

**LOST
IN
WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!**

**BY
RON CHRISTIAN**

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DEDICATED

TO:

Venita Ann Christian

Faithful wife, loving mother, cheerful friend. One who enjoys being “Lost in Wonder, Love, and Praise’ in her worship of the Lord God Almighty.

INTRODUCTION

One who is truly and intimately in relationship with Almighty God, is one who is daily learning the “secret of full surrender.” Surrender of the mind with its thoughts, surrender of the heart with its emotions, and surrender of the will with its decisions. Knowing God intimately is a pursuit that shall last throughout a believer’s entire earthly life - and, indeed, probably forever in heaven. Cultivation of a love relationship with God is the all-consuming challenge of every sincere person. It is not an accomplishment of a day, but a pursuit of a lifetime to “let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” Learning to pattern one’s mind after the self-revealed mind of God takes much time, effort, and discipline on the part of the growing believer. To the extent that one adopts the thoughts of God as his own thought patterns, to that same extent will he experience the heart (compassions) of God, issuing forth eventually in developing a lifestyle of godly actions resulting from righteous choices.

But becoming godlike in one’s thoughts, feelings, and actions does not come easily or quickly. One may make a decision in a moment of time to repent of his sins and to follow the pathway of righteousness, but becoming a mature follower of the Lord God is the result of long practice of “daily surrender” to one’s Master and Lord. And there are many snares and pitfalls and temptations and tests along the way on the journey of faith towards one’s final destination in heaven.

*“Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come.
Grace hath brought me safe thus far, and Grace will lead me home.”*

In dealing with many seeking souls during my active pastorate for over 25 years, I often told faltering Christians that God loves to restore the broken ones and to recover the fallen ones, that God can turn every tragedy into a triumph, that God can take a “Black Friday” and turn it into a “Good Friday” because of “Bright Easter Sunday Morning.” God is the “Great Transformer”, the One who is capable of “taking the broken pieces of our shattered lives” and making something beautiful out of our “fragments” (our hurts and failures and disappointments and even sins). God never allows anything to be “wasted” in the life of a person who fully surrenders everything to Him. Every failure can be used to further the purposes of Almighty God.

There is great soul security (Psalms 91) and fruitfulness (Psalms 1) for the person who is following the Good Shepherd (Psalms 23), who is “lost in wonder, love, and praise” as he contemplates the greatness of his God (Psalms 8). Confidence for living is based on the fact that one has placed his trust in the God who has revealed Himself as a God of truth and strength and love (Psalms 19). The so-called “leap of faith” of the believer is not a “leap” into oblivion or into the hands of a cruel and merciless and impersonal God. Rather the “leap of faith” is into the all-powerful arms of “Eternal Love”, into the arms of a God who cares tenderly for each person. He is a God of perfect love, i.e., He wants what is best for each person. He is a God of perfect wisdom, i.e., He knows what is best for each person. He is a God of perfect power, i.e., He is able to do what is best for every person. How easy it is to take that “leap of faith” when one knows he is not leaping into darkness or weakness or evil; but into light and strength and infinite good - i.e., into the arms of a God who is infinite love, wisdom, and power!

This is not to say that one who chooses the pathway of righteousness rather than the pathway of evil (Psalms 1) is always going to enjoy a smooth and trouble-free pathway. One who makes an initial decision to follow the Lord God of the Bible, is still living in a world that is fraught with many evil temptations and enticements. He still is capable of making wrong moral decisions which result in hurtful moral consequences. There is an enemy - the evil one (Devil) - who is capable of using any number of evil devices to bring defeat and a downfall to the “pilgrim of faith.” Not only is a believer inwardly weak by nature, but the evil one (though he is a defeated foe because of Calvary’s Cross and the Empty Tomb) is a dangerous foe, still “on the loose” seeking to devour whomever he can.

The statements may be trite, but they are, nevertheless, true: “Christians are not perfect, they are only forgiven” and “It is not the perfection of one’s life that is important, but it is the direction of one’s life that is all-important.”

When, as a believer, you find yourself discouraged because of faltering, failing, and falling, never forget the encouraging words of Proverbs 24: 16a - *“For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.”* (KJV) This same truth is paraphrased in the Living Bible as *“Don’t you know that this good man, though you trip him up seven times, will each time rise again?”*

But you may be thinking, “I, as a believer, have tripped up more than seven times in my attempt to live a solid and consistent Christian life!” But the number “seven” in the Bible speaks of “complete” or “full”. In other words, though a believer falls or fails many, many times, he can (and should) get up each time and confess his sin or failure to God and then continue on his lifelong

journey towards Heaven. He is not to “wallow” in his failure, but he is to learn from his past mistakes and to claim the forgiveness and strength and grace of God.

It is too easy to drift off the well-beaten pathway which leads to heaven, for the snares and entrapments of Satan are many, and the allurements of the worldly system are legion.

I, for one, have traveled on the Christian pathway since I was an eleven year old child. I started that journey when I prayed a simple, yet desperate, prayer on March 12, 1956 - “O God, save my soul!” At this writing, I have been “saved” for over 40 years, but I will be the first to admit that my journey on this long pathway which leads toward heaven has not always been smooth. I have committed many sins, have made many mistakes, have fallen into some Satan-strewn traps, have been discouraged and guilt-ridden and paralyzed by multiple fears, have felt overwhelming pressure in a long-term pastorate of the same local church for over 25 years (1967-1994), and have failed miserably in some relationships or in some projects. I have known first hand (not theoretically) what deep and dark and dreadful depression feels like. After enjoying nearly a quarter of a century of fruitful ministry as a pastor of a growing local church, I found myself entrapped in a “downward spiral” of horrible depression - a depression that gradually became so intense and debilitating that I was “forced” to leave the pulpit in the church where I had pastored for so long. No words can be found to describe the terror and the horror of this “dark night of my soul” (which, since I have wonderfully recovered from it, I call “my valley of learning”). I had often, in scores of sermons, casually used the word “Depression”, but little did I know experientially what such a devastating experience entailed. After going through this dark valley of depression (call it a “nervous breakdown” if you wish), I was eventually able to gather my thoughts sufficiently into an objective framework in such a way that I was able to reflect and to record in my journal eight different and identifiable causes (or sources) of my deep stress which eventually led to my extended “living nightmare.” I experienced most of the symptoms and manifestations of clinical depression over at least a two year period of time (while most of this time I continued to at least “go through the motions of pastoral ministry”). During the last four decades, during which time I have sincerely sought wholeheartedly to follow Christ, I have gone through many “valleys of learning”, but I have never experienced the kind or the intensity or the long duration of pain which I experienced during the two to three years of deep depression in the middle of my third decade of pastoral ministry! The typical consequences of depression - compulsive thinking, sleepless nights, fear, worry, loneliness, anger, resentments, anxiety attacks, often-recurring weeping, social alienation, guilt, loss of wholesome self-love, indecisiveness, hopelessness (despair and desire to die) and

spiritual agony (doubt and difficulty in praying and in reading the Bible) - these terrible realities I knew for too long of a time in my life! During the depth of the depression, I felt that there were so few who understood what I was feeling and experiencing! I wondered if I would ever get through this long and dark tunnel! Physically, I was so weak (with little ability to relax and to sleep); mentally, I was so confused and troubled; emotionally, I was so ambivalent with intense anger mixed with cold indifference; socially, I was so lonely because of my inability to 'connect' and to 'bond' with my peers and associates and parishioners; spiritually, I was so desperate, plagued with a sense of both founded (real) and unfounded (false) guilt.

But God was faithful to me, and my dear wife and family and a host of committed friends never "gave up on me." They continued to listen, to call, to pray, to express their love through words and letters and hugs. I continued through this extended "night of my soul" to believe in God, to pray, to read the Bible, and to open my ears to godly counselors. Through the faith of my family (especially my godly wife), and by the competent medical and psychiatric care of loving doctors - combined with the direct and miraculous intervention of God - I was able finally to welcome the "bright dawn" of wholeness and health and mental balance again into my life.

I found wonderful victory through Christ for which I had longed for so long! The joy of the Lord was once again restored unto me. The peace of Christ which passeth understanding swept into my soul again! The love of God again was shed abroad in my heart through the Holy Spirit! A thrilling sense of hope replaced my feelings of despair and despondency, and my deep discouragement was replaced by courage and faith and God-imparted encouragement. Fellowship with God's people was deepened and broadened.

The experiences of the Psalmist (David) now mean so much more to me. My Shepherd (Psalms 23) now seems so much closer to me. My heart and mind are more sensitive to the voice and presence of the self-revealed God (Psalms 19). I appreciate the wonder and the beauty of nature so much more (Psalms 8). This "desert experience" has taught me to "dig wells in my deserts" (Psalms 84), and to "learn perseverance under pressure" (Psalms 62).

What I have learned from personal experience and from a serious study of God's Holy Word (Bible), I want to share with other "pilgrims". I want to tell my "fellow strugglers" how to overcome discouragement (Psalms 11), how to conquer fear through faith (Psalms 27), how to experience freedom from guilt (Psalms 32), how to find deliverance from depression (Psalms 42), how to build character through one's failures in life (Psalms 51), how to win victory over covetousness (Psalms 73), how to grow spiritually during the "desert"

experiences of life's pilgrimage (Psalms 84), and how to enjoy soul security through the development of dynamic faith in God (Psalms 91).

Of course, it would be extremely presumptuous to claim that all the problems which face earth's spiritual pilgrims are "covered" in this book, but I have found that the Psalmist's personal life experiences, so well described in the few Psalms which I have chosen to focus on, are experiences which nearly all believers face at one time or another in their lives - problems of discouragement, confusion in decision making, loneliness, barrenness, fear, guilt, anxiety, feelings of failure, overwhelming pressures and stress, covetousness, adversities and setbacks and discouragements of many varieties, and manifold insecurities.

Regardless of the specific cures which are carefully outlined for the specific problems in these and other Psalms, there are at least three steps which are relevant in the cure of any problem. The title of this book describes those steps.

Charles Wesley (brother of the famous revivalist John Wesley) gave the Christian world literally hundreds of hymns, many of which are still popular. The last stanza of his famous hymn "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" is as follows:

"Finish then thy new creation,
Pure and spotless let us be,
Let us see thy great salvation,
Perfectly restored in thee:
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise."

Only in heaven will God's children be undistracted in their wonder and love and praises - all focused on the triune God. In spite of the fact that on earth believers do have many distractions to overcome - the tests and temptations and trials of life - those who learn to be awe-filled in their contemplation of God's power, those who grow in their intimate love relationship with the God of the Universe, and those who learn to worship their Lord in praise and adoration - these believers will overcome any problem, regardless of the intensity or length of duration of the problem.

One famous evangelist used to say, "What gets your attention, gets you!" In other words, what occupies your thoughts and affections and actions will control your life. The secret to victory over all problems in life is to become "lost in wonder, love, and praise" - to wonder at His power, to love His person, and to praise (worship) His character.

It is the purpose of this book to enable the reader to become more focused on God - to learn to think God's thoughts, to share God's affections, to become involved in God's actions (mission). To learn, in face of all human problems, to become "lost in wonder, love and praise" - the main themes so ably dealt with in the Book of Psalms - and especially in the few Psalms which this book expounds (Psalms 1,8,11,19,23,27,32,42,51,62,73,84,91).

A few words regarding the format and use of this book. Emphasis is placed on the general movement of the thought pattern of each Psalm, through the clear divisions and outlines which are given in "overview" at the beginning of each chapter.

This book can be used and read in several ways. It can be used as a daily devotional guidebook, for serious and personal in-depth study of a few of the more popular Psalms. The Psalms, as a whole, are full of devotional material, enabling the sensitive reader to be aided greatly in his worship of the Almighty God. Because this book is divided into thirteen chapters, the layout of the book is designed in such a way that it can easily be used for an adult or youth Sunday School course. The individual chapters contain enough content, and yet are short enough in length, that they could also well serve as material for small midweek study groups within a local church. The thought-provoking questions at the end of each chapter are intended to enable the participating students in a class context to review and to apply the relevant material in each chapter. Because of the kind of subjects which the various chapters cover (subjects like guilt, fear, anxiety, depression), it should not be difficult to make real life applications as a result of compassionate discussions in small group settings.

A couple additional possible uses for the book. There may be local pastors who are searching for new and fresh outlines and sermon material to share with their congregation. As author of this book, I have spent much time and effort and prayer in preparing these sermons (which were first preached to my own congregation), and I would be delighted if these sermons could be used (partially or in their entirety) to bless other congregations. I can also envision this book as appropriate curriculum to be used in Christian Day Schools, probably in High School Departments, as a devotional study. Teens could well profit from approaching life's problems from a Biblical world viewpoint.

It is my prayer that a serious study of these thirteen Psalms may help many persons to become full of wonder, love, and praise for the God of great wonders, and for the God of infinite love, and for the God who is worthy of our worship and praise! Oh, to be “lost in wonder and love and praise” - amidst all of life’s challenges and problems!

Ron Christian

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As author of this book, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Shirley Ruiz, who dedicated her great skills, abounding energy, and many hours of her time in typing the entire manuscript of this book. I feel certain that her committed hands will be a great blessing to many persons.

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CHAPTER 1

TWO WAYS - TWO DESTINIES!

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TWO WAYS - TWO DESTINIES!

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 1:1-6

INTRODUCTION: What is happiness? Happiness is a ‘Way of Life’, based upon a definite relationship with God. The happy man is the one who receives godly counsel, who practices a godly lifestyle, and who cultivates godly attitudes. In contrast to the life and attitudes of a wicked man, Psalms 1 describes the ‘Happy’ or ‘Blessed’ man - the man whose counsel is right, whose conduct is righteous, and whose attitudes are humble. Psalms 1 describes the two ways in life, and the two destinies at the end of life.

OUTLINE:

- I. DESTAIN FOR THE WICKED (v.1)**
 - A. Counsel Of The Wicked**
 - B. Conduct Of Sinners**
 - C. Company Of Scoffers.**

- II. DELIGHT IN THE WORD (v.2, 3)**
 - A. The Proper Mood For Living - Delight**
 - B. The Proper Object For Living - The Word Of The Lord**
 - C. The Proper Activity For Living - Meditation On The Bible**
 - D. The Proper Results From Living - Productivity**

- III. DESTRUCTION OF THE WICKED (v. 4, 5)**

- IV. DESTINY OF THE WORLD (v. 6)**

CONCLUSION: Remember, Christianity is a ‘Way of Life, not a mere philosophy of the mind or an emotional sentiment of the heart. “From the beginning to the end religion is regarded as a matter of the will as well as of the heart, as a matter of action as well as of thought, as a matter of conduct as well as of belief. A man is walking either the way to life or the way to death; either walking towards God or away from him.” (William Barclay)

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 1

TWO WAYS - TWO DESTINIES!

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 1:1-6

INTRODUCTION: There seems to be constant talk in our modern-day concerning ‘Happiness’. Nearly everyone is seeking to be happy - the best sellers today are written on the subject: ‘How To Be Happy’.

What is happiness? Happiness is a ‘Way of Life’, based upon a definite relationship with God. The happy man is the one who receives godly counsel, who practices a godly lifestyle, and who cultivates godly attitudes. In contrast to the life and attitudes of a wicked man, Psalms 1 describes the ‘Happy’ or ‘Blessed’ man - the man whose counsel is right, whose conduct is righteous, and whose attitudes are humble. Psalms 1 describes the two ways in life, and the two destinies at the end of life. There is the way of righteousness which leads to true prosperity, and there is the way of wickedness which leads to total destruction.

In seeking to understand the two ways and the two destinies, let us look at Psalms 1, using the following simple outline to guide us in our thinking: 1) Destain For The Wicked (v. 1); 2) Delight In The Word (v. 2,3); 3) Destruction Of The Wicked (v. 4,5); 4) Destiny Of The World (v. 6).

I. DESTAIN FOR THE WICKED (V.1)

A. Counsel Of The Wicked

The righteous man does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. “To walk in the counsel of the wicked is to take the advice of the wicked in the conduct of life.” (The Lord Is My Shepherd; Barclay; pg. 39)

Think of some of the popular - yet very wrong - counsels of the wicked which are given today.

(1)Hedonism - “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” Right and wrong is defined, by the hedonist, in terms of sensual pleasure. “You’re young only once, so have fun. You have plenty of time in the future to settle down and get serious. We all have to sow our wild oats. See the world while you have a chance.”

(2) Sensualism - "If you love, love is all that counts. Go ahead and live with her. Marriage can wait for the future. Experiment now and have a little fun sexually. Express your manhood. After all, men must be men!"

(3) Materialism - "Life consists in the abundance of things which a man possesses. After all, if you earned it, you have a right to spend it on yourself. It is your duty to buy and to spend. The more you make and the more you spend on yourself, the healthier the economy will be, and the happier you will be!"

(4) Humanism - "Man is inherently good. It is man's environment which has caused all the problems. Man can do anything he wants to, given enough time and effort. Man is increasingly getting better!"

(5) Scientism - "Science can solve any problem, given enough time, and study and research. Religion is all based on superstition. Science is based on facts and reality. Therefore, let us replace all religion with science."

(6) Secularism - "There is no need for believing in a 'Supreme Being'. There is no way one can prove God's existence. Only that which can be tested with the 'five senses' is 'real'. Man is his own 'Saviour'. We don't need to believe in the supernatural tenets of religion."

(7) Relativism - "There is no such thing as 'absolutes' in the moral realm. Everything is right or wrong according to the circumstances and situations. What's right for you may be wrong for me. Each person must determine for himself what is 'right' for him. There is no such thing as an objective moral standard by which to judge all things as either 'right' or 'wrong'. Each person must judge for himself, must do that which he thinks is right for him."

(8) Militarism - " 'Might makes right'. 'The rewards go to the strongest'. 'You must look out after No. 1 (yourself), even when this means using other people (or nations) as your steppingstones to get to the top of the heap.' Life, after all, is based on competition. You must fight your way to success, regardless of who gets hurt in the process. Be tough and terrible and you will eventually make it to the top. Carry a 'big stick' wherever you go and let people know that you are in charge, that you are 'boss'."

Anyone that allows himself to be influenced by the so-called counsel of

the worldly-wise who are heard to say such foolish things as we have just noted, is listening to the counsel of the wicked! To listen and to receive wicked counsel is to become wicked yourself!

B. Conduct of Sinners

The righteous person does not adopt the conduct of the wicked. “The good man does not stand in the way of sinners; that is to say, he does not conform to the example of sinners.” (Ibid; pg. 39) Describing the lifestyle and evil conduct of the sinful person, David writes, “*The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. Even on his bed he plots evil; he commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong.*” Psalms 36: 3,4. Not only are his words (counsel) evil, but his lifestyle is also evil!

(1) Irresponsible Conduct - The wicked have no sense of right and wrong, and they have no sense of ultimate accountability before God. They take the way of ease and pleasure and selfish indulgence, and they care nothing about others and they are oblivious to God and to His authority.

(2) Impure Conduct - The wicked have no desire to live pure and holy lives, but rather live lives filled with lust and evil passions. They live by the evil advice they give to others: “If it feels good, do it!”

The righteous man is one whose mind is fixed on God and on God’s thoughts. Therefore, he refuses to listen to the evil advice of the wicked. Not only does he reject the wicked counsel (advice) of the wicked, but he refuses to conform to the conduct (example) of the wicked. He seeks to think God’s thoughts and he seeks to follow Christ’s unselfish and pure example. The Bible says, “There is a way that seems right unto man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” “God’s thoughts are higher than man’s thoughts, as high as the heaven is above the world, so are God’s ways higher also than man’s ways.” It is not the counsel (thoughts) and conduct (ways) of the wicked that we are to follow, but it is the thoughts and ways of God that we are to follow!!

To follow the wicked (however educated the wicked may seem to be) is to take the road that leads to death - death of sound thinking and death to sound conduct.

C. Company of Scoffers

The righteous person is not to intimately associate with the company of the wicked.

“The good man does not sit in the seat of scoffers; that is to say, he never associates with those who mock at sacred things.” (Ibid; pg. 39)

The Bible says, *“Evil companions corrupt good manners.”* The Bible exhorts believers: *“Come out from among them (evil persons and evil practices) and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean things, and I (God) will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters.”*

The Bible tells us that we are to be in the world but not of the world. As believers, we must not associate with evil persons or practice evil activities.

To associate with ‘the wicked’ is to become like the wicked. The power of influence cannot be denied. What are the ‘wicked’ like? *“The wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace, my God, for the wicked.”* (Isaiah 57:20, 21) If you wish to lose peace in your life, just begin to spend much time with ‘restless’ sinners. To listen to the counsel of ‘the wicked’ is to accept counsel that leads, not to comfort and peace, but to disharmony and great turmoil.

The righteous man does not keep company with ‘sinners’. A sinner is one whose conduct is not patterned after the will of God. His life is not fitting into the plan and purpose for which he was created. His life is self-centered rather than Christ-centered. His motives are ulterior rather than pure. His goals are materialistic rather than spiritual. He values the things of time more than the things of eternity. He is literally ‘missing the mark’, missing God’s ‘target’ for his life. The man of righteousness does not keep company with such aimless and earthly-minded persons.

The righteous man does not keep company with ‘scoffers’. “The scoffer is the arrogant, cynical, unteachable trouble-maker who resents and refuses all discipline.” (Barclay; Ibid; pg. 41) Scoffers are those who make ‘light’ of the sacred things of life - things like sexual purity, the holy name of God, the sacredness and permanency of marriage, the sanctity of human life, the beauty of the holy communion, the preciousness of the ‘blood of Christ’. The righteous man keeps no company with those whose ‘hearts are hardened’, whose ‘necks are stiffened’, whose ‘consciences are seared’, and ‘whose mouths are full of scoffing words’.

Where are the ‘restless ones’ (the wicked) found? Where are the ‘aimless ones’ (the sinners) found? Where are the ‘arrogant ones’ (the scoffers) found?

They are found in many places, including trashy novels, and illicit magazines, and godless songs, and profane films, and immoral television shows. The righteous person is careful not to keep company with those who scoff at the sacred things of life. Do not misunderstand what is being said. Believers are called to witness to the wicked, to sinners, and even to scoffers. But, in the process of witnessing, believers are told not ‘to throw your pearls before swine’. Believers are to be eager to keep company with unbelievers who are receptive. “The Christian cannot isolate himself from the world; but before he plunges into it, he must be sure that he wants to change it, not conform to it, and he must be equally sure that he so loves his fellow men and so loves purity that he will change them and not they him.” (The Lord Is My Shepherd; William Barclay, pg. 59).

While it is true that believers are called to witness in the world of evil men, believers are never to listen to the counsel of the wicked; believers are never to adopt the conduct of sinners; believers are never to keep company with scoffers. Turn your back upon the counsel, the conduct, and the company of the evil ones whose minds are clouded with falsehood, whose activities are controlled by sin, and whose influences are void of good.

II. DELIGHT IN THE WORD (v. 2, 3)

A. The Proper Mood For Living - Delight

The righteous person is the truly joyous person. The righteous are not always happy, for mere happiness depends on favorable happenings in ones environment. Joy, in contrast to mere happiness, is not dependent on the circumstances of life, but upon the condition of ones relationship with God. Do you find the Christian life a joyous life, a life filled with venture and with thrilling new discoveries?

Can you say, “I delight to do thy will, O my God!”?

B. The Proper Object For Living - The Word Of The Lord.

Do you love the Word of God? Even though you may not understand all the content of the Bible, do you find sheer pleasure in reading and in studying the Bible?

Can you imagine what life would be without the Bible? Never take the fact that you own a Bible 'for granted'. Many there have been throughout history who have not had access to a Bible. There are hundreds of tribes yet today who do not have a Bible which is translated in their own native dialect. Recognize how precious the Bible is to you.

THE BIBLE

This book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers.

Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable.

Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy.

It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you.

It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's character.

Here paradise is restored, heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed.

Christ is its grand object, our good its design, and the glory of God its end.

It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet.

Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully.

It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure.

It is given you in life, will be opened in the judgment, and will be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.-

The Challenger

C. The Proper Activity For Living - Meditation On The Bible.

If the Bible is the object of your greatest delight, it is obvious that you will spend much time reading and studying the Bible. If a person is the object of your great love, you obviously will think much about that person and you will want to spend much time with that much-loved person.

If the Bible is the delight of our hearts, why then do we spend so little time reading and studying the Bible? The complexity of a much-loved person's personality does not keep a lover from spending time with his beloved. Why should the immensity and complexity of the Bible's content and message make us afraid to spend much time studying and reading the Bible? To meditate on the Bible - the Law of the Lord - means to read its contents out loud for the purpose of facilitating concentration, and it means to memorize its main verses for the purpose of strengthening character. Have you learned to concentrate for long periods of time on the Bible's message, allowing the Author of the Bible - the Holy Spirit - to transform your thinking and your lifestyle? Meditate on the Bible day and night - the first thing in the morning when you rise and the last thing at night before you retire. Have a systematic reading schedule -reading through the New Testament consecutively first and then reading through the Old Testament. Use a good Bible commentary to aid you in your self-study. Underline key verses and memorize those portions which are especially helpful to you. Compare different translations. Outline chapters and paragraphs and jot down your personal insights in a special spiral notebook. Regularly listen to Bible cassettes. Ask the Holy Spirit to enable you to apply important truths in your daily life. Discuss the content of the Word with close friends, and be an active participant in a weekly Bible study Group. Engaging in these activities will help you to meditate on the Word day and night. "What is implied by the psalmist is that our meditation is to make the law our nature and character. We are to be immersed, soaking thoroughly, inundated with truth of God's Word." (Falling Into Greatness; Ogilive; pg. 21)

D. The Proper Results From Living - Productivity (v. 3)

The righteous man who delights himself in meditating on the Word of God and who seeks to apply the Word of God in his daily lifestyle, is the one whose life is most productive and fruitful and prosperous. *"He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does he prospers."* (v. 3)

Notes Barclay, "The picture is of a young shoot transplanted into a well-watered, rich-soiled garden in which it can grow uninterruptedly. The tree in question is the palm tree." (The Lord Is My Shepherd; pg.46) Barclay notes seven characteristics of the righteous person whose life is likened unto a well-watered palm tree. (1) "There is in his life the stability of a tree... The good man stands erect, immovable, foursquare

against all circumstances.” (2) “The palm tree has gracefulness and beauty... The good man combines strength with beauty.” (3) “There is growth in the tree; it is not static.” (4) “There is fruit from the tree... The good man is useful to his fellow men and useful to God.” (5) “The tree has its source of nourishment and so has the good man... To his own human effort he has added divine guidance and divine grace.” (6) “The good man is a man for all seasons... The good man will weep with those that weep and rejoice with those who rejoice, he will be able to share both in laughter and in tears.” (7) “The palm tree goes on bearing fruit in its old age. For the good man the best is always yet to be. Age will have its opportunities no less than youth.” (Ibid; pg. 47, 48)

III. DESTRUCTION OF THE WICKED (v. 4, 5)

In contrast to the righteous ones who prosper like a well-watered palm tree, the wicked ones are useless and subject to destruction, like chaff which is blown away by the wind because it is useless.

Notes Barclay, “The chaff gives us the picture of the character and destiny of the evil man.” (Ibid; pg. 50) Barclay notes four characteristics of the wicked, as they are likened unto chaff. (1) “The chaff is empty and worthless, good for nothing.” It is true that “uselessness invites disaster”. The man who is ‘restless’ (the wicked), ‘aimless’ (the sinner), and ‘arrogant’ (the scoffer), is the one who is empty and worthless, ready to be blown away by the wind, or ready to be burned in the fire. (2) “The chaff is impermanent and unstable.” The grain which has enough weight to endure the tests of the wind, has a future destiny of worth, but chaff cannot endure the test of the wind and is thus swept away. Only the righteous endure! Only the righteous are stable and permanent! “*The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*” (I John 2:17) (3) “The chaff is doomed to separation.” The wicked will eventually be separated from the righteous. At the end of time, at the Great Judgment, the righteous lambs will be at Christ’s right hand and the wicked goats will be at Christ’s left hand. The wheat and the chaff will not always be together. A day of great separation is coming. It is good for all to examine themselves honestly and ask God (before it is too late): “Am I living in such a way now that when the end comes, my life will be shown to be wheat, not chaff?” (4) “The wicked like the chaff are doomed to destruction.” Judgment is coming! There is a heaven to be enjoyed by the righteous, and there is a hell to be endured by the wicked. The ‘chaff’ (the ‘wicked’, the ‘sinners’, the ‘scoffers’) are destined to destruction.

IV. DESTINY OF THE WORLD (v. 6)

Psalms 1:6 says, *“For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”*

There are two ways in life and there are two destinies at the end of this earthly life.

**“To every man there openeth
A way and ways and a way,
And the high soul takes the high way,
And the low soul gropes the low,
And in between on the misty flats
The rest drift to and fro.
But to every man there openeth
A high way and a low,
And every man decideth
The way his soul shall go.”**

(John Oxenham)

Jesus Himself spoke of the two ways - the way of life and the way of death. He urged everyone to take the way of life. *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”* (Matthew 7: 13, 14)

There is no middle road, no razor-edge of non-committal upon which we may balance precariously. Jesus said, *“If you are not for me, you are against me!”* There is no moral neutrality, no road of compromise. To those who were trying to serve both Baal and Jehovah, Joshua said, *“Choose you this day whom ye will serve!”* Jesus said, *“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money.”* (Matthew 6:24, NIV)

It is either serving God or serving Satan! It is either walking on the narrow road that leads to heaven or on the broad road that leads to hell! There are only two kinds of people in the world - those who have the Son and those who don't have the Son, those who have eternal life and those who don't have eternal life, those who are saved and those who are lost, those who are reconciled to God and those who stand condemned because of their sins. *“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”* (I John 5:12) *“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.”* (John 3:36)

There are only two ways and there are only two final destinies. There is the way of God and there is the way of Satan! There is the destiny of heaven and there is the destiny of hell! "G. K. Chesterton once said that one of the main characteristics of this age is that it no longer sees things in terms of black and white; it tends to see them in terms of an indeterminate grey. It is significant that the Semitic language has no word for compromise; and that to the Semitic mind grey is not a color. It would be well if we returned to a situation - or come to it for the first time - in which we realized that right is right and wrong is wrong." (Barclay; Ibid; pg. 54)

Considering this Psalms from the New Testament viewpoint, what does it mean to be a 'righteous person'? A righteous person is one who has surrendered to Christ and who is walking with Christ. He is a person who is no longer wicked (i.e., 'restless'), but he is a person who is resting peacefully in his relationship with God, being reconciled to the Father by confession of sin and by faith in Jesus Christ. He is a person who is no longer a sinner (i.e., 'aimless'), but he is a person who is 'hitting the mark' of life, fulfilling the purpose for which he was created, fitting into God's master plan for his life rather than attempting to live a self-centered and independent life. He is one who is learning to be obedient to God's instructions and submissive to God's guidance. Also, he is a person who is no longer a scoffer (i.e., 'arrogant and cynical'), but he is a man who reverently and humbly walks with God, delighting in the sacred Word of God and meditating upon that Word day and night. He is like a tree, planted in a well-watered garden, which is very fruitful and productive, useful and solid and enduring. His life increasingly manifests the traits of Christlike living!

Remember, Christianity is a 'way' of life, not a mere philosophy of the mind or an emotional sentiment of the heart. "From the beginning to the end religion is regarded as a matter of the will as well as of the heart, as a matter of action as well as of thought, as a matter of conduct as well as of belief. A man is walking either the way to life or the way to death; either walking towards God or away from him." (Barclay; pg. 53)

Will you take the way of God today and begin walking with God? The way of God is the way of Jesus, for Jesus said, "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*" He also said, "*No man can come to the Father except by me!*"

To take the way of Jesus, you must confess your sins, surrender your will, and determine obediently to follow Jesus the rest of your life (God being your Helper). "God knows, protects and guides the way of the righteous; but the way of the wicked leads only to disaster." (Barclay; pg. 52) Take the way of the righteous - and live with God forever!

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

Chapter One

Two Ways - Two Destinies

QUESTIONS

1. How, according to Psalms One, would you describe the 'Happy Man', in terms of 'counsel', 'conduct', and 'attitudes'?
2. What does it mean to 'walk in the counsel of the wicked'? (v. 1)
3. In terms of 'philosophical positions', define some of the 'counsels' of the wicked which are offered in our modern-day world, all of which are destructive.
4. How can the conduct (lifestyle) of the 'wicked' person be described?
5. What does it mean to "sit in the seat of scoffers"?
6. How, according to Isaiah 57:20-21, are the 'wicked' described?
7. How does a sinner's life, motives, goals, and values differ from those of a believer?
8. What are some of the 'sacred things' in life which scoffers profane?
9. Where are the 'restless ones' (the wicked), the 'aimless ones' (the sinners), and the 'arrogant ones' (the scoffers) to be found?
10. What does it mean for a believer "to throw his pearls before swine"?
11. What does it mean to be 'in the world' but not 'of the world'? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The Christian cannot isolate himself from the world; but before he plunges into it, he must be sure that he wants to change it, not conform to it, and he must be equally sure that he so loves his fellow men and so loves purity that he will change them and not they him."

12. **With what degree of conviction do you agree with the following statement: “Turn your back upon the counsel, the conduct, and the company of the evil ones whose minds are clouded with falsehood, whose activities are controlled by sin, and whose influences are void of good”?**
13. **If, according to Psalms 1:2, the proper mood for living is ‘Delight’, how would you distinguish between ‘Happiness’ and ‘Joy’?**
14. **According to Psalms 1:2, with what activity does the ‘righteous man’ delight himself?**
15. **From your experience and observation, why do you think that believers generally spend so little time reading and studying the Bible?**
16. **What does it mean to ‘meditate on God’s law day and night’? What ‘aids’, ‘tools’, and ‘methodology’ have you found helpful in your quest for Biblical knowledge and application?**
17. **In what ways is a Christian “like a tree planted by streams of water”?**
18. **How, according to Psalms 1:4, are the wicked ones like “chaff that the wind blows away”?**
19. **Do you agree that there are only two ways in life and that there are only two destinies at the end of this earthly life? How do you react to the following statement: “There is no middle road, no razor edge of non-committal upon which we may balance precariously.” (Note Matthew 6:24)**
20. **Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “One of the main characteristics of this age is that it no longer sees things in terms of black and white; it tends to see them in terms of an indeterminate grey.”**
21. **Considering Psalms One from the New Testament viewpoint, what does it mean to be a ‘righteous person’?**

- 22. How would you describe Christianity in terms of the intellectual, emotional, and volitional aspects of life? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Christianity is a way of life, not a mere philosophy of the mind or an emotional sentiment of the heart."**
- 23. Tell why the worldly-minded person reacts so strongly against the following statement: "A man is walking either the way to life or the way to death; either walking towards God or away from him."**

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!

CHAPTER 2

THE WONDER OF GOD AND MAN!

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

CHAPTER 2

THE WONDER OF GOD AND MAN

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 8: 1-9

TEXT: "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" (v. 4)

OUTLINE:

- I. THE INHERENT MAJESTY OF GOD THAT EVOKES PRAISE (v. 1-3)**
 - A. God's Majesty Manifested In His Uncreated Character (v. 1)**
 - B. God's Majesty Manifested In His Unpretentious Creatures (v. 2)**
 - C. God's Majesty Manifested In His Unfathomable Universe (v. 3)**

- II. THE SEEMING INSIGNIFICANCE OF MAN THAT EVOKES WONDER (v. 3)**
 - A. The Immensity Of God's Creation (v.3)**
 - B. The Insignificance Of Man's Position (v.4)**
 - C. The Dignity Of Man's Honor (v.5)**

- III. THE DIVESTED DOMINION OF MAN THAT EVOKES GRATITUDE (v. 6-9)**
 - A. Man's Unique Privilege - Dominion Over The Earth's Resources
(Basis of Dignity)**
 - B. Man's Unique Responsibility - Stewardship of God's Possessions
(Basis for Humility)**

CONCLUSION: To live well is to live with a constant sense of 'Praise', 'Wonder' and 'Gratitude'.

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

CHAPTER 2

THE WONDER OF GOD AND MAN

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 8: 1-9

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever, during the summer months, laid on your back, gazing up into the starry sky, wondering who you were, why you were here on earth, where the universe ended, where heaven was located? I remember one occasion when my brother-in-law and I went outside on a clear night in Nebraska on our parents-in-law's ranch. I don't remember ever seeing more stars! Because the night was so clear and there was no distracting city lights, the Milky Way Galaxy was most vividly in view! The vastness of the universe overwhelmed me. I felt so small. How could I have a right to feel close to God when I realized that the light from some far-off stars, which my eye was presently seeing, had left those stars thousands of years ago! I asked myself, "Are there other planets in the universe, inhabited by intelligent creatures like man?" "If there are no other creatures like man, then why would God wish to create such a vast universe?" "If there is intelligent life on other planets, is it possible that they too are 'fallen races' of people, and, if so, is it possible that God is presently visiting one of those 'fallen plants' like He did when God came to our earth in the form of Jesus some two thousand years ago?"

The wonder of God and the wonder of Man overwhelmed me on that memorable night in Nebraska.

On a clear night, we are told that it is possible to view as many as 5000 stars with the naked eye, and yet we are told that the universe contains billions of stars! No person can really comprehend the vastness of the universe, and yet the thoughtful person cannot help being struck with the 'wonder of it all'!

PROPOSITION: What is the proper response of finite man when he thinks of the infinite God who has chosen personally to love the human race? It is praise, wonder, and gratitude. All three responses are seen in Psalm 8. (1) The inherent majesty of God that evokes praise (v. 1-2); (2) The seeming insignificance of man that evokes wonder (v. 3-5); (3) The divested dominion of man that evokes gratitude (v. 6-9).

The wonder of God and Man is seen in Psalms 8. One cannot help being filled with praise and wonder and gratitude when he (as a mere human) sees himself in relationship to the vast universe and when he realizes that he is the object of God's special love!

I. THE INHERENT MAJESTY OF GOD THAT EVOKES PRAISE (v. 1-2).

A. God's Majesty Manifested In His Uncreated Character (v. 1)

(1) "O Lord" - Yahweh

Yahweh means "I am that I am". That is, God is the uncreated Creator, the Ground of all Being, the Eternal One, the Uncaused Cause, the One who is before all things and the Creator of all. In Him alone, all creatures live and move and have their very being. He is the sustainer of all things. The triune God, known as Yahweh in the Old Testament, "was before all else began and it is his power that holds everything together." (Colossians 1:17, Living Bible)

(2) "Our Lord" - Adonai

'Adonai' means ruler, king, and sovereign of all life. God is in control of all things. God has everything under control. He knows the end from the beginning. He is the One who is the perfect Judge, the One to whom all creatures are responsible. Nothing happens that is independent of God's will or God's permission. The galaxies move at His command, the creatures of earth respond according to their God-created instincts, and every man with all of his God-allowed freedom can make no moral decision without God's knowledge and permission. As Sovereign, God makes even the 'Wrath of men to praise Him'. 'Though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is Ruler yet.'

He who is the uncreated Creator and the mighty Sovereign, is He who has chosen personally to fellowship with mankind. The Eternal Creator and Sovereign has chosen to reveal Himself to mankind. Mankind is the recipient of God's special self-revelation and is the object of God's personal love. He who is Yahweh (the Eternal One) and Adonai (Sovereign) is 'OUR' Lord! The Creator who is separate from His creation is He who has chosen to befriend his special creatures - mankind. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us humans to perceive, but, while we can't comprehend such knowledge intellectually, we can enjoy His loving presence personally!

God's self-revealed character, as seen in His names - Yahweh and Adonai - calls for unceasing praise from the lips and from the lives of God's created order. *"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"* (Psalms 8, v. 1)

The glory of God is set above the heavens. The majesty of God, as revealed in His names and His nature, transcends even the glory of the created universe. The marvel of the Source - God Almighty - is always greater than the marvel of the products from the Source - the created universe. *“O Lord our Lord, the majesty and glory of your name fills all the earth and overflows the heavens.”* (Psalms 8:1, Living Bible)

B. God’s Majesty Manifested In His Unpretentious Creatures (v. 2)

*“From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies
To silence the foe and the avenger.”* (Psalms 8:2, NIV)

Who are the foes and the adversaries of God? It is those whose lips are sealed from praise and whose hearts are hardened in ingratitude. God’s ‘address’ is praise, and only those who praise God can find and know God. Ingratitude and a spirit of complaining, not only grieves God but it also spiritually blinds man. God is worthy to be praised! Repeatedly the Psalms exhort us to lift our voices in praise to God! *“Praise the Lord. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!”* (Psalms 147:1)

Adversaries of God compose that group of people who are so self-sufficient and proud and sophisticated that they feel no need to recognize God. They are thankless creatures who specialize in negative thinking and in critical conversation. They are like those religious leaders who, on the day of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, were skeptical of Jesus’ ministry and critical of the shouts of the children who praised Jesus. *“And now the blind and crippled came to him and he healed them there in the Temple. But when the chief priests and other Jewish leaders saw these wonderful miracles, and heard even the little children in the Temple shouting, ‘God bless the Son of David’, they were disturbed and indignant and asked him, ‘Do you hear what these children are saying?’ ‘Yes’, Jesus replied, ‘Didn’t you ever read the Scriptures? For they say, ‘Even little babies shall praise him!’”* (Matthew 21:14-16, Living Bible)

If sophisticated and critical adults will not praise the Lord, then God will find unpretentious and grateful children who will gladly raise their voice in praise to Him. Perhaps the praises of children will shame the criticisms of hardened adults! Note the rendering of Psalms 8:2 in

the Living Bible: “You have taught the little children to praise you perfectly. May their example shame and silence your enemies!”

Perhaps the uninhibited and simple praises of children will even soften the hearts of God’s adversaries, changing them into God’s worshipping friends!

C. God’s Majesty Manifested In His Unfathomable Universe (v.3)

God’s majesty and splendor are revealed in God’s self-revealed nature, and His majesty is sung by the lips of unpretentious children. Further, His majesty is declared by His created universe. The beauty and the magnitude and the order of God’s creation all point to a beautiful and a mighty and an intelligent Creator! David considered the heavens, the work of God’s fingers, the moon and the stars, which God put in place (Psalms 8:3), and David was filled with amazement. God’s majesty is revealed in the universe, as noted also in Psalms 19. *“The heavens are telling the glory of God; they are a marvelous display of his craftsmanship. Day and night they keep on telling about God. Without a sound or word, silent in the skies, their message reaches out to all the world. The sun lives in the heavens where God placed it and moves out across the skies as radiant as a bridegroom going to his wedding, or as joyous as an athlete looking forward to a race! The sun crosses the heavens from end to end, and nothing can hide from its heat.”* (Psalms 19:1-6, Living Bible) It is said that our sun which is about 93 million miles from our earth is so big that it could contain one million planets the size of planet earth! And yet our sun is very small compared to other stars!

II. THE SEEMING INSIGNIFICANCE OF MAN THAT EVOKES WONDER (v. 3-5)

The first two verses of Psalms 8 speaks of the majesty and might and glory and splendor of the sovereign Lord. Such majesty properly evokes a response of praise in the hearts of single-hearted and humble-minded persons.

The next three verses of Psalms 8 speak of the magnitude of God’s vast universe in contrast to the seeming insignificance of man’s position and size. The bigness of God’s vast universe in contrast to the tininess of man’s frame would seem to make one conclude that man is totally insignificant and inconsequential and even contemptible. But, the result of comparing the bigness of the universe with the smallness of man is not ‘contempt’ but ‘wonder’? Why? Because the infinite God who created finite man is more ‘in love’ with man the creature than He is ‘in love’ with the created universe of which man is only the tiniest part! Because of man’s unique creation, man is not a

'boisterous bit of organic scum' in a vast universe, but man is rather a creature who is crowned by God with glory and honor. (v. 5)

To better understand the wonder of it all, let's look at these three verses (v. 3-5) in terms of the following three topics: (1) The Immensity of God's Creation (v. 3); (2) The Smallness of Man's position (v. 4); (3) The Dignity of Man's Honor (v. 5).

A. The Immensity Of God's Creation (v.3)

David was overwhelmed with awe as he wrote, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" (v. 3-4) In these two verses, David is contrasting the immensity of God's Creation to the smallness of man's position in that creation.

Think first of the immensity of God's Creation. "On a clear night with the naked eye we can see 5000 stars - that was what the Psalmist saw. With a four-inch lens telescope we could see more than 2,000,000, and with a 200 inch mirror such as there is on Mount Palomar in the United States we could see more than 100 million.... There could be more than 100,000 million galaxies in the universe, each containing more than 100,000 million stars." (Barclay; The Lord Is My Shepherd; pg. 87,88) Some of the larger galaxies are 100,000 light years in diameter. This means that you would have to travel at the speed of light (186,000 miles per second) for 100,000 years to cross only one galaxy! The vastness of God's created universe is beyond our comprehension! "The length across the observable universe is 30,000,000,000 (30 billion) multiplied by 6,000,000,000,000 (6 trillion) miles." (Ibid:87) "If we set out and traveled at space rocket speed of 19,000 miles per hour, it would take 144,000 years to reach the nearest star." (Falling Into Greatness; Ogilvie; pg.32) "The universe is so vast that to cross it at the speed of light (186,000 miles per second), you would travel forty billion light years." (Ibid; 32). How many miles would you travel in one year if you were traveling at the speed of light? Six trillion miles!

B. The Insignificance Of Man's Position (v. 4)

Considering the size of the universe, the size of man is less than the size of a speck of dust in contrast to the size of the world! When I fly by jet over a large city, the buildings on the ground appear to be merely a child's building blocks, and the farmers' fields appear to be only small rectangles on a checker board. Men on the ground, if you can see them at all, appear to be like small ants. The rendering of Psalms 8:3,4, in the

'Living Bible' is the most interesting: "When I look up into the night skies and see the work of your fingers - the moon and the stars you have made - I cannot understand how you can bother with mere puny man, to pay any attention to him!"

Why would the great God of the universe want to give any notice to mankind?

C. The Dignity Of Man's Honor (v. 5)

The contrast between the bigness of the universe and the smallness of man could result in a contemptible view of man. Indeed, many who have abandoned any belief in a personal and caring God, have adopted a view of man that is both ignoble and tragic. Stated atheist Bertrand Russell, "Brief and powerless is man's life. On him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way."

How tragic is Mencken's impious creed: "The universe, a gigantic wheel in rapid revolution; man, a sick fly taking a dizzy ride on the rim thereof; religion, the fly's delusion that the wheel was constructed to give him the ride." One cynic stated that man is "a boisterous bit of organic scum on one small planet." Another said, "Man is but a rash on the epidermis of the universe." (The Word Of The Lord Came Unto Me Also; pg. 128)

It is easy to see why one would become cynical if he did not believe in God or in God's special creation of mankind. It is true that, in light of the magnitude of the universe in contrast to the puniness of man, it would be easy to conclude that man is totally inconsequential and a creature that will inevitably perish in total oblivion. He who abandons belief in a personal God and in a unique creation has no alternative other than despair and cynicism. But he who believes that God created man in the divine image, investing special honor and worth and meaning to mankind, is the one who, like David, is filled with wonder. Said David, "You (O God) made him (man) a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him (man) with glory and honor." (Psalms 8:5)

"'Glory' means value and magnitude of potential. Ability and power would also be implied. 'Honor' is recognition of status and strength." (Ogilivie; Ibid.; 32,33)

Every person is of uncalculable worth to God, the crown of God's special creation, the object of God's special love, gifted by God's grace. Man is a God-breathed creature, a tri-unity - i.e., one who is created with a body, with a mind, with a spirit. Man is capable of thinking rationally, of feeling deeply, of acting purposefully. Man is capable of thinking God's thoughts with his mind, of feeling God's compassion with his heart, of fulfilling God's plan with his will. Because God created man in his own image and because God redeemed man by His Son's blood, man is capable of working as a co-laborer with Almighty God to fulfill God's redemptive plans for His world! Man is an eternal being, built in his soul to live for God on this planet and with God eternally in heaven!

The God-given 'glory' and 'honor' which God has given to mankind is described in Psalms 8:6-8.

III. THE DIVESTED DOMINION OF MAN THAT EVOKES GRATITUDE (v. 6-9)

The honor and glory which man enjoys is described in terms of man's dominion over the earth's creation. *"You (God) made him (man) ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas."* (Psalms 8: 6-8)

What is the proper response from man when he realizes that he has such power and dominion over the world? Should it be pride and arrogance and a certain self-sufficiency? Never! "Man's dominion over creation is not an achievement; it is a gift. In verses 5 and 6 the subject of all the verbs is God. God made - God gave - God put all things under man's feet. All the action is God's.....Therefore man's dominion is not something to arouse pride but rather to excite gratitude." (The Lord Is My Shepherd; Barclay; pg. 92, 93)

Man's dominion over the earth must always be seen in terms of two concepts: (1) Man's privilege to rule, which is the basis of man's dignity and self-esteem, (2) Man's responsibility to be steward of God's resources, and responsibility properly to develop and to use those resources, which is the basis of man's humility and accountability. Let's look more closely at both of these concepts, in an attempt better to understand the meaning of "Dominion".

