taken dangerously ill, and expected shortly to be in eternity. I doubt not, but I felt just as dying persons do. I appeared to be surrounded with thousands of devils, who were all striving to take from me my confidence; and for a time it seemed almost gone. I began an examination from my first awakenings - then my conversion - my call to preach - the motives which induced me to enter this great work - my intention, and life from the beginning. In the time of this examination, every fear was dismissed, and every fiend vanished; and a band of holy angels succeeded with the most melodious music that I ever heard. I then began to ascend, accompanied by this heavenly host; and thought every moment the body would drop off, and my spirit take its flight. After ascending a vast height, I was over-shadowed with a cloud as white as a sheet; and in that cloud I saw a person the most beautiful that my eyes had beheld. I wanted to be dislodged from this tabernacle, and take my everlasting flight. That glorious person, more bright than the sun in its meridian brilliance, spake to me as follows, ‘IF you CONTINUE FAITHFUL TO THE END, this shall be your place; but you cannot come now; return, and BE FAITHFUL: there is more work for you to do.’ Immediately I awoke, and my spirit was so elevated with a sense of eternal things, that I thought I should sleep no more that night. Great, and glorious discoveries have been made to me, both sleeping and waking; but all the PROMISES of heaven and eternal glory, HAVE BEEN CONDITIONAL. In scriptures we have a little, but significant word, IF - IF YOU ARE FAITHFUL UNTIL DEATH, you shall have a crown of life. I would advise all the children of God, to be very careful and watchful, and CONTINUE in well-doing until death.” (Quoted in ‘Discover the Secrets of Heaven’ - A Guideposts Book; pgs. 24, 25)

I believe in the “power of positive thinking”, but I also believe there is (rarely) such a thing as the “positive power of negative thinking”. There is the ‘dark side’ of truth, as well as the ‘bright side’ of truth. Jesus came to earth to seek and to save the lost ones. His ministry was one of positive affirmation and great comfort. He declared, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give thee rest.” (Matthew 11: 28) To the broken-hearted, Jesus always offered healing, and to the contrite in spirit, Jesus always offered forgiveness and peace. But Jesus did not only come to ‘comfort the disturbed’; He came also to ‘disturb the comfortable’. Witness this truth as you read the many “woes” which Jesus pronounced against the hypocritical Jewish leaders (as recorded in Matthew 23). The fact that there are many Warnings to be heeded and many Conditions to be met (as well as many Promises to be claimed) speaks to the fact that there is ‘negative’ truth as well as ‘positive’ truth, revealed in the New Testament. There is the ‘positive’ truth which declares that all sinners who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved from their sins (i.e., they are no longer in a state of ‘condemnation and guilt’ before Almighty God). There is the ‘negative’ truth which declares that any believer who falls into a life of sinning (apostasy) loses both his fellowship and his relationship with Almighty God, and such a person will be eternally

lost if he refuses to repent and if he rejects God’s offer of forgiveness and restoration and peace and reconciliation.

It has often been said, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Spiritually-speaking, it is far better for a believer never to fall into sin (i.e., into a state of backsliding), than for a believer to backslide and have to go through the painful (and often time-consuming) process of repentance and restitution and reconciliation. It is also often said, “To be forewarned is to be forearmed.” Spiritually-speaking, it is wise for a believer to be fully aware of the (negative) dangers and snares and perils which threaten to defeat and destroy his spiritual life, than to be ignorant of such snares and to be off-guard and unprepared and unarmed when Satan attacks! To think about the ‘wiles of the devil’ and ‘the weakness of the human flesh’ and the ‘warnings against apostasy’ may all seem to be ‘very negative’. But this kind of ‘negative thinking’ is also very wise and definitely ‘Biblical thinking’. It might seem ‘more positive’ to entertain thoughts of a believer’s ‘unconditional’ (‘irrevocable’) ‘eternal security’ (i.e., that it is ‘impossible’ for a true believer ever to ‘lose his relationship with God’), but such false reasoning (and ‘false security’) is both unwise and unbiblical!

In my rather thorough examination of the New Testament’s teaching on the ‘perseverance of the believer’ (and the related doctrine of the ‘security of the believer’), I discovered that there are many ‘perils’ (snares) which every earnest believer must avoid, during his earthly pilgrimage. In summary form, the following are some of those ‘perils’ (snares) which every believer must avoid if he is to live a victorious Christian life: (1) Unforgiving spirit; (2) Deception by false teachings or by evil spirits; (3) Spiritual neglect and procrastination (spiritual ‘drifting’ or gradual hardening or ‘lukewarmness’); (4) Spiritual carelessness and shallowness (lack of vigilance); (5) Yielding to temptation, leading to backsliding or apostasy; (6) Preoccupation with worldly interests and with the pursuit of material possessions and earthly riches; (7) Faithlessness and lack of spiritual endurance (disobedience and unbelief and bitterness); (8) Shallow attitude towards ‘sin’ and towards ‘grace’ (Antinomianism); (9) Insensitivity to and neglect of the spiritual ‘Means of Grace’; (10) Offense by fellow believers; (11) Attitude of ingratitude, grumbling, and division; (12) Self-confidence and pride; (13) Resort to religious performance instead of embracing God’s grace alone (leading to Legalism); (14) Discouragement and despair during trials and persecutions, and hardening one’s heart during God’s chastisements (losing of ‘heart’); (15) Rejection of the ‘dictates’ of the Conscience; (16) Temporal irresponsibility to one’s Dependents (family and relatives); (17) Spiritual ‘profession’ without spiritual ‘performance’ (lack of ‘Good Deeds’ and ‘Good Conduct’).

William Barclay notes that Jesus Himself emphasized the ‘perseverance of believers’ in His teaching. Says Barclay, “Jesus declared that entry to the Kingdom can never be automatic, and that it is the result and the reward of a struggle. ‘Keep on striving to enter’, said Jesus. (Luke 13: 24) The word that is used for ‘striving’ is the word from

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which the English word ‘agony’ is derived. The struggle to enter in must be so intense that it can be described as an agony of soul and spirit. We run a certain danger. It is easy to think that, once we have become members of the church by profession, we have reached the end of the road, that then we can, as it were, sit back like those who have arrived and who have achieved their goal. There is no such finality in the Christian life. A man must ever be going forward or necessarily he is going backward. The Christian way is like a climb up a mountain pathway towards a peak which will never be reached in this world. It was said of two gallant climbers who died on Mount Everest, ‘When last seen they were going strong for the top.’ It was inscribed on the grave of an Alpine guide who had died on the mountain-side, ‘He died climbing.’ For the Christian life is ever an upward and an onward way.” (Daily Study Bible; Luke; William Barclay; pgs. 188, 189)

What is the ‘secret’ to maintaining a life of faithfulness and perseverance in the Christian life? Is it not being daily filled with the Holy Spirit, whose ministry is to ‘shed abroad the love of God’ in the heart of every believer? He who has a passionate love for Christ is he who remains close to the “heart of God”, amidst all the changes and chances of life, amidst all the “ups and downs” of life, amidst all the successes and failures of life, amidst all the joys and sorrows of life. Love keeps him close to the heart of God, and love for others makes the believer’s trials and losses bearable. A love-filled person “values the real”, for love sees beyond the temporary to the eternal! Wholehearted love for God keeps one ‘trucking’ in life, keeps one ‘in the saddle’, keeps one from ‘throwing in the towel’ and quitting! Men have wondered what kept John Wesley in the saddle for fifty-three years ‘contesting the three kingdoms for Christ’... They have wondered what kept David Livingstone in the jungle of Africa for thirty-three years, and Peter Claver tending the poor slaves at Cartagena for thirty-eight. None of these men retired. Death alone ended their labors...it is not in normal nature to love like that; it is a ‘given’ love. They had sought it and received it from God and they were consumed by its scorching flame.” (Daily Readings; William Sangster; pg. 134)

There is a “strange reasoning” among some earnest believers who consider themselves “Calvinist” (in terms of their theological ‘persuasion’). Some ‘Calvinists’ believe that a backslidden believer (who is ‘out of fellowship’ with the Lord, but who nevertheless ‘maintains relationship’ with the Lord because he is among the ‘chosen’ of God) will go to heaven even if he dies while he is ‘living in sin’. These persons believe that such a ‘backslidden believer’ will be ushered into heaven, regardless of how many unconfessed sins he has at the time of his physical death (“for he who was once saved in the past is always saved forever” irrevocably, regardless of the sins he commits subsequent to his initial conversion). Even though this appears to be a rather widespread belief among many ‘Calvinist-oriented’ teachers, it is doubtful (when reading from the actual writings of John Calvin) that John Calvin himself would declare that a man living in sin when he dies was ever a ‘true believer’ (an ‘elect one’). John Calvin believed that the only ultimate ‘proof’ that a person was among the ‘elect of God’ was the final perseverance

in the faith of Christ of the person who claimed to be among God’s ‘elect’. Perseverance in the faith meant, to Calvin, faithfulness to Christ and Christ’s ways. Wrote Calvin, “For God is said to give us to the Son so that each may know himself an heir of the heavenly kingdom SO LONG AS HE ABIDES IN CHRIST, apart from whom death and destruction beset us on every side.” (Quoted in ‘Elect In The Son’; Robert Shank; pg. 216) Calvin seems to be saying that only the person (professing Christian) who truly abides in Christ to the end of life will enjoy heaven as his inheritance. This (among other similar statements by Calvin) would seem to refute anyone who claims assurance that he will go to heaven, while he is, at the same time, deliberately practicing sin and refusing genuinely to repent of his sins.

Notes Robert Shank, “Despite his erroneous definition of election, Calvin was on solid ground in his ultimate conclusion that valid assurance of election and salvation is impossible apart from conscious, deliberate perseverance in faith.” (Elect In The Son; pg. 215)

The ‘classical’ Calvinist theology - popularly taught today - believes that those whom God ‘elected’ to eternal salvation will inevitably persevere in the Faith to the end of life. The ‘elect’ (chosen) ones must ultimately be saved in heaven, because (according to this theology) God chose them “before the foundation of the world” to be members of Christ’s chosen followers. And yet, even some Calvinist teachers and writers, when they honestly study the Holy Scriptures directly (without undue influence from their Calvinist presuppositions) acknowledge that perseverance to the end in the Christian life is NOT inevitable! John Eadie, a Calvinist scholar, writes: “While...the perseverance of the saints is a prominent doctrine of Scripture and a perennial source of consolation, it is not inconsistent with exhortations to permanence of faith and warnings of the sad results of deviation and apostasy. He who stops short in the race, and does not reach the goal, cannot obtain the prize. He who abandons the refuge into which he fled for a season is swept away when the hurricane breaks upon him. The loss of faith is the knell of hope.” (Quoted in ‘Elect In The Son’; Robert Shank; pg. 214) Strangely enough, this Calvinist scholar believes that a one-time believer can “fall from grace” (or, as he says “abandon the refuge into which he fled for a season” or have a “loss of faith”), and as a result “be swept away when the hurricane breaks upon him” and experience the “knell of hope”. This teaching by this respected Calvinist scholar does not sound like the typical Calvinist who adamantly contends for “unconditional eternal security” (“once saved, always saved” doctrine). According to this Calvinist scholar, the believer who “stops short in the race and does not reach the goal” cannot, at the same time, retain his Christian hope for eternal security!

Comments Robert Shank (regarding some earnest Calvinist scholars): “When men get close to the Scriptures, they often get far from their theology. Eadie has it right: much is suspended on perseverance, according to the Scripture - all theology to the contrary notwithstanding.” (‘Elect In The Son’; Robert Shank; pg. 214) Fortunately, there are

even many Calvinists who seriously disagree that so-called “backslidden believers” who die while they are living a life of sin, have Biblically-based assurance that they will safely enter heaven! The doctrine of ‘unconditional eternal security’, based on ‘unconditional particular election’ of specific persons, is totally unscriptural, and (thank God) there are even Calvinist scholars (because of their direct study of the Scriptures) who are seriously questioning this erroneous doctrine!

Some sincere believers who declare with great conviction that “*it is impossible for a true believer ever to ultimately fall away from God and finally be eternally lost*”, quote John 10: 28-29 as the Scriptural ‘proof’. Said Jesus, “*I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one shall snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else, so no one can kidnap them from me.*” (Living Bible) Indeed, this is one of the most thrilling and comforting PROMISES ever given to Christians. But, those who sincerely quote these verses as ‘proof’ of the ‘eternal security of the believer’ fail to quote the previous verse - John 10: 27 - which states the CONDITION for the fulfillment of the Promise. To whom does Jesus promise ‘eternal life’ and ‘protection from harm’ (security)? These promises are given ONLY TO SHEEP. And who are Christ’s ‘Sheep’? John 10: 27 answers that question: “*My sheep recognize my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*” Only those who hear the voice of the Shepherd, who know the voice of the Shepherd, and who follow (obey) the Shepherd can justly claim ‘security’ and ‘protection’. Can a one-time believer who no longer hears or knows the voice of the Shepherd, and who no longer follows (obeys) the Shepherd, claim ‘security’ and ‘protection’ from the Shepherd? A person who does not presently meet the conditions cannot claim the promises! He who refuses to accept the responsibilities of being a ‘sheep’, cannot presently enjoy the benefits which the Shepherd has to offer!

An internationally-respected New Testament scholar, I. Howard Marshall, gives the following fitting and Biblically-balanced summary to this important subject of “Perseverance of the Believer”. He notes: “The believer is not told that he is one of the elect and therefore cannot fall away, nor is there any particular character of his faith which indicates that he is the kind of person who cannot fall away. He is simply told to continue in obedience and faith and to trust in the God who will keep him from falling. He perseveres by persevering. Perseverance is not some particular quality of faith or something to be added to faith, but the fact that faith continues. To speak of the need to develop endurance, as the New Testament does, is the same thing as saying that one must continue to believe despite every temptation to disbelieve.

“Such persevering faith is faith in God through Jesus Christ and is at all times a response to His grace. It is faith in the God who keeps, establishes, and strengthens believers, committal of oneself to His Lordship and His care. But such committal does not mean that the believer no longer needs to watch lest he stumble and fall. He must still beware of temptation. The fact that he can still fall into sin shows that he is not

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preserved miraculously by God from falling, although God is able to keep those who trust in Him from falling and never refuses His grace to those who seek it. God’s power enables men to battle against temptation, but does not relieve them from temptation or from the necessity to fight against it. The way to victory is by constant submission to God.

“Alongside the imperatives stand the promises. We do not need to fear in the midst of temptation, for we know that if we trust in God, His power will preserve us...When the believer puts his trust in God, he is entitled to be confident...The New Testament most certainly teaches that God strengthens the faith of the believer so that he may withstand temptation; He does not forget those who trust in Him. Hence, while the New Testament knows the possibility of failure to persevere, it also knows the fact of growth in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ so that the Christian can attain to a confidence which lifts him above the fear of falling away. It is perhaps in this idea of growth and development in faith that the key to the problem is to be found. Faith is something which grows and becomes stronger and consequently more removed from the fear of failing. And yet this does not mean that the assurance of perseverance is for a spiritual elite; it is for the weakest believer who is prepared to cry, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.’

“In short, we cannot go beyond the teaching of the New Testament which places side by side the possibility of failure to persevere and the greater possibility of a confidence in God and a continuing faith which, as it is sustained by God, is preserved from the fear of falling away...There is a confidence which can grow and deepen, and hence the possibility of the faith that God will preserve us for His heavenly kingdom. It is possible, therefore, to maintain the confidence of the believer without committing ourselves to a watertight logical system of irresistible grace and unconditional election to final salvation, and at the same time to give a realistic meaning to the warnings of the New Testament.

“We can say firmly that, while it is possible for a Christian to fail to persevere after a genuine experience of salvation, yet, with all the promises of a faithful God to sustain those who trust in Him, the main emphasis of the New Testament is on confidence and assurance of final salvation.” (‘Kept By The Power Of God’; I. Howard Marshall; pgs. 208-210)

WEAK AND HELPLESS

**Son of God, thy blessing grant;
Still supply my every want;
Tree of life, thine influence shed;
From thy fullness I am fed.**

**Tenderest branch, alas! am I,
Wither without thee and die;
Weak as helpless infancy;
O confirm my soul in thee!**

**Unsustained by thee, I fall;
Send the help for which I call;
Weaker than a bruised reed,
Help I every moment need.**

**All my hopes on thee depend;
Love me, save me to the end;
Give me persevering grace;
Take the everlasting praise.**

Charles Wesley

CHAPTER ONE

AVOID 'DRIFTING' FROM GRACE

Hebrews 2: 1-4

THE PERILS OF THE ‘DRIFTING LIFE’!

Someone well said, “For everyone that definitely turns his back on Christ, there are hundreds who drift from Him. Life’s ocean is full of currents, anyone of which will sweep us past the harbor - mostly even when we seem nearest to it, and carry us far out to sea.” (The Way Into The Holiest; F.B. Meyer’s pg. 24) Taking into consideration the Greek language of the New Testament, here is William Barclay’s translation of Hebrews 2: 1 “Therefore, we must the more eagerly anchor our lives to the things that we have been taught, lest the ship of life drift past the harbor and be wrecked.”

