

GLENNA SALSURY

More
Heavenly
Treasures

Encouragement



*Experiencing the
Transformational
Truth of God's
Sovereign Grace
and Eternal
Purpose*

More Heavenly Treasures

*Experiencing the
Transformational
Truth of God's
Sovereign Grace
and Eternal
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GLENN A SALS BURY



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Great Books, Defined.

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To the faithfulness of God's Spirit in anointing His Word to my heart and life.

To the unfailing love of Jesus Christ, Who continually draws me to Himself.

To the sovereign purpose of the Father, Who sent the Son into the world to seek those whom He loved; I am grateful to be one of those recipients of unconditional, electing grace.

And to my family, all of whom have been called into His family, and whose unconditional love remains the joy of my earthly experience.

Preface



So, then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

—Romans 10:17

HOW OFTEN WE long to have greater faith! Yet I find it easy to forget that the only Source of power is the living Word of God. Christ Himself is alive to us in His Word. We cannot hear Truth unless the Spirit anoints our ears to hear. And the only Truth in the universe is the Word of God.

As the world scene continues to grow darker, I believe our greatest comfort rests in hiding God's Word in our hearts and lives. But the *earth dwellers*, those who do not know Christ (though they may be religious), struggle desperately and in vain to find human, earthly solutions to their dire situations (Revelation 13:12–14). The Lord Himself described the days of worldwide turmoil and *distress* that will precede His return to earth: "For there shall be great *distress* in the land...and upon the earth *distress* of nations, with perplexity...Men's hearts failing

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them for fear...” (Luke 21:23, 25, 26, emphasis mine). King David, in the midst of his circumstances wrote, “In my distress I called upon the Lord, And cried unto my God: He heard my voice out of His temple...” (Psalm 18:6). Believers know the One Solution to dire situations!

The Word of God reveals the character of the Lord to us. We discover His unconditional love, the riches of His grace, His sovereign power, and His continual faithfulness. The Lord draws us to Himself through His Word. We learn to trust Him; we begin to *hear* His voice.

Yet there are very few believers who are discovering or hearing the foundational, doctrinal truths that produce transformational living in Christ. The Word of God is often overshadowed by programs and worldly enticements to gain a crowd. *Nothing* has the power to produce faith and a joy-filled life except the Word of God. Christ Alone, the living Word of God, is “the Author and Finisher” of faith (Hebrews 12:2).

The greatest gift the Lord can give us is the revelation of Who He is. Therein lies salvation. Yet He is infinite; He is God. He has revealed Himself in His fullness in the written Word. And it is this Truth that sustains us.

I have written this second book of “treasures” because God has given me a passion to share the riches of His Book. I continue to be lifted above my own distresses, earthly preoccupations, and personal challenges by the transforming truths that are hidden in that Book.

May your own heart and life be enriched beyond measure as you meditate on the pages that follow.

Resting in His Grace,
Glenna

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Section Two

Encouragement

*Now unto Him That is able to keep you from falling,
and to present you faultless before the presence of His
glory with exceeding joy...*

—Jude 24



Chapter 30

Light in the Lord



For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.

—Ephesians 5:8

THIS PASSAGE FROM the Word of God announces that as believers we once were in blindness, in spiritual darkness. But now, having been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, we *are* light! Notice that the scripture does *not* say we are *in* the light. Rather, it says we *are* light. Because we have received Christ, the Light of the world, we are light. The Greek word for *light* in this passage is *phos*, and it means absolute or underived light. The Greek word *phoster* means a light-giver or a light-bearer. However, in this passage we are described as *phos*, absolute light shining in darkness.

Paul describes believers as those whom the Father made fit “to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light”

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(Colossians 1:12). We are shareholders in the peculiar light that is ultimately referencing the Light of the world.

So, are we aware of being light? The Word tells us that “the whole world lieth in wickedness” or darkness, reigned over by the “rulers of the darkness” (1 John 5:19; Ephesians 6:12). This earth is under the control of Satan, the prince of darkness, the god of this world. Satan, we read, has “blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ...should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Here the word for “light” is *photismos* and means an *illumination* or a *shining*. As believers, we are *shining* in the darkness. We have this treasure, the Light, in our earthen vessels. We literally *shine* wherever we walk. This is why the Lord says, “Ye are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14).

Interestingly, the Lord reigns over Satan, even though He has given Satan permission to have power over the world. And the Lord instructed us as believers to let our light shine among men. He also told us *why* we should let our light shine: so “that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

When we look at Matthew 5:16, two questions may come to mind. First, what kind of “good works” might we do? And if *we* do the good works, why does *God* get the glory?

Peter gives us instruction on this topic. He says, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood...that ye should shew forth the praises of Him Who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” And he says that it is when others behold our good works that they will “glorify God” on the day of His return (1 Peter 2:9, 12). Once again, the purpose of *our* good works is to glorify *God*.

Light in the Lord

So, what good works are we to do? The answer is found in Ephesians 2:10. The *good works* believers will do are those that have been uniquely, individually ordained for them. Who *ordained* that we walk in these specific good works? God. Who accomplished these ordained works? “It is God Which worketh in you both to will and to do, of His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). And if our good works are ordained by God and accomplished by Him, who will get the glory? God!

These are encouraging truths for us. We are light; we have been delivered out of darkness by the Father (Colossians 1:13). He is glorifying Himself by shining in us through the good works He has designed to bring glory to Himself. And we are privileged partakers in this great work of His.