A. Man's Unique Privilege - Dominion Over The Earth's Resources (Basis of Dignity)

Man is not meant to wallow in the dust. Man is meant to stand tall with dignity, and man is meant to rule, to subdue the earth. The Psalmist declared, "You (God) have put him (man) in charge of everything you made; everything is put under his authority." (Psalms 8:6, Living Bible)

To every man, God has given gifts and abilities and power and authority and certain inalienable rights. God means for every person to claim his 'realm', to consecrate his realm to the service of God, and to excel in his realm as a result of using his God-given gifts. God wants and expects each of us, according to the special abilities He has given to us, to rule and to reign over God's world.

Should the fact that man enjoys such great honor and power and authority as rulers over God's earthly creation, evoke pride in man? Self-esteem and dignity - Yes! Pride and arrogance and self-sufficiency - No!

**B. Man's Unique Responsibility - Stewardship Of God's Possessions
(Basis For Humility)**

Mankind's preoccupation must not be with merely wonderful privileges but also with awesome responsibilities. Mankind must not linger too long in contemplation of its power and honor and glory and dominion. Why? For 'Dominion' does not mean 'Ownership'. "We do not own the world, we are only given dominion. The Lord is King, and He has called us to be viceroys of His delegated management." We have no authority or power apart from a dependent relationship with Him. If 'Dominion' is the basis for authentic self-esteem, then 'stewardship' is the basis for authentic humility. "Dominion and obedience must go hand in hand." (Barclay's Ibid; pg. 93)

'Stewardship' assumes accountability to God, because God owns all and man owns nothing. Note what David writes in Psalms 25. "*The earth belongs to God! Everything in all the world is his! He is the one who pushed the oceans back to let dry land appear.*" (Psalms 8: 1, 2, Living Bible) God is Owner and man is manager. "Delegated authority, plus dependence on the One who gives the authority, equals dominion." (Ogilvie, Ibid; 35) Man must manage the earth with both confidence and humility. With confidence because God has given mankind special honor and glory and capabilities. With humility, because man does not

own the earth's resources, and because man is accountable to God for the way that he , as a steward, both develops the raw resources and uses the finished products.

To properly understand the meaning of Man's Dominion is to be saved, on one hand, from the agony of groveling humiliation and indignity (i.e., thinking man is nothing), and is to be saved, on the other hand, from the insanity of prideful arrogance (i.e., thinking that man is everything). Man is neither a demon nor a god. Man is instead a divinely-created being, invested with great power and honor, but accountable for wise management of God's earthly resources. Pride is the perversion of wholesome self-esteem, and humiliation is the perversion of true humility, and a proper understanding of 'Dominion' will save one from both of these perversions. To be saved from the perversions of both pride and humiliation is to be filled with a sense of profound gratitude. The last word of the Psalm is appropriately the same as the first word of the Psalm - Adoration. "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Psalms 8:9).

CONCLUSION: As a result of studying Psalm 8, are you today filled with 'Praise', 'Wonder' and 'Gratitude'? Remember, to see the inherent majesty of God is to be filled with praise! To contrast the seeming insignificance of man with the vastness of the universe is to be filled with wonder! To understand the meaning of man's divested dominion over the world is to be filled with gratitude!

To live well is to live with a constant sense of 'Praise', 'Wonder', 'Gratitude'!

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

Chapter 2

The Wonder Of God and Man

QUESTIONS

1. **What is the proper response of finite man when he thinks of the infinite God who has chosen personally to love the human race?**
2. **What do the two Hebrew words (both of which are translated as “Lord” in the English language) mean, and how do they help describe the ‘majesty’ of God?**
3. **Is it possible for God’s sovereign power to be manifested, and at the same time for man’s moral freedom to be exercised?**
4. **With the use of the personal pronoun ‘OUR’ in Psalm 8:1, what truths regarding God’s nature does the Psalmist reveal? What is the proper response on the part of man to God’s self-revelation?**
5. **According to Psalms 8:2, who are the foes and the adversaries of God? (Note Matthew 21:14-16).**
6. **Give your response to the following statement: “If sophisticated and critical adults will not praise the Lord, then God will find unpretentious and grateful children who will gladly raise their voice in praise to Him.” Why is it that most adult believers in modern-day churches, have a difficult time engaging in uninhibited praise to God? What place should outward expressions of emotions have in the corporate life of the modern-day church (congregation)?**
7. **In what ways is God’s majesty manifested in His unfathomable universe, according to Psalms 8:3,4 and Psalms 19:1-6?**
8. **Should one have an attitude of ‘contempt’ or an attitude of ‘wonder’, as a result of comparing the bigness of the universe with the smallness of man? Why?**
9. **What overwhelming facts regarding the physical universe tend to cause one to feel that he is ‘insignificant’, making him wonder why the great God of the universe would want to give any notice to mankind?**

10. **Why do you believe that many today have abandoned any belief in a personal and caring God, and have adopted a view of man that is both ignoble and tragic?**
11. **Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "He who abandons belief in a personal God and in a unique creation has no alternative other than despair and cynicism."**
12. **Using Psalms 8:5, as your guide to thinking, what can you conclude about the nature and the status of man?**
13. **Give your interpretation of the following statement: "Man is a God-breathed creature, a tri-unity."**
14. **According to Psalms 8:6-9, what is the proper response from man when he realizes that God has given to him great power and dominion over the world?**
15. **Man's dominion over the earth must always be seen in terms of what two complementary concepts?**
16. **Using Psalms 8:6-8 as your guide to understanding, give your interpretation of the following statement: "God means for every person to claim his 'realm', to consecrate his 'realm' to the service of God, and to excel in his 'realm' as a result of using his God-given gifts."**
17. **What is the difference between 'Pride' and 'Self-esteem', as these two words describe the right and the wrong responses to God's gift of dominion to mankind?**
18. **Does 'Dominion' mean 'ownership' or does it mean 'stewardship', as these terms apply to the attitude of mankind regarding this world?**
19. **Give your response to the following statement: "Delegated authority, plus dependence on the One who gives the authority, equals dominion."**
20. **Why should mankind manage the earth with both 'confidence' and 'humility'?**

21. **Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “To properly understand the meaning of Man’s Dominion is to be saved, on one hand, from the agony of groveling humiliation and indignity (i.e., thinking man is nothing), and is to be saved, on the other hand, from the insanity of prideful arrogance (i.e., thinking that man is everything).”**

22. **Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Pride is the perversion of wholesome self-esteem, and humiliation is the perversion of true humility, and a proper understanding of ‘Dominion’ will save one from both of these perversions.”**

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!

CHAPTER 3

HOW TO OVERCOME DISCOURAGEMENT

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

CHAPTER 3

HOW TO OVERCOME DISCOURAGEMENT

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 11:1-7

TEXT: *"In the Lord I take refuge."* (Psalms 11:1a)

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever had one of those days when everything seemed to go wrong? Have you ever felt like 'running to the hills'? Amidst a series of difficult circumstances, have you ever felt that you wanted to "flee like a bird to your mountain" (Psalms 11:1)? Sometimes we say, "When it rains, it seems to pour!" David must have felt that way when Psalms 11 was written. In light of David's multitude of problems, there were negative counselors who gave him negative counsel: *"Flee like a bird to your mountain. For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"* (v. 2, 3)

There are many people today, who, because of their problems, decide to escape - 'to flee like a bird' to the mountains!

OUTLINE:

- I. NEGATIVE ADVICE BECAUSE OF FEARFUL CIRCUMSTANCES (v. 2,3)
- II. POSITIVE FAITH BECAUSE OF A FAITHFUL GOD (v. 1, 4-7)
 - A. Faith Means Looking To God As Your Refuge During Storms (v. 1a)
 - B. Faith Means Looking To God As The One Who Intercedes On Your Behalf (v. 4a)
 - C. Faith Means Looking To God As The Sovereign Ruler In The Affairs Of Men (v. 4b)
 - D. Faith Means Believing That God Is Giving Each Of Us His Personal Attention (v. 4b)
 - E. Faith Means Recognizing That God Tests The Righteous In Love and That God Judges The Wicked With Justice (v. 5-6)
 - F. Faith Means Affirming The Fact That God Loves Justice And That He Will Someday Eternally Reward The Righteous By Bringing Them Into His Heavenly Presence (v. 7)

CONCLUSION: When you are tempted to 'flee like a bird to your mountain' - to run from life, to 'throw in the towel', to 'cop out', to 'take to the road', to 'become a quitter', to 'escape into a life of fantasy', to become embittered because of unjust treatment from evil men, to succumb to doubts and fears because of life's perplexities and trouble, just remember,

there is an effective antidote to the negative counsel people give you because of life's negative circumstances.

What is the negative advice? To run from life and from life's responsibilities and relationships, to 'flee like a bird to your mountain' (v. 1).

What is the effective antidote for negative advice, motivated by negative circumstances? The effective antidote is 'Faith'. "O for a faith that will not shrink tho' pressed by many a foe, that will not tremble on the brink of any earthly woe."

Faith is the victory that overcomes the negative advice of negative people.

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

CHAPTER 3

HOW TO OVERCOME DISCOURAGEMENT

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 11:1-7

TEXT: *"In the Lord I take refuge."* (Psalms 11:1a)

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever had one of those days when everything seemed to go wrong? On the day of my wedding (August 12, 1966), it seemed that things went 'haywire'! My 'best man' from Illinois arrived very late the night before we were to be married, in the middle of a heavy Nebraska rain. My to-be-wife, Venita, was expecting an August sun for the day of her wedding, but instead got up on the morning of August 12 to an angry grey sky that dumped out so much rain that several of the country roads were washed out, making it possible for only about half of the people to attend our wedding in the evening. The rain continued all day on August 12 and throughout the night. My wife's aunt and uncle from Denver, who had planned to fly by small aircraft to Northern Nebraska, had to cancel their trip because of the storm. Lightning flashed and thunder clapped all day, a tree close to Venita's folk's house was struck by lightning, my relatives from Colorado who verily made it to Nebraska a day before the worst part of the storm thought they had come to the 'end of the world', Venita's dad ran over Venita's young niece's dog with his pickup an hour before the wedding, my teenage nephew from Colorado almost made several late to the wedding because of the length of time he took to take his shower in the one bathroom in Venita's country home. At the wedding itself, one of my young nieces who was a candle lighter, just as she was preparing to walk down the church aisle of that little country church, caught her veil on fire because of the hair spray she had used to keep her hair in place. After the wedding ceremony was over, my older sister who was to cut the wedding cake, panicked at the last minute and felt she lacked the proper skills to properly cut the beautifully-decorated wedding cake. Therefore, she turned over the cutting of the cake to my beloved cousin who (as a mechanic) had been assigned (of all things!) to make and to decorate cakes in the Navy. My cousin George came to the rescue for my sister, and he cut the cake! After the wedding reception was over, I and my new bride dashed out the church door in the midst of a downpour of rain and started my old Ford Falcon car, only to hear what sounded like a bomb going off. My heroic cousin George (the one who cut the wedding cake) had placed a huge firecracker in the engine of the car! After regaining my composure in the presence of my new bride, I finally got started on the country road that led to a small town (the town of Oneill) about 30 miles from the country church where we were married. More than once, I thought my little Ford Falcon was going to end up in a ditch. The country roads were almost unsurpassable. You see, when all this took place, there were no paved roads in the country, and it was not too uncommon for the dirt and sand roads to be nearly washed away by a large 'gully washer'. Well, I breathed a sign of relief when Venita and I finally reached the little town of Oneill, but my 'sign of relief' turned to a 'grown of despair' when I went to the hotel office where I had made a reservation only to find that it was locked! We had arrived too

late! I didn't know you could arrive too late at a motel! No place to stay on our first night as husband and wife! I thought by this time, "What else can go wrong!" Pardon the pun, but when "it rains, it seems to pour". Trouble and more troubles - and all in one day! Well, to relieve your anxiety, I must say that I fortunately found another motel that was still open, and that motel had a vacant room available!

Well, before putting this account behind us, I must tell you of one incident that happened, just before I marched up the basement steps and down the aisle of that country church to get married. Venita's mother was half-way up the stairs, ready to be ushered into the church at the start of the ceremony. I was near her and I heard her say in a spirit of great frustration, "I feel like running to the hills!" My normally diplomatic mother-in-law was totally frustrated! In spite of the beauty of the occasion - giving away her last daughter in marriage - she was overwhelmed by the difficult circumstances of the day, and all she could think of temporarily was 'Escape' - "I feel like running to the hills!"

Have you ever felt like 'running to the hills'? Amidst a series of difficult circumstances, have you ever felt that you wanted to "flee like a bird to your mountain"? (Psalms 11:1) On December 28, 1971, - early in the morning - I received the stunning news that my dad had died of a heart attack. Getting ready to go to Fountain to be with my mother, I was traveling down Bryan street in my car, and a neighborhood cat ran in front of my car. I hit and rolled the cat, but the cat kept running in a stunned way after he came out from underneath the car! Before I got to Denver, I developed car problems, and had to stop at a garage in Denver. Knowing nothing about mechanics, I panicked, and simply prayed to God to help me to get to Fountain to be with my mother. Finally arriving in Fountain, I spent time with my brother preparing for the funeral. Along with my mother's pastor, I preached a portion of my dad's funeral message. My brother read the Scriptures. After burying my dad, the last day of that year (1971), I found myself a week later preaching the sermon at my grandmother's funeral. (My mother lost her husband and her mother only a week apart!) Sometimes we say, "When it rains, it seems to pour!"

David must have felt that way when Psalms 11 was written. In light of David's multitude of problems, there were negative counselors who gave him negative counsel: "Flee like a bird to your mountain. For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (v. 2,3)

There are many people today who, because of their problems, decide to escape - 'to flee like a bird' to the mountains!

I. NEGATIVE ADVICE BECAUSE OF FEARFUL CIRCUMSTANCES (v. 2,3)

Many there are who decide to 'run from life', to 'take to the road', to 'call it quits', to 'throw in the towel', to 'escape into a life of fantasy', to succumb to life's pressures and

become embittered or cynical. Many there are who accept negative advice from negative people because of life's adversities.

Life is not always easy, but we must not flee from life's responsibilities. Just this last week I talked to a pastor who has now been at his church for five years. He said there were so many problems among the 30 or 40 people who composed his congregation when he first became pastor, that now (as he looks back) he wonders how he made it through all the pressures and the problems of the last five years. He was often tempted to 'flee like a bird to the mountains', 'to run to the hills', 'to quit', but he didn't. He remained faithful. He kept his faith in God. And God has rewarded him, for this pastor's one-time small church is now a healthy and a growing church!

How do people 'flee like a bird to the mountains'? In many ways! People try to escape life's problems by drinking alcohol or by taking drugs, or by leaving their wife (divorce), or by 'going on a shopping spree', or by going on a pleasure binge or on a food binge, or by hiding themselves in a corner with a trashy novel, or by becoming absorbed in a 'soap opera' or a movie, or by moving to another city for no good reason. Some go so far as to take their own lives - suicide. One of my close middle-aged friends whom I had counseled amidst many tears for many months, ended up taking his own life! He couldn't take the loneliness caused by his divorce and he found no lasting comfort in 'the bottle'. He despaired deeply and I prayed often with him and gave him several Christian books to read. I often encouraged him to come to Church. But, in spite of all the efforts and time, he chose finally to hang himself! I am still grieved when I think about it!

When you are facing difficulties, never listen to negative counsel, whether that counsel comes from negative friends or from the 'evil one' (Satan) himself. What constitutes negative counsel? The advice of the stoic: "Grit your teeth and courageously bear your own share of suffering!" The advice of the disillusioned mystic: "Pain is a mere illusion of the mind, so go on with your life and forget what seems like pain to you." The advice of the embittered cynic: (like Job's wife) - "Curse God and die!" The advice of the escapist: "*Flee like a bird to your mountain!*" (Psalms 11:1)

What (according to Psalms 11:2,3) are the probable causes of negative circumstances? One source of problems which people face is the wicked actions of others. "For look, the wicked bend their bows: they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart." (Psalms 11:2) David was greatly troubled by the jealous king of Israel - Saul. Because Saul sought to destroy David, there probably were negative counselors in David's life who counseled David to retreat, to buckle under the pressure and to give up his faith in God - 'to flee like a bird'.

One source of discouragement for many people is the irresponsible actions of family relatives or associates or employers, etc. Like the teen who told his pastor he was going to

run away from his home because of his discouraging circumstances: parents divorced, mother remarried, stepfather belligerent, conflict at home, trouble at school, etc. etc.

Another source of discouragement for many people is perplexing circumstances that tend to make them feel insecure - as if the foundation of their lives is crumbling. *"When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"* (Psalms 11:3)

Sometimes things happen that no one can really understand. Unexpected sickness or an accident, financial reverses, loneliness because of a friend suddenly moving from your community, misunderstanding because of misinterpretation of something you said, a loss of a long-time job, an unexpected death in your family - these are only a few of the perplexing circumstances of life that threaten to take away your security. It is during times like these that you tend to feel that your foundations are cracking, if not crumbling! It is then that you are tempted to 'flee like a bird to your mountain', 'to run away and hide'.

Is there any answer to discouragement and despondency? How should you react if negative advice is given to you during a time when you are fearful or discouraged? When, as in the case of David, negative counsellors tell you 'to flee like a bird to your mountain', how should you respond?

You should respond by getting your focus off your problems and by putting your faith strongly in God. Faith is the answer to discouragement!

II. POSITIVE FAITH BECAUSE OF A FAITHFUL GOD (v. 1, 4-7)

A. Faith Means Looking To God As Your Refuge During Storms (v. 1a)

It is not a sign of weakness - but a sign of wisdom - to go into a place of protection when a wind is blowing and the snow is piling up on the mountain. God is our refuge in the storms of life! During the storms of life, be sure to run to Jesus for protection.

As a young teen, I had a special place I would go to often, and especially during those times when my heart was burdened about something. My place of refuge and comfort was an old log near the bank of Fountain Creek about two blocks from my home. It was there I spent hours, thinking and praying and memorizing Bible verses. Do you have a place where you often get alone with God?

Put your trust in the Lord. He is reliable. Let the Lord be your 'hiding place' - your refuge - where you unburden your heart and share your struggles and sorrows. The Bible says that we are to cast our burdens on the

Lord for the Lord cares for each of us. Allow God to be your 'refuge' during discouraging circumstances that you face.

B. Faith Means Looking To God As The One Who Intercedes On Your Behalf (v. 4a)

Interpreting this verse ("the Lord is in his holy temple") from a New Testament perspective, we can say that Jesus - the great High Priest - is in heaven making intercession for His people. The Temple was the place where the priests made intercession for the people. *"Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."* (Hebrew 7:25)

Not only is Jesus, our Great High Priest, in the heavenly Temple interceding for us, but it is also stated in Scripture that the precious Holy Spirit is also interceding for us. *"In the same way, the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."* (Romans 8:26-27)

Is there ever a burden that He does not bear, or a sorrow that He does not share? "The Lord is in His Temple" - i.e., the Lord is actively interceding to the Heavenly Father in your behalf. Commit your troubles and sorrows and perplexities to Christ. Allow Jesus to carry these troubles to the Heavenly Father. If your trouble is the result of the unjust actions of others or the result of unexplained and perplexing circumstances of life - then commit the bitterness of your heart and the doubts of your mind to the Lord! The Lord can heal and the Lord can help!

What if the cause of your problem should be personal sin in your life? Is this a problem too big for God to deal with? Never! For the Lord is still "in His Temple", even when you fail morally! Remember, even when your trouble is the result of your own commission of sin, that there is One who still cares for you! Repent deeply of your sin, confess your sin to God, and plead the blood of Jesus, as a cleansing from all your sins. Remember the counsel of John, *"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense - Jesus Christ, The Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."* (1 John 2:1-2)

C. Faith Means Looking To God As The Sovereign Ruler In The Affairs Of Men (v. 4b)

In the midst of all his problems, David looked up to God rather than looking down in despondency. "There is a throne in heaven and there is a God on that throne. Trust in the ruling One lifts the despondent and stops them from fleeing to their mountains." (What Works When Life Doesn't? Briscoe, page 53)

When wrong seems oft so strong, and when circumstances seem to defy reason, never forget that "the Lord is on his heavenly throne." (v. 4) The Lord is Sovereign, i.e., He is Ruler of men and Controller of all events in time. "*He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.*" (Isaiah 40:22-23)

When wrong seems to go unpunished and when right seems to go unrewarded, just remember that God is in perfect control, that God is still Ruler and that all knees will someday bow before Him and all tongues will someday confess that He is Lord of all! (Philippians 2:10,11)

D. Faith Means Believing That God Is Giving Each Of Us His Personal Attention (v. 4b)

When you face a difficult experience, you might tend to think that no one else understands or that no one else is aware of your trouble. But there is always One who understands perfectly and who is intimately involved in your struggles. The Lord "observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them." (v. 4b)

Notes Stuart Brisco, "A friend of mine told me he was putting his small boy to bed one night and after the usual, I -want-a-drink-of-water and tell-me-a-story routines, he was about to leave the room when the boy said, 'Put the light on, Dad.' Thinking this was a new method of stalling, my friend said, 'No, go to sleep.' The youngster began to cry so the light went on and the tears dried miraculously. 'I just wanted to see your face, Dad, 'cause then I can tell you love me.'" (Brisco; Ibid; pg. 54)

Even though you can't visibly see the face of God, God can see your face and He can understand your feelings. "There is no time when the Lord is not carefully, lovingly watching over His own." (Brisco; Ibid; pg.54)

E. Faith Means Recognizing That God Tests The Righteous In Love and That God Judges The Wicked With Justice (v. 5-6)

(1) God Tests The Righteous (v. 5a)

Why do the righteous have to face difficult trials and perplexing problems? Because (according to verse 5) "The Lord examines the righteous." The adversities which believers undergo allow the Lord opportunity to test and to prove the character of the righteous. Peter (in the New Testament) wrote, "*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*" (I Peter 4: 12-14) If you find yourself suffering unjustly for the cause of Christ, just remember that God is allowing you to share Christ's sufferings! Through triumphant endurance of such suffering, you are becoming more Christlike in the process.

Peter also wrote, "*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*" (I Peter 1: 6-7)

Trials which are successfully faced and endured will result in the perfecting of one's faith, and in the glorifying of God's name, and in the eventual glorious rewarding of God's faithful saint.

Listen to James' amazing words regarding a believer's trials. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." (James 1:2-4) Trials are used by God to perfect the character of His people.

"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design

Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.”
(How Firm A Foundation)

In trying to understand the meaning and the purpose of human suffering from a Biblical viewpoint, I came up with the following advantages in having problems or adversities: (1) Problems and suffering can cultivate Christlike character in a person, (2) Problems and suffering successfully met are a powerful witness to unbelievers, (3) Suffering causes one to fix his focus and attention on heavenly glories instead of on earthly problems, (4) Problems cause one to depend more on God's power and resources, instead of on man's wisdom and strength. (5) Man's weaknesses provide opportunity for God's power and glory to be manifested, (6) Problems can help produce spiritual growth and maturity and strength, (7) Problems and suffering can develop a tender heart, more responsive to God's love and human needs, (8) Those who are most effective in ministry are those who minister in an area in which they have personally suffered most, (9) It is a Christlike work to soothe and to sympathize and only those who have suffered themselves can truly sympathize with other people who suffer.

(2) God Judges The Wicked (v. 5b-6)

If faith means (according to Psalms 11: 5-6) recognizing that God tests the righteous, faith also means recognizing that God judges the wicked. *“On the wicked he (God) will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot.”* (v. 6)

If God brought Judgment to unrepentant Sodom and Gomorrah, he will also bring judgment to the world of wickedness today! *“See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.”* (Isaiah 40:10) Wrong will be punished and right will be rewarded! The secret thoughts of all men will be revealed! The secret motives and intents of all hearts will then be known!

He who is Priest “in his holy temple”, and He who is King “on his heavenly throne”, will finally be Judge to punish the wicked and to reward the righteous. *“For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”* (II Corinthians 5:10)

F. Faith Means Affirming The Fact That God Loves Justice And That He Will Someday Eternally Reward The Righteous By Bringing Them Into His Heavenly Presence (v. 7)

When you are discouraged because it seems that the unjust get ahead and the righteous ones seem to suffer unjustly, then remember that the Lord is righteous and that He loves justice. In other words, when you live righteously, you are living a life patterned after the Lord's character and you are living the kind of life that brings great delight to the Lord. That is to say, the righteous life you live results in the 'smile of God's approval' resting on you, eventuating finally in a life with God eternally in heaven. *"For the Lord is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face."* (v. 7) *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."* (Matthew 5: 8)

"It will be worth it all,
When we see Jesus,
Life's trials will seem so small,
When we see Him."

Life's trials are endurable when we realize that they are allowed by divine purpose, that they are meant for character development, and that the successful endurance of them will ultimately be rewarded when the suffering saints see the loving Saviour 'face to face' in heaven! During earth's trials we walk by faith; when faith will finally be rewarded, we shall see him 'face to face'. That will be the glorious day of our final salvation! *"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."* (I Peter 1: 8,9)

CONCLUSION: When you are tempted to 'flee like a bird to your mountain' - to run from life, to 'throw in the towel', to 'cop out', to 'take to the road', to 'become a quitter', to 'escape into a life of fantasy', to become embittered because of unjust treatment from evil men, to succumb to doubts and fears because of life's perplexities and trouble, just remember, there is an effective antidote to the negative counsel people give you because of life's negative circumstance.

What is the negative advice? To run from life and from life's responsibilities and relationships, to 'flee like a bird to your mountain' (v. 1).

What is the effective antidote for negative advice, motivated by negative circumstances? The effective antidote is 'Faith'. "O for a faith that will not shrink tho' pressed by many a foe, that will not tremble on the brink of any earthly woe."

Faith is the victory that overcomes the negative advice of negative people because of adverse circumstances. What does it mean to exercise faith in the face of obstacles and adversities - whether those adversities are in the form of wicked actions of others (v. 2) or whether those adversities are in the form of perplexing circumstances of life (v. 3)?

(1) Faith means looking to God as your refuge during storms (v. 1a); (2) Faith means looking to God as the One who intercedes on your behalf (v. 4a); (3) Faith means looking to God as the Sovereign Ruler in the affairs of men (v. 4a); (4) Faith means believing that God is giving each of us - including you individually - His personal attention (v. 4b); (5) Faith means recognizing that God tests the righteous in love and that God judges the wicked with justice (v. 5-6); (6) Faith means affirming that God loves justice and that He will someday eternally reward the righteous by bringing them into His heavenly home (v.7)

When you receive negative advice (“flee to the mountains”) because of fearful circumstances, then stand up against negative counsel and avoid negative reactions by exercising positive faith in a faithful God - a God who is a merciful High Priest, a God who is Sovereign King, and a God who is a Just Judge! Never forget that God is “in his holy temple” (High Priest to intercede for the believer), that God is “on His heavenly throne” (Sovereign King to control the affairs of men), and that God is “observing the sons of men” (Just Judge to punish the wicked and to reward the righteous.)

If you are facing discouraging circumstances, let me encourage you to flex your muscles of faith - faith in a faithful God who purposes to turn your seeming stumbling blocks into positive steppingstones! Turn your eyes away from your problems and focus your attention upon your loving Saviour!

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full into His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.:

Turn to Jesus! Don't ‘flee like a bird to the mountains’. Remember, “upright men will see his face.” (v. 7).

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

Chapter 3

How To Overcome Discouragement

QUESTIONS

1. From your own experience and observations, suggest ways in which people, during life's adversities, "flee like a bird to the mountains"? (v.1).
2. Why is it vitally important, during times of personal adversities, not to listen to 'negative' counsel? Give illustrations of 'negative' counsel.
3. What, according to Psalms 11:2-3, are the probable causes of negative circumstances?
4. List some of the perplexing and unexpected circumstances that happen to people which cause them to feel that the 'foundations' of their lives have been removed. (Note Psalms 11:3)
5. When (as in the case of David) negative counselors tell you during a crisis "to flee like a bird to your mountain," how should you respond?
6. Recognizing that God is one's true (spiritual) 'Refuge' during the 'storms of life', is it wise for a believer to have a 'secret place' where he regularly meets with God to pray and to meditate on God's Word? Do you have a specific place where you often get alone with God to renew your spiritual fellowship?
7. From a New Testament perspective, what is meant by the phrase "the Lord is in his holy temple" (Psalms 11: 4a)? (Note Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8: 26-27)
8. When trouble comes to a believer, as a result of unjust actions of others or as a result of unexplained and perplexing circumstances of life, what should a believer do?
9. Is there any hope for the believer who is experiencing great trouble and pain, as a result of his own personal moral failures? (Note I John 2:1-2)

10. What, according to Psalms 11:4b, is the lesson of faith for the discouraged believer who looks upon a world where wrong so often is so strong and where circumstances seem to defy reason? (Isaiah 40:22-23; Philippians 2: 10-11)
11. Should a believer be greatly comforted or greatly terrorized when he realizes that the Lord “observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them.” (v. 4b) Why?
12. For what reason does the Lord “examine the righteous” (v. 5a)? (Note I Peter 1: 6-7; 4: 12-14)
- 13.. What are the positive results when trials are successfully faced and endured? (Note James 1: 2-4)
14. List at least eight positive benefits that the earnest believer can derive from problems and suffering.
15. What evidence is there that God is not only ‘Priest’ (“in his holy temple”), and ‘King’ (“on his heavenly throne”), but that he is also ‘Judge’? (Note Psalms 11: 4,5; Isaiah 40: 10; II Corinthians 5: 10; 2 Thessalonians 1: 5-10)
16. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statement: “Life’s trials are endurable when we realize that they are allowed by divine purpose, that they are meant for character development, and that the successful endurance of them will ultimately be rewarded when the suffering saints see the loving Saviour ‘face to face’ in heaven!”

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!

CHAPTER 4

HOW GOD SPEAKS TO US

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

CHAPTER 4

HOW GOD SPEAKS TO US

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 19: 1-14

INTRODUCTION: Is God knowable and reachable and personable? Has the infinite God spoken to finite men, and if He has spoken at all, how clear and how direct and understandable is His communication?

Yes, God has revealed Himself to mankind! He has spoken! He is knowable! God has spoken - in a general way through the silent voice of Nature and in a specific way through the verbal revelation of Scripture. God has spoken - and now God awaits a response from man.

OUTLINE:

- I. PREPARATION FOR GOD'S GREAT REVELATION (Nature) (v. 1-6)
- II. PERFECTION OF GOD'S GREAT REVELATION (Law) (v. 7-9)
 - A. "The Law Of The Lord Is Perfect, Reviving The Soul." (v. 7)
 - B. "The Statutes Of The Lord Are Trustworthy, Making Wise The Simple." (v.7)
 - C. "The Precepts Of The Lord Are Right, Giving Joy To The Heart." (v. 8)
 - D. "The Commands Of The Lord Are Radiant, Giving Light To The Eyes." (v. 8)
 - E. "The Fear Of The Lord Is Pure, Enduring Forever." (v. 9)
 - F. "The Ordinances Of The Lord Are Sure And Altogether Righteous." (v. 9)
- III. DELIGHT IN GOD'S REVELATION (Rewards) (v. 10-11)
- IV. SUBMISSION TO GOD'S GREAT REVELATION (Obedience) (v. 12-14)

CONCLUSION: Nature, with its exquisite beauty and its precise order, is the 'silent and eloquent voice of God' - to catch the attention of all mankind. Indeed (as J. Y. Simpson said), "The world is the garment of the living God."

But, as great as God's revelation is through the world of Nature, this general revelation is preparatory to God's special spoken revelation - the Law.

The Law is the product of divine revelation, not human speculation. Therefore, the law is perfect, even though imperfect men perceive it imperfectly. Nevertheless,

sincere persons can know the laws of God and can come to delight in God's laws. God's laws are more precious than gold and are sweeter than honey.

Sincere men can go beyond the knowledge of the mind and the delight of the heart. They may surrender their will and thus be kept from 'the great transgression'. Prayer and submission are the 'keys' to obedience. He who is the 'Rock' and the 'Redeemer' has the power to enable the believer to keep the Law. Do you wish to be pleasing in God's sight (v. 14)? Then surrender your will to your 'Rock' and to your 'Redeemer' today!

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

CHAPTER 4

HOW GOD SPEAKS TO US

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 19: 1-14

INTRODUCTION: There is an account of a man of the world whose nerves were frayed and whose mental state was very poor. This sophisticated man of the world who was near a 'nervous breakdown' went to a psychiatrist for help. Said the psychiatrist to this very distraught man: "If you ever intend to regain your composure and find peace with yourself, you must pray and you must find the comfort which God alone can give!" Replied the sophisticated worldling to the psychiatrist: "What! For you to tell me to pray to that One up there is like telling me to shake hands with the Milky Way Galaxy!" To this man, God was unapproachable, far removed, aloof and unreachable, distant and obscure and unknowable.

Is God knowable and reachable and personable? Has the infinite God spoken to finite men, and if He has spoken at all, how clear and how direct and understandable is His communication?

PROPOSITION: God is not a God who plays "hide and seek" with mankind! God has come out into the open. He seeks man. God has revealed Himself to mankind! He has spoken! He is knowable! God has spoken - in a general way through the silent voice of Nature and in a specific way through the verbal revelation of Scripture. God has spoken - and now God awaits a response from man.

I. PREPARATION FOR GOD'S GREAT REVELATION (Nature) (v. 1-6)

The heavens are telling the glory of God; they are a marvelous display of his craftsmanship. Day and night they keep on telling about God. Without a sound or word, silent in the skies, their message reaches out to all the world. The sun lives in the heavens where God placed it and moves out across the skies as radiant as a bridegroom going to his wedding, or as joyous as an athlete looking forward to a race. The sun crosses the heavens from end to end, and nothing can hide from its heat. (Psalms 19: 1-6)

"It was Kirkpatrick who said that God has two great volumes in which he reveals himself - Nature and Scripture." (Barclay; *The Lord Is My Shepherd*; 97) The revelation of Nature, even though it is an authentic and wonderful revelation of God, is nevertheless preparatory to the greater revelation of God in Scripture.

But, ever before God revealed Himself in the Holy writings of Scriptures, God revealed Himself through the wonders of Nature. Therefore, men who rejected God as He was revealed through Nature, stand guilty and condemned by God. *“But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, evil men who push away the truth from him. For the truth about God is known to them instinctively; God has put this knowledge in their hearts. Since earliest times men have seen the earth and sky and all God made, and have known of his existence and great eternal power. So they will have no excuse.”* (Romans 1: 18-20, Living Bible)

I like the expanded paraphrase of Psalms 19: 1-6 by the great poet Addison:

**“The spacious firmament on high
With all the blue eternal sky,
And spangled heavens, a shining frame,
Their great Original proclaim.
The unwearied sun, from day to day,
Does his Creator’s power display,
And publishes to every land
The work of an Almighty hand.**

**Soon as the evening shades prevail,
The moon takes up the wondrous tale,
And nightly to the listening earth
Repeats the story of her birth;
While all the stars that round her burn
And all the planets, in their turn,
Confirm the tidings, as they roll.
And spread the truth from pole to pole.**

**What though in solemn silence all
Move round the dark terrestrial ball?
What though no real voice or sound
Amidst their radiant orbs be found?
In reason’s ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious voice,
For ever singing as they shine,
‘The hand that made us is divine.’”**

(Ibid; pg 104: 105)

Notes Barclay, “A splendid house implies a splendid architect; and a wonderful world implies a divine creator.”

II. PERFECTION OF GOD'S GREAT REVELATION (Law) (v. 7-9)

A. "The Law Of The Lord Is Perfect, Reviving The Soul." (v. 7)

The Scriptures are referred to as 'law', which means God's revelation and God's teaching in all its fullness. There is no more complete revelation of God than that which is given in the Bible. This is to say, don't look to any other so-called sacred book as the source for God's revelation of Himself. Don't look to the Koran as the Muslims do. Don't look to the Book of Mormon as the so-called 'Latter Day Saints' do. Don't put your faith in Mary Baker Eddy's so-called holy book which she entitled 'Science and Health', as those of the Christian Science Religion do. All so-called 'Holy Books' are totally inadequate. The Bible - called the Law of the Lord - contains the fullest revelation of God that there is! There is no book that compares with the Bible.

The Bible - or the Law of the Lord - is perfect. That is to say, the Bible is not contaminated with mere human opinion and speculation, but it is the revelation of God's pure thoughts and plans and purposes. The Bible's pure message may be, and often times is, imperfectly understood and interpreted and applied by imperfect human minds, but it is nevertheless true that, in spite of the fallacy of human interpretation, the Word of God itself is pure - without blemish or imperfection. The Bible itself is perfect, even though it is read by imperfect human beings.

The Bible - called the Law of the Lord - revives the soul. That is to say, the Bible, when studied earnestly, gives refreshment to the soul. If you find yourself discouraged, then read the Bible, and you will soon find yourself encouraged. If you are weary in your soul, then begin regularly to read the Bible, and you will find yourself strengthened and uplifted. Someone said the Bible is like 'a moral tonic'. As your body is revived by food when you are very hungry, and like your thirst is quenched by a cold glass of water on a hot day, so your soul is refreshed by the Bible when you are weary and worn and weak. Regularly read the Bible - the perfect and full revelation of God - and you will regularly find refreshment for your soul.

B. "The Statutes Of The Lord Are Trustworthy, Making Wise The Simple." (v.7)

The Bible can be called the 'statutes of the Lord', that is, the testimony of God to man. God revealed Himself on Mt. Sinai when He gave Moses the Ten Commandments. Both the Old and the New Testaments are inspired by God.

God's testimonies are trustworthy, that is, they are true and reliable. You can stake your very life on the testimonies of God. The Bible will always prove to be true. What God says, He means, and He means what He says. The Bible is not a fairy tale; it is not myths; it is not man's opinions, but God's revelation. The Bible is factual, not fantasy; it is solid history, not the mere product of man's imagination. If you claim God's promises and meet God's conditions and heed God's warnings as revealed in God's Word - the Bible - then you can be sure that you will prosper in your soul. Be careful never to misinterpret or misapply God's Word. Never take Scripture out of context. Never force your own opinions onto the Bible, but instead let the Bible's message reshape your thoughts and change your ideas when they need to be changed.

He who puts his faith in the trustworthy Word of God - the Holy Bible - will find wisdom as his reward.

"We need to make a clear distinction between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is the amassing of facts. Wisdom is knowing what on earth to do with what we've amassed. This distinction can help us understand why some remarkable, erudite people are in such quandaries and why some relatively ignorant people have peace of mind and demonstrate integrated living. The Scriptures make simple people wise to what they should do with their knowledge." (What Works When Life Doesn't; Briscoe; pg. 63, 64)

C. "The Precepts Of The Lord Are Right, Giving Joy To The Heart." (v. 8)

'Precept' refers to specific injunctions about particular things. The Bible in its entirety is referred to as 'Law'. The Bible in its specific teachings is referred to as 'precepts'. We need to know the Bible as a whole - having some understanding of the general sweep of its story and message. But, in addition to understanding something of the overall theme of the Bible, we need also to know specific and particular teachings of the Bible. In other words, we need to see the Bible as a person would see a forest from an airplane, but we also need to be acquainted with the forest as a forest ranger is acquainted with the forest. Do you know specific verses and specific precepts and specific proverbs in the Bible? If not, then begin to memorize a few verses each week on specific subjects and topics.

The 'precepts' of the Word are 'Right'. That is to say, the Bible is both correct and direct. The Word is truth clearly revealed - 'to the point' and unmixed with falsehood.

Recently while visiting different ones in the hospital, I happened to notice in the magazine racks the magazine entitled 'Plain Truth'. I wanted to take every copy of that magazine that I could find in the hospital and paste over the title 'Plain Truth' a piece of paper with these words on it 'Complex Falsehoods'. The magazine called 'Plain Truth' is filled with ideas that are neither plain nor truthful. 'Half truths' at best, which means that it is also 'Half lies'.

In contrast to man's false and complex doctrines and religious notions, the Bible is God's revelation of truth - correct and direct!

The 'precepts' of the Lord will give joy to the heart and satisfaction to the mind. Never forget, what is true ethically and doctrinally and morally is that which is the basis of lasting joy. Many there are who desperately are seeking for happiness, but only those whose lives are committed to truth - God's precepts - can find true happiness. There are 'pleasures in sin for a season' - for a short time - but those pleasures of sin soon lead to remorse and guilt and frustration. Only the truth of God's Word gives lasting joy. If you want joy - real joy - let the Word of God saturate your life. The Bible will bring comfort to your heart and satisfaction to your intellect.

D. "The Commands Of The Lord Are Radiant, Giving Light To The Eyes." (v. 8)

God's commandments are His general instructions for life. The Bible can be looked at as man's guidebook for right living. Paul wrote, "*The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right. It is God's way of making us well prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone.*" (II Timothy 3: 16, 17, Living Bible).

God's commandments are radiant, that is, they are full of light. The Bible is often referred to as a lamp to lighten the darkened paths of life and the deep mysteries of life.

The Bible enlightens the eyes, that is, the Bible gives understanding to the mind. Questions regarding God, Man, Sin, Jesus Christ, the World, the Future - these are the primary questions that beg for answers. Only in the Bible can we find answers to the darkest mysteries of life - questions like 'Who am I?' 'Why am I here?' 'Where am I going?' 'How can I find peace with God?'

One great university President one time said that no student is truly educated unless he is educated in the Scriptures.

Notes Briscoe: "I remember meeting a man with a Ph.D. who had just discovered the Bible. He had the same look of wonder on his face as a child with a birthday cake. He kept saying, 'I didn't know that, I didn't know that'. In fact, he hadn't known much, though he was about as educated or schooled as one can get. But what a difference the revelation of God made in his life." (What Works When Life Doesn't', pg. 64)

E. "The Fear Of The Lord Is Pure, Enduring Forever." (v. 9)

The 'fear' of the Lord is the reverential respect for the Lord. The Bible says "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." One result of studying the Bible is gaining a profound respect and sense of awe and reverence for the Lord.

The 'fear of the Lord' has a purifying effect in the worshiper's life. Reverencing the Lord causes one to eliminate the inferior elements in the worshiper's life - i.e., attitudes and actions that are ulterior, and goals that are less than godly.

The 'fear of the Lord' is that quality of reverential respect which is meant to endure forever in our personal lives because it is that characteristic which is eternal and inherent in God's character. God is inherently holy, and eternally full of majesty, therefore our response to God must always be one of awe and reverence.

F. "The Ordinances Of The Lord Are Sure And Altogether Righteous." (v. 9)

The ordinances of the Lord refer to the decrees and the judgments and the decisions of the Lord. It can be said that the Bible is a record of the 'God Who Acts', the God who, on the stage of human history, makes moral decisions and gives moral judgments in the affairs of men and nations. To study the Bible is to study the actions and the reactions of a holy God who is relating to finite men - men who are 'free moral agents' with the ability to repent of sin or to rebel in sin. Depending upon the kind of moral decisions that men and nations make, God sends either untold blessings for obedience or terrifying judgments for disobedience. The Bible then can be called a record of God's moral judgments and holy ordinances (decisions).

The ordinances of the Lord are sure and righteous. That is to say, God is predicable in his moral judgments, for He never acts in an arbitrary way. He is a righteous God, for He has no favorites and He treats all men fairly. He treats all with justice, tempered with mercy.

III. DELIGHT IN GOD'S REVELATION (Rewards) (v. 10-11)

“They (the Scriptures) are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.” (v. 10-11)

“It is said that when a little Jewish boy was learning the alphabet, his teacher sometimes offered him a reward. The letters of the alphabet were written on a slate; and they were written, not with chalk or with slate-pencil, but in a mixture of flour and honey. The teacher would point at a letter and ask what it was and, if the boy could answer correctly, he was allowed to lick the letter off the slate! Learning for him was as sweet as honey. Learning the law was sweeter than honey and more precious than gold.” (Barclay; pg. 116; Ibid)

Do you delight in reading and in studying God's Word - the Holy Bible? My dear mother taught me, when I was still a small child, to take delight in reading and in memorizing the Bible. I spent literally hours reading my Bible and memorizing many portions of truth. I remember, during my high school years, that for at least a half hour before leaving for school, I had time alone with God and with my open Bible. I remember making a study of the three Gospels, (Matthew, Mark, Luke) and I sought to make my own 'Harmony of the Gospels'.

Psalms 1 says that the blessed person is the one who delights in the law of God day and night. Let me suggest to you that you fall in love with the Scriptures. Read them systematically, beginning with the New Testament. Spend at least fifteen minutes a day, either reading chapters or listening to Bible chapters on cassettes. The Scriptures are worth more than pure gold and are sweeter than pure honey, so spend much time studying the Word.

The Scriptures give warnings to be heeded and promises to be claimed. To obey the Scriptures is to avoid many pitfalls of the evil one (Satan). Also, *“in keeping them there is great reward.”* (v. 11) Barclay notes that the rewards for keeping God's Word are manifold: (1) Enjoyment of the law itself, (2) Gain in new understanding and increase in moral strength, (3) Protection from taking the wrong way in life, and assurance that the right way - the winning way - is being taken, (4) A sense of relief and confidence because of enjoying a 'clear conscience' (5) Inner freedom from the bondages to sin which disobedience brings, and a lasting happiness and peace of mind.

IV. SUBMISSION TO GOD'S GREAT REVELATION (Obedience) (v. 12-14)

Knowledge (intellectual comprehension) of God's laws are meant to incite a great delight (emotional response) in God's laws, which in turn leads one to submit (volitional commitment) his own human will to the revealed divine will in obedience.

It is not enough to know God's laws intellectually, or to delight in God's laws emotionally, but intellectual knowledge and affectional delight are meant to issue forth in volitional obedience. It is not knowing or feeling, but doing that demonstrates genuine discipleship and obedience. Obedience is an act of the will, and it is obedience to God's laws that brings great delight to our God (v. 14). This great Psalm ends with an earnest request to be kept from sin and wrong. It is a prayer for moral strength.

I like the prayer that John Drinkwater prayed:

**“Grant us the will to fashion as we feel,
Grant us the strength to labour as we know,
Grant us the purpose, ribbed and edged with steel,
To strike the blow.
Knowledge we ask not - knowledge Thou hast lent;
But, Lord, the will - there lies our deepest need.
Grant us to build above the high intent
The deed, the deed.”**

There are three kinds of sins or wrongs from which we must pray to be delivered.

(a) There are 'errors' (v. 12) "Errors are sins of ignorance. They are committed when a man is off his guard or when he does not know any better." (Barclay; pg. 120) "We all make mistakes in all kinds of ways, but the man who can claim that he never says the wrong thing can consider himself perfect, for if he can control his tongue he can control every other part of his personality." (From the Book of James)

The man who is committed to a life of obedience is a man who, in spite of his sincerity, is a man who is not without faults and shortcomings. Only God can fully discern human errors (v. 12). Everyone - even the most sincere believer - comes short of keeping the perfect law of God, and is therefore in need of God's grace and forgiveness every day.

(b) There are 'hidden faults' (v. 12). "This is the fault of which a man is not conscious." (Barclay; 120) Someone said that ignorance of the law is no excuse. Who knows the law perfectly? Who keeps the law perfectly? Who does not have 'blind spots' in his moral vision, and 'ignorant areas' in his moral consciousness? All things - including man's moral failures and shortcomings - are "naked and open unto the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account." Therefore, we must never ask God to treat us with strict justice but rather with tender mercy and acceptance. (We are, at best, only "Christians in the making") Others see our faults when we don't see them.

(c) There are presumptuous and deliberate sins. (v. 12) These sins are willful sins, transgressions against the known laws of God, sins which are most serious in God's sight. Every day the sincere believer asks God to give him moral strength to resist temptation, to safeguard him against committing the 'great transgression'. Deliberate and premeditated sins are always considered in Scripture to be sins which not only incur God's wrath but which bring devastating consequences to the transgressor. Even though these sins are most serious, they are forgivable, as seen in the case of King David whose 'great transgressions' of adultery, deceit, and murder were the cause of bitter repentance in David's life. David found wonderful forgiveness, but the consequences of these 'great transgressions' were felt in David's life until the day he died.

Obedience to God's laws means praying for deliverance from all sins - the sins of ignorance, the 'hidden faults', and the deliberate sins. Obedience to God is best shown by submission to God. *"May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."* (v. 14) This is a prayer that one may so live "that his every thought is pure enough and his every word clean enough to be an unblemished offering to God." (Barclay; 124)

He who knows God's laws and He who delights in God's laws is he who surrenders his every thought to God and his every word to God for daily cleansing. Have you surrendered your thoughts and your words to God? Have you surrendered your affections and your actions to God? Only when your mind with its thoughts, and your mouth with its words, and your emotions with their feelings, and your will with its decisions are fully surrendered to your 'Rock' and your 'Redeemer', are you truly protected from sin and its devastating consequences.

CONCLUSION: Nature, with its exquisite beauty and its precise order, is the 'silent and eloquent voice of God' - to catch the attention of all mankind. Indeed (as J. Y. Simpson said), "The world is the garment of the living God."

But, as great as God's revelation is through the world of Nature, this general revelation is preparatory to God's special spoken revelation - the Law.