This portion of scripture (Hebrews 2: 1) definitely teaches that there is no such thing as ‘automatic security’ in the Christian life. There are “currents” in life - both externally in society and internally in man’s soul - that oppose the progress of the Christian traveler, and which have the capability of causing spiritual shipwreck. In his letter to Timothy, Paul referred to two persons - one-time believers - who had failed to hold on to their faith in Christ and who had rejected the dictates of their conscience. These two persons - Hymenaeus and Alexander - had made “shipwreck” of their faith (I Timothy 1: 19-20).

Although the Scriptural portion which was our ‘reading for today’ does not itemize the various causes for spiritual drifting, we must scan the Scriptures and try to identify some of the main causes for such a dreadful reality - the reality of ‘spiritual drifting’. During the next several days, we will look at some of those ‘perils’ which every earnest believer must guard against. These are serious causes of spiritual drifting.

First, procrastination because of busyness. How easy it is to become preoccupied with the concerns and the interests of time - family and friends and job and recreation - and soon lose our spiritual focus and begin to drift away from Christ and our relationship with Him! In His parable of the Four Soils, Jesus said the *“thorny ground represents the hearts of people who listen to the Good News and receive it, but all too quickly the attractions of this world and the delights of wealth, and search for success and lure of nice things come in and crowd out God’s message from their hearts, so that no crop is produced.”* (Mark 4: 18-19, Living Bible) Like Martha, we can be so concerned to do a good job of serving others, that we don’t take enough time to sit at the feet of Jesus to meditate and to deepen our communion with our Lord. Active church members who are rightly committed to being busy for their Lord in Christian service, must take time for regular contemplation and solitude and prayer and personal spiritual revival. On one occasion, Jesus said to His busy and over-worked disciples, *“Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile.” Take time to pray, meditate, reflect, plan!*

“Blessed Christ, help me to take time to be holy, for the world rushes on. I want to spend much time in secret with You alone. By looking to You, dear Lord, like You I will become! Then, my friends in my conduct Your likeness will see!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: “If my Outgo exceeds my Intake, then my Downfall will be my Upkeep!” If I am ‘too busy’ to pray much, then I am much ‘too busy’!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

I Timothy 1: 18-19; 6: 6-10

AN OBEDIENT AND SIMPLE LIFESTYLE

We saw yesterday that being too busy in one's daily life or even in one's Christian service, will cause one to drift away from the heart of God! Let us continue to look at other causes for 'spiritual drifting'. Second, ignoring the message of God because of disobedience. Whenever a believer fails to obey a command of God, his conscience become less sensitive and his spiritual ears less attuned to hear the voice of God. Such disobedience leads to an attitude of indifference to the Christian message. It is no wonder that disobedience, which is not openly confessed God, leads to drifting away from God and His wonderful salvation. Wrote Paul to Timothy, *“Cling tightly to your faith in Christ and always keep your conscience clear, doing what you know is right. For some people have disobeyed their conscience and have deliberately done what they knew was wrong. It isn't surprising that soon they lost their faith in Christ after defying God like that.”* (I Timothy 1: 19, Living Bible) The author of Hebrews warns believers against the danger of disobedience. *“Although God's promise still stands - his promise that all may enter his place of rest - we ought to tremble with fear because some of you may be on the verge of failing to get there after all. For this wonderful news - the message that God wants to save us - has been given to us just as it was to those who lived in the time of Moses. But it didn't do them any good because they didn't believe it. They didn't mix it with faith...let us do our best to go into that place of rest, too, being careful not to disobey God as the children of Israel did, thus failing to get in.”* (Hebrews 4: 1, 2, 11)

Third, some believers drift away from Christ and His wonderful salvation because of their lust for material wealth and “creature comforts”. Paul warned against this trap! *“For the love of money is the first step toward all kinds of sin. Some people have even turned away from God because of their love for it, and as a result have pierced themselves with many sorrows.”* (I Timothy 6: 10, Living Bible) One young Christian whom I knew, immediately following his dramatic conversion, was “on fire” for God, attending church regularly and witnessing boldly to his unsaved friends, and spending much time daily in prayer and Bible study. Then a financial crises hit him. Not knowing how he could possibly fulfill his pressing financial obligation, he accepted a 2nd job. This job involved him in driving a tourist van as many as a thousand miles each weekend. Of course, this second job kept him away from his wife and absent from Sunday services. At his own admission, he drifted away from his original life of spiritual zeal and active involvement in church and private devotions. Only after a dangerous year away from the Christian fellowship did he finally “wake up” and repent and restore himself to a close relationship with Christ. He dropped the second job and found the “fire of holy enthusiasm” as he again became a regular church attender.

“Father, do not allow me to become so preoccupied with meeting a ‘legitimate’ financial obligation that I neglect the ‘means of grace’ and begin to spiritually drift. Help me to stay ‘on fire’ for Christ!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Godliness with contentment - and with a ‘clear conscience’ - brings ‘great gain’ to my life!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Romans 12: 9-16

SPIRITUAL ‘DROWSINESS’ OR ‘ALERTNESS’?

We continue to look at the causes of spiritual drifting. Fourth, spiritual drowsiness because of a lack of alertness and zeal. We have all heard the common declaration: “Vigilance is the price of freedom!” Staying alert and active and zealous is the price of spiritual vitality! How easy it is to be lulled asleep by the routine activities of life, and find that we no longer have the mental alertness and spiritual zeal that we one time experienced. We take “for granted” the old-fashioned truths that are so familiar to us, and we no longer give heed to the warnings, and no longer give counsel to the exhortations, and no longer take daily delight in the promises of that ancient and one-time cherished message which we have long known! We have allowed ourselves to drift!

Tragically, with the passing of years, there is the fading of zeal and enthusiasm and freshness in the lives of too many believers. Seeking to live on the “spiritual capital” of the past, there is seldom any new discoveries of truth and seldom any new growth in the Christian life. Drifting can be so gradual and so slow, but it can become so destructive in our spiritual life. Like Peter, it is easy for us too to fall asleep when we should be praying. Said Jesus to his sleepy disciples in the ‘Garden of Gethsemane’, *“Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit (of man) indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

As believers, we must not allow ourselves to drift away from the truth which we have received, because of what we consider to be over-familiarity with the message over a long period of time. We must not become lukewarm in our devotion to the Lord. We dare not lose our “first love” for the Lord and for the truth of His blessed Word (Bible). We must be “unflagging in spiritual zeal”, serving the Lord enthusiastically, keeping our spiritual fervor, with heart full of devotion for the Kingdom business. We must “keep on fire” for Christ, never allowing the flames of spiritual fervor to burn out!

The author of Hebrews writes: *“We are anxious that you (believers) keep right on loving others as long as life lasts, so that you will get your full reward. Then, knowing what lies ahead for you, you won’t become bored with being a Christian, nor become spiritually dull and indifferent, but you will be anxious to follow the example of those who receive all that God has promised them because of their strong faith and patience.”* (Hebrews 6: 11-12, Living Bible)

“Father, You are not only the ‘changeless One’ in your steadfast character of love, but you are also the ‘progressive One’ in your innovative works of creativity. I want both to ‘rest’ in your character, and to ‘stand on tiptoe’ with anticipation of your unfolding ‘surprises’!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because God is the ‘Big Creator’, I will be a ‘small creator’!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Hebrews 10: 19-25

DO NOT NEGLECT ‘THE MEANS OF GRACE’!

The fifth cause of spiritual drifting is this: neglect of the “means of grace” because of a lack of personal discipline. “It is so easy - and much more pleasant - to drift. Just to lie back, and renounce effort, and let yourself go whither the waters will, as they break musically on the sides of the rocking boat. But, ah, how ineffable the remorse, how disastrous the result!” (The Way Into The Holiest; F. B. Meyers pg. 25) Someone half jokingly said, “I am as lazy as I dare to be!” A lack of discipline, taking the “path of least resistance”, giving counsel to one’s fears, and giving in to one’s ‘flesh’ - these are the ways that many drift perilously to their destruction in the spiritual life! Paul wrote about the importance of rugged personal discipline and self-control: *“I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I fight to win. I’m not just shadow boxing or playing around. Like an athlete I punish my body, treating it roughly, training it to do what it should, not what it wants to. Otherwise I fear that after enlisting others for the race, I myself might be declared unfit and ordered to stand aside.”* (I Corinthians 9: 25, Living Bible) Paul made it very clear (as every athlete knows) that *“to win the contest you must deny yourselves many things that would keep you from doing your best.”* (I Corinthians 9: 25, Living Bible)

Serious Bible reading and study is one ‘means of grace’ which too many believers neglect. Admittedly, “the Bible isn’t all easy to understand. Picking bits at random can be dangerous. Only serious, reverent and prayerful study secures its treasures. This takes time - and we have crowded our lives with other things. So let us resolve to know this book better, to learn to live in it, to give time to it daily, to wait on the Holy Spirit before we turn a page, to let God apply it to our soul.” (Daily Readings; pg. 52, William Sangster)

Regular communion with God in prayer is another ‘means of grace’. Exhorts the author of Hebrews: “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.” (10:22) “Let us come boldly to the very throne and stay there to receive his mercy and to find grace to help us in our times of need.” (4: 16) He who regularly draws near to God in daily prayer, cannot at the same time be spiritually drifting away.

A third ‘means of grace’ is Christian fellowship. Exhorts the author of Hebrews: *“Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.”* (10:25) It is difficult, if not impossible, to stay close to God and at the same time be apart for long periods of time from God’s people (church). One good way to help guard yourself against the peril of the drifting life, is to remain in warm fellowship with God’s people.

“Father, You are the ‘source’ of life, and I am the ‘recipient’ of life, but I need ‘channels’ by which your life reaches me. Thank you for your ‘channels’ - the Bible, Prayer, Christian Fellowship, Holy Communion! Help me to open my life to these ‘channels’!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My greatest ‘safeguard’ against spiritual drifting is my surrendered heart which is constantly open to the cleansing blood of Jesus!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

II Timothy 1

HOLD FAST

We live in an impatient world. We are a nation of clock watchers. If you don't believe me, listen for the beepers on Sunday mornings when the sermon goes into overtime. It's no wonder this dilemma looms on the horizon of modern life when we consider the hundreds of time choices people must make every day. The average attention span has shrunk from twenty minutes to a seven minute maximum. Distractions are everywhere. There are volumes of information to absorb daily and innumerable activities to engage in. It's so easy to leave God out of our lives.

We always assume our own generation is the busiest of all time, but I wonder as I read the letters of the Apostle Paul if he felt the same pressure points of life. He exhorted Christians to “hold fast” as if the tug of the world might wrench the faith clean out of their hearts. He encouraged Timothy to “hold fast” to sound words of faith and love. (II Timothy 1: 13) He reminded the Corinthians to “stand fast” in their faith and be strong. (I Corinthians 16: 13) He cautioned the Galatians to “stand fast” in the liberty wherein Christ had made them free and not to be entangled again in the yoke of bondage. (Galatians 5: 1) Paul repeated his exhortation in the same or synonymous words on many other occasions in his letters.

As I read the correspondence of Paul , it's obvious that temptations lurked behind every street corner and shouted from every mountain. Our culture today is different, but the facts penned by an apostle in a Roman prison have not changed. We still need to “hold fast” in the profession of our faith. We still need to clear personal time in our busy schedules to draw near to God. We still need to hold on to scriptural truth when false ideologies proliferate. We still need the support of Christian fellowship. We still need the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome temptation. We still need the courage and grace of The Living Christ so that we, like Paul, might keep the faith, finish the course, and receive the prize. “Hold on” and “hold fast” until you clear the finish line.

“Dear God, hold on to me as I hold on to faith. Let me cross the finish line with you.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: With heaven as my goal and Christ as my guide, victory is assured.

- Loretta Jenkins -

Deuteronomy 4: 1-9

LEST WE FORGET - WE MUST KEEP ‘PRESSING ON’!

Before my mother’s death, she developed Alzheimer’s disease. It was very sad and difficult for me since we lived so far away and we could not visit with her often. I called her every week but, as time passed, she gradually became worse and did not know me when I called. Sometimes when we did get to visit her in person, she would have brief times of remembrance and then another time would have little or no remembrance. Sometimes she would remember times of long ago, but not the present times. It was always good to be with her, but sometimes heartbreaking. It sometimes brought deep sadness and a feeling of great loss to me when I realized that there were things we would never be able to share again together.

During her long life, my mother sang hymns while going about her daily tasks, and she would also quote scriptures to us, her loved ones. In spite of her debilitating disease, these are the things she seemed to have retained in her mind. When I and my daughters and my sister visited her on one occasion, we all went to the nursing home chapel to sing. When we tried to remember the words to some of the hymns, my mom would remember them all and would ‘fill in the gaps’ for us!

I am reminded of the Scripture in Psalm 110: 11 which says: *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee!”* God’s promise is true! He will never leave us or forsake us! Even though the disease had taken my mother’s memory, her knowledge of the Lord and His words were recorded in her mind, bringing her comfort and joy even as she was struggling with her ‘handicap’.

It is painful, indeed, when a loved one can no longer recognize you and has forgotten all the times you shared together throughout your whole life. I cannot help but realize how God must feel when we needlessly forget Him and the great sacrifice He paid on Calvary for us! My mother could not control her ‘forgetfulness’ (because of a physical disease), but you and I have no ‘excuse’ if we forget Christ and His Word! I’m sure He feels pain and loneliness when His dear children do not communicate with Him or share their concerns with Him in loving fellowship.

My daughter gave my husband and me a picture of a team of draft horses pulling a sleigh with a heavy load of hay in a fierce snow storm. The caption reads: *“When the going gets tough; the tough get going.”* Tough times usually do not last, but tough people do. Sometimes when pushed to our limits we can go beyond what we thought ourselves capable of. Don’t give up! Keep pressing on! Don’t forget the Lord! Stay on course and work hard towards your goals! Give it your undivided attention!

“Father, keep me mindful of the goals you would have me reach for in the center of your perfect will.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will not falter as long as I accept my Father’s guidance!

- Joyce Calkins -

NOTES:

1st Samuel 5: 10-23; John 10: 27-29

DISTRACTIONS

Recently, we attended the sheep dog trials at the Rapid City stock show. The dogs were mostly border collies and well-trained. The trainers stood alongside their dog in a marked circle at one end of the arena, while the sheep were at the opposite end in pens. There was an obstacle course the dogs were to follow and herd the sheep into another pen. The trainer, when ready, would signal the keeper of the sheep and the gate would be opened to release them into the arena. At that moment the command to the dog sent him to the far end and he began very carefully to move the sheep around the barrels in the order they were to go in accordance with the commands from his trainer, which was by voice or sometimes by a whistle.

One dog in particular was easily distracted and could not seem to keep his focus on the task at hand. He did not listen closely and did not follow the command from the trainer so eventually was disqualified as he slipped under a gate to the outside. It was very obvious his goal was not to please his master and that his interest was so divided that he went in search of other things, much to the disappointment of his master.

Another of the dogs was prone to become anxious and attacked the sheep, which was against the rules. The sheep could be very obstinate, and at times would turn to face the dog and stamp their hooves in defiance. It reminded me of some small children who sometimes defy authority. Most of the time if one would go into the chutes and pens, the rest would follow. Sometimes people are easily led and then there are those who refuse to be driven. Sometimes the sheep would split up and go in different directions and a goal can be defeated because of the division among them.

It is no wonder the Lord calls us the sheep of his pasture! We can sometimes be obstinate like the sheep and also disobedient like the dogs. Yet God is so patient! Sometimes we get our eyes off the Shepherd and we are drawn away from His goal for us, by the distractions of the world. We need to always be aware of the enemy nipping at our heels and be able to turn and face him head on and stamp our feet in resistance. James 4: 7 tells us to *“Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Submit yourselves therefore to God!”* As the dogs, we need to always be listening for the Master’s voice and be ready to obey instantly. When we grow accustomed to listening carefully to our Master, we will easily recognize the commands He gives.

In Deuteronomy 11: 26-28 Moses addressed the people saying, *“Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, and a curse if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day to go*

after other gods, which ye have not known.” I believe this applies to us yet today.

“Lord, help me to be aware of your voice whenever You speak, and help me to keep my eyes upon You so that the things of this earth will grow dim in the light of Your glory and grace.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Prosperity is contingent on obedience.

