

# ***What to Do on the Worst Day of Your Life (Revised)***

(By Boyce A. Teas, M.S.)

## **Preface**

## **Acknowledgment**

The study is based on Brian Zahnd book, *What to do on the Worse Day of Your Life*, published by Christian Life, 600 Rinhart Rd, Lake Mary, FL 32746.

## **Course Syllabus**

### **Description**

It's a cliché to say we live in tempestuous and uncertain times. The Bible doesn't ignore the reality that God's people suffer while living on planet earth. Still, when tragedy hits our own personal lives we are tempted to ask, "Where is God? I have been following the rules and doing the right things. Look at what happened." These hurting saints are looking for a glimmer of hope, something that can provide a sense of security. Designed to do that, this study examines the lives of days of David, Hezekiah, Daniel, the Shunammite woman, the Apostle Paul and Job. Each story presents a unique aspect of suffering along with biblical principles of how to handle suffering. The study concludes with steps we can take to be to be victorious when the unthinkable happens to us.

**Objective(s):** The objective of this study is to provide the reader with biblical principles of how to be victorious when the unthinkable happens.

**Suggested Reference Materials:** A Bible; except otherwise noted, all scripture is taken from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible.

## Rose Colored Glasses

The overarching storyline of the Bible is not, "Once upon a time God's people lived happily ever after." Far from it! Countless Christians who love and honor God suffer. Take, for example, Dr. Bruce Martin, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church in Alberta, Canada, who at the time of the writing of this study had an unknown and incurable disease. While treatment and medication stabilized the pain at a bearable level, managing that pain became part of his daily routine. Pastor Martin was one of several speakers who shared their stories of suffering at a minister's conference. The first speaker proclaimed, "If you have enough faith and pray, God will act, guaranteed!" Pastor Martin spoke on the subject of "painful faith," depending totally on God's grace and mercy to get you through. Needless to say they presented two opposing views concerning suffering. Afterwards, the man said to Pastor Martin, "You don't have any faith. How can you be a pastor?" In his cause-and-effect-world, not being healed did not make sense. It does, though, to those who have prayed "in faith" and asked God for deliverance with seemingly no result. There are eight reasons why God's people suffer:

1: Suffering comes our way from *living in a fallen world* (Romans 8:19-22). When Adam chose sin over righteousness, the whole world, including nature itself, plunged into a state of bondage of corruption (Romans 8:21). We Christians are not exempted from tornadoes, earth quakes, hurricanes, and other calamities that are common to everyone. Question: "Why did God allow even the potential or possibility for sin to enter the world in the first place?" The answer is for the higher good. If God had not allowed the possibility of evil to exist He would have destroyed our capability to choose to serve and glorify Him freely out of love. Because God gave Adam who was our representative the freedom to choose between obedience and disobedience, we have choices today. If we are not free to choose between good and evil, then we're not free, and our choice is no "choice" at all. For the higher good, God decided not to destroy Satan (evil) but to defeat him through Christ on the cross.

2: Suffering comes because *evil people rule* (Isaiah 13:11; Psalms 17:14; Acts 4:5, 18; 5:17-18; 7:54-60; 12:2). The battle between spiritual light and spiritual darkness is fought on planet earth (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 John 3:8; 5:19; Job 1:6-12) and within the human heart (Ephesians 6:11-18). Question: "Now that Christ has died on the Cross for humanity's sins, why doesn't God go ahead and get rid of Satan and sin?" It is because God is waiting for more people to believe in Jesus and be saved (2 Peter 3:9). That's love! God will deal with Satan and sin when people stop accepting Christ as Savior.

3: Suffering comes our way as a result of the universal law of *cause and effect or sowing and reaping* (Galatians 6:7). There is always a consequence for what we say or do.

4: Suffering comes our way to develop *godly character* (Hebrews 12:5-11, 14; James 1:2-4). A Christian who went through sever suffering gave this testimony: "If God were to heal me this instant, would I rejoice? Absolutely! I look forward, eagerly, to some

day enjoying a pain-free existence. But if God chooses to tarry, allowing me to bear this pain throughout this life, can I see His blessing? Yes. The lessons I have learned, the opportunities for ministry that have opened up to me, and the spiritual growth I experienced, have been blessings to me and those around me.” Well stated. Suffering is a refiner’s fire, purifying the gold of godly character.

5: Suffering tests faith and separates truly dedicated followers of Christ from half-hearted believers. Not everyone who says he or she is a Christian is *genuine* (Matthew 7:21). Read 1 Corinthians 10:6-13. Paul is giving the Christians at Corinth warnings from Israel’s history. Verse 13 means professing believers may not justify sinning with excuses that they are simply human and thus imperfect, or that in this life all born again believers continue sinning in word, thought, and deed. Cross-reference Matthew 7:15-23; Romans 6:1; 1 Corinthians 10:6-13; 11:30; Hebrews 3:12; 1 Peter 1:6-7; 1 John 3:9.

6: Suffering enables us to *empathize* and *comfort* others who might be going through similar hardships and suffering (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

7: When properly responded to, suffering allows us to *lay up treasures in heaven* (Hebrews 11:24-26; James 1:12; 1 Peter 1:7; 4:12-13; Revelation 22:12). We can store up treasures in one of two banks; man’s bank on earth or God’s bank in heaven. We can invest in earth’s bank (Matthew 6:19-33), which has no security, vaults, or safekeeping and where invested treasures rot, rust, or are stolen. Or, we can be faithful in times of suffering and invest in God’s bank of eternity, where everything is kept safe and guaranteed by the FSLIC (the Father’s Security Life In Christ).

8: Sometimes, God’s servants suffer because of divine selection. The purpose for this suffering is to glorify God and uphold His honor. The circumstances are Satan-inspired but the choice initiates with God. This will be clearly seen when we examine Job’s worst day.

### **David’s Worst Day – 1 Samuel 30**

We all have had days, but have you ever gone bankrupt, watched your house burn to the ground and had your family kidnapped by terrorists---all in one day? That actually happened to David, a man who loved God and who was loved by God. David’s story begins when he was 16 years old when Israel’s national prophet, Samuel, came to his home in Bethlehem and anointed him as the future king of Israel. A short time later young David was thrust into sudden fame when he killed Goliath, the champion warrior of the Philistines. He left the sheepfolds of his father Jesse and became a member of the royal household of King Saul. He eventually became commander over all of Israel’s armies where he experienced one victory after another. The paranoid and neurotic King Saul became jealous of David’s God-given success and popularity and tried to kill him. Fleeing Saul’s wrath, David joined other outcasts and formed a mercenary group of 600 men. He and his faithful band of followers secured Israel’s borders, something Saul should have been doing. The Philistines had given David Ziklag, a small town in southern Judea. David, his men and their families had been living in Ziklag for a year

and four months and not much had happened. He was now 29 years old. The year was 1012 B.C. David and his men had gone to Aphek, a three-day journey from Ziklag, and were returning home. Everyone was eager to get back to their wives and children. On the third day, eagerness gave way to anxiety when, from a distance, they saw smoke coming from Ziklag. Anxiety gave way to panic as they entered the city and found that a raiding band of several thousand Amalekites riding camels plundered the wealth, carried off the women and children and then set fire to the city. Added to David's sorrow, his men were threatening to kill him. Needless to say this was the worst day of David's life. Using 1 Samuel 30, let's examine the *steps* David took in dealing with this disaster, steps that progressively led to the miracle of him recovering all.

1: David *wept*—1 Samuel 30:4. His men joined him. Six hundred brave soldiers, men who had faced death many times without a hint of fear, now wept uncontrollably. What this teaches us is that being a person of emotions is not contrary to being a person of faith (Genesis 23:2; 29:11-12; 45:14-15; 2 Kings 20:3; Job 16:16; Nehemiah 1:4; Jeremiah 9:1; Ecclesiastes 3:4; Matthew 26:75). Even the Lord Jesus wept (John 11:35). The fact the Lord wept is a powerful testimony to the fullness of His humanity. Because "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14), God can now identify with our suffering and join us in our tears (Hebrews 2:10, 18). What David's story teaches us is that when the unthinkable happens, it's natural and perfectly acceptable---and many times helpful--to respond with weeping.

2: David turned to God—1 Samuel 30:6. As a result he found strength to deal with the situation. Instead of allowing his grief to consume him like his men, David turned to God, and in turn found strength to go on. The normal emotional reaction to a Ziklag experience is anger; and that's okay, provided you get over it before it turns into bitterness and depression (Eph. 4:26-27). When allowed to linger for long periods of time, sorrow can cause a person to develop a dark and morose personality that attracts demon spirits of depression. This is clearly brought out in Jesus' parable (story) of the sower in Mark 4:13-20. The meaning of the parable is that the good news about Jesus will meet with varying levels of success in the human heart. But the parable does something else. It provides us with insight into how the devil works. Look at the latter part of Mark 4:17. The Old King James version states, "Afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the Word's sake, immediately they are offended." Have you ever been offended? Who hasn't, right? But have you ever been offended at God? If we are not careful we can allow ourselves to become offended at God when things don't work out as we hoped. The word translated *offended* in Mark 4:17 comes from the Greek word *skandalizo*, which means to entrap, trip up, put a stumbling block or impediment. It comes from the Greek root word *skandalon* which means the *trigger on the trap where the bait is placed or thing that offends*. The meaning is that when we become offended we have just taken the bait and tripped the trigger on the *emotional trap* Satan set for us. The offense is the bait; becoming angry and bitter of spirit is the trap! Satan knows that there is a good possibility that if a believer who is not well grounded in Christ (shallow roots) is offended, he or she will become bitter, abandon the faith, and allow grief to become his/her new identity. Grief reactions usually occur in four emotional stages:

- First, there is the *shock stage*, sometimes called the denial phase. I.e., “This can’t be happening to me; this is just a bad dream.” This stage can last from a few hours to a few days.
- Next, there is the *storm stage*. This phase is where one experiences mixed emotions about what has happened. I.e., anger, fear, guilt, etc. Most people get past this phase. There are those, however, who do not. For them, they become their worst enemy as they play the blame game, recycling revenge over and over in their minds.
- The third stage is the *search phase*. Here, one tries to find meaning in what has happened. I.e., “Where is God in all this...How do I make sense out of all that has happened?” Pain doesn’t have to kill; it can give birth to something new within us so we can find meaning in the loss. Joseph, for example, was able to look at his past and see that he wouldn’t have been made prime minister of Egypt, the most powerful country in the world at the time, without his past (Genesis 45:5-7).
- Finally, there is the *sequel stage*: Here, the individual decides to put the past behind and move on. As the result, he/she finds God in a new way. The sequel phase tells how successful the individual has been in his/her search to find meaning out of what happened.

These various emotional phases are normal and part of our journey to recovery. It’s tragic when someone goes through a painful experience and gets stuck in phase two and allows bitterness to become their new identity. That is what happened to David’s men. They allowed grief to turn into bitterness of heart to the point they wanted to kill David (1 Samuel 30:6). Bitterness will do that (Job 21:23-25). We don’t know how long David encouraged himself in the Lord or how he did that. He probably sang a song, possibly Psalm 34. David had written Psalm 34 just two years earlier when God had delivered him from Abimelech, king of the Philistines. The Old King James Version of the Bible renders Psalm 34:3 this way: “Oh magnify the LORD with me...” Magnify means to enlarge or make bigger in perspective. When you magnify an object with a magnifying glass or microscope, you don’t change its reality; you change *your perspective* of that reality. Perspective has everything to do with whether you are encouraged or discouraged. While you cannot make God any bigger than He already is (i.e., you can’t increase omnipotence!), you can magnify (or diminish) your perspective of God by what you believe about a situation. When you make God bigger than your trouble, you make your trouble smaller in relationship to God. Each time we rehearse over and over in our minds what happened, or tell someone how bad things are, we magnify the situation and not God. Instead, we need to dwell on God’s greatness, His might, His love, His presence. This is no doubt what David did. David’s actions teach that mature believers experience emotions like everyone else---they just don’t allow them to have the last word!

3: David sought directions from *God*—1 Samuel 30:7-8. Abiathar was the only priest to escape Saul’s massacre of the priests of Nob (1 Samuel 22:17-20). He had become a personal friend of David and had been living in Aphek, and had returned to Ziklag with David. The ephod (pronounced ee-fod) was a loose-fitting apron-like garment extending to the knees and worn over the priest’s robe for securing the breastplate (Exodus 28:6-7, 25-28). The breastplate was adorned with precious stones that enabled the high priest to learn God’s will in certain situations (Exodus 28:30; 39:1-21). There is no mention of the breastplate in our text, only the ephod. The men no doubt

watched as David in humility laid aside his weapons and armor and put on the ephod and prayed...and waited...and listened. Then God's unmistakable voice spoke to the deepest part of David's being: "Pursue them. You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue" (1 Samuel 30:7b). We don't know how long David may have sought the Lord for that word. But in one short sentence God gave David and his men the faith needed to turn tragedy into triumph. This speaks of the power and effectiveness of the Word of God.

What we need on our worst day is faith in God. Where does faith come from? It comes from hearing and believing God's Word. There are two Greek words translated Word in our English Bibles, Logos (loh-gos) and Rhema. *Logos* is a word, concept or principle that is timeless. Read Hebrews 4:12. Like a surgeon's scalpel in the hands of the Holy Spirit, the Bible is the logos of God cutting into our innermost being in order to discern whether our thoughts and motives are spiritual or unspiritual. It has two edges, either cutting to save our lives or judging us to eternal death. Logos is also the divine word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ. Compare John 1:1-2 with John 6:63. *Rhema*, the other Greek word translated "word" in our English Bibles refers to a *word* from Christ spoken to our spirit by the Holy Spirit for a particular moment, and situation. Romans 10:17 states, "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." "Word" in this passage comes from the Greek word *rhema*. Now read Matthew 14:28-29. When Jesus invited Peter to come to Him by walking on the water, Jesus spoke *rhema*, a specific word to Peter for that particular moment and situation. When Peter asked Jesus if he could come to Him on the water, Jesus said, "Come" (Matthew 14:28-29). Simply reading what Jesus said to Peter will not generate faith in you to walk on water. But in that *specific moment* and in that *specific situation*, when Jesus said, "Come," *for Peter* it was a *rhema* word that generated exceptional faith in him for that *particular moment in time*.

