

Self-Study Courses through Niceville Assembly of God

Distance learning and self-study are among the most dynamic and fastest-growing educational strategies in colleges and churches across America. Though different from traditional classroom study methodology, the goal is the same: to guide students through a systematic approach to spiritual formation.

This course has been carefully written and prepared so that you may experience intellectual and personal growth in the convenience of your home and at your own pace. Do not expect home study to be an easy shortcut to learning; it requires high motivation and self-discipline, since there are no prearranged class times. If you follow the process faithfully, however, your investment of valuable time will pay rich dividends in increased understanding and spiritual growth!

To assist students in grasping the concepts presented in self-study courses, a qualified Course Advisor is available to answer any questions you may have and to help guide you through the materials. Simply e-mail your questions or comments about course content to dguthmuller@nicevilleag.com. Your question(s) will receive prompt attention!

Suggestions for Studying

You cannot study the Bible as though it were just another book. Those who wrote it were inspired by the Holy Spirit, so you need the Holy Spirit to illuminate its truth to your heart and mind. With an open Bible, the Holy Spirit, a textbook, and a study guide, you're in the classroom of the Holy Spirit. As a student of the Holy Spirit, you'll achieve the goal of this course--anointed learning. Here are some study tips:

1. Set aside quiet and regular times for your study. Concentration is easier if you turn your mind to your studies at the same time each day.
2. Pray as you begin each study session. Ask the Lord to help you understand the material and make appropriate application to your life.
3. Look over the lesson objectives and the questions at the back of this workbook prior to reading each section.
4. Read through the lesson. Look up scripture references and take any notes that may be helpful. You may want to highlight pages or take notes in the margins as specific points make an impression on you.
5. Close the book and try to think through the main points. Think about what you've learned and seek ways to apply it in your personal life, in discussion with family and friends, in a Bible lesson, etc.
6. Answer the study questions in the back of the workbook. To get the most out of this study, be sure to use the manual properly. Don't simply turn to the section designated and search only for the answer, leaving the rest of the valuable material unread.
7. Take your time. No bell will ring to force you to move on to new material.
8. Make good use of reference tools, such as a study Bible, a comprehensive concordance, and a Bible dictionary. An up-to-date English dictionary will help you understand words that may be unfamiliar.
9. If you have access to the internet, you may want to use online resources such as <http://www.biblegateway.com/>, <http://www.bible.org/>, <http://www.e-sword.net/>.
10. Email any questions you may have concerning this course and its contents to dguthmuller@nicevilleag.com. Please indicate which course you are taking and the specific page number(s) which is/are in question.
11. When you have completed all study questions, you may check your answers against the answer key in the back of the workbook. Don't "cheat"! Remember, the only person you will be cheating is yourself!

Personal Goals and Progress

Learning Goal

From this course I hope to be able to:

Study Goal

Plan to schedule the following time(s) for study:

Monday:

Tuesday:

Wednesday:

Thursday:

Friday:

Saturday:

Sunday:

Hours per Week:

Progress

Date Course Started:

Date Course Completed:

Personal Commitment

I hereby submit myself to the Holy Spirit and commit myself to becoming the person God created me to be.

Signature

Date

What to Do on the **Worst Day of Your Life**

(A study course by Boyce A. Teas, M.S.)

Preface

Except otherwise noted, all scripture is taken from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible. The title of the study was taken from Brian Zahnd, *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 times, uncertain times. Even the best and most respected and revered Christian may at times experience clouded periods of uncertainty and times of testing. 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. This study is designed to do just that. There are six sections to the study:

- Section 1 – Why Suffering?
- Section 2 - David's worst day.
- Section 3 - Hezekiah's worst day.
- Section 4 - Daniel's worst day.
- Section 5 – The Shunammite woman's worst day.
- Section 6 – Access grace during times of tribulations.

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

Section 1 – Why Suffering?

In every generation countless saints who daily love and honor God experience severe suffering. Yet there seems to be a distorted view on the part of some “super-saints” that when you become a Christian, life is nothing more than a ticker-tape parade where sweetness and roses prevail. But for many believers in Christ life feels more like a death march. Take, for example, Dr. Bruce Martin, Senior Pastor First Baptist Church in Alberta, Canada, who has an unknown and incurable disease. While treatment and medication have stabilized the pain at a bearable level, managing that pain has become part of his daily routine as a pastor. Dr. Martin was one of several speakers who shared their stories of suffering at a year-end banquet in Alberta. The guest speaker before him spoke on the topic of “how to pray in faith.” This man had prayed “in faith” (he emphasized this phrase several times) and now his pain was gone. “If you have enough faith and pray,” he triumphantly proclaimed, “God will heal!” His experience had led him to present a cause-and-effect formula (i.e., if you are in need, pray. If you have enough faith, God will act, guaranteed). Needless to say this man’s message and Pastor Martin’s presented two opposing views concerning suffering. The preacher came to Pastor Martin’s table that evening at dinner and said, “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 and asked God for deliverance with seemingly no result. How un-Christlike to accuse someone of not having enough faith without knowing all the facts. Needless to say, the minister’s condemning words hurt and left Pastor Martin bewildered. Afterwards, Pastor Martin 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.”

What “super-saints” fail to realize is that God deals with us individually. For some faith manifests itself in healing and deliverance. For others God calls upon them to walk through the valley of the shadow of suffering and sometimes death. Being faithful to Christ day in and day out in pain, totally depending on God’s grace and mercy, is real faith too. It’s called *painful faith*. So let’s start off by examining nine reasons why God’s people suffer. Some of these reasons address “just” suffering and some address “unjust” suffering. There is actually no such thing as unjust suffering since we are all sinners by nature (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8) but because the blood of Jesus “purifies us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9) and “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 5:8), we might easily call much of the suffering that comes into our lives “unjust” suffering.

1: Suffering comes because we live in a fallen world where calamities and consequences of sin are common to everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike. We Christians are not exempt from earthquakes, hurricanes, disease, etc. (Matthew 5:45; Ephesians 2:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 1 John 2:15-17).

2: Suffering comes as a result of the universal law of cause and effect - sowing and reaping (Genesis 8:22). There is always a consequence for what we say or do (Galatians 6:7).

3: Sometimes suffering comes our way out of divine discipline (1 Corinthians 4:16-17; 6:19; 10:6-13; 11:30; James 1:14-15; Hebrews 3:12; 6:4-6; 10:26-31; 12:10-11, 14).

4: It is through suffering that God tests faith (1 Peter 1:6-7), that He works (Matthew 7:24-27; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15) and that He strengthens and develops character (James 1:2-4). Few of us ever fully grasp the simple but painful truth that the heat of suffering is a refiner's fire, purifying the gold of godly character and wisdom (1 Peter 5:8-11).

5: Hardship and suffering enable us to empathize and give comfort to other believers who might be going through similar trials and tribulations (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

6: When properly responded to, unjust suffering allows us to lay up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-33; 1 Peter 1:17).

7: Suffering separates truly dedicated followers of Christ from half-hearted believers. Scripture makes it clear that not everyone who says he or she is a Christian is genuine (Matthew 7:21-23; Mark 7:14-23).

8: Suffering comes from living in a fallen world where evil people rule (Matthew 5:45; Psalms 17:14; Isaiah 13:11; Acts 7:54-60; 10:48; 12:2; 2 Timothy 3:10-13). Planet earth is the battleground where the battle between spiritual light and spiritual darkness is fought (Ephesians 6:11-18; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 John 3:8; 5:19; Job 1:6-12).

9: Sometimes God's servants suffer because of divine selection. The circumstances in the divine selection are Satan-inspired but the choice often initiates with God. The purpose for this suffering is to glorify God and uphold His honor. Job was one of those select ones who so touched the heart of God that God granted him the privilege, not granted to everyone, to suffer wrongfully so that God might be glorified. What was God looking for when He selected Job? He was looking for faith and consistency in godly character (Job 1:8). Few people have suffered more indignity and humiliation than Job, yet he never once blamed God or wavered in faith (Job 13:15). God only selects His choicest and most trustworthy servants to suffer for His glory and uphold His honor.

10: Then there is a time in everyone's life when you have to confront the unexplainable, a season in life when God gives no explanations, only promises from His Word. It is then that we find out what kind of God we actually believe in, not the one we try to tell others we believe in when we are describing the Christian faith but the God who is there with us during times of trouble.

Now let's examine the worst days of David, Hezekiah, Daniel and the Shunammite woman. Each of these cases brings to our study a unique aspect of suffering along with biblical principles of how to be victorious when the unthinkable happens.

Section 2 - David's Worst Day

How would you respond if your house burned down, your belongings were looted and your family - spouse and kids- were kidnapped---all in one day? It really happened to David, a man who loved God and who was loved by God. The overarching storyline of the Bible is not, "Once upon a time, they lived happily ever after." Far from it! The scriptural storyline of God's people has plenty of moments where the narrative, in effect, says, "Then all hell broke loose." This was the case with David. His worst day begins in 1 Samuel 29:1 and ends with 1 Samuel 30:31. The year was 1012 B.C. David was 29 years old and had lived a life of adventure up to this time. When he was a teenager (about 15), the 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. After his miraculous triumph over Goliath, David left the sheepfolds of his father Jesse and became a member of the royal household of King Saul. More importantly, he was made commander over all of Israel's armies, where he experienced one victory after another. It is safe to say that David became the national hero of the Israelites; but when the paranoid and neurotic King Saul became jealous of David's God-given success and popularity, he sought to kill David. He was forced to leave the royal household and roam the hillsides of Judea. Joining other outcasts, David formed a mercenary band of 600 faithful followers. For several years David and his men fought the Philistines while expanding and securing the borders of Israel, something King Saul should have been doing. As David waited for the fulfillment of Samuel's prophecy that he would be Israel's next king, he and his men made the city of Ziklag in southern Judea their temporary headquarters. Like David, we all spend some time in Ziklag. It's not where we came from nor is it where we are going. It's just where we happen to be for a while. Ziklag is the place of patiently waiting, located somewhere between prophecy and destiny.