Father, we praise You for the privilege of shining. We praise You for deliverance from darkness. We rejoice in the knowledge that You will accomplish Your good works in us.

Chapter 31

Rest with Us



And to you who are troubled rest with us...

—2 Thessalonians 1:7

ARE YOU TROUBLED about some circumstance or situation in your life? The Greek word for “troubled” comes from the word *thlibo*, and it means to be *afflicted*. Most of us can relate to being troubled or afflicted in our life experiences.

The Thessalonians were being persecuted for their faith. Paul encouraged them to rest in the fact that God eventually would afflict those unbelievers who were troubling (afflicting) them. He recognized, empathetically, that they were enduring persecutions and tribulations. The Greek word for “tribulation” is *thlipsis* and comes from the same root word for *troubles*. We know from personal experiences that afflictions can come from a variety of sources and situations.

Why did Paul suggest that we can *rest* in the midst of our troubles or afflictions? And in what exactly are we to *rest*? The

answer to this *why* and *what* is found in Romans, chapter eight. There Paul reminded the Christians in Rome that because God is for us, no one can be against us. He pointed out that since God gave up His own Son on our behalf, He is certain to “freely give us *all* things.”

Further, the apostle assured the Roman believers that *nothing* could separate them from the love of God. No one and no circumstance can separate believers from His love—no tribulation (affliction of any kind) or distress or persecution or death or life or angels...nor things presently occurring, nor things to come, nor any creature, can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38–39). This is the basis for our daring to *rest*. The Lord loves us so completely and so unconditionally that nothing, absolutely nothing, can cause Him to love us less or cause Him to cease from loving us totally and fully. Hallelujah! What an incredible truth for us to grasp.

The Greek word for “rest” is *anesis*. It is used in some interesting ways in Scripture. In Acts 24:23 we read that Felix “commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have *liberty*” (emphasis mine) so that his friends could be with him. The word used for “liberty” is *anesis*. So *rest* includes the concept of being *free*. When we *rest* in God’s love, we experience *freedom* from fear and worry.

Paul wrote that he had “no rest” in his spirit when he arrived in Troas. He could not find Titus, his fellow-laborer in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:13). In this situation, Paul experienced the affliction of worry or loneliness. In 2 Corinthians 7:5 he again said he had “no rest” in the flesh because of all the afflictions he had suffered. He said, “We were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.” And

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then he continued, “Nevertheless God That comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (2 Corinthians 7:6). Apparently Paul *learned* to rest in the Lord’s love by walking through afflictions and fears and then seeing the ultimate demonstration of God’s endless love. In fact, Paul later wrote, “I have *learned* in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11, emphasis mine). It is encouraging to realize that Paul had to *learn* to rest in the Lord’s love and faithfulness.

Christ Himself clearly invites us to Himself, to His love, if we want to find true rest as believers. He says in Matthew 11:28, 29, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I *will* give you rest...Ye *shall* find rest unto your souls” (emphasis mine).

The Lord promises to give us rest—freedom from our worry and our afflictions. We are to rest in His love for us, in the knowledge that He loves us and is working all things together for our good (Romans 8:28).

Father, we praise You for Your unending love for us. Give us the ability to comprehend the fact that nothing can separate us from You.

Chapter 32

*Don't Even Think
About It!*



Take therefore no thought for the morrow...Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

—Matthew 6:34

THE LORD JESUS, again and again, exhorts believers to let go of all our anxiety about the issues of living daily in the world. But how is that really possible? And what is the Lord really wanting us to grasp?

In His Sermon on the Mount, it seems like the Lord was contrasting the life experiences of earth dwellers with the call on the lives of believers. He stated clearly that there are two kinds of people: those who serve the things of this world and those who serve God (Matthew 6:24). The Greek word for “serve” is *douleuo*, and it means to be *enslaved to* or *in bondage* to someone or something. The Lord seems to have been pointing out that He is the Master of those who know Him. We are His servants, owned by Him!

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Matthew 6:24 says, “No man can serve two masters.” The apostle Paul affirmed this. He described unbelievers as “slaves [or servants] of sin” and believers as “slaves [or servants] of righteousness” (Romans 6:16–18). You cannot belong to two different masters. You are owned by one or the other. And slaves do not have a choice about who owns them! As believers, we are those who have been bought with a price, the shed blood of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:20). He has set us free from the slavery of sin (1 Cor. 7:22, 23; John 8:32), and we belong to Him. He owns us!

As believers, we have a heavenly Father who knows our needs and promises to meet them (Matthew 6:26, 32). This is *why* we are free to “take no thought” for tomorrow. Masters take care of their slaves.

The Lord used an extreme example to illustrate why worry and anxiety are useless. He said, “Which of you by *taking thought* can add one cubit unto his stature?” (Matthew 6:27, emphasis mine). You can’t grow an inch taller by worrying about how tall you are! The Lord says that we are *powerless* to change His plan or improve our circumstances by worrying over the details in our lives!

Then, in case we are tempted to say, “Well, we can’t just sit here and do nothing about our problems,” Christ pointed out that that is exactly the way the birds and the flowers live. Even though they have nothing to do with the sowing and reaping that produces their food, the Father feeds the birds (Matthew 6:26). And the lilies of the field are clothed in beauty, even though they do nothing to “spin” their garments (Matthew 6:28).

The Lord is calling us to trust the Father for all of our needs. He knows all of our needs. He is aware of our concerns and wants us to trust His provision in every area of our lives. Again

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and again the Lord encourages us to give up our anxiety and worry: “Take no thought for your life...why take ye thought?... Take no thought saying, What shall we eat...Take therefore no thought for the morrow” (Matthew 6:25, 28, 31, 34). What a relief it would be if we could give up our anxieties!