There are two Greek words used in the New Testament for time, *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* has to do with the measurement or movement of time in space. *Kairos* is the opportune moment. It is fair and accurate to think of *chronos* as ordinary time and *kairos* as special time. *Logos* corresponds with *chronos*, and *rhema* corresponds with *kairos*. The story of Peter walking on the water with Jesus is logos, a timeless story, from which many general lessons can be derived. But when Jesus specifically says to you, "Come!" and you get out of the boat and walk on water that is a *rhema* word in the *kairos* moment, creating a miracle. That is how divine healing works and any other needed miracle. How does this relate to David's Ziklag situation? David needed to hear from God in the *present moment* and in that *particular situation*. That is why he asked for the ephod. What David received from God was the *rhema* word in the *kairos* moment---a *specific* word for that *specific moment in time*. That is what we need on the worst day of our lives. Instead of wringing our hands when disaster strikes we need to turn to the Word of God and let the Holy Spirit give us a *rhema* word in the *kairos* moment. A faithful believer may at times feel God is not listening to his or her prayers (Psalms 28:1-3). That doesn't mean God is not listening. The Lord may be testing your faith or waiting until you are ready to receive what He has to say, but He is listening. You say, "What's your point?" My point is exceptional faith is generated in times of

crisis by the specific Word of God spoken to your spirit by the Holy Spirit. Search the Bible for that word. Listen for that word. Just make sure what is being registered in your spirit is coming from God and not from your own selfish desires or from Satan. I've seen believers get into trouble because they thought they had heard from God; but what they heard was their own thoughts and impressions or what the devil fed them through some worldly counselor or friend. Satan is very skilled at quoting the Word of God out of context in order to get people to believe a lie (Genesis 3:1-6). If he can get you to believe that God has let you down in one area of life he knows you begin to doubt God in other areas. If he can get you to take a passage of the Bible out of context he can get you to do things you would never normally do. Don't let your natural mind run wild. Don't make something up. Be patient when seeking God for a word. Seek God until you know for sure He is doing the speaking. T

here are two ways in which you can know if God is doing the speaking. First, it will conform to the Word of God. Ask yourself, "Does what I am hearing in my spirit conform to the principles outlined in God's Word, the Bible?" If not, discard it. God is not going to tell you to think, say or do something that is contrary to Scripture. All of the principles and precepts found in the Bible, including those found in the Old Testament, are as valid today as the day they were written (Matthew 5:17-19). Secondly, what you hear from God will bring inner peace. You may have randomly read a passage from the Bible over and over all your life without a significant impact but on this particular day it's like God is audibly speaking to you in your innermost being. In that moment, *rhema met kairos* and faith and hope were born. This is what happened to David (1 Samuel 30:8). Suddenly David's negative energy of despondency and self-pity turned to faith and hope.

4: David regained his passion for *spiritual warfare*—1 Samuel 30:9-16. David and his men marched into the afternoon under the searing Judean sun until they reached the Besor Ravine. Two hundred of the David's men were too exhausted to cross the ravine. It was decided they would guard the supplies while David and the other four hundred continued the pursuit of the Amalekites (1 Samuel 20:9-10, 29). They found an Egyptian slave semiconscious lying in a field who had been left for dead by the Amalekites who agreed to show them where the enemy's camp was if they would spare his life and turn him over to the enemy (1 Samuel 30:11-16). They arrived at the enemy's camp just as the sun was setting. David could see from a ridge that the Amalekites were "scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and reveling over the great amount of plunder they had taken from the Philistines and from Judah" (1 Samuel 30:16). David organized his men and gave the order to attack (1 Samuel 30:17). The battle raged through the night and into the next day. David took no prisoners and gave no ground to the enemy. Fifteen years earlier, against God's will, King Saul had spared Agag, king of the Amalekites. That disobedience set in motion the events that eventually lead to his downfall. David wouldn't make that mistake. The only ones able to escape the surprise attack were some of the younger and faster Amalekites who sped away on camels.

5: David recovered all and more—1 Samuel 30:18-20). Thirty six hours earlier David had dared to listen to God and pursue the enemy (1 Samuel 30:8). It must have been an incredible moment of unspeakable joy when he and his men were united with their families. In an amazing twist of fate, David actually came out of the Ziklag catastrophe *enriched* (1 Samuel 30:20). He and his men not only recovered all their belongings, they recovered all the loot the Amalekites had taken from other locations as they swept through the territory. Some may be wondering, “Will I recover all on my worst day?” Only God knows, as each situation is different and God’s purpose for allowing a Ziklag experience to occur is different for each of us. While you may not get a loved one back or immediately recover monetarily from a disastrous event, one thing is certain, you be stronger in faith than you were before the trial began. You may have been hurt, even victimized, but you don’t have to live like a personal victim the rest of your life. You may have failed but you are not a failure. Who are you? You are a child of God, and an overcomer in Christ Jesus. Overcomers overcome. And, they recover! The storyline of the Bible is how God is in the process of recovering *all* through Christ Jesus that was lost in the catastrophe of sin.

6: David’s sixth and final step was to share the abundance of God’s blessings with others—1 Samuel 30:21-30. Why give?

- ✓ Giving is a characteristic of God – John 3:16.
- ✓ Giving draws us closer to God – Matthew 6:21.
- ✓ Giving tests faith – Malachi 3:10.
- ✓ Giving is an investment in eternity – 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

King Saul was killed in battle at Mount Gilboa by the Philistines three days after David defeated the Amalekites. David was installed as king of Judah shortly after that. A modern day version of raiding Amalekites (1 Samuel 30) may have bought ruin to your hopes and dreams. It may have been a lost job, a failed business, a foreclosure, bankruptcy, a betrayal, a divorce, a wayward child, or even death of a loved one. The question is not will bad things happen to us. Bad things are going to happen. The question is will we become discouraged, bitter and defeated or accept God’s recovery plan and speak outlandish words of faith? The decision is yours, not God’s. God’s Son has already paid the ultimate redemptive price for your sins and rose from the dead for your recovery. Believe it! Accept it! Faith needs no other justification other than the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of the Son of God is the cornerstone for every hope of recovery. It is a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation (Isaiah 28:16). Stand on it! Act on it! Live by it!

### **Lessons learned**

1: There are times in everyone’s life when you have to confront the unthinkable, a season in life when God gives no explanations, only promises from His Word. It is during these times that God finds out who truly loves Him and who doesn’t.

2: There is a time to grieve and there is a time to trust in God and move on. Satan will not expect you to do this. He expects you to become angry, bitter, depressed, give up,

drop out of church, and turn to alcohol, drugs, or some other deviant behavior to cope. The issue is not do we suffer or even why we suffer, but how we handle suffering. The terrible ordeal you are going through now, or will go through in the future, can actually become a catalyst to a greater tomorrow.

3: We must engage the enemy. That is what David did. The difference is our enemy is not a group of Amalekites. It's Satan (Ephesians 2:2). Satan does not work alone (1 Corinthians 2:6, 8; Ephesians 6:12). Spiritual warfare is simply being aware of the devices, schemes and temptations of Satan and his forces of evil and being spiritually prepared to combat him and his kingdom of darkness with the Word of God at all times. There are two extremes when it comes to spiritual warfare. There are those who are obsessed with the external part of spiritual warfare (i.e., miracles, binding, loosing and casting out demons, etc.). What these folks need is balance. At the other extreme are those who have no seeming awareness of the militancy of Satan or of the necessity to do spiritual warfare. For them, the church is nothing more than a social gathering with nothing more expected than fashionable attire and unaware of how Satan operates. This group needs a spiritual awakening. I submit these are "showdown" days, not unlike the OK Corral of the Old West! Daily television beams hell's mores into our living rooms. American courts have made Christianity the one banned religion in our public school systems. Thousands of unborn children are being killed in the name of women's rights. An avalanche of drugs is being peddled with instant addiction and kidney-paralyzing power. Satan has skillfully implanted half-truths and out-and-out false doctrine within the professing church in an effort to deceive believers. Satan means business. This is battle time! We must engage the enemy wearing God's "full armor" (Ephesians 6:13). Christ has promised that His authority, power and presence will accompany us as we battle Satan's kingdom of darkness (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:47-49). But we must do our part! Second Chronicles 7:14 states, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

4: That which was designed to destroy you can actually bless you in the long run. The amount of wealth David recovered from the Amalekites was staggering. How can that apply to us Christians? Romans 8:28-29 tells us that God works to bring good out of all afflictions, trials, persecution and suffering. That is, God uses adverse circumstances to help us grow spiritually. We can do more than just survive a satanic assault; we can be catapulted into a new spiritual dimension. I've stood in hospital rooms and at gravesides with those who have seemingly lost all meaning for existence. I have felt the anguish of those who lost their jobs and feel they have also lost their dignity. I have witnessed the pain of loss in parents who have seen their children abandon the faith. I have felt the pain that comes from betrayal and deep disappointment in my own life. But there is a way, incredible as it may seem, to recover with greater faith, joy and peace. The glorious thing about the chronicles of Scripture is that disappointment is never the end of the story, not for those who love God. Instead, the barren give birth, slaves are set free, the Promised Land is found, and the temple is built...and rebuilt, Messiah does appear, the kingdom does come and the dead are raised.

## Hezekiah's Worst Day

Hezekiah's worst day is found in 2 Kings 18:17-27. How he responded to that crisis is described in 2 Kings 19. Hezekiah's spiritual outlook on the situation is found in Psalm 46, which we shall examine. But first let's look at the background that led up to Hezekiah's worst day. A civil war broke out after King Solomon died and the nation of Israel became divided (1 Kings 11:43). Judah and Benjamin became known as the nation of Judah. Their capital was located in Jerusalem. The ten northern tribes became known as Israel (also called Ephraim). Their capital was located in Samaria (1 Kings 11-12). While Judah and Israel had experienced nearly a half-century of increasing prosperity, prestige and power, neither of them measured up to God's holiness. With one evil king after another, Israel succumbed to pagan worship more so than Judah. In 722 B.C., after a three-year starvation siege, the king of Assyria, Sennacherib (*se'naekerib*) and his powerful army entered Israel's capital city of Samara massacred many of its inhabitants and took captive every able-bodied person and carried them back to Assyria as slaves, leaving only Judah as God's people (2 Kings 17; Isaiah 7:8). Sennacherib then took non-Jewish captives from various parts of the Assyrian empire and settled them in Samaria. What happened to the ten northern tribes teaches that idol worshippers have a predictable end and it's not good. Judah maintained an outward conformity as a covenant people for a while but gradually fell into serious moral and spiritual decline. Places of pagan worship were tolerated; the wealthy oppressed the poor; families neglected in the quest of carnal pleasures; many of the priests became drunken men-pleasers. The blasphemy of King Uzziah brought upon him the judgment of leprosy. He was excluded from public life for the last seven years of his life on account of his leprosy, requiring his 23 year old son Jotham to administer the affairs of the kingdom (2 Chronicles 26:21, 23; 27:1). Upon Uzziah's death, Jotham became sole monarch and reigned for 16 years (B.C. 759-743). His reign was prosperous because he ruled in the fear of God. He was contemporary with prophets Isaiah, Hosea and Micah, by whose ministrations he profited and was greatly lamented by the people when he died (2 Kings 15:38; 2 Chronicles 27:7-9). Jotham was succeeded by his wicked and idolatrous son, Ahaz (2 Kings 16; Isaiah 7-9; 2 Chronicles 28). Ahaz was succeeded by his son Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1; 2 Chronicles 29:1). Hezekiah's name in the Hebrew means "The Lord has strengthened," depicting his godly character. A great spiritual reformation took place under Hezekiah's leadership (2 Kings 18:4; 2 Chronicles 29:3-36), that included the destruction of the "brazen serpent," which had been removed to Jerusalem, and had become an object of idolatrous worship (Numbers 21:9).

The year is now 701 B.C. Ahaz had paid tribute to the Assyrians to avert an invasion. Hezekiah refused to continue that practice when he became king. Instead, he made an alliance with Egypt in hopes of averting an attack. This treaty shows that Hezekiah was not perfect as it was in violation of God's Word (Exodus 34:12, 15; Deuteronomy 7:2). The Assyrian king Sennacherib responded by sending his powerful army into Judea and capturing Judah's fortified cities (2 Kings 18:13; Isaiah 22, 24, 29; 2 Chronicles 32:1-8). Seeing no hope in further resistance, Hezekiah depleted Judah's treasurer, including

taking gold from the doors of the temple, and apologetically submitted to Sennacherib and paid the tribute (2 Kings 18:14-16). But the Assyrians advanced and surrounded Jerusalem anyway (2 Kings 18:17).

Using 2 Kings 19, let's examine the steps Hezekiah took during this crisis.

1. 2 Kings 19:1: Hezekiah *turned to God*.
2. 2 Kings 19:2-7: Hezekiah *sought directions from God*. Hezekiah sent the secretary of state to Isaiah the prophet to receive a word from God. God sent word back through Isaiah and said pay no attention to what Sennacherib says. His days are numbered.
3. 2 Kings 19:15-19: Hezekiah *prayed*. Sennacherib wrote to Hezekiah blaspheming God and threatened to annihilate the inhabitants of Jerusalem if he doesn't surrender (2 Kings 19:10-13). Hezekiah went into the temple and spread the letter out before the Lord and prayed earnestly. We would do well to follow Hezekiah's example and pray a trusting prayer when troubles come into our lives and circumstances seem out of control.
4. 2 Kings 19:19: Hezekiah *appeals to God's honor*. Hezekiah's wasn't concerned with his life or the lives of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. What he was concerned over was God's honor and reputation. Again, we would do well to follow Hezekiah's example. It is of upmost importance that God be revered, glorified and exalted at all times (Matthew 6:9; John 17:4-6). God sent word back to Hezekiah through Isaiah not to worry about anything. He will defend the city, and He did! Read 2 Kings 19:35-36.

Now let's examine Psalm 46 and see how Hezekiah spiritually viewed the situation. Hezekiah either wrote this psalm during the siege or following it. The sons of Korah (musicians) put the lyrics of the song to music. Psalm 46 is divided into three parts by that funny little word called *Selah*. No one knows for sure what the word means. Some folk believe it means to pause and think about what is being said before reading on. While there is nothing wrong with that practice the word was probably used as a musical annotation or pause to allow the orchestra time for re-tuning of the string instruments before starting another stanza.