- Joyce Calkins -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Tell if you believe the following statements describe a realistic (though tragically ‘sad’) understanding of the ‘perils’ of living in a ‘Fallen World’: “For everyone that definitely turns his back on Christ, there are hundreds who drift from Him. Life’s ocean is full of currents, anyone of which will sweep us past the harbor - mostly even when we seem nearest to it, and carry us far out to sea.”**

- 2. What are some of the ‘truths’ that you have been taught (from the Bible) which provide an ‘anchor’ for your life, to help you to avoid making spiritual ‘shipwreck’ of your life? (Note Hebrews 2: 1)**

- 3. According to I Timothy 1: 19, what must a Christian do to avoid ‘spiritual shipwreck’ in his life?**

- 4. Considering Jesus’ Parable of the Soils (Mark 4: 3-20), check which of the following has been the ‘greatest threat’ to the growth of the ‘good seed’ in your Christian life:**
 - a. Cares (worries) of life.**
 - b. Delights of wealth.**
 - c. Search for success.**
 - d. Pleasures of life.**

- 5. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Active church members who are rightly committed to being busy for their Lord in Christian service, must take time for regular contemplation and solitude and prayer and personal spiritual revival.”**

- 6. Give your interpretation and application of the following statement: “If my Outgo exceeds my Intake, then my Downfall will be my Upkeep!”**

- 7. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “If I am ‘too busy’ to pray much, then I am much ‘too busy’!”**

- 8. According to Hebrews 4: 1, 2, 11, what sad consequence is incurred by the person who fails to ‘mix’ volitional commitment (faith and belief) to his intellectual knowledge of the truth of God’s Word?**

- 9. According to I Timothy 6: 10, what is the ‘first step toward all kinds of sin’?**

- 10. From your own personal experience, tell what it means for a believer to stay ‘alert’ and ‘active’ and ‘zealous’ in order that spiritual vitality might be maintained.**
- 11. Why is it unwise (and even ‘spiritually ‘disastrous’) for a believer to attempt to live on the “spiritual capital” of his past, rather than to use his mind to make ‘new discoveries’ of truth?**
- 12. As an earnest believer, what can you regularly (daily) do to avoid losing your ‘first love’ and falling into a state of ‘spiritual lukewarmness’? Tell what you personally have done, throughout the years of your ‘spiritual journey’, to “keep on fire” for Christ, never allowing the flames of spiritual fervor to burn out. (Note Hebrews 6: 11-12, Living Bible)**
- 13. Because God is ‘progressive’ and ‘innovative’ and ‘creative’, what can you as a ‘God-follower’ expect yourself increasingly to become, the more you become like God?**
- 14. Tell to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: “A lack of discipline, taking the ‘path of least resistance’, giving counsel to one’s fears, and giving in to one’s flesh - these are the ways that many drift perilously to their destruction in the spiritual life.” (Note I Corinthians 9: 25-27)**
- 15. Why is serious (systematic and regular) Bible reading and study such an important means by which Christians ‘grow in grace’?**
- 16. Tell why you agree (or disagree) that he/she who regularly draws near to God in daily prayer, cannot at the same time be spiritually drifting away. (Note Hebrews 4: 16; 10: 22)**
- 17. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “It is difficult, if not impossible, to stay close to God and at the same time be apart for long periods of time from God’s people (Church).”**
- 18. Tell with what degree of ‘conviction’ you agree with the following statement: “My greatest ‘safeguard’ against spiritual drifting is my surrendered heart which is constantly open to the cleansing blood of Jesus.”**
- 19. Why do you think that the Apostle Paul often exhorted believers to “hold fast”? (Note 2 Timothy 1: 13; I Corinthians 16: 13; Galatians 5: 1)**

- 20. Why is it important, if you intend to reach your ultimate goal of entering the ‘glories of heaven’, for you often to ‘recall’ the ancient truths of God’s Word? (Note Psalm 110: 11)**

- 21. According to John 10: 27, what characterizes the ‘true sheep’ of Christ’s pastures who enjoy the protection and security of the Good Shepherd (John 10: 28-29)?**

CHAPTER TWO

MAINTAIN FAITHFULNESS TO GOD

Joshua 24: 14-24

THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING YOUR ‘FIRST LOVE’

Mrs. Keener opened her door and leaned against the door frame. Removing her glasses, she rubbed her eyes and said, “I’m having trouble seeing.” She then explained how she had been working on another quilt as she pointed to the beautiful patterned pieces which had been carefully sewn together. The quilt covered most of her living room on her homemade quilting frame. It was a tumbling block design.

We had never held much of a conversation before - just a little chit-chat now and then. But she had something important to say this day. I have grown to love and appreciate the stories of elderly people. Theirs is a generation of story tellers. Telling stories of one’s life is fast becoming a lost art, like quilting. My generation has adopted the theme of a famous TV detective: “Just the facts, ma’am!” Tell it like it is and let us draw our own conclusion. Story telling, on the other hand, gives life to the values which are being expressed.

Standing all of four feet and eleven inches tall, this seventy-five year old grandmother began to tell me her story. She started making quilts when she was seven years old. She wanted to start at a younger age, but her mother told her she would first have to grow a little more. On her seventh birthday she again begged her mother to teach her how to make a quilt and, to her joy, her mother consented. Over the years she has made hundreds of quilts, bringing warmth and joy to many people.

It would be simple for me to draw a moral conclusion from this conversation. I could write about patience, or perseverance, or other such virtues. However, I would rather write about Mrs. Keener’s eyes. Although she admitted that she was having a little trouble seeing, I did not see the weary eyes of a seventy-five year old grandmother who had experienced many of life’s trials. Instead, as she told the story of learning how to make quilts on her seventh birthday, I saw the fresh, excited eyes of a seven year old daughter who was about to receive her first quilting lesson. I was left with the impression that this latest quilt was just as exciting for her to create as was her first. What I discovered in her eyes was the secret for staying forever young: holding on to your first love.

I wonder...will I have a story to tell when I am her age? Oh Lord, when I am seventy-five, let me see with seven year old eyes.

“Remind me of the first time I came to You in faith and trust, Oh God. Enable me to remember the joy which flooded my heart as I realized Your love for me. Furthermore,

I now renew my love for You. Take my heart once again...I give myself completely to You. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because of God’s love, I am able to love.

- Thomas Duckworth -

NOTES:

2 Timothy 1: 3-7

A HERITAGE OF FAITHFULNESS AND PERSEVERENCE

Faithfulness to God and faithfulness to God’s Church are lessons I learned well throughout my childhood and youth. Although I have a humble ancestry, I am rich with a heritage of godly forefathers who were faithful to Christ and to His Church. Timothy’s mother and grandmother remind me of my own committed mother and grandmother.

As a child, I regularly went with my mother to Wednesday night prayer meetings in a little white-framed Free Methodist Church in Fountain, Colorado (a church where some of my ancestors worshiped from the time it was founded in the 1800's). My godly mother rarely missed attending those prayer meetings, even though her long working days as a school cook made her very weary, and she often was plagued with headaches. She believed in faithfulness and she practiced it throughout her long life. She lived well past 94 years, and throughout her life she seldom missed attending the Sunday morning and evening services, as well as midweek prayer meetings. In her later years she hosted a small ‘Christian growth group’ in her home for more than a decade. While I was growing up, I often saw her reading her Bible and praying on her knees. She greatly loved God and she loved everyone around her. At her funeral service recently, her eleven grandchildren offered ‘glowing’ tributes, describing her joyous and compassionate life of commitment to Christ. Recently, the following was written in her obituary: “Helen Irene Christian, 94, died March 2, 2000, at the home of her son and daughter-in-law, Ron and Venita Christian of Fort Collins. Mrs. Christian, a lifetime member of the Free Methodist Church, was an active and committed Christian her entire life. She was known to her family and friends as ‘The Prayer Warrior’.”

My grandmother, before her, was equally faithful to her Lord. I was told that she taught Sunday School classes for some 50 years! My great grandmother, who died in 1950, was a godly woman, married to Joseph E. Benedict. This man died October 8, 1928, and the following appears in his obituary: “Early in life he united with the Free Methodist Church and was a very active, faithful member and sacrificed greatly for the work of God. Though for many years a cripple he was always faithful. He would hobble to church or prayer meeting even when others thought the weather too bad or they were too weary.” My great, great grandfather was born in 1821 and died in Fountain, Colorado in 1909. His pastor, who wrote his obituary, notes, “When the Free Methodist Church was organized in Fountain, he and his wife became charter members. He loved the means of grace and often, even in the last months of his life, walked with trembling steps to the house of God.” Will you leave a ‘legacy’ of faithfulness and perseverance in the Christian Faith, for your children?

“Father, enable me to be faithful to you until the end of my life. Help me never to allow weather or weariness or worry to keep me from being faithful to your church.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The best gift I can give my grandchildren is a godly heritage of faithfulness and fidelity to my God and my Church!

- Ron Christian -

NOTES:

Ephesians 5: 19-20

ONE-EYED FAITHFULNESS

“ We would like to thank all our dear friends for all of your prayers, cards, and support the last six months. After two operations, ending with the removal of my eye, it’s all behind us now and we have so much to be thankful for. We have surely been blessed.”

These words were recently written by Pete, retired Master Potter, who was once invited to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., to participate in an exhibition by the finest potters in America. Pete would create his clay masterpieces and his wife, Fernie, would paint them with bluebonnets and scenes from the farm. They are a creative couple.

Pete and Fernie are ever the optimists, always smiling, never complaining. Theirs is a quiet faith, like still waters running deep. “Six months, two operations, one eye gone, so much to be thankful for, surely blessed.” Words such as these would sound foreign coming from a chronic complainer. They are very much at home in Pete’s heart. Words such as these are foolishness to the unbeliever. They are the wisdom of faith for this creative couple. These are mature Christians, having learned that faith in God does not always shelter us from misfortune, but it does always see us through.

Our commitment to Christ must not be a fragile thing, blown back and forth by every wind of misfortune. It must be as inviolable as wedding vows: for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, till death shall call us home. Such a commitment creates a relationship in which it is always possible to be cheerful, thankful and optimistic regardless of the circumstances. Fanny Crosby was that way with no eyes. Pete is that way with one eye. Surely we can be that way with two eyes. Paul’s words in Philippians 4: 10-13 are helpful here.

If I ever see Pete again, I imagine he will be wearing a patch over the missing eye and will say, “Well, shiver me timbers, if it isn’t preacher Bill!” I’ll ask him where his parrot is and Fernie will smile, raise her hand shoulder high and say, “Here I am.” People of faith sure are fun to be around.

“Dear God, deliver me from so small a spirit that would cast you aside at the slightest difficulty.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will not allow outward circumstances to cause me to break my pledge of allegiance to Jesus.

- William Jenkins -

Luke 8: 22-25

WAITING FOR THE TIDE

The Sea of Galilee is a beautiful blue gem fed primarily by the melting snows of Mt. Hermon; its waters are sweet, clean, and clear. Called the “Sea of Cinnereth” in the Old Testament because of its harp shape, Galilee is thirteen miles long and eight miles wide at its farthest points. Jesus chose the gentle slopes of the western shore of Galilee for his base of ministry. Among his friends and followers were the boat people who made their living fishing the waters of Galilee. With such friends as these Jesus spent many hours riding in a boat on the bosom of Galilee. One such adventure is described in Luke 8: 22-25.

I am particularly interested in that part of verse 22 which says: “...and they launched forth.” That was easy enough for them to do. The waters of Galilee are plentiful and dependable. The apostles could sail with Jesus any time of the day or night; just get Jesus in the boat and go wherever their hearts desired. This is a wonderful metaphor of our life with Christ: gliding peacefully from place to place without a care in the world. “Row, row, row your boat gently on the sea...” The abundance of buoyancy makes this possible.

Not all sailing is as simple as that. Not all waters are so plentiful and dependable that you can at any time launch your boat. This was brought to my attention one summer while on the southern coast of England. Reverend Malcolm Groom was taking me from Rustington to Chichester for a meeting with the circuit preachers. As we crossed over a bay bridge I noticed that there was no water in the bay and some boats were resting on the ground. I pointed this out to Malcolm by saying, “What a dumb place to launch a boat.” He laughed and informed me that the tide was out. I wanted to know: “If there’s a tide, then where’s the water!” He grinned and with amusement in his eyes towards his foreign passenger he answered, “Oh, about a mile south of the highway. Things will be different when we come back this way.” This I had to see.

Three hours later we crossed over the same bridge and the boats were floating. The tide was coming in. I observed this phenomenon at Bosham and other places. Each time I saw boats sitting in a dry basin I would think “They’re waiting for the tide.”

This reminded me of a parallel in our life with Christ. I remembered those times when it seemed easy to “launch forth” with Christ in my boat and sail on the plentiful waters of life; but much of the time I have been like those boats in the dry basin, waiting for the tide. If you find yourself in the dry basin, remember three things. First, a boat in the dry basin is no less a boat than the one on the deep waters. It may not be in its natural habitat, but it is still a boat. Secondly, Jesus keeps company with us even when our boat

is grounded. He doesn't say, “Well, this boat's not going anywhere so I'm bailing out.” He promised never to leave us, but to always be with us. Never despair when the tide is out because Christ is with you. Thirdly, the tide always comes in. For those who desire the will of God, the tide always comes in. Just as there is a natural law which never fails to bring the tide in, so there is a spiritual law which will bring an abundance of buoyancy for those who wait in their boats with Jesus for the tide to come in.

“Heavenly Father, I will love You on the oceans and in the dry basin. My faith will not be subject to the tides of life.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When the tide is out, I will not abandon the boat.

- William Jenkins -

NOTES:

Hebrews 12: 1-3

SAIL ON

On October 12, 1492, after 70 days at sea, Christopher Columbus made his astounding entry into the ship’s log, “Sighted land!” On such a small hinge history made a sweeping turn. There is some irony in the fact that October 13th is the birthday of the U.S. Navy. On that day in 1775, the Continental Congress authorized a fleet of two cruisers. Need I remind you that Columbus had three boats?

Keeping his place in history has not been an easy task for Mr. Columbus, but if he is known for anything, it is tenacity. He has always had to play second-mate to “Erik the Red”, the Viking. Even on the calendar, Erik is ahead of Columbus as Leif Erikson Day is October 9. Those first Europeans must not have been terribly impressed with the New World. They may have considered it a nice place to visit, but didn’t want to live here. Perhaps if they had landed in the more tropical regions as Columbus did they would have had a more favorable impression. Interestingly enough, Columbus polished his skills as a sailor by sailing to Iceland. Perhaps that adventure helped him decide to sail around the world to the West rather than to the North.

It was from the writings of Ptolemy and the apocryphal book of 2 Esdras that Columbus concluded that the world was round, and conceived the idea of reaching Asia by sailing West. It is one thing to have an inspired idea and quite another to bring it to pass. On August 3, 1492, Columbus set sail to bring his idea to pass. Historians studying the ships’ logs kept by Columbus on his epic voyage have noted that on many days the entry stated simply, “Today we sailed on”. Not much happened. There were no storms, no rainbows, no interesting diversions from the monotony of sea, sky, and horizon. “Today we sailed on”, through the uneventful and unpromising. With only a dream, and faith in that dream, and nothing to sustain that dream but hope, “we sailed on”. Beyond the point at which over half the life-sustaining supplies were used up and the greatest peril lay in turning back, “we sailed on”. Therein lay the secret of success for Christopher Columbus.

Perseverance through the uneventful and unpromising days yet remains the secret of success in all of life’s endeavors. Especially is this true of the life of faith. The Letter to the Hebrews promotes this principle by saying, “*Let us run with patience the race that is set before us*”. (12: 1) It is one thing to set out on a journey, it is quite another to complete it. Sail on!

P.S. Columbus failed to reach his goal. Something better got in his way. Such are the rewards of perseverance. Sail on!

“Heavenly Father, in my journey with You, give me the stamina of a long distance runner.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My heart will keep the courage of the quest and hope the next horizon will be the best.

- William Jenkins -

NOTES:

Psalm 118: 27b

“COMMITMENT IS NOT SOMETHING WITH A GUARANTEE ATTACHED”

I am not an airplane pilot, but I have talked with some who have been. In taking off from the field there is a point of no return, i.e., up to a certain point on that runway, depending on local conditions, load weight, speed, and weather, there is a point where that plane flight can be aborted. Once past that point, that pilot has committed the plane and its cargo to lift off. He cannot now stop; to reverse the engines would be futile. A commitment has been made and the flight pattern must be followed.

What is commitment? To commit is to “give in trust; entrust; consign; to bind; to pledge.” There is an air of decisiveness, finality, solidness about this word. I like it. It takes one ‘off the fence’ of half-hearted devotion to God and His church, or whatever it may be. I like its either/or-ness. It moves one from the realm of luke-warmness.

In 450 BC, the Persians were advancing into Europe, and Leonidas with his small army of Greeks held them off at the Thermopylae Pass. Though he died in the attempt and nearly all of his men were killed, this was one of the most decisive battles which saved Europe from Asian invasion. All that depended on that heroism could not have been known by the men who became the heroes. They simply committed themselves to their duty and to the defense of their people, and history made heroes of them.