The Law is the product of divine revelation, not human speculation. Therefore, the law is perfect, even though imperfect men perceive it imperfectly. Nevertheless, sincere persons can know the Laws of God and can come to delight in God's laws. God's laws are more precious than gold and are sweeter than honey.

Sincere men can go beyond the knowledge of the mind and the delight of the heart. They may surrender their will and thus be kept from 'the great transgression'. Prayer and submission are the 'keys' to obedience. He who is the 'Rock' and the

'Redeemer' has the power to enable the believer to keep the Law. Do you wish to be pleasing in God's sight (v. 14)? Then surrender your will to your 'Rock' and to your 'Redeemer' today!

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

Chapter 4

How God Speaks To Us

QUESTIONS

1. What evidence is there that God is 'knowable', 'reachable', 'personal', that the infinite God has 'spoken' to finite man?
2. What are the 'two great volumes' in which God reveals Himself?
3. What is God's indictment on those who reject God's revelation of Himself through 'Nature'? (Romans 1:18-20)
4. Is it reasonable to believe that a visible orderly universe gives strong evidence that there exists an invisible intelligent Creator? Why or why not? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A splendid house implies a splendid architect; a wonderful world implies a divine Creator."
5. According to Psalms 19:7, how should we react to those religious people who claim to possess some 'Holy Book' other than (and in addition to) the Holy Bible?
6. Why and how does reading the Bible 'revive the soul'? (Psalms 19:7)
7. Why is the Bible called the 'statutes of the Lord'? (Psalms 19:7) How does acceptance of the Bible as 'trustworthy' influence us in our interpretation and application of the Bible's context?
8. What, according to Psalms 19:7, is the result of putting one's faith in the trustworthiness of the Bible as the 'Word of God'?
9. How do you distinguish between 'Knowledge' and 'Wisdom'?
10. What happens in a nation where knowledge is accumulated without the exercise of wisdom?
11. To whom alone does God give the gift of 'Wisdom'? Is it possible for 'uneducated people' to experience and to exercise 'Wisdom'? Why or why not?

12. How would you distinguish between the Bible as 'Law' and the Bible as "Precepts"?
13. What is meant by the following statement: "The 'precepts' of the Bible are 'Right'"?
14. Is it possible to experience true joy without knowledge of and obedience to the truths of the Bible? Why or why not? (Note Psalms 19:8) Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Only that which is true ethically and doctrinally and morally, provides a basis for lasting joy."
15. In contrast to the worldly-minded persons who see the commands of God as restrictive and forbidding, with what attitude do believers look at God's commands? (Note Psalms 19:8)
16. In what way do the commands of the Lord give 'light to the eyes' (Note Psalms 19:8)? Is it possible to be highly educated and yet spiritually ignorant?
17. How does learning to reverence the Lord (as result of studying the Bible), change one's attitudes, actions, priorities, relationships, motives, and goals in life? (Note Psalms 19:9)
18. Give your response to the following statement: "God is inherently holy, and eternally full of majesty, therefore our response to God must always be one of awe and reverence."
19. Why, (according to Psalms 19:9) can the Bible be called a record of God's moral judgments and holy decisions, manifested on the stage of human history?
20. Does Scripture give evidence that God's judgments are morally consistent and just, or that they are sometimes arbitrarily manifested? (Note Psalms 19:9)
21. If the Scriptures are worth more than pure gold and are sweeter than pure honey, then why do so few Christians spend large amounts of time daily studying and memorizing the Scriptures? (Note Psalms 19:10)
22. What are some of the rewards for keeping (obeying) God's Word? (Note Psalms 19:11)
23. Intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally, what should one's response be to God's Word (Bible)? (Psalms 19:10-11)
24. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It is not knowing or feeling, but doing that demonstrates genuine discipleship and obedience."

- 25. What are three kinds of sins or wrongs from which we must pray to be delivered? (Note Psalms 19:13)**
- 26. Why is the prayer, as recorded in Psalms 19:14, such a good prayer daily for a believer to pray?**
- 27. Tell with what degree of conviction you believe the following statement: “Only when your mind with its thoughts, and your mouth with its words, and your emotions with their feelings, and your will with its decisions are fully surrendered to your ‘Rock’ and your Redeemer’, are you truly protected from sin and its devastating consequences.”**

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!

CHAPTER 5

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

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THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 23: 1-6

INTRODUCTION: The relationship between the Good Shepherd and the sheep is what is so beautifully portrayed in the most popular of all Psalms. The type of relationship is noted in verse 1. The resources of the relationship are noted in verses 2 - 3. The durability of the relationship is noted in verses 4 -6.

PROPOSITION: Believers who establish and maintain a close relationship to the Good Shepherd are the recipients of rich resources from the Good Shepherd, and their relationship to the Good Shepherd is durable amidst the changes and the chances and the challenges of life's circumstances.

OUTLINE:

- I. TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP (v. 1)
 - A. Present Relationship With The Good Shepherd
 - B. Personal Relationship With The Good Shepherd
 - C. Protected Relationship With The Good Shepherd
 - D. Provisional Relationship With The Good Shepherd

- II. RESOURCES OF RELATIONSHIP (v. 2-3)
 - A. "He Makes Me Lie Down In Green Pastures." (v. 2a) - Contentment
 - B. "He Leads Me Beside The Still Waters." (v. 2b) - Peace
 - C. "He Restores My Soul." (v. 3a) - Restoration
 - D. "He Leads Me In The Paths Of Righteousness For His Name Sake." (v. 3) - Guidance

- III. DURABILITY OF RELATIONSHIP (v. 4-6)
 - A. Durability In Spite Of The Threat Of Death (v. 4)
 - B. Durability In Spite Of Life's Enemies (v. 5)
 - C. Durability In Spite Of The Passing Of Time (v. 6)

CONCLUSION: Those believers who, like sheep, maintain a close relationship to the Good Shepherd, will enjoy great protection and abundant provisions. The resources which the Good Shepherd makes available to the sheep are most wonderful - Contentment, Peace, Restoration, Guidance. The relationship between the Good Shepherd and the sheep is strong and durable - durable in spite of the threat and eventual inevitability of physical death, durable in spite of the fact of life's many spiritual enemies, durable in spite of the changes and the chances of life's circumstances over a long period of time.

It is the purpose of the Good Shepherd to take every one of His sheep to heaven. Allow the Good Shepherd to love you and to sustain you and to restore you. Learn daily to appropriate the resources of the Good Shepherd. In spite of life's challenges, continue to allow the Good Shepherd gently to lead you into green pastures and beside 'still waters'. Learn to enjoy the abundant life which the Good Shepherd makes possible for you. Said Jesus, "*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the Good Shepherd.*" (John 10: 10-11)

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

CHAPTER 5

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 23: 1-6

INTRODUCTION: Notes the great Henry Ward Beecher about the 23rd Psalm: “The twenty-third Psalm is the nightingale of the Psalms...It has charmed more griefs to rest than all the philosophy of the world...It has comforted the noble host of the poor. It has sung courage to the army of the disappointed. It has poured balm and consolation into the heart of the sick, of captives in dungeons, of widows in their pinching griefs, of orphans in their loneliness. Dying soldiers have died easier as it was read to them; ghastly hospitals have been illuminated; it has visited the prisoner, and broken his chains...It will go singing to your children and my children, and to their children, through all the generations of time; nor will it fold its wings till the last pilgrim is safe, and time ended; and then it shall fly back to the bosom of God, whence it issued, and sound on, mingled with all those sounds of celestial joy which make heaven musical for ever.” (Expositions of the Psalms; Spurgeon; pg. 402, 403)

The relationship between the Good Shepherd and the sheep is what is so beautifully portrayed in the most popular of all Psalms. The type of relationship is noted in verse 1. The resources of the relationship are noted in verses 2 - 3. The durability of the relationship is noted in verses 4 -6.

PROPOSITION: Believers who establish and maintain a close relationship to the Good Shepherd are the recipients of rich resources from the Good Shepherd, and their relationship to the Good Shepherd is durable amidst the changes and the chances and the challenges of life's circumstances.

I. TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP (v. 1)

A. Present Relationship With The Good Shepherd

“The Lord Is My Shepherd.” This describes a ‘day-by-day’ walking with God. The Christian life is not primarily a past experience or a future hope, but it is primarily a present love relationship with the Good Shepherd. Do you have an up-to-date relationship with God today? Let every day be a day of renewing your relationship with the Good Shepherd. Do not allow yourself to drift away from the Lord. Do not neglect your daily ‘Quiet Times’, and be sure to keep your appointments with God with solitude and meditation. Keep a daily account of your relationship with God. Take a daily inventory of your spiritual life. Don’t allow yourself to grow lukewarm or indifferent in your relationship with God. Do not neglect the ‘means of grace’ -

daily Bible reading and prayer, and church attendance. Learn constantly to abide in Christ.

There's a peace in my heart that the world never gave,
A peace it cannot take away,
Tho' the trials of life may surround like a cloud,
I've a peace that has come there to stay!

Constantly abiding Jesus Is Mine;
Constantly abiding, rapture divine;
He never leaves me lonely, whispers, O so kind:
'I will never leave thee',
Jesus Is Mine.

To keep your relationship up-to-date with the Good Shepherd, you must take time to be holy.

Take time to be holy; The world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone;
By looking to Jesus, Like Him you shall be;
Your friends in your conduct His likeness shall see.

B. Personal Relationship With The Good Shepherd

"The Lord is MY Shepherd." It is true that God is big enough to give special attention to all, and it is true that the Good Shepherd loves all persons equally and unconditionally. We must never ask God to give us special attention or to give us personal favors. God has no favoritism and God will not allow Himself to be used by selfish men to accomplish selfish goals. However, it is true that each sheep is the object of God's special love and attention. God loves each person as if there was only one person to love! That's how personal God's love is. You may enjoy a personal relationship with God! Do you know God in a personal way today? Do you talk to Him as your personal friend? Do you confide with God, sharing your deepest sorrows and your greatest joys with Him? Do you talk with Him and walk with Him, as your very best friend? Have you learned to cast your burdens on the Lord, knowing that He cares for you?

And He walks with me,
And He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own,
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.

C. Protected Relationship With The Good Shepherd

“The Lord is my SHEPHERD.” The fact that the Lord is called a Shepherd reveals the fact that God is a protecting God - a God who cares for and protects His people from Satanic attacks and eternal destruction. What is the result of your maintaining a personal and up-to-date (present tense) relationship with the Good Shepherd? As a part of the flock of God, you will enjoy protection from the Shepherd. This oftentimes means physical protection but it always means spiritual protection. It may not be likely, but it is possible that, just as the Good Shepherd laid down His physical life on a Cross, you may have to surrender your physical life someday for the cause of Christ. But even if you become a martyr for the cause of the Kingdom of God, you nevertheless will be protected from ultimate spiritual harm.

“Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill;
God’s truth abideth still;
His kingdom is forever.” (Martin Luther)

There is no guarantee that the sheep will never suffer physical or material loss (note Hebrews 11:36-38), but the Good Shepherd will see to it that His sheep never suffer ultimate spiritual and eternal loss. The sheep - i.e., those who listen to the Good Shepherd’s voice and who follow the leading of the Good Shepherd - will never perish. Obedient ones are secure ones! Said Jesus in the New Testament - *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”* (John 10: 27-30)

D. Provisional Relationship With The Good Shepherd

“I Shall Not Want.” God has not promised abundance in luxuries, but He has promised adequacy in needs. God has not promised perfect health or abundant riches or a life free from trials or losses or disappointments, but God has promised an abundant life - a life full of God’s gracious provisions for meeting the real needs of life.

God Hath Not Promised Skies Always Blue, by William M. Runyan.

God has not promised skies always blue,
Flower strewn pathways all our lives through;
God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

God hath not promised we shall not know
Toil and temptation, trouble and woe;
He hath not told us we shall not bear
Many a burden, many a care.

God hath not promised smooth roads and wide,
Swift, easy travel, needing no guide;
Never a mountain, rocky and steep,
Never a river turbid and deep.

Refrain:

But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labor, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Undying sympathy, undying love.

What does God promise? To supply all our needs! Wrote Paul to the Philippian believers: "*And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:19). Even though Paul at times seemed to be destitute of basic needs such as sufficient food and adequate clothing and shelter, Paul felt that God had supplied him with all that he really needed in order to live victoriously. Listen to Paul's testimony from a Roman prison which he shared with the Philippian believers: "*Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*" (Philippians 4: 11-13)

He who has a personal and up-to-date (daily) relationship with the Good Shepherd, is he who not only enjoys spiritual protection from evil, but is he who also enjoys daily provision of his basic physical and spiritual needs. The Good Shepherd speaks these words of comfort to the obedient sheep: "As thy day so shall thy strength be." The Good Shepherd has abundant provisions for each day's needs. "*The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.*" (Psalms 34:10)

II. RESOURCES OF RELATIONSHIP (v. 2-3)

The relationship between the Good Shepherd and His Sheep is very real. It is a daily, personal, and secure relationship - a relationship that is most fulfilling. The Good Shepherd provides many resources to meet all the needs of the sheep. The tender care of the Shepherd for the sheep is described beautifully in Psalms 23: 2-3.

A. "He Makes Me Lie Down In Green Pastures." (v. 2a) - Contentment

Notes Stuart Briscoe, "Sheep are such anatomical oddities that the only way to their haunches is through their stomachs. In other words, you can't make a hungry sheep lie down. But if you can only fill its stomach it will find a quiet place, lie down, and contentedly ruminate on how good things are under the shepherd's control. Contentment is the word we must emphasize at this point, for contentment is a missing ingredient in our society. We live in a discontented age." (What Works When Life Doesn't? Pg. 73)

Contented sheep are sheep which are well fed by the Good Shepherd. God, the Good Shepherd, alone is the Source of Contentment. Only the food which God feeds the soul can bring satisfaction. The soul is left starving if it tries to find satisfaction in anyone or in anything else other than God. Augustine so wisely said, "Man is restless until he rests in thee, O God." Only God can fill the 'God-shaped vacuum' in our souls. Only God can satisfy the longings of our hearts.

What are some of the basic soul-hungers of man which God alone can satisfy? There is the hunger for security. Can man feel safe and secure? Yes, the Good Shepherd gives security and protection from moral harm. Jesus the Good Shepherd gives security and protection from moral harm. Jesus the Good Shepherd gives the sheep eternal life, "*and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*" (John 10: 28, 29) There is the hunger for self-esteem or significance. Can man feel significant or important? Jesus said to His followers, "*Greater works than these ye shall do, for I go to my Father.*" Can a blood-brought sinner feel inferior and insignificant? *The Good Shepherd has come to give us abundant life. "I came that they might have life and have it abundantly."* (John 10: 10) The Good Shepherd values the sheep so much that He was willing to sacrifice His own life for the sake of the sheep. "*I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*" (John 10: 11)

B. "Leads Me Beside The Still Waters." (v. 2b) - Peace

"Sheep have learned to fear rushing, gushing, moving water and to search for quiet pools from which to drink." (Ogilvie; Falling Into Greatness; pg. 43)

God wants His people to live quiet and peaceful lives, lives which learn to enjoy solitude and contemplation and devotion. Says God to His people, "*Be still and know that I am God.*" "*In quietness and confidence shall be thy strength.*"

Sheep are meant to live in quietness and in stillness, drinking from the still moving waters. This is not to say that believers are to live passive or inactive or

indifferent or lazy lives, uninvolved and retreating. No, believers are to be active, aggressive, ambitious, creative, industrious, and enterprising. What then does it mean to be led beside 'still waters'? I believe it means that sheep are to be at peace with the Good Shepherd, at peace with other sheep, and at peace with themselves.

(a) Peace with the Good Shepherd. Being led beside 'still waters' means first to have a peaceful relationship with the Good Shepherd. Such a scene speaks of an intimate relationship of caring. The sheep is submissively being led by the Good Shepherd to the peaceful streams in order to have the basic thirsts of life quenched. A creature at peace with his Creator is another way of saying that a believer has a 'clear conscience' in his relationship with his God. There is an old song that depicts this peaceful relationship.

Nothing between my soul and The Saviour
Naught of this world's delusive dream;
I have renounced all sinful pleasure,
Jesus is mine; there's nothing between.

Nothing between my soul and the Saviour,
So that His blessed face may be seen;
Nothing preventing the least of His favor,
Keep the way clear! Let nothing between.

(b) Peace with One's Self. "Many of our storms are self made. In the mad crazy desire to be something that we are not or to compensate for what we'll never be, we get into all kinds of choppy waters." (Briscoe; pg. 74)

To be at peace with yourself means first to be at peace with God -to know that one's sins are forgiven because of what Christ did on the Cross of Calvary. To be a peace with yourself secondly means to forgive yourself for your own sins and past failures. One, of course, does not have a right to forgive himself of his own past if he has not first asked God to forgive his past, but if one has honestly confessed his sins to God then he must follow-up by learning to forgive himself. Refusal to forgive yourself of your past is to contend for a different moral value system than God's moral value system of grace (which is really a form of spiritual pride). Also, refusal to forgive yourself results in forfeiting one's peace. Accepting God's forgiveness and learning to forgive yourself are two essentials if you are to experience inner peace with yourself. Third, you must learn to accept yourself if you are to experience inner peace. "Much of our tension and anxiety

can be traced directly to a fear of inadequacy. We should meet this fear...by learning to accept ourselves. We probably are Not adequate for all our ambitious schemes, and only at the cost of enormous nervous energy can we succeed in becoming momentarily what we really are not...Suppose we accept ourselves good-humoredly, realizing our limitations and how much we have to learn, with cheerfulness and without envy of those who are, or appear to be, more adequate than ourselves.” (The New Born Christian; pg. 129; J.B. Phillips)

(c) Peace With Others. Sheep who are enjoying the ‘still waters’ are sheep who are at peace with all other sheep. Sheep which are competitive or contentious or comparative are unhappy sheep. Sheep which are compassionate and caring and sharing and serving are sheep that are happy and peaceful. It is impossible for sheep to enjoy an intimate relationship with the Good Shepherd unless they are enjoying an unselfish and loving relationship with other sheep in the fold. Wrote Paul to the Philippians: “Make me truly happy by loving each other, working together with one heart and mind and purpose. Don’t be selfish; don’t live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. Don’t just think about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and in what they are doing.” (Philippians 2: 2-4; Living Bible)

C. “He Restores My Soul.” (v. 3a) - Restoration

The Good Shepherd is committed to the welfare of the sheep. He is concerned that the sheep experience contentment and enjoy peace. But what is the Good Shepherd prepared to do for the sheep when they lose their joy and peace? When the sheep stray, the Good Shepherd goes after the sheep. *“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.’”* (Luke 15: 4-6)

A believer does not need to stray and should not stray from the flock, but if he does it is possible to be restored to the fold of God. To the straying ones, God says, “Return, ye backslidden children, and I will heal your backsliddings.” Prayed David to the Lord, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.” It is not God’s will that any of the sheep of His fold drift away into sin, but if any should drift away, they can come back to the Shepherd. It is not God’s will that any should fall, but if a believer should fall into sin, God is ready to forgive and to restore the repentant one.

God restores the fallen, refreshes the weary, heals the brokenhearted. *"He (God) gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."* (Isaiah 40: 29-31)

D. "He Leads Me In The Paths Of Righteousness For His Name Sake." (v. 3) - Guidance

The Good Shepherd is committed to meeting all the needs of all the sheep. He gives contentment to the hungry, peace to the troubled, restoration to the fallen, and guidance to the confused.

Many are the decisions of life, and great is the possibility of confusion and doubt. The Bible says, *"There is a way that seems right unto men but the end of the way thereof is the way of death."* The Bible says, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way."* (Isaiah 53: 6) Notes Stuart Briscoe, "For some reason, sheep have a remarkable aptitude for getting lost. There is something vaguely disturbing about sheep behavior especially as it relates to human behavior. People do have a great tendency to desert what is good for them, believing something better is just out of reach. To them, 'the grass is always greener' on the other side of the fence. Herd instinct is just a polite expression for what turns out to be flock folly. We head after strong leaders with great enthusiasm, rarely stopping to check where they are leading us. There is an inbred propensity to go wrong in every human being." (What Works When Life Doesn't?; pg. 71)

Only the Good Shepherd can lead the sheep into the 'paths of righteousness'. Without the guidance which the Good Shepherd gives, the sheep would wander away from the truth into falsehood and error. This very thing happened to the Galatian believers. They fell into falsehood because they got their eyes off of the Good Shepherd. Wrote Paul to the straying believers who have left the 'path of righteousness', *"I am amazed that you are turning away so soon from God who, in his love and mercy, invited you to share the eternal life which really doesn't go to heaven at all. For there is no other way than the one we showed you; you are being fooled by those who twist and change the truth concerning Christ."* (Galatians 1: 6-7, Living Bible)

Do not wander from the truth! Guard against false teachers and false teachings! Let the Good Shepherd guide you to the 'path of righteousness'.

Don't allow yourself to be led off the 'path of righteousness' onto the 'path of legalism'. This is what happened to the Galatians believers. They had been saved

by faith, but they fell into the error of thinking that they could only continue to be accepted by God through human effort and by law-keeping. Paul condemned the 'way of legalism' when he wrote the following to the straying Galatians: *"For if trying to obey the Jewish laws never gave you spiritual life in the first place, why do you think that trying to obey them now will make you stronger Christians?...I ask you again, does God give you the power of the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you as a result of your trying to obey the Jewish laws? No, of course not. It is when you believe in Christ and fully trust him."* (Galatians 3: 3,5; Living Bible)

If man cannot be saved through human effort and by law-keeping alone, it is also true that man cannot be saved without obedience to God's commands. Wrote John, *"Someone may say, 'I am a Christian; I am on my way to heaven; I belong to Christ.' But if he doesn't do what Christ tells him to, he is a liar. But those who do what Christ tells them to will learn to love God more and more. That is the way to know whether or not you are a Christian. Anyone who says he is a Christian should live as Christ did."* (I John 2: 4-6; Living Bible)

Obedience motivated by love for Christ is the meaning of faith and the essence of righteousness. We are not saved by mere human effort or by attempts to keep laws and regulations. Rather, we are saved by Christ alone, but he who places his faith in Christ alone for his personal salvation is the one who will evidence his faith in Christ through a life of love and obedience. Obedience is the result of genuine faith, not the condition for entering into a relationship with Christ. We do not have to present perfect obedience or meet the standard of law-keeping before we are accepted by Christ. Rather, as sinners we come to Christ 'just as we are' in repentance and faith, and allow Christ to change our evil natures. The result of Christ changing our evil natures, will be seen in our ability to lead a new life, patterned after Christ's holy lifestyle of obedience and love and purity. We are not saved by good works (for we have no good works that are acceptable to God before our conversion), but we are saved for good works (for our changed nature will enable us to lead a new life, full of obedience and compassion). Love for God which issues forth in a life of obedience - this describes the 'path of righteousness' which the Good Shepherd leads humbled souls on to!

III. DURABILITY OF RELATIONSHIP (v. 4-6)

Sheep who maintain a personal daily relationship with the Good Shepherd are sheep who learn to appropriate the resources of the Good Shepherd - resources like satisfaction for life's hungers, peace for life's turmoils, recovery from life's falls, and protection from life's snares.

Life does have its snares and its challenges. There is the threat of death all along life's way. The Psalmist describes this challenge as the 'valley of the shadow of death' (v. 4).

There is the challenge of life's enemies - the enemies of the believer which surround him (described in verse 5). There is the challenge of passing time which can prove to be a hinderance, rather than a help, to the believer (noted in verse 6).

The question is this: "Can the sheep's relationship with the Good Shepherd stand the test of threatening death (v. 4), the test of hostile enemies (v. 5), the test of passing time (v. 6)? How durable is the sheep's relationship with the Good Shepherd? Does the Good Shepherd have the ability to keep the sheep safe and secure, in spite of the fact that the threat of death is ever present (v. 4), in spite of the fact that the presence of enemies on every hand seeks to destroy the sheep (v. 5), in spite of the fact that the passing of time with all of time's challenges can result in causing the sheep to grow weary and faint or to wander (v. 6)?"

A. Durability In Spite Of The Threat Of Death (v. 4)

The ever-present possibility of death could and often does send terror to the heart of man, but for believers there is the antidote of love and faith to ward off the fear of death. "*Perfect love casteth out fear, for fear hath torment.*" (I John 4:18) Why fear to die when one knows that physical death is simply the doorway into the presence of the loving Heavenly Father? "The One who is with the Christian in death and dying is the One who has been there already and come through with flying colors: the Risen Lord. If it is true, therefore, that the 'last enemy' is death, it is great news indeed to know that the One who has blown death wide open in resurrection is 'with me'." (Brisocoe; pg. 76)

Death, for the believers need not be a fearful thing, wrought with evil. Why? Because Christ has already gone through death and has come through death with 'flying colors'! Christ is the 'firstfruits' of those who shall rise from the dead. Death does not have the 'final word'. Life is stronger than death, righteousness is stronger than evil, and Christ is stronger than Satan. Because of Christ's resurrection, Satan is now a 'defeated foe'. "*Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (I Corinthians 15: 57)

Not only has Christ decisively won the victory over death for all of mankind in a universal sense, but the Good Shepherd has promised individually to be with the dying saint to bring comfort. "*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me*" (v. 4)

Even in the hour of death there is comfort for the child of God. The Good Shepherd will not forsake his sheep then, but He will gently carry them in His arms through the 'valley of death'. A few months ago an elderly friend of mine lay on a hospital bed, slowly dying. A few days before she died, several of her children asked

me to gather around her bedside with them to repeat the 23rd Psalm. Like countless thousands who have repeated this most popular of all Psalms in the last hours of life, this family seemed to receive great comfort from the mere recitation of this Shepherd Psalm.

Note in this Psalm (v. 4) that death is referred to as a 'valley'. Notes Charles Spurgeon, "The storm breaks on the mountain, but the valley is the place of quietude, and thus full often the last days of the Christian are the most peaceful in his whole career; the mountain is bleak and bare, but the valley is rich with golden sheaves, and many a saint has reaped more joy and knowledge when he came to die than he ever knew while he lived." (Exposition of the Psalms; pg. 400,,401)

Listen to some of the words of joy by dying saints:

"The chariot has come, and I am ready to step in." (Margaret Price)

"Eternity rolls up before me like a sea of glory." (Jordon Antie)

"How bright the room! How full of angels!" (Martha McCrackin)

"I wish I had the power of writing; I would describe how pleasant it is to die."
(Dr. Cullen)

"The sun is setting; mine is rising, I go from this bed to a crown. Farewell."
(S. B. Bangs)

"Can this be death? Why, it is better than living! Tell them I die happy in Jesus." (John Lyth)

How durable is the relationship of the Good Shepherd with his sheep? It is so durable that not even physical death can destroy this relationship. The Good Shepherd leads His sheep through the valley of death into the portals of heaven. Paul said, "*For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!*" Death for the believer is not a fearful enemy but a kind friend which allows the believer to enjoy the nearer presence of Christ in heaven.

B. Durability In Spite Of Life's Enemies (v. 5)

How durable is the Shepherd's relationship with His sheep? Durable enough to go through the valley of death and come into the portals of heaven! But before the believer wins the 'crown of life' in heaven, he must fight the 'fight of faith' on earth. There are many enemies of the cross of Christ on earth, many who are far from being 'friends of grace'. In one form or another, believers will face persecution, which living for Christ inevitable brings. Wrote Paul to Timothy, "*Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, just as I do.*" (2 Timothy 2:3)

He who makes himself the friend of God, automatically makes himself an enemy of godless people who hate Christ. But the Psalmist assures us that the Good

Shepherd will not allow the enemies to cut off the divine supply. Even though enemies many times surround the believer, the believer can enjoy a divinely-prepared feast, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies." You may be the only Christian on your job, and you may be surrounded with the godless ones, some of whom may even sneer at you and ridicule you. Nevertheless, the Good Shepherd is near you and can feed your soul and 'anoint your head with oil'. You can enjoy the anointing and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit even when surrounded by those who are enemies of the cross of Christ. Your life can be so full of the Holy Spirit and of the Word of God that you will overflow with joy. You can minister to others - even to unbelievers - out of the overflow of your life. "Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows." (v.. 5b)

Think of God - the loving Shepherd - preparing a table of spiritual food for you, even as you are surrounded by the ungodly. God is pictured as the Host and you are pictured as the guest! What an unspeakable great privilege to be served by God Himself, and to be anointed and filled with the blessed Holy Spirit! Plenty of divinely-prepared food served to you in the presence of life's enemies! Do not become preoccupied with the threats of your enemies, but give yourself time to be served by your divine Host - the Good Shepherd of your soul.

C. Durability In Spite Of The Passing Of Time (v. 6)

The Good Shepherd has the power to keep the sheep safe and secure, in spite of the threat of life's enemies and in spite of the inevitability of death's call. Also, in spite of the trials and tests of life, the relationship between the Good Shepherd and the sheep can remain fresh and intimate. "*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*" (v. 6a) It is because of the enduring goodness and mercy of the Good Shepherd that the sheep are able to endure and to persevere through all of life's changes and chances. The 'test of time' can prove to be a hard test. Only he who endures to the end shall be saved. It is not he who starts well, but it is he who finishes well that will ultimately be saved. Many there are who start a life's 'spiritual marathon'. Paul testified, "*I have fought long and hard for my Lord, and through it all I have kept true to him.*" (2 Timothy 4: 7a)

God cannot save man independent of man's response of faith and obedience. But, while man's response of faith cannot be minimized as a condition for final salvation, the emphasis in Psalms 23:6 is on God's faithfulness. God never tires of the believer. God is faithful to the believer all throughout a believer's earthly pilgrimage. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." "Goodness supplies our needs, and mercy blots out our sins." (Spurgeon; pg. 402)

Because God is good to us, as seen by His abundant provisions for all our human needs, and because God is merciful to us, as seen by His ready forgiveness of

all our sins, the believer has a basis for confidence and a source of strength as he battles life's temptations and as he faces life's trials. It is God's goodness and God's mercy that provide the source for the Christian's 'staying power', enabling the believer to stand the 'test of time'. The believer needs not only 'dying grace', but he also needs 'living grace'. The passing of time with its routine duties and its occasional crisis can either perfect the growing saint or it can undo the lagging believer. Given enough time, many one-time believers will 'fall along the wayside' to take their place amidst the sad company of the backslidden; or given enough time, present struggling and faltering believers will become 'strong in the Lord and in the power of His might' to take their place among the stalwart leaders and the pillars of the Church. The passing of time will be the perfecting of some and the undoing of others. Why do some persons prove, over a long period of time, to be true to the Lord and others prove to be false to the Lord? Those who prove to be true to the Lord are those who determine to accept the goodness of the Lord to meet their daily needs and who determine to accept the mercy of the Lord to forgive all their daily sins. The strong ones in life depend alone upon the goodness and the mercy of the Lord to follow them all the days of their lives (v. 6). Such people are dwelling in the house of the Lord, i.e., they are 'at home' with God, feeling very comfortable in His presence. Enjoying the presence of God daily on earth as a result of constantly accepting the goodness and the mercy of God, such saints of God anticipate dwelling with God forever. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." (v. 6) Notes Spurgeon, "While I am here I will be a child at home with my God; the whole world shall be his house to me; and when I ascend into the upper chamber I shall not change my company, nor even change the house; I shall only go to dwell in the upper storey of the house of the Lord forever." (Expositions of The Psalms; pg. 402)

CONCLUSION: Those believers who, like sheep, maintain a close relationship to the Good Shepherd, will enjoy great protection and abundant provisions. The resources which the Good Shepherd makes available to the sheep are most wonderful - Contentment, Peace, Restoration, Guidance. The relationship between the Good Shepherd and the sheep is strong and durable - durable in spite of the threat and eventual inevitability of physical death, durable in spite of the fact of life's many spiritual enemies, durable in spite of the changes and the chances of life's circumstances over a long period of time.

It is the purpose of the Good Shepherd to take every one of His sheep to heaven. Allow the Good Shepherd to love you and to sustain you and to restore you. Learn daily to appropriate the resources of the Good Shepherd. In spite of life's challenges, continue to allow the Good Shepherd gently to lead you into green pastures and beside 'still waters'. Learn to enjoy the abundant life which the Good Shepherd makes possible for you. Said Jesus, "*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the Good Shepherd.*" (John 10: 10-11)

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

Chapter 5

The Lord Is My Shepherd

QUESTIONS

1. Why did Henry Ward Beecher choose to call the 23rd Psalm “the nightingale of the Psalms”?
2. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “The Christian life is not primarily a past experience or a future hope, but it is primarily a present love relationship with the Good Shepherd.” (Note Psalms 23:1)
3. Is it presumptuous to say that “each sheep is the object of God’s special love and attention”? Why or why not? (Note Psalms 23:1) Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “God loves each person as if there was only one person to love.”
4. What evidence is there from Scripture that our God is a ‘protecting God’? (Psalms 1:1; John 10:11 - 18, 27 - 30; II Thessalonians 3:3) Does God, as Shepherd, always guarantee physical protection to believers? (Note Hebrews 11:36-38)
5. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Those who maintain a present and personal relationship with the Good Shepherd, are the same ones who enjoy a wonderful protection against ultimate harm and spiritual loss.” What conditions must be met in John 10:27 before one can expect to enjoy the blessings of John 10: 28-29? If conditions are not met, does one have a right to claim the promise of God? What is the difference between ‘true’ security and ‘false’ security? From a study of John 10: 27 - 28, (and many other Scriptures) can we conclude that ‘eternal security’ is conditional or unconditional?
6. Give your interpretation of the promise, as recorded in Psalm 23:1, “I shall not want”. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “God has not promised abundance in luxuries, but He has promised adequacy in needs.” (Note Philippians 4: 11- 13, 19; Psalms 34:10)
7. What are some of the basic soul-hungers of man which God alone can satisfy? (Psalms 23: 2)
8. What does it mean, according to Psalms 2:2, for believers (sheep) to be led beside ‘still waters’?

9. In what three relationships does God (the Good Shepherd) make it possible for persons to enjoy 'Peace', and what does 'Peace' mean in each of these relationships?
10. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Many of our storms are self made. In the mad crazy desire to be something that we are not or to compensate for what we'll never be, we get into all kinds of choppy waters."
11. What three steps must one take if he is to find and to establish peace with himself?
12. What does refusal to forgive yourself evidence in your life?
13. Why is it so important for one to learn to accept himself?
14. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It is impossible for sheep to enjoy an intimate relationship with the Good Shepherd unless they are enjoying an unselfish and loving relationship with other sheep in the fold." (Note Philippians 2: 2-4; I John 3: 14 - 15; 4: 19 - 21)
15. What is the Good Shepherd prepared to do for the sheep when they lose their peace and joy or when they stray? (Psalms 23:3; Luke 15: 4 - 6) What must straying ones do in order to be restored?
16. Why do people (sheep) have such a great need for divine guidance from the Shepherd? (Note Psalms 23:3) Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "People do have a great tendency to desert what is good for them, believing something better is just out of reach." (Note Galatians 1: 6 - 7)
17. What are some of the 'paths of error' which sheep tend to drift onto? (Note Galatians 3: 3, 5; I John 2: 4 - 6)
18. Practically and theologically, how would you describe the "path of righteousness" (Psalms 23: 3) which sheep are to stay on all of their lives?
19. Discuss what the following statement means to you: "Obedience motivated by love for Christ is the meaning of faith and the essence of righteousness."
20. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Obedience is the result of genuine faith, not the condition for entering into a relationship with Christ."

21. Why, for believers, should physical death never be looked at as a fearful thing? (Note Psalms 23:4; I Corinthians 15:51-57; Philippians 1: 20 -24) Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Death for the believer is not a fearful enemy but a kind friend which allows the believer to enjoy the nearer presence of Christ in heaven.? Have you ever personally known a friend or a relative whose last words at the time of his death (when he passed through the ‘valley of death’), evidenced great joy and peace and assurance of eternal life?
22. Tell what comfort you derive from the following declaration of faith in the Shepherd’s provision for the sheep during persecution from enemies: “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” (Psalms 23: 5) What is your response to the fact that God (the Good Shepherd) is pictured as the ‘Host’ while you (the sheep) are pictured as the ‘Guest’? From a New Testament viewpoint, what do you think it means to have your head “anointed with oil” and to have your “cup overflowing”? (Psalms 23: 5).
23. Tell what is meant by the following statement: “The believer needs not only ‘dying grace’, but he also needs ‘living grace’.”
24. Give your reaction to the following statement: “It is not he who starts well, but it is he who finishes well that will ultimately be saved.” (Note Revelation 2:10; Matthew 24: 45 - 51; Ezekiel 33:12 -20)
25. Why is the passing of time a ‘friend’ to some, and to others an ‘enemy’? Is God’s grace strong enough to enable a believer “to stand the test of time”? Tell what your reaction is to the following statement: “Given enough time, many one-time believers will ‘fall along the wayside’ to take their place amidst the sad company of the backslidden, or, given enough time, present struggling and faltering believers will become ‘strong in the Lord and in the power of His might’ to take their place among the stalwart leaders and pillars of the Church.”
26. For those who enjoy an intimate relationship with God here on earth, will heaven be to them a change in company and in location, or will heaven be simply a ‘consummation’ of a relationship greatly enjoyed on earth?

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

CHAPTER 6

CONQUERING FEAR THROUGH FAITH

THE WONDER OF GOD AND MAN

CHAPTER 6

“CONQUERING FEAR THROUGH FAITH”

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 27: 1-14

INTRODUCTION: When confronting life's threatening enemies which seem to paralyze our hearts with fear and which plot to destroy our very lives, we must, like David, look to God in faith, for in the day of trouble the Lord has promised to keep us safe in His dwelling (v.5). The way of faith is the way of victory over fearful enemies which seek to destroy our lives, as believers.

PROPOSITION:

- I. **CONTEXT OF FAITH (Where Faith Originates) (v. 1)**
 - A. Unshakeable Source of Faith - The Lord
 - B. Invincible Power of Faith - Fearlessness
- II. **CONQUEST OF FAITH (What Faith Accomplishes) (v. 2-3)**
 - A. The Great Fall of the Evil Aggressor (v. 2)
 - B. The Great Victory of the Besieged Righteous (v. 3)
- III. **CRAVING OF FAITH (What Faith Desires) (v. 4)**
 - A. Concentrated Focus of the Soul's Desire (One thing I ask)
 - B. Satisfying Object of the Soul's Desire (Personal Relationship with God)
- IV. **CONSOLATIONS OF FAITH (What Faith Enjoys) (v. 5-6)**
 - A. Safety In The Day Of Trouble (v. 5)
 - B. Exaltation In The Midst Of Enemies (v. 6a)
 - C. Rejoicing With The Attitude Of Worship (v. 6b)
- V. **CONCERNS OF FAITH (What Faith Requests) (v. 7-12)**
 - A. To Be Heard (When I Call) (v. 7)
 - B. To Be Accepted (When I Seek) (v. 8-9)
 - C. To Be Comforted (When I Am Abandoned) (v. 10)
 - D. To Be Led (When I Am Oppressed) (v. 11)
 - E. To Be Defended (When I Am Accused) (v. 12)
- VI. **CONFIDENCE OF FAITH (What Faith Anticipates) (v. 13-14)**
 - A. Future Expectation - 'Goodness Of The Lord' (v. 13)
 - B. Present Persistence - 'Wait For The Lord' (v. 14)

CONCLUSION: Faith, placed in the living God, is the answer for overcoming your many fears! Even though the faithful are, at times, assailed by doubts because of life's seeming injustices and perplexities, the righteous can rest assured that evil will ultimately be punished and righteousness will ultimately be rewarded. 'Though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is Ruler yet.' There are many causes of fear and several types of fear, but faith in God can conquer all terrorizing fears. The faithful are promised personal safety in the day of trouble (v. 5), if not always safety from physical death, deliverance through physical death to heaven - these are the themes of Psalms 27, and these can be the experiences of the people of faith! Exercise faith in a faithful God of goodness, and you will find deliverance from all your terrorizing fears. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world!

THE WONDER OF GOD AND MAN

CHAPTER 6

“CONQUERING FEAR THROUGH FAITH”

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 27: 1-14

INTRODUCTION: Fears of all kinds plague millions of individuals. Fears, both real and imaginary, do great harm to individuals. In Psalms 27, David speaks of the presence of many enemies - all of which constitute a real threat, but all of which are defeated through faith in the living God. How does David describe the opponents and the enemies which confronted him? Evil men, like cannibals, who advanced against him to devour his flesh (v. 2), foes who attacked him (v. 3), enemies who surrounded him (v. 6), false witnesses who rose up against him, breathing out violence (v. 12).

In the face of these terrorizing enemies which could have paralyzed his heart with fear, how did David find victory? David conquered fear through faith! Faith in the living God!

Faith in God is the way of peace in spite of turmoil, and the way of confidence in spite of confusion. Psalms 27 can be considered one of the great ‘Faith Chapters’ of the Bible. Let us look carefully at Psalms 27 in order to learn the ‘way of faith’. Several questions regarding faith are answered in this great Chapter: 1) Context of Faith (Where Faith Originates) - (v.1); 2) Conquest of Faith (What Faith Accomplishes) - (v.2-3); 3) Craving of Faith (What Faith Desires) - (v.4); 4) Consolations of Faith (What Faith Enjoys) - (v.7-12); 5) Concerns of Faith (What Faith Requests) - (v.7-12); 6) Confidence of Faith (What Faith Anticipates) (v.13-14).

When confronting life’s threatening enemies which seem to paralyze our hearts with fear and which plot to destroy our very lives, we must, like David, look to God in faith, for, in the day of trouble the Lord has promised to keep us safe in His dwelling (v.5).

PROPOSITION: The way of faith is the way of victory over fearful enemies which seek to destroy our lives, as believers.

I. CONTEXT OF FAITH (Where Faith Originates) (v. 1)

In seeking to understand the workings of faith, especially as it relates to conquering fearful enemies, it is important to understand the context of faith, i.e., the source of faith and the dynamic nature of faith.

A. Unshakeable Source Of Faith - The Lord

It is the Lord alone who inspires faith in the heart of the fearful saint who is facing ominous enemies. The Psalmist declares, “*The Lord is my light and my salvation... The Lord is my stronghold.*” (v. 1)

The Lord is, by nature, the very essence of light. Workers of iniquity - the enemies of the saints of God - are those whose works are characterized as ‘works of darkness’. Darkness conceals reality; light reveals reality. The Lord - the essence of light - reveals reality - showing the true nature of sin and the true nature of righteousness. Not only does the Lord expose the works of darkness and the true nature of sin, but the Lord brings salvation to the lost. The repentant one is saved from sin, and the regenerated soul is saved from the snare of his enemies. ‘Salvation’ speaks not only of salvation from sin which God as the ‘light’ exposes and magnifies, but salvation speaks also of salvation from sinners who seek to destroy saints. The Lord is also the ‘stronghold of my life’. The Lord not only gives moral light in order to reveal moral darkness, and the Lord not only gives salvation from sin, but the Lord also gives strength for weakness. “Our life derives all its strength from him who is the author of it; and if he designs to make us strong we cannot be weakened by all the machinations of the adversary.” (Charles Spurgeon; *The Treasury of David*; Vol. 2; pg.1)

B. Invincible Power of Faith - Fearlessness

Because the Lord is my light and my salvation and the stronghold of my life - whom shall I fear and of whom shall I be afraid? (v. 1) The object of one’s faith determines the value of one’s faith, and if the Lord is the object of one’s faith, then one has nothing to fear. The Lord’s light which reveals reality is stronger than moral darkness which conceals sin and evil. The Lord’s salvation which converts the sinner and which saves him for heaven, places the converted one on a plane which is infinitely higher than the sinner who thrives on his wicked deeds. Though the evil plots of evil men may be ever so strong, the righteous plans of godly men are much stronger! The righteousness which salvation brings is more enduring than the evil schemes which sinners plan! Right will triumph ultimately and evil will be destroyed eventually. The stronghold of the saved person is the Lord Himself, and no evil man or group of evil men can tear down that mighty stronghold! “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

**“The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I’ll never, no never, no never forsake!”**

(How Firm A Foundation)

Because the Lord is our light and our salvation and our stronghold, we have no need to fear the enemies of our soul. Because the unshakeable source of our faith is the Lord, the invincible power of our faith is manifested in fearlessness!

II. CONQUEST OF FAITH (What Faith Accomplishes) (v. 2-3)

Life, for the righteous man, will not always be easy, but it can always be victorious. Though the evil man be ever so aggressive in his actions and ever so murderous in his intentions to destroy the righteous, the evil person will ultimately fail (v. 2). Though the righteous one be ever so cruelly attacked and surrounded by evil persecutors, his heart can remain calm and his confidence in the Lord can remain intact (v. 3).

How is the conquest of faith described? First, in terms of the fall of the evil man who seems so powerful (v. 2), and secondly, in terms of the victory of the righteous man who seems so overpowered by surrounding enemies. What is the declaration of faith and the catchwords of faith's victory? "Though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is Ruler yet!" "Though evil seems to triumph, evil will be vanquished and righteousness will be vindicated!" "Though evil men are ever so aggressive in their sinful ways, the righteous ones shall not be moved from their confident standing with God!"

A. The Great Fall Of The Evil Aggressor (v. 2)

David declares with confidence, "*When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall.*" (v. 2)

There may be such a thing as passive evil and an attitude of passive indifference on the part of sinners toward the saint, but Psalms 27:2 does not describe a passive or a 'laid-back' or an indifferent attitude of sinners towards saints. Rather, verse 2 describes an aggressive and murderous action on the part of evil men towards righteous men. Like cannibals, evil men advance their evil forces to attack the righteous. Their intention is not only to destroy, but also to consume the 'flesh' of the righteous! Like Satan who sought to possess Simon Peter in order that he might 'sift' him like wheat, so evil men even today are violently plotting the overthrow of righteous men.

Twentieth century history is replete with countless cases of evil men aggressively murdering the righteous. Militant communism will not stop short of total destruction of godly people. Secular humanism is insidious and seeks

aggressively to destroy all mention of God and supernaturalism in our school's text books. Blatant pornography is pushed shamelessly on the streets of our large cities by conscienceless exploiters of our young people. There are many aggressive men of evil whose intent is to devour the flesh of the righteous!

But Psalms 27:2 assures us that the evil aggressor will eventually stumble and fall! How and when? We may not know. But the inevitable fall of evil men is assured! Evil cannot forever go rampant and unchecked! God will place stones on the pathway of the evil man which he never reckoned upon and over which he will decisively fall!

B. The Great Victory Of The Besieged Righteous (v. 3)

If the great fall of the evil aggressor is assured, it is also true that the great victory of the besieged righteous is assured. If the wicked, who seem so invincible, will eventually fall, then what can be said about the righteous ones who seem so weak in their vulnerability before their wicked opponents? David confidently declared concerning the oppressed righteous, with whom he personally identified: *"Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident."* (v. 3)

When surrounded by foes which are great in number and which are demonic in power, the righteous one might be tempted to throw away his confidence and to succumb to his fears. But not David! Surrounded by an army of evil (which may have been the powerful forces of his rebellious son Absalom), David remained confident in his Lord and calm in his heart.

"Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed;
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand
Upheld by my gracious omnipotent hand."

(How Firm A Foundation)

What does faith accomplish? Faith brings victory over evil! The wicked one will fall, in spite of his well-planned schemes of aggressive evil, and the righteous one will remain calm and confident, in spite of the overwhelming odds against him!

III. CRAVING OF FAITH (What Faith Desires) (v. 4)

Faith means, not only affirmation of right doctrinal beliefs about God, but faith means also a passionate desire for God - for God's personal and abiding fellowship.

Faith then is not mere intellectual assent to right doctrines, but faith is a concentrated focus of the soul's desire for intimate and growing fellowship with God.

Said the Psalmist, *"One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life."* (v. 4) In this verse, two truths are evident: the concentrated focus of the soul's desire ("One thing I ask and seek after"), and the satisfying object of the soul's desire (an abiding, exciting, and growing relationship with the Lord).

A. Concentrated Focus Of The Soul's Desire (One Thing I Ask)

David was a man of many secondary desires and a man with a life full of activities, but amidst all the immediate desires and the variety of duties and tasks, David had one all consuming inner desire and passion in his life. He had a concentrated focus - and that focus was centered on God.

Are you a person of divided loyalties, a double-minded man who is unstable in all your ways (James 1:6-7), or are you a person who has brought all your different desires and ambitions and plans and projects and duties to a focused point which is centered on God and your intimate relationship with God? "Let all our affections be bound up in one affection, and that affection set upon heavenly things." (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg.2)

**"Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of his glory and grace."**

When the focus of your desires is centered on Christ alone, the things of time become secondary in importance to the values of eternity. What God values, you too must learn to value, such as the Word of God, the causes of the Kingdom of God, the value of never-dying souls, the power of prayer, the fellowship of God's people in the Church, an intimate relationship with the Lord.

"One thing I ask (or desire) of the Lord" means that you make the Lord the object of your earnest desires and that you turn your desires into fervent prayers. You must desire to know the Lord intimately, and then express your desires to know the Lord through your fervent praying.

If your desires are right (to know the Lord), and if your focus is concentrated (turning your gaze upon the Lord in prayer), then your holy

desires which are expressed in prayer, must lead to resolute action. "One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek."