David and his men and their families had been living in Ziklag for a year and four months and not much had transpired. David decided to go to Aphek, a three-day journey from Ziklag. He and his men were returning home with everyone 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 the city. As they drew near to Ziklag, anxiety gave way to panic as they realized the unthinkable had happened. The city had been attacked, ransacked, and set on fire. Every home and every building had been reduced to a smoldering heap of rubble. A raiding band of several thousand Amalekites riding camels had attacked the city. They looted the wealth, took the women and children captive and then set fire to the city. Needless to say this was the worst day of David's life. In one day, he lost everything: Possessions stolen, house burned down, and worst of all, his family kidnapped. 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? Added to David's sorrow, his men were threatening to kill him. That's David's worst day! It raises the question, "What do you do on the worst day of your life?" The issue is not do we suffer or even why we suffer. The issue is what you do when the unthinkable happens. Let's examine *ten steps* David took on his worst day, steps that progressively led to the miracle of his recovering all. While every situation is different and every individual is unique, the scriptural record of how David handled this tragedy provides principles that are timeless and universal.

The first thing David did was weep. His men joined him (1 Samuel 30:4). Six hundred men, all of them strong and brave soldiers, men who had faced death many times without a hint of fear, now wept openly and uncontrollably until they were too tired to cry anymore. It's okay to weep (Ecclesiastes 3:4). Many biblical figures wept (Genesis 23:2; 29:11-12; 45:14-15; 2 Kings 20:3; Job 16:16; Nehemiah 1:4; Jeremiah 9:1; Matthew 26:75). When the unthinkable happens to you, it's natural and perfectly acceptable---and many times helpful---to respond with weeping. Being a person of emotions is not contrary to being a person of faith. God has created us emotional beings; it's part of our human makeup. Even Jesus wept (John 11:35), a fact which, by the way, is a powerful testimony to the fullness of His humanity. Because "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14,) God can now join us in our tears and identify with our suffering (Hebrews 2:10, 18). So when trouble hits you so hard you feel it must be the worst day of your life, it's perfectly acceptable to weep.

The second thing David did was not become bitter. Bitterness does not belong on the road of recovery. We must allow God to take control of our emotions before they take control of us so our grief doesn't conquer us. The normal emotional reaction to a Ziklag experience is anger, and that's okay, provided you get over it before it turns into bitterness (Ephesians 4:26-27). Natural sorrow when indulged for too long can cause you to develop a dark and morose personality that will attract demon spirits of depression. This truth is clearly brought out by the Lord in the parable (story) of the sower (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. 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, after following Scripture, we can 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*. When we become offended, we have just taken the bait and tripped the trigger on the *emotional trap* Satan had set for us. The offense is the bait; becoming angry and bitter is the trap! The devil knows 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 and go back into the world. Over the years as a pastor and church counselor, I have seen those who were so paralyzed by their emotions of bitterness that they withdraw from church attendance, Bible reading,

prayer and eventually from fellowship with God. I've also seen believers so absorbed in their own sorrow that bitterness became their new identity. That is what happened to David's men. Their anger and sorrow had turned into bitter of heart to the point they wanted to kill David (Samuel 30:6). Bitterness will do that (Job 21:23-25). When you encounter the worst day of your life, make sure your sorrow doesn't get out of control. Rather, choose to forgive so the seed of offense doesn't become a root of bitterness that defiles your soul (Hebrews 12:15). Don't play the blame game or recycle revenge. Speak words of healing rather than words of hate and bitterness even though you may not feel like it. Mature followers of Christ experience emotions like everyone else---they just don't allow them to have the last word!

The third thing David did was change his focus from his problem to God. David's men were focusing on the disaster and their pain. Not so with David. First Samuel 30:6 states, "David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God." Instead of allowing grief and bitterness to consume him, David turned to God. As a result, he found strength to go on. David had a track record of turning to God in time of trouble. God, in turn, had a track record of delivering him.

We don't know how long David encouraged himself in the Lord or how he did that. He probably sang a psalm (song), possibly Psalm 34. David had written Psalm 34 just two years earlier when God had delivered him from Abimelech, king of the Philistines. It is easy to imagine David sitting in the ashes of what was once his home singing, "I will extol the LORD at all times; His praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt His name together. I sought the LORD, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears" (Psalm 34:1-4). The Old King James Version renders verse 3 as, "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 the object. Perspective has everything to do with whether you are encouraged or discouraged. That is why we need to magnify God and not our trouble (or the devil) when disaster strikes. You cannot make God any bigger than He already is (i.e., you can't increase omnipotence!), but you can magnify (or diminish) your perspective of God by what you believe. 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 situations and the devil (who caused the tragedy) and not God. Like David, what we need to be doing is magnifying God. Speak of His greatness, His might, His love, His presence. That is no doubt what David did.

The fourth thing David did was call for Abiathar, the priest and inquire of the Lord. A few years earlier Abiathar was the only priest to escape the massacre of the priests of Nob by Saul (1 Samuel 22:17-20). Since that time Abiathar had become a personal friend of David and had been living in Aphek. He had returned with David to Ziklag.

Read 1 Samuel 30:7-8. The ephod was a sacred garment worn by the high priest. It was adorned with precious stones that enabled spiritual leaders to find God's will in certain situations, similar to the Urim and Thummim (Exodus 28:30). David wore the linen ephod when he would seek direction from God. As a type of Christ, David occupied three offices: prophet, priest and king. He composed psalms as a prophet, wore the ephod and inquired of God as a priest and held the scepter as a king. This was a picture of what Christ would do centuries later. The men no doubt watched as David in humility laid aside his weapons and armor and put on the simple linen 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, possibly throughout the night, but in one short sentence God gave David and his men everything they needed to turn tragedy into triumph. This is the power and effectiveness of the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12). What you need on your worst day is faith in God. According to Romans 10:17 faith comes from hearing the Word of God.

To fully understand how faith comes to a believer in Christ, especially in times of great crisis, it is helpful to understand how the New Testament uses the word, "*word*." When the New Testament says that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17, KJV), it uses the Greek word *rhema* for "word." *Rhema* is different from *logos*, another Greek word for *word*. *Logos* is primarily a word as an idea, a concept, a reason, logic, and something that is very much alive and related to that which is timeless. *Logos* is especially used to refer to the written Word of God (Hebrews 4:12). It can also apply to Jesus (John 1:1-2). *Rhema*, on the other hand, is used three hundred times in the Greek New Testament and means a *living spoken word*. It is more specific and more particular to time and place. It is the word for you for that moment. Consider this example. When Jesus invited Peter to come to Him by walking upon the sea, Jesus spoke *rhema* (a specific word) to Peter for that time and place. When Peter asked Jesus if he could come to Him on the water, Jesus said, "Come" (Matthew 24:28-29). Simply reading that Jesus said to Peter, "Come," 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 generating exceptional faith in Peter. Exceptional faith is generated in the time of crisis by the specific Word of God that is spoken to your spirit by the Holy Spirit. The reason David asked for the ephod was because he needed to hear from God in the *present moment* and in that *particular situation*.

Just as there are two Greek words for "word," there are also two Greek words used in the New Testament for "time," specifically *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* has to do with time on the move or the measurement of time. Thus, we have the word *chronological* (measurement or movement of time through space). *Kairos* is the opportune moment. It is fair and accurate to think of *chronos* as ordinary time, but *kairos* is special time. Now let's put these words together. *Logos* corresponds with *chronos*, and *rhema* corresponds with *kairos*. When we read the story of Peter walking on the water with Jesus, it is a timeless story from which many general lessons can be derived. However,

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. What David received from God when he wore the linen ephod was the *rhema* word in the *kairos* moment---a *specific* word for that *specific moment in time*. That’s what needs to happen on the worst day of your life. When disaster strikes, instead of wringing your hands---go to God in prayer, read the Bible and let God give you a *rhema* word in the *kairos* moment. It will lift you up out of the feelings of despair. Now I know passages like Psalms 28:1-3 sound like God is sometimes silent when we pray. It doesn’t mean He is not listening. He is either testing your faith or waiting until you are ready to receive what He has to say. You are not ready to hear from God if you are in a state of bitterness and unbelief. Besides, a faithful believer may at times feel that God is not listening to his or her prayers. This experience, however, will not be the norm as long as we continue to draw near to God through Christ (Hebrews 4:16; 7:25). After a period of trial, the Lord will respond and help us as a shepherd cares for his sheep (Isaiah 40:11).

The important thing to remember is that God has a specific word for you in that situation. Listen for it! Search the Bible for it! The only thing you must make sure of is that what is being registered in your spirit is actually from God and not from your own selfish desires or Satan. I have seen believers get into trouble because they thought they had heard from God when all they had was a thought and a mere impression in their minds, probably based on their own desire or what some worldly counselor, friend or the devil had said. Believe it or not, the devil and his demon helpers are very religious. They not only know Scripture, but they are also very skilled at quoting God’s Word out of context (original setting) in order to get people to believe a lie (Genesis 3:1-5). If Satan 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 as well. If he can get you to take a passage of the Bible out of context to get the wrong interpretation, he can get you to do things you would never normally do. There are two sure ways to be confident that what you hear is from God. First, it will *always* conform to the whole Word of God, both the Old and New Testaments. God is not going to tell you to violate His Word. All of the principles and precepts found in the Bible are just as valid today as they were when they were written (Matthew 5:17-19). Secondly, what you hear will bring peace (Philippians 4:7). Don’t let your natural mind run wild. Don’t make up a word in your mind. Be patient when seeking God for a word. Seek God until you know for sure He is doing the speaking. The Word of God is like a surgeon’s scalpel in the hands of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 4:12). Listen for that word. You may have randomly read a passage of the Bible over and over all your life without a significant impact but on this particular day it’s like God was audibly speaking to you in your innermost being. In that moment, *rhema* met *kairos* and faith is born.

The fifth thing David did was encourage his men. Hope is contagious. A new day began to dawn over Ziklag and a new day began to dawn in David’s heart as he then knew what to do. David had spent the night wearing the linen ephod and seeking the Lord. In the middle of the night God spoke (1 Samuel 30:8). Suddenly the negative energy of despondency and self-pity turned to faith and hope in everyone’s heart as

David shared with his men what God had said. God had reoriented David's vision, which, in turn, had reoriented the vision of David's men.