Bishop Gerald Kennedy in his book, Fresh Every Morning says:

“In 1776 the Americans who took their courage in their hands and signed the Declaration of Independence had no guarantee of the future. Indeed, most people looking at it objectively would have said these were men doomed to die as traitors. For defeat would have sent them down through history as a group of well-meaning rebels who were executed.” Then Bishop Kennedy makes this important observation which is so applicable to us: “COMMITMENT IS NOT SOMETHING WITH A GUARANTEE ATTACHED TO IT, AND THE GREAT MOMENT IS ONLY SEEN TO BE GREAT AFTERWARD.” (emphasis mine)

What he is saying, as it may apply to us today, is this – It is one thing to make a decision or a commitment at an altar of prayer in an evangelistic meeting, or in a worship service, or during a missions convention, or in the quietness of our own room, but it is another thing to follow through with that decision or commitment in the days and weeks and months following.

You have no doubt attended spiritual meetings where God’s presence was near.

You were challenged, stirred, dealt with by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Now, you do not want to lose one inch of ground gained. The beachheads are important and necessary but the continued occupation of the territory is also important for continued victory.

The Psalmist in a few words gives us the answer to conserve our commitments: “...bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar” (Psalms 118: 27b).

“Blessed Holy Spirit, the guarantee for continued commitment challenges me. Help me to always keep that challenge before me. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Have I committed myself to Jesus Christ? If so even today I will make certain that I am still in that mode.

- Floyd Cooper -

NOTES:

Ephesians 6: 18

JUST HOLD ON!

“He’s preparing for the inevitable,” I said to myself as I drew near to him with my car. What his game was, I do not know—maybe “chicken,” “bird-car roulette,” or something in bird language. Maybe he mistook my car (a Falcon) for a real bird, then decided at the last moment he was no match for it.

When they saw me coming, all his bird fellows flew away except him. He squatted, dug his claws into mother earth, and held on. Looking in the rear view mirror after the close encounter, I saw him take wings and fly away - no doubt to his buddies, saying, “See! Nothing to it! Be calm! It takes courage and steel nerves. All you have to do is hold on.”

Perseverance means “the faithful continuance in anything.” There are the undesirable moments, if not characteristics, in nearly every occupation. Quitting is the method some people use to escape. This is not always wise, but perseverance is.

In one of the decisive battles of World War I, disastrous reports poured into the headquarters of Marshal Foch, the commander of the Allied forces. The great general, faced with reverses that would have overwhelmed most people, never lost heart. When things were at their worst, he drafted his famous order which is now in all textbooks of military strategy:

**“My center is giving way, my right is pushed back,
my left is wavering. The situation is excellent. I shall attack!”**

Gerald Kennedy in Fresh Every Morning titles chapter 18 - He Did Not Quit! He tells of Lord Kelvin who “was one of the great scientists of his time. In the latter part of the 19th and the early part of the 20th centuries, he contributed to thermodynamics and to the understanding and use of electricity. He received honors from several universities and from the government for his achievement. A statue was erected to him in Glasgow in 1913, and yet he said one time, ‘One word characterizes the most strenuous of the efforts for the advancement of science that I have made perseveringly during fifty-five years: that word is failure.’ Which is to say that his success came out of perseverance, or if we may put it in the negative way, he succeeded because he did not quit.” (p. 170)

In the spiritual battle, we dare not quit, but continue to persevere by God’s enablement to the end. “Though Satan should buffet, tho’ trials should come...” - H.G. Spafford. “Ten thousand foes arise; The hosts of sin are pressing hard...” George Heath. Keep alert, continue on, persevere by God’s grace.

In Living Truths, B.T. Robert, exhorts us: “To gain Heaven we must endure to the end. Persevering efforts, and not spasmodic efforts, win the prize. A good plan is a good shelter. Becker says: ‘That mariner has no praise who sinks his ship before he comes in to the harbor; that soldier obtains no glory who lays down his arms in the heat of the battle.’” (p. 142)

“Precious Holy Spirit, all people encounter storms in life, and in such times I am in need of your help to enable me to persevere. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Not knowing what I may encounter today, beforehand I have determined that I will keep on track.

- Floyd Cooper -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. From a practical (spiritual) viewpoint, what do you think is the ‘secret’ for “staying forever young”, even though you have long persevered in the ‘Christian Life’? (Note Revelation 2: 1-4) Think of an older Christian who has remained ‘youthful’ in attitudes, in vision, in zeal, in joy, and excitement.**
- 2. Considering the many various wonderful attributes which describe a follower of Christ, what (to you) is the most important characteristic of the Christian life by which you would like most to be remembered in a ‘tribute’ at your funeral? Is it your desire to leave a ‘legacy’ of faithfulness and perseverance in the Christian Faith, for your children and grandchildren?**
- 3. Why, in spite of a person’s great adversities and losses, is a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving and appreciation so important if a believer is to maintain spiritual victory in his Christian life? (Note Philippians 2: 14-16; I Corinthians 10: 5-12)**
- 4. As you think about the ‘most mature’ believers whom you have known throughout your lifetime, tell if you think the following statements accurately describe their ‘commitment’ and the ‘happy results’ from that ‘commitment’: “Our commitment to Christ must not be fragile but as inviolable as wedding vows: for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, till death shall call us home. Such a commitment creates a relationship in which it is always possible to be cheerful, thankful and optimistic regardless of the circumstances.” (Note Philippians 4: 10-13)**
- 5. When your spiritual life (likened unto a boat which is resting in the dry basin) is not as ‘buoyant’ and ‘smooth sailing’ as you would like for it to be, what three things should you remember?**
- 6. From your understanding of Scripture and from your own experience, tell if you think the following statement accurately describes the ‘secret’ to success in the ‘Christian Life’: “Perseverance through the uneventful and unpromising days yet remains the secret of success in all of life’s endeavors, and especially in the life of faith.”**
- 7. As it applies to the ‘Christian Life’, give your interpretation and application of the following statement: “The beach-heads are important and necessary but the continued occupation of the territory is also important for continued victory.”**

- 8. When you (as a Christian person) feel at times like ‘quitting’ because of your frequent ‘failures’ and ‘weaknesses’ in living the Christian Life, why is it important to persevere rather than to despair and quit? (Note Galatians 6: 9; I Corinthians 15: 58; 2 Corinthians 4: 1, 7-11; 2 Timothy 4: 7-8; Hebrews 10: 35–39)**

- 9. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “To gain Heaven we must endure to the end. Persevering efforts, and not spasmodic efforts, win the prize.” (Note Matthew 24: 12-13)**

CHAPTER THREE

HONOR SPIRIT FOR VICTORIOUS LIVING

Ephesians 6: 10-17

KEEPING IN STEP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Sweet. It only lasted a moment, but that moment should be described as sweet. To really appreciate this “milestone,” I need to travel back to 1988. The most disturbing decision my wife and I made was choosing to buy a new car after our current vehicle was on “death’s bed.” The ad to which we responded claimed a guaranteed trade-in amount whether one had to “push, pull, or tow” the car in. Unknown to each other, Vicki and I were lifting silent prayers. All we wanted God to do was deliver us safely into the car lot. We did not care if the car fell apart at the dealership; we just wanted to get there and get rid of that old lemon.

God more than answered our prayers. Not only did we arrive safely, we were allotted more for our old car than we expected. We purchased a smaller car, but one with a solid reputation. As we drove out of the lot with our brand new Honda Civic, I noticed that the odometer was equipped with an extra space. Older model cars, when they turned over 100,000 miles would simply read “0” again. I was struck by the confidence of the manufacturer to place that additional column on the odometer.

This week, our car turned 150,000 miles old. Sweet! I have never owned a car which has traveled so well. We plan to keep this car for many years to come. To what do I attribute this taste of triumph? First, to a car well built, second, to keeping an eye on routine maintenance. And third, to fair driving habits.

Nothing is new under the sun. These three principles apply to all areas of life. What you care for will take care of you. For instance, how is your spiritual walk: is God taking care of you? Of course, perhaps He is only dealing with you as well as you are taking care of what He has entrusted to you.

Here’s how to get a lot of mileage out of your relationship with God. First, realize that you are well built. As the little child said, “God don’t make junk.” Second, have routine maintenance checks. Is your faith running in time with the Spirit? Have you been renewed by the oil of His faithfulness? Do you recharge your spiritual battery in worship and praise? And third, is your lifestyle in harmony with God’s Word? Are you cruising within the vast boundaries of God’s grace, or are you speeding through the dark alleys of temptations? When you take care of the things of God, He will take care of you.

“Lord, am I guilty of not maintaining the faith You have given to me? Have I misused Your grace? Forgive me, Father, for not paying closer attention to our relationship. Check my spirit, fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and renew joy as I worship and praise

Your name. Through Christ, Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: A relationship with God is mutual. God will keep His Word if we maintain our faith in Him. Depend upon the Holy Spirit to keep your relationship fresh.

- Thomas Duckworth -

NOTES:

Matthew 5: 16; 25: 13; I John 1: 7

KEEP CHRIST’S LIGHT SHINING IN YOUR LIFE!

Don’t let the light of Christ go out in your life! Recently, our electric power was off due to a bad wind storm. After several hours the house began to grow cold due to the furnace being off. It always seems to be colder without light for some reason. The darkness was so great that the circle of candle light did not reach far. We found ourselves counting the blessings of lights, and thinking of the things the source of electric power provides us. I began speaking of the things I would have done earlier had I known the power would be off. I was reminded once again of the great power source we have in Christ, the power of His eternal light that never fails through the ‘storms’ of life. How dark is our personal lives without the light of Christ, and how cold and dark is the world of men without the warmth and light of Christ’s influence which is felt as a result of Christians who are the ‘lights of the world’ (the reflectors of Christ’s eternal light)! “Jesus replied, *‘My light will shine out for you just a little while longer. Walk in it while you can, and go where you want to go before the darkness falls, for then it will be too late for you to find your way. Make use of the Light while there is still time; then you will become light bearers.’*” (John 12: 35-36, Living Bible)

Today is the ‘age of grace’ - the time when God offers the ‘Light of Life’ (Christ) to every person. Persons who have accepted Christ are Christ’s ‘light bearers’ to a darkened and sinful world. If you, as a Christian, allow the Light of Christ to go out in your life, not only will you suffer eternal consequences, but the world of needy (sinful) men will continue to dwell in deep darkness without hope and life and light! Keep the light of Christ burning brightly in your life - for your sake and for the sake of the world!

Before we had electric lights, we used oil lamps. A daily routine was cleaning the glass chimneys, trimming the wicks and refilling them with oil. They were ready to use again. *“The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. But only five of them were wise enough to fill their lamps with oil, while the other five were foolish and forgot. So, when the bridegroom was delayed, they lay down to rest until midnight, when they were roused by the shout, ‘The bridegroom is coming! Come out and welcome him!’ All the girls jumped up and trimmed their lamps. Then the five who hadn’t any oil begged the others to share with them, for their lamps were going out.”* (Matthew 25: 1-8, Living Bible) ‘Oil’ in the Bible oftentimes represents the Holy Spirit. The person who is possessed by the Holy Spirit is the person who possesses the life and light of Christ. Only the Spirit-possessed person is able to spread the ‘light of Christ’ in a darkened world. Such a person is useful to the world, and ready when the end of time comes!

“Father, I thank you that I am a partaker of ‘the inheritance of the saints of light’, delivered from the power of darkness. Keep the ‘light of Christ’ shining brightly in your daily life, that the darkness of the world may be penetrated by Christ’s eternal Light!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: “This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine, shine, shine!”

- Joyce Calkins -

NOTES:

John 14: 26

WARNING!

Do you know that little light in the panel of your car that flashes “Check Engine” when there is a problem? For quite some time when the signal light illuminated, I would go into a panic. Years ago my car broke down while traveling through a blizzard in Kansas. Since that time, when that yellow light appeared, my stomach would feel like it was tied in a knot. However, I must have overcome some of my fears, for when the “Check Engine” light recently turned on, I responded calmly to it. At first I had no idea what could be wrong. After driving a few miles I glanced at my speedometer and noticed I was driving at zero miles per hour. Upon further investigation I discovered that my odometer was also not working, as the mileage indicator was frozen in place. That was not a big problem...just a fuse which needed to be replaced. Without that warning light, I may not have known there was a problem.

After rejoicing that I did not enter into a state of anxiety, I had an intriguing thought. Wouldn't it be wonderful, if a trouble light would flicker in our brains when something is going spiritually wrong. As we walk through our day, perhaps we could see a yellow light in our mind that would read: “check brain.” Something like that would save us a lot of trouble - we might not say or do things we ought not, if we first checked our thought process. Think of how much trouble we would avoid if only we could see the warning that a problem lies ahead!

Furthermore, as I continued my creative imagining, I thought how much better it would be if God could have created in us a warning light that might say: “check spiritual condition.” That is something I could really use. Whenever I tend to walk away from God or disregard the spiritual disciplines which help me to walk rightly with my Lord, a yellow light would shine in my mind to remind me that I am in spiritual danger. Something that visible would surely make me return to the path where I want to and need to walk.

Each time a sinful thought would enter my mind, the warning light would signal that I am in danger. Every time I get lazy in my prayer life or Bible reading, that same light would turn on as a reminder that I need a spiritual tuneup. I just think a little more help from God is sometimes necessary. It's too bad I wasn't around when God created the world. That would have been my suggestion for the creation of a perfect human.

However, our God is kind and loving and does not force Himself upon us. He allows us to make our own choices which too often include turning from His ways. His desire is that it would be our desire to live for Him and to follow Jesus daily. He is the Master

Mechanic and knows how to keep us spiritually running. We can choose to let God work in us, or we can choose to drive away from Him and make a wreck of our lives.

The good news is that my idea is not a new idea. God has already given us that inner warning system. Jesus promised we would receive the Holy Spirit. *“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you”* (John 14: 26). We do have a way of recognizing our spiritual condition: the Holy Spirit, whose job is to remind us of scripture and to reveal to us our spiritual condition; isn’t God good? I guess He liked my idea after all. I must be pretty smart!

Oops! My warning light just turned on. “Check spiritual condition:” Pride! Lord, I am sorry. Whew! The lamp is out. Good. Everything is fine and I’m certain God is pleased with how humble I am. Oops...

“Draw me near, O Lord, that I may sense Your presence. Cleanse me of my sin and guide me onto the path of righteousness. Keep my heart and thoughts pure, and fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may not wander from your Truth. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am a child of God by grace and He will direct my path by His Holy Spirit.

- Thomas Duckworth -

NOTES:

I John 5: 11-12

BEING SAVED AND STAYING SAVED

How much fun it is to argue when you’re in your teens and twenties, to chew over old and new ideas with your friends. I used to argue with friends from other churches about differing doctrines. ‘Once saved, always saved,’ they would tell me. ‘No,’ I’d argue, ‘You must be true to the end!’ And we both had Bible verses to ‘prove’ our points. Sometimes it would unsettle me, making me think.

Later I heard a scholarly pastor explain it. He had studied it clear through in his Greek New Testament. His explanation helped settle my mind. As the Book of I John explains, *“God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life.”* (5: 11, 12a)

My problem was a misunderstanding of the nature of salvation. It isn’t a ‘thing’ that you possess, or an experience you once had that guarantees heaven. Salvation is not a commodity you get, or a ticket you hold with God keeping the stub filled out in your favor.

Salvation is life. It is Jesus’ life that he shares with you day by day. Salvation is only found in relationship with Jesus as you draw on His saving power.

It is alive and living, and you are really alive and living when you draw on his life daily. That’s why Jesus tells us *“If a man remains in me and I in him...he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”* (John 15: 5)

But then my head asked me if I could always keep on remaining in Christ? Was I good enough and strong enough to always abide in Him? Then God brought me assurance from Philippians 1: 6 *“...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”*

The same Jesus who began this good life in me carries it on as I draw on his saving life! No wonder they call this the ‘good news!’ No argument!

“Jesus, thank you for sharing your saving life with us.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I’m enjoying salvation as I remain in daily relationship with Jesus.

- Beth Stewart -

Psalm 91

THE TINY HITCH-HIKER WHO HUNG ON

My wife, Diana, and I once had a “hitchhiker” on a weekend trip. It was a dry maple leaf that had somehow curled itself around the car’s radio antenna. Surprisingly, it stayed there at highway speed and we watched it occasionally as the miles rolled on. Eventually we named it (him) Leif, concocted stories about how he had drifted over from Norway, and invented adventures we claimed the little Viking had on that journey. He rode on our car for 478 miles until he quietly got off late one evening. We like to think that he left us to visit relatives in the forest through which we were driving.

Peter was persistent. Soon after Jesus’ ascension, King Herod began to persecute the believers. He had James, the brother of John, beheaded and, finding that it had pleased the Jews, Herod had Peter arrested. An angel took Peter out of prison the night before the mock trial and execution. Peter rushed to the house where his friends were praying, knocked, but the servant girl was so thrilled to hear his voice that instead of opening the door she ran to tell the others, who thought she was mistaken. Meanwhile, impatient Peter was still beating on the door - bang, bang! He needed the comfort and safety they could provide, so he was persistent (Acts 12: 1-18).