The apostle Paul was one who certainly had an abundance of things to worry about each day. He constantly was being persecuted, beaten, and imprisoned, and he even was stoned and shipwrecked on an island. Yet his exhortation to believers is, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing...let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6, 7).

In the world, day after day, we are faced with an onslaught of concerns. We are continually tempted to worry, to wonder, and to wake in the night with the mental and emotional turmoil about our lives and our circumstances. Perhaps we need to be reminded once again to go to the Father and pour out our hearts, to lay before Him all of our mental and emotional agonies. He knows our every concern. We are His beloved. As Matthew 6:26 says, “Your heavenly Father feedeth [the birds]. Are ye not much better than they?”

Father in heaven, by Your Spirit, help us to grasp the truth that You are faithful to meet all of our needs. Help us to take every thought, every worry, every anxiety and bring them into captivity “to the obedience of Christ,” presenting ourselves at Your throne of grace (2 Cor. 10:5).

Chapter 33

God's Strange Plans



Jesus answered them, “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?”

—John 6:70

THE LORD JESUS Christ made it quite clear, again and again, that He was sovereignly in charge of the events that unfolded during His time on the earth. He explained to His disciples, “Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit...” (John 15:16). The Lord also was aware of His future and the purpose of His coming to earth. In addition, He knew the heart of a man and understood that “man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

In His conversation with the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus explained Who He is: “I am that bread of life...if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is My flesh...” (John 6:48, 51). But many of these Jews rejected

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Christ's statements, and the Lord said, "'But there are some of you that believe not.' For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him" (John 6:64).

Isn't it puzzling that the Lord, who could read hearts, would intentionally choose Judas Iscariot as one of the twelve disciples, knowing Judas would betray Him? Jesus said, "'Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?' He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon; for he it was that should betray Him, being one of the twelve" (John 6:70, 71).

The apostle Peter recognized the reality of God's sovereign, perfect plan in all of this. After the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, Peter preached to the men of Israel. He explained that they were *guilty* while carrying out God's sovereign plan. He said that Christ, "being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). The New Living Translation reads, "But you followed God's prearranged plan. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to the cross and murdered him."

The mystery in all of this is best seen in the Lord's own words as He described His coming betrayal by Judas. In John chapter thirteen we read of the disciples being gathered at the Last Supper. Christ handed Judas the dipped bread as a sign of who the betrayer was and told him to do what he *needed* to do quickly. Then we read, "And after the sop Satan entered into him" (John 13:27). At this juncture, Judas left the table and Jesus announced, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him" (John 13:31). All of this unfolded in order

that the Son of Man would be glorified and that God the Father would be glorified in Jesus' crucifixion!

The Word of God teaches us this same truth in the story of Lazarus' death. Jesus loved Lazarus. He knew Lazarus was sick, and yet He waited until Lazarus had died before He went to him. And Christ announced to His disciples that this entire event was "for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby" (John 11:4).

So what is the message the Lord is giving us about His glory? The answer: God the Father and the Son are glorified by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Judas had to betray Jesus for His death to occur. And this is true for Lazarus also; his death and resurrection were a testimony to the power of Christ to produce life out of death! Sin and death were defeated in the resurrection. And this victory over sin and death is *revealed* in the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

Furthermore, the mystery of all of this includes the fact that we as believers are somehow involved in this glory. The apostle Paul says, "For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives" (Romans 6:4 NLT).

The answer to the mystery of the Lord's selection of Judas is revealed in the ultimate purpose God had planned before the world began. Yet, on the surface, the selection of Judas appears to be a horrible mistake. Truly, God's ways are not our ways. It is in knowing this that we dare to believe that *all* things work together for the good of those who love God, "who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

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Do you have some puzzling aspects of your life? Are there some things that appear to be negative or sinful or just plain senseless from your perspective? The Word of God exhorts us to give thanks in everything (1 Thessalonians 5:18) and to believe that everything in our lives is working for our good and His glory (Romans 8:28).

Lord, give us the mind of Your Spirit that we may see every aspect of our lives as designed for Your glory and our highest good.

Chapter 34

Lift Up Your Eyes!



At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High...

—Daniel 4:34

NEBUCHADNEZZAR, KING OF Babylon in about 500 B.C., terrorized the Jews, destroyed Jerusalem, and took many Jews into exile. One of those captured was Daniel, a young man at the time. Daniel consistently stood for his faith in the Lord God of Israel in the face of Nebuchadnezzar's persecution.

Ultimately, Nebuchadnezzar became insane and lived like a wild animal for seven years. "He ate grass like a cow...his hair was as long as eagles' feathers and his nails were like birds' claws" (Daniel 4:33 NLT). Then God in His grace delivered the king, and his sanity returned. When he was in his right mind,

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he lifted up his eyes, for the first time, and worshipped the Lord, Creator of heaven and earth.

In the New Testament we discover another man who finally lifted up his eyes. But it was too late. In the account of the rich man and the beggar, Luke writes, “The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments...” (Luke 16:22–23).

The psalmist King David seems to have made it a habit to “lift up his eyes.” He wrote, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord...The Lord is thy keeper...The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil. He shall preserve thy soul” (Psalm 121:1, 2, 5, 7). And again he said, “Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest in the heavens...our eyes wait upon the Lord our God until that He have mercy upon us” (Psalm 123:1, 2).