Your past desires to know the Lord are commendable, but they are not sufficient for the present. Your past desires to know the Lord must continue and must become persevering desires. This verse speaks, not of short-lived desires or passing emotions and sentiments regarding the Lord, but this verse speaks of persistent desires that become increasingly more intense with the passing of time and unaffected by changing circumstances in the future. The sincerity of one's desire for God and the evidence that one's desire for God is intense is shown by the fact that desires (expressed in prayers) are translated into efforts (expressed in work). "Desires are seeds which must be sown in the good soil of activity, or they will yield no harvest. We shall find our desires to be like clouds without rain, unless followed up by practical endeavors." (Spurgeon; *Ibid*; pg. 3) "Many desires are unsatisfied because conduct does not correspond to desires. Many a prayer remains unanswered because its pray-ers never do anything to fulfill their prayer." (*Expositions of Holy Scriptures*; Alexander McClaren; vol. 4; pg. 147.)

Someone said, "*Impression without expression leads to depression.*" *It can also be said that "faith without works is dead"*. This Scripture (Psalms 27:4a) is expressing the importance of coupling the desires of the heart with the actions of the hand. Someone said, "Prayer is work; prayer works; prayer leads to work." What you ask of the Lord, you must also seek after. Prayer is never a substitute for work or personal effort.

"A China man brought a number of his friends to the mission. When he was asked how he succeeded in getting so many to come, he replied, 'I got on my knees and talkee, talkee, talkee. Then I got up and walkee, walkee, walkee.' Pray, and then go to work. Prayer without work, is vain. Praying without working, like working without praying, is dead, being alone. Let us all 'talkee and walkee'." (*Shoe-Leather Faith*; Rosell; No. 540)

B. Satisfying Object of the Soul's Desire (Personal Relationship With God)

What is the "one thing" which the Psalmist desires and asks of the Lord? That he may have a personal relationship with God, as described in the three following ways: 1) "That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life" (an abiding relationship); 2) "to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord" (an exciting relationship); 3) "and to seek him in his temple" (a growing relationship).

1. An Abiding Relationship

Is it your supreme desire and your fervent prayer and your diligent goal to “dwell in the house of the Lord” all the days of your life? “Its fulfillment depends not on where we are, but on what we think and feel; for every place is God’s house, and what the Psalmist desires is that he should be able to keep up unbroken consciousness of being in God’s presence and should be always in touch with Him.” (McClaren; Expositions of Holy Scripture; vol. 4; pg. 141)

Is it your supreme desire to have an abiding relationship with the Lord, all the days of your life?

**“Constantly abiding, Jesus is mine;
Constantly abiding, rapture divine;
He never leaves me lonely, whispers, O so kind:
‘I will never leave thee’, Jesus is mine.”**

Are you learning to work at cultivating a conscious sense of the abiding presence of God in your life? You may desire to have that sense of God’s presence, but the desire must be coupled with the supreme effort on your part. What you desire and what you ask of the Lord in prayer, must be the same thing that you diligently seek after and regularly practice in your life.

What can you do to help cultivate a sense of the abiding presence of God in your life - a presence which you desire to be conscious of all the days of your life (v. 4)? You may desire to be a good pianist, and you may even ask the Lord to make you a good pianist, but you will never be a good pianist unless desire and prayer are turned in to daily practice. How can you practice the presence of God in your life; i.e., how can you learn to “dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of your life”? Here are a few suggestions (and you can think of many more): 1) Begin every day with God, talking to God before you get out of bed in the morning, and thanking Him for standing beside you while you were sleeping during the night, 2) Listen for God to speak to you, while you are meditating upon God, early in the morning, and write down any specific instructions God gives you while you are at your ‘Listening Post’, 3) Let God speak to you as you systematically read a few verses out of the Bible each morning, 4) take one verse from the Bible with you into your daily work, and ask God to make you conscious of His presence as He works with you all day long, 5) During spare moments during the day, read a

few verses from your pocket New Testament, or listen to a few Bible chapters on cassette tape while you are traveling in your car, 6) Talk to family members about God during your family devotions at the supper table, 7) Share a few words of prayer with a friend, either in person or over the telephone during the week; 8) Picture God sitting on the passenger side in your car (if you are traveling alone in your car), and carry on a natural and warm relationship and conversation with the Lord while you are driving, 9) Picture God sitting in the vacant chair at each of the meals in your house (a practice of the early Quakers). Never forget: "God is the unseen Guest at every table, the silent Listener to every conversation", 10) In the evening, before you go to bed, talk to God and review your day's events and thoughts and problems. Share all of your burdens with the Lord and write down your observations and feelings and experiences in your daily diary. Go to sleep while you are expressing your love to Jesus, or while you are reviewing a verse of Scripture which you are memorizing, or while you are listening to an uplifting Gospel song on your Christian radio station. Going to sleep while memorizing verses, or while talking to Jesus, or while listening to Christian music will have a soothing affect on your subconscious mind - and you will probably sleep better!

These are a few suggestions on how to 'practice the presence of God' daily. Following these suggestions will aid you in your goal of "dwelling in the house of the Lord all the days of your life."

2. An Exciting Relationship

Not only is your relationship to the Lord to be a constantly abiding relationship, but your relationship is to be an exciting and thrilling relationship also. David's goal, reflected in his desires and prayers and by his efforts, was to "gaze upon the beauty of the Lord."

You will not see the beauty of the Lord if you simply give a passing glance at the Lord or at the Lord's works and words. To see the beauty of the Lord, you must train yourself to gaze upon the Lord, and gazing takes time and effort and concentration.

First, you must take time to meditate upon the beautiful thoughts of the Savior.

**“Jesus, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills the breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest.”**

To meditate upon the beautiful words of Holy Scriptures, is one way we gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.

Second, you must take time to be alone with the Lord in your private prayers. It was said of John Wesley that, after he had spent time alone with the Lord in prayer, his face shone with a holy and beautiful radiance. People knew that he had been in the beautiful presence of his Lord, as reflected in his shining countenance.

Third, you must take time to minister to hurting people, for the beautiful face of God is seen in the dirty faces of the orphans, and in the broken bodies of the crippled, and in the despairing looks of the lonely, and in the sunken eyes of the starving. Where do you see the face of God? Where is God’s beauty reflected? Where do you find God? *“Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Sir, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you anything to drink? Or a stranger, and help you? Or naked, and clothe you? When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?’ And I, the king, will tell them, ‘When you did it to these my brothers you were doing it to me!’”* (Matthew 25:37-40, Living Bible)

A fourth way you “gaze upon the beauty of the Lord”, is to delight in God’s beautiful creation and to behold God’s beauty in His creation. The full-orbed moon, the twinkling stars, the brilliant sun, the fresh dew in the early morning, the gentle snowflakes, the clashing thunder, the delicate flowers - these and a thousand other intricacies of nature all combine to reflect the infinite beauty of our beautiful God.

3. A Growing Relationship

Just as you work at ‘practicing the presence of God’ in order that you may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of your life (v. 4), and just as you learn to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord in many different ways (v. 4), so you also must learn “to seek God in his temple.” (v. 4)

Seeking God in His temple speaks of a concerned effort in learning to worship the Lord. ‘Seeking’ speaks of the effort of work and

of the progress of growth. Jesus said, "Seek, and you will find." Isaiah wrote, "*Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.*" (Isaiah 55:6) Promised God to his people, "*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*" (Jeremiah 28:13)

When God is the object of the soul's deepest desires, it is only natural to seek the face of the Lord and to worship him in the temple of the Lord. 'Worship' means recognizing the worth of God. No human being can fully conceive the total worthiness of the triune God - the beauty of Jesus, or the magnificence of the Spirit, or the holiness of the Father. But to the extent that one earnestly seeks God in His temple, to that same extent will one's capacity to worship the Lord be ever more expanded.

If seeking God in His temple means learning to increase one's capacity to worship the Lord, then seeking God in His temple also means learning increasingly to understand God's will and God's ways. "We must inquire as to the will of God and how we may do it...We should sit at Jesus' feet, and awaken all our faculties to learn of him." (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 3)

**"More about Jesus let me learn,
More of His holy will discern;
Spirit of God my teacher be,
Showing the things of Christ to me."**

**"More about Jesus in His Word,
Holding communion with my Lord;
Hearing His voice in every line,
Making each faithful saying mine."**

Are you seeking the Lord in His temple? Are you learning to worship Him more earnestly? Are you learning to discern His will for your life? Do you have a hunger for knowledge and for wisdom? Are you learning to sit at the feet of Jesus in His temple to learn of heavenly matters? "To seek the Lord in His temple" requires a teachable spirit and a humble mind.

Dwelling in the house of the Lord all the days of your life (i.e., learning to practice the conscious presence of the Lord daily), is a goal that requires the exercise of your will and is a volitional response of faith. Gazing upon the beauty of the Lord is a goal that requires the exercise of your aesthetic abilities and is an emotional response of faith. Seeking

God in His temple is a goal that requires the exercise of your mind, and is an intellectual response of faith.

The satisfying object of your soul's desire is a vital relationship with the Lord, and that vital relationship can be described in a threefold manner: volitionally as an abiding relationship (to dwell in the house of the Lord), emotionally as an exciting relationship (to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord), intellectually as a growing relationship (to seek the Lord in His temple).

A satisfying relationship with the Lord calls for man's wholehearted response - volitionally (the will), emotionally (the heart), intellectually (the mind). Did not Jesus say that the focus of our soul's desires is to be fixed on the Lord and that our love for the Lord is to be wholehearted? Commanded Jesus, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart (emotional response), and with all your soul (volitional response), and with all your mind (intellectual response)." (Matthew 22:37)

Supreme love for God as expressed in an abiding relationship (volitional response) and in an exciting relationship (emotional response) and in a growing relationship (intellectual response) is taught in both the Old Testament (Psalms 27:4) and in the New Testament (Matthew 22:38).

Why is a loving relationship with God such a great antidote for terrorizing fear of God? Simply because one cannot possess a deep love for God and have a terrifying fear of God at the same time. *"We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly; his perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what he might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what he might do to us, and shows that we are not fully convinced that he really loves us."* (I John 4:18, Living Bible)

The person who loves people is the person who has faith in people, and one cannot have faith and trust in people and, at the same time, fear people. One is not afraid of people whom he loves. Love for people produces faith in people as a by-product of the love. Therefore, love for God and love for people is the primary method of getting rid of fear.

IV. CONSOLATIONS OF FAITH (What Faith Enjoys) (v. 5-6)

What security and comfort and safety and joy is afforded the believer whose loving relationship with God is abiding and strong! Verses 5 - 6 note the consolations or rewards of faith. He who loves the Lord truly is he who enjoys the benefits of faith exaltedly! He who faithfully loves the Lord will enjoy: 1) Safety in the day of trouble (v. 5), 2) Exaltation in the midst of enemies (v. 6a), 3) Rejoicing with the attitude of worship (v. 6b).

A. Safety In The Day Of Trouble (v. 5)

Like David, the one who is in love with God can confidently say, *“For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon the rock.”* (v. 5)

David does not deny the fact that believers will have ‘troubles’. Christians are not immune to trials and tests and struggles and losses and disappointments and failures. ‘Troubles’ of all sorts befall believers, as well as nonbelievers. Never think that, just because you are a believer, you will never suffer financial loss, or physical infirmities, or social alienation, or spiritual trials. Death is no respecter of persons. Accidents happen to believers as well as to non-believers.

The emphasis of verse 5, however, is not on the fact of troubles befalling the saints of God, but the emphasis is on the positive fact that God will provide safety to believers in the time of trouble. David says of himself, *“God will ‘keep me safe’, ‘hide me in His shelter’, ‘set me high upon a rock.’”*

Says the Lord to the faithful believers: *“When through the deep waters I call thee to go, The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow; For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless, And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.”*

Jesus is a ‘shelter in the time of a storm’, ‘a bulwark never failing’, an ever-present help in the time of need, a hiding place from the snares of evil men and the attack of demonic forces, an impregnable rock which cannot be stormed by the foes of the soul!

Wrote Martin Luther, during a time of great trouble in his life:

**“And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us;
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth and triumph through us.**

**The prince of darkness grim, We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, For lo, his doom is sure;
One little word shall fall him."**

**"Let goods and kindred go, This mortal life also;
The body they may kill; God's truth abideth still;
His kingdom is forever."**

B. Exaltation In The Midst Of Enemies (v. 6a)

"Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me." (v. 6a) The righteous will ultimately be honored and the wicked will ultimately be shamed. The proud will be brought low, and the humble will be exalted. Evil enemies who seek to terrify the righteous will themselves be terrified by the Lord.

Jesus said in one of His beatitudes: **"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."** The future belongs to believers, not to sinners who defy the living God. One thinks of young David who engaged in battle as a picture of the victory over evil which all believers will enjoy.

C. Rejoicing With The Attitude Of Worship (v. 6b)

Troubles sometimes beset even the most dedicated believers. The trials of adverse circumstances combine with the terrors of vicious enemies in an attempt to destroy the righteous, but the Lord sustains the righteous and even exalts the righteous in the midst of their enemies. What is the response of the righteous person when he experiences deliverance from his enemies by the hand of the Lord? A response of joyful and grateful worship! Said David, **"At his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing, and make music to the lord."** (Psalms 27:6b.)

Great deliverance evokes great gratitude and joyful praise in the life of the delivered for the Deliverer!

'Shouts of joy' speaks of ecstasy of feeling and uninhibited expression of that joyous feeling. How can one remain silent when he experiences victory over a great enemy? Worship that is characterized by a spirit of joy and expressed through music and singing, is worship whose participants are filled with gratitude to God for His saving strength and His salvation. He who is forgiven much will also love much, and he who is delivered from powerful foes will also rejoice

wholeheartedly! There is a place for quietness and for contemplation in worship, but when a worshiper is a recipient of God's saving grace - when he has been delivered out of the hand of great oppressors - how can his spirit be passive and his lips remain sealed? When one-time and cruelly-treated slaves were finally emancipated by Abraham Lincoln during the days of the Civil War, how could they remain silent? Should not the righteous rejoice with 'shouts of joy'? Should not the redeemed 'sing and make music to the Lord'? Exuberant worship, heart-warming testimonies, hearty singing, and joyful music - these activities are expressions of a grateful congregation which is conscious of the mighty deliverance of the Lord!

Safety in the day of trouble, exaltation in the midst of enemies, rejoicing with the attitude of worship - these are the rewards and the consolations which come to the faithful.

V. CONCERNS OF FAITH (What Faith Requests) (v. 7-12)

Life for the righteous is not always easy. Wrong, at times, seems to triumph and righteousness seems to go unnoticed and unrewarded. Injustice seems to have the upper hand, and fear threatens to paralyze the heart and to steal away faith.

What circumstances of life often become the cause of many fears? David notes some of the causes of fear in Psalms 27:7-12.

1) Fear of not being heard by the Lord when we pray (v. 7); 2) Fear of being rejected by God as He turns His face away from us in anger (v. 8-9); 3) Fear of being abandoned by those who are closest to us (v. 10); 4) Fear of being falsely accused by false witnesses who seek to exploit us for their own selfish gains (v. 12).

In light of these fear-producing circumstances of life, the man of faith makes several requests of God. The man of faith looks to God as the answer for his frustrations and fears. What are the concerns of faith? What does faith request of the Lord?

A. To Be Heard (When I Call) (v. 7)

***"Hear my voice when I call, O Lord; be merciful to me and answer me."* (v. 7). When storms assail and when fears annoy, the person of faith need not fear that God will not hear him when he sincerely calls upon the Lord. And when the man of faith calls upon the Lord, he can be assured that God will not give strict justice to him in place of tender mercies. When our hearts are**

broken, God will come to heal us. When fearful circumstances overwhelm us to undo us, the Lord will come to comfort and to sustain us. God will not give us what we deserve - strict justice - but the Lord will give us what we desperately need - tender mercy and understanding and love! God will speedily answer the prayers of the penitent and the requests of the brokenhearted.

It is a test of faith when one makes his earnest requests to the Lord and when the answers to his prayers are slow in coming. One concern of the man of faith is that his prayers are heard by the God of the universe! "We may expect answers to prayer, and should not be easy without them any more than we should be if we had written a letter to a friend upon important business, and had received no reply." (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 4)

B. To Be Accepted (When I Seek) (v. 8-9)

"My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!' Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior." (v. 8-9)

The condition for finding is seeking wholeheartedly. The reward for diligently seeking God is the glorious discovery that the face of God is a smiling and a compassionate face.

The better instincts in one's life which encourage him to seek God, must be obeyed as reflected outwardly in a life that actively seeks God's face and His divine acceptance. Every man, in his better moments, knows he ought to seek God, not merely to seek material possessions or physical security or professional achievements. The wise man obeys those inner spiritual stirrings in his heart and his conscience, and he translates the wholesome impulses of his heart into outward striving for God.

When your inner soul instructs you to seek the Lord, don't squelch those tender stirrings of your heart. Activate those feelings and yearnings, and allow those God-inspired instincts and judgments to direct you actively and outwardly and earnestly to seek the Lord God Almighty!

And to be assured that your inner impulses which compel you outwardly to seek God, will be met by an accepting God - a God who, if you take one step towards Him, will take a thousand steps toward you. "Draw near unto God, and He will draw near unto you." Do not fear that God will turn His face away from you in anger. He will never reject you or forsake you. He is a saving and accepting Savior. It is His nature to save, not to destroy; to accept, not to reject! He will never leave you nor forsake you. He who planted a desire within

your heart to seek the Lord, is He who will gladly welcome you when you act upon your inner impulses, and actually and outwardly seek Him.

Perhaps, man has no greater fear than the fear of rejection. No one can be promised he will never be rejected by his fellow men, but the honest seeker after God can rest assured that he will never be rejected or forsaken by a loving and a merciful God!

C. To Be Comforted (When I Am Abandoned) (v. 10)

Many there are in this world who are exploited by cruel men and who are even abandoned by close relatives. Does faith have an answer for the fearful possibility of abandonment? David affirmed great faith in a God of comfort when he wrote, *“Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.”* (v. 10) This same verse in the Living Bible reads, *“For if my father and mother should abandon me, you would welcome and comfort me.”*

Faith in God covers all emergencies and tragedies. It is a tragedy indeed when parents abandon their children, but even when this most terrible of all desertions takes place, the Lord will comfort the lonely and welcome the orphan. “These dear relations will be the last to desert me, but if the milk of human kindness should dry up even from their breasts, there is a Father who never forgets.” (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg.5)

Faith affirms the fact that God will never abandon those who love Him, even if all others - even parents - abandon the believer. Did not Jesus promise that the Heavenly Father would send the blessed Comforter - the Holy Spirit - to be with the people of faith? Said Jesus to his disciples: *“If you love me, obey me; and I will ask the Father and he will give you another Comforter, and he will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who leads into all truth....No, I will not abandon you or leave you as orphans in the storm - I will come to you.”* “John 14: 15, 16, 17a, 18; Living Bible)

D. To Be Led (When I Am Oppressed) (v.11)

Fear of being misled by cruel oppressors or by cunning exploiters is a real fear in the hearts of men today. Many there are who look after no ones interests but their own. Many there are who would lead others onto ‘dead end’ roads - roads that are crooked instead of straight, roads that are treacherous instead of safe, roads that are intricate and cunning rather than simple and honest. Jesus spoke of cruel oppressors of men in His own day when He warned people against false teachers - ‘the blind leaders of the blind’ as He called them.

Fear of being misled into falsehood by false teachers and prophets can be allayed when one turns to the Lord for instruction in the truth and for guidance on life's pathway. *"Teach me your way, O Lord; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors."* (Psalms 27:11) "Help is here sought as well as directions; we not only need a map of the way, but a guide to assist us in the journey." (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 5)

Faith in God as the teacher of truth and as the companion/guide on life's treacherous pathway, results in giving understanding to the confused and in giving guidance to the weak. It is the work of the blessed Holy Spirit to impart truth to the mind and to give guidance to the soul. Said Jesus to His disciples: *"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)

E. To Be Defended (When I Am Accused) (v. 12)

Fear of being falsely accused by false witnesses who seek to exploit the righteous for their own selfish gains (v. 12) is a real fear that many face. One of the concerns of the faithful is that God will come to the defense of the righteous who are accused day and night. Is not Satan himself called *'the accuser of the brethren'* (Revelation 12:10), and does he not have many followers who take their place on the witness stands of many of earth's court rooms to give a false witness against the righteous? Have there not been countless believers through the ages, as well as believers in this very century, who have gone to their deaths as a result of the slanders and the false witnesses of evil men? Many believers there are today who, along with David, are concerned that justice be rendered and that false witnesses be silenced. Prayed David to his Lord, *"Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence."* (Psalms 27:12)

What promise did Jesus give to the faithful who are slandered and who are persecuted and lied about. Said Jesus, *"When you are reviled and persecuted and lied about because you are my followers - wonderful! Be happy about it! Be very glad! for a tremendous reward awaits you up in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted too."* (Matthew 5: 11-12; Living Bible)

When Christians are arrested on false charges (as many are in many places in the world today), how are they to react? Said Jesus, *"When you are arrested, don't worry about what to say at your trial, for you will be given the right words at the right time. For it won't be you doing the talking - it will be the Spirit of your heavenly Father speaking through you!"* (Matthew 10: 19-20; Living Bible)

The man of faith believes that the Lord is his chief Defender against false accusations, and his greatest Protector against violent men.

VI. CONFIDENCE OF FAITH (What Faith Anticipates) (v. 13-14)

A. Future Expectations - 'Goodness of the Lord' (v. 13)

"I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."
(v. 13)

He who maintains a vital relationship with the living God is he who boldly faces the future, for he knows that, regardless of the challenges and the crisis of life, the future is always bright because of the promises of God. The God of the past whose mercies have never failed, is the God of the future whose goodness will continue to rescue the godly. The goodness of God is unfailing and His mercies are manifest from age to age. What He has done for us in the past, He will continue to do for us in the future. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever! Our God is not an arbitrary or a fickle or an unpredictable God. Confidence in God because of His past works of love in delivering the righteous from their enemies, will not be shattered in the future. The God who reigned in ages past is the same God whose sovereignty will continue to be manifested in the present and in the distant future. There is no 'shadow of turning' with God, no turning His back on the faithful.

The believer's confidence in God's continuing goodness is a confidence that is founded on the integrity of God's character. God has never failed to exercise His saving power and He will always in the future continue to exercise His power. Exclaimed David, *"I am expecting the Lord to rescue me again, so that once again I will see his goodness to me here in the land of the living."* (Psalms 27:13; Living Bible)

B. Present Persistence - 'Wait For The Lord' (v. 14)

What is the secret to overcoming fear? How can one maintain his confidence in the Lord? How can one be assured that his hopes for continuing deliverance from the Lord will not be disappointed? The answers to these questions are found in verse 14. *"Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."*

'Waiting' for the Lord is important, for God has His own timing. Man tends to take things into his own hands, rushing ahead in an attempt to change his own environment and to force his own will on his personal relationships.

God alone can change people and can control circumstances, and God has His own time schedule and His own ways of working in the affairs of men and of nations. Believers are promised deliverance from their outward oppressors and from their inward fears, but God's methods of rescue may be different than what we expected. God will always rescue the faithful, but God's method of rescue may sometimes be rescue through life's adversities rather than rescue from life's adversities. Hebrews 11 describes the two methods of God's rescue of the righteous. Many of the faithful (like Moses, Gideon, and David) were rescued from the oppression of their enemies. Many of the faithful won battles, overthrew kingdoms, were kept from harm in a den of lions and in a fiery furnace, and were given great power in battle as shown by the fact that they made whole armies turn and run away. (Hebrews 11:33-34) Other faithful servants of God were not delivered from their adversities, but they were delivered through their adversities. God did not choose to deliver their bodies from bodily harm, but God did deliver them from their bodies through death, allowing these choice saints to enter their heavenly home. *"Some died by stoning and some by being sawed in two; others were promised freedom if they would renounce their faith, then were killed with the sword."* (Hebrews 11:37; Living Bible)

The faithful are urged to remain strong and to keep encouraged and not to succumb to despair or to discouragement. 'The best is yet to be', 'the future is bright with the promises of God', and 'God is still on His throne'. *"Don't be impatient. Wait for the Lord, and he will come and save you! Be brave, stouthearted and courageous. Yes, wait and he will help you."* (Psalms 27:14; Living Bible)

The Lord will quiet your fears, and He will bring deliverance to you from your enemies. The faithful often are delivered from physical harm, but if the faithful face death because of their commitment to God, their deliverance is the greatest of all! The deliverance through physical death is even greater than the deliverance from physical death. Paul said, *"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."* (Philippians 1:21). Wrote John Bunyan, "Let dissolution (physical death) come when it will, it can do the Christian no harm, for it be but a passage out of a prison unto a palace."

Expect the Lord to rescue you again and again, and anticipate seeing the continuing goodness of the Lord in the land of the living (Psalms 27:13), but always remember that if God chooses not to rescue you bodily, He will always rescue you spiritually. Whether from death or through death, God is always the great Deliverer. Those who wait for the Lord will always see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living (Psalms 27:13-14).

CONCLUSION: Faith, placed in the living God, is the answer for overcoming your many fears! Even though the faithful are, at times, assailed by doubts because of life's seeming injustices and perplexities, the righteous can rest assured that evil will ultimately be punished and righteousness will ultimately be rewarded. 'Though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is Ruler yet.' There are many causes of fear and several types of fear, but faith in God can conquer all terrorizing fears. The faithful are promised personal safety in the day of trouble (v. 5), if not always safety from physical death, then safe entrance into heaven through physical death. Safety, security, rescue, deliverance - these are the themes of Psalms 27, and these can be the experiences of the people of faith! Exercise faith in a faithful God of goodness, and you will find deliverance from all your terrorizing fears. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world!

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

Chapter 6

Conquering Fear Through Faith

QUESTIONS

1. According to Psalms 27:1, how does the Lord reveal himself to the sin-inflicted and morally-weakened person?
2. Discuss your understanding and reaction to the following statement: "The object of one's faith determines the value of one's faith, and if the Lord is the object of one's faith, then one has nothing to fear."
3. How, according to Psalms 27:2-3, is the conquest of faith described? What are some of the popular 'catchwords' which you have heard that describe the victory of Biblical faith.
4. Describe some of the corporate (institutional) and philosophical systems which aggressively seek (like cannibals) to destroy the faith and life of believers. (Note Psalms 27:2)
5. If the wicked who seem so invincible will eventually fall, then what can be said about the righteous ones who seem so weak in their vulnerability before their wicked opponents? (Note Psalms 27:2-3)
6. What is the Object of faith's desire, according to Psalms 27:4? Give your response to the following statement: "Faith is not mere intellectual assent to right doctrines, but faith is a concentrated focus of the soul's desire for intimate and growing fellowship with God."
7. According to Psalms 27:4a, what was the 'focus' of David's life? Are you a person of divided loyalties, a double-minded man who is unstable in all your ways (James 1:6-7), or are you a person who has brought all your different desires and ambitions and plans and projects and duties to a focused point which is centered on God and your intimate relationship with God?
8. List some of the spiritual and eternal values that should, from a Biblical viewpoint, become the priorities of your life. What is the relationship between 'earnest desires' and 'fervent prayers' and 'decisive actions'?

9. **Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Many a prayer remains unanswered because its pray-ers never do anything to fulfill their prayers.”**
10. **Give your interpretation of the following statement: “Impression without expression leads to depression.” (Note James 2:14-26; I John 3:17-18) Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Prayer is work; prayer works; prayer leads to work.”**
11. **In what three ways does the Psalmist (in Psalms 27:4) describe the kind of relationship which he desires to establish with God?**
12. **What does it mean to “dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life” (Psalms 27:4a)?**
13. **Suggest ways in which you can ‘work’ at cultivating a conscious sense of the abiding presence of God in your life. Give your response to the following statement: “What you desire and what you ask of the Lord in prayer, must be the same thing that you diligently seek after and regularly practice in your life.”**
14. **Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “To see the beauty of the Lord (Psalms 27:4b), you must train yourself to gaze upon the Lord, and gazing takes time and effort and concentration.”**
15. **Share specific ways in which you can “gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.”**
16. **Share what it means to you “to seek God in his temple.” (Psalms 27:4)**
17. **Note those spiritual activities in Psalms 27:4 which respectively show the volitional, emotional, and intellectual dimensions of true faith. (Note Matthew 22:37)**
18. **Tell with what degree of conviction you believe the following statement: “To the extent that one develops a deepening relationship of love with God (issuing forth in a growing love for one’s fellowmen), to that same extent are the various paralyzing fears in one’s life dissipated.” (1 John 4:18)**
19. **Does Psalms 27:5 promise deliverance from troubles or does it promise victory in spite of troubles?**
20. **What, according to Psalms 27:6a, is the appropriate response of the person who experiences deliverance from his enemies by the hand of the Lord?**

21. Give your response to the following statement: "Exuberant worship, heart-warming testimonies, hearty singing, and joyful music - these activities are expressions of a grateful congregation who is conscious of the mighty deliverance of the Lord." Why does there seem to be a tendency in many Christian congregations today to be passive, inhibited, and unemotional in their worship services?
22. What, according to Psalms 27:7-12, are some of the fear-producing circumstances of life that challenge the exercise of faith?
23. What, according to Psalms 27:7, is the great need of the broken-hearted when he cries out to God in a true time of need?
24. Give an example from your own life that illustrates the truth of the following statement: "The wise man obeys those inner spiritual stirrings in his heart and his conscience, and he translates the wholesome impulses of his heart into outward striving for God." (Note Psalms 27:8) Tell with what degree of conviction you agree or disagree with the following statement: "If you take one step toward God, He will take a thousand steps toward you." (Note Psalms 34:17-18)
25. According to Psalms 27:10, does faith have an answer to the fearful possibility of human abandonment? (Note John 14:15-18)
26. In an age of mental confusion and moral chaos, can a sincere believer be assured of divine guidance? (Note Psalms 27:11) From a New Testament perspective, who is the Christian's Guide? (John 14:27)
27. In our modern age, when many believers in many different countries have been falsely accused and even put to death because of deceptive witness, tell why it is possible for the man of faith to make the following declaration: "The Lord is my Chief Defender against false accusations and He is my greatest Protection against violent men". (Note Psalms 27:12; Matthew 5:11-12; Matthew 10:19-20)
28. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Regardless of the challenges and the crisis of life, the future is always bright because of the promises of God." (Note Psalms 27:13)
29. How can one be assured that his hopes for continuing deliverance from the Lord will not be disappointed? (Note Psalms 27:14)

30. **Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “God will always rescue the faithful, but God’s method of rescue may sometimes be rescue through life’s adversities rather than rescue from life’s adversities.” (Note Psalms 27:14; Hebrews 11:33-37)**
31. **In light of the truth of Psalms 27:14, give your reaction to the following statement: “The faithful often are delivered from physical harm, but if the faithful face death because of their commitment to God, their deliverance is the greatest of all. (Note Hebrews 11:36-40; Philippians 1:21) Mediate on Martin Luther’s words in “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”**

**“That word above all earthly powers,
No thanks to them abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through Him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill;
God’s truth abideth still;
His kingdom is forever.”**

32. **Give your response to John Bunyan’s declaration: “Let dissolution (physical death) come when it will, it can do the Christian no harm, for it be but a passage out of a prison into a palace.”**

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!

CHAPTER 7

FREEDOM FROM GUILT

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

CHAPTER 7

FREEDOM FROM GUILT

OUTLINE

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 32: 1 - 11

TEXT: "I acknowledged my sin to thee, and I did not hide my iniquity." (v. 5)

INTRODUCTION: Someone said that the most beautiful word in the English language is the word 'Forgiveness'. Man needs forgiveness because all men are sinners - both the moral and immoral, both the cultured and the uncultured, both the educated and the uneducated. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none that is righteous, no not one!

Is there any hope for lost mankind? Can man experience forgiveness? Can guilt be resolved and can peace be enjoyed? Yes! Guilt acknowledged and sin confessed results in sins forgiven and in peace and joy and love abounding!

OUTLINE:

- I. THE BLESSEDNESS OF SIN CONFESSED (v. 1-2)
 - A. Transgressions Forgiven (Wrong Pardoned)
 - B. Sins Covered (Shame Removed)
 - C. Sin Not Counted Against The Sinner (Judgment Forfeited)
 - D. No Deceit In Spirit (Integrity Established)
- II. THE FOLLY OF SINS UNCONFESSED (v. 3-)
- III. THE BENEFITS OF SINS FORGIVEN (v, 5b- 1)
 - A. Resolution Of All Guilt As A Result Of Past Sins (v. 5b)
 - B. Confidence When Facing God At The Future Judgment (v. 6)
 - C. Strength Presently To Live Abundantly And Joyously Each Day (v. 7- 1)

CONCLUSION: Does guilt plague you and does fear paralyze you? Do you wish your past would not track you, and do you wish that you could face the future with peace? Do you wish you could feel love surrounding you and joy abounding within you? Are you weary of 'keeping silent' regarding your sins (Psalms 32:3)? Is it your desire to confess all your sins to a forgiving God whose grace and whose mercy is everlasting? Now is the day of salvation. Today is your 'golden moment' of opportunity! Tomorrow may be too late! "If we confess our sins to him, He is faithful and just, and He will forgive all our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness!" (I John 1:9)

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

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Dr. Karl Menninger, in his book 'Whatever Became of Sin?' begins his first chapter with an intriguing illustration. On a sunny day in September a stern-faced, plainly dressed man could be seen standing still on a street corner in the busy Chicago Loop. As pedestrians hurried on their way to lunch or business, he would solemnly lift his right arm, and pointing his finger at the person nearest him, shout the single word 'GUILTY!' Notes Menninger, "Then without any change of expression, he would resume his stiff stance for a few moments before repeating the gestures. Then, again, he would raise his arm, point, and solemnly pronounce the word 'GUILTY!' to the passerby. The effect of this strange pantomime on the passing strangers was extraordinary, almost eerie. They would stare at him, hesitate, look away, look at each other, and then at him again; then hurriedly continue on their ways.

"One man, turning to another, exclaimed: 'But how did he know?'"

"No doubt many others had similar thoughts. How did he know?"

"Guilty! Everyone guilty? Guilty of what? Guilty of over parking? Guilty of lying? Guilty of unfaithfulness to a faithful wife? Guilty only of evil thoughts - or evil plans?" (Whatever Became of Sin? Pg. 1, 2)

The man of self-righteous morality can easily condemn the immoral behavior of 'down-and-out' sinners. Adultery, stealing, cheating, murder, and other such actions are easily and rightly condemned, but the man of morality finds it difficult to diagnose the universal disease of all mankind - the disease of self-righteousness and self-centeredness. "The thing that is deeply wrong with human nature is not that some people commit adultery, and some steal, but that all of us are self-centered -- the decent and the indecent, the nice and the nasty. Manners, polish, refinement, and culture only

cover the disease, like rouge on the face of a woman dying of anemia. They can't affect the deadly disease underneath." (Questions People Ask About Religion; Sangster; pg. 58)

Is there any hope for lost mankind? Can man experience forgiveness? Can guilt be resolved and can peace be enjoyed? David was no stranger to sorrow and to heartache and to guilt - most of which were caused by his own wrong moral choices. David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and he murdered her husband Uriah! David covered up his sin and deceived others - including the nation of Israel which he ruled. But the tragic results of covering up his sins, instead of confessing his sins, are understood in terms of personal spiritual deterioration, social alienation, and physical distress. "There was a time when I would not admit what a sinner I was. But my dishonesty made me miserable and filled my days with frustration. All day and all night your hand was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day until I finally admitted all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them." (Psalms 32: 3 - 5; Living Bible)

PROPOSITION: Guilt acknowledge and sin confessed results in sins forgiven and in peace and joy and love abounding.

In seeking to understand freedom from guilt, as taught in Psalms 32, let us look at : (1) The Blessedness of Sins Confessed (v. 1-2); (2) The Folly of Sins Unconfessed (v. 3-5); (3) The Benefits of Sins Forgiven (v. 6 - 11)

I. THE BLESSEDNESS OF SINS CONFESSED (v. 1 - 2)

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit." (v. 1-2) There are four ways David describes the joy that comes through confession of sin.

A. Transgressions Forgiven (Wrong Pardoned)

Sin can be defined as transgression against the known law of God. God's laws are objective and real, and violation against God's laws incurs guilt. The sinner stands guilty and defenseless before God and must confess nothing but moral bankruptcy, and can plead nothing but God's unmerited grace and mercy. The sinner cannot repay God for his serious debt; the sinner can only receive free pardon from the hand of a forgiving God. It is not because of works of righteousness which we have done, but it is according to God's mercy that we are saved!

B. Sins Covered (Shame Removed)

Not only are transgressions forgiven with pardon granted, but sins are covered with shame removed! The Bible says that sinners are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we must deal - God Almighty. There is an all-seeing eye which sees us at all times - our motives and desires and intents and secret plans. We can hide nothing from God. Adam and Eve could not hide their sins from God. Their shame was openly exposed. The shame which the exposure of David's sins brought to David as a result of the brave prophet Nathan's rebuke, was almost more than King David could bear. But David's confession of sins resulted in his sins being covered and his shame being removed.

What joy to know that God not only pardons the wrong, but that He also removes the shame and the embarrassment of sin, and that he restores dignity and esteem and honor to the sinner!

C. Sin Not Counted Against The Sinner (Judgment Forfeited)

Pardon received and shame removed are wonderful benefits of Confession of Sin. But some believers unfortunately are still worried about the future. Will my sins be thrown in my face at the judgment of God someday? Will my hidden sins be exposed in eternity, if I have confessed them to God during my time on earth? Will my sins follow me to the 'judgment bar' of God in eternity, like a 'blood hound' tracking blood in the winter snow? Will my sins be recited to me before the accusing angels in the hereafter?

The Good News is this: The sins which God has pardoned and the shame which God has covered here on earth will not be brought before you in eternity! If God has hidden your sins in the 'sea of His forgetfulness' when you confessed them here on earth, you can be assured that your sins will remain buried at the time of final judgment hereafter. "What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record." (v. 2; Living Bible) Jesus is our 'sin bearer' and He took our judgment for us when He died on the cross.

**"My sin - O the bliss of that glorious thought!
My sin - not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to His cross, and I bear it no more;
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!"**

If you honestly confess your sins to Christ and forsake your old ways of life, then you can be assured that God will not remember your sins against you

ever again! As far as the east is from the west, so far are your sins removed from you. They are hid in the 'sea of God's forgetfulness'!

D. No Deceit In Spirit (Integrity Established)

One of the great benefits of honest confession of sin to God is a sense of inner cleansing from deceit and falsehood and duplicity. The deceitful spirit is the one which seeks to trick others. One who is deceitful is one who tries to appear good in the eyes of others even though his spiritual condition is contradictory to his outward profession. The Pharisees during Jesus' day appeared to others as religious and respectable, but Jesus saw the corrupt hearts of these hypocritical religious leaders. Jesus' piercing eyes saw below the religious facade of the Pharisees and He exposed their deceitful hearts. "Woe to you, Pharisees, and you religious leaders - hypocrites! You are so careful to polish the outside of the cup, but the inside is foul with extortion and greed. Blind Pharisees! First cleanse the inside of the cup, and then the whole cup will be clean. Woe to you, Pharisees, and you religious leaders! You are like beautiful mausoleums - full of dead men's bones, and of foulness and corruption. You try to look like saintly men, but underneath those pious robes of yours are hearts besmirched with every sort of hypocrisy and sin." (Matthew 23: 25-28; Living Bible)

He who pardons wrongs and he who removes shame and he who forgets judgment, is He who positively establishes inner soul integrity and heart purity. The God who outwardly pardons sin is He who inwardly purifies the sinner. The pardoned sinner becomes the assured believer who can face the world with boldness and who can look at himself with confidence. His inward integrity and his outward honesty are one and the same. He is not double-minded or two-faced, but transparent and real. No disguises or deceit or duplicity, but purity and poise and purpose! Inwardly and outwardly whole and holy! Not guiltless, but blameless! Still human and subject to mistakes and in need of daily cleansing, but a forgiven sinner who is becoming a perfected saint!

O the blessedness of forgiveness! No wonder that some people consider 'forgiveness' to be the most beautiful word of the English language! Transgressions pardoned, shame removed, judgment forfeited, integrity established!

II. THE FOLLY OF SINS UNCONFESSED (v. 3 - 5)

We have noted in verses 1 - 2 that transgressions can be forgiven and sins can be covered and judgment can be forfeited and integrity and purity can be established! This is what God can do! The possibilities of divine grace are limitless! There is no

stain of sin which is so deep but what the blood of Jesus goes deeper yet! Where sin abounds, grace superabounds! As long as there is breath, there is hope - hope of forgiveness, restoration, and peace!

But if God is so willing and ready to forgive, what must the sinner do to be forgiven? He must confess his sins to God. 'Confession' means 'agree with God that God's estimate of your moral condition is right'. Confession involves repentance and repentance means 'a change of mind' regarding sin from one of embracing sin to one of forsaking sin. Repentance means 'godly sorrow', acknowledging one's personal moral responsibility. "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord' - and you forgave the guilt of my sin." (Psalms 32:5)

There is no attempt to escape personal moral responsibility. The blame is not put on one's environment, heredity, background, society, parents, or friends. Says Dr. Boisen, perceptive psychiatrist, "My observation is that the patient who condemns himself, even to the point of thinking he has committed the unpardonable sin, is likely to get well. It is the patient who blames others who does not get well...Self-blame, even when it leads to severe psychosis, means the recognition that something is wrong and the acceptance of one's responsibility for the difficulty. The emotional disturbance which follows is then analogous to fever or inflammation in the body. It is not an evil but a manifestation of nature's power to heal." (Quoted in The Crisis In Psychiatry and Religion; O. Hobart Mowrer; pg. 66). Real guilt comes, not from acts which the individual would commit but dares not (Freudian psychology), but from acts which he has committed but wishes that he had not committed (Christian View). Therefore, confession of sin to God is the only way to find deliverance from real guilt!

If confession brings forgiveness of sins, the 'keeping silent' (refusing to confess sins) brings great misery - mentally and physically and spiritually. David describes the misery which he experienced as a result of his failure openly to confess his sins to God. "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer." (v. 3 -4)

Increasingly it is being shown that hidden, suppressed, and unconfessed sin infects the body as well as the soul. Guilt produces within man a sense of God's displeasure. Guilt can cause man to avoid his own best friend (Jesus Christ) and can make that Friend out to be an enemy to be avoided! Notes Spurgeon, "While we smother our sin it rages within, and like a gathering wound swells horribly and torments terribly...Under terrors of conscience, men have little rest by night, for the grim thoughts of the day dog them to their chambers and haunt their dreams, or else

they lie awake in a cold sweat of dread. God's hand is very helpful when it uplifts, but it is awful when it presses down; better a world on the shoulder, like Atlas, than God's hand on the heart, spoke David." (Treasury of David; Vol. 2; pg. 90-91)

David 'kept silent', failing quickly to confess his sins to God, and, as a result, he suffered greatly. What are ways in which people today 'keep silent' regarding their sins?

Some rationalize sin, and say 'I am as good as many church folks!' True, but irrelevant! What does this statement prove? God is our standard, not other people! Hypocrites will keep many people out of heaven!

Some project the blame of their sins onto someone else - that is, they scapegoat their sins. "It is easy enough to find all kinds of defenses behind which to seek to hide. We may blame our sins on our heredity, on our environment, on our temperament, on our physical condition." (Daily Study Bible; pg. 39; Barclay; I John).

**"At three I had feelings of Ambivalence toward my brothers,
And so it follows naturally I poisoned all my lovers.
But now, I'm happy; I have learned the lesson this has taught;
That everything I do that's wrong is someone else's fault."**

Have you heard people try to escape personal moral responsibility by saying, 'The devil made me do it!'?

It is bad enough to rationalize sin. It is perhaps worse to blame others for our actions of moral irresponsibility. Worse yet, is to be callously indifferent to sin and to sin's consequences. Notes Barclay, "At first a man regards some wrong thing with horror; the second stage comes when he is tempted into doing it, but even as he does it, he is still unhappy and ill at ease and very conscious that it is wrong; the third stage is when he has done the thing so often that he does it without a qualm." (Daily Study Bible; Ephesians; Barclay; pg. 114)

There are those who "claim that sin has no effect upon them, who say that they can sin and take no harm; who insist that they can take their pleasures, and, if need be, make their mistakes and emerge none the worse for them." (Daily Study Bible; I John; Barclay; pg. 39) In other words, there are those who feel that they can sow 'wild oats' and yet never have to 'reap wild oats'. They do not see the 'cause and effect' of sin! Paul wrote, "Don't be misled; remember that you can't ignore God and get away with it: a man will always reap the kind of crop he sows! If he sows to please his own desires, he will be planting seeds of evil and he will surely reap a harvest of spiritual decay and death; but if he plants the good things of the spirit, he will reap the everlasting life which the Holy Spirit gives him." (Galatians 6: 7, 8; Living Bible)

III. THE BENEFITS OF SINS FORGIVEN (. 5b - 11)

What are the benefits derived when one honestly acknowledges his sins and openly confesses them to God?

A. Resolution Of All Guilt As A Result Of Past Sins (v. 5b)

“I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’ - and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” (v. 5b)

What an unspeakably great joy to know that the sins of one’s past are totally forgiven and that the heavy guilt is totally resolved! No longer does one feel the heavy hand of God resting upon him, but instead the gentle hand of God guiding him! The frown of God’s disapproval is replaced by the smile of God’s approval. One no longer feels his bones wasting away, but instead he feels his health being restored and renewed. His groans of despair are turned to songs of praise and thanksgiving. His strength is no longer sapped by guilt, but his strength is renewed by grace. The bondage of sin gives way to the liberation of love. The bad memories of foregone days in sin’s evil plots are replaced by the sweet plans of new and anticipated projects of love and mercy.

B. Confidence When Facing God At The Future Judgment (v. 6)

If forgiveness makes peace with the past, it is also true that forgiveness prepares one for the future. *“Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him.” (v. 6)*

The one who enjoys the forgiveness of sins is the one who assures himself against punishment and condemnation at the future judgment of God. Like a rising flood of water which threatens to sweep away an earthly dwelling, so the impending judgment of God hereafter will be like the mighty waters which rise to reach and to sweep away the wicked. The ‘mighty waters’ of God’s judgment will not reach the righteous, however, for their confessed sins have already been forgiven, as a result of their sins having already been judged on Mount Calvary when Jesus died for sinners.

“The mercy seat is the way to heaven for all who shall ever come there. There is, however, a set time for prayer, beyond which it will be unavailing; between the time of sin and the day of punishment mercy rules the hour, and God may be found, but when once the sentence has gone forth pleading will be useless, for the Lord will not be found by the condemned soul. O dear reader, slight not the accepted time, waste not the day of salvation. The godly pray

while the Lord has promised to answer, the ungodly postpone their petitions till the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and then their knocking is too late.” (Treasury of David; vol. 2; pg. 92; Spurgeon)

Have you confessed all your sins to God? Those who repent now will be spared God’s judgment hereafter! But those who spurn God’s mercy now will reap God’s fiery judgment hereafter! One of the great benefits of forgiveness is security against the future wrath of Almighty God. When the mighty waters of judgment rise, the righteous ones will remain safe. The waters of God’s judgment will not reach them!

C. Strength Presently To Live Abundantly And Joyously Each Day (v. 7 - 11)

If there is forgiveness (resolution of guilt) for PAST sins, and if there is confidence to face FUTURE judgment, there is also strength to live PRESENTLY.

(1) *Protection during the storms of life* (v. 7a).

“*You are my hiding place from every storm of life*” (v. 7a; Living Bible). The forgiven man is the protected man. The storms of life will come, but the man of faith finds his hiding place in the Lord. Far from an enemy to be avoided because of guilt’s fears, the Lord is a refuge to be enjoyed during the storms of life.

(2) *Victory over the troubles of life* (v. 7b).

“*You even keep me from getting into trouble!*” (v. 7b; Living Bible)
“Trouble shall do me no real harm when the Lord is with me, rather it shall bring me much benefit, like the file which clears away the rust, but does not destroy the metal.” (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 92)

(3) *Divinely-given guidance and instruction along life’s pathway, conditional upon the believer’s attitude of submission and obedience* (v. 8-9).

“I will instruct you (says the Lord) and guide you along the best pathway for your life; I will advise you and watch your progress. Don’t be like a senseless horse and mule that has to have a bit in its mouth to keep it in line!” (v. 8-9) Notes Spurgeon, “We are not pardoned that we may henceforth live after our own lusts, but that we may be educated in holiness and trained for perfection.” (Ibid; pg. 93)

(4) *Abiding love and abounding joy to trusting and obedient believers (v. 10 - 11)*

“Many sorrows come to the wicked, but abiding love surrounds those who trust in the Lord. So rejoice in him, all those who are his, and shout for joy, all those who try to obey him.” (v. 10 -11; Living Bible)

There may be ‘pleasures in sin for a season’, but the way of sin is the way of sorrow. There may be occasional sorrows and heartbreaks in the Christian life, but the way of repentance and faith is the way of abiding love and abounding joy. Just as Jesus grew in favor with God and with man, so the man whose heart is broken and whose spirit is contrite will find himself favored by God and loved by his fellowmen. Sorrow because of repentance will last for awhile, but sorrow will give way to ‘joy that is unspeakable and full of glory’. Abiding love and abounding joy is the eternal inheritance of God’s people. Is it any wonder that God’s people are urged to rejoice and to shout! ***“So rejoice in him, all those who are his, and shout for joy, all those who try to obey him.” (v. 11; Living Bible)*** He who is forgiven much will love much, and he who loves the Lord deeply will rejoice exaltedly!