Jesus described a man who has an unexpected house guest and who, three times in the middle of the night, beats on his neighbor’s door begging for bread. Jesus knew that persistence arises out of our needs and, because Jesus wants us to get our needs met, he encourages us to ask and receive. *“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”* (Luke 11: 13)

God is persistent in his care over us. God, Jesus says, is like a shepherd who leaves his ninety-nine sheep to look for the one who is lost (Matthew 18: 10-14; Luke 15: 3-7) and who risks his life for the sheep (John 10: 7-18). His care is guaranteed by his promises. Jesus said that those promises are so reliable that we do not have to worry. *“See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”* (Matthew 6: 28-30)

What should be our response to God’s persistence? One way to respond to God’s persistent love is to *“Hold on to the good”* (I Thessalonians 5: 21). *“Stand firm,”* Paul

wrote to the church at Corinth, *“Let nothing move you”* (I Corinthians 15: 58). That begins with a decision to return persistence to the one who is of relentless persistence in His love for and care over us.

“Heavenly Father, thank you for your care, for inviting me to seek from you and through you the meeting of every need I have. Help me to hang on to you and to return your faithfulness. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: *“He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him”* (Psalm 91: 15).

- Richard Walters -

NOTES:

Psalm 42: 1-11; 63: 1-5

SOUL THIRST

Summer is here again. Those of us who live on the Gulf Coast of Texas have been feeling lucky for the past few days because it’s cooler here than it is in Washington D.C. and New York City. We try not to remember last year’s drought which took a toll on farm crops and city water supplies all across the Southwest . Hope is born again every year that we won’t have a repeat of that long, hot summer.

We are acquainted with thirst from many angles. Water is a most precious commodity. It is a necessity of life. People can live longer without food than without water. It is a consuming need when it goes unsatiated. I got my first and only spanking in first grade for breaking in line at the water fountain. The children of Israel murmured about their thirst so forcefully that God brought water out of a rock to silence them. In Greek mythology, the punishment of the hero Tantalus was to stand in a stream of running water and cup his hands and fill them over and over again. Just as the cool, refreshing liquid was almost touching his lips, it slid through his fingers. Thus his thirst was never assuaged through all eternity. It is from this story that we get our word ‘tantalize’.

The thirst of the soul for God is as powerful as the thirst of the body for water. Have you ever been in a place where blessings seemed just out of reach? If so, you can empathize with the writer of Psalm 42 who begins his song with these words: “As the deer pants after the water brooks, so my soul pants after You. My soul thirsts for You in a dry and thirsty land.”

These words always remind me of Bracketville, Texas. My brother lived on a goat farm in that barren area. He coexisted with the horned toads and rattlesnakes and tarantulas that hid among the cactus, loco weed, and thorny shrubs. Except for free-roaming deer herds, purple sage and cactus flowers in season, and the most beautiful sunsets you will ever experience, this part of the state has a very unwelcoming landscape. Old Fort Clark was established in this locale as a stronghold against hostile Indians. The site was chosen because of the artesian wells feeding one small body of water there. You might say it’s like an oasis in the desert. A few years ago, my husband and I were privileged to spend a night at the old fort. As we drove across the bridge spanning a crystal, rock-bottom creek, we stopped to read the inscription on the historical marker. A phrase in it caught my eye: The Indians believed that he who crosses this stream will have his sins washed away.

The Psalmist, like the Indians, realized that there is a relationship between the thirst of the body and the thirst of the soul. In verses 5 and 11, he crossed the creek of hope and found his soul filled with praise. If you find yourself languishing in a long, hot summer

of the soul, remember the God of the good times (vs. 6) and remember that He can be found even in a desert. (vs 8) If God is your foundation, He will satisfy your thirsty soul, even if he has to bring water out of a rock. (vs. 9) The artesian wells may only be a prayer away. Drink deeply.

“Dear God, fill my soul with Your Spirit that I may cover my world with Your love.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The reservoir of the Holy Spirit is limitless. Fill your cup.

- Loretta Jenkins -

NOTES:

John 15: 1-17

ABIDING SAVIOR

Returning from Galveston recently, I noticed in one of the towns along the way a small church called “Abiding Savior Lutheran Church”. I had never seen a church named “Abiding Savior”. I had seen one called “Corinth” and wondered why anyone would name a church after that infamous congregation to which Paul wrote two letters.

“Abiding Savior” has such a winsome aura. It suggests a divine presence permeating the atmosphere. It offers a relationship that lasts a long time. “Abiding Savior” rolls off the tongue gently and rests easily in the mind. “Abiding Savior” raises expectations of hope and help, of peace and security.

Henry Francis Lyte had been the parish minister for twenty-three years in the little seaside village of Lower Brixham, England. One Sunday afternoon he walked alone beside the sea. He had administered his last communion and preached his last sermon in the village church he loved so well. His failing health was necessitating a move to a dryer climate.

As he walked, his mind was flooded with memories of the years and an awareness of his mortality. He sensed the abiding presence of the Savior with him. Lines of poetry took shape in his mind. He transferred them to a scrap of paper. That evening he gave his new poem to a dear friend. A few days later he crossed the English Channel in route to Italy. Before a month had passed, Henry Lyte died.

A few years later his poem was discovered by a church musician who wrote the tune “Eventide” for it. We sing the poem as “Abide With Me”. The third stanza goes like this:

**“I need thy presence every passing hour.
What but thy grace can foil the tempter’s power?
Who, like thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, oh, abide with me.”**

An abiding relationship is what the Savior offers to all who will accept it. Just as fish must abide in the water and plants must abide in the soil, people must abide in Jesus to discover their greatest strength and comfort.

“Abiding Savior, as the world and the events of my life keep changing, I am so thankful that You abide the same ‘yesterday, today, and forever’.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: As I live and breathe, I will free my soul for an abiding relationship with my Savior, through the indwelling and life-giving Holy Spirit!

- William Jenkins -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Prayerfully (and as honestly as you are able), take the following ‘spiritual inventory’ (and put a ‘check’ at those places which best indicate your present spiritual ‘condition’):

	Very Seldom	Most of the Time	All of the Time
(a) My ‘faith’ is running in time with the Spirit.			
(b) Daily I am renewed by the ‘oil’ of His faithfulness			
(c) Weekly I ‘recharge’ my spiritual batteries in worship and praise.			
(d) My lifestyle is in harmony with God’s Word.			
(e) Daily I am ‘cruising’ within the vast boundaries of God’s Grace.			
(f) I avoid the ‘dark alleys’ of temptation.			
(g) I witness to others about the goodness and mercy of God.			
(h) I keep my eyes focused on my heavenly destination.			
(i) I give a portion of my income (at least a tithe) to the Lord’s Work each month.			

2. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “A relationship with God is mutual. God will keep His Word if we maintain our faith in Him.”
3. Practically-speaking, what does it mean for you (as a follower of Christ) to be a ‘light bearer’ in the dark world of sin and sadness? (Note John 12: 35-36) What can (and should) you do as a Christian to keep the light of Christ burning brightly in your life? Tell with what degree of ‘conviction’ you agree or disagree with the following statement: “If you, as a Christian, allow the Light of Christ to go out in your life, not only will you suffer eternal consequences, but the world of needy (sinful) men around you will continue to dwell in deep darkness without hope and life and light.”

- 4. Tell if you think the following statement is ‘logically sound’ and ‘Biblically-accurate’: “God (the Holy Spirit) is the ‘Master Mechanic’ and knows how to keep us spiritually running. We can choose to let God work in us, or we can choose to drive away from Him and make a wreck of our lives.”**
- 5. From what ‘source’ does the Christian receive knowledge of the truth, guidance in decision-making, and discernment of his spiritual condition? (Note John 14: 26)**
- 6. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Salvation is only found in relationship with Jesus as you draw on His saving power. It is alive and living, and you are really alive and living when you draw on his life daily.” (Note John 15: 5 and I John 5: 11-12)**
- 7. According to Philippians 1: 6, what ‘initiative’ has God taken to enable a believer to ‘stay saved’?**
- 8. From your own personal experience, tell if you ‘identify’ with the truth as expressed in the following statement: “The same Jesus who began this good life in me carries it on as I draw on His saving life.”**
- 9. Cite evidence from Scripture that indicates that God is very persistent in His loving care of His creatures. (Note Luke 11: 13| Matthew 18: 10-14; Luke 15: 3-7; John 10: 7-18; Matthew 6: 28-30; Philippians 4: 19; Psalm 91: 15)**
- 10. What should be our response to God’s persistent love and undying faithfulness? (Note I Thessalonians 5: 21; I Corinthians 15: 58)**
- 11. Have you personally made a ‘firm decision’ to return persistence (in your faithfulness) to the One who is of relentless persistence in His love for and care of you?**
- 12. Share your personal response (reaction) to the following Scripture: “If we think that our present service for Christ is hard, just remember that some day we are going to sit with him and rule with him. But if we give up when we suffer, and turn against Christ, then he must turn against us.” (2 Timothy 2: 12, Living Bible) Even though the Bible teaches that we must never question the ‘faithfulness of God’ and the ‘keeping power of God’, does the above Scripture (2 Timothy 2: 12) teach that the ‘faithfulness of God’ cannot ‘cover for’ the ‘unfaithfulness of man’ (a one-time believer who ‘turns against Christ’)?**

- 13. If, as a Christian, you find yourself languishing in a long, hot summer of the soul, from what ‘source’ can you find satisfaction for your spiritual thirst? (Note Psalm 42: 1-2; 63: 1-5; John 7: 37-39)**
- 14. From your personal experience in living the ‘Christian Life’, what ‘adjustments’ have you made and what ‘disciplines’ have you established which have enabled you better to ‘abide in the Son’ (through all the ‘ups and downs’, the ‘changes and the chances’ of life). (Note John 15: 1-17)**
- 15. Tell with what degree of ‘conviction’ you agree with the following statements: “An abiding relationship is what the Savior offers to all who will accept it. Just as fish must abide in the water and plants must abide in the soil, people must abide in Jesus to discover their greatest strength and comfort.”**
- 16. According to John 15: 5, what condition must be met if a person is to remain a healthy and fruit-producing ‘branch’?**
- 17. According to John 15: 5-6, is it possible for a one-time ‘fruitful branch’ to become a ‘withered and dead’ branch? What, according to John 15: 6, is the tragic end for a branch which separates itself from the vital life-giving Vine (Christ)?**

CHAPTER FOUR

KEEP FOCUS ON HEAVENLY GOAL

Galatians 6: 4-10

**PAINFUL PERSEVERANCE CULMINATES
IN ETERNAL FRUITFULNESS**

It’s all Adam’s fault. My muscles ache and I groan as I move from chair to chair. Had my great ancestor not fallen from the garden, we would be living in the luxury of Eden. But because Adam could not resist the temptation to eat of the forbidden fruit, he was cursed to work the ground and grow his own food. Accepting my part of the punishment for what is known as original sin, I dig and plant a garden in my backyard every Spring.

As the seeds are planted in their rows, I am hopeful to see them in full bloom in just a few weeks and to be enjoying the flavor of those veggies in a few months. This anticipation brings me back to the garden every Mother’s Day weekend (Grandpa always said to plant the garden on Mother’s Day). We expect to taste beans, peas, carrots, beets, lettuce, spinach, cucumbers, onions and tomatoes before the Summer is through. With the end result in mind, I forget the aches and pains which come with working a garden. Of course, visiting middle age makes me keenly aware of aching muscles. Still, like clockwork, the garden is planted and the anticipation begins.

Spring is that season of eternal hope. After the long cold days of winter, the warmth of the sunshine is welcome and the beauty of new growth inspires all of us. It is this combination which fills our hearts with this eternal hope; without the sun there could be no garden. Without the seeds, the warm sun is not achieving what it is capable of doing. The seeds, in obedience to what they are designed to be quickly send out roots and sprout leaves as they reach upward to the sun.

I am a seed of faith. As God shines His light of love upon me, in obedience, I want to send my roots deep to get a strong footing, but I want to reach up to Him as if to embrace Him in the sky. It all sounds so easy and effortless. Yet, there is pain involved. Someone had to work the soil of my soul until I was ready to germinate with the new life God gave to me. Somehow, I picture this gardener as Jesus. He has prepared me to enjoy and glorify Him forever. The ache and pain in His hands and feet and in His side where He was pierced was worth it all. The suffering He endured to enable me to have new life was worth every moment on the cross. In retrospect, the aching muscles I now feel are nothing in comparison to what Jesus endured for me. I hurt to raise a few vegetables. Jesus hurt to raise us to new life.

“Father, forgive me for whining about things that really do not matter. Help me to put into proper perspective the fact that any suffering I face, You faced even more...and endured. By Your example, and for the sake of Your kingdom, I will persevere to the very end. Then, I will rest in Your arms. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: To live for Jesus is the greatest glory!

- Thomas Duckworth -

NOTES:

Mark 12: 28-34

CLIMBING CLOSE

Dressed in a white tuxedo, ruffled shirt, and a black tie, Hollywood stuntman Ron Broyles arrived at the base of the Texas Commerce Tower in Houston at 4:45 AM. With the goal of securing his membership in the exclusive 1,000 foot climbing club, he began to scale the side of the building. Slowed by a fog bank and a muscle cramp, he reached the 50th floor around 5:00 PM. Twenty-five stories to go. It was 10:45 PM when he finally drew himself over the top ledge. He had asked some friends to have lasagna and beer waiting for him when he finished. They brought bologna sandwiches and soda pop instead. That was a disappointment. He was arrested as expected, and then received a greater disappointment. A spokesman for the firm that owned the building informed Mr. Broyles that the building was only 993.3 feet high.

At one time or another all of us may experience that sinking feeling of coming so very close to reaching a goal but not quite close enough. My senior year in high school I came very close to going to the state track meet, but not close enough. A few feet, a couple of seconds, can make the difference between achieving a goal or almost achieving a goal. I learned to live with my disappointment and turned it into a good teacher. In love, in business, in life we must be able to survive the trauma of just coming close.

There is one area of life where coming close simply is not an option. Jesus spoke about some people who thought they had successfully completed the climb to heaven. They said to him, *“Lord, Lord, we have prophesied in your name, cast out devils, and done many wonderful works.”* (Matthew 7: 22, 23)

Jesus responded, “I do not know who you are; go away”. For whatever reason, a besetting sin, a character flaw, a fly in the ointment, they came up short of their goal. On another occasion Jesus said to someone, “You are not far from the kingdom of God”. Mark 12: 34)

I don't know how, or even if, God measures closeness. I do know that I don't want to fall 6.7 feet short of heaven: *One of the teachers of religion who was standing there listening to the discussion realized that Jesus had answered well. So, he asked, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” Jesus replied, “The one that says ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only God. And you must love him with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.’ The second is: ‘You must love others as much as yourself.’ No other commandments are greater than these. The teacher of religion replied, “Sir, you have spoken a true word in saying that there is only one God and no other. And I know it is far more important to love him with all my heart and understanding and strength, and to love others as myself, than to offer all kinds of*

sacrifices on the altar of the Temple.” Realizing this man’s understanding, Jesus said to him, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” And after that, no one dared ask him any more questions. (Mark 12: 28-34, Living Bible)

“Help me, Lord, to keep my eyes on the prize.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Each day I will keep looking up and pressing on.

- William Jenkins -

NOTES:

Daniel 3: 8-30

ON BEING FAITHFUL

Three men of Hebrew extraction made Bible history when they defied the order of the day. The story is told in the third chapter of Daniel, an account of a mid-east kingdom rife with bureaucracy (see verse 3) into which God placed Daniel and his friends.

These three men stood together in their belief that God was supreme above all governments, and that no graven image should take His place. They were prepared to ‘take the consequences’ and the king ordered them burnt in a very hot furnace. But the king saw with his own eyes that God had sent His angel to deliver them, and that “no other God is able to deliver in this way” (verse 29).

In May 1955, three Christian men stood with their wives, and holding hands, pledged to pray for each other daily in the future. Their ways parted them, but for the next forty years they stayed in touch as God led them in particular lines of service in His Kingdom. They denied the gods of their time to serve Him Who is Supreme.

One became the president of a college, twice, on two continents, and then was elected to be the Bishop of his church. Another went to become a pastor-teacher in Christian schools on three continents. The third became a teacher of deaf people, the most hidden of all mission fields, and worked tirelessly to find ways for existing schools to educate them in Christian doctrine.

Each of these men had their times of extreme trial. One was spat upon in a public meeting, humiliated before his fellows. He had recurring illnesses, bringing discouragement and temptation to quit. Another went through severe pain which culminated in back surgery, while experiencing isolation from familiar support.

The third man was rebuffed again and again in his quest for recognition of the need to educate deaf people, who needed special arrangements for effective communication.

The old story of faithful service is thus repeated in every generation. Each decade has brought its ‘fiery furnace’ experiences, with graven images demanding to be worshiped.

Out of this persecution have come martyrs, who gave their lives for the truth, even as Jesus did when He denied Caesar was supreme. Many others have, through the centuries since those days, come through the fire to serve the living God victoriously.

God has rewards for those who are faithful to His call to service (verse 30).