The sixth step David took was regain his passion for spiritual warfare. David and his six hundred men marched all morning and into the afternoon under the searing Judean sun until they reached the Besor Ravine. Two hundred of the men were too exhausted to cross the ravine. It was decided they would remain at Besor and watch over the supplies while David and the other four hundred continued the pursuit of the Amalekites. They found an Egyptian slave semiconscious lying in a field who had been left for dead. They gave him some water and food and in a short time he recovered. Promising to spare his life and not turn him over to the Amalekites if he would lead them to their camp, David struck a deal with the slave to show them the enemy's camp (1 Samuel 30:11-16). They arrived at the enemy's camp just as the sun was setting. From a ridge, David could see 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). This rekindled David's resolve for spiritual warfare. He organized his men and got ready to attack.

The seventh step David took was give the order to attack: "David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day, and none of them got away, except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled" (1 Samuel 30:17). David and his men took no prisoners and gave no ground to the marauders. Fifteen years earlier at the battle of Shur, against God's will, King Saul had spared Agag, king of the Amalekites. It was Saul's failure to fully carry out the command of the Lord that set in motion the events that eventually lead to King Saul's 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. The battle raged through the night and into the next day.

David's eighth step was recover all and more. It must have been an incredible moment of unspeakable joy when David and his men were united with their families following the battle. They not only recovered all their belonging, but they also recovered all the loot the Amalekites had carried away from Ziklag and other locations as they swept through the territory. Thirty six hours earlier David had dared to listen to God and attack. Now the prophecy "recover all" had been fulfilled (1 Samuel 30:18). Some of you may be wondering, "Will I recover all?" Only God knows, as each situation is different and God's purpose for allowing that to happen is different for each of us. However, I can say with certainty that while you may not get a loved one back or immediately recover monetarily from a disastrous event, you can recover all of your emotions and be stronger in faith than you were before the trial began. By faith, you are united with the triumph of Christ. His triumph over sin, Satan, death, hell and the grave is your triumph (Philippians 3:10-11). You may have been hurt, even victimized, but you don't have to be a personal victim. You may have failed but you are not a failure. Who are you? You are a child of the King, an overcomer in Christ Jesus. Overcomers overcome; they recover! Have you ever asked yourself, "What is salvation for?" Not what is salvation but what is salvation for? Salvation is for the restoration of all things to God. Salvation

is the story of how God recovers from His loss. God created a perfect world, but this good and perfect world was lost to Satan, sin, corruption and death. The story of the Bible is how God is in the process of recovering *all* through Christ Jesus that was lost in the catastrophe of sin.

David's ninth step was celebrate. In the beginning, the ashes were undeniable and the tears were uncontrollable but they were not David's legacy. They were not what would ultimately define David. In an amazing twist of fate, David actually came out of the Ziklag catastrophe enriched (1 Samuel 30:20). The tenth and final step David took on his worst day was share the abundance of God's blessings with others. David and his men loaded up the items they had taken from the Amalekites and returned with their families and possessions to Ziklag. What David did with the wealth he took from the Amalekites is one of the reasons God calls him "a man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22). After David gave God an offering from this abundance (1 Samuel 30:16), he sent some of the plunder to the elders of Judah (1 Samuel 30:26). King Saul was killed in battle on Mount Gilboa three days later. David was installed as king of Judah shortly after that.

There are numerous spiritual lessons derived from David's story. Here are just two of them. For one thing, David's experience at Ziklag teaches us that there is a time to grieve and there is a time to get up and take action. There is a time to shake off passivity and resignation and regain your passion to do spiritual warfare. Satan was behind what the Amalekites did to David and he's behind the bad things that happen to you. That is why we must be careful not to direct our anger against people, even though they may be used by Satan to carry out the evil attack. Your spiritual warfare is against Satan and his spiritual forces of evil in the spirit realm (2 Corinthians 10:4-5; 11:24-27; Ephesians 6:10; 1 Peter 5:8-9). Here's what you do as a Christian on the worst day of your life: you attack the enemy, using the weapons God has provided you through Christ. Satan will not expect this. He expects you to become angry, bitter and depressed. Instead, you go on the offensive! That's what David did. That is what we must do if we hope to be victorious over our worst day. Christians aren't fighting people. We face a spiritual conflict with Satan and a host of evil spirits (Matthew 4:10; Ephesians 6:12). Our protection (armor) is the Lord Jesus Christ. Our weapons are what Christ provided for us through His death and resurrection (Ephesians 6:13-16). The second lesson learned from David's Ziklag experience is that that which was designed to destroy you can actually bless you. The amount of wealth that had been taken from the Amalekites was staggering. The terrible ordeal you are going through now can become a stepping-stone to a greater tomorrow provided you don't give up. You can do more than just survive the satanic assault; you can be catapulted into a new dimension of grace. 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 of loss that comes from betrayal and deep disappointment in my own life. But there is a way, incredible as it may seem, to recover from a Ziklag experience where you can recover your faith, joy and your peace.

Section 3 - Hezekiah's Worst Day

Hezekiah's worst day is found in 2 Kings 18. It is expressed, however, in Psalm 46. Hezekiah was king of Judah at the time. The nation of Judah was in deep trouble. Hezekiah learned what it means to truly trust in God in the midst of that trouble and wrote Psalm 46. He had the sons of Korah (musicians) put the lyrics of the song to music.

The first thing that stands out in Psalm 46 is that God allowed His people to experience earth shaking events, events that rocked their world. Hezekiah became king of Judah when he was only 25 years old. He was a righteous king and was complimented in scripture by saying he was like his father David. This was the highest compliment paid to a king. A civil war broke out after King Solomon died and the nation of Israel became divided. The ten northern tribes became known as Israel (sometimes called Ephraim), with its capital in Samaria. Judah and Benjamin, the two southern tribes, became known as Judah. Their capital was located in Jerusalem where the temple was located. The ten northern tribes never did have a godly king but Judah did. Hezekiah was now one of those godly kings. Seven years prior to the writing of Psalm 46, the king of Assyria came against the ten northern tribes. After a three-year starvation siege, they entered Israel's capital city of Samara, plundered and destroyed the city and massacred many of its inhabitants. They also took every able-bodied person captive back to Assyria as slaves. The Assyrian king then took non-Jewish captives from all over his empire and settled them in Samaria. The ten northern tribes disappeared never to be seen again, leaving only Judah as God's people. Hezekiah's predecessor had paid tribute to the Assyrians to avert an invasion. Hezekiah refused to continue that practice when he became king because he trusted in God as his source of protection. However, just in case God was busy taking care of the universe some place else and couldn't answer his prayer if he needed Him, Hezekiah made a mutual aid treaty with the Egyptians, who were considered a formidable enemy of the Assyrians at that time. This pact, however, was in violation of God's command to Israel's kings not to make any entanglement of alliances with the pagans around them (Exodus 34:12, 15; Deuteronomy 7:2). With that background in hand let's review Psalms 46. This Jewish song can be divided into three sections by that funny little word called *Selah*. No one knows for sure what *Selah* means. We know it was used as a musical annotation or pause to allow the orchestra time for the re-tuning of the string instruments (i.e. violins) before starting another stanza. It also tells us to pause and think about what is being said. Anytime you see the word *Selah* in a psalm, stop and ponder what is being said before reading on.

Section 1 – God, the Invincible Warrior who is on our side

Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength an ever present help in trouble." Here, Hezekiah introduces God to us as a personal Savior who cares about us, not as some distant or disinterested God. The New English Translation describes God in this passage as "the Invincible Warrior who is on our side." This was the God Hezekiah believed in. Does God guarantee trouble won't come to His children? No! He is more

honest than that. However, what He does do is tell us that He, our personal heavenly Father, will be in it with us. Stop for a moment and think about God being your Invincible Warrior and your refuge (protection) and strength in time of trouble.

Psalms 46:2, “Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. *Selah.*” What could be so terrible that would cause Hezekiah to paint this bleak of a picture? The phrase “the mountains fall into the heart of the sea” has historical significance. Since the time of Joshua, the people who lived in Judah believed that because the sea was to their backs and they lived in the mountains where chariots are of very little value, they were secure and safe. They also believed that the ten northern tribes would be a buffer from invading armies. The problem was the ten northern tribes were no longer there. They had been taken to Assyria as slaves. Added to this frightening vulnerability is the fact that the Assyrian army came through those mountains as if the weren’t even there. So Hezekiah is speaking of the natural buffers of life, the things they had trusted in to protect them and keep them safe as no longer being in place. The people of Judah are now exposed and threatened by that same invading army. Everything Hezekiah and the people of Judah felt was invincible is suddenly no longer in place. The Assyrian army came up to Jerusalem and stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool (2 Kings 18:17-18), the water supply for the city.

Psalms 11:3, asks, “When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?” The word “foundations” here is a very rare word in the Bible. It is translated in Hebrew as *šāṭ*, meaning the basic structures of society – family, friends, relationships, morality, work, church, etc. It can also be translated to mean the warp of a loom. If the warp is gone, how can one weave? In other words, who do you turn to when the foundations are destroyed and the very fabric that makes up our daily lives has been utterly destroyed? What do you do when everything you hold dear in your life is shaken, when your world begins to spin and fall apart? Hezekiah turned to God, the Invincible Warrior. However, if you have not practiced trusting God in the safe times, you are not very likely to know how to do it in the bad times. *Selah.*

Section 2 – God’s Provision

Read Psalms 46:4-7. Hezekiah is suddenly faced with another problem. He is surrounded by the enemy in the walled mountainous city of Jerusalem with no water source. 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. So, 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 the water to the people. Starting at the Pool of Shalom (south end of the city), one group of workers began digging northwards. Another group of workers began digging a tunnel southward at the reservoir end. Keep in mind they didn’t have GPSes or satellites back in those days. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us 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. The tunnel still exists in the old city of Jerusalem.

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. Verse 5 states, "God is within her, she will not fall. God will help her at break of day." This passage is speaking of the two times when the people were most afraid.. One is what I call a *time of anxiety* or *perplexity*. This is where you are worried about something but you can't do anything about it. It's like waking up at 3 A.M. in the morning and every fear you have ever had suddenly flows into your mind in technicolor. You can't do anything about it---it's three in the morning! That's a time of anxiety. Hezekiah basically says in verse 5, "Everything is okay, God is there. Speak to Him; talk with Him; work it out with Him in your mind." The second time of fear was when the people were actually under attack. They didn't have night-vision goggles in ancient times. They had to wait until the sun came up to attack because you didn't want to shoot your own men. So, the most dangerous time of the day was break of day because that was the best time for an attack. Hezekiah says, "God will help her [Jerusalem] at break of day." The Hebrew says, "When the morning dawns." That's the time of an attack. So whether it is in the middle of the night when you can't do anything about it or early in the morning when you must get up and do something about it, God is there with you. Trust Him!