### Section 1 – A Personal Savior who Shelters and Strengths His People

Psalm 46:1: Here, Hezekiah introduces God to us as *a personal Savior* who cares about us, not some distant or disinterested God. This was the God Hezekiah believed in. God doesn't guarantee trouble won't come to us? What He does do is guarantee that we will be sheltered and strengthened in times of trouble. But we must trust Him to do that. "Refuge" pictures a shelter from danger. "Strength" refers to the Lord enabling His people to overcome obstacles and carry out God's will. Paul said in Colossians 1:29, "I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me." That is why he could say, "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

Psalms 46:2-3: What could be so terrible that would cause Hezekiah to paint this bleak a picture? Look at the phrase "the mountains fall into the heart of the sea" (verse 2). *Everything Hezekiah and the people of Judah felt was invincible is suddenly no longer in place*. They believed that they were secure and safe from attack because the sea was to their backs and they lived in the mountains where chariots are of very little value.

They also believed the ten northern tribes was a buffer from invading armies. The only problem was the ten northern tribes were no longer there and the Assyrian army came through those mountains as if they weren't even there. What do you do when your world begins to spin and fall apart? Hezekiah's answer is, turned to God. He will shelter and strengthen you. If you have not practiced trusting God in the safe times, you are not very likely to know how to do that in time of trouble, however. Selah.

## Section 2 – God's Provision

Psalms 46:4-7: Hezekiah is suddenly faced with another problem. The enemy has cut off the water source to the city (2 Kings 18:17-18). If he was going to withstand a siege for any length of time he would have to find a way to get water into the city. Here is what God led him to do. From inside the walls, he had workers dig a 150 feet deep pit (reservoir) that could hold water. They had to dig through solid rock! They then tunneled under the northern section of the city wall and tapped into the Gaiyon Spring that flowed just outside the city wall to fill the reservoir. Workers then began digging a tunnel from one end of the city to the other to distribute water to the people. Starting at the south end of the city, one group of workers began digging northwards. At the reservoir north end, another group of workers began digging a tunnel southward. Keep in mind they were digging underground and couldn't see each other. They did not have GPS, satellite, or modern surveying equipment as we do today. According to Josephus, a Jewish historian, the tunnel was so precise that the pick from the man digging from the south hit the man's pick that was digging from the north! Suddenly there was water flowing into the city. It was one of the ancient marvels of the old world.

Psalms 46:4, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells." Hezekiah is giving God the credit for the water, as he should have. Spiritually speaking, God's "river" is the continual flow of grace, glory and power in the midst of His faithful people that refreshes (Psalms 4:13-14; 7:38; 46:11; Isaiah 8:6; Ezekiel 47:1; Revelation 3:12; 22:1).

Psalms 46:5: The phrase "God will help her [Jerusalem] at break of day" is significant. The Hebrew says, "When the morning dawns." That is the time of an attack. They didn't have night-vision goggles in ancient times. The enemy had to wait until the sun came up to attack so they wouldn't shoot their own troops. Hezekiah is saying that God will help His people when the enemy attacks.

Psalms 46:6-7: God is telling us that while He *may not take us out of our troubles, He's right there protecting us through them.* He is also *servicing notice to the heathen army that had surrounded Jerusalem, "Your life is about over as you know it."* When everything falls apart, God is still our fortress – God is still God, trust Him! Selah.

## Section 3 — God Will be Exalted

Psalms 46:8-11. There are two views concerning the phrase "be still and know that I am God" (verse 10). There are those who believe God was saying to the heathen

nations to cease warring against His people because they don't have a chance of winning. The other view is that God was telling His own people to settle down and trust Him. While both views have merit, I am inclined to go with the second view because Psalms 46 was written to God's people. Besides, the king of Assyria viewed God as just one more in the arsenal of gods believed back then (2 Kings 18:33-36). The imagery in verse 10 is that of a mother cradling her un-consolable child in her arms. Nursery workers can best identify with this when they try to console a fretful baby but nothing works. In comes this young inexperienced mother. She takes her infant in her arms, hold him/her close and says, "Shh..." and immediately the child quiets down. This young mother did something the experienced nursery workers couldn't do. Yet all she did was to hold her baby close to her. It's not magic. It's about the child feeling safe in the arms of Mom (or Dad). That's the picture God paints for us when He says, "Be still, and know that I am God." In other words, "Shh...Shh...stop worrying. I have everything under control. I will be exalted in the end." There are believers who are so busy fretting and worrying over a situation that they aren't able to hear God whisper, "Shh...trust me in this situation." The Apostle Paul said, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). So often we miss out on God's blessing, not because He is inactive; but because we are too busy worrying about this and that and trying to tell God how to run the universe. We need to stop and think how God came through for us in times past and trust Him in our current situation. Psalms 46:11 tells us that God is our fortress: Isaiah said, "So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed'" (Isaiah 28:16). Isaiah is saying that on Christ as the foundation, God is building a new people, whose commitment is righteousness. The entire New Testament is based on this truth: John 14:6; 17:2; Romans 9:33; 1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:4-6.

### **Lessons learned**

1: When adverse situations comes our way it is imperative that we concentrate on God and what He is doing and not on the enemy and what he is doing. The people were pre-occupied with what the enemy was saying. The only reason they didn't get into a dialogue with the enemy was because Hezekiah gave them orders not to (2 Kings 18:36). All Hezekiah wanted to know was what God had to say about the situation (2 Kings 19:1-7). He already knew what the enemy wanted. Too often we dwell on the problem and not on God's ability to work on our behalf in the midst of the problem (Romans 8:28). Like Hezekiah we don't need to get into a contest with those who want to destroy Christianity. The moral fabric of society is crumbling around us. What should we do? For one thing we must not turn to the world for answers. We need to turn to God's Word. What you'll discover when you search the Scriptures is that God is sufficient for any situation we might have to face. I know there may be times when you cannot possibly understand how God can rescue you. But God specializes in the impossible. In Genesis 18:14, God asked Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" The answer of course is "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

What does God say do in Psalms 46:10 when we're in the valley of confusion, anxiety and discouragement? "Shh..., hold tight, I am still God, I am still in charge! Trust me!" So when you are in the valley of decision concentrate on what God is trying to accomplish through you and not on what the enemy is trying to do to you. God is well capable of taking care of the devil and his crowd. From Hezekiah's viewpoint, the same God who delivered him in past situations could be trusted to come through in this situation. We would be wise to follow his example.

2: If we will do our part God will do His. It was no easy task digging and tunnel through solid rock. God brought the water when the people had done their part. Our part is to tear up the credit card and stop adding to our debt if we are in trouble financially. If our marriage is in trouble, our part is to become the Christ-like husband or wife we need to be and trust God with the results. It may be difficult in light of what is going on at the time, but if you will do your part God will certainly do His. The Lord Jesus tells us to speak to the mountain (problem) and not about the mountain (problem) (Matthew 17:20). Regardless of what people can do to us (Matthew 10:28), God is well capable of taking care of us. Trust Him! True faith is not a belief in "faith" as a force or power, but a "faith in God" (Matthew 11:22).

3: No one blasphemes God without consequences. No one! Psalms 46:9, Hezekiah said that God "makes wars cease to the ends of the earth." When you read 2 Kings 19:5-7, 32-37 you'll discover that one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the enemy's camp died that very night without a single arrow being shot. "At the other end of the earth" (from Hezekiah's perspective) the blasphemous king Sennacherib went home to his assassination! What is the storyline of Hezekiah's worst day? God is sufficient for any situation we might face. Sennacherib was right when he said no one had ever stood up against him (2 Kings 18:33-34), but then he had not come up against the one true God before. He learned the hard way you don't blaspheme the one true God and get away with it. Read 2 Chronicles 32:24-33. Hezekiah's dealings with the envoys from Babylon are told in 2 Kings 20:12-19 and Isaiah 39. God sometimes withdraws evidence of his nearness and favor in order to test the hearts and steadfast trust of his servants. You see, success breeds prayerlessness, presumptuousness and pride. That is what happened to Hezekiah. Are we better off not to be blessed? That way we're less accountable and less prone to presumption, right? Wrong! We're better off in whatever state of spiritual success God deems to place us. He knows what He's doing. All He asks of us is that the more He blesses us, the more we humble ourselves. The more he blesses us, the more we praise Him. The more He blesses us, the more we recognize the meaning of grace. As Christians, there is no basis for it. If someone comes to you on a hot day and pours you a cup of cool lemonade and it's the best lemonade you ever drank, do you praise the pitcher, or the glass? No, they're just vessels; praise goes to the one who made it. Satan's landmine is laid in place. Whenever success comes, the subtle danger is that the success becomes spiritual pride. At that moment, we have a choice. We can stand on our feet and say look at us, or we can humbly say look at our heavenly Father. What happens from then on will be decided by which way we go.

## Daniel's Worst Day – Daniel 1

The book of Daniel can be broken down into two parts: Part one is found in the first six chapters describing a historical narrative of Judah's 70-year period of captivity, presenting dynamic stories that challenge our faith. Part two, Chapters 7 through 12 provides us with invaluable information about the nation of Israel and surrounding Gentile nations in the end times; much of which compliments the Book of Revelation. Daniel's worst day occurred in part one of the Book.

Daniel 1:1: Daniel's worst day involved an invasion by the worst of the worst, the Babylonians. Ancient Babylon was located on the landmass of what is known today as Iraq. Under the leadership of their crown prince Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians had already conquered the Syrians and were now turning their attention to Egypt, their only rival in the Middle East. The Egyptians saw what was coming and attacked Babylon north of the Euphrates River. The Babylonians had a decisive victory, allowing Nebuchadnezzar to expand his conquest outward into Judea. He was almost to the city of Jerusalem when he received news of his father's death. He returned to Babylon to secure his position as king and then resumed his conquest of Judea, at which time he captured Jerusalem. He was to conquer Jerusalem two more times, eventually leveling the city. It was during Nebuchadnezzar's first conquest of Jerusalem (605 BC) that the people of Judah were exiled to Babylon (2 King 25:21-22). It was difficult for the people of Judah to understand how this could happen, especially since God had defeated Assyrians who had invaded Judah just seven years earlier (2 Kings 19:35-36). But they should have known why this was happening. God had sent prophet after prophet to warn them that unless they repented of their wicked ways judgment would fall (1 Kings 6:12). But they wouldn't listen. While the people of Judah had committed various sins that warranted judgment, three stood out. First, they had failed to observe the sabbatical year of rest for the land. According to the Law (Leviticus 25:1-7), they were not allowed to cultivate the land, plant anything, or prune the vineyards every seven years. It was to be a Sabbath of rest for the land unto God. Judah's captivity took place in the sabbatical year they were suppose to let the land rest. It lasted 70 years; one year for every year they had violated this law! (Jeremiah 25:11) Judah's second great sin was idolatry. God said He was a jealous God and would not tolerate idolatry (Deuteronomy 5:6-7) and He didn't! Third on Judah's gross sin list was sexual perversion of various kinds, which guaranteed God's judgment (Deuteronomy 5:32-33; 6:10-25). Of course there were those who remained devoted to Jehovah. Unfortunately they had to suffer along with the guilty. This portion of our study examines how one of those who were faithful to God, Daniel, responded to that suffering. We have no record of what happened to his parents. Daniel was probably 17 years old at the time.

Daniel 1:2: What was Nebuchadnezzar's motive for taking sacred vessels from the Jewish temple and placing them in the treasure house of his god? He was giving credit to his god for his victory over Judah. People of that era believed they could only conquer their enemies if their god was more powerful. This passage clearly shows that Nebuchadnezzar routinely followed that custom.

Daniel 1:3-4: Apparently the Babylonian Empire had grown so fast Nebuchadnezzar did not have enough educated men to run the government. So he decided to select princes from various countries he had conquered and put them through a three year program to teach them the Babylonian culture and language and then use them in the government. These young men were the intellectuals, the best of the best in their various societies. All of them came from wealthy families of royalty or nobility. They were in their mid-teens, old enough to function independently of parents, yet young enough to be impressionable and teachable. They all had a high I.Q. with the capacity of learning the Babylonian language and customs. They were also handsome so they would make a good impression in the king's court. Among those selected for the three year training program were some from Judah, Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Daniel 1:6).

Daniel 1:5: What was the king's purpose for giving Daniel and his peers the same kind of food he ate? Nebuchadnezzar's purpose for giving the princes the same kind of food he ate was to assimilate them into Babylonian society as quickly as possible. But there was a problem. The king's meat had been consecrated to an idol before being cooked. Daniel and his three friends believed if they ate this meat they would be pledging allegiance to and worshiping that idol. That is exactly what Nebuchadnezzar wanted them to think. I.e., if they were to be effective Babylonian officials in the government they needed to accept Babylonian ways, including Babylonian gods.

Daniel 1:6-7: Why did Nebuchadnezzar have their names changed? The Hebrew names of these four teens tell us their parents were devoted to God. If these young princes were to enter the king's service they needed to have Babylonian citizenship, which was accompanied by giving them Babylonian names. But, as the following chart depicts, it was also to honor Babylonian gods and erases all identity of them being followers of Jehovah (YAHWEH):

Meaning of Hebrew Names	Meaning of Babylonian Names
Daniel: "God is my Judge."	Beltshazzar: "Protector." Bel was the name of the Babylonian chief god.
Hananiah: "the LORD showed grace."	Shadrach: "servant of Aku," the name of the Babylonian moon-god.
Mishael: "who is equal to God?"	Meshach: "shadow of the prince" or "who is this."
Azariah: "the LORD helped."	Abednego: "the god of wisdom" or "morning star," a former name for Satan.

Daniel 1:8-21: Daniel resolved beforehand he was not going to violate his conscience or disobey the Word of God even if it cost him his life. God honored Daniel's resolve and showed him a way out (1 Daniel 1:11-14). Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." That's Daniel's story in a nut shell. In order to resolve the stand off Daniel asked the overseer

of the project if he and his three friends could be excluded from the royal diet. His request was denied because they were objects of the king's special attention (v. 10). Daniel did not argue. He went to the man who actually served the food and proposed an experimental ten-day all vegetable and water diet. God gave Daniel favor with the man and the proposal was implemented. "At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food" (Daniel 1:15). At the final examination when they stood before the king they demonstrated more wisdom and knowledge, and looked healthy, than all of the other candidates. They also stood unafraid before the king because they knew God was with them (vs. 18-20). At Daniel's request, the king appointed Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah to positions of responsibility in Babylon's administration, while Daniel served in the king's court (Daniel 2:9).