It is worth noting that David seems to have been consciously aware of the act of “lifting up his eyes.” “I will lift up mine eyes...” And he kept his eyes fixed upon the Lord while he waited for the Lord’s merciful actions in his life.

There is a gentle reminder for us here. Our heavenly Father does not expect us to “leap over tall buildings” in some huge demonstration of faith in Him. Rather, we only need to “lift up our eyes.” He is urging us to stop focusing on our earthly situations and our worldly preoccupations. He wants us to experience peace and hope, which are ours as we recognize the True Source from which “help cometh.”

Jesus Himself knew the importance of “lifting up His eyes” unto the Father while He was on earth. John wrote that as He stood before Lazarus’ tomb, just before He raised Lazarus from the dead, “Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said, ‘Father, I thank

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Then that Thou hast heard Me...’ And...He cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth.’ And he that was dead came forth...” (John 11:41–44). The Savior “lifted up His eyes” and prayed for the Father to demonstrate His power in what appeared to be a hopeless situation. Even Christ Himself did not count on His own strength to fix a desperate situation.

Lord, day by day and hour by hour, would You remind us to look to You for our every need? May we escape the insanity of Nebuchadnezzar and come to You for help. Help us to regain our sanity whenever we begin to take our eyes off the Heavenly Help that is ours in You.

Chapter 35

Lord Over All



Be not afraid...neither be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts...And be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.

—1 Peter 3: 14, 15

THE LITERAL READING of this verse is “sanctify the Christ as Lord in your heart.” The exhortation is for us to give Christ His rightful place as Lord of our lives. If we reflect on this, the Spirit may reveal an incredible reality to us. *Christ is Lord*. He is Creator, Lord over all. He is Lord over every single detail of our lives. And, therefore, if we truly see this (by revelation), we instantly will “sanctify Him” in our hearts because we recognize the fact that *He is Lord!* Not a hair falls from our heads, not a step is taken, without His sovereign control.

It is not really accurate to say that we choose to “make Him Lord of our lives.” He *is* Lord of every life on the planet. The difference rests in the Holy Spirit’s revealing this to us personally.

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When that revelation comes, we worship Him with enhanced awe and wonder.

We are able to “be not afraid” and “neither troubled” when we see Who is in control of all. The how of overcoming fear in any area of our lives is found in experiencing the truth of “Christ as Lord.”

In addition, our readiness to give a reason for the hope within us is in direct proportion to our understanding that the Lord alone, by the power of His Spirit, opens ears to hear. Nothing depends on us. It is not our knowledge, nor our cleverness, charisma, or persuasiveness that will cause others to understand when we explain our faith in Christ. We can boldly proclaim that Christ is Lord. Why? Because He is Lord over even our stumbling words of testimony to others. Our fearlessness, our peace, our boldness in sharing the gospel flow from this understanding of Christ’s sovereign Lordship. He is not dependant on our puny efforts, nor does He have any “high hopes” for us to excel. He knows our frame. We are but dust. However, He gathers up the “dust” He created and molds us into useable instruments.

The Hebrew and the Greek words for “sanctify” mean “to set apart.” When the apostle Peter urges us to “sanctify the Lord in our hearts,” he simply is urging us to see that the Lord is unique, set apart from every mundane aspect of our earthly existence. When we see this reality of Christ as King over all, we can enter into the realm of the peace that surpasses all understanding.

Lord, by your Spirit, would You please reveal more and more of Your heart of love towards us? We want to trust You more fully. May we be unafraid and untroubled because of Who You are.

Chapter 36

The Secret of Daily Contentment



I have learned the secret of living in every situation...

—Philippians 4:12 NLT

THE APOSTLE PAUL experienced some serious suffering in his life. He was beaten, imprisoned, rejected, and forsaken by friends. He had no wife or children to comfort him. Yet in the midst of enormous trials, it was Paul who could say, “I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11).

Most of us would have difficulty making that statement day in and day out! It makes us ask: What had Paul learned that led him to such contentment in the midst of his fiery trials?

Before we consider the answer to that question, it would be encouraging for us to recognize that his ability to be content in the midst of trials was a *learned* truth as opposed to a quick-fix formula or an instant revelation. A learning process usually involves time, experience, and perhaps, a student’s heart. Paul had

been a Christian for about twenty-five years when he wrote those words, and his life had been a series of dramatic experiences.

So, what had Paul learned? What was his secret for living at peace in every situation? Certainly he had learned by experience because God sovereignly had delivered him in unique and miraculous ways out of seemingly hopeless situations that included shipwrecks, poisonous snake bites, prison chains, beatings, and stonings.

How about you? Have you been delivered from some desperate situations in your past because of God's merciful action on your behalf?

Paul also had discovered through prayer and personal communication with the Lord that the Father answers our requests. And Paul had learned that the answer may be multiple "nos." He had been "given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger from Satan..." He wrote, "Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time He said, 'My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness'" (2 Corinthians 12:7-9 NLT).

Have we learned that when we are not getting the answers we want, we can trust the Lord's "no"? The Lord taught Paul to trust Him by not answering his persistent prayers. Paul learned by having begged in prayer, having received no relief, and thus being taught that God works in weakness because He alone is the faithful, able One. Paul had no options. He learned to rest through having his own weaknesses revealed. Paul had learned how to live "with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:12, 13 NLT).