Psalms 46:6-7, "Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; He lifts His voice, the earth melts. (7) The Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress." King Hezekiah is telling us that while God may not take us out of our troubles, He's right there protecting us through it all. He is also telling the heathen army that had surrounded Jerusalem, "Your life is about over as you know it." Compare 2 Kings 18:28-35 with Psalms 46:6-7. The bottom line of what King Hezekiah is saying to us is that when everything falls apart, God is still our fortress – God is still God! Selah.

Section 3 — Trust God; He Will be Exalted

Read Psalms 46:8-11. The Hebrew meaning of the phrase "ends of the earth" in Psalms 46:9 literally means, "At the other end of the world." Now read 2 Kings 19:5-7, 32-37. A hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the enemy's camp died that very night without a single shot being fired. , "At the other end of the earth" (from their perspective, of course) this blasphemous king went home to his assassination! The king of Assyria was right when he said no one had ever stood up against him (2 Kings 18:33-34), but then he had never come up against "the Lord Almighty." The story line of Hezekiah's worst day is that we are not to worry about what heathens can do to us. They aren't getting away with anything. No one blasphemes God without consequences.

Psalms 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The picture that is painted for us in this passage is that of a mother cradling her unconsolable child. Nursery workers can best identify with this.

You do everything you can to console a child but nothing works. In comes this young inexperienced mother, takes her infant in her arms, holds him close and says, “Shh...” and immediately the child quiets down. This inexperienced mother did something experienced nursery workers couldn’t do. Yet all she did was 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, stop worrying over everything. Trust God (cross-reference Philippians 4:6).

There are believers who are so busy fretting and worrying about something that they don’t hear the still quiet voice of God that says, “Shh...trust me in this situation.” Yes, there are times we are so deep in our troubles that we cannot possibly understand how God can rescue us. However, it will help to trust God again if we will look back and see how He came thorough for us in times past. From Hezekiah’s viewpoint the same God who delivered him in past situations could be trusted to rescue His people from the king of Assyria. We can remain calm in a crisis if we have truly made God our refuge and present help in time of need. 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 rather than simply trusting Him and listening to what He is saying to us and what He is doing. Paul said, “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will” (Romans 8:26-27). So what does God say do in Psalms 46 when you’re in the valley of confusion, anxiety and discouragement? God says, “Shh..., hold tight, I am still in charge. I am still God! The Holy Spirit will help you pray the kind of prayer you need to be praying. Trust me! Selah.”

Section 4 – Daniel’s Worst Day

The book of Daniel answers the age-old question of where is God when bad things happen to His people. Daniel can be broken down into two parts. Part one is found in the first six chapters where Daniel describes a historical narrative that covers a 70-year period. Part one provides us with great stories that challenge our faith and provide helpful lessons for everyday living. Part two is found in Chapters 7 through 12, providing the reader with invaluable information about the nation of Israel and surrounding Gentile nations in the end times, much of which fits into the Book of Revelation. Daniel Chapter one, however, applies to the study at hand---what to do on your worst day.

Daniel 1:1: “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.” Daniel’s worst day involved an invasion by the worst of the worst, the Babylonians. Ancient Babylon was located on the land mass of what we know today as Iraq. Under the leadership of their crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians had already conquered the Syrian empire and were now turning their attention to the only rival in the Middle East, Egypt. The Egyptians saw what was coming and went on the offensive, attacking the Babylonian army north of the Euphrates River but the Babylonians had a decisive victory. Nebuchadnezzar then expanded his conquest outward into Judea. He and his army were 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 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 events of Daniel chapter one took place.

Think about it. The God who parted the Red Sea and defeated Israel’s enemies as they marched into the Promised Land is now letting a godless and wicked people conquer Judah, the only remnant of the people of Israel? It was difficult for the Jews to understand that especially since God had defeated the Assyrian army under the leadership of Hezekiah. The book of Habakkuk is dedicated to answering the question as to why God allowed this to happen. Of course the Jews should have known all along. God had sent Habakkuk and Jeremiah, two outstanding prophets, to warn them that unless they repented of their wicked ways and returned to Him, this would happen. While they had committed various sins that warranted judgment, three stood out. First, they failed to let the land lay rest every seventh year as commanded in the Law. Every seventh year was to be a sabbatical year of rest for the land. What is interesting is that Judah’s captivity took place in the sabbatical year they were to have observed and the captivity lasted 70 years! 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. Thirdly, God’s people were committing gross sexual sins of immorality of various kinds, a fact which guaranteed God’s judgment (Deuteronomy 5:32-33; 6:10-25).

Read Daniel 1:2. Nebuchadnezzar’s motive was clear. 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. No doubt Nebuchadnezzar routinely followed that custom.

Read Daniel 1:3-4. These young men were the intellectuals, the best of the best in Hebrew society. All of them came from wealthy families of Jewish royalty or nobility. They were in their mid-teens and old enough to function independently of parents, yet young enough to be impressionable and teachable in the ways of the Babylonian culture and religion. They were also handsome so they would make a good impression in the king's court. They all had a high I.Q. with the capacity of learning the language and customs of the Chaldeans. The word "Chaldeans" in Daniel 1:4 refers to the elite, the privileged upper class of the Babylonians. The Chaldeans were the ruling class--- intellectuals and wise men of Babylonian society--- to which the king himself belonged. Daniel and his peers were to receive the best secular education the Babylonian culture could offer and be integrated into this elite group. Nebuchadnezzar was one smart king.

Read Daniel 1:5. The purpose for giving Daniel and his peers the same kind of food that the king ate was to assimilate them into Babylonian society as quickly as possible. There was a problem, however. The king's meat was consecrated to an idol before being served. Daniel and his friends believed that if they ate this meat, they would be pledging allegiance to and worshiping that idol. That is exactly what Nebuchadnezzar wanted them to think. His thinking was if they were to be effective Babylonian officials in his government, then they needed to accept Babylonian ways, including Babylonian gods.

Read Daniel 1:6-7. The Hebrew names of these four teens tell us that their parents were deeply devoted to God: The "L" in Daniel and Mishael is a reference to God. The "iah" in Hananiah and Azariah is an abbreviation for Jehovah. By giving Daniel, Hananiah and Mishael new names that honored Babylonian gods, Nebuchadnezzar was trying to erase all identity of them being followers of Jehovah. It was an intense test of faith for these three teenagers, to say the least. Being the godly young men they were, Daniel and his companions refused to compromise their biblical convictions and eat the king's meat. God honored their godly stand and gave them favor with the overseer. They were permitted to eat an all-vegetable diet during the three year period of training. You say, "Let me see if I have this correct. A pagan king rode into Jerusalem, gutted God's temple, stole the sacred vessels of worship and placed them as trophies in the temple of his false god. Kidnapped Daniel and his friends and subjected them to all kinds of pressure in an effort to destroy their faith in the one true God. And God did nothing to stop it?!" Correct! The fact that wicked people rule, or that bad things happen to God's people, does not cancel out what God has *purposed within Himself* to accomplish. However, that is not the rest of the story. We know from Daniel 1:18-21 that after the 70 years allotted by God, the Jews returned to Jerusalem just as God said they would. Daniel 4:17, "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." That's the rest of the story!

Deliverance is God's initiative and His gift and not some genie we can conjure up by the right prayer. It is in these 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. Doubt that is allowed to linger too long will produce dangerous emotional and spiritual instability (Deuteronomy 28:13). You must truly believe God wants you to succeed in life and that He has your best interest in mind. That's done when everything is going good. It's too late trying to figure out what you believe when sitting in the emergency room trying to read the troubling expression on the doctor's face and trying to understand the technical words he uses so he won't have to say, "This is really awful." You cannot be wondering if God wants you to win or lose, succeed or fail, flourish or falter. You need to know that ahead of time. God's ultimate goal is to get you to view life from that which is spiritual and eternal (Romans 8:31-39). From God's viewpoint, if you lost everything but grew spiritually, you would be better off than the person who gained everything and lost his/her soul (Mark 8:36). 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."

The sovereignty of God is described in Psalms 115:3: "Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him." The sovereignty of God means that God can do anything He wants to anytime He wants to. And absolutely no one can stop Him from carrying out His divine will in heaven or on earth, period. The French philosopher Voltaire predicted that Christianity would be dead within a hundred years after his death. In 1779, 50 years after Voltaire's death, the German Bible Society used *his house* and *his printing press* to print Bibles! How about this one: on numerous occasions, during an episode of deep depression, the 18th Century poet and hymn writer William Cooper tried to commit suicide. First, he tried to kill himself by taking poison. His suicide attempt failed and he lived. Then he hired a carriage and asked to be taken to the London Bridge with the intention of jumping off to his death. After driving for two hours in the fog, the coachman admitted he was lost. In disgust, Cooper asked to be let out so he could walk, only to discover that he was only a short distance from home. He decided to go home for the night. The next morning he purposely fell on a sharp knife but the blade broke. When that didn't work, he tried to hang himself. He was found unconscious but alive. A short time later William Cooper picked up a Bible and found that there is a God in heaven who loved Him, a God who understood his suffering and who gives meaning to life. He accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and went on to write a number of Christian hymns, one of which goes like this: "God moves in a mysterious way, wonders to perform. He plants His footsteps in the sea, rise upon the storm. Deep in unfathomed minds of never failing skill He treasures up His bright designs and works His sovereign will. You fearful saints, fresh courage, take. The threatening clouds you so much dread are big with mercy and shall break in countless blessings on your head."

Arthur 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). Warren Wiersbe said, "When God permits His children to go through the furnace, He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat. His loving heart knows how much and how long." That's the sovereignty of God in a nutshell.