### Lessons learned

1: God and His sovereignty put Daniel in Babylon and God and His sovereignty kept him safe while there. Daniel 1:21: "And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus." This passage tells us that not only did Daniel live to see the Meds and Persians take over the mighty Babylon Empire; he lived to see the first group of exiles returned to Jerusalem. Jeremiah prophesied that the people of Judah would return to Jerusalem after 70 years of captivity (Jeremiah 25:11-12; 27:22). In the 69<sup>th</sup> year of Judah's captivity, the Persian king Cyrus conquered the Babylonians. One year later (Judah's 70<sup>th</sup> year of captivity), King Cyrus issued a decree authorizing the Jews to return to Jerusalem (538 B.C.). Some 160 years before it happened, the prophet Isaiah foretold the event, naming King Cyrus (Isaiah 44:26-28; 45:1-13)!

The world is not like a ship without a captain going from age to age. God in His sovereignty is in full control. The sovereignty of God is defined for us in Psalms 115:3: "Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him." Daniel 4:17 attests to this fact: "The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone He wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men." God can do anything He wants anytime He wants and absolutely no one can stop Him, period. Author Pink said, "Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They will allow His workshop to fashion worlds and make stars. They will allow Him to be in His armory to dispense His alms and bestow His bounties. They will allow Him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of heaven, or rule the waves of the ever-moving ocean; but when God ascends His throne His creatures then gnash their teeth. And we proclaim an *enthroned* God and His right to do as He wills with His own; to dispose of His creatures as He thinks without consulting them in the matter... It is God upon His throne whom we trust." (*The Attributes of God* by Arthur W. Pink, pages 32-33). Charles Spurgeon once said, "There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God's sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstance, in the most severe trials, they believe that sovereignty has ordained their afflictions; that sovereignty overrules them, and that sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought more earnestly to contend than the doctrine of their Master

over all creation—the kingship of God over all the works of His own hands—the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that throne.” I agree. The general headquarters of the universe is not Washington DC, London, Moscow, Mecca, Peking, or anywhere else on the planet. It is in heaven (Psalms 11:4; 47:8; 97:2; 103:19; Ezekiel 1:26-28).

Read Daniel chapter 6. As you read through this chapter you’ll discover that in the midst of the strife, discord, and confusion of this world, God is sitting on His throne in heaven superintending over His creation and looking after His people. There is a legend that says when a Cherokee Indian youth is ready for manhood his father takes him deep into the forest, sits him down on a stump, blindfolds him and leaves him there all night. Under no circumstance is the boy allowed to leave or remove the blindfold until he feels the rays of the morning sun shining through the blindfold. Furthermore, he must not tell the other boys about the experience. He is considered to be a man if he meets those conditions. The boy is naturally terrified as he can hear all kinds of noises and wild animals walking around in the woods. After a horrific night, the sun appears and the boy removes his blindfold. It is then that he discovers that his father is sitting on the stump next to him. The man had been there throughout the entire night watching over his son and protecting him from harm. The moral of the story is we are never alone. While it appeared Daniel was in danger of losing his life when he was placed in the den of hungry lions, he wasn’t. God was right there overseeing the events as they unfolded to protect him from harm. Just because you can’t physically see your heavenly Father doesn’t mean He is not there watching over you day and night overseeing the events of your life.

2: It is essential that we maintain an eternal outlook on life at all times. In Daniel 3, King Nebuchadnezzar required everyone to worship a 90 feet high and 9 feet wide gold statue he had erected as a means of promoting loyalty to himself. Nebuchadnezzar decreed, “Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace” (3:6). It was reported to Nebuchadnezzar that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah), members of his own administration, refused to serve his gods or bow and worship the image of gold. Furious, the king called the three youths in and gave them one last chance to worship the image or be thrown into a blazing furnace. The king concluded, “Then what god would be able to rescue you from my hand?” (Daniel 3:17). We don’t know where Daniel was when all this was happening. He was most likely in some other part of the provinces on business.

Read Daniel 3:16-23. It is clear from this passage that, like Daniel (1:8), Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) had decided beforehand they would not compromise their Biblical convictions even if it cost them their lives. Though the Bible instructs us to obey, honor, and pray for those who rule over us (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Peter 3:12-17), our first duty is to God (Acts 5:29), we must never compromise biblical principles regardless of what it cost (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37-38). In the end times, the promise of global peace and prosperity will be most alluring to the unregenerate and uninformed Christians. That’s why the antichrist will be able to blaspheme God without any resistance (Revelation 13:6-8). Where we

end up depends upon to whom we will give our loyalty and worship (Joshua 24:15). Once people embrace the seductive world system that will be in place during the Great Tribulation and take the mark of the beast, their spiritual freedom will permanently close with no escape (Revelation 14:9-11; Hebrews 10:26-31). That is why we must know and follow God's Word.

Read Daniel 3:24-25. Deliverance is God's initiative and His gift and not some genie we can conjure up by some carefully formulated prayer. There are two views as to the identity of the fourth man. Some believe he was an angel sent to protect Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) in their time of great trial. Others believe he was a pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ. It is immaterial either way. God is fulfilling his promise never to leave or forsake His people (Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Joshua 1:5; Hebrews 13:5). What is interesting is the Hebrew names of these three teens correspond to their deliverance: "The LORD showed grace" (Hananiah) to them and "the LORD helped" (Azariah) them. The form of the fourth man in the fire was as one "who is equal to God" (Mishael)! That being said, the deliverance of these three teens is not as important as their decision to remain true to God in the face of death. They didn't know God was going to deliver them until they were actually thrown into the fire. Obedience and persevering trust in God, and not necessarily the experience of deliverance, give true evidence of Biblical faith. The reason they held true to God's Word in face of death was because they had an eternal perspective on life. And that is done when everything is going good. It's too late trying to figure out what you believe lying unconscious in an emergency room waiting to see if you will live or die. From God's viewpoint, if we lost everything but grew spiritually, we would be better off than the person who gained everything and lost his/her soul (Mark 8:36).

3: The greater the sins of a nation, the greater God's punishment will be when it finally falls. Read 1 Kings 14:7-11, 15-16. These are strong words for a people who just a generation earlier enjoyed God's favor under King David. Daniel 1:1-2 is in fulfillment of God's promise of judgment on the ungrateful nation of Judah. America will soon find itself in a similar position if we continue down the path we are going. What was once good is now considered evil; and what was once evil is being celebrated as good. New York, for example, became the sixth state to sign same-sex marriage into law. The state's Senate, a majority of which is Republican, approved the measure in mid summer of 2011 to the delight of the Democratic governor, Andrew Cuomo. The media showed the New York Senate chamber erupting in loud applause from the balcony as spectators celebrated the outcome of the vote. This new law will do more to accelerate and legitimize the immoral homosexual and lesbian agenda than anything preceding it. Homosexuals and Lesbians from anywhere in the country will now be able to travel to New York, get married, and then return to their home state claiming to be a legal couple, thereby challenging existing laws in those states forbidding same gender unions. God says, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil who put darkness for light and light for darkness" (Isaiah 5:20). As evil as it is, homosexuality is not the only sin in this prosperous nation. Many unborn babies are murdered each year through abortion in the name of women's rights. One-half of all babies that are born are born out of wedlock in many parts of the country. The use of pornography is pandemic and

marriages are crumbling because of infidelity. These are just the “sex sins.” Never mind greed, glutton, drug abuse, deception, murder, theft, self-centered pride, the pursuit of the occult, outright hatred for God or the denial of His existence, to name just a few. Never mind, a President who claimed to be a Christian, yet stands opposed to the Biblical position on many, if not most, of the moral spiritual issues facing our nation. Americans were aware of where he stood on these issues and that he had the most liberal anti-Christian voting record in the U.S. Senate, yet still voted him into office. Additionally, the U.S. appears to be withdrawing its support of Israel. If the U.S. stops supporting Israel, judgment is certain. God has promised to bless every person and nation who blesses Israel and to curse every person and nation that curses Israel (Genesis 12:1-4). The day America turns its back on Israel will be the day God will turn His back on America.

In spite of the above realities, it remains fashionable and almost second-nature for us to say, “God bless America.” But how can He? Only God knows how much longer America has to repent of her sins. Every indication points to the fact that time is running out as God’s merciful pleas have been ignored by this proud and defiant nation. When a nation persistently chooses to reject God’s patient efforts to correct them, His judgment eventually falls. Ancient Israel is proof of this. God can carry out his judgment on a nation in a variety of ways, depending on the severity of its rebellion. He may choose to affect the nation’s livelihood by bringing down its economy, or He may allow it to be attacked and overtaken by its adversaries (2 Kings 17). Destruction can occur through natural disasters such as floods, extreme drought, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc. Regardless of how a nation is judged by God, all of its inhabitants are impacted to some degree, including Christians.

God’s judgment against a nation should not be confused with God’s eternal judgment of individuals, however. Whether at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10), or the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15), each of us will one day be required to give an accounting to the living God of how we lived (Romans 14:12). Those who succumb to Satan’s deception, oppose the truth of God’s Word, and reject Christ Jesus as Savior will spend eternity in the lake of fire separated from God and everything that is good (Revelation 20:15). Those of us who have accepted Jesus as Savior and leader of our lives are under the covering of His blood which paid the penalty for our sins. We will receive glorified bodies and spend eternity with Christ as our reward. Until then, like Daniel and his three friends, we Christians will suffer along with the ungodly who brought down God’s judgment on our nation.

### **Shunammite Woman’s Worst Day**

The story of the Shunammite woman is found in 2 Kings 4:8-37. A Shunammite was someone who resided in the town of Shunem, a very rich farm section of Palestine belonging to the tribe of Issachar, located on the edge of the Plain of Esdraelon at the foot of “Little Hermon” near Jezreel (Joshua 19:18). David’s nurse came from Shunem (1 Kings 3:2:17-22). Here the Philistines encamped before they fought at Gilboa (1 Samuel 28:4). In his travels Israel’s national prophet Elisha frequently passed through

Shunem. One day he is invited to lunch by a wealthy Shunammite woman. She must have been a good cook because whenever Elisha was in the area he would stop by for a meal. And he must have dropped by pretty often because she suggests to her husband they build a guest room on the roof of their home for Elisha. He could come by, eat a meal and rest up. Being appreciative, Elisha asked what he could do for her. She said nothing since she already had a home among her people. Elisha asks his assistant Gehazi what he thought should be done for the woman. Gehazi said, "Well, she has no son and her husband is old," which meant she would have no one to take care of her when he died. Elisha tells the woman she will have a son about that same time next year. "No, my Lord," she objected. "Don't mislead your servant, O man of God!" (2 Kings 4:16), revealing her deep longing for a son. Sure enough, the woman becomes pregnant and gives birth to a boy. The boy grew and was healthy until one morning he complains to his Dad about his head hurting. His Dad has a servant take him to his mother. The boy dies around noon sitting on his mother's lap. It is believed he died from inflammation of the brain produced by sunstroke.

That's the Shunammite woman's worst day. Most people would become angry and bitter at this point. Not this woman. She carries her dead son up and lays him on Elisha's bed, gets on a donkey and sets out to locate Elisha. She finds him at Mount Carmel. Realizing something is wrong due to her hurriedness, Elisha tells Gehazi to run and find out if everything is alright. The woman tells Gehazi everything is fine. But when she comes to Elisha she reaches down and takes hold of his feet indicating she was in great distress. Gehazi starts to push the woman away but Elisha stops him and says, "She is in bitter distress but the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me why" (2 Kings 4:27). After discovering what happened, Elisha tells the woman Gehazi will go back with her and place his staff (Elisha's walking stick) on the boy's face. But the woman refuses to leave Elisha's side. Elisha accompanies the woman to where the child is located (2 Kings 4:30). In the mean time, Gehazi runs ahead and places Elisha's walking stick on the boy's face without results (2 Kings 4:31-32). Elisha arrives, prays for the boy and the child is restored back to life. The woman receives her son back healed and well (2 Kings 4:36).

### **Lessons learned**

1: The story of the Shunammite Woman shows that God blesses those who consistently serve Him. In contrast to Obadiah's poor widow in 1 Kings 4:1-7, this Shunammite was very affluent and she had a husband. God blessed the faithful woman by giving her a son (2 Kings 4:8-17), which shows that God does not show favoritism. It's not what you have but what you are doing with what you have.

2: Sometimes God tests us to see if we will hold to His word of promise. This is depicted in the fact God severely tested the Shunammite woman by permitting her son to be taken from her (2 Kings 4:18-22), and then restored the boy back to life when she held firmly to God's word of promise (2 Kings 4:22-37). Many times God allows His faithful ones to pass through the inexplicable trials and afflictions in order to test their devotion to Him (Hebrews 11:17-40; Job 1-2).

3: The actions of both Elisha and the Shunammite woman provide illustrations of the importance of faith and persistence. Like the Shunammite woman we must not let the tragic events of our lives cause us to lose our grip on God's empowering grace. Many have let unfortunate events (i.e., broken engagements, the tragedy of divorce, the loss of a custody case, the death of a loved one, etc.) cause them to lose their grip on God's empowering grace. Some have left the Lord over the loss of ministry, which meant ministry was more important than God. Making people or ministry more important than God is idolatry. God declares, "I will not yield my glory to another" (Isaiah 48:11).

If God gives you a dream, the dream comes to life and everything is going good and all of a sudden the dream dies God may be trying to find out what is more important to you, your dream or Him? Once He determines that, like the Shunammite woman, you may get back your dream. The Shunammite woman's action was clear. Elisha was the man of God and she wanted to be as close to God as possible. When Elisha told her to go back with his servant, she refused. While she wasn't sure of everything that was going on, one thing was sure; she was going to hang on to God at any cost. Since Elisha was God's representative to her, she refused to leave his side (2 Kings 4:30), holding firmly to God and His Word of promise. As the result God restored her son's life.