One of the major events in Paul's life was his experience of being "caught up to the third heaven." He received visions

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and revelations from the Lord that confirmed to him the reality of an incredible future that belongs to every believer (2 Corinthians 12:1–7). In fact, he wrote, “For to me, living is for Christ, and dying is even better...I’m torn between two desires: Sometimes...I long to go and be with Christ” (Philippians 1:21–23 NLT).

Paul lived each day with an ever-present awareness of the reality of heaven. Though few of us ever have had the kind of vision Paul experienced, we have access to the powerful biblical accounts that show us the certainty of the existence of this realm in which we will reign with Christ. Paul urges us to “set your sights on the realities of heaven...Let heaven fill your thoughts. Do not think only about things down here on earth” (Colossians 3:1, 2 NLT).

Are we students of heaven? Have we learned what the Lord has revealed to us through His written Word about the amazing future He has arranged for us?

If we as believers long to learn to be content in this life, we can start with the clues that Paul gives us: Review the past deliverances that have been ours. Accept the hopeless or discouraging situations and unanswered prayers as the Lord’s way of teaching us to trust Him. And dare to become a student of the heavenly future that is ours.

Contentment is not the natural state of human beings. It is a grace learned in the school of Christ by those who are born from above (1 Peter 1:23).

Oh, Lord, draw us into the walk of faith, for Your glory and our contentment.

Chapter 37

How to Be Strong in Him



Finally...be strong in the Lord...

—Ephesians 6:10

HERE ARE MANY places in the Scriptures where we as believers are encouraged to “be strong” in the Lord. The apostle Paul wrote that Abraham was “strong” in his faith (Romans 4:20). Paul told Timothy to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1). And he wrote to the Corinthians, “Stand fast in the faith...be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13).

Isn't that what each of us desires—to be strong in our faith? Yet questions rise up within us: How? How do we stand strong in the Lord? What can we do to increase our strength as faithful followers of Christ?

In Ephesians 6:10, given above, the Greek word for “be strong” is *endunamoo*, which means “be empowered.” It is a passive verb, which means it is something we receive, not something

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we do. “Be empowered by the Lord.” It is the same Greek word used in Acts 9:22. We read, “Saul [the apostle Paul] increased the more in strength.” In other words, the newly converted Paul was strengthened by the Lord.

Paul learned the how of experiencing strength in his faith, in his walk with the Lord. And he repeated the answer to the “how” question again and again. In 2 Corinthians 12:10 Paul says, “...for when I am weak, then am I strong.” Now there is a strange statement!

So, what is the heart of this message? What was the Lord telling Paul? What is He telling us? Don’t we tend to try to be strong in our faith? Why would we want to be weak?

Perhaps the best clues we have to find the answer to this puzzle about weakness producing strength is found in Hebrews, chapter eleven. The author lists the names of numerous believers who have been placed in hopeless situations. Noah faced a worldwide flood. Abraham was called to leave his homeland without knowing where he was going. Then he was asked to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac. Moses was called to lead millions out of Egypt. Summing up the lesson of faith, the writer says that “out of weakness,” these saints were “made strong” (Hebrews 11:34).

We are brought to deep, strong, abiding faith in the Lord only by living through desperate circumstances and experiencing His amazing, delivering grace! It is only when we see our own hopelessness and our own weaknesses that we discover what it is to be made strong by His Spirit.

The life of a believer never was designed to be lived in the same kind of strength that a disciplined, capable unbeliever experiences! Let’s think about that carefully. There are many

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Christian “self-help” books and programs that often cause us to think that we are capable of living the Christian life. We tend to rely on the same activities that produce strong, successful, capable unbelievers. But the “self-help” life is not the *faith* life; the faith life depends on an entirely different Source, an empowerment that is God-given and not man-made.

The Lord Himself explained this truth to impetuous Peter, who was certain he was strong in faith. Peter was confident that he would not deny the Lord. Yet the Lord warned Peter: “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak!” (Matthew 26:41).

So, how do we access His power? We recognize our own inability to accomplish that which is divine in origin. We stand in the awareness of His life in us. We stand in the truth of His promises, knowing He is working all things together for our good. And, finally, we are to “pray at all times and on every occasion...” (Ephesians 6:14–18 NLT). And then we simply wait and watch, a seemingly “weak” approach to a crisis. Yet it is in this place that faith is at work...and His strength is revealed in His time and His way.

Lord, we confess that without You we can do nothing (John 15:5). Empower and strengthen us for Your glory, not ours!

Chapter 38

Faith Against All Odds



“Lord, help me.” . . . But He answered and said, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread and to cast it to dogs”

—Matthew 15:25, 26

THIS ENTIRE CONVERSATION is jolting to our senses. Here was a mother whose heart was breaking over the condition of her little girl. Her daughter was possessed by a demon. And this mother was begging the Lord to have mercy on her. “But He answered her not a word” (Matthew 15:23). He appeared to ignore her pleas.

Next came the disciples with their requests. They were irritated and annoyed with this woman. She was a Gentile and a woman. As Jewish men, they wanted the Lord to “send her away” (Matthew 15:23).

The Lord appeared to ignore their request as well. Instead, we read, “But He answered and said, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24).

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Then the woman returned with her second request. She worshipped Him, in spite of His having ignored her earlier request. And this time she cried, “Lord, help me.”

“But He answered...” Notice that first He “answered her not a word.” This time He answered, but His words seem rude, a complete rebuff. He said, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread and to cast it to dogs.” The Gentiles were known as “dogs” by the Jews; they were completely despised. Jesus was clearly stating that she was a Gentile sinner, not worthy of the “bread” provided to the Jews, the lost sheep of Israel. These words actually would reflect exactly what the Jewish disciples were standing there thinking!