There is a legend that goes like this. 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. The lad cannot remove the blindfold until he can feel the rays of the morning sun shining through the blindfold. And he must not cry out for help to anyone. He cannot tell the other boys of this experience because each lad must come into manhood on his own. He is considered to be a man if he meets those conditions. The boy is naturally terrified. He can hear all kinds of noises, wild beasts walk by, etc. Even if a storm comes up, he is not permitted to remove the blindfold and leave his post. It would be the only way he could be declared a man! Finally, after a horrific night, the sun appears and he removes his blindfold. It is then that he discovers his father sitting on the stump next to him. The boy's father has been at watch the entire night protecting his son from harm. The moral of the story is you are never alone. 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 our lives. When trouble comes, all we have to do is reach out to Him. If your sun has set, it will rise again. You may lie down at night with tears streaming down your face, but, Beloved, there are better times coming. One day God will pull back the shades of night and pin them with a star and open the door of the eternal morning and flood your world with the sunshine of His eternal love and glory. 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 Jesus if He was the Messiah? 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. However, it's okay to ask God why if it's with the desire to find His purpose so we might fall in line with His divine will and bring Him glory.

Section 5 – The Shunammite Woman

The story of the Shunammite woman is found in 2 Kings 4:8-37. One day Elisha (Israel's national prophet) went to Shunem and ran into a wealthy Gentile Shunammite woman who invited him to come to her home for a meal. Apparently she was a pretty good cook because whenever Elisha was in the area, he stopped by for a meal. As time went by, she suggested to her husband they make a small room on the roof of their home for Elisha (2 Kings 4: 9-10). He could come by, eat a meal, and then take a nap. Elisha was so appreciative he asked, "What can I do for you?" "She replied, 'I have a home among my people. I don't need anything'" (2 Kings 4:13, my paraphrase). Gehazi, Elisha's assistant said, "Well, she has no son and her husband is old" (2 Kings 4:14). That meant she would have no one to take care of her when her husband died. Elisha sent for the woman: "About this time next year," Elisha said, "you will hold a son in your arms" (2 Kings 4:16). You can see how deep her longing for a son was by her response: "No, my lord," she objected. "Don't mislead your servant, O man of God!" (2 Kings 4:16). The woman became pregnant and sure enough, the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son (2 Kings 4:17). The child grew. One day the boy went out to his father who was with the reapers in the field and complained about his head hurting. His father had a servant carry him to his mother. The boy died around noon sitting on his mother's lap (2 Kings 4:18-20). She took him up and laid him on Elisha's bed, had a servant saddle a donkey and set out to look for Elisha (2 Kings 4:22).

The Shunammite woman found the prophet at Mount Carmel. Seeing the woman coming in a hurried pace from a distance and realizing something was wrong, Elisha had Gehazi run ahead and ask if everything was okay. She told Gehazi that everything was alright but when she got to where Elisha was, she reached down and took hold of his feet (2 Kings 4:27). This was a sign of bitter distress in ancient times. Gehazi started to push her away but Elisha stopped him. "She is in bitter distress but the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me why," explains Elisha (2 Kings 4:27). The woman told Elisha what happened. Elisha handed Gehazi his staff and instructed Gehazi to tuck his cloak (long robe) under his belt and run as fast as he could and lay the staff on the boy's face (2 Kings 4:29). The woman refused to leave Elisha. She followed Elisha back to where the boy was (2 Kings 4:30). In the meantime, Gehazi had gotten no response from the boy when he placed the staff on the boy's face (2 Kings 4:31). When Elisha arrived, he found the boy lying dead on his bed (2 Kings 4: 32). "He went, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD. Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boys sneezed seven times and opened his eyes" (2 Kings 4:33-35). Elisha handed the boy back to the Shunammite woman alive (2 Kings 4:36). What is the point of that, you ask? The point is if God gives you a dream and brings life into it, shows up in it and it dies, maybe God is trying to find out what is more important to you-- the dream or Him! 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. Making people or ministry more important than God is idolatry. Idol worshippers have a predictable end and it's not good. God declares, "I will not yield my glory to another" (Isaiah 48:11). Loving God means we must avoid idolatry. 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 to her son 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 and since Elisha was God's representative to her, she refused to leave his side.

C.S. Lewis said, "He who has God plus many things has nothing more than he who has God alone." How true. While God is infinitely and infinitely capable of meeting our needs (Philippians 4:19), you can't add to Him. The individual who has God plus a nice home has nothing more than he who has God alone. Or he who has God with a new automobile is nothing more than he who has God without an automobile. He who has God, plus a healthy marriage, has nothing more than he who has God alone. He who has God and who has a ministry reaching millions of lives around the world has nothing more than he who has God alone. So if God gives you a dream, the dream comes to life and everything is going good and all of a sudden the dream dies, maybe God is trying to find out what is more important to you, your dream or Him? Once He determines that you may get back your dream. Or you may not get it back and have to live the rest of your life without it, but that will be okay because you have God. This should help you face a God you never learned in Sunday school. You say, "Why would God want us to let go of our dream?" Because anything we are unwilling to let go of is an idol and we are living in sin. Besides, we must be careful not to find our identity in our gifting, intense drive to do good works or even in our good works. Find your identity in Christ and your relationship with God (John 17:3). Some may be thinking, "Wait a minute. Aren't we supposed to do good works?" Sure, Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works..." "Well there you go," you say. Let's get busy!" I hear what you are saying but when you read the second half of Ephesians 2:10, you will discover that God had the good works He wanted you to do in mind before you were ever born. You don't have to think them up. You don't have to craft a vision paper. You don't have to try a bunch of stuff to see what works---you just have to listen to the internal voice of the Holy Spirit and follow your innate desires. You say, "What if I still don't know what my calling is?" Then wait on God! When people of great faith in God's Word aren't sure what God wants them to do, they don't do anything. They wait on God! That's a tough concept for us Americans, especially for us ministers, i.e., "What's the vision for your ministry; where do you want to be in five years? How big do you want this thing to get?" "Oh, big, real big." "Well, then let's put it together. Let's get busy."

I can't tell you how many times I've heard the word vision in church over my lifetime. God isn't asking us to come up with a vision. That's His job. We are a covenant people. We are not taught to be a people of vision but a people of *revelation*! Yes, I am very familiar with Proverbs 29:18 where it states, "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." When you use that translation of that

verse to support the vision for your ministry or church, you are misunderstanding what God meant. Who was the first person to have a vision in the New Testament? Peter in Acts 10:9-15. He saw a large sheet come down from heaven filled with all kinds of animals, some clean and some unclean, according to the Law. "Then a voice told him, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat'" (Acts 10:13), indicating he was to take the gospel to the Gentiles. You say, "Wait a minute. That's not a vision like what we mean today? That is more of a divine revelation." Exactly! What we have here is a linguistic issue. When we quote the verse "Where there is no vision, the people perish," we are quoting the Old King James translation, a translation that was completed long before the word vision ever popped up in any strategic planning book. A more accurate translation of Proverbs 29:18, like the New International translation, reads like this: "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law." The meaning is when the people of God don't have the Word of God, they do what is right in their own eyes. That is what we need to hear today. The speed of the moral decline in the American church is unprecedented in history. The divorce rate inside the church is identical to that of the world. Internet pornography is identical inside and outside the church. Because we have polluted and prostituted ourselves with other religions and idols, we live in a post-Christian/interfaith era where the politically-correct norm embraces all religions as pathways to God. As the result, gross sexual sins of immorality are now being accepted by those who go by the name of Christ. That should not be. The problem isn't we don't have enough visions or programs. The problem is we are doing what is right in our own eyes rather than following the biblical mandates outlined in God's Word. There are pastors who want to cast *their vision* and change the world as Noah did. What they fail to understand is that Noah's vision, or better yet, revelation, came with blueprints and everything. How old do you think Noah was when God gave him the blueprints for the Ark? He was "six hundred years old" (Genesis 6:22; 7:6)! Not bad for an old guy, huh? What do you think Noah was doing the first 500 years of his life? He was being totally consecrated to God (Genesis 6:9). "That's it", you ask? That's it exactly. Instead of trying to change the world, if we would just concentrate on walking with God and following His Word on a daily basis, the world would change. That's because the world doesn't learn about Christ by reading books, watching Christian movies or going to church. The world learns about Christ by watching Christians! Noah didn't spend a hundred years putting cypress wood together trying to build things in preparation for the Ark (i.e., "Hey, look I made a rowboat. Do you need one of those?"). No! Noah walked with God and waited on God. So when God needed someone He could depend on to build the Ark, He called on Noah, the one man who was spiritually prepared and who was listening. The Psalmist said, "As the deer pants for the streams of water, so my soul pants for you O God..." (Psalms 42:1). Notice he didn't say as my soul pants for the megachurch I hope to establish or the ministry I hope to grow. He said, "My soul pants for you, Oh God." The most important thing is not the work you can do for God but to make loving God the number one priority in your life (Matthew 6:33; Philippians 3:7-11). Do you dream of the work you can do for God? Do you carry ambition of changing the world in His name? While these are noble endeavors, they mean nothing without God. Waiting on God is so vital. The impact God has planned for us will not occur when we are pursuing impact. It occurs when we are pursuing God!

Section 6 – Accessing Grace during Times of Tribulations

There you have David, Hezekiah, Daniel and the Shunammite woman's worst day and the actions they took to survive. In this final section of our study we are going to examine the one essential ingredient found in each of these cases---God's grace. Each story brings out some aspect of the beauty of God's grace in finding hope for our own troubled situations. As we've already seen, God rarely removes His people from calamities that come to both believers and non-believers. Sometimes, the Lord exercises His sovereignty and intervenes in a miraculous way. Most of the time, however, God simply spreads a table in the presence of our enemies and gives us the needed grace to endure the hardship in order to bring Him greater glory (1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Peter 1:6-7; Psalms 23:5). Typically when we experience difficulties, we question our relationship with God. When we do that, it is easy to fall for one of the many false teachings concerning trials and tribulations that have been passed down from one church generation to another. Here are four of them.

1: The way to access God's grace during 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). Furthermore, confession followed by absolution by a priest is no substitute for divine forgiveness from God with its witness of the Spirit (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 10:10, 14).

2: The way in which you overcome tribulation is through positive confession. That is, when you experience some hardship, you 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! 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.

3: Give your way out of tribulation. For example, "If you will support this ministry, God will bless you." Wrong assumption! While we should be doing good deeds, doing them will not gain you favor with God (Ephesians 2:8; John 1:12; 3:3).

4: Suffering and sin are *always* connected. Wrong again! 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. 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 refutes this false assumption: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God may be revealed in him” (John 9:3). There are two important principles found in this passage. First, 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). Secondly, 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. Coming into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ is more important than being physically healed (John 8:24).