Comments Spurgeon on this verse: **“It is to be feared that the church of the present day, through a craving for excessive propriety, is growing too artificial; so that inquirers’ cries and believers’ shouts would be silenced if they were heard in our assemblies. This may be better than boisterous fanaticism, but there is as much danger in the one direction as the other. For our part, we are touched to the heart by a little sacred excess, and when godly men in their joy overleap the narrow bounds of decorum, we do not, like Michael, Saul’s daughter, eye them with sneering heart.” (Ibid, pg. 94)**

CONCLUSION: Does guilt plague you and does fear paralyze you? Do you wish your past would not track you, and do you wish that you could face the future with peace? Do you wish you could feel love surrounding you and joy abounding within you? Are you weary of ‘keeping silent’ regarding your sins (Psalms 32:3)? Is it your desire to confess all your sins to a forgiving God whose grace and whose mercy is everlasting? Now is the day of salvation. Today is your ‘golden moment’ of opportunity! Tomorrow may be too late! “If we confess our sins to him, He is faithful and just, and He will forgive all our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness!” (I John 1:9)

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE

Chapter 7

Freedom From Guilt

QUESTIONS

1. Why can it be said that 'forgiveness' is the most beautiful word in the English language?
2. What is the universal disease of mankind, and why do people of great morality have a hard time recognizing this disease?
3. What, according to Psalms 32:3-5, were the tragic results when David attempted to 'cover up' his sins?
4. When guilt is incurred because of violations of God's objective laws, what response should a sinner appropriately make in order that forgiveness may be experienced? (Psalms 32: 1-2)
5. What does it mean to have one's 'sins removed'? (Psalms 32:2)
6. Will your hidden (secret) sins be exposed in eternity, if you have confessed them to God during your time on earth? Why or why not? (Psalms 32:2)
7. What's the result in life of a person whose life has been cleansed of deceit? (Psalms 32:2) Tell what is your response to the following statement: "There is no stain of sin which is so deep but what the blood of Jesus goes deeper yet."
8. What is the meaning of "confession"? (Psalms 32:5)
9. How would you distinguish between 'real' and 'false' guilt? Give your response to the following statement: "Real guilt comes, not from acts which the individual would commit but dares not (Freudian psychology), but from acts which he has committed but wishes he had not committed (Christian view)."
10. Is there documented evidence that shows that hidden, suppressed, and unconfessed sin actually can cause physical illness, as well as mental anguish and spiritual distress?
11. What are several ways in which people today 'keep silent' regarding their sins? (Psalms 32:3)

12. **In terms of one's relationship to God, to himself, and to others, describe some of the dramatic changes that take place in the life of the one who genuinely repents of his sins. (Psalms 32:5)**
13. **In God's total plan for mankind, does God have an appointed time in which mankind may receive forgiveness through confession of sins, after which time the 'day of grace' shall give way to the 'day of unremitting judgment'? Give your comment on the following statement: "The godly pray while the Lord has promised to answer, the ungodly postpone their petitions till the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and then the knocking is too late."**
14. **In what ways do you believe that God protects the believer during the "storms of life"? (Psalms 32:7a)**
15. **Tell what you think is meant by God's promise to the trusting believer: "You will protect me from trouble." Give your response to the following quotation: "Trouble shall do me no real harm when the Lord is with me, rather it shall bring me much benefit, like the file which cleans away the rust, but does not destroy the metal."**
16. **For those who are confused in mind and distraught in spirit, tell how the following words of comfort provide encouragement: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you."**
17. **What conditions, according to Psalms 32:9, must a believer meet in order to receive divine guidance in his life?"**
18. **According to Psalms 32:10, how is the 'high cost' in not serving God described, and what are some of the great benefits in trusting God?**
19. **Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "There may be occasional sorrows and heartbreaks in the Christian life, but the way of repentance and faith is the way of abiding love and abounding joy."**
20. **Tell why you agree or disagree with the following quotation from Charles Spurgeon: "It is to be feared that the church of the present day, through a craving for excessive propriety, is growing too artificial; so that inquirers' cries and believers' shouts would be silenced if they were heard in our assemblies."**

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 8

VICTORY OVER DEPRESSION

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 8

VICTORY OVER DEPRESSION

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 42:1-11

TEXT: *“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”* (v. 11)

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever had a heartbreaking time in your life when your tears became your food day and night? “Depression is a major ill that affects more people than we imagine and infects them more than we realize.” (Briscoe)

PROPOSITION: There is no depression so great but what the love and the power of God are greater yet. Through a positive exercise of one’s volition and the positive disciplining of one’s thoughts, the depressed person can learn to turn from his dark moods and his hurtful feelings to the God of hope whose power is able to save to the uttermost.

I. THE LONGINGS OF A SOUL THAT IS DESPERATE (v. 1-3).

- A. Insatiable Thirst For God (v. 1)**
- B. Intense Homesickness For God (v. 2)**
- C. Incessant Tears From Sorrow (v. 3a)**
- D. Insensitive Taunts From Cruel Men (v. 3b)**

II. THE MEMORIES OF A SOUL THAT IS LONELY (v. 4)

- A. Unleashed Sorrows Of A Soul Focusing On Present Troubles (v. 4a)**
- B. Nostalgic Memories Of A Soul Recollecting Past Troubles (v. 4b.)**

III. THE REMINDERS OF A SOUL THAT IS THOUGHTFUL (v. 5-8)

- A. Causes Of Depression Must Be Explored (v. 5a)**
- B. Source Of Hope Must Be Reaffirmed (v. 5b)**
- C. Communion In The Past Must Be Recalled (v. 6)**
- D. Sovereignty Of God Must Be Acknowledged (v. 7)**
- E. Mercy Of God Must Be Anticipated (v. 8)**

IV. THE AGONIES OF A SOUL THAT IS OPPRESSED (v. 9-10)

- A. The Mystery Of Restraints In Divine Intervention (v. 9)**
- B. The Agony Of Ridicule By Human Interrogation (v. 10)**

V. THE REAFFIRMATIONS OF A SOUL THAT IS HOPEFUL (v. 11)

A. Present Reassurance Based On Reflective Questioning (v. 11a)

B. Future Confidence Based On Reliable Commitment (v. 11b)

CONCLUSION: You can find victory over your depression! However, it will require the positive exercise of your will and the positive disciplining of your thoughts. Explore the possible cause of your depression. Affirm the fact that God is the source of your hope and the object of your faith. Recall the past blessings of God in your life, and remember that God, as sovereign, is in total control of all circumstances - even those circumstances which have given birth to your depression. Anticipate that God's mercies will be poured out upon you, anew and afresh. Realize that God has a purpose to accomplish even in your depression, that God can take the broken pieces of your shattered life and can make something beautiful out of brokenness. Even though God seems at times to be slow in His divine intervention, and even though the cruel taunts of insensitive men inflict deep hurts to your soul, remember that God is your Savior and as such is able and ready to save you out of your 'pits of despair'. Reaffirm your faith in a faithful God! Say to yourself, "I will put my faith in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." "The saddest countenance shall yet be made to shine, if there be a taking of God at his word and an expectation of his salvation." (Spurgeon)

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 8

VICTORY OVER DEPRESSION

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 42:1-11

TEXT: *“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”* (v. 11)

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever had a heartbreaking time in your life when your tears became your food day and night? “Depression is a major ill that affects more people than we imagine and infects them more than we realize.” (What Works When Life Doesn’t? Briscoe; pg. 114)

Is there any victory over depression? Psalms 42 vividly describes the nature, the possible causes, and the ultimate cure for depression. This Psalm describes (1) The Longings of a Soul that is Desperate (v. 1-3); (2) The Memories of a Soul that is Lonely (v. 4); (3) The Reminders of a Soul that is Thoughtful (v. 5 - 8); (4) The Agonies of a Soul that is Oppressed (v. 9-10); (5) The Reaffirmations of a Soul that is Hopeful (v. 11).

PROPOSITION: There is no depression so great but what the love and the power of God are greater yet. Through a positive exercise of one’s volition and the positive disciplining of one’s thoughts, the depressed person can learn to turn from his dark moods and his hurtful feelings to the God of hope whose power is able to save to the uttermost.

I. THE LONGINGS OF A SOUL THAT IS DESPERATE (v. 1-3).

There are some persons whose deep depression has left them passive and listless and speechless. But there is a depression which finds expression in desperate pleas and pathetic groans and heartbroken cries. It was the latter kind of depression that David experienced - a depression that rent his soul and broke his heart and confused his mind. A depression that resulted in David feeling that God was far removed from him, that God had forgotten him, that God had even hidden Himself from human approach. David’s deep depression gave way to agonizing cries and to desperate pleadings.

A. Insatiable Thirst For God (v. 1)

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.”
(v. 1) The soul which feels that God is absent is the soul that feels it is going to

die for lack of security and satisfaction. Man's soul is made for God, and therefore the soul that feels separated from God is like a famished deer that is panting to fulfill its basic need - cold water from a welcome stream!

B. Intense Homesickness For God (v. 2)

"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (v. 2)

Whatever were the specific circumstances in David's life when this Psalm was written, it is quite certain that David's depression was partly caused by the fact that he was far removed from the center of public worship in Jerusalem. Because he was debarred from public worship, David was both depressed and heart-sick. "See how pathetically he questions as to the prospect of his again uniting in the joyous gathering! How he repeats and reiterates his desire!" (Treasury of David; Spurgeon; Vol. 2; pg. 300)

If your depression is caused by separation from a loved one, would you not find yourself experiencing intense longings to be reunited with your loved one? Does not the depression caused by your homesickness give expression in deep longings of your soul to be with the one who occupies your thoughts day and night? David was heartsick and depressed because he was homesick for the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. He longed to be reunited with fellow worshipers whom he loved so deeply.

C. Incessant Tears From Sorrow (v. 3a)

"My tears have been my food day and night." (v. 3a) If you have ever been heartbroken because of hard-to-understand circumstances, or because of separation from those you long to be with, or because of God's seeming absence from your life, or because of the cruel reactions of peers in your environment - then you can in some ways understand the perpetual sorrow which David experienced in his state of deep depression. He wept day and night. His deep grief took away his physical appetite. When we are depressed, how easy it is for us to succumb to our feelings and to fall into the pit of self-pity and to think that there is no way out of our 'unique' predicament!

D. Insensitive Taunts From Cruel Men (v. 3b)

"While men say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'" (v. 3b) It is bad enough to experience lonely depression within the solitude of our private dwelling, but our bad experiences become worse experiences when our grief becomes obvious to the outside world which responds with hurting questions rather than with sympathetic understanding!

When you are going through depression, it is easy for outsiders to question your spirituality. All day long people may look askance at you. They may question your present standing with God. They may be so bold as to ask you: 'Where is your God?' When the crucified Jesus was agonizing on His cross, did not His enemies taunt Him with these words: "*He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One. If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.*" (Luke 23: 35,36) In other words, "If God is with you, then why are you in such a predicament?"

When Christians are depressed, pray for them, love them, listen to them, talk to them about past days of mercy and about future days of hope, but don't question their spirituality and don't ask: "Where is your God?" There are enough cruel unbelievers who like to taunt depressed believers with the question, critically asked: "Where is your God?" In other words: "You who claim to be so close to God, now where is your God when you need Him most in your depressed state? Why should you even be depressed if you are a Christian?" The insensitive taunts from cruel men add further hurt to injury, intensifying the depression of the one who needs sympathy rather than ridicule!

II. THE MEMORIES OF A SOUL THAT IS LONELY (v. 4)

There are probably many factors that tend to intensify one's depression, but one common tendency of a depressed person is to reflect upon bygone days which were filled with joy in contrast to the present days which seem to be filled with nothing but misery. This contrast between one's present agony and one's past ecstasy intensifies one's feelings of depression.

A. Unleashed Sorrows Of A Soul Focusing On Present Troubles (v. 4a)

David's reflection on past joys resulted in his pouring out his soul in agony because of present troubles. "*These things I remember as I pour out my soul.*" (v. 4a)

It is not uncommon for a depressed soul to unleash his feelings of sorrow as he focuses upon his present overwhelming troubles in contrast to his past days of unbounded joys and triumphs.

B. Nostalgic Memories Of A Soul Recollecting Past Triumphs (v. 4b.)

David recalled the joys of the past when he *“used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.”* (v. 4b) *“Painful reflections were awakened by the memory of past joys; he had mingled in the pious throng, their numbers had helped to give him exhilaration and to awaken holy delight, their company had been a charm to him as with them he ascended the hill of Zion.”* (Spurgeon; *Ibid*; pg. 301)

It is not uncommon for people who have fallen into a state of depression because of heartbreaking adversities, to idealize the past and to long to return to the past. Nostalgic memories of a pleasant past make the present difficult circumstances seem even worse than what they really are. There is a great tendency for the depressed person to want to return to the ‘good old days’ - the days when all was peace and calm and happiness, the days when the children were all still at home, the days when life was much simpler, the days when the traditional values of morality were respected by almost everyone, the days when the employer was more understanding, the days when the church was smaller and more friendly, the days when neighbors took time to visit rather than being glued to the T.V. set, the days when health was enjoyed and ‘aches and pains’ were unknown, the days when the wife did not have to work outside of the home to balance the family budget.

Morose reminiscing on the ‘good old days’ tends to intensify the sorrows and the loneliness of one’s present.

III. THE REMINDERS OF A SOUL THAT IS THOUGHTFUL (v. 5-8)

Notes Stuart Briscoe, *“The details of David’s circumstances may differ from ours, but the experience of his depression is not at all removed from the symptoms suffered by so many. Self-pity, brooding, withdrawal, morose reminiscing, introspection have been the painful lot of the depressed in all ages.”* (*What Works When Life Doesn’t*; pg. 116)

A. Causes Of Depression Must Be Explored (v. 5a)

“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?” (v. 5a)

These are the honest questions which a depressed soul should ask himself, in an attempt to pinpoint the cause or causes of his depression.

“As though he were two men, the psalmist talks to himself. His faith reasons with his fears, his hope argues with his sorrows.” (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 301)

There are many causes of depression, and the one who is experiencing deep depression may be so clouded in his thinking that he is unable to pinpoint the specific causes without the aid of an understanding friend or perhaps even the aid of a compassionate professional counselor. But the depressed person who decides to give counsel to his higher reasoning powers rather than to his lower emotions, is on the road to recovery. Objective thinking must replace mere subjective emotions. Pinpointing the causes of emotional depression is more than half the solution.

One must ask himself: “Is my depression caused by unresolved guilt and unconfessed sins?” “Is my depression caused by false guilt, imposed upon me by my own overly-sensitive conscience or overstrict parents or by satanic accusations?” “Is my depression caused by chemical imbalance in my physiological makeup, which could easily be treated medically?” “Is my depression caused by subconscious fears which I am unaware of or by conscious fears which I have been unwilling to face - fears like ‘fear of failure’ or ‘fear of rejection’ or ‘fear of the unknown future’ or ‘fear of death?’” “Is my depression caused by my sense of personal inadequacy, brought on because of my unrealistic and perfectionist ideals for personal achievements?” “Is my depression caused by my jealous feelings towards a competitor whose accomplishments have overshadowed my accomplishments, resulting in my ego becoming deflated and my self-esteem being injured?” “Is my depression caused by the attitudes which others have towards me - attitudes of judgmentalism and critical fault-finding?” “Is my depression caused by a sudden change in my environment from one filled with exciting adventure to one filled with disappointments and failures?” “Is my depression caused by a major emotional let-down following the completion of a major project in my life?” “Is my depression caused by the lose of loved ones or friends, either as a result of sudden death or unexpected moving?” “Is my depression caused by worry and anxiety - worry over financial uncertainties, or worry because of physical infirmities, or anxiety because of a change of jobs?”

Wise is the depressed person who positively exercises his will to put his hurtful feelings behind him long enough to investigate possible sources of his depression. It is almost impossible to solve problems without understanding the nature of the problems. Clear thinking regarding possible causes of depression helps to solve the problem of depression!

B. Source Of Hope Must Be Reaffirmed (v. 5b)

The psalmist continues to talk to himself: *“Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”* (v. 5b)

After one has sought to pinpoint the source or cause of his depression, he must not unduly focus on the cause but he must begin to focus on the power and the greatness of God. What gets your attention, gets you. Refocus on God. That is, one must place his faith in God’s power as the basis for solving his problem which has caused his depression. The answer to depression is ‘my Savior and my God’. A personal relationship with Christ and faith in an all-knowing and in an all-powerful God is what enables one to deal effectively with his depressing problems. God is the source of hope, and hope is what drives the depressed person to find answers for his debilitating problems. One who is overcome with despair is one who becomes more and more depressed, and such depression can lead eventually to suicide. The despairing person must get his eyes off of the hurtful circumstances around him, and he must focus his attention on God. God is ‘Savior’ and thus, by nature, he is able to deliver one out of the ‘slough of despondency’. He who is ‘mighty to save’ is He who is able to put joy in the heart and a song on the lips. David reminds himself that, through a decisive act of his will, he must place his faith in a hope-producing God. The troubling circumstances may seem hopeless in terms of change, but the depressed person who begins to look to the Lord will find that God can change the circumstances that gave birth to depression. But, if God does not choose to change the depressing circumstances, He is always ready to change the attitudes and the moods of the depressed person, such that the one-time depressed person finds himself ‘singing and praising God’ in spite of depressing circumstances! There is a song with these words: “Anyone can sing when the sun is shining bright, but it takes ‘a song in the night’”. God is able to give a person a ‘song in the night’ of depressing circumstances. If it is not because of circumstances changing, then it can be in spite of circumstances not changing, that the man of faith can begin to sing songs of joy rather than continue to groan away his life in depression!

C. Communion In The Past Must Be Recalled (v. 6)

Learning to cope with depression involves pinpointing the cause of the depression and then learning to focus on the God of hope rather than upon the feelings of hopelessness. Notes Stuart Briscoe, “When people start looking at the Lord and His attributes and abilities instead of their own failings and situations, I believe they turn the corner. But make no mistake, a definite act of the will is required!” (What Works When Life Doesn’t? pg. 119)

The next step in overcoming depression is to recall past days of joy and communion with the Lord. As David continues to talk to himself, he recalls his past choice hours of sweet communion with the Lord. *“My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon - from Mount Mizar.”* (v. 6) Notes Spurgeon, “It is great wisdom to store up in memory our choice occasions of converse with heaven; we may want them another day, when the Lord is slow in bringing back his banished ones, and our soul is aching with fear.” (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 303)

The God of yesterday whose blessings were enjoyed is the God of the present whose will it is to pour out new and greater blessings today and tomorrow. His loving kindness is from everlasting to everlasting. The present ‘desert experiences’ will not last forever; the ‘joy of the Lord’ will be restored to the presently distressed believer. God will not allow His saints to shed needless tears. The present tears of mourning will be wiped away and God will speak peace to the tempestuous waves of turmoil.

Recall the past days of sweet communion with your Lord. To help you to recall the past, you may need to develop the discipline of keeping a daily spiritual Journal. When the ‘blues’ overtake you, open your Journal and remind yourself that the God of past blessings is the all-sufficient God whose mercies never fail. They are fresh every morning!

D. Sovereignty Of God Must Be Acknowledged (v. 7)

In his attempt to ‘get out of the dumps’, David continues to speak. This time to the Lord: *“Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.”* (v. 7)

A vivid description of David’s helpless feelings of sorrow and depression! “His soul seemed drowned as in a universal deluge of trouble, over whose waves the providence of the Lord moved as a watery pillar, in dreadful majesty inspiring the utmost terror.” (Spurgeon; pg. 303)

David is acknowledging the fact of God’s sovereignty when he speaks of the ‘waterfalls’ and the ‘waves’ and the ‘breakers’ which are sweeping over him as belonging to God. “It is some comfort to remember that the waves and billows are the Lord’s, ‘thy waves and thy billows’, says David, they are all sent, and directed by him, and achieve

his designs, and the child of God knowing this, is the more resigned.”
(Spurgeon; pg. 303)

This is not to say that God is the author of depression or that He sends depression to people. God is not the source of depression. God is the source of love and joy and peace. Nevertheless, God is sovereign, and, as such, God allows His saints to go through the valleys of depression. God is ultimately in control of events and circumstances. God can use any experience in the life of his children - even the experience of depression - to help perfect the character of his saints.

“When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply.
The flame shall not hurt thee;
I only design thy dross to consume,
And thy gold to refine.”

All things - even depression - work into a pattern for good to those who love the Lord! (Romans 8:28) God can even use the billows and the waves of sorrow to accomplish ultimate good for His saints! When you are going through hard times, just remember that God is in control. The surrendered Christian can rest assured that all his experiences - even the experience of depression - are under God’s watchful eye and can only happen with God’s permission. Never forget: God allowed Job to be depressed and grief-stricken for a reason - a reason perhaps not always fully understood by the believer but fully known to the Father of love!

E. Mercy Of God Must Be Anticipated (v. 8)

We are looking at the steps which one must take to overcome his depression: (1) Causes of depression must be explored (v. 5a), (2) Source of hope must be affirmed (v. 5b), (3) Communion in past must be recalled (v. 6), (4) Sovereignty of God must be acknowledged (v. 7).

The fifth step is found in verse 8 - Mercy of God must be anticipated. “By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me - a prayer to the God of my life.”

‘Though the wrong seems off so strong, God is Ruler yet.’
‘Though sorrows like sea billows roll’, God will still the wild seas and He will bring peace to the troubled soul. “The day may darken into a strange and untimely midnight, but the love of God ordained of old to be the portion of the elect, shall be the sovereign decree meted out to

them. No day shall ever dawn on an heir of grace and find him altogether forsaken of his Lord: the Lord reigneth, and as a sovereign he will with authority command mercy to be reserved for his chosen.” (Spurgeon; pg. 304)

Even though the depressed may have no desire to pray, it is important, nevertheless, to exercise positive volition in prayer, for the object of prayer is a God whose mercies are never failing. Behind the angry clouds of darkness and gloom, there is the shining countenance of the God of love whose nature it is to forgive and to restore and to bless. When you are in the ‘desert of despondency’, look up and anticipate God’s showers of blessings soon to fall upon you! ‘The best is yet to be’. After the darkest night comes the brightest morning! God intends for your depression to pass, and for your joy to be restored unto you! Anticipate the mercy of the Lord!

IV. THE AGONIES OF A SOUL THAT IS OPPRESSED (v. 9-10)

What happens to the person whose sorrows seem to continue and whose depression seems to deepen? Such a person can become more introverted, or he can choose instead to become more persistent in his approach to God. His depression may temporarily deepen as a result of the cruel interrogations of those humans around him (v. 10b), and as a result of the mystery of God’s seeming restraints in exercising divine intervention (v. 9), but the depressed one must persevere in his honest and frank approach towards God.

A. The Mystery Of Restraints In Divine Intervention (v. 9)

“I say to God my Rock, ‘Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?’” “Faith is allowed to enquire of her God the causes of his displeasure, and she is even permitted to expostulate with him and put him in mind of his promises, and ask why apparently they are not fulfilled. If the Lord be indeed our refuge, when we find no refuge, it is time to be raising the question, ‘Why is this?’ Yet we must not let go our hold, the Lord must be ‘my’ rock still; we must keep to him as our alone confidence, and never forego our interest in him.” (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 304)

Never fear to be open and honest and direct and frank with God. There are many mysteries surrounding God’s divine methods. Never be fearful to ask God any question. Only as you question will the answers be forthcoming. “God’s ways are higher than our ways, as high as the heavens are above the earth.” You will never know all the reasons for

human suffering, but some of your 'question marks' will be straightened out into 'exclamation marks' if you earnestly and persistently enquire of the Lord as to the 'Why' of your predicaments. God is not obligated to give an intellectual defense for His divine actions, but if God does not tell you the 'Whys' of your human suffering, He will tell you 'Hows' - 'How to use difficult circumstances to advance your own spiritual life and to serve His own holy causes.' Questioning God can be an ally, not an enemy, of your Christian faith. It is not given to humans the ability to solve the total mystery as to why God seems sometimes to be so slow in using His divine power to intervene in human problems, but asking honest questions of God is no sin. It is no sin to ask: "How can the strong God, who is as firm and abiding as a rock, be as hard and unmoved as a rock towards those who trust in him? Such enquiries humbly pressed often afford relief to the soul. To know the reason for sorrow is in part to know how to escape it, or at least to endure it. Want of attentive consideration often makes adversity appear to be more mysterious and hopeless than it really is." (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 304)

B. The Agony Of Ridicule By Human Interrogation (v. 10)

When God's ears seem to be closed to the cry of the suffering, the temptation is to believe that God has forgotten his hurting child. Doubts assail and fears annoy when the believer looks at the power of God on one hand and looks at the weakness of his own broken life on the other hand. Why is God's power (as a Rock) not being exercised in his behalf as a believer whose troubled life is presently like shifting sand? "*Why have you, O God, forgotten me?*" (v. 9)

Added to the agony of feeling that God has forgotten you, is the agony of knowing that human interrogators are cruelly taunting you. Wrote David, "*My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'*" (v. 10)

"The tongue cuts to the bone, and its wounds are hard to cure....This (question) is the unkindest cut of all, reflecting as it does both upon the Lord's faithfulness and his servant's character." (Spurgeon; pg. 304) Cruel are the taunts of evil men who look upon the brokenness of believers and say, "Where is your God? If he is such a great God as you say He is, then why doesn't He deliver you from your misery? If you are such a great Christian, then why are you suffering depression in the first place?"

Great is the agony of a depressed soul whose sufferings continue, in spite of prayers for God's powerful intervention, and intensified by cruel human interrogators whose taunts cut deeper than the flesh!

V. THE REAFFIRMATIONS OF A SOUL THAT IS HOPEFUL (v. 11)

The Psalmist closes this Psalm on a high note of faith and affirmation. In spite of the fact that the billows of sorrow seem so overwhelming, and in spite of the fact that the response of God to save one out of the 'slough of despondency' seems so slow, and in spite of the fact that the taunts of human interrogators who mockingly ask 'Where is your God' cause mortal agony to the sensitive sufferer, the Psalmist reaffirms his faith in a faithful God who is rightly addressed as 'my Savior'.

A. Present Reassurance Based On Reflective Questioning (v. 11a)

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?"
(v. 11a) "In the rehearsal of his sorrow, he finds after all no sufficient ground for being disquieted. Looked in the face, his fears were not so overwhelming as they seemed when shrouded in obscurity." (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 304, 305)

The depressed soul who asks himself searching questions which cause him to doubt the ability of holding onto his depression, is the soul that is clearing away the dismal clouds of sorrow to behold the sunshine of God's love. The depressed soul would do well to ask himself: "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" These questions, at this point in the plan for recovery, are not questions which seek to discover the possible causes of depression, but these questions are questions that the honest seeker asks of himself in order to demonstrate to himself that there is too much positive in life to brood any longer on the negatives in life. In other words "Why, my soul, should you brood any longer on the hurts which people or circumstances have inflicted on you? Why continue to wallow in self-pity, wasting your energy in self-preoccupation, when you could instead be 'reaching out in love' to bring joy to others? My soul, why should you continue to engage in morose reminiscing on the 'good old days' of yesterday, when the God you serve is the God also of the present and of the future whose mercies are fresh every day and whose present blessings can always match past blessings? My soul, why do you bewail the pain which you feel because of the thorny bushes along life's way, when you know that the thorny way is the way to heaven's eternal happiness? Thorns there may be on the road to heaven, but there are snares and pitfalls on the road which leads to endless suffering in hell. There may be a 'high cost' in serving Christ, but there is a much 'higher cost' in serving the Devil! The way of the

Cross may have its hurts and its bruises, but the way of the world has its greater hurts which are only hints of infinite hurt in a godless eternity!"

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" - when you realize that God is good, that life is positive, that the suffering of the righteous is temporary, that the punishment of the wicked is eternal, that all things on earth work into a pattern for good to those who love the Lord? Reflective questioning can lead to reassurance and peace! Reflective questioning can show the wisdom of casting our burdens of depression on the Lord, knowing that He cares for us.

B. Future Confidence Based On Reliable Commitment (v. 11b)

The Psalmist turns his attention away from his past sorrows and he places his faith in a faithful God whose power to heal guarantees to him a hopeful future. Speaking to himself, the psalmist says, "*Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*" (v. 11b)

Faith in God will restore hope to the despairing soul, put praise on the lips of the bitter wailer, and give relief to the anxiety-ridden soul. Depression will give way to delight, sorrow will give way to joy, turmoil will give way to peace, and debilitating sickness will give way to rebounding health!

CONCLUSION: Have tears been your food day and night? Have troubles befallen you and do you feel crushed in your spirit? Does the way seem long and dreary, and do you often feel lonely or forsaken? Does God seem distant from you? Do you sometimes feel like crying out, "O God, why have you forgotten me?" Are you downcast, disturbed, depressed?

You can find victory over your depression! However, it will require the positive exercise of your will and the positive disciplining of your thoughts. Explore the possible causes of your depression. Affirm the fact that God is the source of your hope and the object of your faith. Recall the past blessings of God in your life, and remember that God, as sovereign, is in total control of all circumstances - even those circumstances which have given birth to your depression. Anticipate that God's mercies will be poured out upon you, anew and afresh. Realize that God has a purpose to accomplish even in your depression, that God can take the broken pieces of your shattered life and can make something beautiful out of brokenness. Even though God seems at times to be slow in His divine intervention, and even though the cruel taunts of insensitive men inflict deep hurts to your soul, remember that God is your Savior and as such is able and ready to save you out of your 'pits of despair'. Reaffirm your faith in a faithful God! Say to yourself, "I will put my faith in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior

and my God.” “The saddest countenance shall yet be made to shine, if there be a taking of God at his word and an expectation of his salvation.” (Spurgeon)

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

Chapter 8

Victory Over Depression

QUESTIONS

- 1. Have you ever had a heartbreaking time in your life when your tears became your food, day and night?**
- 2. How can David’s depression be described, and how was his depression manifested? (Psalms 42: 1-3)**
- 3. How is the anguish of the depressed soul vividly expressed in Psalms 42: 1?**
- 4. For what was David likely homesick, as recorded in Psalms 42:2, and what are some modern-day counterparts which become the objects of great desire and the cause of great sorrow when they are denied the person of faith?**
- 5. Tell what is your reaction to the following statement: It is bad enough to experience lonely depression within the solitude of our private dwelling, but our bad experiences become worse experiences when our grief becomes obvious to the outside world which responds with hurting questions rather than with sympathetic understanding.”**
- 6. When one of your fellow Christians is going through deep depression, why is it both unwise and wrong to question his ‘spirituality’? What should be your appropriate response to a fellow believer who is deeply depressed?**
- 7. How does the contrast between one’s present agony and one’s past ecstasy tend to intensify one’s feeling of depression? (Psalms 42:4)**
- 8. Give illustrations from your own life or from your personal observation of others, of the truth of the following statement: “It is not uncommon for people who have fallen into a state of depression because of heartbreaking adversities, to idealize the past and to long to return to the past.”**

9. **What are some of the common symptoms of the debilitating problems of depression?**
10. **In seeking to find a cure for one's depression, what can one do to help himself think objectively about his problems rather than merely to succumb to further subjective feelings? Does 'talking to ones self' (v. 5a), and talking to a sympathetic friend help one to gain better perspective as he tries to cope with depression?**
11. **What possible causes of depression should be explored, as one attempts to restore himself to mental and spiritual wholeness?**
12. **After one has sought to pinpoint the source or the cause of his depression, what next must a depressed person do? Why is it important for one not to focus too intently and too long on his 'problems' which have caused his depression? Give your interpretation of the following statement: "What gets your attention, gets you!"**
13. **Is it always God's will to remove those circumstances which have precipitated depression in a person's life? Why or why not? Give your response to the following statement: "If it is not because of circumstances changing, then it can be in spite of circumstances not changing, that the man of faith can begin to sing songs of joy rather than continue to groan away his life in depression."**
14. **From your own experiences of coping with depression, tell if you believe the following statement reflects 'realism'! "When people start looking at the Lord and His attributes and abilities instead of their own failings and situations, I believe they turn the corner. But make no mistake, a definite act of the will is required".**
15. **In light of the truth of Psalms 42:6b, give your comments on the following statement: "It is great wisdom to store up in memory our choice occasions of converse with heaven; we may want them another day, when the Lord is slow in bringing back his banished ones, and our soul is aching with fear." Have you considered the benefits of keeping a 'Spiritual Journal' in which you daily enter your thoughts and distresses and joys and prayers - the purpose of which is to help you gain spiritual perspective and to recall the past mercies of the Lord in your life?**

16. How does the Psalmist declare the sovereignty of God in Psalms 42:7, and how does such a declaration help one better to cope with his experiences of depression? From your own experiences with depression, can you witness to the truth of the following statement: *“God can use any experience in the life of his children - even the experience of depression - to help perfect the character of his saints!”* (Romans 8:28)
17. Why is prayer, during a time of depression, difficult to engage in and yet most beneficial? (Note Psalms 42:8) Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: *“There are no hopeless situations in life, only people who have grown hopeless about them.”*
18. Tell why you think the following statement does NOT reflect mere ‘wishful thinking’: *“When you are in a ‘desert of despondency’, look up and anticipate God’s showers of blessings soon to fall upon you!”*
19. What should a person do when, after he has prayed earnestly for deliverance, his sorrows seem to continue and his depression seems to deepen? (Note Psalms 42: 9-10)
20. Is it appropriate for a believer, whose answers to prayer for deliverance are slow in coming, to aggressively inquire of God as to the reason for God’s seeming delay or inactivity? Why or why not? (Note Psalms 42:9)
21. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: *“You will never know all the reasons for human suffering, but some of your ‘question marks’ will be straightened out into ‘exclamation marks’ if you earnestly and persistently inquire of the Lord as to the ‘Why’ of your predicaments..”*
22. If God does not always answer the ‘Whys’ of human suffering, what is God always willing to do for suffering people?
23. After reading Psalms 42:11a, give your response to the following statement: *“The depressed soul who asks himself searching questions which cause him to doubt the validity of holding onto his depression is the soul that is clearing away the dismal clouds of sorrow to behold the sunshine of God’s love.”*
24. Why can ‘reflective questioning’, as illustrated in Psalms 42:11a, be so helpful to the depressed person who is honestly seeking deliverance from his wistful state of depression?

- 25. Do you think that a person can long remain depressed when he reaffirms the following declarations of truth: "God is good; life is positive; suffering of the righteous is temporary; punishment of the wicked is eternal; all things on earth work into a pattern for good to those who love the Lord."**
- 26. Do you believe that, according to Psalms 42:11b, your future is bright because of your trust in God, that your depression will give way to delight, that your sorrow will give way to joy, that your turmoil will give way to peace, that your debilitating sickness will give way to rebounding health?**

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 9

DOES JESUS CARE FOR FAILURES?

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

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DOES JESUS CARE FOR FAILURES?

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 51:1-19

TEXT: *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”* Psalms 51: 17

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever failed morally or spiritually or socially, and after your failure wondered if God still cared for you? He who climbs the highest, may fall the hardest. Jesus warned us to watch and to pray, lest we fall into temptation. He said that the spirit of man is willing, but that the flesh is weak. Everyone is vulnerable at one time or another. What happens when one does fall on his face spiritually? Does God care for people who miserably fail? Psalms 51 describes the steps toward recovery of one who had fallen miserably into sin.

PROPOSITION: The tragedy of sin is seen in the fact that sin brings terrible consequences into the life of the one who has violated God’s laws, but, because of the unfailing love and mercy of God, there is hope for spiritual recovery and healing.

OUTLINE:

I. DESCRIPTION OF SIN’S TRAGEDY

- A. Context Of Sin (Conditions Conductive For Passion)**
- B. Consequences Of Sin (Result Of Passionate Action)**

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE SINNER’S RECOVERY

- A. Conviction Of Sin (Awakening Of The Sinner’s Conscience)**
- B. Confession Of Sin (Consternation In The Sinner’s Prayer)**
- C. Cleansing From Sin (Faith For The Believer’s Total Deliverance)**
 - 1. The reality of original sin**
 - 2. The divine standard of inward purity**
 - 3. The possibility of abounding joy**
- D. Character-Building Through Faith (Growth For The Believer’s Maturity)**
 - 1. Steadfastness**
 - 2. Holiness**
 - 3. Joy**
 - 4. Submission**
 - 5. Service**

6. Righteousness
7. Praise
8. Humility
9. Worship

CONCLUSION: The Bible says that 'where sin abounds, grace super abounds'! There is no sin so deep but what the cleansing blood of Jesus goes deeper yet! Is your sin great? Then God's love is greater yet! Is your heart broken? Then God's power to heal is available. Confess your sins, plead for the mercy of God, cry out to God for inner cleansing, believe God for total healing, and accept God's offer to clothe you with His own garments of righteousness! He will not only forgive your sins and cleanse you from inner moral depravity, but He will heal your broken spirit and rebuild your life. You can become a mature believer, healed and whole and ready to turn other sinners to the living God (Psalms 51:13). Throw yourself on the mercy seat of God! Be whole!

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 9

DOES JESUS CARE FOR FAILURES?

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 51:1-19

TEXT: *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”* Psalms 51: 17

INTRODUCTION: There is an old-fashioned song entitled “Does Jesus Care?” I sang it often in Church when I was a mere child. One verse goes like this:

**“Does Jesus care when I’ve tried and failed
To resist some temptation strong;
When for my deep grief I find no relief,
Tho’ my tears flow all the night long?”**

The chorus answers the question:

**“Oh yes, He cares: I know He cares
His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,
I know my Savior cares.”**

Have you ever failed morally or spiritually or socially, and after your failure wondered if God still cared for you? Have you ever felt so guilty that you had a hard time thinking that you could ever love yourself again? Have you ever had a hard time looking at yourself in the mirror after you did or said or thought something that was ignoble? Have you ever had an experience when you felt, like Simon Peter, that you had denied your Lord? “The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: *‘Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times. And he went outside and wept bitterly.’*” (Luke 22: 61, 62)

It is comforting to know, as our text says, that God will not despise a broken and contrite heart of repentance. Peter sinned grievously and he wept bitterly, but he also repented and turned to God wholeheartedly. Peter’s sins were forgiven and his dignity was restored. He became a great leader in the early church.

He who climbs the highest, may fall the hardest. Jesus warned us to watch and to pray, lest we fall into temptation. He said that the spirit of man is willing, but that the flesh is weak. Everyone is vulnerable at one time or another. Wrote Paul to the

overly-confident Corinthian believers: *“So let the man who feels sure of his standing today be careful that he does not fall tomorrow.”* (I Corinthians 10: 12, Phillips) Notes Don Bastian, “Be sure of God, but don’t be too sure of yourself without Him. A new Yorker had puffed his way to the peak of Matterhorn. In glee he leaped into the air, both hands above his head. Just then, a cold gust nearly swept him off the peak. His guide shouted, ‘Down on your knees’.....It was like telling him ‘Either get down on your knees or fall flat on your face.’” (A Faith To Grow By: pg. 41)

What happens when one does fall on his face spiritually? Does God care for people who miserably fail?

It is interesting that the Bible records the failures of its heroes. “Noah got drunk, Moses got angry, and Gideon got scared. Peter could be inconsistent, Paul was inconsiderate, Thomas doubted, Martha pouted. But God dealt with them and used every one of them for His glory and for our blessings.” (What Happens When life Doesn’t? Briscoe; pg. 136)

Psalms 51 describes the steps toward recovery of one who had fallen miserably into sin. Scholars believe this Psalm was written following the time when the prophet Nathan came to David to rebuke David, after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

PROPOSITION: The tragedy of sin is seen in the fact that sin brings terrible consequences into the life of the one who has violated God’s laws, but, because of the unfailing love and mercy of God, there is hope for spiritual recovery and healing.

I. DESCRIPTION OF SIN’S TRAGEDY

A. Context Of Sin (Conditions Conducive For Passion)

1. Idle Mind - II Samuel 11:1, 2 says: *“In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful.”* Indulgence - eating and drinking; leisure with no great task; David stayed in Jerusalem and enjoyed leisure (got up from his couch).

Notes Briscoe, "No red-blooded king stays in bed while his men are on the field of battle. The king had a case of the royal blahs." (Pg. 137)

**"In works of labor or of skill,
I would be busy too,
For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do."
(Isaac Watts)**

**Someone said, "An idle mind is the devil's workshop."
Note the following warnings against idleness: II Thessalonians 3: 6-13: I Timothy 5: 11-15. *The man or woman whose mind is full of God's thoughts and whose hands are full of love projects, is not likely to fall into sin!* Titus 3:14 says, "*Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.*"**

2. The Second Look that led to passionate thinking and mental adultery (how did he know she was exceptionally beautiful? He obviously gazed at the woman). Guard the affections of your heart, by guarding the eye gate and the hearing gate of the body.

3. Mental Plotting - II Samuel 11: 3, "*And David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, 'Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?'*"

4. Passionate Act Itself - II Samuel 11:4, "*Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home.*"

B. Consequences Of Sin (Result Of Passionate Action)

The Bible says, "*Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap.*" He can choose, initially, but we cannot choose the consequences. For instance, a murderer may be forgiven of his sin, but he must bear, as a forgiven murderer, the consequences of his sin - imprisonment. Or take another illustration: A man who has smoked all of his life can be forgiven, but he must bear, as a forgiven person, the consequences of his smoking habit - bad health perhaps in the form of lung cancer or heart disease. A lustful sinner can be forgiven of his terrible

sexual sins, but the consequences of his sin may remain - consequences like regret or sometimes certain diseases. David was wonderfully forgiven, but the consequences of his many sins remained.

1. Unexpected problems (II Samuel 11:5) - conception of illegitimate child. (Sin never keeps its promise. Pleasures in sin are only for a 'season', short-lived. Pleasure gives way to pain and heartache, and shocking surprises.)

2. Cover-up plot which was unsuccessful (II Samuel 11: 6-9) (the Bible says, "*Be sure your sin will find you out.*")

3. Further desperate plotting as attempt to cover up his shameful sin (II Samuel 11: 10-13). Sin leads to deception.

4. Successful plot of murder (II Samuel 11: 26-27)

5. Stole another man's wife (II Samuel 11: 26, 27; 12:10)

6. Harsh judgment from God (II Samuel 12: 1-12)

a) Illegitimate son's death (II Samuel 12: 15-19)

b) Amnon, a son of David, committed incest with Tamar, a daughter of David. Absalom, David's son, slaughtered Amnon as a punishment (II Samuel 13: 22-38)

c) Absalom, David's son, undermined David, secretly conspired against David for the throne of Israel, took over Jerusalem temporarily, causing David to flee for his life, and finally David's army fought against Absalom's army resulting finally in Absalom's tragic death.

d) Internal rebellion, dissensions, and plots which made life weary for David.

One of the tragedies of sin is that others are affected when one sins. Sin has terrible social consequences. David faced serious trouble in his household for years, following his sin.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE SINNER'S RECOVERY

A. Conviction Of Sin (Awakening Of The Sinner's Conscience)

The prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin, and he said to David, *'You are the man'*. (II Samuel 12: 7). Before a man can be right with God, he must experience a spiritual awakening. He must confront God and recognize his own personal, spiritual need. This 'Collision with God' or inner awakening to personal need, is the work of God's Spirit. Notes Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Though men decide not to believe in God and put Him and His ways out of their lives, though they ignore all consequences and in a spirit of bravado decide to follow the other life, they do not therefore finish with God and truth at that point. The truth continues to remind them of its existence and to worry them. It does so most definitely, of course, in and through the conscience. It warns, it condemns, and it prohibits. The Truth is not static and lifeless. It is actually within us -- there is 'light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world'...the truth follows us and worries us." (The Plight of Man and the Power of God; pg. 51)

During the time that David was hiding his sin, his conscience must have bothered him a lot. Sin unconfessed brings much disturbance. In another Psalm (32:3) David writes about the affects of unconfessed sins: *"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer."*

B. Confession Of Sin (Consternation In The Sinner's Prayer)

After God awakens a person to his true spiritual condition, he must repent of his sins. When Nathan confronted David with his heinous sins, David did not try to rationalize his sins or deny them or scapegoat responsibility upon someone else. "Then David said to Nathan, *'I have sinned against the Lord.'*" (II Samuel 12:13) In Psalms 51:1, David recalls God's merciful disposition: *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions."* The sinner who finds himself helpless and hopeless, has no claim on God except God's mercy. The sinner, whose awakened conscience intensifies his sense of total unworthiness, never demands God's justice (which would result in the execution of the death sentence), but he pleads for God's mercy (which results in pardon and forgiveness).

**“In my hands no price I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling.”**

**“The blood, the blood is all my plea,
O, hallelujah, it cleanseth me.”**

It is God’s nature to be merciful, so the repentant one can be assured that he will receive what he needs - mercy - not what he deserves - justice ! God’s unfailing love and His great compassion is the source of hope for an otherwise hopeless and despairing situation of moral collapse.

If David believed that God was, by nature, a God of unfailing mercy and compassion, how much more should we affirm God’s mercy, especially now that we see God’s love personified in Jesus Christ! Jesus said He came to seek and to save the lost, that He came to heal the morally diseased, that He came to restore the fallen. Jesus is filled with compassion for sinners.

**“Come, and He will give you rest;
Trust Him, for His word is plain;
He will take the sinfulest;
Christ receiveth sinful men.”**

David realized his personal guilty condition and made no attempt to blame or to rationalize or to deny his sin. “*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.*” (v. 3)

Even though David had sinned against Uriah and Bathsheba and against the entire nation of Israel which he ruled over as King, David recognized that sins against mankind and nations were essentially sins against the Sovereign God Himself. “*Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.*” (v. 4a) Even though sins have social consequences and need the pardon of our fellowmen against whom we have sinned, there is no sin that is not a violation God’s will, that is not a perverting of God’s ways, that is not a missing of God’s mark. All sin is sin against God primarily, and only against others secondarily. To understand the true nature of sin is to feel compelled to acknowledge God’s goodness in contrast to one’s own evil, and to acknowledge God’s righteousness in contrast to one’s own unrighteousness. Seeing one’s sin against the backdrop of God’s holiness, compels one to cry out with David, “*I have done evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.*” (v. 4b)

C. Cleansing From Sin (Faith For The Believer's Total Deliverance)

1. The reality of original sin

David acknowledged his need, not only for forgiveness of sins which he committed, but also for cleansing of moral depravity which he inherited. *"Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."* (Psalms 51:5) Notes Donald Bastian regarding Original Sin, "It is that evil tendency which disposes him to do wrong and thus to become not only by nature, but by personal choice a sinner." Donald Bastian says that original sin "is explained by the universal law of natural generation that like begets like. Adam, by the personal exercise of his own free will fell into sin, thus becoming a sinner. The son born to him was like him not only in physical structure, but in his moral image as well. From Cain to the present all his descendants have inherited from him a nature depraved and prone to sin like his own." (Genesis 6:5, 12; Jeremiah 17: 9; Mark 7: 21-22)

2. The divine standard of inward purity (v. 7)

Prayed David to God: *"Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place."* (Psalms 51: 7)

David recognized his need for pure motives, for inward healing of all duplicity and double-mindedness. The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. It was Kieregaard who said that purity of heart is "to will one thing" - to will to do God's will only. To be truthful in the 'inward parts' is to be genuine and integrated, with a heart set upon God alone. A supreme preference for God and His holiness describes a pure heart. God calls every believer to be pure. The God who calls His people to be holy is the God who also accomplishes the work of total cleansing in the hearts of His people. It is the backslidden believer who must confess his sins; it is the Savior who alone can forgive the sins. It is the believer who must acknowledge his need for heart cleansing; it is God the Sanctifier who alone can cleanse the believer's heart of all moral pollution! *"Cleanse me with hyssop, and*

I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.”
(Psalms 51:7)

3. The possibility of abounding joy. (v. 8, 9)

“Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.” (v. 8, 9)

The one who confesses his sins and who consecrates his life to God is the one whose broken life will be healed and whose joy will be restored. God will hide His face from his sins and will blot out all his iniquity, and the consecrated believer will experience joy and gladness beyond measure.

Note the order: Confession of sins which brings forgiveness, consecration of heart which brings cleansing, inner healing which brings unbounded joy! It is futile to seek or to expect gladness in one's life until there has first been genuine repentance of sin and total consecration of the heart to God. Joy is the result of a right relationship with God, and there cannot be a right relationship with God unless sins have been forgiven and moral depravity has been cleansed.

D. Character-Building Through Faith (Growth For The Believer's Maturity)

The God who forgives and the God who cleanses, is also the God who establishes the sincere believer in a life of true maturity. The marks of a mature, godly lifestyle are briefly described in the remaining verses of Psalms 51.