Notice that this woman knew who Christ was. She called him Lord, and she worshipped Him. In spite of what His outward words and actions towards her seemed to indicate, she saw beyond the visible. She knew His character, His heart. Therefore, she persisted! The woman answered and agreed with the Lord: “Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table” (Matthew 15:27).

Look at what this response tells us about what the woman knew about Christ. She knew that whatever He said, it was the truth. Secondly, she honored Him again as Lord. She also accepted the fact that she was an unworthy dog! She agreed with that. And, finally, she was willing to accept “crumbs” because they were from the Master’s table! Somehow, in our world of “personal rights” and our preoccupation with having “equal opportunities,” we tend to be put off by this scene.

After that, Jesus suddenly responded to her. “Then Jesus answered...” Notice that three times previously we read, “But Jesus answered...” Now something has changed. “Then Jesus

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answered... ‘Oh, woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.’ And her daughter was made whole from that very hour” (Matthew 15:28). The Lord seemed to be waiting for the perfect timing to provide healing for her daughter.

What is the wisdom the Lord might be revealing to us in this encounter? It seems He was testing her faith, even giving her the “religious arguments” of the day to determine if her faith was simply a superficial, religious faith. Yet, the Lord knew her heart. He knew she had genuine faith. So why was He publicly testing her faith?

Remember that the Jewish disciples were following Christ, but one eventually would turn traitor and another would deny Him three times. Perhaps the Lord was giving a lesson about true faith to the disciples through allowing the woman’s genuine faith to be revealed. She had been quick to recognize herself as “unworthy” of His blessings. Yet she knew His heart, knew Him to be her only hope. Her faith was great in spite of what could have been seen as personal rebuffs on the part of the Lord towards her!

Lord, help us to trust You and Your ways in our lives because we know You, Your true heart of love, by faith—regardless of what may appear to be true in Your actions towards us. Herein is great faith, true faith.

Chapter 39

Listening for God's Love



Cause me to hear Thy lovingkindness in the morning; For
in Thee do I trust.

—Psalm 143:8

*I*T IS WORTH recalling that the Hebrew word for “trust” is *batah*, which actually means confide. Literally, the sign or marking of someone who trusts in the Lord is that he or she confides in Him. If we have confidence in a person, we trust him or her; therefore, we confide (share our heartfelt thoughts) in that person.

King David had learned that the Person in whom he had the utmost confidence was Jehovah, the Lord God of Israel. It might surprise us, however, to see what it was that David believed (trusted) that God would do for him. In the verse above, David asked that the Lord cause him to hear God’s lovingkindness, His grace, in the morning.

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Do you sometimes wake up in the morning with a subtle longing to experience more of God's love and grace? Notice that David asked that the Lord Himself cause him to experience grace. And David asked to *hear* God's grace as the means by which he would *experience* grace.

But David doesn't stop with this heartfelt request. Psalm 143 reveals David's utter dependence on the Lord for every aspect of his life experience. Here are some of the things he wrote:

- “Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk...” (v. 8).
- “Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies...” (v. 9).
- “Teach me to do Thy will...” (v. 10).
- “Lead me into the land of uprightness...” (v. 10).
- “Quicken me...for Thy Name's sake...” (v. 11).
- “For Thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble...” (v. 11).
- “Cut off mine enemies...” (v. 12).
- “Destroy all them that afflict my soul...” (v. 12).

It doesn't seem like David thought that he personally was capable of knowing the way in which he should walk. He recognized his need to be taught to do the Lord's will. He believed he had to be led into righteous living. He believed that the Lord alone could quicken him and bring life to his inner man. There isn't much room for a “self-help” program in this psalm. Rather, David's prayer life, as revealed here, reveals a man who knew that he was incapable of determining the Lord's will or of living a righteous life unless the grace of God was extended to him in every one of these areas.

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It is also interesting to see David's driving passion, his motives behind all of these prayerful requests. He wrote, "My soul thirsteth after Thee" (v. 6). "Quicken me...for Thy name's sake, [for the sake of Your reputation, Lord]" (v. 11). So that "Thy righteousness" will be revealed (v. 11).

David seemed to be very clear about Who would and should get the glory if his requests were fulfilled! David also revealed how he encouraged himself while waiting to hear from the Lord. He wrote, "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Thy works; I muse on the work of Thy hands" (v. 5).

We often are tempted to remember our own sins and failures, to meditate on all of our current distresses and muse on the works of our own hands, both the good and the bad ones! But David knew a better way. He remembered, meditated on, and mused about the Lord's doings, not on his own. He sat quietly and focused on the One, the only One, who was his Sustainer and his Supplier.

Finally, it is clear that David expected to hear from the Lord, to experience His loving kindness, His grace. David said, "Hear my prayer, O Lord...in Thy faithfulness answer me..." (v. 1). David was counting on God's character; he knew Him to be faithful to His children. Therefore, David confided with expectation.

What a worthy reminder is ours in this psalm. Our experiencing God's love and grace comes through the faithfulness of God in our lives, not through our efforts or our performance.

Let us listen, Lord, to hear of Your unfailing grace towards us.

Chapter 40

A Helpful Perspective



The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool.

—Isaiah 66:1

*M*OST OF US are clear about the fact that Christ reigns in the heavenlies. We have read the account of His being lifted up, in His flesh and bone body, into heaven after His resurrection (Acts 1:9–11). And we await His return from heaven.