When the apostles speak of tribulation of faith in their writings they are not talking about tribulation of trials, rather *tribulation of faith* (1 Peter 1:3-7). There is a difference. *Tribulation of faith* is when we experience difficulties and are tempted to come out of “justified by faith” (Romans 5:1) and go back under “justification by works” (Galatians 5:4; law, doing something) as a means of accessing God’s grace. It is an antichrist doctrine to tell a believer in Christ the reason he/she is not healed or does not have some other blessing is because there is some sin in his/her life, there’s something he/she is not doing good enough or hard enough or even worse, they don’t have enough faith. Yes, we sow what we reap. Yes, we need to exercise faith. But as you saw in the beginning of this study, God’s people suffer for various reasons. Besides, if you are born of God’s Spirit (John 3:3, 6) the Holy Spirit lives in you to turn you back to God when you 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 its how you stay saved. According to Romans 1:17 and Romans 3:22, there is a righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. The righteousness Paul speaks of in these passages is not some moral superiority embodied in a person whose good behavior lays an obligation on God to reward him. Rather, it is given to those who acknowledge their fundamental dependence upon God, repent and come into the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is not something earned! It is a gift bestowed upon us by God when we declare Christ Jesus to be Lord of our life (Philippians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:21-4:25). While the righteousness of believers consists of being forgiven, justified and accepted by God through faith (Romans 4:5), it’s more than that. Our righteousness is actually Christ Jesus himself living within our innermost being (Philippians 1:20-21; Romans 8:10; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 3:4).

In the Old Testament, the Messiah (Christ) is referred to as the “righteous Branch” and “The Lord Our Righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:5-6). Christ’s righteousness is credited to us (Romans 3:22) based on our declaration that He is Lord (Romans 3:21-4:25; 10:9-10; 2 Corinthians 5:21). It is not something earned. It is God’s gift that enables us to access God’s grace and “approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may

receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). (Cross-reference 1 Corinthians 1:30); Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 10:35-36.) Through Christ indwelling, we become in Him “the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). See also Philippians 3:9.

Some may be thinking, “What about Paul’s statement in Philippians 2:12 where it says ‘to work out your salvation with fear and trembling’”? You have to read verse 13 to understand what Paul meant by that statement. Paul is *not* talking about using our works to justify our salvation. He is talking about *walking in sanctification and living out the grace of God* after we have been justified by faith in Jesus. What about what James said about “faith without works being dead” (James 2:17)? James is talking about faith in Christ that *produces* works, not works for justification purposes (self-justification). There is a vast difference. *Works of faith* are those done in the spirit of liberty, purely out of love and appreciation for what God has *already* done for us. Righteous faith works can only be done by those who are empowered by the Spirit and who have *already* been declared righteous (Romans 1:17; 3:22; Philippians 3:9).

Grace is Sufficient

Over the years, we have told people what they must do to get God to work on their behalf and nothing happened. We told sick people to say certain words or phrases to get God to work on their behalf. We call this a gospel but it is not a gospel at all. It is a heavy yoke of bondage that left many sincere believers absolutely devastated. When faith teachers teach on faith they usually teach in relationship to a person’s needs, telling believers how to apply faith in order to get from God what has already been given through Christ Jesus. All this is doing is subdividing faith. Although they were not consciously aware of it, they were teaching believers to switch to another faith. It is no longer just faith in Christ; it is now faith in health, faith for finances, faith for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, faith for the gifts of the Spirit, etc. People were taught how to be healed, how to prophesy, how to receive financial blessing, etc., instead of teaching them how to access righteousness through Christ and get into God’s grace. What they did was hand back to Satan the only tool he has to rule over people, salvation by works. Because when we try to muster up enough faith on our own to believe God for His promises, we automatically fall into self-righteousness and legalism. Self-righteousness is like a yardstick (ruler) with pride and guilt at the opposite ends. Pride says, “I am good enough on my own.” Guilt says, “I am not good enough even with Jesus.” Our strength (self-righteousness) is what is being measured when we say we can do it on our own. When we leave the realm of self-righteousness, we leave the emotions of pride and guilt behind. Humility looks to God for what it needs. Humility is not shocked to discover its own weaknesses, having learned to trust God’s strength. Nor do the humble take faith for granted, always drawing near to God, distrusting self.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:1-30. Paul is responding to some false apostles, possibly Jews from Palestine (Acts 6:1; Philippians 3:5), who were leading Christians at Corinth away from the gospel of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:4), and they were claiming to be superior to Paul (2 Corinthians 11:7-11). By many, Paul’s craft of tent-making (Acts 18:3) was

looked down on. Paul's personal presence was weak and unimpressive according to his critics (1 Corinthians 10:9-10). His speaking ability was even ridiculed by those who prided themselves on eloquence according to the standards of Greek rhetorical style (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). So Paul boasts not of his accomplishments but of his suffering for the cause of Christ. Listen to the strange assortment of things Paul rejoiced over in 2 Corinthians 12:10:

- ✓ Infirmities or weaknesses. The Greek literally means "physical weaknesses caused by sickness or bodily failure." It is the very thing we spend so much of our time, money and prayer seeking to avoid. It is the frailty of health that makes normal activities either impossible or difficult. Paul was basically saying, "When I am sick, then Christ can be strong in me." That's because we have to be totally dependent on God.
- ✓ Insults or reproaches. The Greek word means a strong springing PASTOR TEAS: I DIDN'T QUITE UNDERSTAND THE TWO PREVIOUS WORDS: "strong springing"? from insolence, an injury; affront, insult; inflicted by the violence of a tempest. It is the joy of being railed at, misunderstood, and wrongfully becoming the subject of the violent rage of another. What a strange thing to be thankful for. Why would such things be helpful? Because, like physical illness, they bring you to nothing. There is nothing in the natural realm you can do. Only a supernatural response will do (1 Peter 2:21-24).
- ✓ Necessities or hardships. These are calamities and distress imposed by circumstances or by law of duty regarding one's advantage, custom or argument.
- ✓ Persecutions involve the unjust treatment that comes when you stand for your faith and the world uses it against you.
- ✓ Distress or difficulties refer to dire calamity or extreme affliction. This is the end result of the other four. The word used here means for all intents and purposes, it's over. You are in a corner and there is no way out.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Paul's thorn was no superficial prickle. Phillips' translation says it was a "stabbing pain." Paul had pleaded "three times" with the Lord to remove this hindrance (2 Corinthians 12:8). Each time God said His grace was sufficient. The word three had a particular significance to the Jews. It meant continually. Instead of removing the hindrance, God simply enabled Paul to live with it. We don't like to hear that. We want instant healing; instant deliverance. Whatever the affliction Paul had to endure 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).

In 2 Corinthians 12:10, Paul also states, "For when I am weak, then I am strong." How can that be? It's because acknowledging our weaknesses and inabilities causes Christ's power of grace to be manifested within us. Grace is God's presence, favor, power and *enabling ability through Jesus Christ*. It is a force and a heavenly strength given to believers in Christ who accept their weaknesses and difficulties for the gospel's sake (Philippians 4:13). The greater our weaknesses and trials for Christ, the more grace God will give to accomplish His will. Because he acknowledged his weaknesses

and remained humble, Paul continually received grace upon grace from the Father to tell us about the grace of God.

Paul tells us in Philippians 3:3 to “put no confidence in the flesh.” The key has always been acknowledging our weakness and placing total dependency on God. 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 God’s grace. For it is out of our weaknesses that God speaks to us. Referring to those biblical characters that experienced severe testing, Hebrews 11:34 states, “(They) quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength...” Are you willing to turn your weaknesses 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. The only problem is that you are limiting the grace of God. But 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 waiting to do supernaturally what you cannot do naturally. You have two choices. You can chafe at your weaknesses, trials and hardships and cry out to be delivered. Or you can quietly submit to God and let Him give you the needed strength to endure. Paul said he considered “that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

Where most of us lose it spiritually is when we try to view life through our fleshly feelings and emotions. When we do that, it’s like the little boy trying to watch a parade through a knothole in a wooden fence. Can you imagine his view of what’s happening? How much can he see? When we look at people, issues and events through the eyes of the old nature (hole in the fence,) we only see bits and pieces of what is happening but never the whole picture. Viewing life from God’s perspective is like looking at the same parade from the Goodyear blimp, seeing the whole picture from beginning to end as one event. This not only helps you trust Jesus throughout it all, but it also helps you understand that anything that happens in this material world is temporal and passing anyway. Grace also helps you shift your perspective so problems become less significant and God’s greatness becomes more evident (Philippians 3:12-16). As comfortable as God wants us to be in life, we aren’t ready to face the future until we understand that regardless of what’s out there in terms of pain and suffering, God’s strength of grace is capable of handling it from within us. If you have Jesus, you have sufficient strength (grace) to handle anything Satan and life can throw at you. The message of the Bible is that our God reigns supreme over every other authority and power in the universe and absolutely nothing is going to happen to us which God is not aware of ahead of time. Jesus is not diminished by war, famine, disease or grief.

Watch out for Black Holes

When we encounter hard times, when we face the worst day of our lives, we must be careful not to become 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 in upon itself, it is creating a gravitational pull from which not even light can escape. These spooky phenomena that exist in outer space may well be parallels for humans who refuse to allow God to have His way in their lives. Strangely enough, from that context, the apostle Jude seems to make a kind of reference to black holes when he talks about those who pretend to be a part of the body of Christ but are in reality just serving self. He calls them “clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted---twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever,” says the apostle (Jude 12-13). These wandering stars that refuse to be a part of any other orbit but serve only themselves become doomed to the blackness of darkness forever. If we are not careful, our crisis can very easily become our entire universe. We want the whole world to stop and take notice of our situation. Of course it does not. The world goes on. On the other hand, when we come through hard times and are gloriously delivered from the worst day of our lives, we can be so elated with happiness that we can make the mistake of thinking that the whole world should be rejoicing. But funerals are not cancelled and the tears of those who are just now entering their worst day continue to be shed. Life goes on.