“Father in Heaven, stand with us when the furnace of life’s situations gets hot, and deliver us to serve you.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God will, with every temptation, make a way to escape, that we will be able to bear it.

- Eugene Stewart -

NOTES:

Joshua 14: 6-15

GROWING OLDER VICTORIOUSLY

Catherine Deneuve, the French actress who has symbolized beauty and elegance for three decades, said she wasn't thrilled about growing older. Her response to growing older was, “It hurts”, supposedly referring to wrinkles. That famous cat Garfield said, “Life is a warm bath. The longer you stay in, the more wrinkles you get.”

One thing is sure about all of us: we are all growing older. Whatever our age may be, we are all growing older, and that is a wonderful thing because life is a wonderful adventure on the way to heaven. My grandmother had this saying: “The older you get, the more you get like where you're going.” (Heaven or Hell) The really big question is, “In what way are you growing older?”

In the Old Testament, Caleb gives us a great lesson on growing older victoriously. To understand how Caleb did it, we must revisit Numbers 13. Joshua and Caleb had returned from their spy mission full of enthusiasm and excited about possessing ‘The Promised Land’. A poll was taken and ‘The Promised Land’ lost. Their failure of faith sentenced Israel to forty years of wilderness wanderings. Forty years! Caleb would have to keep his dreams on hold until he was eighty years old. Here on the border between ‘The Promised Land’ and ‘The Waste Land’, Caleb begins to grow old victoriously by not allowing the disappointments of life to diminish his faith in God.

In the midst of his disappointment, the Lord gave Caleb a promise that one day he would arrive again at the border of ‘The Promised Land’ and would possess it. Three things make life worthwhile: someone to love, something to do, and something to hope for. Caleb had something to hope for. He grew older victoriously by trusting in a Divine promise. For every mile the Israelites traveled away from ‘The Promised Land’, in his mind and heart Caleb was traveling a mile closer.

After forty years of wandering and five years of conquest, Caleb is ready to possess the promise. One problem: The giant Anakins live there in great, fortified cities. No problem. Whenever challenges arise, Caleb has learned to live victoriously by leaning on the Lord.

“It will be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the Lord said.” (Joshua 14: 12)

To grow older victoriously is to realize that youth and age are not times of life. They are attitudes of the spirit and mind.

“Lord, as I grow older, let me grow more and more like a citizen of ‘The Promised Land’.

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Regardless of my ‘age’, I will seek to live today like the ‘prime’ of my life!

- William Jenkins -

NOTES:

Matthew 24: 3-14

ON COPING WITH COLDNESS

The weather report today for Finland registered 60 degrees below zero! Most Americans find it hard to comprehend such conditions, let alone cope with them!

When I lived in north Idaho, we experienced some very cold weather, almost like today’s temperatures in Finland, but not quite. Water pipes buried six feet deep under the street froze. Folks who had no insulation in their homes found it difficult to keep warm. Schools closed. We came close to canceling worship on Sunday, but two families, seven hardy souls, walked two miles to join those who were closer to the church, and we dare not cancel!

Such conditions were not what our Lord meant when He said “*most men’s love will grow cold.*” (Matthew 24: 12) He was speaking of a time of tribulation when there would be a great deal of political, social, and spiritual pressure to deny Christ as Lord. Our Lord was speaking of spiritual frigidity, of having no warm feelings about God’s love for us, rejecting His call to discipleship for many reasons.

Jesus said there would be false Christs, and reports of wars, famines, and earthquakes that would frighten and mislead many. There will be reversions, he said, and betrayal and straying and hatred, with great increase in social wickedness in our culture.

We do not have to wait for a future era to see the reality of Jesus’ words. We need only listen to the news and read our newspaper headlines to know that we must not wait. Every one of us knows coldness, either in ourselves or in someone near, perhaps dear, to us.

What will warm us in such dire times? Is there spiritual insulation that will help keep out the cold? Is there a fire in our hearts that will suffice to life eternal though there’s an Arctic blast about to engulf us?

We will always have conditions such as Jesus foretold. It is part of life on our planet. It may even get worse. We have been warned. The answer? Endurance. “*He who endures to the end shall be saved.*” (Matthew 24: 13)

The Christian life is not a dash, nor even a middle-distance race, but an endurance test. We must endure the false guides, the naysayers, the scandalmongers and the alarmists, for they will persist.

Our strong assertion must be *“I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day!”* (I Timothy 1: 12, King James Version) His amazing grace will help us.

“O Lord, my God, lift up my feeble hands and warm my heart with your love, that I may EVER serve you!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I shall stand, God helping me, until He comes to claim me, and take me to Himself.

- Eugene Stewart -

NOTES:

John 16

THE CRACKER JACK BOX OF LIFE

On a Sunday morning at our church, there were two speakers. Paula was one of the youngest ladies in the church, and Verline Danheim, one of the oldest. Mrs. Danheim, as she was respectfully called, spoke from her experiences about “The Cracker Jack Box of Life”. As a child, Cracker Jacks had been her favorite snack food because she liked being surprised by the prize inside. Her talk that day was prompted by a letter from a friend in which she enclosed a clipping by Lewis Grizzard entitled, “Cracker Jack Box of Life Doesn’t Always Have a Prize”.

The article was about a nine-year-old girl whose father encouraged her to sue the maker of Cracker Jacks because she bought a box of their product that didn’t have the anticipated prize inside. The suit was settled when the company offered a free box of Cracker Jacks with a guaranteed prize inside and threw in some peanut mix for good measure. The little girl was happy for the moment, but the author of the article concluded that some day she would need to learn that not all the boxes we get in life have prizes inside.

In her talk Mrs. Danheim reminded us that Jesus did not promise us a prize in every box. As a matter of fact, he told us that some of our Cracker Jack boxes of life would contain trouble and disappointments. Further, Jesus was rejected because He did not give the world the kind of prize it wanted from His box.

Mrs. Danheim mentioned how many people follow Jesus only for the prize he offers. At the first suggestion that a prize is not forthcoming, they reject Jesus. She asked us, “Why can’t the prizeless occasions in our life be a process of strengthening, of purifying, of cleansing? The prizeless occasions separate the chaff from the wheat and the impurities from the gold.”

She went on to emphasize: “We should not become guilty of rationalizing every event-good- or bad -so that God and His Son become the source of every happy turn of the card or the scapegoat for every prizeless circumstance. God will look at the whole person, who at the time of crossing into that other realm, may have some large or small scars of earthly existence, but who will be ready for their accounting with a calm countenance, a solid stance, and an upright posture. A Christian of that ilk will have withstood the empty Cracker Jack boxes without blaming their Creator, their Savior, or anyone else. They will have accepted the prizeless boxes as purely mundane and temporal circumstances, will have lost no time in the valley of despair, and will have continued on their way to whatever might come next. That Christian, that true follower of the Way, will survive, grow and finally triumph.”

All of us who knew Mrs. Danheim considered her faith to be as pure grain and refined gold. She’s not around anymore, but when she opened her last Cracker Jack box, she found the most wonderful prize - Eternal Life!

“Heavenly Father, thank You for all the prizes I have received in life and for all the lessons I’ve learned from empty boxes.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Whatever the content of my Cracker Jack boxes in life, I will, like Job, serve God just for the joy of His presence.

- William Jenkins -

NOTES:

Jeremiah 25: 5-7; Psalm 137

RETURN

Like carrier pigeons, people are blessed with a homing instinct, a strong desire to return to their place of origin. I remember how cut-off I felt when my parents died and it was left to me to sell their home. It was like being torn away from my moorings. For a time, I drifted isolated in a sea of change. It didn't matter that I hadn't lived at home in over two decades. 535 North High symbolized permanence. Someone there had made cookies for me and dried my tears. Now someone else would occupy familiar rooms. The old blue pickup would no longer sit curbside. Familiar objects would disappear from the yard. A new coat of paint would cover up my past. No longer could I return to the visible symbol of my childhood and youth.

From Adam to you and to me, God's people have been leaving home. From the disappearance of the Garden of Eden through the forty-year wandering in the 'Wilderness' to the destruction of the walls and towers of Zion, the Israelites wandered. The foundations of their permanent dwellings crumbled and disappeared, blown away by winds of persecution and change. Familiar landmarks were torn down by enemies. Strangers inhabited their homes. Pagans desecrated their temple. Fences with "No Trespassing" signs were erected to keep them off of their own land. Many were carried away from their country enslaved and desolate. The poignancy of their plight is recorded in Psalm 137: 1: *"By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion."* Only one dream kept their courage alive: RETURN. Jeremiah, prophet to these prisoners, phrased God's plan this way: *"I will set my eyes upon my people for good, and I will bring them again to this land..I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people and I will be their God; for they shall RETURN to me with their whole heart."* (Jeremiah 25: 6, 7)

The Bible is a book about returning. That word is used over and over to direct us back to God. Sometimes, like children, we become enslaved to momentary pleasures and lured away from home. Before we know it, a feeling of lostness overwhelms us. Like the children of Israel in the Old Testament, we *"hang our harps on the Willow trees"* (Psalm 137: 2) and become prisoners of hope. Like the Prodigal Son in the New Testament, we *"come to ourselves and return to the Father's House" and find Him waiting with open arms to receive us.* (Luke 15: 17, 18)

The Bible tells me I have a forever home in God, "for in Him I live and move and have my being". I can always return to it. When I sin, I can return to it. When I move far away, I can return to it. When life disappoints or hurts me, I can return to it. When the people closest to me leave, I can return to it. This home will never be sold. The paint will never flake off. Rust will never damage the pipes. Corruption will never mar its

character. The occupant will never leave or die. I can call its twenty-four-hour hotline at any time for counseling or conversation. This home has a sidewalk that winds all the way to eternity and a garden filled with all the fulness of God’s bounty. It’s name is Heaven. It’s borders are as wide as the arms of God. I hope to see you there in the family room someday. Until then, keep the dream alive!

“Dear God, keep eternity’s dream alive in our hearts until the door of your house swings open to receive us.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God’s arms are always open when we return.

- Loretta Jenkins -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. How does the ‘pain’ which you must endure (to become a Christian and to remain a vital and disciplined Christian) compare with the ‘pain’ that Jesus (as a human ‘sacrifice’) endured on earth to make possible His gift to you of spiritual redemption and eternal life? Does the ‘unspeakable great pain’ which Christ endured for the human race (including you, as an individual member of that human race) make your own ‘pain’ (as a repentant sinner and as a struggling believer) seem more ‘bearable’ and ‘endurable’ and ‘justifiable’? Does the fact that your ‘pain’ (suffering) as a believer is meant (by God) to be ‘redemptive’ (purposeful and useful), and that it is only temporary, give you greater motivation to be ‘persevering in the Faith’ and even ‘humbly grateful in your suffering’? (Note Romans 8: 16-18; 2 Corinthians 4: 16-18; Colossians 3: 3-4; Titus 2: 11-13)**
- 2. As a committed follower of Jesus, what advice would you give to a sincere seeker of God whose religious and moral life are ‘exemplary’ and who (from your ‘perspective’) is “not far from the kingdom of God”? (Note Mark 12: 28-34)**
- 3. Can you think of a past or present follower of God who (like the three Hebrew ‘children’ in Daniel 3: 8-30) was willing to suffer persecution and loss, in order to be true to the Living God rather than succumbing to the pressure to ‘bow the knee’ in worship of false gods (idolatry)?**
- 4. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Whatever our age may be, we are all growing older, and that is a wonderful thing because life is a wonderful adventure on the way to heaven.”**
- 5. Is it possible for you (as a believer) to grow old victoriously by not allowing the disappointments of life to diminish your faith in God? How can you grow older and become ‘better’ rather than ‘bitter’?**
- 6. Amidst your many disappointments and losses (griefs) in your life, how can you keep your ‘hope alive’, and your ‘spiritual vision clear’, and your ‘enthusiasm aglow’, and your ‘drive strong’, and your ‘faith unwavering’, and your ‘heart tender’, and your ‘self-evaluation humble’, and your ‘conscience clear’ and your ‘motives pure’, and your ‘relationships reconciled’, and your ‘love flowing’, and your ‘gifts activated’, and your ‘body healthy’ and your ‘mind active’, and your ‘spirit worshipful’?**

- 7. According to Joshua 14: 6-15, what do you think was the ‘secret’ to Caleb’s ‘youthfulness’ during his old age (at the age of 85)? Do you believe that (for a Christian) life can become ‘sweeter and sweeter’ as the years ‘come and go’? Why or why not? Have you ever personally known older persons whose faith in God caused them to be ‘youthful’ in their attitudes and ‘sweet’ in their spirit, even though they were weak and old in their body?**
- 8. From a ‘Faith Viewpoint’, tell how you (as a Christian) would ‘interpret’ and ‘express’ the truth of the following statement: “Three things make life worthwhile: (a) someone to love, (b) something to do, (c) something to hope for.”**
- 9. In spite of the ‘darkness’ of life’s mysteries and inequities and injustices and tragedies, do you think that your strong trust in a God whose divine Promises are great and wonderful, will enable you to resist your temptation to despair and enable you to grow older victoriously?**
- 10. Is it your sincere desire to be like Caleb (in the Old Testament) who lived victoriously throughout his long lifetime (regardless of the number of challenges he faced during the 40 years of ‘Wilderness Wanderings’ with the disobedient Israelites) - because he always ‘leaned on the Lord’?**
- 11. From a Biblical viewpoint, give your interpretation of the following statements: “To grow older victoriously is to realize that ‘youth’ and ‘age’ are not times of life. They are attitudes of the spirit and mind.”**
- 12. During a time when ‘Christianity is mocked’ and ‘worldly attitudes’ (of Materialism, Secularism, Hedonism, Sensualism) are deeply entrenched in society, how can you (as a believer) avoid ‘falling away from God’, or avoid becoming spiritually ‘frigid’ (i.e., having no warm feelings about God’s love, and rejecting God’s call to a holy lifestyle of discipleship)? (Note Matthew 24: 9-13)**
- 13. If the ‘Christian Life’ is not a ‘dash’, nor even a ‘middle-distance race’, but an ‘endurance test’ (spiritual ‘marathon’), then what resources are available to you (as a believer) to help enable you to ‘endure’ and ‘persevere’ until you cross the ‘finish line’ of life (and enter heaven)? (Note I Timothy 1: 12; Jude 1: 24-25)**
- 14. Why is it a ‘sign’ of great spiritual immaturity (which can result in ‘spiritual disaster’) for persons to follow Christ for the ‘immediate results’ (‘prizes’) which they anticipate receiving as a result of ‘following Christ’? Were there those persons in ancient Palestine who followed Jesus only for the ‘personal benefits’ of receiving ‘healings’ and ‘bread’ and who left Jesus when He no longer performed miracles and passed out loaves? Is it your desire to be Jesus’ disciple**

(i.e., a person who ‘denies himself’, bears his God-given ‘cross’, and consistently ‘follows’ Christ), regardless of whether earthly ‘prizes’ and ‘benefits’ are given to you? Even though followers of Christ are not guaranteed ‘earthly rewards’ for their faithfulness, what ‘rewards’ will ultimately be given to the ‘faithful’? (Note Matthew 19: 27-29; Mark 10: 28-31)

- 15. Share your response (reaction) to the following testimony of the ancient prophet Habakkuk: *“Even though the fig trees are all destroyed, and there is neither blossom left nor fruit, and though the olive crops all fail, and the fields lie barren; even if the flocks die in the fields and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will be happy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my Strength, and he will give me the speed of a deer and bring me safely over the mountains.”* (Habakkuk 3: 17-19, Living Bible)**

- 16. Have you ever known a ‘saint of God’ whose faithfulness to God remained, in spite of the ‘passing of time’, and in spite of the loss of family and friends and fortune and fame and health and property (similar to the losses experienced by Habakkuk or Job or a Christian who endured the ravages of World War II under the tyranny of Hitler)? (Note Hebrews 10: 32-34) Do you believe that those who suffer greatly for Christ on earth, will receive greater rewards in heaven because of their ‘unusual faithfulness’? (Note Revelation 7: 13-17)**

- 17. Amidst all your (legitimate) pursuits of earthly life - work, family, recreation - have you ever strongly felt ‘heaven’s beckoning call’ in your inner spirit? Without despising the God-given gifts of ‘earth’s pleasures’, have you ever become ‘homesick’ for heaven and for heaven’s inhabitants (including your departed loved ones)? Have you ever dreamed of the ‘glories’ of heavenly life, where all tears shall be wiped away from your eyes and where “there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain” (Revelation 21: 4)?**

APPENDIX I

SUMMARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS ON

‘PERSEVERANCE OF BELIEVERS’

**SUMMARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS ON
“PERSEVERANCE OF BELIEVERS”**

There are scores of New Testament Scriptures which encourage Christians to ‘persevere in the Faith’ (i.e., not to succumb to temptations and other pressures in life, but to remain true to the Lord until ‘the end of life’).