Will we get back what is taken from us in our tests of life? Only God knows. But one thing for sure, anything, or anyone, we are unwilling to let go of is an idol and we are living in sin. While God is infinitely capable of meeting our needs, we must be careful not to find our identity in people, in our gifting, ministry, intense drive to do good works or even in our good works. Like the Shunammite woman, those who firmly hold on to God's word of promise will experience God's love, grace and compassion (cross-reference Psalms 25:10; Romans 8:28); Hebrews 11:6).

### **Paul's Worst Day**

Our text for Paul's worst day is found in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Before we examine this passage, let me give you some background. Paul is responding to false apostles, possibly former Pharisees from Judea, who were claiming to be superior to him (2 Corinthians 11:5-11). For one thing they looked down on Paul for his craft of tent making (Acts 18:3), which was held in low social esteem in Greek society. Paul tells the Christians at Corinth that his financial independence was not intended to embarrass them but to encourage them by his example of preaching the gospel...free of charge (2 Corinthians 11:7). Poorer churches had also supported Paul so he would not be a burden to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 8:2). His critics also said his speaking ability was lacking (1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 2 Corinthians 10:9-10). Paul didn't argue. Here is a paraphrase of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:3-4: "I was so scared I stuttered, so nervous that I forgot my point, and the fact that you heard anything at all is testimony to God." But the greatest contention between Paul and his critics was that he preached faith in Christ alone is the only way to be saved (1 Corinthians 2:1; Ephesians 2:8-9). They were saying you have to also observe certain parts of the Old Testament Law in order to be saved (Acts 15:1-6; Galatians 3:1-4; 5:4 Philippians 3:2). And they were

claiming to be apostles. Paul called these so called “super apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:5) “false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:13). If they were true apostles they would have been persecuted for preaching Jesus as he was. They weren’t. Hardship, according to Paul, was a norm for someone who is truly dedicated to Christ (2 Corinthians 4:8-9; 2 Timothy 3:12). Second Corinthians 11:26-33 tells us Paul had the scars to prove he was a true apostle:

- He had received *40 lashes* on five occasions for the cause of Christ (v. 24).
- Was beaten three with rods on three occasions (v. 25).
- Once *stoned* (v. 25).
- *Shipwrecked* three times (v. 25).
- Spent a day and a night in *the open sea* (v. 25).
- Hunted like an *animal* by bandits, Jews, Gentiles, and false brothers (v. 26).
- Often exposed to the *elements* and gone hunger and thirst (v. 27).
- Labored, toiled, and *gone without sleep* (v. 27).
- Had to be let down a wall in a large *basket* on one occasion to save his life (v. 33).

Added to all this was Paul had a problem that would not go away. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Various suggestions have been given as to what Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was. There are those who believe that as a single man (1 Corinthians 7:7), Paul was battling the flesh with sexual temptation and asking God to give him the gift of celibacy. Galatians 4:13-14 refutes this belief. Others have suggested Paul’s problem was his enemies, that a “messenger of Satan” was a person and not a demon. Still others believe Paul’s thorn was his lack of public relation skills. One thing for sure, Paul wasn’t very diplomatic when he confronted Peter at Antioch (Galatians 2:11). There were no gray areas for this man when it came to the grace of God (1 Timothy 1:20). Lastly, there are those who believe a case can be made that the thorn in Paul’s flesh was poor eyesight (cross-reference Galatians 4:15; 6:11). Those of this persuasion believe Paul’s eyesight may have been impaired following his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road (Acts 9:8-12) and became progressively worse over the years. While we will never know for sure what Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was, we do know Paul’s pain was no superficial prickle. Phillips’ translation says it was a “stabbing pain.” We also know Paul’s thorn had demonic origin, permitted, yet limited by God and given to Paul to keep him from becoming proud over the numerous revelations he had received from Christ. In any case, Paul’s thorn kept him dependent in greater measure on God’s *grace* (2 Corinthians 12:9; Hebrews 12:10). Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” remains unidentified so all of us who have a “thorn” can readily apply the spiritual lessons of this passage for themselves.

Read Mark 8:34-38. The cross of Christ in this passage is a symbol of suffering (1 Peter 2:21; 4:13), death (Acts 10:39), shame (Hebrews 12:2), ridicule (Matthew 27:39), rejection (1 Peter 2:4) and self-denial (Matthew 16:24). When we as believers take up our cross and follow Christ, we deny our own selves (Luke 14:26-27) and commit ourselves to four areas of struggle and suffering: First, we suffer in a lifelong battle against sin (Romans 6; 1 Peter 4:1-2) by denying our own sinful desires (Romans 6; 8:13; Galatians 2:20; 6:14; Titus 2:12; 1 Peter 2:11, 21-24). Second, we suffer in a war against Satan and the powers of darkness as we advance the kingdom of God in an

ungrateful world (2 Corinthians 10:4-5; 6:7; Ephesians 6:12; 1 Timothy 6:12). We experience both the hostility of the adversary with his demonic host (2 Corinthians 6:3-7; 11:23-29; 1 Peter 5:8-10) and the persecution that comes from standing against false teachers who distort the true gospel (Matthew 23:1-36; Galatians 1:9; Philippians 1:15-17). Thirdly, like Jesus and Paul, we may also suffer ridicule and persecution from the religious world (Mark 8:15, 31). Finally, we suffer the hatred and ridicule of the world (John 15:18-25; Hebrews 11:25-26) by testifying in love that its deeds are evil (John 7:7), by separating ourselves from it both morally and spiritually, and by refusing to accept its standards and philosophies as our own (1 Corinthians 1:21-27).

### **Lessons learned**

Paul's "thorn in the flesh" remains unidentified so all of us who have a "thorn" can readily apply the spiritual lessons of this passage themselves. Here are some of those lessons:

1: Being faithful to Christ day in and day out in pain, totally depending on God's grace and mercy, is real faith too. While God deals with us individually, He rarely removes us from calamities that come to both believers and non-believers. What God does offer in the midst of our trouble is His grace to see us through our difficulty in order to bring Him greater glory (1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Peter 1:6-7; Psalms 23:5). This was the case with the Apostle Paul. Instead of removing the hindrance, God simply enabled Paul to live with it.

2: God is there in the dark hours of our lives to provide us with *sustaining and enabling grace*. When Paul pleaded for deliverance over and over, God kept saying, "My grace is sufficient for you..." (2 Corinthians 12:9). And it was! God's grace is a heavenly strength. The song writer John Newton took the following words from the wall of a slave ship: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see. Thro' many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; 'tis grace hath bro't me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." These words were no doubt written by a slave on his or her way to a lifetime of slavery. This song not only depicts God's saving grace, it tells us that God will be there with us in the darkest times of our lives. When Ira Staphill, a gifted song writer, entered the ministry, he selected for his wife a minister's daughter who was gifted in music like he was. He and his wife made a great team for Jesus, writing numerous gospel songs together. Then a spiritual change took place in his wife. She left Ira and their 6-year old son and became a nightclub singer. Reverend Staphill traveled alone for many years perplexed and troubled. It was out of this dark period of his life that he wrote the song "I Know Who Holds Tomorrow." The chorus goes like this: "Many things about tomorrow, I don't seem to understand; but, I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand." That's God's empowering grace in action.

3: God receives glory when we allow Him to turn our weaknesses into strength. Paul states in 2 Corinthians 12:10, "For when I am weak, then I am strong." Why is that? It is because God's grace does more than just save us; it is also God's enabling ability in

us and through us (Philippians 4:13). All we have to do is acknowledge our weaknesses and tap into God's enabling ability and we'll have the strength to go on. That enabling ability is the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 11:34 tells us that saints of old "quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength..." The key to victorious living has always been acknowledging our weakness and placing total dependency on God (Philippians 3:3). As long as we think we can, we can't. As long as there is an ounce of spiritual pride left in us we quench the Holy Spirit and cut off the flow of God's power of grace.

The question is not is God's enabling abilities able to carry you through your worst day? The question is are you willing to acknowledge your weaknesses, turn them over to God, and allow Him to turn them into strength for His glory? Or, do you have preconceived limits to which you plan to hold God? That's your privilege of course. You can draw the lines anywhere you choose but you'll be limiting the power of God's grace. Should you decide to tap into God's Spirit empowered grace you can expect to experience Isaiah 40:30-31: "But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint." How can that be? It is called grace. It is God doing supernaturally what you cannot do naturally. We have two choices, as I see it. We can chafe at our weaknesses, trials, and hardships and cry out to be delivered. Or, like the Apostle Paul, we can quietly submit to God and let Him give us the needed strength to go on. Most pastors would tell us to accept life's blows and praise God through the experience. While that is good advice, God takes us one step further in 2 Corinthians 12:9. He tells us to let God turn our weakness into strength. That is what Paul did. We don't like to hear that because we want instant healing; instant deliverance. But there is always a reason why the Lord allows us to experience suffering. In Paul's case, it was there to keep him from having an inflated opinion of himself and his abilities. The God who despises pride loved Paul too much to let him ruin his ministry by being conceited (2 Corinthians 12:7).

### **Job's Worst Day**

Job was one of those select ones who so touched the heart of God that he was granted the privilege, not granted to everyone, to suffer wrongfully so that God might be glorified. Job's name means "persecuted one." A quick overview of the book of Job goes something like this: Job is a godly man who has lived a troubled free and prosperous life for many years. He is wealthy and influential and owns large herds of sheep, oxen, and camels. He is a loving husband and father. One day, within the span of a few hours, his children and his wealth are taken away by traumatic disasters and marauding thieves. To make matters even worse, he is afflicted with painful boils from head to foot. Job is left with nothing but his faith in God and the unanswered question as to why these calamities have befallen him. Friends come to grieve with him, but soon their comfort turns to accusations and debate. Finally, God intervenes with His perspective and His rebuke of Job's friends. The story ends with Job's restoration to happiness and wealth.

Job's worst day is described in Job 1:13 through 2:10. The book of Job can be broken down as follows:

1. Chapters 1 and 2 introduce the characters and describe a series of calamities affecting Job personally and the cause behind them.
2. Chapters 3 through 31 provide three cycles of dialogue between Job and his friends, in which they search for intellectual answers to Job's affliction (3:3-31).
3. Chapters 32 to 37 provide four monologues by Elihu (a man younger than Job) and his three friends. Their comments contain some glimmer of insight but totally miss the cause of Job's affliction.
4. Chapters 38 to 42:6 is where God speaks to Job's ignorance and complaint and then listens for Job to respond to this revelation.
5. Job 42:7-17 records God's concluding comments and Job's restoration.

The Book begins with a narrator's description of Job's character, which is flawless. Not only is he devoted to God; he hates evil with a passion (1:1). He has seven sons and three daughters (1:2). Job was very wealthy and considered the most influential man in that region (1:3). His sons took turns hosting parties in their homes, always inviting their three sisters to join them in their merrymaking. When the parties were over, Job would get up early in the morning and present a burnt offering to God for each of his children just in case they may have sinned. He did this regularly (1:5). The scene then moves to heaven where the angels are reporting to God about what is going on in the universe. Satan slips in among the angels to listen in on the conversation (1:6). God says to Satan, "What have you been up to?" Satan replied, "Going here and there, checking things out on earth." "Have you noticed my friend Job," asked God? "There's no one like him in all the earth, honest and true to his word, totally devoted to God and hating evil" (1:8). Satan snapped back, "Do you think Job does all that out of the sheer goodness of his heart? No one ever had it so good! You pamper him like a pet, making sure nothing bad ever happens to him or his family or his possessions. No wonder he serves you so well. What do you think will happen if you reached down and took away everything that is his? He'll blame you and curse you to your face, that's what" (1:9-10). God allows Satan to proceed against Job, but places restrictions as to how far he can go (1:12). Satan immediately carries out his plan with vengeance. One-by-one, messengers bring Job bad news. His animals and servants have been captured and killed (1:13-15, 17). Lightning starts a fire and burns up his crops (1:16). Worse still, a storm flattens the house where his children had gathered and all were killed (1:18-19). Job is now bankrupt and childless. Job's response is found in Job 1:21-22. What a testimony!

God has another staff meeting and once again Satan shows up. God singles out Satan and asks, "And what have you been up to?" Once again, Satan says, "Oh, going here and there, checking things out." God asked, "Have you noticed my friend Job? There is no one quite like him, is there – honest and true to his word, totally devoted to me and hating evil? Although you tried to trick me into letting you destroy him he still has a firm grip on his integrity" (2:1-3). Satan came back with, "A man will do anything to save his life. What do you think would happen if you reached down and took away his health?"

He'd curse you to your face, that's what." "OK, you can do what you like with him as long as you don't kill him," replied God (2:4-6). Satan strikes Job with a horrible disease that causes boils to cover his entire body (2:7). Itching, he scrapes his sores with a piece of broken pottery (2:8). Job's wife tells him to cast off his integrity, "curse God and die" (2:9). Job rebukes her on the grounds that he must accept both good and bad from God (2:10). Job 2:20 states, "In all this, Job did not sin in what he said." What a testimony!

Four of Job's friends heard of his trouble, got together, and came to show their concern (2:11). Eliphaz, a descent of Esau, came from Teman, which was located in northern Edom (Job 6:19; Amos 1:12; Joshua 5:6-12). Edom was the land south of the Dead Sea, extending to the Gulf of Aqabah, including mountains and fertile plateaus on both sides of the Arabah, known today as Jordan. Esau overcame the inhabitants of the mountains of the Arabah (Genesis 14:6; Deuteronomy 2:12), married their daughters and settled there (Genesis 36:2, 20). The country was also called "Seir or Mt. Seir. Eliphaz was most likely a philosopher. Temanites were famous for their fables and proverbs (Jeremiah 49:7). Bildad the *Shuhite* came from Shuah on the Middle Euphrates, below the mouth of the Khabur River. Zophar (Zo-fer) the *Naamathite* is believed to have come from the region between Beirut and Damascus. Elihu (El-uh-hyoo), Job's fourth friend, is not introduced until chapter 32. He is from Buz, which makes him either an Aramean or an Edomite.