The spiritual implication is that we collapse in upon ourselves and become a black hole when we try to make self the center of our own personal universe. It is essential that we understand that we are not the center of the universe. God is! Everything revolves around Him and for Him. While God loves us and shares in our joys and sorrows, taking personal interest in our lives, our God does not build the universe around us. The only way to prevent orbiting around yourself and ending up a self-observed spiritually doomed black hole is to put Christ, not self, at the center of your personal universe. That is let your focus be on Christ, not self or the problem. Only God has enough substance to be the object of endless orbit. That is why we must build our lives around the Lord Jesus and Him alone.

Don't lose the Joy of the Lord

Compare Philippians 4:4-7 with 2 Corinthians 8:1-2. The Christians at Philippi had two opposites going for them. They were having a lot of trouble and experiencing overflowing joy at the same time. In their extreme poverty they 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. You who feel like you have arrived need to read 1 Corinthians 4:8-13. Some at Corinth boasted of their wisdom, superior knowledge and spiritual gifting. Paul told them that the true life of a faithful believer is the way of the Cross and that suffering must precede glory (cross-reference Romans 8:17). In 2 Corinthians 4:10-11, Paul is expanding on the theme of *power through weakness* to include life through death. His missionary career was both stressful and dangerous, not to mention he could suffer martyrdom at any time. Of course, Paul was only following the pattern Christ left us (1 Corinthians 15:31; Galatians 6:17). In the midst of your perils you too can experience the joy of the

Lord. If the devil cannot steal your joy, he cannot change your focus from God, thus unable to defeat you. At this point of your suffering God doesn't want you to do anything for Him; instead He wants to do something *through you* (Ephesians 6:10). He wants to give you joy and help you tap into the power of the Holy Spirit and the 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 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). Furthermore, what is actually in the heart is now empowered by the Holy Spirit. The result is more joy. The moment you begin encouraging yourself in the Lord and recover your joy, you have placed yourself on a course of recovery. The way to move from weeping into victory is to become immersed in the Lord Jesus and the grace of God. This is an essential step if you hope to recover your joy---not the shallow, volatile feeling of happiness but deep abiding joy which can be present even in the midst of extreme sorrow. 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 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 excessive grief, lingering suffering and depression, thereby reducing you to weakness. This is his primary strategy. However, there is nothing that says you have to give your joy up! There is strength found in the joy of just knowing Christ as your personal Savior (Romans 8). The believer who can recover 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).

Give thanks in all Circumstances

First Thessalonians 5:18, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus." How can that be? That's because from God's perspective, there's always something for which to be joyful and thankful. You say, "Come on! You have to be kidding! Let me tell you my story. I have a terrible job, a mean boss, don't make enough money to pay my bills and you tell me to be joyful and give thanks? Besides, I don't even feel like being joyful. I feel like giving up." If that is your thinking, you have missed what Paul said. *WHERE* do you give thanks? "In all circumstances" - not because of them! Paul is not saying give thanks for the bad things that happen to you, but in spite of them or in the midst of them, give thanks. That you can do. *WHEN do you give thanks?* You give it "*In all circumstances.*" *There is no escape clause here.* It doesn't say in almost all circumstances. If it were, terrorists flying commercial aircraft, loaded with passengers, into the World Trade Center buildings in New York City and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 would have been an exception. It wasn't! When Paul used the phrase "in all circumstances," he's saying that there is no circumstance that can keep you from finding something to be thankful for. *WHAT* do you give thanks for? You sure don't give thanks for the evil thing that just happened? Satan, not God,

is responsible for that. Paul isn't saying give thanks for the evil, but you can give thanks for who God is and what God can accomplish through the disaster (Romans 8:28-39; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). From God's perspective, every born again believer in Christ has something to be thankful for! Even if you lost your life, you would still be better off than the wealthiest man on earth who doesn't know Christ as Lord and Savior. *HOW* do you give thanks? "You give thanks in all circumstances..." (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

To give thanks means you have a grateful spirit or attitude and are willing to express gratitude regardless of what is happening to you. God is not cruel. He would not ask you to do something He in you is not both willing and able to do (Philippians 4:13). You say, "Let me see if I get you right. On my way to work, a driver who is on his cell phone runs me off the road, causing me to hit a telephone pole that destroys my car. I am in an ambulance in agonizing pain and on my way to dollar bill hospital, and you say, 'be thankful?'" No, I didn't say that. The Holy Spirit said that through the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:18. Ask yourself, "What is God's perspective on a situation like this?"

- Your body is God's and it's temporary. He can do whatever He wants with it. By the way, He has one waiting for you that's totally indestructible. The one you now live in isn't.
- Your finances are temporal. God can do with them as He wishes. There are incorruptible treasures waiting for you in heaven. These aren't.
- God isn't after pleasure and that's good, for there is nothing pleasurable about the bad thing that just happened to you.
- God isn't after treasure and that's good, because the guy who hit you can't even spell insurance, let alone have any.

What is God after? He is after *demonstration, transformation and multiplication*. He desires to demonstrate His character through you. He wants to transform you so you can have a heart like His Son. God wants to multiply His kingdom through you so those around you can get to know Him by the way you hold up under the trial as His representative (ambassador). *And He is succeeding!* In fact, it's God's big break. Now He can demonstrate His grace, patience and love to the staff at the hospital through one of His children. If you've been asking God to touch others whom you normally wouldn't see, He just gave you that opportunity. Ask Him for the grace to forget your pain, look at the nurses and doctors who are trying to help you, express your gratitude for their help and take advantage of the opportunity to demonstrate Christ's love and patience in front of them. Is that natural? No! It's supernatural! If it were natural, you wouldn't need God to help you do it. The issue is not do we have something to be thankful for in adverse circumstances, but are we willing to praise God in spite of them? If you have a personal relationship with Christ, you have a lot to give thanks for regardless of what happens to you. After all, your name has been written down in God's divine ledger of the redeemed, the book of life (Revelation 3:5:20:12). You can't get any better than that! But if you still don't feel you can't give thanks during times of trouble, try this. First, identify the specific characteristic of God that is needed to get you through the situation and thank God for that characteristic. For that is what God is offering you at the time. I have applied this principle during time of trouble and can attest to the fact it

works. There will never be an incident or situation in your life that does not illustrate at least one aspect of the character of God of *which you need* in order to endure the ordeal and should be thankful for. Here are some examples:

- In the midst of loneliness, thank God for His fellowship and closeness! (He said, “I will never leave you or forsake you” - Hebrews 13:5).
- In the midst of spiritual warfare, thank God for His power and protection! The battle that really counts was won on your behalf on Calvary some two thousand years ago (Romans 4:12-21; Colossians 2:14-15; Hebrews 2:14).
- In the midst of failure, thank God for His mercy and forgiveness. Our finite minds cannot even conceive the depth of His forgiveness. He has allowed us to need it, so we can discover more of Him by giving thanks.
- In the midst of a time of great decision, thank God for His wisdom and ask Him to guide you. He knows; He understands; He has a plan. Thank Him for that plan, whether you understand it or not. He will reveal it to you when the time is right. See Deuteronomy 29:29.
- In the midst of a great trial, thank God for His grace that will enable you to be the man or woman of God you need to be to show the world that Jesus lives in you.
- In the midst of persecution for Christ’s sake, thank God for His love that can help you love your enemies, so you will not be empty handed when God’s rewards are being given out at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

If you are able to identify that part of God’s nature that is being revealed to you or needed to get you through the worst day of your life and thank Him for that characteristic, you’ll move into the most holy place, the center of the heart of God. Having entered, you’ll discover a peace and a meaning to what you’re experiencing and God’s grace to endure the hardship. What you thought and feared through the eyes of the natural person - the flesh - will turn out to be nothing at all. It will also help you escape from the prison house of despair and move you into a new realm of spiritual heights that enables you to give thanks. So, the first principle in overcoming a trial or hardship is to identify the specific characteristic of God that needs to be manifested in you at the time and thank Him for it. For, that is the specific character of God that is being offered you through this trial. The second step is to identify what God is trying to accomplish through you by allowing you to experience what you are experiencing. I can tell you for certainty God is after *demonstration*, *transformation* and *multiplication*. He wants to demonstrate his power and grace to a fallen world, transform you so you can have a heart like His Son and multiply His kingdom through you so those around you can get to know Him by the way you hold up under the trial (Romans 8:28).

Sometimes before God gives us what we want, He tests us to see if what we say we want is really what we really need. Then He lovingly steps back to see if we really know how to be thankful. This principle is bought out in Philippians chapter one where Paul doesn’t just thank God *in* his circumstances; he thanks God for them. When Paul wrote that letter he was chained to a palace guard in Rome not knowing if he would be released or have his head cut off. Yet, the apostle says, “Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that

I am in chains for Christ” (Philippians 1:12-13). Wow! Paul saw his “chains” (imprisonment) as a blessing, not a curse. He was reaching a unique group of people whom he would never have been able to reach in any other way. He was reaching the elite Imperial Palace Guards, the “marines” of ancient Rome. Palace guards were a special class of Roman soldiers. They were the Emperor’s personal bodyguards who also guarded imperial prisoners such as Paul. In addition, how Paul was conducting himself during his incarceration was encouraging other Christians to courageously speak out for Christ in face of persecution (Philippians 1:14). More importantly, Christ was being preached, even though there were legalists fighting Paul’s justification by faith doctrine (Philippians 1:15-18). So Paul had a number of reasons to rejoice and give thanks and so do we when trouble comes knocking on our heart’s door.

Stay on course and determine to finish strong

Max Lucado tells this story about one of his golf games with some fellow ministers. “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 tress?’ 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. The same can be said about life. Life is tough enough as it is. It's even tougher when we're headed in the wrong direction" (Max Lucado's book *Just Like Jesus*; pp-89-91).

Paul states in Philippians 3:13-14, "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. The analogy is that of a runner on the course straining every muscle as he/she runs toward the goal, his/her hand stretched out to grasp it.

Compare Hebrews 3:12-19 with Hebrews 12:1-3. The word race in Hebrews 12:1 comes from the Greek word *agon*. It 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. 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, physical illness, or the kind of blow that Ziklag delivers (1 Samuel 29). Whatever the reason, they are no longer in the race. Oh, they may still come to church but their hearts are not in it. 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.

Read 2 Timothy 4:6-8. Staying on course and finishing strong is an extremely important mindset for the Christian. Here, Paul compares the Christian life to various athletic contests of his day. Of all the sporting events, the winner of the 26-mile marathon received the highest honors. Paul compares his loyalty to Christ to that event. He says in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I've stayed on my feet and competed well in the great contest of life. I have finished the race" (my paraphrase). Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:24-25, "I have not been disqualified."