1. Steadfastness

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” For the believer to remain steadfast and faithful amidst the changes and the chances of life and amidst the threats of temptations, is a miracle indeed. To serve God, come 'hell or high water', is a mark of a man who has learned daily to submit to the lordship of Christ! A 'steadfast spirit' is a spirit that can stand the test of time and the tests of trials and temptations. Wrote Paul to the

Corinthian believers, *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, 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, King James Version)

2. Holiness (v. 11)

“Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.” Saul, the first king of Israel, so grieved the Lord that eventually the Spirit of the Lord left him. David, having gravely sinned against the Lord, feared that the Spirit of God might be taken from him as happened to Saul. But the difference between Saul and David must be recognized. Saul’s temporary remorse for his shameful actions did not lead him to deep repentance and a permanent change of behavior. Saul did not, like David, have a broken heart and a contrite spirit of genuine repentance.

The person of the Spirit is grieved in the life of the backslidden believer, but the Spirit does not leave such a person if he pleads for inner cleansing, and if he surrenders himself anew to the leadership of the Lord. The Holy Spirit, who cleanses the heart of the straying believer, is the same Holy Spirit who rebuilds and matures the character of the surrendered believer.

3. Joy (v. 12a)

David cries out, *“Restore to me the joy of your salvation.”* Joy that is lost because of willful sinning, can be restored because of sincere confession and total surrender. Salvation - the recovery of a lost soul by the power of God - is a worthy cause of unspeakable joy. The joy of the Lord constitutes the strength of the believer whose sins are forgiven, and whose heart is cleansed, and whose will is surrendered to do God’s will. Happiness depends on happenings, but the joy which God gives to the trusting heart is independent of life’s changing circumstances. Happiness is a product of happy external events; joy, on the other hand, is a gift of God permanently experienced by the sanctified believer, in spite of circumstances!

4. Submission (v. 12b)

David further prays, *“Grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”* Glad obedience, as a result of a submissive spirit, is a mark of true maturity. A ‘willing spirit’ is a spirit that is teachable and moldable, open to change and to correction and to discipline.

5. Service (v. 13)

“Then will I teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.” The man whose sins are forgiven and whose heart is cleansed and whose spirit is teachable, is a man who is ready and worthy to teach others. Persons who are well trained themselves become good trainers of others. Persons who personally experience forgiveness and inner cleansing are equipped to help others whose experiential needs are the same as his own. The truly converted and the thoroughly cleansed ones become God’s best evangelists and teachers, or better said, God’s only evangelists, for how can one convert another to God if he has never been personally converted himself? David knows that if his sins are forgiven, if his heart is cleansed, if his joy is restored, if his spirit is renewed, then he is equipped to teach transgressors and to turn sinners to God. One important mark of maturity is the desire to witness, to seek the lost ones for the Lord, to teach transgressors the ways of God.

6. Righteousness (v. 14)

“Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.”

What a contrast between the sinner’s ‘bloodguilt’ and the Lord’s righteousness. David deserved the death penalty for his gross iniquities, but he asks not only pardon and purity but for the Lord’s very righteousness to be given to him! Far from being presumptuous, the sinner, whose guilt is real, needs to acknowledge his unworthiness before God, but, far from despairing, the sinner whose pardon and cleansing is assured by Christ, needs to claim the best that God has to offer him - the very gift of God’s righteousness! Thus, while there is never a place for presumptuous self-righteousness

(because of the fact of man's universal guilt and moral pollution), there is also never room for debilitating self-despair (because of the fact of God's gift of Christ's righteousness available to all of mankind). From the depths of 'bloodguilt', one can be raised to the heights of Christ's 'borrowed righteousness'. Even though our hands are stained with the blood of our sinful crimes, the blood of Jesus Christ is able to justify the ungodly and to clothe him with the pure garment of God's righteousness. He stands justified in God's sight because of what Christ has done for him. His tongue sings constantly of Jehovah's righteousness. (Psalms 51:14)

7. Praise (v. 15)

"O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise." When God forgives sins, resolves guilt, cleanses moral depravity, restores joy, and heals the broken spirit, is it not logical that the Lord will also unstop the shame-silenced mouth? When God opens sealed lips, the tongue shall declare the state of the cleansed heart and the renewed mind and the healed spirit. Praise for the God whose miracle power has affected inner changes shall pour forth from grateful lips. "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise." Praise befits the godly and is a mark of true Christian maturity. "If God opens the mouth he is sure to have the fruit if it...when vanity, anger, falsehood, or lust unbar the door, the foulest villainies troop out; but if the Holy Spirit opens the wicket, then grace, mercy, peace, and all the graces come forth in tuneful dances." (The Treasury of David; Spurgeon; pg. 455)

8. Humility (v. 16-17)

Declares David, "*You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take delight in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*"

The contrite heart, the broken spirit, the repentant soul - these the Lord cherishes, for these are the manifestations of true humility. The one who abandons any hope for salvation except in Jesus Christ, is the one whose

salvation is assured. "Not the labors of my hands can fulfill Thy laws' demands; Thou must save, and Thou alone." "Could my tears forever flow. Could my zeal no languor know? These for sin could not atone. Thou must save and Thou alone!" "A heart crushed is a fragrant heart. Men condemn those who are contemptible in their own eyes, but the Lord seeth not as man seeth. He despises what men esteem, and values that which they despise. Never yet has God spurned a lowly, weeping penitent, and never will he while God is love, and while Jesus is called the man who receiveth sinners." (Ibid; Spurgeon; pg. 456)

If the mature person is one who has a 'steadfast spirit' instead of a faithless spirit (v. 10), and one who has a 'willing spirit' instead of a rebellious spirit (v. 12), then the mature person is also one who has a 'broken spirit' instead of a proud spirit (v. 17)

9. Worship (v. 18 - 19)

"In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offering to delight you; the bulls will be offered on your alter." (v. 18 - 19)

The one who is personally renewed by the Lord's saving and sanctifying grace, is the one who desires intensely to see 'Zion' - the church of God - prosper collectively (v. 18b). Building up the walls of Jerusalem (v. 18b) is a picturesque way of saying "God, build up the strong defenses of your Church to protect her against godless and demonic forces." Notes Spurgeon, "There is surely no grace in us if we do not feel for the church of God, and take a lasting interest in its welfare." (Ibid; pg. 456)

Desire for a prospering Church (v. 18) is fulfilled when God's people are corporately and enthusiastically worshipping the Lord (v. 19). "Though we bring no more sacrifices for sin, yet as priests unto God our solemn praises and votive gifts are thank offerings acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. We bring not the Lord our least things - our doves and pigeons; but we present him with out best possessions - our bullocks." (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 456)

A mature Christian is always a worshiping Christian - a believer who prays for the prosperity of God's Church and who gladly presents himself (along with his fellow worshipers) as a *"living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God."* (Romans 12: 1)

CONCLUSION: The Bible says that 'where sin abounds, grace super abounds'! There is no sin so deep but what the cleansing blood of Jesus goes deeper yet! *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."* (Psalms 51: 17)

Is your sin great? Then God's love is greater yet! Is your heart broken? Then God's power to heal is available. Confess your sins, plead for the mercy of God, cry out to God for inner cleansing, believe God for total healing, and accept God's offer to clothe you with His own garments of righteousness! He will not only forgive your sins and cleanse you from inner moral depravity, but He will heal your broken spirit and rebuild your life. You can become a mature believer, healed and whole and ready to turn other sinners to the living God (Psalms 51:13). Throw yourself on the mercy seat of God! Be whole!

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

Chapter 9

Does Jesus Care For Failures?

QUESTIONS

- 1. Have you ever failed morally or spiritually or socially, and after you failed, wondered if God could ever forgive you? Have you ever (like Peter after he denied his Lord) ‘wept bitterly’ because of your sins, and wondered if you could ever love yourself again? (Luke 22: 61-62)**
- 2. What causes believers to become overly confident in their lives, causing them to become very vulnerable to sin? (I Corinthians 10: 12; Mark 14: 38)**
- 3. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “The tragedy of sin is seen in the fact that sin brings terrible consequences into the life of the one who has violated God’s laws, but, because of the unfailing love and mercy of God, there is hope for spiritual recovery and healing.”**
- 4. According to II Samuel 11: 1-4, what conditions are conducive for strong temptations which lead to sinning? Do you agree with the following statement: “The man or woman whose mind is full of God’s thoughts and whose hands are full of love projects is not likely to fall into sin”?**
- 5. Give your comments on the following statements: “Every moral decision brings with it either negative consequences or positive results, depending on whether the decision was for or against the will of God. ‘Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap’.”**
- 6. What were some of the negative consequences in David’s life which came as a result of his initial wrong moral choice (in committing adultery with Bathsheba)? What is meant by the statement: “Sin has terrible social consequences”? If God is a God of justice, how do you account for the fact that often ‘the innocent’ suffer as a result of someone’s wrong moral choice (sin)?**

7. **Is it possible for a person to get right with God without first experiencing a spiritual 'awakening'? From your own personal experiences, or from your observations of others, how would you define and describe a 'spiritual awakening'?**
8. **What, according to Psalms 32:3-4 are some of the effects on a person who fails to confess his sins to God?**
9. **What is the only 'claim' that a helpless sinner has on God? (Psalms 51:1)**
10. **When David's sin was exposed by Nathan the prophet, how did David respond? (II Samuel 12: 13) What are inadequate ways to deal with one's sins? What should one do if he commits a sin against God? (Psalms 51:3)**
11. **Was David shortsighted when he prayed the following prayer of confession to God? "Against you (God), you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight"? (Psalms 51: 4a)**
12. **What is the difference between 'volitional sins' and 'original sin'? How do you interpret David's 'acknowledgment' in Psalms 51:5?**
13. **What does it mean to be truthful in the 'inward parts', according to Psalms 51: 7? What Scripture evidence can you cite to show that there is a twofold nature of sin (i.e., sinful actions and sinful nature), and that there is a twofold cure for sin (i.e., forgiveness for what one has done, and cleansing from what one is)? Theologically speaking, is God's work of justification in the life of a sinner concerned with forgiveness of sins, whereas God's work of Sanctification in the life of a believer concerned with cleansing from inherited moral pollution (i.e., 'depravity' as a result of 'original sin')?**
14. **In finding spiritual restoration, what is the relationship between 'confession', 'consecration', 'inner healing', and 'joy'?**
15. **As recorded in Psalms 51:10, what do you believe it means for one to have a 'steadfast spirit'? (Note I corinthians 15:58; Philipppians 4:1)**

16. **Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “The Person of the Spirit is grieved in the life of the backslidden believer, but the Spirit does not leave such a person if he pleads for inner cleansing, and if he surrenders himself anew to the leadership of the Lord.” (Psalms 51:11)**
17. **How would you distinguish between ‘joy’ and ‘happiness’? (Psalms 51:12)**
18. **As recorded in Psalms 51:12, what does it mean for one to have a ‘willing spirit’?**
19. **What personal and academic ‘credentials’ must one have if he is to be an effective ‘teacher’ and ‘evangelist’? (Psalms 51: 13)**
20. **In addition to pardon and purity, what else does David request that God give to him, according to Psalms 51:14?**
21. **As recorded in Psalms 51:15, what do you think will be the content of praise of the one whose shame-silenced mouth is opened to declare the wonders of God?**
22. **In light of the truth of Psalms 51: 16-17, give interpretations of the following statement: “To some extent it is necessary for people to have confidence in their God-given abilities, but deeply ingrained self-trust leads to death.”**
23. **In contrast to a ‘faithless spirit’, ‘rebellious spirit’, and a ‘proud spirit’, what ‘spirit’ characterizes a truly mature and godly person? (Psalms 51: 10, 12, 17)**
24. **Is it possible for a person to be truly dedicated to God and, at the same time, be uninvolved in and indifferent to the local church? (Note Psalms 51:18-19)**

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 10

LEARNING PERSEVERANCE UNDER PRESSURE

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 10

LEARNING PERSEVERANCE UNDER PRESSURE

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 62: 1-12

TEXT: “Find rest, O my soul, in God alone my hope comes from him.” (Psalms 62:5)

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever felt weary in your soul, wishing for a time of rest from your heavy burdens? Have you sometimes felt tempted by the enemy of your soul to give up your faith, and have you ever felt attacked by unbelievers whose evil aim was to topple you from your lofty place of spiritual fellowship and activities? Have you ever wished you could turn the vessel of your soul upside down in God’s secret presence to share with the Lord your innermost thoughts and feelings and desires? Have you ever felt that you needed a stronger shoulder to lean on than the shoulder of your closest friend or loved one? Have you ever wondered if this universe really is a ‘moral’ universe, when in this world wrong so often seems to go unpunished and when right so often seems to go unrewarded?

All the above questions tend to merge into one basic question: “Do I, as a believer, have what it takes to persevere in my Christian life, when I think of my own weaknesses and when I feel the pressure of temptation from wicked men and from difficult circumstances?”

OUTLINE:

I. DELIGHTFUL CONFIDENCE FROM WHOLEHEARTED COMMITMENT (v. 1-2)

- A. “My soul finds rest in God alone.”**
- B. “My salvation comes from him.”**

II. DECEPTIVE ASSAULTS OF EVIL DESIGN (v. 3, 4a)

- A. The Aggressive Intention Of The Wicked (v. 3, 4a)**
- B. The Deceptive Strategy Of The Wicked (v. 4b)**

III. DIVINE SUSTENANCE FOR CONTINUING STRENGTH (v. 5-8)

IV. DISDAINFUL RIDICULE OF CORRUPT TRANSGRESSORS (v. 9-10)

V. DETERMINED JUDGMENT FOR ACCOUNTABLE MANKIND (v. 11-12)

CONCLUSION: What motivation is there for the suffering servant of God to persevere under pressure? (1) God is all-sufficient in His ability, not only to offer salvation for the sinner, but to give rest for the weary saint (v. 1,5); (2) God is able to sustain the persecuted believer who is heavily pressured by unrelenting sinners whose aim is to topple the righteous from their lofty places of security (v. 4). Even though the harassed believer may at times feel like a 'leaning wall' and a, tottering fence', because of the constant barrage of aggressive attacks from the wicked (v. 3), still the Lord will keep the righteous from being attacked from the wicked (v. 3), still the Lord will keep the righteous from being shaken or destroyed (v. 2, 6); (3) The suffering saint can persevere because he knows that he can share his innermost thoughts and burdens with the Lord (v. 8); (4) Contrasting the vanity of men and the transitoriness of earth's wealth with the steadfastness and trustworthiness of God alone, gives the weary believer motivation to keep leaning on the Everlasting Arms (v. 9-10); (5) Knowing that God is a God of perfect power and perfect love and perfect knowledge (v. 11-12), gives the troubled believer comfort and gives the careless believer caution, for God will ultimately "reward each person according to what he has done." (v. 12)

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 10

LEARNING PERSEVERANCE UNDER PRESSURE

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 62: 1-12

TEXT: *“Find rest, O my soul, in God alone my hope comes from him.” (Psalms 62:5)*

INTRODUCTION: Wrote Paul, *“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” (I Corinthians 15: 58).* Paul wrote to the Galatian believers: *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6: 9)*

I used to get a letter monthly from an old saint. That old saint of God, who at the time lived in another town, used to send her monthly tithe to the church - a tithe based on her meager income - and with the tithe check she wrote a few lines to me. Addressing me affectionately as ‘son’, she would say, time and time again, ‘Keep on keeping on’. In other words, “Persevere in the faith”.

Through the thick and thins, the ups and downs, the advances and reverses, the lean times and the prosperous times - ‘keep on keeping on’! Amidst all the changes and the chances of life, God is unchanging in His mercy and His grace. God will never leave us or forsake us. He will go with us every step of the way.

Notes Stott: “In recent centuries perhaps nobody has exemplified perseverance more than William Wilberforce...In 1789, Wilberforce said of the slave trade (in the British Empire) in the House: ‘So enormous, so dreadful, so irremediable did its wickedness appear that my own mind was completely made up for Abolition...Let the consequences be what they would, I from this time determined that I would never rest until I had affected its Abolition.’” (Involvement; Vol. 2; pg. 256, 257) After his struggle for 45 years - struggles that involved great ridicule and persecution and tireless efforts to introduce legislation many different times - “in July 1833 the Abolition of Slavery Bill was passed in both Houses of Parliament, even though it included the undertaking to pay 20,000,000 pounds in compensation to the slave-owners. ‘Thank God’, wrote Wilberforce, ‘that I have lived to witness a day in which England is willing to give 20,000,000 pounds sterling for the abolition of slavery.’ Three days later he died. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, in national recognition of his forty-five years of persevering struggle on behalf of African slaves.” (Ibid; pg. 258).

Think of how God honored - and now our nation is honoring - the perseverance of Martin Luther King Jr.! He learned to persevere in a cause of righteousness - amidst unusual pressure and persecution!

It is not easy to learn to persevere under pressure - 'to keep on keeping on' regardless of circumstances.

Have you ever felt weary in your soul, wishing for a time of rest from your heavy burdens? Have you sometimes felt tempted by the enemy of your soul to give up your faith, and have you ever felt attacked by unbelievers whose evil aim was to topple you from your lofty place of spiritual fellowship and activities? Have you ever wished you could turn the vessel of your soul upside down in God's secret presence to share with the Lord your innermost thoughts and feelings and desires? Have you ever felt that you needed a stronger shoulder to lean on than the shoulder of your closest friend or loved one? Have you ever wondered if this universe really is a 'moral' universe, when in this world wrong so often seems to go unpunished and when right so often seems to go unrewarded?

All the above questions tend to merge into one basic question: "Do I, as a believer, have what it takes to persevere in my Christian life, when I think of my own weaknesses and when I feel the pressure of temptation from wicked men and from difficult circumstances?"

Psalms 62 is an answer to the question of perseverance in the spiritual life. It is a chapter, characterized by realism: The soul that is weary and in need of rest (v. 1-2); the soul that is pressured and in need of defense (v. 3-4); the soul that is burdened with grief and in need of comfort (v. 5-8); the soul that is insecure and in need of permanent security (v. 9-10); the soul that is hard-working and in need of recognition and ultimate rewards for faithfulness (v. 11-12).

Through a careful study of Psalms 62, the motivations for spiritual perseverance can be discovered. God is the all-sufficient God who is able to give rest to the weary (v. 1,5), defense for the assaulted (v. 3-4), comfort for the distressed (v. 5-8), lasting confidence for the insecure (v. 9-10), and rewards for the faithful (v. 11-12).

PROPOSITION: Amidst the challenges of life, the trusting soul will never be shaken, and the expectations of the hopeful soul will never be frustrated. (Psalms 62: 5).

Psalms 62:5, was written in the front cover of my first Bible which I received as a small child from my crippled aunt. I early memorized that verse: "*My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation cometh from Him.*" (King James Version)

In an attempt to discover the motivations for spiritual perseverance, we will consider the following: (1) Delightful Confidence from Wholehearted Commitment (v. 1,2); (2) Deceptive Assaults of Evil Design (v. 3, 4); (3) Divine Sustenance for Continuing Strength (v. 5,6); (4) Disdainful Ridicule of Corrupt Transgressors (v. 9, 10); (5) Determined Judgment For Accountable Mankind (v. 11,12).

1. DELIGHTFUL CONFIDENCE FROM WHOLEHEARTED COMMITMENT (v. 1-2)

A. "My soul finds rest in God alone."

"The soul is restless until it rest in God alone."

**"My soul in sad exile was out on life's seas,
So burdened with sin and distress, Till I heard a sweet voice saying,
'Make me your choice'; and I entered the 'Haven of Rest!'**

Chorus:

**I've anchored my soul in the' Haven of Rest,'
I'll sail the wide sea no more;
The tempest may sweep o'er the wild, stormy deep,
In Jesus I'm safe evermore."**

Have you known people whose souls were very restless as they were trying to find satisfaction in something or in someone other than in God? Jesus said, *"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* Are you weary, are you troubled in your soul? Has your pursuit for money or for pleasure or for prestige and position left your soul restless and discontent? Notes William Sangster, "Earth does not satisfy us. I cannot help but feel that is in impressive fact. I warn you against supposing that, if only you had more of this or that, you would be completely satisfied. It is an illusion. Earth cannot satisfy you. William Watson -- in his poem 'World Strangeness' -- asked:

**'In this house with starry dome,
Floored with gemlike plains and seas,
Shall I never feel at home,
Never wholly be at ease?'**

Never! You weren't meant to." (Sangster's Daily Readings; pg. 104)

Outside of God, there is no rest for the soul! It may be a trite saying, but it is nevertheless a true saying: 'There is no rest for the wicked!' But there is rest for the people of God (see Hebrews 4: 9-11).

If you are restless today, bound by sin's fetters, full of guilt, divided in your loyalties, anxiety-ridden, worried and fearful, may I encourage you to put your faith in God alone as the One who can speak peace to your troubled soul!

**"Come, every soul by sin oppressed,
There's mercy with the Lord,
And He will surely give you rest
By trusting in His Word."**

B. "My salvation comes from him."

The Psalmist recognized his need for salvation, and God as the only source of his salvation.

Do you recognize your need for salvation? 'Salvation' comes from the same family of words as 'Saved'. Do you recognize your need to be 'saved'? 'Saved from what'? You may ask. Saved from your sins. Your sins are the result of your deliberate breaking of God's moral laws - the Ten Commandments. Saved from your bondage and your bondage is the result of hurtful habits you have formed in your life. Physical bondage like alcoholism, spiritual bondage, like pride, social bondage like inferiority, psychological bondage like worry. Saved from condemnation - condemnation not only in this life but damnation hereafter. To be saved from 'hell on earth' and from 'hell after death' is God's miracle of grace made available for every human being!

Salvation from sins, from bondage, from condemnation - this is part of what 'salvation' means to a sinner. To recognize the need of salvation is important, but it is just as important to recognize the source of salvation. God alone is the source of salvation. Some say (perhaps lightly) statements like the following, "His job was his salvation", or "His marriage to that special woman was his salvation", or "His grant of that loan was his salvation", or "His relocation to that new city was his salvation". Most of us know, in a lower 'human' way of talking, that a new job or a marriage to a particular person or a relocation to a new city or a receiving of a college degree might all be considered a person's 'salvation', but to talk of 'salvation' in these ways is almost to cheapen

this marvelous word. 'Salvation', in the truest and most meaningful way, comes from God Alone!

If you are putting your trust in anyone or in anything other than in God alone for your salvation, you are putting your faith in an object that is powerless to save you! Money can't save you! The Church can't save you! Education can't save you! Loved ones can't save you! Military power can't save you! Your own morality or philosophy or religiosity can't save you!

Your position or power or prestige or popularity can't save you! Only God can save you!

Do you believe in your heart and can you say with your lips the following: "*My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken*" (Psalms 62: 1-2)? Wholehearted commitment to God alone brings sweet confidence that your salvation is real and that your security is lasting.

II. DECEPTIVE ASSAULTS OF EVIL DESIGN (v. 3, 4a)

A. The Aggressive Intention Of The Wicked (v. 3, 4a)

With amazement at the persistence with which evil men seek the downfall of the righteous ones, the Psalmist writes, "*How long will you assault a man? Would you throw him down - this leaning wall, this tottering fence? They fully intend to topple him from his lofty place.*" (v. 3, 4a)

The assaults of the wicked against the righteous come in various forms. There is outright hostility against the righteous ones, as is evidenced in Communist lands where thousands of believers have either been imprisoned or tortured or killed for their so-called 'crime' of 'indoctrinating' others with Christian teachings. There is psychological and mental abuse, as seen when believers are intimidated by non-Christian employers who demand certain unethical behavior at the risk of Christians losing their jobs. Daniel in the Old Testament was harassed mentally when he was told that he would be cast into a den of lions if he continued to pray to his God. There is verbal abuse by non-Christians, as seen often on T.V. shows where great delight is taken by holding up Christians as the brunt of crude jokes. Others assault Christians by spreading outright lies about them, or by intentionally

encouraging cruel insinuations. Another type of assault on believers is passive indifference, seen in the cold shoulders which non-believers often give to believers. Calling evangelical Christians 'wild-eyed fanatics' or 'stupid radicals' is bad enough, but cold indifference, i.e., total close mindedness to reasonable debate and open dialogue is perhaps even harder to bear. Taking pride in one's prejudice against Christians, combined with unwillingness to think and to speak objectively about moral issues, is evidence of assaults against honest believers who seek to know the truth which open debate and dialogue help discover.

Christians who are bombarded with continual assaults in various forms can become weakened like 'a leaning wall' or a 'tottering fence' 3). Wicked men are glad when their constant and varied assaults have weakening affects upon believers. When believers manifest fear or despair or grief or discouragement or doubt or intimidation, then the wicked are filled with glee!! In their devious schemes to defeat the righteous, the wicked are glad to add further insult to believers who are already hurting deeply. They are not 'friends of grace' and their cowardliness is seen in the fact that the minority righteous are 'ganged up on' by the majority wicked who find additional evil ones to bring further pressure against the righteous ones. "Would all of you throw him down?" (v. 3) Concerning the many wicked who attack the few righteous, Spurgeon writes, "Ten thousand to one has not seemed to them too mean an advantage; there is not a drop of chivalrous blood in their veins." (The Treasury of David; pg. 115; Vol. 3)

"They fully intend to topple him (the righteous) from his lofty place." (v. 4a) Notes Spurgeon, "If the wicked could but ruin the work of grace in us, they would be content; to crush our character, to overturn our influence, is the object of their consultation." (Ibid; 116)

B. The Deceptive Strategy Of The Wicked (v. 4b)

The intention of the wicked is to topple the righteous. The strategy behind this evil intention is varied. The devil has many different strategies and methods in his attack (Ephesians 6), and so do his followers. Among the many strategies of the wicked, two are pointed out in Psalms 62: 4b - "they take delight in lies. With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse." There is the obvious and blatant strategy of attack - the outright resort to lies, used gladly in an attempt to destroy the reputation and the cause of righteous people. There is the more subtle and manipulative strategy of attack - the use of flattery to accomplish eventual and ultimate destruction of the righteous. With a

little thought, many illustrations could be cited to show how both of these strategies have been used against Christians in an attempt to topple or to crush them. Notes Spurgeon, "Flattery has ever been a favorite weapon with the enemies of good men; they can curse bitterly enough when it serves their turn; meanwhile, since it answers their purpose, they mask their wrath, and with smooth words, pretend to bless those whom they would willingly tear in pieces." (Ibid; 116)

III. DIVINE SUSTENANCE FOR CONTINUING STRENGTH (v. 5-8)

The one who has learned to rest alone in God as the source of his salvation and as the object of his great love (v. 1- 2), will be engaged at times in severe battles with the devil and with the devil's evil agents (v. 3 -4). But, even though the righteous may at times feel like a 'leaning wall' or a 'tottering fence' because of the undue pressure of evil men who seek to topple the righteous, the righteous one whose confidence is in God alone can be assured of divinely-given sustenance for continuing spiritual strength. The pressures of sin and Satan and evil men may be great, but the internal sustaining power of God's presence and comfort is much greater.

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake!"
(How Firm A Fountain)

The one who has cast his care upon God is the one whose hope for deliverance from evil assaults will be fulfilled. "Expectation (for deliverance from evil men) is the child of prayer and faith....our expectations are on the way, and in due season will arrive to satisfy our hope. Happy is the man who feels that all he has, all he wants, and all he expects are to a bound in his God." (Spurgeon; Ibid; 117; Vol. 3)

It is good for a believer who is harassed by evil men or circumstances to remind himself that, in spite of the storms without, there can be sweet rest and calm within. God alone is the source of that inward peace. God is the mighty rock, the refuge of protection against destruction from the enemy. God will enable the righteous to remain unshaken and unmoved in spite of malicious attacks by evil men with devious strategies. In light of the context, the 'salvation' of which verse 6 speaks, probably refers to rescue from worldly enemies (v. 3-4) as well as ultimate soul security after death. The one who trusts the Lord will receive his honor from the Lord, in spite of the dishonor and the abuse which the ungodly heap on the righteous. Declares the Psalmist, "*My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge.*" (v. 7) The Bible says, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" To have the smile of God's approval is worth more than all the world's wealth, and he who enjoys God's

'smile of approval' can bear all the sneers and scorn of the evil ones around him. The whole world could turn against a believer, but because a believer is backed by God, he is backed by all the universe! Thus, he is always 'in the majority' when he is on God's side! The honor which God gives to a trusting believer is not only for time, but that honor extends to eternity! *"The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."* (I John 3: 17)

God gives divine sustenance for continuing strength to those who place their total trust in God at all times. *"Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge."* (Psalms 62: 8) When fears annoy and pressures increase and the plots of evil men seek to undo your work and destroy your peace, then call upon the Lord. Keep your confidence in God at all times, whatever the circumstances around you may be. *"Turn the vessel of your soul upside down in his secret presence, and let your innermost thoughts, desires, sorrows, and sins be poured out like water...Sympathy we need, and if we unload our hearts at Jesus' feet, we shall obtain a sympathy as practical as it is sincere, as consolatory as it is ennobling."* (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 117, 118) The Scripture exhorts us to cast all our care (anxieties and fears and burdens) upon Him, for He careth for us! For the weary in soul and the disheartened in spirit, there is divine sustenance available. Look up! Reach out! Focus on the Rock of your salvation, and you will continue to stand amidst all the pressures of life.

IV. DISDAINFUL RIDICULE OF CORRUPT TRANSGRESSORS (v. 9-10)

The one who puts his trust in God alone for his salvation (v. 1-2), will probably sometimes face the pressure of godless men who seek to topple the righteous from their lofty place of spiritual living (v. 3- 4). But the righteous will be sustained by the Lord God who is named as the believer's personal hope, rock, salvation, fortress, honor, and refuge. (Note the use of the personal pronoun 'my' in verses 5 - 7, which speaks of the joy of personal experience of the greatness of God as He provides for the trusting believer in the face of life's great challenges and crises). Victory comes to the persecuted believer, not only as a result of reaffirmation of faith in an all-providing God (v. 5 - 8), but also by observing the vanity of evil men and the temporariness of earth's treasures (explicitly and implicitly noted in verses 9 - 10). The act of placing one's total confidence in God alone for salvation and protection (v. 1 - 2, 5 -8) is seen to be an act of great wisdom, in light of the fact that confidence which is placed in anyone (v. 9) or anything (v. 10) else other than God is confidence badly misplaced. *"Lowborn men are but a breath, the highborn are but a lie."* (v. 9a) That is to say, men of low estate have no longevity in the help they can give. 'Lowborn' lack both resources and durability, and their help is like a breath of air - short-lived. 'Highborn' are not to be trusted. They are but a 'lie', i.e., they may promise much but they produce little or nothing.

There is a song which says, 'ye dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.'

Why is it senseless to put your confidence in either the 'lowborn' or the 'highborn'? For, "if weighed on a balance, they are nothing; together they are only a breath." (v. 9b) This verse assumes that that which weighs much, has much value - like gold or silver; that that which weighs little (like feathers) or nothing (like a breath), is of no value. Men who are deplete of spiritual resources, void of spiritual understanding, and preoccupied with worldly pursuits are in God's eyes more worthless and weightless than a feather on a scale. Without 'weight', spiritually-speaking, they are without merit as a spiritual counselor or an encourager. Better to put your trust in a God who has never failed, who has never deceived anyone, whose glorious character is so heavy that no scale, earthly or celestial, is able to weigh it!

No other person, lowborn or highborn, is as trustworthy as the living God. Put not your trust in men, but in God alone. Also, put not your trust even in honestly earned material possessions: "*though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them.*" (v. 10b) "If (wealth) grows in an honest, providential manner, as the result of industry or commercial success, do not make much account of the circumstances; be not unduly elated, do not fix your love upon your money-bags. To bow an immortal spirit to the constant contemplation of fading possessions is extreme folly....as we must not rest in men, so neither must we repose in money." (Spurgeon; Ibid; 119)

V. DETERMINED JUDGMENT FOR ACCOUNTABLE MANKIND (v. 11-12)

In verses 11-12, there are three characteristics of God which are noteworthy. God is the one with perfect power (omnipotence), the one with perfect love (compassion), and the one with perfect knowledge (omniscience). "*One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.*" (Psalms 62: 11-12)

God is strong to defend the helpless and to strengthen the weak and to humble the proud. God's power is never carelessly or selfishly used, however, for God's power is controlled by God's love. To have power without love (mercy and compassion) is to cause havoc and to destroy lives (Hitler had great power but with no compassion to control his power, and millions of innocent people were killed as a result). The thought of an all-powerful God with no love is most terrifying! God's power is always love in action, and love in action means both mercy for the repentant and just judgment for the unrepentant. "*Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.*" (Psalms 62:12). God's power, controlled by love, is manifested in just and holy judgment for all mankind. All who are righteous will be rewarded with life eternally

lied with God, and all who are wicked will be rewarded with separation from God eternally. Tremendous blessings for the righteous and terrifying judgment for the wicked! The ultimate fate of each person is not based on some arbitrary divine decree; rather, it is based on God's perfect knowledge of every human being's volitional response to divinely-given opportunities. Because God is all-powerful (strong), He is able to save all persons and to preserve the righteous in the midst of life's storms (v. 2, 6). Because God is compassionate (loving), He wants to save all. God's perfect will is to save everyone. God is not willing that any should perish eternally (Note II Peter 3: 9). Because God is all-knowing, He is capable of rendering perfect judgment in His evaluation of each person's individual response to divine offers. God will 'balance the books' - i.e., reward the righteous ones for holy lives and deeds, and punish the wicked for unrighteous lives and deeds. *"Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done."* (Psalms 62: 12)

CONCLUSION: What motivation is there for the suffering servant of God to persevere under pressure? (1) God is all-sufficient in His ability, not only to offer salvation for the sinner, but to give rest for the weary saint (v. 1,5); (2) God is able to sustain the persecuted believer who is heavily pressured by unrelenting sinners whose aim is to topple the righteous from their lofty places of security (v. 4). Even though the harassed believer may at times feel like a 'leaning wall' and a tottering fence', because of the constant barrage of aggressive attacks from the wicked (v. 3), still the Lord will keep the righteous from being attacks from the wicked (v. 3), still the Lord will keep the righteous from being shaken or destroyed (v. 2, 6); (3) The suffering saint can persevere because he knows that he can share his innermost thoughts and burdens with the Lord (v. 8); (4) Contrasting the vanity of men and the transitoriness of earth's wealth with the steadfastness and trustworthiness of God alone, gives the weary believer motivation to keep leaning on the Everlasting Arms (v. 9-10); (5) Knowing that God is a God of perfect power and perfect love and perfect knowledge (v. 11-12), gives the troubled believer comfort and gives the careless believer caution, for God will ultimately "reward each person according to what he has done." (v. 12) there is great motivation to endure and to persevere in the Christian life, if one knows that in the end God will reward the faithful with untold heavenly blessings, and that in the end God will punish the wicked with untold eternal curses! Love is the greatest and primary motivator for perseverance, but it can't be denied that fear is the secondary motivator for spiritual perseverance. Deep love for God should be the driving force that motivates believers to be faithful to the Lord, but holy fear (reverential respect) is also a great incentive to faithfulness. Jesus said concerning the wisdom of having a wholesome fear of the Lord: *"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell."* (Matthew 10: 28).

Learning to persevere under pressure is important in living the Christian life, and Psalms 62 gives us several reasons (motivations) to persevere. Great are the rewards for the one who perseveres. Says the Lord to each of us: "I am coming soon.

Hold on to what you have (i.e., persevere), so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.” (Revelations 3: 11-12)

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

Chapter 10

Learning Perseverance Under Pressure

QUESTIONS

- 1. Share as many Scriptures as you can, which exhort believers to remain steadfast in the Christian Faith, regardless of the pressures of life. (Note I Corinthians 15: 58; Galatians 6:9)**
- 2. Share your emotional and intellectual response to the following statements: “God is unchanging in His mercy and His grace. God will never leave us or forsake us. He will go with us every step of the way.”**
- 3. Have you sometimes felt tempted by the enemy of your soul to give up your faith, and have you ever felt attacked by unbelievers whose evil aim was to topple you from your lofty place of spiritual fellowship and activities?**
- 4. Share a time when, during a severe trial, you turned the vessel of your soul upside down in God’s secret presence to share with the Lord your innermost thoughts and feelings and desires.**
- 5. Have you ever wondered if you, as a believer, have what it takes to persevere in your Christian life, especially when you think of your own weaknesses and when you feel the pressure of temptation from wicked men and from difficult circumstances?**
- 6. Have you known people whose souls were very restless as they were trying to find satisfaction in something or in someone other than God? (Note Matthew 11:28; Hebrews 4: 9-11; Psalms 32:10)**
- 7. Is the following a trite or a true statement: “There is no rest for the wicked”?**
- 8. In relationship to God’s salvation (Psalms 62:1b), (from both an Old Testament and New Testament viewpoint) what do you believe it means to be ‘saved’?**

9. **Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “If you are putting your trust in anyone or in anything other than in God alone for your salvation you are putting your faith in an object that is powerless to save you.”**
10. **In what ‘things’ do many people today place their confidence, in hopes that they will be ‘Saved’ or ‘Delivered’?**
11. **What are some of the various forms of assaults which the wicked bring against the righteous? (Note Psalms 62:3)**
12. **According to Psalms 62:3, what general strategy do wicked people sometimes form against righteous persons, and what affect does the strategy sometimes have on the righteous minority? Among the many strategies of the wicked, what two specific strategies are pointed out in Psalms 62:4?**
13. **From your own personal experience, can you attest to the truth of the following statement: “The pressures of sin and Satan and evil men may be great, but the sustaining power of God’s presence and comfort is much greater”?**
14. **Is it possible for a believer who is harassed by evil men or by difficult circumstances to enjoy, in spite of the storms without, sweet rest and calm within? (Note: John 16:33; Psalms 62: 6; (Philippians 4:7)**
15. **Tell what is meant by the following statement: “Christians are always ‘in the majority.’”**
16. **From a study of Psalms 62:9, why is it an act of folly for one to put his trust for deliverance in either ‘lowborn’ men or in ‘highborn’ men?**
17. **In light of Psalms 62:9, give your response to the following statement: “Men who are deplete of spiritual resources, void of spiritual understanding, and preoccupied with worldly pursuits are in God’s eyes more worthless and weightless than a feather on a scale.”**
18. **Considering the analogy, as recorded in Psalms 62: 9, tell how you would interpret the following statement: “God has more ‘weight’ than any earthly creature, whether that creature is ‘lowborn’ or ‘highborn’.”**

19. **What attitude should you, as a believer, appropriately have towards your possessions and your riches when they gradually or suddenly increase? (Note Psalms 62: 10b; I Timothy 6: 6-10, 17-19)**
20. **What are the attributes of God as revealed in Psalms 62: 11-12?**
21. **In rendering judgment, what is the relationship between God's power, God's love, and God's knowledge?**
22. **Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "God's power is always love in action, and love in action means both mercy for the repentant and just judgment for the unrepentant."**
23. **In light of II Peter 3: 9, give your reaction to the following statement: "The ultimate fate of each person is not based on some arbitrary divine decree; rather, it is based on God's perfect knowledge of every human being's volitional response to divinely-given opportunities."**
24. **Considering all the truths, as revealed in Psalms 62, what motivation is there for the suffering servant of God to persevere under pressure?**

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 11

WHEN YOU COVET THE WICKED

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 11

WHEN YOU COVET THE WICKED

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 73: 1-28

TEXT: *“Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.” (v. 1: 5)*

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever felt a spirit of covetousness come over you when you observed the wicked in their prosperity in contrast to your hardships and obstacles and financial troubles? Have you ever wondered why God allows the wicked man to enjoy pleasures and power and position and prestige, while God, at the same time, allows the righteous man to suffer hardships of all kinds - financial losses, physical infirmities, heartbreaking sorrows, spiritual depressions?

However justified a believer may feel he is to have feelings of covetousness, as he observes the prosperity of the wicked in contrast to his own poverty and problems, covetousness always has devastating moral consequences. The folly of covetousness in the life of the believer must be confessed, and the believer’s thinking must be renewed as he learns to realign his attitudes with those of God.

OUTLINE:

- I. CONSEQUENCES OF COVETOUSNESS (v. 2,3,13 - 16)**
 - A. Spiritual Instability (v. 2,3)**
 - B. Spiritual Despair (v. 13)**
 - C. Spiritual Bitterness (v. 14)**
 - D. Spiritual Offense (v. 15)**
 - E. Spiritual Confusion (v. 16)**

- II. CAUSES OF COVETOUSNESS (v. 3-12)**
 - A. Prosperity Of The Wicked (v. 3)**
 - B. Complacency Of The Wicked (v. 4, 5)**
 - C. Contempt Of The Wicked (v. 6 - 12)**

- III. CURE FOR COVETOUSNESS (v. 1, 17 - 28)**
 - A. Affirmation Of God’s Goodness (v. 1)**
 - B. Reorientation Of Human Thinking (v. 16 - 17)**
 - C. Recognition Of Divine Judgment (v. 18 - 20)**

D. Confession Of Personal Folly (v. 21 - 22)

E. Renewal Of Divine Communion (v. 23 - 28)

CONCLUSION: Covetousness is a universal experience of all mankind. Everyone experience envy. It is what you covet that determines whether your covetousness is helpful or hurtful, pleasing or painful, God-honoring or shameful. If you envy the health and the wealth and the power of the wicked, then your envy is evidence that your heart is set upon the wrong values of life. On the other hand, if you covet righteousness and holiness and godliness and wisdom and the 'smile of God's approval', then your covetousness becomes the incentive to moral discipline, prayer, and spiritual growth.

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 11

WHEN YOU COVET THE WICKED

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 73: 1-28

TEXT: *“Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.” (v. 1)*

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever felt like you took two steps forward and three steps backward, that the harder you tried to live a godly life the more adversities and reverses you seemed to experience? Have you ever felt a spirit of covetousness come over you when you observed the wicked in their prosperity in contrast to your hardships and obstacles and financial troubles? Have you ever wondered why God allows the wicked man to enjoy pleasures and power and position and prestige, while God, at the same time, allows the righteous man to suffer hardships of all kinds - financial losses, physical infirmities, heartbreaking sorrows, spiritual depressions? Have you ever thought that health and wealth automatically belonged to you by virtue of your spiritual position in God’s family, and that, when you weren’t enjoying prosperity, God must be failing to keep His promises? Have you ever been tempted to demand an explanation of why some who are not as righteous as you are, seem to get ahead?

If you believe that material prosperity is a sure sign of God’s blessings, then you will be very confused, maybe even bitter, if you observe the wicked prospering while you are not prospering! Envy is the result of one person (in this case, a believer) making an unfavorable comparison with another (in this case, with a prosperous wicked man). Envy saps one of spiritual energy, and envy can even cause a believer to lose his spiritual stability. So it was in the case of the psalmist in Psalms 73. *“But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”* (Psalms 73: 2, 3)

PROPOSITION: However justified a believer may feel he is to have feelings of covetousness, as he observes the prosperity of the wicked in contrast to his own poverty and problems, covetousness always has devastating moral consequences. The folly of covetousness in the life of the believer must be confessed, and the believer’s thinking must be renewed as he learns to realign his attitudes with those of God. The believer who is presently debilitated because of covetous feelings must realize that God will surely and ultimately reward the righteous and punish the wicked. He must learn to redirect his attention from the temporary affairs of men to the sovereign will and ways

of God. Looking up to God will enable the believer to have a proper outlook on life and this upward gaze will bring him deliverance from all his hurtful feelings of covetousness.

I. CONSEQUENCES OF COVETOUSNESS (v. 2, 3, 13 - 16)

The envious person - especially the envious believer - pays a high price for envy: instability (2), despair (13), bitterness (14), offense of others (15), and general spiritual confusion (16). Also, the envious believer is guilty of breaking one of God's commandments, 'Thou shalt not covet'. Thus, envy is a direct affront to God, for envy is the result of your focusing upon others rather than focusing upon God, and envy is a result of your doubting God's goodness to you while thinking that God favors others more than He favors you. Wrote the repentant Psalmist, after he acknowledged the folly of his covetousness: "*When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.*" (Psalms 73: 21, 22)

Note some of the specific consequences of covetousness:

A. Spiritual Instability (v. 2, 3)

"But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." (v. 2, 3)

To envy others is to take one's eyes off of God and to focus them on others, and to do this is to court disaster! It is when Christians begin to accept material prosperity as the gauge of success and happiness that they begin to make hurtful comparisons which lead to either pride or despair or bitterness. Using such a false measurement for success, such an out-of-focus Christian can arrogantly 'pat himself on the back' if his comparison with others, financially and materially, is favorable. If his comparison with others leaves him on the 'short end of things', then he can feel himself a failure, resulting in feelings of either dismal despair or bitter envy. Because the standard for success is wrong, the outcome of comparison will always be wrong, and thus the stability of the believer will always be threatened by such comparisons.

B. Spiritual Despair (v. 13)

"Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence." If one believes that material prosperity, or physical health, or leisure from life's common burdens are God's rewards for personal holiness and moral integrity, what happens to the

believer whose life becomes burdened with life's cares such as financial loss or physical disability? He is tempted foolishly to despair and to blame God for not rewarding him for his holy lifestyle! Are those who are pure in heart and honest in conduct guaranteed material prosperity and physical health? "The psalmist lived in a time when the Hebrew people believed that the blessing of the Lord was always manifested in material prosperity. Suddenly he faced a time when life fell apart and he said, 'Where is my God now?'" (Ogilvie; *Falling Into Greatness*; pg. 110). If a Christian believes that health and wealth are the inevitable results of living a holy and pure life, then the saint will fall into a state of depression and despair if financial reverses and ill health come to him. Envy of those who prosper brings despair to those who don't prosper.

C. Spiritual Bitterness (v. 14)

"All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning." (v. 14) When the disturbers are comforted and the comforters are disturbed, when the evil man prospers and the godly are plagued and beset with constant troubles, is it any wonder that the temptation to bitter envy is so real to the believer?

Bitterness of spirit is a high price to pay for covetousness, for bitterness is like a canker worm which eats the heart out of life!

D. Spiritual Offense (v. 15)

"If I had said, 'I will speak thus', I would have betrayed this generation of your children." (v. 15)

A Christian who feels covetousness in his heart brings hurt to himself because of the disquiet which envy causes within him, but if the envious believer outwardly expresses his inner feelings to those around him, his speech may be an occasion of great offense to others. Weak believers who admire stronger believers may be cast down with doubt or they may adopt the stronger brother's expressed attitudes of envy as their own way of looking at others. Unbelievers who hear the expressed views of covetousness and envy coming from the lips of professing believers may conclude that Christians are really no different than godless men in their attitudes and sentiments and values. "Expressions which convey the impressions that the Lord acts unjustly or unkindly, especially if they fall from the lips of men of known character and experience, are as dangerous as firebrands among stubble; they are used for blasphemous purposes by the ill-disposed; and the timid and

trembling are sure to be cast down thereby, and to find reason for yet deeper distress of soul.” (Spurgeon; Treasury of David; pg. 343)

E. Spiritual Confusion (v. 16)

“When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive.” (v. 16)

Trying rationally to understand all the ways of God and of men becomes oppressive to the mind and grievous to the spirit. When things around you don't add up to moral sense or justice, you tend to be lost in the maze of unanswerable questions. Questions like: “Why do the dishonest prosper and the honest suffer loss?” “Why do the upright seem always to be burdened with life's troubles and the godless seem always to be carefree to indulge themselves in their own fantasies?”

“We struggle to pay our mortgages and are faithful in paying our bills and living a responsible life. Then we walk into the home of an affluent person who gives no pretense of believing in God and we wonder, ‘God, what are You doing?’ ‘I trust you and you didn't give me all this. Here's somebody who doesn't even care about You who is getting ahead.’” (Ogilvie; Falling Into Greatness; pg. 110, 111)

Envy causes one to be topsy-turvy in thinking - mentally confused and spiritually distraught.

II. CAUSES OF COVETOUSNESS (v. 3-12)

One incentive in dealing with covetousness is to understand the serious consequences of covetousness - in terms of what hurtful affects covetousness has in one's relationship with God, in one's relationship to others, and in one's relationship to himself. Covetousness grieves God because the covetous believer has turned his attention away from God and has placed his focus on others instead. Covetousness hurts others because the covetous believer sees others as opponents to overcome rather than as fellow brothers to serve. Covetousness harms oneself because the covetous believer misses out on God's blessing for himself while he enviously desires the blessings which God is bestowing on others. Preoccupied with what others have, the covetous person fails to give proper attention to what he already has, to what he ought to be enjoying. As Ogilvie says, “Envy is always a hungry beggar, who never has enough. Our eyes register our comparisons of what we have with what others have achieved. Think of what wonders we miss when our roving eyes are focused on the wrong things.” (Ibid; pg. 111)

We have noted some of the sad consequences of covetousness: instability (v. 12), despair (v. 13), bitterness (v. 14), offense (v. 15), confusion (v. 16).

The next step in finding victory over covetousness is to pinpoint some of the causes of envy and covetousness.