Job's friends could hardly recognize him when they arrived. They ripped their robes and dumped dirt on their heads as a sign of grief over the calamity of their friend and sat with Job seven days and nights without saying a word (2:11-13). Job finally breaks the silence. He resigns himself to the thought that God has the right to do as He pleases with His own creatures. Just as people accept blessings as coming from God, they must uncomplainingly accept bad things in life as well. Job's friends have a different view of the situation. They argue that since suffering was the result of sin, and since Job was the most afflicted of all men, he must be a terrible sinner. Job persistently denies the charge, carrying it to the point of self-righteousness (chapters 3-31). Elihu (El-uh-hyoo), who up to this point has remained silent (possibly, because he is youngest), addresses Job. He is angry at the three men because they have not discovered the reason for Job's suffering, yet have condemned Job. He is angry at Job because he is self-righteous, justifying himself rather than God. After a lengthy apology for speaking up (32:6-22), he offered another perspective, namely, that Job's suffering can be God's merciful chastisement in order to enlighten the soul (33:30) and to bring about a more intimate relationship with God (36:7-10). But like the others, Elihu assumed that Job had sinned and therefore deserved his suffering. In the end, everyone was silenced by God, including Job, who humbly acknowledges his ignorance and self-righteousness and immediately repents (chapters 38-42). God then rebukes Job's friends and instructs them to sacrifice a burnt offering and have Job pray for them. Apparently, God will only accept Job's prayer. After Job had repented of contending with the Almighty (40:1-4, 8; 42:5-6) and praying for his friends (42:8, 10), he was delivered from his fiery trial and restored twofold (42:10). Job's latter days were blessed more than his life before the disaster and affliction (42:12-17).

## Characteristics of the Book of Job:

1: Job was most likely a contemporary of *Abraham*. Job lived in Uz (Job 1:1), somewhere in northwest Arabia near Midian, where Moses would later live 40 years as a shepherd. Notice that there are no references to any of the covenants God made with any of the Hebrew patriarchs or the Law of Moses. Furthermore, Job conducts priestly functions on behalf of his family and lives to be nearly 200 years old. All of these factors suggest Job lived around the same time as *Abraham*, approximately 2000 B.C.

2: The Book makes an invaluable contribution to the total biblical revelation on key subjects such as God, creation, Satan, repentance, faith and righteousness suffering. Righteous suffering is *suffering to honor God*.

3: The book of Job teaches that there are times in everyone's life when you have to confront the unthinkable, a season in life when God gives no explanations, only promises from His Word. It is during these times that God finds out *who truly loves Him and who doesn't*.

4: The testing of *faith* and developing *godly character* is part of God's divine plan for each of us. Job never learned why God permitted him to suffer. But Job did learn to be patient and accept his situation without questioning God's wisdom and judgment. If we are to be victorious over Satan, like Job, we must be willing to let God *test the mettle of our faith He has given us against uncontrollable forces*.

5: While Satan attempts to destroy the faith of God's people, God is at work to *prove and deepen it*. Satan's role as "*accuser*" is demonstrated in the book of Job more than any other Old Testament book. Of the 19 Old Testament references to Satan by name, 14 occur in Job. The word Satan means *accuser*. What was Satan doing in Job 1:9-16? *He was accusing Job of impure motives and God of bribery*. Satan accused Job of worshipping God only because it profited him, implying that his love for God was not genuine. Satan then accused God of blessing Job in order to receive Job's devotion (1:10-11). The devil's assertion to God was if you stop giving Job protection, wealth, health, and happiness, Job "will curse you to your face" (1:11). *Satan was wrong!*

6: Few people have suffered like Job, yet he never once blamed God or wavered in faith (Job 13:15). Some ways in which we can overcome Satan's accusations are...

- *Live by faith* in Christ's atoning blood (Romans 1:17; Revelation 12:11). Spiritual victory is something we enter into! Jesus Christ has already won the victory on our behalf through His death and resurrection.
- Maintain a *good conscience* before God (1 Timothy 1:19).
- Use Scripture to *put the accuser in his place* when he comes knocking on your hearts door (Matthew 4:3-11; James 4:7; Revelation 12:11).
- *Honor* God in everything we do or say so Satan won't be justified in accusing us. Like Job, we can be vindicated if we live godly.

7: In Job 1:10, Satan accuses God of shielding Job and his family from his attacks. God didn't deny it! What is this hedge? *It is God's presence and protection* (Zechariah 2:6). During Israel's pilgrimage to the Promised Land God's protection manifested itself as a cloud by day and a ball of fire by night to prove to the Israelites that God was there guiding them and protecting them on their journey (Exodus 13:21; 14:19). The cloud and the fire were present with them until they reached the Promised Land (Exodus 40:38; Numbers 9:15-23; 14:14; Deuteronomy 1:33). We Christians are also on a journey, not to some promised land here on earth, but to God's eternal abode, the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21).

8: The book of Job clearly shows that suffering can come from divine selection. The purpose for this suffering is to *glorify God* and uphold His *honor*. The circumstances are *Satan-inspired* but the choice initiates with *God*. Satan was hoping to make God look bad, instead he ended up looking bad. Why? *It is because Job wisely chose to make God his advocate and not his enemy*. We all face the temptation of making God our adversary instead of our advocate in times of tragedy. When going through a trial, instead of declaring our innocence or questioning the justice of God, we should, like Job, *submit in humility and faith* and wait for God to reveal Himself and His purposes to us. Foremost, we must remain faithful to the Lord.

9: God only selects His *choicest* and most *trustworthy servants* to suffer for His honor and glory. Job proved to be a perfect candidate. What was God looking for when He selected Job to suffer for His honor? He was looking for *faith* and *consistency in godly character* (Job 1:8). Job 1:1 tells us that most notable quality was "blameless and upright." Job served God, not for what he received from God, but because he desired to give the highest trust and confidence due Him, setting an example for all of us.

10: The book of Job teaches that *steadfast faith* enables God's purpose to prevail over the devil. Job trusted God and never gave up on God, even when his wife wanted him to curse God and die, teaching us that if we will stay close to God He will give us the strength to endure even the greatest of difficulties.

11: The book of Job teaches that suffering does not always come from sin or from a lack of faith in God. Much of the book of Job records the faulty belief by Job's friends that suffering always comes from sin or from a lack of faith in God. Perhaps the reason their wrong way of thinking is so frequently repeated in the Book is because it reflects a common error among God's people that needs correcting. At no time did Job enter into guilt and condemnation.

12: The book of Job demonstrates there have always been those who serve God not for what they receive from God but because they desire to give God the highest trust and confidence due Him.

13: Job 42:5-6 dramatically demonstrates the biblical principle that we are transformed by *revelation* and not information. Job was one of a select few whom God spoke to directly. In Chapters 38 to 42:6, God spoke to Job's ignorance and complaint and then

listened for Job to respond to this revelation. It was at that point that Job is transformed and repents. Today that is done through the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit (Psalms 119:11, 148; John 8:31-32; 15:7). Spiritual growth is a process. It starts with being *faithful* in small things such as reading the Bible and praying on a daily basis and attending church. God will give you more revelation when you have proven yourselves in these (Matthew 25:21).

14: The book of Job teaches that *God*, not Satan, is *in charge* of things on this planet (1:12; 2:4-6). It also teaches that the accuser's power is strictly limited to *what God allows*.

15: In Job 9:32-33, the mediator who can identify with Job's suffering, for whom he longs, is none other than the *Lord Jesus Christ*. In Job 19:25-27, the Redeemer whom Job confesses is also *Christ*. As God's appointed Redeemer, mediator, wisdom, healer, light and life, Christ has identified fully with human sufferings (Hebrews 4:15-16; 5:8). *Job 19:25-27* is a reference to Christ's return.

### **Bringing it all Together**

Using the above Biblical figures as examples, let's close out the study by examining six principles we can follow when the unthinkable happens.

#### **1: Access God's grace during times of trouble!**

Typically when we experience difficulties we enter into guilt and condemnation being to question our relationship with God. That's because we've been taught that suffering always comes from sin or from a lack of faith in God. Much of the book of Job records this faulty belief by Job's friends. Christ also refutes this faulty belief. Read John 9:1-3. Notice that Jesus' perspective concerning the blind man's situation was very different from that of the disciples. They viewed the man's affliction as a result of sin by either himself or his parents; Jesus saw it as an opportunity for God to be glorified. Like Job's friends, the disciples made the false assumption that suffering and sin are *always* connected. We do the same today. When a devoted saint comes down with a fatal illness and there seems to be no obvious link to sin or evil, we get angry and accuse God of breaking the rules: i.e., "How can you permit a gentle and kind person like this to suffer when there are so many wicked people being prosperous and healthy?" It seems to us God isn't being fair when the righteous suffer and the wicked succeed. That concept is based on the assumption that sin and suffering are always connected. The Lord refuted this false assumption when he stated, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God may be revealed in him" (John 9:3). This tells us that sin does not always have something to do with one's affliction or suffering. There are times when sin is involved, but as we see here in John 9, not in every case (See also Matthew 5:45).

The second thing John 9:3 tells us is that God intended to use the blind man's affliction for the positive purpose of displaying His mighty power. Jesus was basically telling the disciples, "You are talking about pain as a punishment, but I am saying that pain is a

privilege because God uses it for his glory. The man's past has no power over him because God is going to use his affliction for a great purpose, to glorify God." Laying aside the historical events of this story, we are challenged to view the hard and difficult events of our lives from the perspective of God's grace. As the story of the blind man unfolds, we know Jesus healed him which caused him to believe in the Lord as the Son of God. When the Apostle Paul speaks of tribulation in his writings, he does not talk about tribulation of trials, rather *tribulation of faith* (1 Timothy 1:18-20; 6:12) and not tribulation of faith. There is a difference. *Tribulation of trials* is come out of "justified by faith" (Romans 5:1) and going back *doing something* as a means of accessing God's grace when we experience difficulties. There are those, for example, who say the way to deal with times of trouble is to pray to one of the saints. Wrong! While we should respect the religious beliefs of others, rituals or devotion to anyone other than Jesus Christ cannot help you access God's grace, period (1 John 1:17; Acts 4:12). Additionally, confession followed by absolution by a priest is no substitute for divine forgiveness from God. That can only be accomplished by true repentance with its witness of the Spirit (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 10:10, 14). The faith movement tells us to overcome tribulation through positive confession; that is, when we experience some hardship, we need to muster up enough faith to say "I am not experiencing what I am experiencing." When we are sick we are told to say over and over, "I am healed...I am healed..." Wrong again! Nowhere in the Bible are we told to confess something in order to get it. All the faith movement did was to teach us what we were already capable of doing through the flesh and that is to enter into denial when something bad happens to us. Entering into denial is a natural response to a crisis or extreme trouble. That's why it was so easy to believe what these folks said. Then, there are those who say give your way out of tribulation. I.e., "If you will support this ministry, God will bless you." Doing something in order to gain favor with God is nothing more than Law or "justification by works" (Galatians 5:4). While you should be doing good deeds, doing them will not gain you favor with God (Ephesians 2:8; John 1:12; 3:3). It is an antichrist doctrine to tell a follower of Jesus Christ the reason he/she is not healed or does not have some other blessing is because there's something he/she is not doing good enough or hard enough, or even worse, don't have enough faith. Yes, we sow what we reap. Yes, we need to exercise faith, but God's people suffer for various reasons. Additionally, if we are born of God's Spirit (John 3:3, 6) the Holy Spirit lives in us to turn us back to God when we step out of line (Hebrews 12:2). Faith in Jesus is that channel (Romans 5:1-2). It's how you got saved (Ephesians 2:8, 9) and it's how you stay saved!

The way to move from weeping into victory on your worst day is to become immersed in the grace of God. This is an essential step if you hope to recover your joy---not the shallow and volatile feeling of happiness, but Christ's deep abiding joy that is present even in the midst of extreme sorrow. The moment you begin encouraging yourself in the Lord and recover the joy of the Lord, you have placed yourself on a course of recovery. I know the idea of having joy in the midst of sorrow may seem paradoxical but truth is in the paradox. If you are going to recover from the worst day of your life, among the first things you have to do is to recover your joy. The only way to do that is to focus on Christ and become emerged in God's grace. The devil is quite aware of Nehemiah 8:10, "...Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." In order to

defeat you, Satan knows he must steal your joy through personal failure, excessive grief, lingering suffering or depression, thereby reducing you to weakness. This is his primary strategy. There is nothing that says you have to give your joy up! Compare Philippians 4:4-7 with 2 Corinthians 8:1-2. In their extreme poverty, the Christians at Philippi were extremely generous (2 Corinthians 8:2)! That doesn't seem logical! Then again, neither does grace. Anyone who allows trouble to determine how they feel is a defeated person. If the devil cannot steal your joy, he cannot change your focus from God, thus unable to defeat you. God doesn't want you to do anything for Him in your suffering; instead He wants to do something *through you* (Ephesians 6:10). He wants to help you tap into the power of the Holy Spirit and His invisible resources Christ purchased for you through His death and resurrection (2 Corinthians 9:8; Philippians 4:19). The Holy Spirit's job is not to get you to see what God wants out of you when trouble comes knocking on your heart's door, but to help you to become free in Christ so *you will release* what God *has already* put in your heart to do (2 Corinthians 8:3; Ephesians 2:10). What God has put in your heart is now empowered by the Holy Spirit. The result is more joy. There is strength found in the joy of just knowing Christ as your personal Savior (Romans 8). The believer who accesses God's grace and recovers his/her joy during the dark night of personal anguish is destined to triumph in the end. For the joy of knowing Christ in a personal way knows no bounds and cannot be destroyed by pain, suffering, weakness or difficult circumstances (Hebrews 12:2).

## **2: Trade in your anxiety for God's peace!**

It's equally important that we take control of our run away thoughts as they can lead to anxiety; anxiety leads to depression. Depression is a black hole. Black holes are scary stuff! Perhaps the most fearsome objects in the physical universe are black holes. A black hole is an immense star that no longer has the capacity to sustain itself and collapsing from within, a gravitational pull from which not even light can escape. The spiritual implication is that we become a black hole and collapse in upon ourselves when we worry and enter into anxiety. According to Dictionary.com, "anxiety is distress or uneasiness of mind caused by fear of danger or misfortune." Anxiety is actually the absence of faith in God's ability or willingness to meet our needs. Worry begins that process, and where the spiritual battle is usually won or lost for many of us.