The apostle Paul makes a truly remarkable statement in 1 Corinthians 8:3: "But the man who loves God is known by God." Is it possible for someone to be unknown to God? Apparently! Jesus declares that in the final judgment some will be told, "I never

knew you" (Matthew 7:23). Ultimately, God will be known only to those who love Him and long to be with Him. Christ said to the church at Ephesus, "Yet I hold this against you; you have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place" (Revelation 2:4-5). The Lord is speaking to His Church here! He's not talking to unbelievers. He's saying that if the backslidden Christians at Ephesus stubbornly refused to repent and turn back to Christ, He would no longer be in their midst. That's scary! But listen to what the Lord said to the suffering, yet faithful church, at Smyrna: "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer... Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). He said to the church in Philadelphia: "I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (Revelation 3:11). The Greek gives two words for crown: *diadema* (a crown for royalty, kings, etc.) and *stephananos* (victor's wreath). *Stephanos* is used here. In order to receive our crown of victory we must cross the finish line, however. That requires us to "fix our eyes on Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). When our heart becomes weary and discouraged, we need to wrap ourselves in the trailing robe of His majesty, the Lord Jesus and let Him strengthen us by His Spirit to finish our race for eternal life.

A distinctive mark of God's people is that they do not feel at home in this world but looking forward to their heavenly home (2 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 11:13-16). The lake of fire must somehow be the place where God discards anything and anyone who is not made new (Revelation 20:14-18). But everything God knows and everything that loves God will be made beautiful. This really is the meaning of God's promise to create a new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:1-4). God promised that there would be a perpetual inheritance of the earth by the human race (Isaiah 45:18; Matthew 5:5). A new earth is in fulfillment of that promise. What is interesting is that John doesn't give us any details in Revelation 21:1 concerning the new earth (its size, etc.) or the new heaven---only that they are new. That's because John's focus is on the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9-22:5, the same as Isaiah 65:17-19). Why the New Jerusalem? It's the eternal abode of Christ's redeemed. The New Jerusalem is not heaven. Revelation 22:1 states emphatically, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth." Revelation 22:10 supports this fact. The New Jerusalem coming down out of the heaven is in fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus in John 14:2, "I go to prepare a place for you." The Lord did not go to prepare a house or a building; He went to prepare a city. The heavenly Jerusalem is that city. Abraham looked for this city because he knew that the earthly land of promise was not the end of his eternal journey (Hebrews 11:9-10).

When Paul mailed his first letter to Timothy, he might as well have boxed up a pair of knee-high rubber boots and sent them along in the package. Timid by temperament, Timothy had to wade into the swamp and wrestle a tag-team of alligators. He had to deal with false doctrines, endless controversies, petty power struggles, etc. Paul knew a glimpse of the King and His Kingdom was needed to get Timothy back in the race and run with enthusiasm. So he said to his spiritual son, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Timothy 1:17). Paul was saying, "Ah, Timothy the enemy is so subtle. People can be inconsiderate.

The world has become so corrupt. But look up. Can you see Him? Can you push all this stuff to one side for a minute and get a glimpse of King Jesus? Can you forget about the sermon and the board meeting and that cranky elder and feast your eyes on the King?"

A little later in the same letter it happened again. This time Paul is talking about money issues, church fights over some self-serving prosperity doctrine, and attitudes of greed, suspicion and envy. He senses though the Spirit that his young friend needed another glimpse of Jesus. So, under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul writes: "Listen, the material things that trip and tangle so many of God's people will all shrivel like dried grass in the flames of His coming. He's the King! Timothy, imagine an ocean of light coming down on you; light so bright it drives the sight from your eyes. I caught a glimpse of it on that Damascus highway and it knocked me to the ground. Oh, the splendor, might and power of Jesus, Timothy. Praise Him!" (1 Timothy 6:14-16; my paraphrase). The prophet Jeremiah caught a glimpse of King Jesus in His splendor when he wrote, "No one is like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is mighty in power. Who should not revere you, O King of the nations? This is your due. Among all the wise men of the nations and in all their kingdoms, there is no one like you" (Jeremiah 10:6-7).

Today the weak are overpowered by the strong; the innocent are preyed upon by the depraved; helpless unborn babies are savagely pulled out of their mother's wombs before they can draw their first breath, etc. The world groans under the weight of it all. It will not always be so. Someone is coming who will change all that. Signs of His return are already on the horizon. The end time clouds are already gathering, proclaiming the King is coming. This time our Lord will not be humiliated or scorned. He comes to set things in proper order on this planet when He returns. John, exiled on Patmos for refusing to worship an unworthy Roman emperor, looked up from his imprisonment and gave us this description of our Lord: "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war... On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Revelation 19:11-16). If you have made Jesus Savior and Lord of your life, you are on the winning side. Furthermore, you have a destiny and an anointing to fulfill in life. Don't let the devil, legalists or hardships of life take it from you. Let God rescue you from empty religion. There are so many people who die sad and defeated. That's not God's way. Whatever you do, finish your race for eternal life victoriously. It's a must if you hope to live eternally with King Jesus.

Determine to make God a beautiful tapestry of grace.

Your life is a story that is to be told in the tapestry. 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. King Jesus wants to decorate His kingdom with tapestries of grace telling the life stories of those whom He has redeemed. God the Holy Spirit is the artist and weaver and the maker of those tapestries. There are two sides to a tapestry; the back, where it is being

created, and the front which tells the complete story. The artist creating the tapestry upon the loom works from the *back* of the tapestry. The front of the tapestry is the finished story, while the back of the tapestry is the story as it is being created. Another way to view it is the back of your tapestry is your story *in the present moment*. The back is a mess of loose ends, tangled knots, muted colors, and general confusion. The front or finished side of the tapestry tells a beautiful story that makes perfect sense, while the back of the tapestry is a confusing and tangled mess that doesn't make any sense at all, at least at the moment. Both sides use the same threads, but they produce 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 the beautiful picture and a work of art. It will all be beautiful and everything will make 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, broken beyond repair. But never forget that the Creator is sitting at the loom of your life. Each of us is to surrender our lives over to His creative skill. Romans 8:28 speaks of 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 God (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 (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 it tells a beautiful story of His 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 isn't trying to make us happy; He is trying to redeem us and make us holy. Holiness is not only what God gives us believers, but what we manifest that God has given us. The New Jerusalem will be filled with tapestries of God's grace, the redeemed.

Conclusion

As we have already seen, 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 are you, God? I have been following the rules, serving and doing the right things. Now look at what happened." Some are tempted to even say, "I am not going to believe in a God who would allow something like this to happen to His people." Pagans deserve it, we think. What we need to understand is that if God only allows evil people to experience trouble, in order to avert hard times everyone would run to Him and embrace the religion He offers and gladly pay the premium on the insurance policy by whatever good works or deeds He requires. But the Bible is more honest than that. It describes life the way it really is--- that good people and evil people alike suffer. Bad things just seem more noteworthy when it happens to us.

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. These are the kinds of losses that can seem impossible to recover from, but you "can do all things through Him who gives [you] strength" (Philippians 4:13). There is recovery. There is a grace that flows from the Cross to bring healing and restoration to your soul. The question is, will you accept God's recovery plan and speak outlandish words of faith or will you become discouraged, bitter and defeated? The decision is yours, not God's. God has already paid the ultimate price on Calvary and rose from the dead for your recovery. Believe 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! 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. I can tell you with complete certainty that God's plan for you is to accept His Son, Jesus, as your personal Savior and live a life worthy of Christ's death on the cross so you can one day enter the eternal kingdom of God and reign with Christ throughout eternity.

Let me leave you with this story. 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 discarding meaningless "treasures," 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. Some will die as a result of an illness; some as a result of a plane crash; some as a result of an automobile accident; some as a result of a fire in their home or at work, etc. No one knows if *this day* will be the last day of his or her life on earth. That is why we need to live as if it were. Paul did not know 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!

Questionnaire

1: The writer presents nine reasons why good people suffer. Which of these, if any, do you believe affect you?

2: What did you learn from how David handled his worst day?

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. We learn from the Shunammite Woman (2 Kings 4:8-37) that God does not show favoritism but helps all who will trust Him. ___True ___False

11. If God gives you a dream, the dream comes to life, God shows up and everything is going good and all of a sudden the dream dies, maybe God is trying to find out what is more important to you, your dream or Him? ___True ___False

12. 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.

13: The writer stated, "Grace only begins to function when man can't." What do you believe he meant by that statement?

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

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

16: Did the study help you? If so, in what way? Please submit your answer to dguthmuller@nicevilleag.com. We would appreciate your feedback.

Answer 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: Answers given in study: (1) Suffering comes from living in a fallen world, where calamities and consequences of sin are common to everyone; (2) suffering comes as a result of the universal law of sowing and reaping; (3) sometimes suffering comes our way out of divine discipline; (4) it is through suffering that God develops character; (5) Hardship and suffering enable us to empathize and give comfort to other believers who might be going through similar trials and tribulations; (6) when properly responded to, unjust suffering allows us to lay up treasures in heaven; (7) suffering separates truly dedicated followers of Christ from half-hearted believers; (8) suffering comes from living in a fallen world where evil people rule; (9) sometimes God’s servants suffer because of divine selection.

2: There are numerous lessons learned from how David handled his disastrous situation: (1) immediately turn to God; don’t be so quick to give up; always trust God; get into the Bible and become encouraged; while we may not always see the hand of God working behind the scene, it is; you can recover from a disastrous situation, etc.

3: T

4: d

5: T

6: T

7: That God is superintending over His creation.

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: T

12: e

13. The stronger a person determines themselves to be independent of God, the less grace they will be able to receive. Another way to say it is, the more a person believes he/she deserves God’s blessings, the less they would be able to appropriate it. The

key has always been total dependency on God and acknowledging our weakness.

As long as we think we can, we can't.

14: If you are going to brag, brag about something eternal, suffering for Christ's sake. The point of Paul's rejoicing is we are giving sufficient strength to endure whatever God has called upon us to endure, provided we acknowledge our weaknesses and depend on God for strength to endure.

15: Live in such a way 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.

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