A. Prosperity Of The Wicked (v. 3)

“For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” (v. 3)

When your next door neighbor - a neighbor who obviously is not a Christian - drives home one night in a brand new car, how do you feel? When your fellow employee - a man who is notorious for his crude language and his godless actions - flaunts his new clothes before you and talks about his newly purchased 4000 square foot home, how do you feel? When your non-Christian friend comes back from his two week ocean cruise and is eager to show you his pictures of himself bathing in the sun on the beaches, how do you feel? When your next door neighbor lady friend - an unbeliever - comes to your home for coffee in the midmorning and talks to you about her happy family and her loving husband and you know that you - a believer - are presently having marital problems and disciplinary problems with your children, how do you feel?

If we are honest, most of us would have to admit that the seeming ‘prosperity’ of our unsaved friends, in contrast to our seeming ‘failures’, causes envious feelings to rise to the surface of our hearts.

B. Complacency Of The Wicked (v. 4, 5)

“They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not played by human ills.” (v. 4, 5)

Living a life of ease and complacency, the wicked seem often to be physically fit and handsome, and to be fearless and confident in the face of death. Free from pain on earth, they seem to assume they will experience a painless death as well. Free from the cares and burdens of life, they ‘eat, drink, and make merriment’ all day long. They seem to do what they want, to go where they will, and to spend money to their heart’s content. “While many saints are both poor and afflicted, the prosperous sinner is neither.” (Spurgeon; pg. 340) The suffering, care-

ridden saint is tempted to envy the healthy, indulgent-living sinner who seems to be living a life of perpetual ease and fortune.

C. Contempt Of The Wicked (v. 6 - 12)

The very attitude of contempt and pride which the wicked display can become an occasion for inciting envy in some people - including even believers. The contempt of the wicked manifests itself in a variety of ways, as described in Psalms 73: 6-12.

1. Pride (v. 6)

"Therefore pride is their necklace." Far from concealing their pride, they display it like one displays an expensive necklace for all to see. Their self-reliant and confident attitude can cause the more conscientious persons to feel intimidated or even envious of such confidence.

2. Violence (v. 6b)

"They clothe themselves with violence." The selfishness of the wicked is often manifested by their boldness in approach to people. "They brag and bully, bluster and brow-beat, as if they had taken out a license to ride roughshod over all mankind." (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 340)

3. Indulgence (v. 7)

"From their callous hearts come iniquity." (v. 7a) This verse is translated interestingly in various translations: "their eyes gleam through folds of fat." (NEB) "Their eye bulges from fatness." (NASB) "These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever wish for!" (Living Bible) A description of indulgence and greediness and excess! No physical or material desire is denied them! They have more than their heart could desire. "The evil conceits of their minds know no limits." (v. 7b) (NIV) Physical indulgence and luxury is the outward manifestation of conceited imaginations of the mind. Their minds are controlled by 'illusions of grandeur'; they see themselves as persons who desire to live as kings and queens, with delights galore and with

servants a plenty who wait upon them continuously!

It is strange indeed that the self-indulgent wicked could be at one and the same time, both the object of God's wrath and the object of covetousness by some professing believers! What is contemptible to God should also be contemptible to God's people, but alas! some professing believers find themselves coveting the passing wealth of earth more than coveting the permanent wealth of heaven! The Bible exhorts believers to set their affections upon things above - heavenly treasures - rather than upon things below - the passing wealth of this world.

4. Boastful Speech (v. 8, 9)

***"They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth."* (v. 8, 9)**

When they speak, people listen! When they move, people get out of the way! When they order, people obey! They sneer at the holy and sacred things of life and they presume to possess ultimate authority. They pose as superior to all, and they expect everyone to obey them, at the threat of oppression for disobedience. Acting as little gods, they lay claim to heaven itself as their worthy place to live. Throwing their 'weight around', they defy God's authority and expect all humans to defer to them.

Such persons are the objects of God's holy wrath and just judgment, and these persons should be the scorn of all righteous souls. But alas! some professing believers feel a secret envy for the wicked who seem to exude such confidence and who seem boldly to wield such widespread influence and power!

(5.) Destructive Influence (v. 10)

***"Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance."* (v. 10, NIV) The meaning of the Hebrew for this verse is uncertain, but the New English Bible translation may best catch the possible meaning of this verse. If it is true that the bold and brazen attitudes and actions of the wicked tend to wield**

undue and negative influence upon gullible and weak believers and upon nominal professing Christians, then the following translation makes sense: “*And so my people follow their lead and find nothing to blame in them.*” (Psalms 73:10, NEB) Concerning the context of Psalms 73 on the subject of believers envying unbelievers, this verse may be describing believers who lose their critical discernment. Believers who begin to envy the wicked are believers who become morally insensitive and soft, easily succumbing to the negative influence of powerful and godless leaders. Far from despising the evil ways of evil men, covetous believers who wrongly admire the wealth and power and positions of evil leaders begin to follow the leadership of such godless persons.

(6.) Spiritual Indifference (v. 11)

They (the wicked) say, ‘How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?’” (v. 11)

The wicked are puffed up by their own conceits and are fattened with their own self-indulgence, and are boastful in their own claims, and are destructive in their evil influence. These marks against the wicked are grave enough, but added to these terrible traits is threat of spiritual indifference. In posing the question, “How can God know?”, they are slandering God’s very character, denying God’s omniscience. They are in essence saying: “God is too preoccupied or too limited to be concerned or knowledgeable of our personal actions and hidden plots.” “If there is a God, is he not too much occupied with other matters to know what is going on upon this world.” (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 341)

The wicked don’t really believe that they are morally accountable. They believe they can sin without facing personal and serious moral consequences. Living lives of ease and self-indulgence with no compunction of conscience and with no fear of judgment, these hedonistically-oriented persons can provoke feeling of covetousness in the hearts of luke-warm believers. The fallacious, but nevertheless the all-too-easy, reasoning of some shallow Christians, is as follows: “How much easier to ‘eat, drink, and be merry’ and to throw caution to the wind and to relax and pursue my own pleasures for awhile! Is there really a God who sees and who knows all things? Won’t God surely understand if

I relax my moral standards for awhile? Why all this moral effort and discipline and self-denial, especially when my attempts at living a righteous life seem to bear no fruit? The wicked prosper and get ahead in life and their conscience doesn't seem to bother them. Why not give in to my desires and take the moral 'path of least resistance' for awhile? Why stand up against temptation all the time? Does God really have knowledge of my personal actions and of my inner motives and desires? And even if He does know and even if He doesn't always approve of my thoughts and motives, He will always forgive!"

Such reasoning is the reasoning of the fool - but is it not true that some professing Christians have grown weary in their moral discipline and have mistakenly thought that to cast aside moral restraints was to bring in moral freedom? Observing the wicked who seem to live comfortably and carelessly, with no troubling of their conscience and with no sense of ultimate moral accountability for their careless lifestyle, may evoke feelings of envy in the lives of luke-warm professors of Christianity who long for a life of ease rather than for a life of spiritual discipline. Looking at the comfortable lifestyle of the godless compared with the hard-working and disciplined lifestyle of the godly, the weary believer sometimes is tempted to declare: "*This is what the wicked are like - always carefree, they increase in wealth.*" (Psalms 73: 12)

What causes some shallow-rooted Christians to succumb to the temptation of covetousness? Psalms 73: 2-12 indicates at least three possible causes: (1) *Prosperity of the wicked* (v. 3), (2) *Complacency of the wicked* (v. 4-5), (3) *Contempt of the wicked* (v. 6-12)

III. CURE FOR COVETOUSNESS (v. 1, 17 - 28)

A. Affirmation Of God's Goodness (v. 1)

"Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart." (v. 1) When you are tempted to blame God for seeming injustice, and when you are tempted to follow the lead of the powerful and the influential and the wealthy who seem always to prosper regardless of the immorality of their personal lives, then it is time to reaffirm the goodness of God. When wrong seems to go unpunished and

when right seems to go unrewarded, and when the wicked prosper while the godly suffer want, it is then that believers are susceptible to Satanically-implanted thoughts which cause one to question God's integrity and His goodness.

Concerning the importance of affirming God's goodness, especially during times of moral testing and mental confusion, Charles Spurgeon says, "Whatever may or may not be the truth about mysterious and inscrutable things, there are certainties somewhere; experience has placed some tangible facts within our grasp; let us, then, cling to these, and they will prevent our being carried away by those hurricanes of infidelity which still come from the wilderness, and, like whirlwinds, smite the four corners of our house and threaten to overthrow it. O my God, however perplexed I may be, let me never think ill of thee. If I cannot understand thee, let me never cease to believe in thee. It must be so, it cannot be otherwise, thou art good to those whom thou hast made good; and where thou hast renewed the heart thou wilt not leave it to its enemies." (Ibid; pg. 338)

B. *Reorientation Of Human Thinking* (v. 16 - 17)

"When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny." (v. 16-17)

Replacing one's own petty perspective with God's true perspective of reality is an indispensable step that one must take if he is to find victory over covetousness. Mental confusion and emotional depression are the results of trying to figure out the world of moral inconsistencies and spiritual mysteries. It is when the confused believer lays aside his independent mental queries and begins instead to seek the mind of God within the sanctuary of God, that he begins instead to find answers to his questions and cleansing from his disquieting envies. The Bible says that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). To see the world from God's perspective is to see the world from a moral perspective - a world where the 'books will be balanced', where evil will be eventually punished and where righteousness will be ultimately rewarded. When the righteous affirm the goodness of God to His saints and, in addition, when the righteous understand the severity of God to His enemies, who would ever again want to envy the wealth and the power and the prestige of the wicked? "He (the Psalmist) had seen too little to be able to judge; a wider view changed his judgment; he saw with his mind's enlightened eye the future of the wicked, and his soul was in debate no longer as to the happiness of their condition. No envy gnaws now at his heart, but a holy horror both of their impending doom, and of their present guilt, fills this soul. He

recoils from being dealt with in the same manner as the proud sinners, whom just now he regarded with admiration.” (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 343)

C. Recognition Of Divine Judgment (v. 18 - 20)

We are outlining the helpful steps that the righteous one, beleaguered with covetous feelings for the seemingly prosperous wicked, must take to be delivered from his envious bondage. Even though the hand of God may appear to be heavy in its administration of discipline to the righteous, the believer must affirm the goodness of God. God is good even though His ways seem at times to be inscrutable, past rationally figuring out.

Affirming God’s goodness with the lips, issuing forth from the heart (v. 1), helps one to realign and to reorient his thinking regarding moral realities (v. 16-17). God’s ways are higher than man’s ways, as high as the heaven is above the earth. Even though wrong seems often so strong and righteousness seems often to go unrecognized and evil ways seem often to be the ways of prosperity, the Psalmist is led to the sanctuary of God (v. 17) where moral confusion is dispelled and where true spiritual enlightenment is imparted. Understanding the final destiny of the wicked is one of the greatest factors in the cure of covetousness in the heart of the righteous person.

God’s judgment on the wicked is certain and terrible, therefore why envy the wicked? Though wrong seems often so strong, God is Ruler yet and He will eventually bring decisive judgment on unrepentant sinners!

(1.) Instability of the Wicked (v. 19)

“Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin.” This speaks of God’s Sovereignty. It is no accident that the wicked sometimes prosper. God allows the wicked to prosper for a reason. It may be that God allows prosperity to lull them to sleep spiritually to prepare them for greater spiritual judgment eventually. “They (the wicked) were but elevated by judicial arrangement for the fuller execution of their doom. Eternal punishment will be all the more terrible in contrast with the former prosperity of those who are ripening for it.” (Ibid; pg. 334; Spurgeon)

(2.) Destruction of the Wicked (v. 19)

“How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!” (v. 19) “This is an exclamation of godly wonder at

the suddenness and completeness of the sinners' overthrow....Like blasted trees, consumed by the lightning, they are monuments of vengeance; like the ruins of Babylon they reveal, in the greatness of their desolation, the judgments of the Lord against all those that unduly exalt themselves, the momentary glory of the graceless is in a moment effaced, their loftiness is in an instant consumed.” (Ibid; pg. 344; Spurgeon)

(3.) Judgment of God (v. 20)

“As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.” (v. 20)

From the perspective of eternity, when all persons face God in judgment, the pomp and power and prosperity of earth will appear as a short-lived and useless dream. At God's judgment bar, the illusions and the perversions of earth will be seen for what they really are. The righteous are to take comfort in the fact that the pompous preoccupations of evil men will be seen from eternity's perspective as short-lived dreams of unreality which shall be punished severely when in eternity reality will replace the mere illusions and fantasies of the world.

Recognizing the judgment of God upon unrepentant men of wealth and power, ought to be a strong antidote in the hour when confused believers are tempted to covet the position and the place of the wicked. To see beyond the present earthly illusions to the future eternal verities, is to see that the eternal destiny of the wicked is filled with terror. “What a slippery path they are on - suddenly God will send them sliding over the edge of the cliff and down to their destruction: an instant end to all their happiness, an eternity of terror. Their present life is only a dream! They will awaken to the truth as one awakens from a dream of things that never really were!” (Psalms 73: 18-20, Living Bible)

D. Confession Of Personal Folly (v. 21 - 22)

Personal repentance for holding bitter envy in ones heart is a vital step in finding victory in ones spiritual life. Affirming God's goodness to one's self, regardless of how hard life at times seems to be, is the first step towards regaining one's spiritual equilibrium. Reorienting one's thinking regarding the life of the wicked, from that of coveting the prosperity of the wicked to that of recognizing the final destiny of the wicked, is the next step in achieving victory

over covetousness. Contemplating the seriousness of God's judgment on the unrepentant wicked is the next step towards recovery. This means trusting in God's sovereignty - i.e., believing that God has a reason for allowing the wicked to prosper materially and for allowing the righteous to experience hardships. Earthly prosperity is the prelude to God's harsh judgment in eternity on unrepentant sinners (v. 188, 19), while earthly adversity is sometimes the instrument of God's discipline to better prepare humble saints for their ultimate rewards in heaven. Earthly prosperity cannot always be looked at as a sign of God's favor, and neither can adversity always be considered as a sign of God's judgment. The righteous oftentimes do prosper physically and materially, but so do the wicked. It is understanding of the ultimate destiny of the righteous and of the wicked that enables the believers, who is caught in the web of covetousness, to find deliverance from that debilitating web. Repentance means 's change of mind' from one of foolishly coveting earth's unsubstantial wealth to one of coveting the eternal wealth of heaven. It was Paul who wrote, *will be also.*" (Matthew 6:19-21, NIV) "*Aspire to the realm above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, and let your thoughts dwell on that higher realm, not on this earthly life.*" (Colossians 3: 2, NEB). Jesus wisely advised: "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart*

Repentance is recognizing the folly of coveting the wrong things = the wealth and the power and the position of the wicked. Setting one's affections on the things of time rather than on the things of eternity is what constitutes sinful coveting. Jesus exhorts us to covet the things of God, not the passing fantasies of this world.

Genuine repentance is the prelude to genuine victory over destructive covetousness. Said the Psalmist, "*When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.*" (Psalms 73: 21, 22) As the grass-eating ox has but this present life, and can only estimate things thereby, and by the sensual pleasure which they afford, even so had the psalmist judged happiness by this mortal life, by outward appearance, and by fleshly enjoyments. Thus he had, for the time, renounced the dignity of an immortal spirit, and, like a mere animal, judged after the sight of the eyes." (Ibid; Spurgeon; pg. 345)

E. Renewal Of Divine Communion (v. 23 - 28)

We are considering the steps that the believer must take in order to be cured of his covetousness: (1) Affirmation of God's goodness (v. 1); (2)

Reorientation of human thinking (v. 16-17); (3) Recognition of Divine Judgment (v. 18-20); (4) Confession of personal folly (v. 21-22).

The remainder of the chapter describes the joy of renewing personal communion with a loving God. This is the fifth step in the recovery process.

(1) Spiritual communion in spite of personal distraction (v. 23)

“Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.”

(v. 23) In spite of the fact that the Psalmist came close to falling away from the Lord, because of his envious preoccupation with the prosperity of the wicked, he rejoices that his distressing sin has not destroyed his relationship with his Lord. Sin is serious, and sin that is persisted in without genuine repentance can eventually sever the believer from his relationship with his Lord, but sin that is acknowledged and confessed is sin that is forgiven, resulting in the reestablishment of the believer’s communion with his blessed Lord. “He (the Psalmist) had almost fallen, and yet was always upheld.” (Ibid; Spurgeon; pg. 345)

(2) Earthly guidance leading to heavenly glory (v. 24)

“You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.” (v. 24) it is as if the Psalmist is acknowledging the folly of his human wisdom and understanding, and recognizing that he needs the divine guidance and spiritual wisdom which God alone can provide. Rather than simplistically trying to figure out the inequities and the mysteries and the seeming injustices of life, the Psalmist realizes that he must rely on the sovereign God alone. It is when a believer falls and fails that he is usually most humble and receptive to the counsel of God. “Our former mistakes are a blessing, when they drive us to this. The end of our own wisdom is the beginning of our being wise.” (Ibid; Spurgeon; pg. 345)

When the mind cannot understand the ways of God, the heart must trust the wisdom of God. God’s ways are higher than our ways, as high as the heavens are above the earth. Therefore, trust the Lord, submit to His counsel, accept His disciplines, and anticipate His future glory when He shall ultimately reward his humble servants in heaven.

(3.) Single-minded devotion resulting in undivided love (v. 25).

“Whom have I in heaven but you? And being with you, I desire nothing on earth.” (v. 25) He who is focusing on God, cannot at the same time focus on anything or on anyone lesser than God. He who is full of love for his Lover, cannot covet lesser objects of affection at the same time. ‘The things of earth grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.’ The Psalmist felt that his God was better to him than all the wealth, health, honor, and peace, which he had so much envied in the worldling; yes, He was not only better than all on earth, but more excellent than all in heaven.” (Ibid; Spurgeon; pg. 346)

(4.) Divine sustenance in spite of human weakness (v. 26)

“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (v. 26)

It is not houses and lands, position and power, or earthly friends that are the source of the Psalmist’s strength. These things may not be wrong within themselves and indeed may be very good, but they have no ability to strengthen the fainting heart, and none of these can provide soul securities in the hour of physical death. Why covet the things of the world when they leave the heart dissatisfied in time and the soul unsecured in eternity? Death will ultimately and inevitably overtake every person, and therefore God alone is able to carry the deathless soul of man safely through the tempests of life and through the gates of death. Man’s earthly portion - his material wealth - will be taken from him. We brought nothing into the world and it is certain we will take nothing out of the world but our naked soul! God is the inheritance of the righteous, and the righteous ones who on earth make God the object of their undivided love and affection, will in heaven have God as their ‘portion’ forever. God will satisfy all the desires of the righteous forever in heaven. “The days of the blameless are known to the Lord, and their inheritance will endure forever.” (Psalms 37: 18)

(5.) Secure fellowship instead of destructive apostasy (v. 27-28)

“Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, it is good to be near God.”

Who are those that are far from God? It is those who (according to Psalms 73: 6-11) are proud, violent, self-indulgent, spiritually indifferent. These shall perish. Those who are faithless - i.e. those who leave the Lord's presence to pursue the way of worldliness - shall be destroyed.

But soul security belongs to the faithful! Drawing near to God constitutes goodness and defines wisdom. Putting one's trust in God rather than in the godless results in understanding the meaning of life. "Faith is wisdom; it is the key of enigmas, the clue of mazes, and the pole star of pathless seas. Trust and you will know." (Ibid; Spurgeon; pg. 345, 347)

Not only does drawing close to God guarantee soul security, but it provides the motivation for witness to lost souls. He who draws close to God is he who reaches out to his fellowmen - to testify of God's wonderful deeds! He who knows God best is he who declares God most! Sweet communion with God produces bold communication to men!

CONCLUSION: Covetousness is a universal experience of all mankind. Everyone experiences envy. It is what you covet that determines whether your covetousness is helpful or hurtful, pleasing or painful, God-honoring or shameful. If you envy the health and the wealth and the power of the wicked, then your envy is evidence that your heart is set upon the wrong values of life. On the other hand, if you covet righteousness and holiness and godliness and wisdom and the 'smile of God's approval', then your covetousness becomes the incentive to moral discipline, prayer, and spiritual growth.

What do you covet? Earthly wealth or heavenly treasures? The object of your covetousness will determine the moral value of your covetousness. To covet God's favor and to desire heaven's eternal rewards is to be possessed with holy aspirations, but to covet earth's passing fantasies and frills and favors is to be infected with an unholy disposition. Jesus encouraged us to be filled with right desires. "*But seek for (aim at and strive after) first of all His kingdom, and His righteousness (His way of doing and being right) and then all these things taken together will be given you besides.*" (Matthew 6: 33, Amplified) Jesus also said, "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" (Matthew 6: 19-21, NIV)

“The danger of the kind of envy the psalmist struggled with is that we spend our energies comparing our fortunes with other people’s and never get to the reason we were born.” (Ogilvie; Falling Into Greatness; pg. 114) What is the reason for which we were born? To enjoy God and to do His will, and to glorify God in time and throughout all eternity! Rich indeed is such a person, regardless of how much or how little of this world’s goods he owns and uses! Covet the good and the godly, and disdain the evil and the profane!

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

Chapter 11

When You Covet The Wicked

QUESTIONS

- 1. Have you ever felt like you took two steps forward and three steps backward, that the harder you tried to live a godly life the more adversities and reverses you seemed to experience?**
- 2. Have you ever felt a spirit of covetousness come over you when you observed the wicked in their prosperity, in contrast to your hardship and obstacles and financial troubles?**
- 3. Have you ever wondered why God allows the wicked man to enjoy pleasures and power and position, and the righteous man to suffer hardships of all kinds - financial losses, physical infirmities, heartbreaking sorrows, spiritual depressions?**
- 4. Have you ever thought that health and wealth automatically belonged to you by virtue of your spiritual sonship in God's family, and that, when you weren't enjoying prosperity, God must be failing to keep His promises?**
- 5. What hurtful consequences come to a believer who gets his focus off of God, and who begins to look at financial prosperity as the gauge of success in life? (Note Psalms 73: 2-3)**
- 6. If one believes that material prosperity, or physical health, or leisure from life's common burdens are God's rewards for personal holiness and moral integrity, what happens to the believer whose life becomes burdened with life's cares such as financial loss or physical disability? (Note Psalms 73:13)**
- 7. Why is the temptation to bitter envy so real to a believer who is facing a situation in life like that which is described in Psalms 73:14?**
- 8. What harmful affects can words of covetousness, from the lips of a Christian, have upon the lives of fellow Christians or upon the lives of unsaved peers? (Note Psalms 73: 15)**

9. **According to Psalms 73:16, what affect does envy have upon the rational capabilities of a believer?**
10. **Generally speaking, what harmful affects does covetousness have upon one's relationship to God, one's relationship to others, and one's relationship to himself?**
11. **What are some of the features in the lives of wicked people which unfortunately sometimes become the object of great desire and covetousness in the lives of some righteous people? (Note Psalms 73: 3-12)**
12. **In light of the truth, as recorded Psalms 73:7, give your response to the following statement: "What is contemptible to God should also be contemptible to God's people, but alas! some professing believers find themselves coveting the passing wealth of earth more than coveting the permanent wealth of heaven!"**
13. **From your own personal experience or from your observation of others, give an illustration that demonstrates the truth of the following statement: "Believers who begin to envy the wicked are believers who become morally insensitive and soft, easily succumbing to the negative influence of powerful and godless leaders."**
14. **What serious denials are the wicked making about God's character and power, as reflected in their question, recorded in Psalms 73: 11? What affect can the casual and the careless attitudes of the wicked have upon the nominal and 'lukewarm' Christians?**
15. **From your general observations, can you conclude that far too many professing Christians have been beguiled by the evil influence of evil men (as manifested in Psalms 73: 11), and have consequently adopted a careless attitude regarding moral disciplines: "Why not give in to my desires and take the moral 'path of least resistance' for awhile? Why stand up against temptation all the time? Does God really have knowledge of my personal actions and of my inner motives and desires? And even if He does know and even if He doesn't always approve of my thoughts and motives, He will always forgive"?**
16. **According to Psalms 73: 1, what should a believer do when he is tempted to blame God for seeing injustices, and when he is tempted to follow the lead of the powerful and the influential and the wealthy who seem always to prosper regardless of the immorality of their personal lives?**

17. **With consideration of Psalms 73:16-17 in mind, give your comments on the following statement: "It is when the confused believer lays aside his independent mental queries and begins instead to seek the mind of God within the sanctuary of God, that he begins to find answers to his questions and cleansing from his disquieting envies."**
18. **Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Understanding the final destiny of the wicked is one of the greatest factors in the cure of covetousness in the heart of the righteous person." (Note Psalms 73: 17)**
19. **How does the impending judgment of the wicked, as recorded in Psalms 73: 18-20, serve as our incentive to faithfulness and as an antidote against envy?**
20. **Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Earthly prosperity is the prelude to God's harsh judgment in eternity on unrepentant sinners, while earthly adversity is sometimes the instrument of God's discipline to better prepare humble saints for their ultimate rewards in heaven."**
21. **If it is not appropriate for a believer, on one hand, to despise material things, and , on the other hand, to worship material things, what is the proper attitude of the believer towards material things?**
22. **Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Repentance means 'a change of mind' from one of foolishly coveting earth's unsubstantial wealth to one of coveting the eternal wealth of heaven." (Note Colossians 3: 21; Matthew 6: 19-21)**
23. **In light of the repentant attitude of the Psalmist (in Psalms 73: 23-24), give your interpretation of the following statement: "The end of our own wisdom is the beginning of our being wise."**
24. **In light of life's inequities, mysteries, and injustices, illustrate the truth of the following statement: "When the mind cannot understand the ways of God, the heart must trust the wisdom of God." (Matthew 27: 46)**
25. **What, according to Psalms 73: 25, is the greatest solution to the problem of carnal coveting? Do you agree with the following statement: "He who is full of love for his Lover, cannot covet lesser objects of affection at the same time"? What is meant by the statement: "The expulsive power of a new affection"?**

- 26. In light of the fact that death will ultimately and inevitably overtake every person, why should a person covet the things of the world which have no ability to satisfy the heart in time or to secure the soul in eternity? From whence does man find lasting satisfaction for his heart's desires and eternal security for his never-dying soul? (Note Psalms 73: 26)**
- 27. Do the following statements accurately reflect the truth of Psalms 73: 28? "He who knows God best is he who declares God most! Sweet communion with God produces bold communication to men!"**
- 28. If it is true that everyone envies something or someone, then what determines whether your envy is 'Right' or 'Wrong'?**
- 29. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "If you covet righteousness and holiness and godliness and wisdom and the 'smile of God's approval', then your covetousness becomes the incentive to moral discipline, prayer, and spiritual growth." (Note Matthew 6: 19-21, 33; Colossians 3: 1-2; I Corinthians 12: 31; 2 Peter 1: 3-11)**

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 12

DIGGING WELLS IN YOUR DESERT!

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 12

DIGGING WELLS IN YOUR DESERT!

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 84: 1-12

TEXT: *“My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God...no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.”* (v. 2, 11b)

INTRODUCTION: We are all born thirsting for infinity! We are all pilgrims panting for the rest to come! The craving of the soul in need of God (v. 1-4), will lead to the conquest of the soul in pursuit of God (v. 5-7), and will eventually result in the consolation of the soul in fellowship with God (v. 8-12)

OUTLINE:

- I. THE CRAVING OF THE SOUL IN NEED OF GOD (v. 1-4)
 - A. The Loveliness Of The Dwelling Place Of God (v. 1)
 - B. The Agony Of The Homesick Soul Of Man (v. 2)
 - C. The Comfort Of The Lowly Creatures Of God (v. 3)
 - D. The Blessedness Of The Abiding Soul In Praise (v. 4)

- II. THE CONQUEST OF THE SOUL IN PURSUIT OF GOD (v. 5-7)
 - A. The Strength Of The Determined Soul In Pilgrimage (v. 5)
 - B. The Miracle Of The Rejoicing Pilgrim During Tribulations (v. 6a)
 - C. The Refreshment Of The Revived Spirit Amidst Adversities (v. 6b)
 - D. The Progress Of The Maturing Pilgrim Toward Zion (v. 7)

- III. THE CONSOLATION OF THE SOUL IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD (v. 8-12)
 - A. The Prayer Of The Faithful Saint In Intercession (v. 8-9)
 - B. The Priority Of The Humble Servant In Worship (v. 10)
 - C. The Honor Of The Blameless Man In Holiness (v. 11-12)

CONCLUSION: Can you say: “My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God”? If God is the object of your wholehearted quest, then God shall be the satisfaction of your insatiable hunger. Says the Lord, *“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”* (Jeremiah 29: 13).

To the extent that your quest for God is strong, to that same extent will your satisfaction in God be great! Said Jesus, *“Keep on asking and it will be given you; keep on seeking and you will find; keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you.”* (Matthew 7: 7, Amplified) *“God will supply all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4: 19). *“For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.”* (Psalms 84: 11)

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 12

DIGGING WELLS IN YOUR DESERT!

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 84: 1-12

TEXT: *“My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God...no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.”* (v. 2, 11b)

INTRODUCTION: It was Hannah More who noted that “the soul on earth is an immortal guest, compelled to starve at an unreal feast; a pilgrim panting for the rest to come; an exile anxious for its native home.”

Think of this statement. Your soul is an immortal guest, that you are over built for this earth. You are a creature of eternity, not merely of time. You have a temporary body, but you are an eternal spirit. You are God’s guest! God has created you for Himself - to enjoy God and to be enjoyed by God forever in Heaven!

You are made by God and for God, and you remain restless until you rest in God alone! That is to say, that without personal knowledge of God, you are compelled “to starve at an unreal feast.” While man is ‘feasting’ his soul on the so-called delights of earth - sensualism, materialism, worldly power - his soul is starving. Man shall not live by ‘bread’ alone - the earthly delights - but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. God’s Word - the Bible - and God’s Living Word - Christ - are the true sources of soul satisfaction. “Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6: 35)

You are a pilgrim panting for the rest to come. As a pilgrim, you must recognize that this world is not your home. You must see yourself as an exile anxious for your native home. Heaven is your native home! You are not to despise the present world with its temporary delights and God-allowed pleasures, but you are to be a person who lives for two worlds - the world of time and the world of eternity. You are to set your affections on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father’s throne.

We are all born thirsting for infinity! We are all panting for the rest to come!

PROPOSITION: The cravings of the soul in need of God (v. 1-4), will lead to the conquest of the soul in pursuit of God (v. 5-7), and will eventually result in the consolation of the soul in fellowship with God (v. 8-12)

I. THE CRAVING OF THE SOUL IN NEED OF GOD (v. 1-4)

The wisest of all persons - Christ - said "*Where your treasure is, there will your heart also be.*" One's goal in life and the intensity with which one pursues his goal, is what judges a life to be either noble or ignoble. Self-centered goals pursued with selfish greed spells ultimate frustration and shame, while selfless goals pursued with God-inspired motivation of love spells ultimate success, and brings both the eventual praise of God and men! It is wise for one always to ask himself: 'What all-consuming purpose controls my life?' 'Is my goal, career survival, or physical security, or temporary pleasure, or earthly success, or material prosperity?' None of these are necessarily evil, and, indeed, they all may be legitimate and good, but none of these is big enough to deserve the sole attention of the soul.

For what does your soul yearn and for what does your heart and flesh cry out? The Psalmist had a life passion, a desire that gave direction to all his activities and a goal that consumed all his energies.

A. The Loveliness Of The Dwelling Place Of God (v. 1)

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty." (v. 1)

The passion of the Psalmist's life was to constantly enjoy the presence and the fellowship of His God. Where does God dwell? Even those in the Old Testament periods of divine revelation knew that God's presence could not be confined to one particular place. "*If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.*" (Psalms 139: 8-10). A time would come when Jesus would clearly teach that the true worship of God is not connected with any certain place. "*Jesus declared (to the Samaritan woman), 'believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem...A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.'*" (John 4: 21-24)

Recognizing that, unless one is worshiping God personally in 'spirit' he is not really worshiping God at all, and recognizing that true worship is never confined only or even primarily to a specific place or time or style, it is nevertheless also true that the one who most craves God's personal fellowship is also the one who most desires to worship corporately with God's people in God's holy sanctuary.

Can you say, "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty"? Is the local church a place of delight to you?

B. The Agony Of The Homesick Soul Of Man (v. 2)

My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord; and my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.” (v. 2)

Apparently, the Psalmist, when writing this Psalms, was in some distant land where he finds himself unable to enter the House of the Lord. Memories flood his mind of bygone days when he often enjoyed the company of fellow believers. He is now so homesick for the House of the Lord. His entire being - his spirit, his flesh, his heart - is filled with a passionate desire to return to corporate worship in the holy city of Jerusalem. Of course, it is not the temple itself so much that the Psalmist yearns for, but it is the living God, whose presence is symbolized by the holy Temple, that the Psalmist considers as the sole object of his unspeakable delight and intense desire. The ‘courts of the Lord’ symbolize everything that speaks of soul satisfaction. To be in God’s House with God’s people is next to being with God Himself!

How attractive are the courts of God’s House to you? Are you ever homesick for the people of God? Does your soul ever yearn for the closer presence of God which is more keenly felt when you are corporately worshipping and singing and praying and praising God in His holy sanctuary?

Some have to be forced to go to Church. Others come to Church sporadically and reluctantly. Others enter the sanctuary passively; their listless and their joyless expressions evidence indifference or boredom. Many are the excuses of the passionless and the lukewarm professors of religion, regarding church attendance: (a) ‘I need to relax on Sunday morning, and therefore I don’t have time to attend Church services.’ (b) ‘I need to be with my family and relatives on Sunday. If I am enjoying my family rather than attending Church services, God will surely understand.’ (c) ‘I need to work, and therefore I can’t come to Church services on Sunday.’ (d) ‘I don’t understand what is being said at Church so I simply study my Bible at home.’ (e) ‘I am discouraged because of my circumstances and therefore I don’t feel like going to Church.’ (f) ‘I am ‘trying out’ several churches before I settle on attending one church regularly.’

Excuses, excuses, all flimsy excuses! Expressions of lethargy and spiritual indifference! Such contrast to the passionate desire of the homesick soul of the Psalmist who cried out for ‘the living God’, and who fainted for the ‘courts of the Lord’ (v. 2).

Craving for God’s presence, and love for God’s people are two expressions of the truly spiritual person. One cannot truly know God and, at the same time, reject God’s people and neglect God’s sanctuary. Notes Elton Trueblood, “Individual Christianity is a self-contradiction! Unless there is a sense of ‘one another’ there is

no sense of the Living Christ. Though the Church, as we observe it, frequently fills us with frustrations, we know, if we are realists that it provides the only way in which Christians can be faithful to their Lord.” (The Future of the Christian; pg. 22)

C. The Comfort Of The Lowly Creatures Of God (v. 3)

“Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young - a place near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God.” (v. 3)

If a lowly creature like a sparrow or a swallow is ‘at home’ and is ‘welcome’ in a place near God’s altar, now much more should I - a special creature created with an insatiable hunger for God - be welcome at the House of God? If there is an appropriate place - a comfortable nest - for the swallow and the sparrow near the altar of God, how much more should there be a place for the creature whom God has created in His own image! After all, no lowly creature has the capability, rationally or spiritually, to address its Creator as ‘Lord Almighty, my King and my God’. If the insignificant birds of the earth have a comfortable place near the altar of God to hatch their young, how much more should a weary soul have a place to rest in the inner sanctuary of God’s House and in the inner sanctity of God’s presence! The happier lot of God’s lowly creatures in contrast to the restless lot of humanity is meant to show us the unnaturalness of spiritual estrangement from God and the rationale for passionate longing for God and for God’s holy sanctuary.

Because God is Almighty and because the King is ‘My’ personal King, the bitter contrast between the satisfied birds near God’s altar and the dissatisfied soul, distant from the ‘courts of the Lord’, leads to confident assurance that the soul’s longings for God will be filled. “Our spirits cannot hunger in vain if they hunger after God; for that hunger is the sure precursor and infallible prophet of the covering satisfactions...Say ‘my King and my God!’ in the deepest recesses of a spirit conscious of His presence, of a will submitting to His authority, of emptiness expectant of His fullness; say that, and you are in the house of the Lord. For it is not a question of place, it is a question of disposition and desire.” (Expositions of Holy Scripture; MaClaren; pg. 127)

D. The Blessedness Of The Abiding Soul In Praise (v. 4)

“Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.” (v. 4).

How can the goal of the righteous man best be described? Constant abiding in God and praise of God! ‘Dwelling in God’s House’ is an Old Testament way of describing what the New Testament teaches about constantly abiding in the Son. Said Jesus to His disciples, “*Maintain a living communion with me, and I with you. Just*

as the branch is unable to be bearing fruit from itself as a source unless it remains in a living union with the vine, so neither you, unless you maintain a living communion with me. As for myself, I am the vine. As for you, you are the branches. He who maintains a living communion with me and I with him, this one is bearing much fruit, because apart from me you are not able to be doing anything.” (John 15: 4-5, Wuest)

When one understands something of the glory and the splendor of knowing and fellowshiping with the living God on a moment-by-moment basis, he is filled with a soul craving to find God! “To be the guests of God, enjoying the hospitalities of heaven, set apart for holy work, screened from a noisy world, and familiar with sacred things - why this is surely the choicest heritage a son of man can possess.” (Treasury of David; pg. 65; Vol. 4).

II. THE CONQUEST OF THE SOUL IN PURSUIT OF GOD (v. 5-7)

The loveliness of the dwelling place of God is described in verse one. The agony of the homesick soul of man in contrast to the comfort of God’s lowly creatures - the birds - is described in verses 2 and 3. The blessedness of the abiding soul in praise is described in verse 4: *“Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.”*

A. The Strength Of The Determined Soul In Pilgrimage (v. 5)

The goal of every earnest soul is to enjoy constant fellowship with God (“dwell in your house”) and to engage in a life of constant praises of God (“they are ever praising you”). The fulfillment of this life-time goal must be the craving of every wholehearted soul. Those who find God - who enjoy sweet fellowship - are those who seek God with their whole heart. “The blessedness of sacred worship belongs not to half-hearted, listless worshipers, but those who throw all their energies into it.” (The Treasury of David; Spurgeon; Vol.4; pg. 65)

The persistence and intensity with which one pursues the knowledge and the fellowship of God is determined by the degree of passion with which one feels his need for God. One does not easily or quickly come to know God intimately; there are hurdles and obstacles on life’s pathway that cause many to become lukewarm in their response to God or to become diverted from God altogether. There must be a set of the mind and a determination of the will if one is to come to know God truly and deeply.

He who is determined in his soul to know God does not depend upon his own strength to sustain him in his noble pursuit of God. God is the source of sustaining strength for the otherwise weary pilgrim, who, without God’s imparted strength would surely fail and faint and abandon his pursuit of God. It is not by might nor by

power, but by God's Spirit that anyone has a desire to seek God, or the power to persist in his quest for God. Blessed - to be envied - is the person who has set his heart on God and who has learned to depend alone on God for his strength to sustain him in his long pilgrimage towards the heavenly Jerusalem! "*Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.*" (Psalms 84: 5)

B. The Miracle Of The Rejoicing Pilgrim During Tribulations (v. 6a)

"As they pass through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs."
(v. 6a)

The valley of Baca may mean 'the valley of weeping'. It is possible that the word 'Baca' refers to balsam trees or aspens, thus indicating trees or shrubs that grow in arid places. The point the Psalmist seems to be making is this: As the pilgrim makes his journey to the distant city of Zion (Jerusalem) where he anticipates the glory of God's presence and the fellowship of God's people, there are dry and difficult valleys along the way, experiences that may appear to be barren and arid, troublesome times that bring sorrow to the heart and tears to the eyes.

However, the miracle is this: that while the determined pilgrim is going through difficult experiences, he learns "to dig blessings out of hardships" (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; Psalms pg. 305). "These pilgrims find themselves on their way to a highly desired spot but in their going they have within their own hearts just what it takes to transform the desert into a lovely garden. They not only can endure the vale of weeping without losing heart, but they re-create it into a joyous place of songs. God is so real to them, their religion is so vital, their joy is so genuine, their faces are so radiant, their songs are so uplifting, their spirit is so contagious, that their 'passing through' makes a difference....God would have you turn your own valley into a place of refreshing springs where not only your own soul but the souls of all your neighbors may be refreshed and revived and made to sing aloud of His mercy." (Preaching From the Psalms; Kyle Yates; pg. 56, 57)

During the arid periods of life, the believer must learn to find good where only evil seems to be present, to transform a tragedy into a triumph, to dig a well and find a spring of blessings. The man of faith, whose mind is set on God and whose soul yearns for the 'courts of the Lord', is the man who digs for wells even in the desert experiences of life.

The believer must train himself to ask, when facing problems: "What good does God intend for me to salvage out of this problem and trouble?" In the midst of great adversity, Paul dug a well; he turned his stumbling blocks into stepping stones; he used his prison experience in Rome for his good and for God's glory. Wrote Paul

to the Philippians, regarding his imprisonment: *“Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the Word of God more courageously and fearlessly.”* (Philippians 1: 12-14) If Paul’s prison experience resulted in Roman pagans being converted, in timid Christians being encouraged, and in the Gospel message being spread, what do you suppose your ‘prison’ experience could result in?

During John Bunyan’s difficult spiritual pilgrimage, he was imprisoned several years because of his strong faith in God. Bunyan dared to ‘dig blessings out of hardships’. He dug a well in his desert! He used his prison experience for the glory of God and for the good of men. He wrote ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ while he was in prison. This classic has been cherished more than any other book, second only to the Bible in popularity among Christians for centuries!

Someone once said to a gallant soul who was undergoing a great sorrow: “Sorrow fairly colors life, doesn’t it?” Back came the reply: “Yes, and I propose to choose the color.” This is like saying, “During the desert experiences of life, I will not give up. I will make it a place of springs!”

“A gracious Christian lady said to another: ‘I know you dislike being ill. But I find the only thing to do is to get something out of every experience that comes to me. So make your illness give you something.’” (Abundant Living; pg. 388). Can illness give you something? It can give you an appreciation of good health, and an appreciation for those who help you during your illness, and a sympathy for those who endure a similar illness. Can sorrow give you something? It can draw you close to God and let you experience, as never before, the comforting presence of God which shall in turn enable you to be a better comforter of other sorrowing people. Can financial loss give you something? It can give you a better realization of the perishability and unreliability of material things and make you value the permanent and eternal possessions of life more. Can temptation give you something? By resisting the Devil and finding victory over temptation, you can come out a stronger and more mature Christian. Can loneliness give you something? It can give you time to pray and to learn to cultivate a sense of God’s constant abiding presence, and it can give you opportunity to meditate without the distractions which being in a group brings.

Not only can you turn your own deserts into living springs of water, dig blessings out of your own hardships, but you can bring blessings to other people during their hardships. “Phillips Brooks was one of America’s greatest preachers. His place as king in the pulpit was unquestioned. Boston knew him as a mighty prophet of God. One day in the leading New England paper there appeared the following line which speaks for itself: ‘Yesterday opened cloudy and unpleasant; but

about noon Phillips Brooks came downtown, and everything brightened up.’ Do you see it? Just one man walked down the street in a darkened city. What a powerful influence such a man can have! What is your status in this matter? Do you tend in that direction? When you walk through a street does it help?” (Preaching From the Psalms; Kyle Yates; pg. 59)

You can find or make springs in your desert experiences of life, and you can help bring springs to others in their barren times of life!

C. The Refreshment Of The Revived Spirit Amidst Adversities (v. 6b)

The direct outpouring of God’s blessings is promised to those faithful pilgrims who have learned to face trials optimistically and creatively. “*The autumn rains also cover it with pools.*” (v. 6b)

God will not leave the weary traveler to fend for himself. He will pour out ‘showers of blessings’ upon the barren land and will turn the deserts of life into rose gardens of sweet fragrance.

“There shall be showers of blessings
This is the promise of love;
There shall be seasons refreshing,
Sent from the Savior above.”

“There shall be showers of blessings
Send them upon us, O Lord;
Grant to us now a refreshing;
Come, and now honor Thy Word!”

There are so called ‘dry periods’ in every believer’s life. Every Christian goes through periods of trials when he doesn’t feel the closeness of God or when the blessings of God seem to be withheld. It is during these times that Christians must keep their appetite for God alive and their quest for God in earnest. As a creative pilgrim, the single-minded Christian must seek to use every problem as a steppingstone for spiritual growth.

To the persistent soul, the ‘breakthroughs’ will come. Added to the soul’s creative transformation of problems into possibilities, (i.e., digging blessing out of troubles, making a place of springs in the desert), is the Lord’s direct renewal of the soul (i.e., heaven-sent autumn rains that cover the desert with refreshing pools.” ‘To dig blessings out of hardships’ speaks of the believer’s earnest efforts and positive and creative attitudes in approaching the trials of life. ‘To receive blessings from God’ speaks of the Lord’s merciful response to the earnest soul who is in need of

divine refreshment and renewal of spirit.

D. The Progress Of The Maturing Pilgrim Toward Zion (v. 7)

“They go from strength to strength till each appears before God in Zion.”
(v. 7).

One might think that the longer he travels the pathways of life and the more he is faced with ever recurring challenges and tests and problems and perplexities, he would become weaker and weaker in his spiritual walk. That is always a possibility. Some do become weaker and eventually fade and fail and give up the Christian walk altogether. But this is not God’s intention. God intends for us to grow stronger and stronger in our inner spirit and in our outer devotion - the longer we are Christians. Every trial successfully met makes us stronger for the next trial. Every temptation successfully resisted makes us stronger to resist the next temptation - even if the next temptation is stronger and more subtle.

Reward for passing one grade in school is a harder grade to enter and to conquer. Reward for work well done is more and harder work to do. He who has traveled longest on the road toward Zion - the heavenly Jerusalem - should be the strongest. Every time the persevering pilgrim creatively uses problems to glorify God and to benefit himself and others, he is made stronger and more creative to face and to use further and harder problems. “One experience of the Lord’s provision in problems opens us up to greater trust in the future. We can say, ‘Thank You, Lord. You gave me courage to expect and receive power from you. I know that You will give me greater strength for bigger problems in the future. My purpose is to glorify You in all that happens. The more I face the more You will bless me. Help me to listen for you to tell me what you want and I will claim it.’” (Falling Into Greatness; Ogilvie; pg. 123)

III. THE CONSOLATION OF THE SOUL IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD (v. 8-12)

What is the secret to victory in the spiritual life, while one is traveling as a pilgrim towards Zion - the heavenly Jerusalem? First, maintain a strong craving for God and for the ‘courts of the Lord’ (v. 1-2). Second, when facing problems in the deserts of life, learn creatively to transform the desert into a lovely garden by digging blessings out of hardships (“they make it a place of springs”) (v. 6). Third, anticipate and receive blessings directly from God during adversities, for the production of new growth in your seemingly barren life (“the autumn rains also cover it with pools”) (v. 6). Fourth, use each test and trial to strengthen you for further tests and to mature you in your walk with God. To follow God more closely as a result of each trial successfully overcome is one of the ‘keys’ to the enjoyment of constant spiritual victory in the Christian pilgrimage (v. 7).

A. The Prayer Of The Faithful Saint In Intercession (v. 8-9)

The craving of the soul in need of God (v. 1-4) leads to the conquest of the soul in pursuit of God (v. 5-7) which results finally in the consolation of the soul in fellowship with God (v. 8-12). A strong craving for God sustains one in his noble conquest over obstacles that could divert him from God. A triumph over obstacles in one's pilgrimage results in the consolation of sweet fellowship with God.

The consolation of the soul which is enjoying sweet fellowship with God can be described in various ways: Intercessory prayer for God's people and for God's leaders (v. 8-9), humble service in God's House (v. 10), and personal security and honor from God (v. 11, 12).

Think first of the prayer of the faithful saint in intercession (v. 8-9). *"Hear my prayer, O Lord God Almighty; listen to me, O God of Jacob. Look upon our shield, O God; look with favor on your anointed one."*

The believer, on his pilgrimage towards heaven, finds great consolation in the fact that God is a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God. God does not close His ears to the pilgrim whose prayers are earnest and whose needs are openly expressed. God's power to accomplish miracles is limitless! God is able to do abundantly above all that we can ask or think. God is not only able to do the miraculous, but He is desirous to do the miraculous. It is God's desire to *"throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."* (Malachi 3: 10). God is a God of infinite power and of abundant goodness. He is lavish in His gifts of love! He wants to bless your life beyond measure! Behind every prayer you pray stands a God who is 'Almighty' - One whose arm is not shortened that it cannot help and One whose ears are not stopped that He cannot hear, and One whose heart is not hardened that He cannot feel. He is a God who is ready to hear and to answer prayer!

The only thing that will hinder God from answering your prayers is unconfessed sin. Writes Isaiah, the prophet to God's backslidden people, the Israelites: *"Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."* (Isaiah 59: 1-2)

However, the faithful saint - the one whose heart is pure and whose desires are fixed on the Lord - can take great consolation in the fact that his prayers will be heard and answered by an Almighty God!