Even though the theme of Christology (the doctrine of the ‘person and nature of Christ’) is a great theme of the Book of Hebrews, the primary theme of Hebrews is ‘Perseverance of the Saints’ (i.e., ‘let us hold fast’). Notes Robert Shank (regarding the proper understanding of the theme of the Book of Hebrews): “The phrase ‘let us go on’ appears but once (Hebrews 6: 1). ‘*Let us go on*’, he writes, ‘unto perfection’. The writer may have reference to his intention to proceed to the advanced development of the doctrine of Christ to which he proposes to lead them in the course of his letter. Or, it may be a call to his readers to advance from spiritual infancy in which he found them (Hebrews 5: 11-13) toward the maturity (v. 14) which is possible for all who will grasp it. Actually, both things are within the writer’s purpose. Certainly it is his intention to proceed toward the fuller development of his Christ ology...But the presentation of his Christology is not an end in itself...The principal burden of the letter is not ‘let us go on’, but ‘let us hold fast’...In contrast with the exhortation ‘let us go on unto perfection’, which occurs but once, the exhortation ‘let us hold fast our confession’ occurs twice (Hebrews 4: 14; 10:23) and the epistle abounds with cognate exhortations: ‘*if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end*’ (3:6); ‘*if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end*’ (3: 14); ‘*lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God*’ (3: 12); ‘*lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*’ (3: 13); ‘*lest at any time we should slip away*’ (2:1; ‘*if we neglect so great salvation*’ (2: 3); ‘*harden not your hearts*’ (3: 8, 15); ‘*lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief*’ (4: 11); ‘*show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end*’ (6: 11); ‘*let us keep on drawing near with a true heart in full assurance of faith*’ (10: 22); ‘*cast not away therefore your confidence*’ (10: 35); ‘*for ye have need of patience, that...ye might receive the promise*’ (10:36); ‘*the just shall live by faith: but if he draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him*’ (10:38); ‘*lest ye be wearied and faint*’ (12: 3); ‘*despise not the chastening of the Lord nor faint when thou art rebuked of him*’ (12: 5); ‘*be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live*’ (12: 9); ‘*lest that which is lame be turned out of the way*’ (12: 13); ‘*lest any man fail of the grace of God*’ (12: 15); ‘*lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who sold his birthright*’ (12: 16); ‘*if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven*’ (12: 25); ‘*be not carried away with divers and strange doctrines*’ (13: 9); ‘*let us keep going forth unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach*’ (13: 13). Any emphasis in the Epistle to the

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Hebrews on going on toward spiritual maturity is secondary. The burden of the writer’s ‘word of exhortation’, is that his readers ‘hold fast the confession of their hope’ in Jesus Christ as the only Savior and ‘the Source of eternal salvation unto all who obey Him.’” (Life In The Son; Robert Shank; pgs. 231-234)

The highly respected writer (from the early 20th century), James Denney, in his well-known book ‘The Death of Christ’, believed the main thrust of the Book of Hebrews was ‘conservation of the Faith’. He writes, “The author (of Hebrews) was not an evangelist so much as a pastor, and it is not the initiation of Christianity, but its conservation, with which he deals throughout.” The internationally-known New Testament scholar, William Barclay, agrees. He writes: “When we sum it all up, we can say that Hebrews is a letter written by a great teacher, written by a man whom we would call a professor, to a little group or college of Christians in Rome. He was their teacher; at the moment he was separated from them; he was afraid that they were drifting away from the faith; and so he wrote this letter to them.”

When studying the New Testament, it is helpful to look at larger sections of Scripture with three thoughts in mind: (1) Promises to be claimed, (2) Conditions to be met, (3) Warnings to be heeded. With these three ideas in mind, let us briefly ‘scan’ some of the relevant New Testament passages, all of which deal with the important subject of the ‘perseverance of believers’ and the ‘security of believers’. Space will not permit the quotation of many Scriptures, but I will attempt a brief summary of the ‘key’ points in several of the New Testament passages.

In Matthew 18: 21-25, God promises total forgiveness of one’s total ‘debt’ to God, provided that one is willing to forgive those who have sinned against him. A lack of mercy and forgiveness of others incites the wrath of the Lord, and actually forfeits one’s own forgiveness.

In Matthew 24: 4, 5, 11-13, 23-26, the Lord promises to save those who ‘endure to the end’ (v. 13). Believers are warned of the possibility of being led astray by false ‘Christs’. Multiplied wickedness in the earth can cause the ‘cooling’ of a believer’s love for God (v. 12).

In Matthew 25: 1-3, in Christ’s parable of the Marriage Feast, believers are warned against neglecting to purchase ‘oil’, thus resulting in their lamps going out when Christ comes (v. 8), and being shut out of the marriage feast while trying too late to purchase oil (v. 10-12).

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In Luke 8: 11-15, believers are taught that spiritual fruitfulness and productivity (v. 15) is the result of hearing the Word, holding it fast in an honest and good heart, and patiently enduring. Christians must guard against the devil stealing the Word from their hearts. They must guard against shallowness and falling away during temptation (v. 13), and they must also guard against their lives being choked by the ‘cares and riches and pleasures of life’ (v. 14).

In Luke 11: 24-28, persons whose lives have been initially cleansed from evil must guard against evil spirits which are seeking re-entrance into the lives of those who had previously experienced deliverance. This Scripture apparently is teaching that, following one’s cleansing from sin, there must be positive ‘infilling’ of one’s life with the blessed presence of the Holy Spirit (to prevent re-entry of any ‘evil spirits’).

In Luke 12: 42-46, the Master (Christ) sets believers over His ‘household’ and over all His possessions. Faithfulness and wise management of God-entrusted responsibilities is expected from all servants. The servants (believers) are exhorted not to become impatient at the delay of the Master’s coming. Impatience can lead to mistreatment of those persons who have been entrusted to their stewardship, leading to a ‘life of debauchery’ (v. 45). Such faithless stewards will be punished with a severe ‘beating’ and assigned to the ‘place of the unfaithful’ (v. 46, 47).

John 6: 66-71, teaches that believers must continue to follow Christ, rather than ‘drawing back’ and no longer going with Him (v. 66). There is a possibility (as in the case of Judas Iscariot) of a one-time believer ‘betraying’ Jesus (v. 70, 71).

In John 8: 31-32, Jesus states that persons can be His disciples (and ‘know the truth which shall set them free’) if they hold to his teachings and continue in His Word.

John 8: 51, states that a person shall never see (spiritual) death if he keeps God’s Word.

Act 14: 21-22, reveals that a large number of persons became disciples to the Lord. It is recorded that Paul strengthened the disciples and encouraged them to ‘remain true to the faith’. Paul taught that Christians ‘must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God’.

In Paul’s popular teaching in **Romans 6: 11-23**, he teaches that it is possible for one’s ‘body parts’ to be yielded as ‘instruments of sin and wickedness’ (v. 12, 13). Paul warns against believers entertaining a shallow attitude toward God’s grace, and a casual attitude towards sinning, and he exhorts believers never to claim that grace quickly

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provides for one’s practice of sinning (v. 15). Paul says that offering one’s self to obey sin results in final spiritual death (v. 16). In Romans 8: 13, Paul says that one will die if he lives according to his ‘sinful nature’.

Romans 11: 20-22, teaches that a person enjoys a ‘standing in Christ’ if he has ‘faith’, ‘humility’, ‘godly fear’ and ‘reverence’ - and provided that he continues ‘in God’s kindness’. God will not spare those who persist in unbelief. Unbelief causes the branch to be broken off the Vine. Those who do not continue in God’s kindness will be cut off (v. 22).

Romans 14: 15-23, teaches that a believer must act in love by carefully refraining from anything that is a source of stumbling to his fellow Christian. A Christian must guide his life and actions by ‘righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (v. 18). It is possible for a believer to be offended by and even destroyed by a fellow believer. It is possible for a believer to destroy the work of God and to cause a fellow Christian to stumble by his insensitive and offending actions (v. 20, 21). It is possible for a believer to sin as a result of doing things with doubt rather than with faith (v. 23).

I Corinthians 9: 23-27, teaches that a person (believer) will enjoy “a crown that will last forever” (v. 25) if he is willing to undergo God’s strict training, and if he runs the spiritual race with ‘aim and purpose’ (i.e, ‘beat my body and make it my slave’). Paul (wholesomely) feared that “after I have preached to others, I myself will be disqualified for the prize” (v. 27).

Serious warnings are issued to believers in I Corinthians 10: 1-22. It is possible, after a believer has experienced many spiritual blessings, for God no longer to be pleased with him (v. 5). It is possible for one who has experienced ‘spiritual food and drink’ to set his heart on evil things (as the Israelites in the wilderness did - verse 6). It is possible for a believer to fall into idolatry and sexual immorality, and consequently to be destroyed by God (v. 7, 8). It is possible for a believer to ‘test’ (over-tempt) the Lord and to be destroyed by the Lord (v. 9). It is possible for a believer to fall into a life of grumbling against the Lord and to be ‘killed by the destroying angel’ (v. 10). Wrote Paul, “*These things happened to them (the Israelites in the wilderness) as examples and were written down as warnings for us..So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!*” (v. 11, 12) “*I do not want you (believers) to be participants with demons.*” (v. 20) *Don’t arouse the Lord’s jealousy* (v. 22).

I Corinthians 11: 27-32, notes that it is possible for a believer to become insensitive to the spiritual significance of ‘The Lord’s Supper’, and consequently to sin ‘against the

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body and blood of the Lord’ and bring ‘judgment on himself’ (v. 27, 29). Some even died in the Early Church because they insensitively partook of the Lord’s Supper (v. 30).

1 Corinthians 15: 1-2, teaches that if one does not hold firmly to the word which he received for initial salvation, he has ‘believed in vain’ (v. 2).

2 Corinthians 11: 2-4, teaches that a gullible believer can deceptively be led away from his pure and single-hearted devotion to Christ, into false teachings (as illustrated by Eve’s deception by Satan - 2 Corinthians 11: 3-4).

2 Corinthians 12: 21-13:5, teaches that it is possible for a one-time believer to sin grievously (impurity, sexual sin, debauchery) without being activated to repentance.

Paul warns believers against reverting to a life of ‘legalism’, after having been initially set free from sin through God’s mighty grace. With great sadness, Paul writes to the Galatians Christians who had reverted to ‘legalism’; *“You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; You have fallen away from grace”* (Galatians 5: 4).

Someone said, “If a believer takes one step towards God, God takes a thousand steps toward the believer!” God is the ‘God who acts’ - the God who initiates, the God who is ‘eager to respond’ to any person who demonstrates any degree of desire to ‘know God’. Someone wisely said, “It is not hard to live the Christian life; it is impossible - unless, of course, God’s Spirit indwells and empowers the believer.” Philippians 2: 12-16 contains both Promises and Conditions, as these relate to one’s salvation. As a believer, you can be encouraged, for *“God works in you to will and do what pleases Him.”* (v. 13) Because of the inward work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, he can become ‘blameless and pure’, a child of God ‘without fault in a crooked and depraved generation’, and he can be a *‘shining star in the universe’* (v. 15). But, with the promises and divine provisions, there are some conditions to be met: *“Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling”* (v. 12). Christians are to *‘do everything without complaining or arguing’* (v. 14).

Colossians 1: 21-23, speaks of both a wonderful Promise to be claimed, and a serious Condition to be met. “God has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation...IF YOU CONTINUE IN YOUR FAITH, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.”

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Colossians 2: 4-8, contains all three - the Promise (divine provision), the Condition, and the Warning. The Promise (the divinely-given provision) - *“You received Christ Jesus as Lord”* (v. 6). The Condition - *“Continue to live in Christ, rooted and built up him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness”* (v. 6, 7). The Warning - *“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ”* (v. 8)

Colossians 2: 18-19, warns believers against the possibility of falling ‘prey’ to a deceptive philosophy (v. 18), the result of which is disqualification for the spiritual prize. It is possible for a believer to succumb to the teachings and practices of a false philosophy, and consequently to lose *“connection with the Head (Christ)”*. (v. 19)

I Thessalonians 3: 1-8, teaches that it is possible for believers to be unsettled by the inevitable trials and persecutions which all believers are destined to experience. (v. 3, 4) It is possible for a believer to fall during temptation and to lose his faith, resulting in the efforts of the soul-winner becoming ‘useless’. (v. 5)

Paul urges Timothy (Paul’s young ‘son in the Faith’) to *“fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience.”* (I Timothy 1: 18-19) Paul teaches that it is possible for a believer to turn to false doctrines (I Timothy 1: 3). It is possible for a believer to ‘fall from grace’ and to begin promoting controversial doctrines (regarding law-keeping) rather than promoting the work of God which is faith (I Timothy 1: 4). It is dreadful to think about, but it is possible for a believer to wander away from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith, and to turn to “meaningless talk”. (I Timothy 1: 6) It is possible (as in the case of Hymenaeus and Alexander) to reject faith and a good conscience, and thus to make ‘shipwreck’ of one’s faith. (I Timothy 1: 19-20)

I Timothy 4: 1-16 contains wonderful Promises, multiple Conditions, and serious Warnings. The Promises - Godliness holds *“promise for both the present life and the life to come.”* (v. 8) The Living God saves those who believe. (v. 10) The Conditions - *“Train yourself to be godly.”* (v. 7) *“Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.”* (v. 12) *“Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift.”* (v. 12, 14) *“Watch your life and doctrine closely. PERSEVERE in them, because IF you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”* The Warnings - It is possible to *“abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.”* (v. 1) *It is possible for one’s conscience (apparently even the conscience of a one-time believer - according to the context of the Scripture) to become “seared as with a hot iron.”* (v. 2)

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I Timothy 5: 8, teaches that it is possible for a believer to ‘deny the faith’ and, as such, to become ‘worse than an outright unbeliever’.

I Timothy 5: 6, 11-15, contains some serious warnings for Christians. It is possible for sensual desires to overcome a believer’s dedication to Christ. (v. 11) It is possible for believers to break holy pledges, and to fall into hurtful habits, and thus to incur the judgement of God. (v. 12-13) It is possible for a believer to turn away from the faith “to follow Satan.” (v. 15) It is possible for a believer to begin living for pleasure and thus to die spiritually. (v. 6)

I Timothy 6; 9-12, believers are urged to flee from the ‘love of money’ which is the ‘root of all kinds of evil’. (v. 10-11) Believers are urged to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. (v. 11) Believers are urged to “fight the good fight of the faith.” (v. 12a) Believers are urged (commanded) to “take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.” (v. 12) This portion of Scripture also contains a serious warning (especially relevant to modern-day Christians who live in a materialistically-oriented society). I Timothy 6: 9-10 teaches that it is possible for believers to fall in love with money, resulting in “wandering from the faith and piercing themselves with many griefs”, and plunging themselves into “ruin and destruction”. In order for the materially wealthy believer to “take hold of the life that is truly life” and to establish “a firm foundation for the coming age”, he/she is required to be generous and “rich in good deeds”. The selfish and the greedy person will be judged by the Lord. (I Timothy 6: 17-19)

According to I Timothy 6: 20-21, it is possible for believers to succumb to the godless talk and foolish arguments of worldly ‘knowledge’ and, consequently to ‘wander from the faith’ (‘lose their faith’ - J.B. Phillips’ translation).