God's prescription for preventing the spiritually black hole of anxiety and depression is simple: trade in your worries for His peace. Peter said, "Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). The Lord Jesus said don't worry about anything (Matthew 6:31-32). That sounds easier than done if you came from a line of people like me who speak faith but act out fear. But if we are a born again believers in Jesus, the Christ, we are not supposed to worry about anything. Anything? Anything! Each time we tempted to worry we are suppose to pray and tell God exactly what we perceived our needs to be and thank Him in advance for His answer, whatever that might be. Having done that, we are guaranteed something. We are guaranteed the serenity and rest of God called peace. This quality of life is so supernatural the human mind can't even understand it. "Where do you get that from," you ask? From Philippians 4:6-7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and

petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” God is imagining you and me in the midst of that trial, in the midst of that crisis, at the moment of that bad news, or at just the prospect of that impending event, which may or may not happen, and telling us to build our lives around the Lord Jesus Christ and trade in our worries for His peace. The phrase “peace of God” in Philippians 4:7 does not mean an imitation of God’s kind of peace. Nor does it mean peace with God. We are given that at the cross through justification by faith (Romans 5:1). “Peace of God” in Philippians 4:7 literally means the peace which God has – God’s inner quality of peace. The word “guard” is the Greek word *phraeo* which literally means a garrison. It comes from the same Greek word used to describe the keep in the center of the castle where the enemy cannot intrude and destroy. God is saying that, through Jesus Christ, His peace will keep our emotions, the point of our vulnerability, and it will keep our minds, the point of our accessibility. Cross-reference 2 Timothy 4:18; Jude 1, 24; Romans 8:31-39.

At any given moment you can spiritually enter the Grace National Bank of God in the Throne of Grace Building (Hebrews 4:16), walk up to the teller’s window and trade in your worries for God’s peace. The Teller is the Holy Spirit. But you need to know before you can do business with God your I.D. card (heart) must have stamped upon it the seal of the Holy Spirit, which is the proof that you have been born again. You cannot do business with God unless you are born again of God’s Spirit (John 3:3, 6). If you don’t have the proper I.D., the good news is you can go to the next window and get it. Behind that window is Christ Jesus, God’s Son, who is willing to qualify you to do business with God. This is God’s most beautiful transaction of all. You give Him your sins and He gives you His righteousness. There are no fees or hidden costs. It is all free, paid for by His precious blood some two thousand years ago on a Roman cross. God asks for no collateral. But He does require that you repent of your sins (Matthew 3:2; 4:17), believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (John 3:23; 6:29; 8:24; 1 John 3:23) and accept Him as your personal Savior (John 1:12; Romans 10:9-10). It only takes a minute for that transaction to take place, at which time you will be sealed with the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). From that point forward, you’ll be able to trade all of your cares for the peace of God. None of them have any marketable value, but those are the kinds of deals God always makes. In exchange for each worry, God will give you back an equal amount of His grace (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Every worry you exchange will give you more grace which will give you more peace.

Don’t worry about the Grace National Bank of God running out of funds because it is backed by the Almighty Himself. That is because the price was paid some 2,000 years ago by Jesus on the cross. It will always be sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9). However, three things must take place in order for you to exchange your worries for God’s peace on a continual basis. First, you have to maintain a living faith in Christ as your personal Lord and Savior (1 Peter 1:9; John 14:4, 6; Colossians 1:23; 2 Timothy 2:14-15; 4:7; Revelation 3:8, 10). Secondly, you have to be in the known will of God. You can’t have God’s peace and live a lifestyle of sin (John 9:31; Psalms 66:18; Isaiah 1:15; 59:1-2).

Third, you have to break the habit of worrying about everything. Most of us are Walt Disney Christians. The things we worry about are mostly “Mickey Mouse” things, stuff that really doesn’t matter. Then when something important occurs we don’t know how to truly trust God. Regardless of how minute the issue, don’t wait until you run through a negative scenario in your imagination. It will be too late then. While you may not be able to stop a negative thought from entering your mind you don’t have to entertain it (2 Corinthians 10:5). While it may not turn out the way you want, if you trust God with the situation, it will turn the way He wants, which will always be for your good (Romans 8:28). And, it will glorify God in the process. But you have to stop the negative dialogue first. Once you’ve learned to do that you will be able to enter God’s peace and enjoy the rest that is yours for the keeping (Matthew 11:28).

Read John 14:27. What if for twenty-four hours, your personality gets the day off and you are led one hundred percent by the personality of Christ. Jesus wakes up in you; assumes your schedule; your boss becomes His boss; your relatives become His relatives; your pains become His pains, with one exception; nothing about your life changes. Your health doesn’t change, your temptations don’t change, your circumstances don’t change and your schedule isn’t altered. The only difference is, Jesus becomes you for one day. What would you be like for that twenty-four hour period? Would people notice a change in you? Would your family and the people who are normally around you see you differently? Would you treat people the same? Would people detect more peace and joy? What alterations would this transplant have on your stress level? What about your mood swings and temper? Would you still dread what you are dreading? Better yet, would you still be doing what you are doing? What would change in your life if Jesus becomes you for one day? The point is if God’s Spirit is governing our hearts there should be no change needed if Jesus took our place for a day. Paul said in Philippians 2:5, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” In Ephesians 4:23-24, he tells us “to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Satan must delight when children of the King live as spiritual peasants even though they are royalty. But it also grieves God when His children bypass the very act of faith that would allow His grace to envelope their lives and touch a hurting world that is looking to them to see a difference.

### **3. Give thanks!**

First Thessalonians 5:18, “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” You say, “Let me tell you my story. I have lost my job; don’t have any money to pay my bills and about to have my house foreclosed on. How can you expect me to thank God for all that? I don’t even feel like giving thanks; I feel like giving up.” If that’s your attitude, then you have misunderstood what’s being said in this passage. Let’s look at the where, when, what and how of giving thanks:

WHERE do you give thanks? “In all circumstances,” not for them! Paul is not telling us to give thanks for the bad things that happen to us; he’s telling us to maintain a grateful

heart towards God regardless of what happens to us. That we can do. Why? It is because regardless of what is occurring at the time, from an eternal perspective, there's always something to be joyful and thankful for. Romans 5:8 states, "God demonstrated His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." That's not only something to be thankful for, it's something to shout about.

WHEN do you give thanks? You "give thanks in all circumstances." There is no escape clause here. When Paul used the phrase "in all circumstances" (NIV) or "in everything" (OKJ), he's saying there is no circumstance that can make this command null and void for the Christian. If it were, what happened on September 11, 2001, when terrorists flew commercial aircraft loaded with passengers into the world trade center and Pentagon killing both Christians and unbelievers, would have been an exception. It's not! If you lost your life you would get to go to heaven if you are a Christian. If that's not something to be thankful, what is?

WHAT do we give thanks for? Let me say up front, we don't thank God for all the evil that happens to us. That would be like saying God was responsible for it. He's not! Satan, not God, is behind all the evil in the world. If we are not to give God thanks for the bad thing that happens to us, then what are we to be thankful for," some may ask. Recall, Philippians 4:6 tells us to thank God in advance for His answer to prayer, whatever that might be. Here is how you can find something to give thanks for:

First, identify the specific characteristic of God's nature that is needed to help you endure what you are going through at the time and thank God for that characteristic. Why? That is what God is offering you at the time to help you get through the trial. There will never be a situation when you will not need at least one facet of God's nature to get your through! Identify that characteristic or trait and thank God for it. Here are some examples:

- ✓ In the midst of loneliness, thank God for His fellowship and closeness! Jesus said, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18; OKJ).
- ✓ In the midst of failure, thank God for His mercy and forgiveness. Our finite minds cannot begin to conceive the depth of God's forgiveness (Colossians 2:13-14). Thank Him for it.
- ✓ In the midst of spiritual warfare, thank God for His power and protection. The battle that really counts was won by Jesus on the cross some two thousands years ago (Colossians 2:15). Thank Him for that.
- ✓ In the midst of a time of great decision, thank God for His wisdom that guides you. God knows; He understands; He has a plan. Whether you understand it or not, thank God for that plan. He will reveal it to you when the time is right. For now, just trust God and thank Him for orchestrating your life for your good (Romans 8:28).
- ✓ In the midst of a great trial, thank God for His grace that will enable you to be the man or woman of God He has called you to be (2 Corinthians 12:9).

- ✓ In the midst of persecution for Christ's sake, thank God for His love that enables you to love your enemies so you will not be empty handed when rewards are given out in heaven.

If you are able to identify that aspect of God's nature that is needed to get you through your worst day and move into it, you'll enter into the perfect will of God. Having entered, you'll discover the needed grace and power to endure and glorify God.

Secondly, find out what God is trying to accomplish by allowing you to suffer. I can tell you with certainty what God is after. He's trying to help you grow up spiritually so you can glorify Him and touch the lives of those around you for Christ. God is not cruel. He would not ask us to do something He in us is not both willing and able to do. Paul said in Philippians 4:13, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." The Holy Spirit's job is not to get you to see what God wants out of you when trouble comes knocking on your heart's door, but to help you to become free in Christ so *you will release* God's enabling abilities that God *has already* put in your heart. God's part is to empower you from within; your part is to choose to maintain a grateful heart. Is that natural? No! It's supernatural! If it were natural, we wouldn't need God's help.

HOW do we give thanks? By doing it! Paul's phrase "give thanks" in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 implies we have something in our hearts to give. Words are an expression of one's heart (Matthew 12:34-35). If we maintain a grateful heart towards God on a daily basis when things are going good that is what is going to automatically come out of us when we are suddenly faced with our worst day. But, if we have a negative outlook on life that will be what is manifested when our world turns upside down. Let's take a moment and look inside the Bailey household. Dad Bailey had just been given a substantial promotion at work. The family had gathered around the dinner table to celebrate. Needless to say, visions of materialistic grandeur were racing through the minds of the Bailey's three teenage boys, each of whom considered himself to be in the poverty zone among his peers. Following the meal, Dad Bailey sat back in his chair and said, "Boys, I have a little gift for each of you to celebrate my promotion and to make you feel you are part of it." He then handed each boy a carefully wrapped package. Each package was so thin you wouldn't have thought there was anything inside. With the zeal of a treasurer-hunter, each boy ribbed off the paper. Each box contained the same thing, a yellow notepad. On each notepad was a list of character qualities needed to become successful in life. Dad had labored over the list for hours and had marked the ones each boy needed to work on to reach his potential. Materialistically, the gift cost very little, but taken to heart, it could have be the most valuable gift the Bailey boys could have received. One by one, each boy rose from the table.

Danny, the oldest boy, was first. In disgust, he threw his pad down and said, "Thanks a lot, Dad; I hope you can afford it." Then he stormed out of the room. Bobby, the middle son said, "Thanks, Dad, I appreciate your thoughtfulness." Then, he ran to his room to call his girlfriend to tell her what his cheap idealistic dad had done. But, with a grateful heart Eddie the youngest boy studied the list carefully. Tears began to form in his eyes as he thought of the hours of labor that had gone into that one sheet of paper. He

thought, "What a treasure of information about me that no one else but Dad could compile." He reached over, hugged his dad, and said, "Thanks Dad, I will cherish this as long as I live." Each boy received the same gift and all three said "thanks," or did they? While the oldest son, Danny, said thanks, it was spoken out of bitterness of heart. Although the second son, Bobby, said thanks, it was with obvious hypocrisy. Only the youngest son, Eddie, said "thank you" with a genuinely grateful heart. (Story taken from one of the sermons by the Russell Kelfer) Which one of the three Bailey boys can you relate to?

- Are you like Danny, the oldest son, who constantly displays a grumpy and ungrateful spirit? E.g., "Well, praise the Lord, anyway." That statement implies that God did His best but it wasn't good enough. That's blasphemy!
- Or, are you like Bobby, the middle son, who verbally said "thanks," but really didn't mean it. You can easily identify this person by the way he or she handles disappointment. It doesn't take much to make them angry.
- Or, are you like Eddie, the youngest son, who learned the secret of being truly thankful in every situation. Strangely enough, this kind of attitude comes from those who constantly manifest the joy of the Lord on a daily basis.

By the way, Dad Bailey had other gifts for his sons that day. He just wanted to test them to see if they knew how to be grateful for the things that truly mattered and what he was trying to do for them. We have a loving Heavenly Father who does that for us. Sometimes He tests us by giving us instructions or correction to see if what we say we want is really what we need. Then, He lovingly steps back to see if we really know how to be thankful. Incidentally, Eddie studied his list and began working on the things his Dad said needed correcting. When he grew up he became president of a very large corporation. The other two boys, who simply could not honestly be thankful over being corrected, struggled throughout life, battling the very character flaws their loving father had pointed out to them on the note pad. The way our Father in heaven shows us our character flaws is by allowing us to face hardships in life. Our true self will be manifested each time we face something that is displeasing to us.

#### **4: View circumstances from God's eternal perspective!**

There are only three ways of looking at life. One way is the way non-Christians look at life. The unbeliever lives without any regard as to where he or she will spend eternity. The apostle Paul brings this indictment against the ungodly: "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21). Until a person enters into a personal relationship with God by becoming born of God's Spirit through Christ Jesus, he or she is incapable of understanding spiritual matters and doing God's bidding (John 3:3; John 4:24; 1 Corinthians 2:14). The second way to view life is from self-centeredness. If Satan can't stop someone from becoming a follower of Christ, he tries to get him or her to view life from a selfish or worldly viewpoint. This individual will seek after pleasure, treasure, and worldly success, not eternal rewards. A selfish and greedy Christian will see adverse circumstances as some kind of satanic interruption of

the plan of God. They also view God as some genie that you rub to get health and wealth and improve your circumstances, as everything evolves around them, not Christ.

The third way of viewing life is from God's eternal perspective. If we look at adverse circumstances out of our fleshly feelings, we're going to say, "It's not fair" and become depressed and angry. But if we look at adverse circumstances from God's eternal perspective, we will be able to give thanks and touch the heart of God in the process. From God's perspective, if you lost everything but grew spiritually and went to heaven you would be better off than the person who gained the whole world and lost his/her soul (Mark 8:36). Instead of viewing adverse circumstances as punishment from God, a Christian with an eternal perspective sees adverse circumstances as stepping-stones for spiritual growth and opportunities to glorify God and lay treasurers up in heaven. That in turn brings God glory.