The praying pilgrim finds great delight in knowing his prayers will be answered. For what does the faithful saint pray? For much, but especially that God's

favor may rest on God's anointed one - the King of Israel. Translating this prayer request into the context of Christian faith, we can say that the refreshed saint who has overcome his obstacles along the pathway to heaven and who has received a fresh outpouring of blessing from the Lord (v. 6), is the pilgrim whose earnest prayers are offered to God for the prosperity of the Church (i.e., 'spiritual Israel') and for the favor and anointing of God's spiritual leaders.

He who is close to God is the same one whose prayers often rise to God for the success and for the prosperity of God's kingdom and for God's spiritual leaders. His prayer is something like this (paraphrasing Psalms 84: 9) "*Almighty God, who hast given me personal victory in the trials of life and who hast refreshed me with your blessings during my personal periods of spiritual 'dryness' and barrenness, I ask you to hear my prayer for your leaders - for those who shepherd your church. O God, look with favor on your anointed ones, and help them to lead your people in the right ways!*" Wrote Paul to Timothy, "*I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for everyone - for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*" (I Timothy 2: 1-2) Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica: "Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you." (I Thessalonians 5: 12)

The soul of the pilgrim in fellowship with God finds great consolation in offering faith-filled prayers to Almighty God for the 'king' (spiritual and national leaders) and for the 'kingdom' (the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ).

B. The Priority Of The Humble Servant In Worship (v. 10)

We said earlier that the consolation of the soul which is enjoying sweet fellowship with God can be described in several ways. Intercessory prayer for God's people (the Church) and for God's leaders (v. 8-9) is one way. Another way is humble service in God's House (v. 10). "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked."

(1) Think of the contrast in status between those who dwell in 'the tents of the wicked' and those who merely and humbly wait at the thresholds of God's House. The humblest place in God's kingdom is infinitely better than the most powerful position among the wicked! 'Little is much if God is in', but 'Much is nothing if God is not in it'! To be last in line in God's row is far better than to be first in line in the devil's company. "To bear burdens and open doors for the Lord is more honor than to reign among the wicked...God's worse is better than the devil's best." (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 66, 67). It is far more

ennobling and significant to be the least in God's family than to be the most powerful and influential in Satan's kingdom!

(2) Think of the contrast in apparent security between those who dwell 'in the tents of the wicked' and those who serve as doorkeepers in the house of the Lord. "God's doorstep is a happier rest than downy couches within the pavilions of royal sinners, though we might lie there for a lifetime of luxury." (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 67)

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold;
I'd rather be His than have riches untold;
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands,
I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand
Than to be the king of a vast domain
Or be held in sin's dread sway.
I'd rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today."

(3) Think of the contrast in the company between those who dwell 'in the tents of the wicked' and those who attend to the simple tasks in the House of the Lord. In the company of the wicked, one's acceptance in the group is conditional, whereas a believer's acceptance in the company of the righteous is unconditional. Unconditional love, because of each person's intrinsic worth as a God-created, Christ-redeemed soul rather than conditional acceptance based on mere functional worth to the inner clique. With or without status and material wealth, each person who dwells in the courts of the Lord is the object of God's special love and the equal in God's family. When one's value does not have to be earned by performance and position and power, he is able to rejoice in his God-given status as a son in the Family of God with his fellow brothers and sisters, and he is able to join in adoration and love for the Heavenly Father who cares equally for all His children. To be the youngest or the most obscure in the family of God is infinitely more wonderful than to be the oldest or the most influential in the company of the wicked! The most humble in God's family is more ennobled than the most powerful in Satan's company. "What balm it is to a poor, frustrated, neglected, ignored, and impotent soul to be assured from Heaven that his gifts and service, however lightly regarded on earth, are not less precious to God than those of his most brilliant contemporary...The simplest servant of the kingdom, quietly confident that he is doing his best, may feel the smile of God upon him." (He Is Able; Sangster; pg. 118)

The greatest pilgrim, on his way to Zion - heavenly Jerusalem - can take great consolation in the fact that he is a humble servant of God. The

contrast of status, and apparent security, as well as of company can be seen between the doorkeeper in the House of the Lord and the one who dwells in the tents of the wicked. Great is the joy of the one who serves God in humble obscurity, doing his tasks for God without seeking the applause or the recognition and the praise of men. Richard DeHaan illustrates this point well in one of his devotionals in 'Our Daily Bread'. Says Dr. DeHaan, "It was my privilege recently to minister in a church where the love and warmth of its members was especially evident. I was also impressed by their willingness to pitch in and work. On the Sunday I spoke, three services were scheduled: morning, afternoon, and evening. The women of the church had provided a bountiful meal to be served between the meetings for visitors who had traveled a long distance to attend. Following the dinner, after most of the people had left, I noticed a distinguished-looking couple clearing the tables and dumping the dirty paper plates into large plastic bags. When I complimented them on what they were doing, they said matter-of-factly, 'Oh, we're the "garbage detail". We volunteered to clean up after every church function. We consider it a ministry.' I thought, how wonderful! This man and woman were not only available to serve the Lord, but they humbly do what others might consider demeaning work. Some individuals volunteer for the more prominent and appealing forms of ministry in the church, but these dear people were glad to be what they cheerfully called the 'garbage detail'. God calls some members in the body of Christ to serve in places of prominence; others to labor quietly behind the scenes. Regardless of what the Lord asks us to do, may we be willing to do it by serving one another through love (Galatians 5: 13), knowing that ultimately we are serving the Lord Christ (Colossians 3: 24)." (Daily Bread; Jan. 4, 1987).

Never forget, "Humble work becomes holy work when it is done for God." A humble place in God's work is far better than an honored place of power in the devil's kingdom! Affirm with the Psalmist: "*I would rather be a doorman of the Temple of my God than live in palaces of wickedness.*" (Psalms 84: 10; Living Bible)

C. The Honor Of The Blameless Man In Holiness (v. 11-12)

Thus far we have described two ways in which the soul that is at rest in God finds deep fulfillment - through his involvement in intercessory prayer for God's people and for God's leaders (v. 8-9), and through his involvement in humble service in God's House (v. 10). The consolation of the soul which is enjoying sweet fellowship with God can be described in a third way: personal spiritual security and honor from God (v. 11, 12).

Concerning the honor which the righteous man enjoys, four things can be noted: (1) The source of honor, (2) the extent of honor, (3) the condition for honor, (4) the result of honor.

Note, first, the source of honor. *“For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor.”* (v. 11a) Great is the consolation of the man who receives honor from the Lord: To have the “smile of God’s approval” on a man’s life is worth all the wealth of the world! If God is for a person, who can be against him?

Note, second, the extent of honor. “No good things does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.” God is never stingy in his gifts and never reluctant in his willingness to give the best that heaven has to offer. As a God of infinite goodness, the Bible teaches that it gives God great pleasure when He sees children prospering in their souls. Paul writes in the New Testament: *“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”* (Romans 8: 32) The Bible teaches us that God will meet all our needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4: 19). Spoke Jesus to His disciples: *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”* (Luke 12: 32) *God has given us all things richly to enjoy.* (I Timothy 6: 17)

Note, third, the condition of honor. *“No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.”* (v. 10b) That is, to those whose hearts are set alone on God, the Lord will give good things. To walk ‘blamelessly’ is not to walk without weaknesses or shortcomings or faults. To be ‘blameless’ means instead to be pure in heart, single-minded in devotion, sincere in intention, undivided in loyalty to God. The ‘blameless’ man is the one whose heart is open to God, the one who is ready and able to receive God’s abundant blessings. Says the Lord to His people, *“Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.”* (Psalms 81: 10b) The ‘blameless’ one is unclogged in his communication with God, for he has confessed all of his sins. It is sin that deprives one from receiving the best that God has to offer. Said God to His people, through Jeremiah the prophet: *“Your wrongdoings have kept these away; your sins have deprived you of good.”* (Jeremiah 5: 25)

The opposite of a ‘blameless’ man is a ‘double-minded’ man. Double mindedness deprives one of God’s good gifts, because the double-minded person is beset with doubts and fears. *“He who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.”* (James 1: 6b-7)

To the one whose inward heart is right with God, resulting in an outward walk of uprightness and integrity, the Lord will withhold no good thing. It is the Father’s good pleasure to give His children the joys and pleasures of the Kingdom. God is a

good God and He is favorably disposed towards mankind. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." With every promise to claim, there is a condition to meet, but if we meet the condition of walking blamelessly, then we may boldly and gladly claim the promises of God!

It is important for God's children who walk uprightly to have confidence in God's wisdom. God alone knows what is best and good for each of His children. "A good thing is what God determines as ultimately best for us. He answers our prayers with what He withholds as much as what He gives." (Falling Into Greatness; Ogilvie; pg. 124).

Note, fourth, the results of honor. "O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you." (v. 12) The one who is honored by God is the man who is to be envied by men! It is a most enviable and blessed condition to be in a place of special honor with God! The one who trusts in God is the one who is safe and secure and happy and truly prosperous in his soul. He is undergirded by the Everlasting Arms of the Heavenly Father. His past is under 'the blood of Christ'. His future is as bright as the promises of God. Because he trusts in God without fear, he has become a trustworthy person, thus an attractive and a winsome person whom people love. Enjoying the friendship of God results in him attracting to himself many earthly friends. Happy, fortunate, to be envied is the man who commits his all to God! It has not even entered into the mind of man what God has prepared for those who love Him! Heaven is greater than what man, with his greatest powers of imagination, can conceive! No wonder the man who is 'heaven-bound' is called 'blessed' - the one who is to be envied!

CONCLUSION:

Can you say: "My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God"? If God is the object of your wholehearted quest, then God shall be the satisfaction of your insatiable hunger. Says the Lord, "*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*" (Jeremiah 29: 13).

To the extent that your quest for God is strong, to that same extent will your satisfaction in God be great! Said Jesus, "*Keep on asking and it will be given you; keep on seeking and you will find; keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you.*" (Matthew 7: 7, Amplified) *God will supply all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4: 19). "*For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.*" (Psalms 84: 11)

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER TWELVE

DIGGING WELLS IN YOUR DESERT!

QUESTIONS

1. Give your interpretation of the following quotation by Hannah More: “The soul on earth is an immortal guest, compelled to starve at an unreal feast; a pilgrim panting for the rest to come; an exile anxious for its native home.” (Note John 6:35)
2. What does it mean to be “a person who lives for two worlds”?
3. What does it mean to say that every man is “born thirsting for infinity”?
4. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Self-centered goals pursued with selfish greed spells ultimate frustration and shame, while selfless goals pursued with the God-inspired motivation of love spells ultimate success, and brings both the eventual praise of God and men!”
5. Share briefly the greatest goals of your life for which your soul yearns and for which your heart and flesh cry out. (Note Psalms 84:2)
6. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Recognizing that, unless one is worshiping God personally in ‘spirit’ he is not really worshiping God at all, and recognizing that true worship is never confined only or even primarily to a specific place or time or style, it is nevertheless also true that the one who most craves God’s personal fellowship is also the one who most desires to worship corporately with God’s people in God’s holy sanctuary.” (Luke 4:16; Hebrews 10:25)
7. Like the Psalmist (84: 1-4), have you ever been really ‘homesick’ for the people of God? Does your soul ever yearn for the closer presence of God which is more keenly felt when you are corporately worshiping and singing and praying and praising God in His holy sanctuary?
8. List some of the ‘flimsy’ excuses which lukewarm ‘professors of religion’ give, for not regularly attending local church services.
9. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “One cannot truly know God and, at the same time, reject God’s people and neglect God’s sanctuary.” Do you agree with the following vivid statement by Elton Trueblood; “Though the church, as we observe it, frequently fills us with frustrations, we know, if we are realists that it provides the only way in which Christians can be faithful to their Lord.”

10. What is the significance of the Psalmist's reference to the lowly 'sparrow' in Psalms 84:3?
11. Considering the teaching of the New Testament (as well as Psalms 84: 1-4), how would you define 'the House of the Lord', and how (spiritually-speaking) does one enter 'the House of the Lord'? (Note Psalms 23: 6 and John 15: 4-5)
12. From your own personal experiences, can you testify to the truth of the following statement: "When one understands something of the glory and the splendor of knowing and fellowshiping with the living God on a moment-by-moment basis, he is filled with a soul craving to find God"?
13. Considering Psalms 85: 5, tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The persistence and intensity with which one pursues the knowledge and the fellowship of God is determined by the degree of passion with which one feels his need for God." If it is man's responsibility to set his heart on God as the object of his great desire, what part does God's Spirit play in man's quest of God? What is the relationship between man's part and God's part, as revealed in Psalms 84:5?
14. Spiritually-speaking, what does "the valley of Baca" symbolize in the Christian's spiritual pilgrimage towards heaven?
15. Share creative ways in which you (with the enabling power of God, may (and have) turned your 'valley of Baca' into 'places of springs'. (Psalms 84:6)
16. What must a believer train himself to ask, when he is facing a particular problem or trial?
17. Share from your own personal experience (or from your observation of a fellow Christian) a time where, during a spiritually-arid period in your life, you learned to find good where only evil seemed to be present, to transform a tragedy into a triumph, to dig a well and find a spring of blessings in the midst of a 'desert'. (Psalms 84: 6; Philippians 1: 12-14)
18. What can you do, as a believer, to help bring 'springs' to others in their barren times of life?
19. What, according to Psalms 84: 6b, has God promised to those faithful pilgrims who have learned to face trials optimistically and creatively?
20. Is it possible for believers to become stronger and stronger in their spiritual lives, even amidst great challenges and recurring tests and difficult perplexities? Why or why not? (Note Psalms 84: 7)
21. According to Psalms 84:1-7, what is the secret to victory in the spiritual life, while one is traveling as a pilgrim towards Zion - the heavenly Jerusalem?

22. Tell with what degree of excitement you affirm the truth of the following statement: "Behind every prayer you pray stands a God who is 'Almighty', and whose arm is not shortened that He cannot help, and One whose ears are not stopped that He cannot hear, and One whose heart is not hardened that He cannot feel!"
23. Translated into New Testament terminology, how would you interpret the intercessory prayer of the Psalmist in Psalms 84: 8-9, especially as this prayer applies to contemporary church life? (Note I Timothy 2: 1-2; I Thessalonians 5: 12)
24. Why is it better to spend one day in the courts of the Lord than to spend a thousand days elsewhere, and why is it better to be a doorkeeper in the house of God than to dwell in the tents of the wicked? (Psalms 84: 10)
25. Do you agree with the following statement: "'Little is much if God is in it', but 'much is nothing if God is not in it'"? Do you find the following statement encouraging to you: "Humble work becomes holy work when it is done for God"?
26. According to Psalms 84: 8-12, what are three ways in which the soul that is at rest in God, finds deep fulfillment?
27. According to Psalms 84: 11-12, what is the source and the extent of honor which the godly man enjoys?
28. What does it mean to be a 'blameless' man (Psalms 84: 10b), and what spiritual condition describes the opposite of 'blameless man'? (Note Jeremiah 5: 25 and James 1: 6b - 7)
29. If it is true that "no good thing does He (God) withhold from those whose walk is blameless," should a sincere Christian thereby conclude that God's answers to prayer will always be in the affirmative? Why or why not? Do you agree with the following statement: "A good thing is what God determines as ultimately best for us. He answers our prayers with what He withholds as much as what He gives"?
30. What are some of the 'enviable' blessings which the humble man of faith enjoys?

18. **What can you do, as a believer, to help bring ‘springs’ to others in their barren times of life?**
19. **What, according to Psalms 84: 6b, has God promised to those faithful pilgrims who have learned to face trials optimistically and creatively?**
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“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 13

SOUL SECURITY THROUGH DYNAMIC FAITH

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 13

SOUL SECURITY THROUGH DYNAMIC FAITH!

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 91: 1-16

TEXT: “ *If you make the Most High your dwelling - even the Lord, who is my refuge - then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.* ” (Psalms 91: 9-10)

INTRODUCTION: Does the Bible teach and does God promise that all who are Christians will always enjoy good health and great wealth? When Psalms 91: 10 declares that “no harm will befall you (a believer), no disaster will come near your tent,” can these comforting words be claimed by the believer as a guarantee against all physical illness or accidents and against all financial poverty? Or is the exercise of a dynamic faith that which gives a believer in the Lord ultimate soul security, in spite of life’s losses and calamities?

PROPOSITION: The person who dwells in the shelter of the Most High (v. 1) is the one who is guaranteed true prosperity - soul security and victory over spiritual enemies. To the one whose faith is placed in God alone, is granted exceedingly great and precious promises. To such a one, his dynamic faith in God truly gives him soul security and rest!

OUTLINE:

- I. THE OBJECT OF DYNAMIC FAITH (v. 1-2) - ‘The Most High’**
 - A. Conflict In Life’s Storms**
 - B. Comfort Amidst Life’s Storms**

- II. THE BENEFITS OF DYNAMIC FAITH (v. 2-13) - Protection From Disaster**
 - A. Freedom From Deadly Deception (v. 3-4).**
 - B. Freedom From Terrorizing Fears (v. 5-8).**
 - C. Angelic Guardianship Amidst Dangers (v. 9-13).**

- III. THE CONDITIONS FOR DYNAMIC FAITH (v. 14-16) - Acknowledge His Name**
 - A. Trust The Lord Only**
 - B. Love The Lord Truly**
 - C. Pray To The Lord Fervently**

CONCLUSION: Dynamic Faith - this is the means by which the restless soul may find sweet rest and the fearful soul may find lasting security!

The Object of faith is 'the Most High', 'the Almighty'! When the object of your faith is solid - and God is the solid object of your faith - then the value of your faith is priceless - you are given unlimited power to live a victorious life!

What are some of those benefits? Soul rest (v. 1), and protection from moral calamities (v. 3-8) and spiritual disasters (v. 9-13).

If there are promises to be enjoyed, there are also conditions to be met! One must abide (dwell) in the Lord continuously (v. 1,9), love the Lord truly (v. 14), and pray to the Lord fervently (v. 15).

Put your trust in the Lord alone (v. 2) and begin to dwell in the shelter of the Most High (v. 1) under the divine wings (v. 4). Then develop an intimate love relationship with the Lord (v. 14), and learn daily to call upon the Lord in prayer (v. 15).

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

CHAPTER 13

SOUL SECURITY THROUGH DYNAMIC FAITH

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 91: 1-16

TEXT: “ *If you make the Most High your dwelling - even the Lord, who is my refuge - then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.*” (Psalms 91: 9-10)

INTRODUCTION: There are those within the larger Christian community who sincerely teach and who fervently preach that if one is a true Christian he can expect always to be healed of all physical illnesses and diseases. Say those who teach such a doctrine: “If you remain ill as a Christian, then it simply reveals that you have not exercised sufficient faith in God, or it means that you have unconfessed sin in your life, or it means that you have not yet become accomplished in the art of ‘Binding Satan’. After all, does not the Bible teach that ‘no harm will befall believers, (Psalms 91:10) and that Christians are protected against all pestilences and all plagues (Psalms 91:6)?”

Added to this ‘Good Health’ Gospel is the ‘Great Wealth’ Gospel. Say those who preach the ‘Great Wealth’ Gospel. “God is the King, and Christians are children of the King. Therefore, Christians are to enjoy what children of royalty ought to enjoy - material wealth! God doesn’t want any of His children to be poor. He wants them to be rich. After all, did not God promise that He would give His children all things richly to enjoy? If Christians are joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, then why should they not enjoy the best that God has to offer them! It is ‘the meek’ whom Jesus said will ‘inherit the earth’, so Christians have the right to own and to enjoy the best things this world has to offer! Why shouldn’t a Christian own a luxury car, and live in a large house, and wear fine clothes and take ‘nice’ vacations! Remember God-promised blessings are to be claimed! Remember, God promised ‘to open the windows of heaven’ and pour out a blessing upon His people - a blessing so great that they cannot even contain it! (Malachi 3: 10) Why live like a pauper when you, as a believer, should be living like a ‘king’s kid’?”

Does the Bible teach and does God promise that all who are Christians will always enjoy good health and great wealth? When Psalms 91: 10 declares that “no harm will befall you (a believer), no disaster will come near your tent,” can these comforting words be claimed by the believer as a guarantee against all physical illness or accidents and against all financial poverty? Or is the exercise of a dynamic faith that which gives a believer in the Lord ultimate soul security, in spite of life’s losses and calamities?

PROPOSITION: The person who dwells in the shelter of the Most High (v. 1) is the one who is guaranteed true prosperity - soul security and victory over spiritual enemies. To the one whose faith is placed in God alone, is granted exceedingly great and precious promises. To such a one, his dynamic faith in God truly gives him soul security and rest!

To better understand the nature of 'Dynamic Faith' let us consider (1) The Object of 'Dynamic Faith' (v. 1-2), (2) The Benefits of 'Dynamic Faith' (v. 3-13); (3) The Conditions for 'Dynamic Faith' (v. 14-16).

OUTLINE:

I. THE OBJECT OF DYNAMIC FAITH (v. 1-2) - 'The Most High'

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'" (v. 1-2)

A. Conflict In Life's 'Storms'

Are believers promised shelter from all storms of life? Do believers ever suffer loss and privation?

What does it mean to be sheltered by the Most High, the result of which is to enjoy rest in His shadow?

Those who are believers are not promised immunity from troubles. Jesus Himself said to His followers, *"In this world you will have troubles."* (John 16: 33) Wrote Paul to Timothy, *'In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and deceived.'* (2 Timothy 3: 12-13)

Sickness, sorrow, financial loss, death - all of these things come to believers as well as to non-believers. Paul suffered terribly because of his faith in Christ. He experienced hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, sleepless nights, hunger, and many other pressures and problems (Note 2 Corinthians 6: 3-10; 11: 23-29)

Christians are not escapists from life's challenges, and believers are not promised immunity from Satan's attacks. But believers who live close to God - who 'dwell in the shelter of the Most High' - are believers who enjoy peace amidst the turmoil of life, and who experience joy amidst the sorrows of life, and who find rest amidst the burdens of life, and who find purpose in spite of the

disillusioning circumstances of life. Wrote Paul, *“But this precious treasure - this light and power that now shine within us - is held in a perishable container, that is, in our weak bodies. Everyone can see that the glorious power within must be from God and is not our own. We are pressed on every side by troubles, but not crushed and broken. We are perplexed because we don't know why things happen as they do, but we don't give up and quit. We are hunted down, but God never abandons us. We get knocked down, but we get up again and keep going.”* (2 Corinthians 4: 7-9, Living Bible)

B. Comfort Amidst Life's 'Storms'.

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High” is he who looks to God for strength in his weaknesses, to God for comfort during his sorrows, to God for peace during his conflicts, to God for healing during his hurts, to God for meaning during his disillusionments, to God for rest during his weariness, to God for joy during his unhappiness!

Dwelling in the “the shelter of the Most High” is not escaping all of life's problems, but it is finding victory amidst life's problems. Wrote the author of Hebrews to suffering Christians: *“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.”* (Hebrews 10: 32-34)

Those who are ‘practicing the presence of God’ in their lives - i.e., those who are learning to give attention to the Lord and who are continuously conscious of intimate communion with the Lord - these persons are living above their circumstances and are enjoying peace and joy in spite of external adversities. What is the secret of contentment and joy? It is centering on God, dwelling in the shelter of the Most High, resting in the shadow of the Almighty (Psalms 91: 1). *“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee.”* (Isaiah 26: 3) After Jesus warned His disciples that they would have trouble in the world, He encouraged them by saying: *“I have overcome the world.”* (John 16: 33) He who places his trust in God is placing his trust in the ‘Most High’, and thus, every threat is cut down to size! Problems may appear insurmountable and over-whelming until they are measured against the stature and the power of the ‘Most High’. No problems are so great but what God's power to conquer those problems is greater yet, for God is the ‘Most High’! Losses can be turned into gains, and sorrows can be turned into joys because the ‘Most High’ can use everything to ultimately prosper His children.

Problems, surrendered to God, become divine projects, and none of God's projects have ever turned out to be failures! Stumbling blocks become stepping stones for spiritual progress when God - the Most High' - is in control!

To put trust in God is to put trust in One whose power is limitless. He is 'the Most High', 'the Almighty', the One who provides a shelter in the times of storms, and a rest to the weary, and a refuge and a fortress to the distressed! If God chooses not to remove the problems, then God will produce character through the problems. He will protect the struggling saint from the ultimate and the real enemies of spiritual destruction and death. The object of your faith determines the value of your faith, and if the 'Most High' is the object of your faith, then you have placed your faith in One who can make you victorious, in spite of life's problems!

To place your trust in God is to place your trust in One who is altogether trustworthy - in One whose promises have never been broken, whose strength has never failed, whose love has never grown cold, whose fortress has never been destroyed by all the powers of hell! "Where there is every reason and warrant for faith, we ought to place our confidence without hesitancy or wavering." (Spurgeon's Treasuries of David; vol. 2; pg. 232)

II. THE BENEFITS OF DYNAMIC FAITH (v. 2-13) - Protection From Disaster

Various and wonderful are the benefits which are the results of placing faith in 'the Most High', the Almighty' (v. 1).

A. Freedom From Deadly Deception (v. 3-4).

Deception is rampant in our world today. False prophets are committed to their evil devices of seduction. There are those religious teachers whose motives are ulterior, and whose methods are manipulative, and whose purposes are evil. They are out to deceive, if it were possible, even 'the elect'. Of such false teachers, Paul wrote, "*Their teaching will spread like gangrene...and they destroy the faith of some.*" (II Timothy 2: 17a, 18b) "*For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.*" (Romans 16: 18, NIV) "*For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ.*" (2 Corinthians 11:13)

Because there are evil men who are very cunning and crafty and deceitful in their schemes to overthrow the righteous ones, sincere people of faith must always be watchful and prayerful and guarded! They must know sound doctrine and must remain firm in their convictions regarding right living (Ephesians 4: 14-

15). *Believers have been warned in the Bible that “evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” (2 Timothy 3:14, NIV) Many cultists there are today who do not believe that Jesus is the divine, eternal, incarnate Son of God. Of them John wrote, “Watch out for the false leaders - and there are many of them around - who don’t believe that Jesus Christ came to earth as a human being with a body like ours. Such people are against the truth and against Christ.” (2 John 7, Living Bible)*

These false doctrines are ‘doctrines of demons’. To be ensnared by false doctrines is to become spiritually sick unto death.

Those who ‘dwell in the shelter of the Most High’ will be saved from the skillful deceivers who are out to entrap the careless and the gullible. “There is a deadly pestilence of error, we are safe from that if we dwell in communion with the God of truth.” (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 232)

It is the Lord’s faithfulness and the believer’s faithful commitment to the Lord which is the basis for protection from the enemy of the soul and from the false teachings of deceitful men. “He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.” (v. 4)

God will not forsake His own; He will protect them from every Satanic attack. He will shield them from the fiery darts of the devil, and He will protect them against the subtle allurements of the Evil One who tries to lull the righteous away from the paths of truth and righteousness. Many are the snares of the wicked, but the Lord delivers the righteous from them all! When the enemy shall come in like a flood to overwhelm the godly, the Lord shall raise up a defense against the evil forces of sin. Tenderly the Lord cares for His own. “Even as a hen covereth her chickens so doth the Lord protect the souls which dwell in him...Hawks in the sky and snares in the field are equally harmless when we nestle so near the Lord.” (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 232, 233)

B. Freedom From Terrorizing Fears (v. 5-8).

“You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.” (Psalms 91: 5-8)

There is a wholesome, cleansing fear, and there is also a debilitating, enslaving fear; one kind of fear borne out of deep respect and holy reverence

and contemplation of the greatness of God in contrast to the smallness of man, and another kind of fear which seizes the hearts of the believers when they think of the cowardly attacks of crafty men whose aim is to kill the righteous with their deadly arrows of slander and hate.

The fear which comes to the hearts of believers, as a result of the cunning schemes of evil men, is matched by the Lord's power which brings protection to the trusting believers.

Sudden temptation, unexpected sorrow, heartbreaking loss, overwhelming persecution - these are some of the circumstances of life which could constitute 'the terror of night' and 'the arrow that flies by day.' (v. 5) The one who finds soul security under God's wings will be able to endure the severe trial and will not become the victim of the cruel arrows of wicked men and demonic powers. Ten thousand around him who fail to trust the Lord may fall (Psalms 91: 7), but he will not fall or fail. Under His wings and protected by God's armor, the believer may be severely attacked, but he will not be destroyed! Wrote Paul to the Ephesians, "*So use every piece of God's armor to resist the enemy whenever he attacks, and when it is all over, you will still be standing.*" (Ephesians 6: 13, Living Bible)

**"Under His wings, O what precious enjoyment!
There will I hide till life's trials are o'er;
Sheltered, protected, no evil can harm me;
Resting in Jesus I'm safe evermore."**

God protects the righteous from ultimate and spiritual harm. The believer can rest secure under the wings of God, full of reverential respect and holy awe, but free from the terrorizing fear of the enemy. "Blessed is that communion with God which renders us impervious to midnight frights, and horrors born of darkness. Not to be afraid is in itself an unspeakable blessing, since for every suffering which we endure from real injury we are tormented by a thousand griefs which arise from fear only." (Spurgeon; Ibid; pg. 233)

C. Angelic Guardianship Amidst Dangers (v. 9-13).

"If you make the Most High your dwelling - even the Lord, who is my refuge - then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent." (Psalms 91: 9-13)

What is meant by the promise “then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.” (v. 10)

It must be admitted that believers can fall into sin, during a time of subtle temptation when the ‘guard’ temporarily has been relaxed. Wrong moral choices bring hurtful consequences, and not even believers are spared the pain which comes from making foolish decisions. However, it is true that God, who is merciful even when one sins, can use mistakes and sins to teach lessons and to discipline believers. David wrote about the benefits which he derived and the lessons he learned through the pain which he experienced because of his personal moral failures: “*It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.*” (Psalms 119: 71)

So, it cannot be denied that if believers fail to trust the Lord - i.e., if believers fail to keep themselves under the divine wings - they can suffer severe pain and even experience moral disaster (v. 10). Most of the pain in the world today is caused because of wrong moral choices, and believers, as well as non-believers, must bear the painful consequences of their wrong moral choices.

What then does the promise mean: “then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near you”? (v. 10) Notes Alexander Maclaren, “We shall understand God’s dealing with us, and get to the very throbbing heart of such promises as these in this Psalms far better, if we start from the certainty that whatever it means it does not mean that, with regard to external calamities and disaster, we are going to be God’s petted children, or to be saved from the things that fall upon other people. No! No! We have to go a great deal deeper than that.” (Expositions of Holy Scriptures; Vol. 4; pg. 186)

E. Stanley Jones makes the following comment regarding the promises of Psalms 91 - “If you spiritualize this, it can be used; but if it is to be taken literally, then it raises questions. The New Testament does not teach this. Nor does life teach it. It is the insistence upon the literal fulfillment of such promises as the above and the conflict it raises with the daily facts around one that stuns and shatters the faith of many. It simply does not work out that no plagues come nigh the dwelling of the righteous and that they are invariably satisfied with long life. It is quite true that righteousness does tend to saner and healthier and longer living. A life lived in the Christian way fits the facts of the universe better, makes a man happier, and therefore on the whole gives longer life. But the exceptions to this are so many that we cannot expect the solution of the problem of suffering to consist in being spared from plague and being satisfied with invariably long life. It raises more problems than it settles.” (Christ and Human Suffering; pg. 28-29)

The facts of life reveal that Christians, as well as non-Christians, suffer loss of all kinds. Believers, as well as non-believers, experience financial loss, disappointment, failures, sickness, sorrow and death.

After Charles Colson came home from the hospital after an extended bout with cancer, he wrote the following, "If God really delivers his people from all pain and illness, as is so often claimed, why was I so sick? Had my faith become weak? Had I fallen from favor? No, I had always recognized such teaching as false theology. But after four weeks in a maximum-care unit, I came to see it as something else: a presumptuous stumbling block to real evangelism.....God may miraculously intervene in our lives. But we come to God not because of what he may do to spare us suffering, but because Christ is truth. What he does promise us is much more - the forgiveness of sin and eternal life....God does not witness to the world by taking his people out of suffering, but rather by demonstrating his grace through them in the midst of pain." (Christianity Today; April, 1987; pg. 56)

Notes Dr. 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. A London minister tells of a father whose son was fighting with the forces in France. 'At our prayer meetings', said the pastor, 'he would earnestly pray that God would hide that soldier son beneath His wings. He once added with deep tenderness, "The bullet was never made that can pierce Thy wings." But the boy was killed all the same.

"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 of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens' (v. 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.' (v. 35-37).

"No wonder George Tyrell once set it down boldly: 'To believe that this terrible machine world is really from God, in God, and unto God, and that through it and in spite of its blind fatality all works for good - that is faith in long trousers.'

"The faith that escapes trouble is often honored of God, but, equally, the faith that endures trouble." (Prayer and Life's Highest; pg. 95, 96)

If life bears witness to the fact that believers, as well as non-believers, do experience 'harm' and 'disaster', then what is meant by the promise: "No harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent"? (v. 10).

I believe this promise assures the Christian of two realities. First, no 'real' harm will come to the believer who experiences financial loss or physical adversities or some other such reverses in life. All things - even the losses and the sorrows - are used by God to bring ultimate and true good to the trusting believer. Meditate carefully on the following perceptive comment by Charles Spurgeon: "It is impossible that any ill should happen to the man who is beloved of the Lord; the most crushing calamities can only shorten his journey and hasten him to his reward. Ill to him is no ill, but only good in a mysterious form. Losses enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach is his honor, death is his gain. No evil in the strict sense of the word can happen to him, for everything is overruled for good. Happy is he who is in such a case. He is secure where others are in peril, he lives where others die." (Ibid; pg. 235)

I believe, secondly, that this promise assures trusting believers that no moral evil will overpower and destroy them. Temptations there will be. The poisonous arrows of evil circumstances and demonic schemes will fly, but, regardless of the power of evil men and demonic forces, the believer who rests under the protecting wing of God, will be delivered. "For no man who lies under the shadow of God, and has his heart filled with the continual consciousness of that Presence, is likely to fall before the assaults of evil that tempt him away from God; and the defense which He gives in that region is yet more magnificently impregnable than the defense which He gives against external evils." (Expositions of Holy Scriptures; Maclaren; pg. 187; vol. 4)

The guardianship of the protecting angels should give the trusting believer great comfort. "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." (v. 11-12) The writer of Hebrews notes that the angels are ministering spirits who are sent by God to serve those who will inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:14). Doubtless there are countless times when God's protecting angels stand guard over persons to prevent serious accidents or perhaps to ward off even the physical forces of disease. The trusting believer does at times escape the ravages of diseases and the physical calamities of accidents. However, physical protection is not unconditionally guaranteed to devout followers of Christ. But even if believers do strike their feet against the hard stones of physical or economic adversities (such as illness or bankruptcy), the 'stones' will not ultimately hurt and destroy them. Some good will come out of every hardship.

The greater ministry of the guardian angels is in the spiritual realm. The angels will guard the unsuspecting saint against the snares and tricks of the devil. The trusting heart will find a 'way of escape' during the hour of temptation. The angels will guard him against Satanic attacks of all sorts. The angels will lift him up, not allowing him to strike his foot against the stones of moral disaster. Amidst great moral dangers - dangers described in vivid terms: 'the lion', 'the cobra' (v. 13) - the guardian angels will enable the trusting believer to be victorious. "You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent." (Psalms 19: 13). Says Spurgeon, "The strongest foe in power, and the most mysterious in cunning, shall be conquered by the man of God." (Ibid; pg. 236)

III. THE CONDITIONS FOR DYNAMIC FAITH (v. 14-16) - Acknowledge His Name

The benefits of trusting God, or dwelling in the shelter of the 'Most High' under the divine wings, are great and wonderful: (1) rest in the shadow of the Almighty (v. 1), (2) enjoying God as a refuge and fortress (v. 2), (3) rescue from the snares and deadly pestilence of the enemy (v. 3), (4) experiencing God as a rampart against the arrows that fly by day and the terror that threatens to paralyze the heart with fear at night (v. 5), (5) angelic guardianship against ultimate harm during physical adversities and deliverance from moral calamities (v. 11, 12)

Promises to be claimed and benefits to be enjoyed should preoccupy our attention in living for God. However, there are also conditions to be met before the benefits can be enjoyed. Psalms 91 is filled with promises and blessings and benefits, and it describes in beautiful and poetic form the great triumph of good over evil. In brief, we can say that this chapter describes the soul security of the believer!

But the continuing victory of believers in this present life and the final security of believers in eternity is determined by meeting certain important conditions here on earth. Psalms 91 mentions some of those conditions.

A. Trust The Lord Only

A person must choose to dwell in the shelter of the Most High if he is to experience and to enjoy the benefits of victory over evil. Some trust in money and some trust in power or in popularity for their security, but only those who trust in the Lord alone have a basis for security and soul rest. "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty." (v. 1) Only he who puts his trust in God alone (v. 2b) will enjoy God as his refuge and fortress (v. 2) Trust in God alone and dwelling in the shelter of the Most High will bring the blessings of divine protection (v. 3-8). "If you make the Most

High your dwelling - even the Lord, who is my refuge - then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.” (v. 9-10) The condition is ‘dwelling’ or ‘abiding’ in the Most High. Notes William Sangster, “That is where discipline comes into the holy life: not the toilsome, straining, failing effort to be good; but the faithful attending on God to receive...The fact of one high moment cannot secure holiness for ever; it is a life of intimate relationship (which issues in mystic indwelling) and faithfulness which shows itself in our consistency in attending....There can be no continuance of the holy life in the soul of any man who does not continually wait on God.” (Daily Readings; pg. 188)

B. Love The Lord Truly

A person must not only trust the Lord only, but he must love the Lord truly, if he is to enjoy soul security. Put in a more accurate form: the one who is trusting the Lord only as the source of his on-going life, is the person who loves the Lord truly, for such a person has put aside all other ‘gods’ and is serving and trusting the true and living God only. “Because he loves me’, says the Lord, ‘I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name’” (v. 14). To acknowledge the name of the Lord means to worship the Lord only and to recognize the true nature of the character of God. What is the essence of God’s nature - God’s name - which must fully be recognized and affirmed? It is love! God is love and all of His works are works of love, including His works of judgment. To acknowledge the name of the Lord is to see God as a God of perfect love who is worthy of your fullest human response of love. God rescues from the snares of evil only those who truly love Him.

C. Pray To The Lord Fervently

A person must not only abide in the Lord continuously, love the Lord truly, but he must also pray to the Lord fervently. “He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.” (v. 15) Notes Spurgeon, “Not without prayer will the blessing come to the most favored, but by means of prayer they shall receive all good things.” (Treasury of David; vol. 2; pg. 237) Prayer is the Christian’s lifeline to God. He who ceases to pray, is he who will finally cease to dwell in God! Prayer is simply communication with God, and he who no longer communicates with God fails to receive strength and guidance from God. All who have backslidden from God have first ceased to pray to God.

CONCLUSION: Dynamic Faith - this is the means by which the restless soul may find sweet rest and the fearful soul may find lasting security!

The Object of faith is 'the Most High', 'the Almighty'! When the object of your faith is solid - and God is the solid object of your faith - then the value of your faith is priceless - you are given unlimited power to live a victorious life!

What are some of those benefits? Soul rest (v. 1), and protection from moral calamities (v. 3-8) and spiritual disasters (v. 9-13).

If there are promises to be enjoyed, there are also conditions to be met! One must abide (dwell) in the Lord continuously (v. 1,9), love the Lord truly (v. 14), and pray to the Lord fervently (v. 15).

Put your trust in the Lord alone (v. 2) and begin to dwell in the shelter of the Most High (v. 1) under the divine wings (v. 4). Then develop an intimate love relationship with the Lord (v. 14), and learn daily to call upon the Lord in prayer (v. 15).

Then the benefits and blessings will soon be forthcoming to you! Troubles you may have, but God will turn your troubles into triumphs. Temptations you will have, but God's protecting angels will prevent your feet from striking the stones of moral disaster and spiritual destruction. "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent ." (v. 12-13)

"No harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent." (v. 10) Because of your dynamic faith you will enjoy soul security!

The mystery of human suffering is not yet solved even though the best theological minds throughout history have tried to 'tackle' this problem. Perhaps a full explanation for human suffering will never be given, for there is much about reality that we human beings are incapable of understanding. God's thoughts (Mind) are higher than man's thoughts, as high as the heavens are above the earth! However, while much that happens on earth frankly defies human reason, it is also true that God's Word, in many places, touches on the subject of 'Human Suffering'. Psalms 91 is among those many Scriptural portions which deal in some measure with this problem of suffering and evil. As a result of studying Psalms 91 and several other Scriptures, the following general conclusions can be drawn.

- 1. There is no greater pain than the pain which is the result of sin, and the entire human race experiences this pain, because the entire human race is engulfed in sin (both by nature as descendants of Adam and by choice as a result of wrong volitional decisions).**

2. Deliverance from the pain caused by sin is possible because of Christ's atoning death and glorious resurrection which make possible the forgiveness of sins and healing from the hurts caused by sin.

3. It is God's will that all persons enjoy spiritual healing, and such is made possible through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

4. Those who trust in God for their salvation - i.e., those who dwell in the shelter of the Most High, Psalms 91: 1, - are promised angelic protection from all spiritual harm and evil - i.e., trusting believers will not strike their foot against a stone (Psalms 91: 12).

5. Trusting believers are not promised immunity against all physical or economic problems, however. Believers are more likely to experience better health, because the Christian life enables one better to cope with stress (the basic cause of many physiological problems), and believers are many times financially honored by God because of their simple lifestyle and generous motivations. However, the Scriptures do not teach that believers will always be more physically healthy or more materially wealthy because of their faith in God.

6. Disobedient believers who fail to stay close to God are subject to moral failures and even to serious moral disasters. Such persons who are out of fellowship with God can make wrong moral decisions which bring great spiritual suffering to themselves (i.e., failure to dwell in the shelter of the Most High, Psalms 91: 1, can cause a believer to strike his foot against the stones of moral disaster, Psalms 91: 12.) Believers who, like David in the Old Testament, experience great pain because of wrong moral decisions, can be restored and renewed in faith and can become great servants of God. The moral scars (like as in David's life) may remain for a lifetime, however, even after forgiveness has been granted to the backslidden believer. Believers (like as in the case of David, Psalms 119: 71) can learn lessons in obedience as a result of their moral failures.

7. Believers who trust the Lord only (Psalms 91: 1), who love the Lord truly (Psalms 91: 14), and who pray to the Lord fervently (Psalms 91: 15), are not promised immunity from all physical or economic problems, but they are promised freedom from deadly deception (Psalms 91: 3-4), freedom from terrorizing fears (Psalms 91: 5-8), and angelic protection against moral and spiritual disasters (Psalms 91: 9-13).

8. While Christians are not guaranteed good physical health and great material wealth, Christians are promised protection against ‘real’ harm and evil, and Christians are promised God’s power to use every physical or economic difficulty as ‘steppingstones’ for great spiritual growth.

9. When a believer is experiencing financial or physical losses, he must ask himself some important questions:

(a) Is the pain I am experiencing, because of these physical or material problems, the result of my own unwise decisions? (In other words, have I violated the rules for physical or economic health, the result of which is ‘understandable’ pain?)

(b) Is the pain I am experiencing, because of physical or material problems, the result of external or mysterious happenings - happenings that are hard to control personally or hard to explain ‘rationally’? Could these losses be the result of an unavoidable change in my environmental circumstances (such as an economic depression or recession or a disease epidemic)? Could these losses be the result of a direct Satanic attack, as in the case of Job in the Old Testament?

(c) Whether the losses (and pain from the losses) are the result of explainable or unexplainable causes, what benefits can I derive from these losses?

10. “No evil in the strict sense of the word can happen to him (the trusting believer), for everything is overruled for good.” (Spurgeon) “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28; NIV)

“LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE!”

Chapter 13

Soul Security Through Dynamic Faith!

QUESTIONS

- 1. What do some Christians mistakenly conclude about people (believers) who are not healed physically?**
- 2. What do Christians, who preach the ‘Great Wealth’ Gospel, conclude is God’s will for His believing children?**
- 3. Does the Bible teach, and does God promise, that all who are Christians will always enjoy good health and great wealth? When Psalms 91: 10 declares that “no harm will befall you (a believer), no disaster will come near your tent,” can these comforting words be claimed by the believer as a guarantee against all physical illness or accidents and against all financial poverty? Why or why not?**
- 4. What do you believe it means to be sheltered by the ‘Most High’, the result of which is to enjoy rest in His shadow?**
- 5. Does the Bible promise believers immunity from all troubles? (Note John 16: 33; 2 Timothy 3: 12 - 13; 2 Corinthians 6: 3-10; 11: 23-29; Hebrews 11: 35-38)**
- 6. Is it possible for believers to enjoy peace amidst the turmoil of life, to experience joy amidst the sorrows of life, to find rest amidst the burdens of life, to find purpose in spite of the disillusioning circumstances of life? (Psalms 91: 1)**
- 7. What does it mean to “dwell in the shelter of the Most High”? (Psalms 91: 1)**
- 8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Dwelling in ‘the shelter of the Most High’ is not escaping all of life’s problems, but it is finding victory amidst life’s problems.” (Note Hebrews 10: 32-34)**
- 9. What is the ‘secret’ to one living ‘above’ his difficult circumstances and enjoying peace and joy in spite of external adversities? (Note Psalms 91: 1 and Isaiah 26: 3)**

10. Give your response to the following statements: “Problems may appear insurmountable and overwhelming until they are measured against the stature and the power of the ‘Most High’. No problems are so great but what God’s power to conquer those problems is greater yet, for God is the ‘Most High’.
11. What power do Christians believe is available to enable them to turn their losses into gains, their problems into projects, their stumbling blocks into steppingstones?
12. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “If God chooses not to remove the problems, then God will produce character through the problems.”
13. How would you define and describe ‘the fowlers’ snare? (Psalms 91: 3), and what must a believer do to be saved from the ‘snare’? (Note 2 Timothy 2: 13, 17-18; Romans 16: 18; 2 Corinthians 11: 13; 2 John 7; Psalms 91: 4)
14. Distinguish between a ‘wholesome fear’ and a ‘debilitating fear’. (Note Psalms 91: 5-8; 2 Timothy 1: 7)
15. What are some of life’s experiences that might constitute ‘the arrow that flies by day’ and ‘the terror of night’? (Psalms 91: 5)
16. Demonstrate from your own personal experience the truth of the following statement: “Not to be afraid is in itself an unspeakable blessing, since for every suffering which we endure from real injury, we are tormented by a thousand griefs which arise from fear only.”
17. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Most of the pain in the world today is caused because of wrong moral decisions, and believers, as well as non-believers, must bear the painful consequences of their wrong moral choices.” What benefits can a believer derive from his mistakes and his failures and even his sins? (Note Psalms 119: 71)
18. Why does E. Stanley Jones (a great saint of God) make the following comment, regarding Psalms 91 - “If you spiritualize this (Psalms 91), it can be used; but if it is to be taken literally, then it raises questions.”
19. Why does the misguided teaching that God wills for all believers to be physically healed become “a presumptuous stumbling block to real evangelism” (Charles Colson)?

20. Give your response to the following statement by Charles Colson: "We come to God not because of what He may do to spare us suffering, but because Christ is truth."
21. Give illustrations to demonstrate the truth of the following statement: "God does not witness to the world by taking his people out of suffering, but rather by demonstrating his grace through them in the midst of suffering."
22. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The faith that escapes troubles is often honored by God, but, equally, the faith that endures trouble." (Note Hebrews 11: 32-40 for examples of both expressions of faith).
23. If life bears witness to the fact that believers, as well as non-believers, do experience 'harm' and 'disaster', then what is meant by the promise: "No harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent"? (Psalms 91: 10)
24. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "All things - even the losses and the sorrows - are used by God to bring ultimate and true good to the trusting believer." (Note Romans 8: 28)
25. What ministry do the angels of God have to believers, according to Psalms 91: 11-12, and what does it mean for believers to be saved from striking their feet against the 'stones', and how do you interpret rescue from 'the lion' and 'the cobra'? (Psalms 91: 13)
26. According to Psalms 91: 9-10, what condition must a believer meet if he expects to enjoy divine protection from evil? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "There can be no continuance of the holy life in the soul of any man who does not continually wait on God."
27. What, to you, does it mean for one to trust the Lord only and to love the Lord truly? What does it mean to acknowledge the 'name of the Lord' (Psalms 91: 14)?
28. According to Psalms 91: 15, what condition must one meet if he expects to be 'delivered' in the day of trouble?
29. What makes possible man's forgiveness of sins and man's healing from the hurts caused by sin?
30. Why, generally-speaking, will sincere believers tend to be more physically healthy and more materially wealthy, because of their faith in God, in contrast to persons who deny or ignore God?

- 31. When God forgives the moral transgressions of a repentant person, does He always remove the 'moral scars', caused by one's wrong moral choices in his past? Why or why not?**
- 32. What questions should a person ask himself, during a time when he is experiencing financial or physical losses?**
- 33. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following comforting declaration: "No evil in the strict sense of the word can happen to the trusting believer, for everything is overruled for good." (Note Romans 8: 28)**