“We (Christians) will live with him and we will reign with him (Christ)...IF we died with him, and IF we ENDURE.” (2 Timothy 2: 11-12) It is possible for a believer to “disown Him” (God), with the result that God will disown that person (v. 12). In such a case, the faithful character of God does not stand in question (v. 13). “Quarreling about words...only ruins those who listen.” (2 Timothy 2: 14). It is possible for a believer (as in the case of Hymenaeus and Philetus), to engage in ‘godless chatter’ and consequently to ‘wander from the truth’ and to cause others to have their faith destroyed. (2 Timothy 2: 16-18)

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Hebrews 2: 1-3, teaches that it is possible for believers to ‘drift away’ from ‘what we have heard’ (the message of faith). (v. 1) It is possible for believers to neglect and to ignore God’s ‘great salvation’, resulting in just punishment. (v. 2, 3)

Hebrews 3: 6-19, contains Promises, Conditions, Warnings. The Promises - “Christ is faithful over God’s house” (which are believers). (v. 6) “We are his house” (that is, Christ lives in us), and “we have come to share in Christ.” (v. 14) The Conditions - “Encourage one another daily, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” (v. 13) “...IF we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.” (v. 6); “...IF we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.” (v. 14) The Warnings - It is possible for believers to harden their hearts, and to stray away from God’s ways, with the tragic result of never entering God’s rest. (v. 7-11) It is possible for ‘brothers’ (believers) to have a “sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” (v. 12) It is possible for a believer to become “hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” (v. 13, 15) It is possible for one-time believers to disobey God so grievously that they never enter into God’s rest. “They were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.” (v. 19)

To enter the rest which God has prepared for His people, believers must “*make every effort...so that no one will fall by following the Israelites’ example of disobedience.*” (Hebrews 4: 11)

Hebrews 10: 19-31, is full of Comfort (blessings and provisions for believers), but there are also multiple Conditions which believers must fulfill, and there are some serious Warnings for believers to heed! The Divine Provisions - “We have confidence to enter the most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.” (v. 23) The multiple Conditions (and commands to believers) - “Let us keep on drawing near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” (v. 22) “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess.” (v. 23) “Spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” (v. 24) “Let us not give up meeting together (as some are in the habit of doing).” (v. 25) The Warnings - It is possible to deliberately keep on sinning after a person has received the knowledge of the truth, with dire consequences involved - “a fearful expectation of judgement and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.” (v. 26-27) It is possible for a one-time believer to trample the Son of God under foot and to treat as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and to insult the Spirit of grace with the consequent punishment of dying without mercy. (v. 28-29)

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Hebrews 10: 32-39, teaches that a believer needs to PERSEVERE in the faith in spite of severe persecution (public exposure to insult, and imprisonment for the faith, and confiscation of personal property).(v. 32-34) Maintenance of confidence and PERSEVERANCE in the faith are necessary in order to “receive what God has promised.” (v. 36) A believer must choose to believe and thus to be saved, rather than to shrink back from the faith and finally be destroyed. (v. 39)

Hebrews 11, is called the ‘Faith Chapter’ of the Bible (listing the ‘heroes of the Faith’). *“All these people were still living by faith when they died.”* (v. 13) (It is very important to read Ezekiel 33: 10-16)

In Hebrews 12, believers are commanded to throw off everything that hinders them and the “sin which so easily entangles them.” (v. 1) Believers must run with PERSEVERANCE the race marked out for them. (v. 1) Believers must fix their eyes on Jesus, who is the Pioneer and Perfecter of the Faith and who is the believer’s Intercessor before the Father. (v. 2) As a believer you must “consider him (Christ) who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (v. 3) The believer must ‘struggle against sin’. (v.4) A believer must willingly receive the Lord’s discipline in his life (v. 5) and he must submit to the Father in order to live. (v. 9) The believer must endure hardship as discipline. (v. 7) If a believer expects to share in God’s holiness, he must be willing to receive discipline from the Lord. (v. 10) There is a ‘harvest of righteousness and peace’ for those believers who have been trained by the painful discipline of the Lord (v. 11) *“Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.”* (v. 12, 13) *“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”* (v. 14) *“See to it that no one misses the grace of God.”* (v. 15) *“See that no one is sexually immoral.”* (v. 16) Serious Warnings are here also. It is possible for the lame Christian to become disabled rather than to be healed. (v. 13) It is possible for a believer to ‘miss the grace of God’. (v. 15) It is possible for a ‘root of bitterness’ to spring up in a believer’s life, causing trouble and defilement to many. (v. 16) It is possible for a believer to become godless (like Esau) by selling out his spiritual inheritance. (v. 16, 17)

According to Hebrews 12: 25-29, God speaks to mankind from heaven, revealing His holy will and nature, and warning men to follow the Lord of Heaven. (v. 25) *“We are receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken.”* (v. 28) Christians are commanded: *“See to it that you do not refuse him (God) who speaks.”* (v. 25) It is possible for us believers to “turn away from him who warns us from heaven”, rather than continue to “worship God acceptably with reverence and awe”, with the result that we will be punished by

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God who is “a consuming fire”. (v. 28, 29)

According to Hebrews 13: 9, it is possible for believers to be “carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.”

Christians must be on their ‘alert’ during times of temptation. Jesus said *“Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit (of man) indeed is willing, but the flesh (of man) is weak.”* It is possible for a believer to be tempted, to succumb to ‘his own evil desire’, and to be ‘dragged away and enticed’, and to indulge in outright sin (which, when it is full-grown, gives birth to spiritual death). (See James 1: 14-15)

It is possible for a believer to fall into the evil pleasures and friendships of the unsaved world. A one-time believer who “chooses to be the world’s friend makes himself God’s enemy” (James 4: 4).

The often overlooked last two verses of the Book of James contain some vital (and sometimes misunderstood) truths. Writes James (the half-brother of Jesus): *“Dear brothers, if anyone has slipped away from God and no longer trusts the Lord and someone helps him understand the Truth again, that person who brings him back to God will have saved a wandering soul from death, bringing about the forgiveness of his many sins.”* (James 5: 19-20, Living Bible) As in the case of Simon Peter who denied the Lord three times (and thus, fell into a terrible ‘backslidden’ condition), so it is possible for any believer to ‘fall into sin’ and to wander away from the Lord (thus destroying his ‘fellowship’ with the Lord, and eventually severing his ‘relationship’ with the Lord). However, according to James, it is possible for such a backslidden believer (as in the case of Simon Peter) to repent of his sins and to be restored to relationship with Christ. However, if it is possible to be restored, it is also possible not to be restored! It is possible for a believer to slip away from the Lord and no longer to trust the Lord, and ultimately (if the backslider is not turned back to the Lord) to experience spiritual death!

God’s promises to believers are real, and those promises are most wonderful, but promises cannot be fulfilled unless certain conditions are met by believers. This fact is well established, time and time again in the New Testament. Take I Peter 1: 5-9, 13 as an example of this repeated truth. *“You are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time...THROUGH FAITH.”* (v. 5) The faith of believers must be proved genuine (at the time of Christ’s return), through suffering all kinds of trials. (v. 7) Believers are being filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, because they are being saved...THROUGH THEIR LOVE AND FAITH IN THE SAVIOUR. (v. 8, 9) You Christians must “prepare your minds for action; be

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self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.” (v. 13) Promises and Conditions are inseparably connected!

According to 2 Peter 1: 5-11, a person (sinner) finds his ‘standing in Christ’ (justification) by Saving Faith. However, faith is only complete and effective when one increasingly adds to it the other great qualities of goodness, knowledge, self-control, PERSEVERANCE, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. (v. 6, 7) If a believer does not possess these listed ethical qualities, “he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.” (v. 9)

According to 2 Peter 3: 16-17, a believer enjoys a ‘secure position’ in Christ. But, a believer is to be on his guard against the ‘error of lawless men’. It is possible for a believer to relax his watchful guard and consequently to “be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from his secure position.” (v17)

I John 1: 5 - 2: 11, contains very precious truths regarding God’s provisions for believers, but these provisions are not given automatically. Certain conditions must be met. We (Christians) have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses from every sin...IF we walk in the light, as he is in the light (v. 7); God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness...IF we confess our sins to God and IF we continue to maintain an attitude of constant need for God’s forgiveness (Note: ‘Confess’ is in the ‘present tense’ in the Greek language, and therefore ‘confession’ is an ongoing and continuing attitude which must be maintained for all life). “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” (v 6) He who claims to be a ‘Christian’ must continue to walk as Jesus walked - in humble dependence on the Heavenly Father, and in daily obedience.

According to I John 2: 15-28, believers are given the promise that they will live forever...IF they “PERSEVERE in doing God’s will” (v. 17, Williams’ translation) “See that what you have heard from the beginning REMAINS in you. IF it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.” (v. 25) “And now, dear children, CONTINUE in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.” (v. 16) It is possible for believers to be ‘led astray’ (v. 26) by ‘antichrists’.

I John 2: 29, teaches that the reality of the ‘New Birth’ is evidenced by the practice of righteous actions. One can only remain a child of God as he CONTINUES (‘present tense’ in the Greek language) to love his brothers. (I John 3: 10)

Can a person claim to be a ‘Christian’ if he is ‘living in sin’ (i.e., if he is habitually

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practicing sin - living a ‘sinful lifestyle’)? The answer is rather ‘obvious’. Wrote John: *“So if we stay close to him, obedient to him, we won’t be sinning either; but as for those who keep on sinning, they should realize this: They sin because they have never really known Him or become His.”* (I John 3: 6, Living Bible) The Greek ‘perfect tense’, properly translated, refers to persons whose present practice of sinning shows that their ‘profession of faith’ was false from the beginning. By implication, I believe that this Scripture also refers to persons whose present practice of sinning reveals that they are apostates who have departed from true saving faith in Christ. I believe that this verse teaches that the believer who does not stay close to Christ and who does not remain obedient to Christ, is the person who will (by his ‘denial’ of Christ) ‘be sinning’. He who ‘practices’ sinning is he who cannot, at the same time, be ‘born of God’. The two condition (i.e., the condition of ‘standing begotten of God’ and the condition of ‘habitually sinning’) are totally incompatible and contradictory and cannot exist in a person at the same time. (v. 9) A person (a one-time believer) who reverts to a ‘practice of sinning’ (and who fails to repent of his sins) destroys his relationship with God (i.e., he is no longer ‘begotten of God’ or ‘saved’). These above-stated truths are rather clearly stated in God’s Word! A ‘sinning Christian’ is a ‘contradiction in words’! This is not to say that a Christian will never sin but when he sins, he quickly repents and confesses his sins to Christ, and he is quickly restored to fellowship and relationship with Christ. He does not allow the re-entry of a ‘life of sinning’ (i.e., a practice of a sinful lifestyle), for he keeps daily ‘short accounts’ with His loving God. When He sins, he ‘claims the blood of Christ’ as His immediate (constant) remedy. Thus, he remains ‘cleansed from all sin’, for he ‘keeps himself under the blood of Jesus’. Wrote John to Christians: *“If we (believers) are living in the light of God’s presence, just as Christ does, then we have wonderful fellowship and joy with each other, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from every sin.”* (I John 1: 7, Living Bible) He continues: *“My little children, I am telling you this so that you will stay away from sin. But if you sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father. His name is Jesus Christ, the one who is all that is good and who pleases God completely. He is the one who took God’s wrath against our sins upon himself, and brought us into fellowship with God; and he is the forgiveness for our sins, and not only ours but all the world’s.”* (I John 2: 1-2, Living Bible)

In 2 John I: 8, Christians are told to “watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.”

Jude is a small book with big warnings! Those whom God honors and delivers, He can later destroy because of their persistent unbelief (v. 5), or because of their rebellion against God’s authority (v. 6), or because of their indulgence in gross sin (v. 7). It is possible (as in the case of the apostates that Jude warns against) for one-time believers

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to become “godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.” (v. 4) The actions of apostasy are most brazen and violent and deceptive (v. 4, 8-10), but these actions will invoke God’s ultimate destruction and judgment (v. 10). Notes Robert Shank, “‘Twice dead’ (v. 12) can only refer to the fact that men who once were alive in Christ have again become spiritually dead by severing their union with Him ‘who is our life’.” (Life In The Son; pg. 174) It is gloriously possible for believers to experience eternal life (v. 21). Through Christ’s mighty power, believers can be kept from falling into sin (v. 24). But, it is not only God who is able and responsible to ‘keep believers from falling into sin’; it is also the responsibility of believers to ‘keep themselves fro sinning’. It is a cooperative relationship between the Almighty God and the obedient believer. Commands Jude to Christians: “Stay always within the boundaries where God’s love can reach and bless you. Wait patiently for the eternal life that our Lord Jesus Christ in his mercy is going to give you.” (Jude 1: 21, Living Bible)

God will “*give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God...to him who overcomes.*” (Revelation 2: 7) Believers need not be afraid during times of suffering (Revelation 2: 10). Believers will be given the ‘crown of life’ ...IF they are faithful “*even to the point of death*”. (Revelation 2: 10) Believers will “*not be hurt at all by the second death*”...IF they will be overcomers. (Revelation 2: 11) ‘Hidden Manna’ and ‘a white stone with a name written on it’ will be given to the believer who overcomes. (Revelation 2: 17) Christ commands Christians to “*hold on to what you have until I come*” (Revelation 2: 25) Says Christ to believers: “*I will give authority over the nations to him who overcomes.*” (Revelation 2: 26) *However, it is tragically possible for believers to tolerate compromise, and it is possible for even God’s servants to fall into sexual immorality, causing intense spiritual suffering and eventual spiritual death, “unless they repent”.* (Revelation 2: 20-23)

Believers “*will walk with Christ, dressed in white, for they are worthy*”...IF they do not “*soil their clothes*” (Revelation 3: 4-5).

The believer will be ‘dressed in white’, and his name will remain in the Book of Life, and his name will be acknowledged before the Father and His angels...IF he continues to overcome. (Revelation 3: 5)

God places before the believer “*an open door that no one can shut*”, but believers must keep God’s Word and not deny God’s name. (Revelation 3: 8)

God will keep believers from the hour of trial...IF they keep God’s commandment “*to*

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God will keep believers from the hour of trial...IF they keep God’s commandment “to endure patiently”. (Revelation 3:10) Christians are told to “hold on to what you have so that no one will take your crown.” (Revelations 3: 11) Christ will make the believer “a pillar in the temple of my God”, and the believer will never leave it, and the believer will have the name of God and the name of the Holy City written on him...IF he continues to overcome. (Revelation 3: 12)

It is dreadfully possible for believers to become ‘lukewarm’ spiritually, invoking God’s anger, and the possible judgment of being ‘spit out of God’s mouth’. (Revelation 3: 16)

Believers are greatly loved by God, but they must be willing to receive God’s rebukes and His discipline, which are meant to lead them to earnestness and to repentance. (Revelation 3: 19)

It is possible for one-time believers to become self-sufficient, proud, and self-deceived (not realizing that they have become “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked”). (Revelation 3: 17)

Christ will give the believer the right to sit with Him on His throne...IF he continues to overcome. (Revelation 3: 21)

The believer “will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son”...IF he continues to overcome. (Revelation 21: 7) “But the cowardly who turn back from following me, and those who are unfaithful to me...their doom is in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur. This is the Second Death.” (Revelation 21: 8, Living Bible)

God promises a share in the ‘Tree of Life’, and in the ‘Holy City’...IF the believer does not add or subtract from “the words of the prophecy of this book.” (Revelation 22: 18)

Many times, in the forgoing Scriptures, where we have looked at the ‘perseverance of the believer’ and the ‘security of the believer’, the ‘contingency word’ IF has appeared. “If you will do this”, says the Lord, “then I will do that”. Fulfilled promises because of kept conditions! No person becomes a Christian initially without meeting certain ‘conditions’, and no one remains a Christian without meeting certain ‘conditions’ (and all the ‘conditions’ are God-given). Spiritual life (both in ‘obtaining’ and in ‘maintaining’) is based on ‘contingencies’. Salvation, while it originates with God alone, is nevertheless a cooperative relationship between the initiating Saviour and the responding believer.

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Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910) was considered to be one of the greatest preachers of the nineteenth century; he acquired the reputation of “the prince of expository preachers”. He left behind a large number of sermons which, even today, are read and studied by many ministers and serious Bible students. One person who listened to Maclaren’s preaching said: “This man is a prophet, and you must either listen and swallow, or flee.” Joseph Parker (another great preacher of the nineteenth century) said there was “no greater preacher than Alexander Maclaren in the English-speaking pulpit.” Maclaren was a Baptist minister, born to Baptist parents, and, and even though Baptist preachers are often characterized as ministers with a Calvinistic theological persuasion (who believe in the popular doctrine of ‘once saved, always saved’), Alexander Maclaren often in his sermons emphasized the importance of ‘perseverance of the believer’ - that is, the importance of maintaining a vital and continuous faith in Christ to the very end of life. As far as I can tell from reading his sermons, he did not believe in ‘unconditional eternal security’. While not minimizing the importance of God’s initiating grace, Maclaren often equally emphasized the importance of the believer’s ‘faith response’ to God’s offer of grace. Often he emphasized, in great and vivid detail, the necessity of the believer’s wholehearted efforts (perseverance) in developing a mature and lasting relationship with God Almighty. Maclaren rightly expounded the Biblical understanding of ‘Saving Faith’ as not only the initial reception of God’s offer of salvation but also as the continuing response of faithful obedience to the Lordship of Christ. One example of this oft repeated emphasis in Alexander Maclaren’s writings (sermons) is found in his expositional sermon, based on Ephesians 6: 23 (“Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith.”). The following are his comments on the meaning of ‘saving faith’ as it relates to living a victorious Christian life: “Then, remember still further, that this personal outgoing of confidence, which is the action both of a man’s will and of a man’s intellect, to the person (of Christ) revealed to us in the great doctrines of the Gospel - that this faith, if it is to be worth anything, must be CONTINUOUS. Paul could desire nothing better for his Ephesian friends than that they should have that which they had - faith; that they should CONTINUE to have it, and that it should be perennial and increasing all through their lives. You can no more get present good from past faith than the breath you drew yesterday into your lungs will be sufficient to oxygenate your blood at this moment. As soon as you break the electric contact, the electric light goes out, and no matter how long a man has been living a life of faith, that past life will not in the smallest degree help him at the present moment unless the faith is CONTINUOUS. Remember this, then, a broken faith is a broken peace; A BROKEN FAITH IS A BROKEN SALVATION; and so long, and only so long, as you are knit to Jesus Christ by the conscious exercise of a faith realized at the moment, are you in the reception of blessing from Him at the moment.” (Expositions Of Holy Scripture; volume 13; Alexander Maclaren; pgs. 384, 385)

- RON CHRISTIAN -

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