Yet we also are aware that the Lord dwells on the earth in the person of the Holy Spirit, Who indwells believers. The apostle Paul says that we are in Christ, Who is our Head, the Head of the Body of believers, and Christ dwells in us in the person of the Holy Spirit (Colossians 1:27; Colossians 1:1, 18; Romans 8:9). But perhaps there is a truth hidden in this Isaiah 66:1 passage that would help us to live with greater joy and greater peace if we could grasp it.

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In Ephesians 2:4–6 Paul writes, “God, Who is rich in mercy...hath raised us up together, and made us sit together [the Greek word *sunkathizo*] in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” The apostle tells us that those who are in Christ are, at this very moment, seated with Him in heaven.

In Ephesians 1:3 we read, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” In Romans 8 it says, “...and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified” (Romans 8:30). Notice the past tense of those verbs. We already are glorified in Him.

In Colossians, Paul writes that we have been delivered from darkness and “translated...into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Colossians 1:13). Again, these verbs are in the past tense, describing a finished work. This is the “mystery” that has been hidden from former generations (Colossians 1:26). You “are complete in Him,” Who is our Head (Colossians 2:9, 10).

So what does this mean to us in a practical way? It means that our own heads can be in the heavenlies every single moment! The earth is only a temporary resting place for our feet—our footstool! This is Paul’s entire persuasion, his key to living. “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above... Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1, 2).

We who have been “born from above,” by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 4:25–29) are not earth dwellers. Our dwelling is heaven. We have nothing in common with earth dwellers other than a physical body. But even the destination of our physical bodies is different from the destination of earth dwellers and their bodies. We worship the Creator, Jesus Christ (John 1:1–3).

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We already have been translated into a heavenly kingdom. We are not related to “the god of this world,” who reigns over the earth (2 Corinthians 4:4). We have a unique purpose—to glorify Christ Jesus as we walk on the earth. We are Light bearers. Our reward, our inheritance, is reserved for us in heaven.

The Lord Himself has given us the key to living out who we are, even as our feet are on earth. He said, “Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will be” (Matthew 6:21 NLT).

Lord, turn our eyes toward You and our heavenly place in You. May we see our earthly life from Your heavenly perspective!

Chapter 41

Fear Not!



Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

—Luke 12:32

WHEN WE CONSIDER the biblical fact that God experiences pleasure, it seems a bit surprising! The Greek word used is *eudokeo*. It could be translated “happy thoughts” or “delight.” The Lord delights in giving His sheep the kingdom. It makes Him happy; He loves to give to us.

John Piper, in his book *The Pleasures of God*, wrote that Christ's purpose in telling the disciples this “is to defeat the fear that God is not the kind of God who really wants to be good to us.” He goes on to say that we tend to think that God “is not really generous and helpful and kind and tender, but is basically irked with us...”¹ Really, the fact is that the Lord is teaching us about the very nature of God. He is reminding us that we are His sheep, His very special “little flock.” He is the Shepherd; the Shepherd's heart is to protect, feed, and tenderly

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care for His sheep, knowing them individually and by name. (Read John, chapter 10.)

What if we actually believed that we have nothing to fear? Would our anxieties and worries lessen? What if we trusted it to be true that God is loving, gracious, kind, and merciful—all the time? How would our life experiences be enhanced if we believed that we can trust the Father’s total love for us, no matter what our circumstances or our emotions might be signaling to us?

In Luke 12:32, the Lord was reminding the disciples of what their future held. “So don’t be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom” (NLT). Why should we not be fearful in our current situations? Because we are going to inherit a kingdom; we are going to reign with the King of Kings. All of our needs, wants, and desires will be fulfilled. The apostle Paul says, “Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will give us later” (Romans 8:18 NLT). He has given us “right standing” with Himself and promised us “his glory” (Romans 8:30 NLT).

So the Lord has given us at least two great reasons why we do not need to fear anything in our lives. First, He said that His greatest happiness is in gifting His own sheep! “I will do all the good I have promised...” (Jeremiah 32:42 NLT). Second, He said that we have a secure future, a “priceless inheritance,” which God has reserved for us. “It is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God, in his mighty power, will protect you until you receive this salvation...” (1 Peter 1:4, 5 NLT).

Lord, give us the gift of ruthless trust in You, relinquishing all our fears. Let us dare to believe that it makes You happy to give to us!

Chapter 42

The Lord is Merciful



The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

—Psalm 103:8

*G*OD'S *GRACE* IS often defined as our “receiving that which we do not deserve.” But God’s *mercy* can be defined as “not receiving what we do deserve.” How often our behavior would seem to warrant the Lord’s anger or serious discipline in our lives! Yet He again and again extends His mercy to us, knowing that, in our flesh, we are but dust.

King David encourages us to praise the Lord for His mercy especially. He writes that God “hath not dealt with us after our sins; Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities” (Psalm 103:10). Oh, what a relief! What a gift—God’s amazing mercy!

David used every possible description to help us see the magnitude of the Lord’s mercy to you and to me. He wrote,

The Lord is Merciful

“For as the heaven is high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward them that fear Him” (Psalm 103:11).

One of the incredible demonstrations of the Lord’s mercy is His removing any record of our sins. Psalm 103:12 says, “As far as the east is from the west, So far hath He removed our transgressions from us.”

How long will He continue to extend His mercy to those of us who know Him? Psalm 103:17 states, “The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting...”