## **5: Worship!**

Worship is a thread that runs throughout each story presented in this study. That is because we are changed when we worship God. When most people think of worship they think of standing together in church and in complete harmony worshipping God. While that is certainly worship; there is far more to it than that. Worship is a lifestyle! Worship has more to do with what we do when we leave the sanctuary than what we do inside the sanctuary. Besides, most of our church services today are hyped up praise services, not worship services. Worship is entering into the spirit realm where God exists and becoming a part of an eternal and transcendent reality that goes beyond the history of the moment in which we live (Psalms 22:3). It's more than lip service. The story of Paul and Silas illustrates this point. They were arrested, humiliated, beaten, and chained in a rat-infested dungeon for casting a demon out of a girl (Acts 16:25-26). Everything worked out when Paul and Silas entered into the eternal stream of the power of worship (Acts 16:26-29). When we enter into God's transcendent power of worship, we are able to look past the veil of this life and understand there is a throne fixed in heaven. Upon entering we'll discover that nothing can steal God's eternal joy of knowing Him in a personal way (Romans 8:35-39). That is why we should never be fearful when we watch the evening news. There is coming a day when Christ will return and bring an end to all the madness and evil that's going on in the world (Revelation 19:11-21). Until then, we can be comforted to know there is a throne fixed in heaven where Christ is superintending over the affairs of human history. Our Lord is not diminished by war, famine, disease, or grief. Absolutely nothing is going to happen to you in which Jesus, the Lord over human history, is not aware of before time. Your life is a story that is to be told in the tapestry of life. Are you familiar with tapestries? Tapestries are woven hangings often adorned with complex pictures that tell a story. In medieval times, tapestries were often used to decorate the walls of royal palaces. Tapestries have two sides. The back is a mess of loose ends, tangled knots, muted colors, and general confusion that doesn't make any sense at all, at least at the moment. The front of the tapestry tells a beautiful story that makes perfect sense when it is finished. Both sides use the same threads, but present different pictures.

The analogy is that in a present moment of crisis your life may look like a mess of loose ends and tangled knots but when God completes His work of grace, you will see that it is a work of art. It will all be beautiful in the end and everything will make perfect sense. This is what it means for your life to be a tapestry of grace. Sometimes, in the present moment, in the thick of the battle and in times of personal crisis life can be confusing, bewildering, and appear to be broken beyond repair. But never forget that the Creator is sitting at the loom of your life. Our part is to surrender to His creative skill (will). Romans 8:28 speaks of this. It tells us that God bringing good out of all affliction, trials, persecution and suffering. The good that God works is forming us into the image of Christ and ultimately bringing glory to His name (our tapestry). "All things," or the things that happen to you, are the threads of your life. Not every thread that comes into your life comes from God, however (1 Thessalonians 2:18). Some come from Satan (Deuteronomy 30:19) and some threads come from your own personal choices (Deuteronomy 30:19). Then there are those threads that are woven in as the result of living in a fallen world (Ecclesiastes 9:11). But for those who love God and are called according to His purpose, God promises to weave each thread into the tapestry of your life in such a way that in the end tells a beautiful story of His empowering grace. To paraphrase Paul's words in Romans 8:28, "God causes all the threads of our lives to be woven together for good." God's goal is not to make us happy. God's goal is to redeem us and make us holy, as "without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Our part is to allow Him to use the threads of our life to weave a beautiful tapestry of His powerful grace.

## **6: Determine to finish strong!**

Max Lucado tells this funny true story while playing golf: "The golf game was tied with four holes to go. As we stood on the tee box, I spotted the next green. 'Sure seems like a long way off,' I commented. No one spoke. 'Sure is a narrow fairway,' I said as I teed up my ball. Again, no response! 'How do they expect us to hit over those trees?' Still no answer! The silence didn't disturb me. Years of ruthless competition against fellow ministers on municipal courses have taught me to be wary of their tricks. I knew exactly what they were doing. Intimidated by my impressive streak of bogeys, they resolved to psych me out (after all, we were playing for a soda). So I stepped up to the ball and took a swing. There is no way to describe what happened next—I *hit a great drive*. It was a high arching ball that faded over the top of the trees to my left. I could hear the other guys groan. I assumed they were jealous. After watching their drives, I knew they were. None of them even made it close to the trees. Rather than hit left, they each hit right and ended up miles from the green. That's when I should have suspected something, but I didn't. They walked down their side of the fairway, and I walked down mine. But rather than find my ball sitting up on thick fairway grass, I discovered it hidden in weeds and rocks and surrounded by trees. 'This is a tough hole,' I muttered to myself. Nevertheless, I was up for the challenge. I studied the shot and selected a strategy, took out a club, and—forgive me but I must say it again—I *hit a great shot*. You would have thought my ball had been radar controlled: narrowly missed one branch, sweeping around another, heading towards the green like a jackrabbit dashing for supper. Only the steep hill kept it from rolling onto the putting surface. I'd learned

from televised tournaments how to act in such moments. I froze my follow-through just long enough for the photographers to take their pictures, and then I gave my club a twirl. With one hand I waved to the crowd, with the other I handed my club to my caddie. Of course, in my case there was no photographer or caddie, and there was no crowd. Not even my buddies were watching. They were all on the other side of the fairway, looking in the other direction. A bit miffed that my skill had gone unnoticed, I shouldered my clubs and started walking to the green. Again, it should have occurred to me that something was wrong. The tally of curious events should've gotten my attention, as a comment on the difficulty of the hole or complimenting my drive. With everyone else hitting to the right while I hit to the left: A perfect drive landing in the rough. My splendid approach shot, unseen. It should have occurred to me, but it didn't. Only as I neared the green did anything seem unusual. Some players were already putting! Players I didn't know; players whom I'd never seen before; players who, I assumed, were either horribly slow or lost. I looked around for my group only to find them also on the green—on a *different* green! That's when it hit me. I'd played the wrong hole! I had picked out the wrong target. I had thought we were playing to the green on the left when we were supposed to play the green on the right! All of a sudden everything made sense. My buddies hit to the right because they were supposed to. The groan I heard after my drive was one of pity, not admiration. No wonder the hole seemed hard—I was playing in the wrong direction. How discouraging. Golf is tough enough as it is. It's even tougher when you're headed the wrong way" (*Just Like Jesus*; pp-89-91, by Max Lucado). The same can be said about life. Life is tough enough as it is. It's even tougher when we fail to finish strong or worst yet, headed in the wrong direction.

Compare Hebrews 3:12-19 with Hebrews 12:1-3. The word race in Hebrews 12:1 comes from a Greek word that means *agony*! The writer is saying that the Christian's race for eternal life is not a jog or sprint but a demanding, grueling, and sometimes agonizing, cross-country marathon. It's not how you start off but how you finish the race for eternal life that counts. Furthermore, it takes a massive effort to finish strong. There are those who have dropped out of the race for eternal life and are now sitting on the sideline. There was a time when they kept the pace, but they let weariness set in. They didn't think the run would be that difficult or take that long. They may have become discouraged by a bump or push by a fellow runner (Christian), financial difficulty, or physical illness. Or, they may have had a blow like their spouse leaving them or losing a loved one. Whatever the reason, they are no longer in the race. They retired before their time. Unless something changes, their best work will have been their first work. They will finish with a whimper, if they finish at all. Whatever you do, finish your race for eternal life victoriously. It's a must if you hope to live eternally with King Jesus. Revelation 7:17, "For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." What a moment that will be when wounded, afflicted, and hurting saints gather around God's throne to worship. Never again will life's hardships pierce our soul. The only scars in heaven will be those on Jesus! It is with Him, and Him alone, that we shall return, not ragged and defeated, but as a triumphant people who have been welcomed into His presence with everlasting joy.

## Conclusion

We must not pretend bad things never happen to God's people, they do. But we must never lose our eternal perspective either. If you know God in a personal way, then you know He is in control. That's why hopelessness is never the final answer. Ironically, it's because we do believe God is in control that we often ask, "Why?" No doubt those who saw Jesus die on the cross asked why did God let the Romans kill Him if He was the Savior? The answer was clear early Easter Sunday when Christ rose from the dead. But it wasn't so clear around 3 P.M. Friday afternoon when Jesus took His last breath on a Roman cross. Sometimes the answer to our "why" questions aren't as clear either. It's okay to ask God why, if it's with the desire to find and follow God's will and bring Him glory. There was a pastor who had had terminal cancer and found himself at the threshold between this world and the next. He reasoned, "As one standing on the bridge with suitcase in hand, I need to take inventory of the baggage I am to carry, taking care to pack only those things that will have eternal significance." So he began seeking only those things that had eternal significance. Over the next few weeks, speech became difficult for the once animated and gifted preacher. Amazingly he continued preparing sermons, slowly conveying his heart's burden to his wife, who lovingly repeated the messages to the congregation. One of his most powerful sermons consisted of two sentences: *"All of us who have put our faith in Christ are standing on the bridge between two worlds. The only difference between you and me is that some of you don't know it, and I do."*

If you knew today would be your last day on earth, how would you spend it? What would you do differently than what you had planned? Would your thinking and actions be any different? The hard fact of life is for many today will be their last day of life on earth. No one knows if *this day* will be the last day of his or her life on earth or not. That is why we need to live as if it were. Paul did not know while sitting in a Roman prison if he was going to live or die. But no matter, Paul's purpose for living was to please Christ (2 Corinthians 5:9-10; Ephesians 5:7; Colossians 3:23). It must be ours as well! It is in desperate times that we are forced to exercise profound faith in an omnipotent and omniscient God and let Him give us an eternal perspective on the situation, one that transcends time and events.

## Questionnaire

1: Which is correct?

- a. Suffering is always due to a lack of faith or because the person has sinned.
- b. The Bible doesn't ignore the reality that God's people suffer
- c. God's people suffer for various reasons.
- d. Only b and c are correct.

2: David's worst days teaches people who loved God and who are loved by God sometimes suffer. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False

3: How David handled his disastrous situation teaches that it's okay to grieve provided you don't get stuck there. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False

4: From Hezekiah's experience, we learn that...

- a. When disaster strikes, sometimes the only thing you can do is to just wait on God.
- b. God always provides our needs.
- c. Always trust God.
- d. All of the above are correct.

5: The way to remain calm in a crisis is to truly make God your refuge and present help in time of need. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False

6: When the unthinkable happens, it's natural and perfectly acceptable---and many times helpful---to respond with weeping. \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False

7: The book of Daniel answers the age old question of where is God when bad things happen to God's people. Where do you believe God is when bad things happen to good people?

8: What is the primary theme of the Book of Daniel?

- a. God is letting evil rule without any intervention whatsoever.
- b. God cares about us but for the most part He has given us the responsibility of figuring out what to do when bad things happen to us.
- c. The primary theme of the Book of Daniel is the sovereignty of God.
- d. All of the above.

9: Define the sovereignty of God:

10: The story of the Shunammite Woman (2 Kings 4:8-37) teaches that if our dream dies maybe God is trying to find out what is more important to us, our dream or Him? \_\_\_True \_\_\_False

11: Which is correct?

- a. We must not become bitter when we encounter suffering
- b. When disaster strikes, we must not let our emotions get out of control.
- c. It's okay to recycle revenge provided you don't let your emotions get out of control.
- d. All of the above are correct.
- e. Only a and b are correct.

12: What do you believe Paul meant in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 when he said he rejoiced in infirmities, insults, hardships, persecutions and difficulties?

13: Job's story teaches...

- a. While Satan attempts to destroy the faith of God's people, God is at work to prove and deepen it.
- b. That suffering can come from divine selection. The purpose for this suffering is to *glorify God* and uphold His *honor*. That God only selects His *choicest* and most *trustworthy servants* to suffer for His honor and glory. Job proved to be a perfect candidate.
- c. That suffering does not always come from sin or from a lack of faith in God.
- d. All of the above are correct.

14: The book of Job teaches that God, not Satan, is in charge of things on this planet (1:12; 2:4-6). It also teaches that the accuser's power is strictly limited to what God allows. \_\_\_True \_\_\_False

15: What do you believe the writer of the study meant when he stated, "Determine to make God a beautiful tapestry of grace?"

Did the study help you? If so, in what way? Please submit your answer to [TEMO@nicevilleag.com](mailto:TEMO@nicevilleag.com). We would appreciate your feedback.



## Answers Sheet

In the pursuit of a course of this nature much scripture must be *read*. It is recommended that you read the assigned scripture before reading the explanatory material in the study course. Certainly, the student hardly needs the exhortation to read *prayerfully*. The Bible is a class by itself, different from any other book ever written. That is because the Holy Spirit is its true author (2 Peter 1:21).

It is also recommended that you read through an entire section before answering the questions provided in the workbook. The value of reading with continuity is that we discern the central line of thought, the pivotal idea, which is so essential to the understanding of other scriptures related to it. Questions have been prepared following each section to help you grasp the “meat” of the study. It is important that you completely read through each section before answering these questions.

1: d

2: T

3: T

4: d

5: T

6: T

7: That God is superintending over His creation. That is, God is in charge, not Satan.

8: c

9: The sovereignty of God means that God can do anything He wants to anytime He wants to. Absolutely no one can stop God from carrying out His divine will in heaven or on earth, period.

10: T

11: e

12: Paul is comparing himself to false apostles who were bragging about their abilities. Paul is saying if you are going to brag, brag about something eternal or suffering for Christ's sake, not some carnal stuff. The point of Paul's rejoicing is over God enabling abilities through His grace.

13: d

14: T

15: Live in such a way as to honor God with your life. In a present moment of crisis your life may look like a mess of loose ends and tangled knots. But when God completes His work of grace, you will see the beautiful picture and a work of art. It will all be beautiful and everything will make sense.

## References

Sermon by Dr. Howard Clark, *Weathering the Storms of Life*.

Brian Zahnd, *What to do on the Worst Day of Your Life*, by Published by Christian Life, 600 Rinhart Rd, Lake Mary, FL 32746.

*Ministry Magazine*, January 1010 issue, Pastoring in Pain, Serving God When You Suffer.

Boyce A. Teas, Part I – Grace Study, First Assembly of God, Niceville, FL.