Another amazing demonstration of God’s mercy towards us is His gift of righteousness to those who are His. Not only did He remove all record of our sins, but also He gifted us with His perfection, His complete righteousness. We are saved from God’s wrath because Christ’s life, His righteous life, is His gift to us (Romans 5:10). Because of His merciful gift, we never will receive the wrath we deserve.

David explained that the only worthy response to the Lord’s mercy is for us to bless God! It is an awe-inspiring thought to realize that we can bless the Lord; we can give Him joy! David exhorted his own heart and mind to this activity: “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits” (Psalm 103:1, 2).

How often it seems we focus on our expectations, our desires, our frustrations, and our daily wants rather than simply focusing on the mercies of God in our lives—those past, present, and future. Joy actually springs up in us when we, day after day, delight in His endless mercy in our lives.

God has “redeemed” our lives from destruction. He has “crowned” us with His “loving-kindness and tender mercies.”

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He satisfies us with good things so that our energy is “renewed like the eagle’s” (Psalm 103:4, 5).

Oh, Lord, when we recount all of our own failures, lapses, and sins, Your mercy is our only solace. Please continue to reveal Your magnificent mercy, and may we continually praise You for this precious gift. “Bless the Lord, O my soul” (Psalm 103:22).

Chapter 43

*That We Might Know
Him!*



That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection...

—Philippians 3:10

DO YOU EXPERIENCE a hunger, a longing to really know the Lord in an intimate, meaningful, accurate way? If so, you can be assured that the Holy Spirit lives in you! Only those who have been born again by the Spirit of God have that kind of longing.

The apostle Paul was a Jew who hated the Christians and was persecuting and killing them. Then in a moment in time, the Spirit of God removed the scales from his eyes, and Saul, the Jew, was born again. (Read Acts 9 for the whole story!) As a result of this incredible conversion, the core purpose of Paul's life changed. He could write that his deepest longing was "to know Him." Paul spent the rest of his life getting to know the Lord and telling others what he had come to know—that Jesus

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Christ is God in the flesh, the Messiah for whom all of Israel had been waiting.

The Jewish prophet Daniel wrote, “The people that do know their God shall be strong” (Daniel 11:32). The Hebrew word for “know” in this passage is *yada*, which means to have an experiential knowledge (rather than an intellectual knowledge). Daniel said that we will be strong if we have experienced the Lord in our lives. The Hebrew word for “strong” is *hazak*, which means to have endurance in our faith in the midst of life’s trials and struggles. What a motivation for day by day increasing our own intimate experiences of Christ in our lives! The result will be a stronger, more enduring faith.

What does the Word of God tell us about how to grow in our knowledge of Christ? The apostle Peter exhorts us to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). He is summarizing his words from his entire letter of 2 Peter, in which he answers the question of how to grow in this knowledge. Peter encourages the saints to:

- Learn the promises given to us in the Bible (2 Peter 1:4).
- Gain an awareness of the facts about Christ (2 Peter 1:5). (The word “knowledge” there is the Greek word *oida*, which refers to intellectual information.)
- Be established in the truth of God’s Word (2 Peter 1:12, 16).
- Be educated in the realm of prophecy, which is found in the Word (2 Peter 1:19–2:2; 2 Peter 3:1–7).
- Look for the second coming of Christ every day (2 Peter 3:10–14).

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It is thrilling to realize that every one of the actions Peter encourages us to take is related to reading and learning the Word of God. Peter says that we will grow in our *experiential knowledge* of the Lord (the Greek word is *gnosis*, 2 Peter 3:18) as we grow in our *intellectual knowledge* of Him (the Greek word is *oida*, 2 Peter 1:5). This is something we can do! We can open The Book; there is life-changing power inherent in the Word of God.

Lord, give us the hunger, the discipline, and the desire to experience You more fully through Your Word.

Chapter 44

*The Power in Giving
Thanks*



In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving,
let your requests be made known unto God.

—Philippians 4:6

DO YOU SOMETIMES wish you had a “sure-fire” formula for knowing that the Lord is hearing your prayers? Most of us know (in our heads) that God has invited us to pray and has promised to hear and answer our requests. Yet our hearts sometimes long for some greater assurance that we are praying properly.

The truth is that any form of crying out in prayer by a believer is heard. Jonah cried out from the belly of a whale! However, it is encouraging to meditate on the apostle Paul’s specific directions about prayer in his letter to the Philippians. There, Paul explains that we can come to the Lord “in everything.” The Greek word is *pas*, which means all and every single thing. Have you sometimes felt guilty for praying about little things, like finding a parking

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place or having a traffic jam clear so that you can be on time for something? The Lord is our Father; He loves to know that we look to Him for *every single thing!*

Paul says that we are to come to the Lord in prayer. The Greek word here is *proseucke*, which means to pour out. Now there is an exciting reality! We don't have to have the "right" words or the right "form." We are told just to pour out our thoughts, feelings, needs, desires, failures, hurts, resentments, and hopes. Let the words flow freely!

Paul also writes that we are to bring our requests through prayer (a pouring out of words) and supplication. The word "supplication" refers to coming to God with a deep, personal need. So we are invited to bring our smallest personal concerns or our greatest agonies and desires to the Savior.

In the middle of this invitation to come to the throne of God with all of our concerns, the apostle says that we are to come with thanksgiving. Why? What is the reason we are to be giving thanks? The answers to our requests have not been given yet, so why does Paul say we should give thanks while we are making our requests?

The Greek word for thanksgiving is *eucharistos*, which describes the awareness we have of God's grace and love. The very fact that we are in His family through the sacrifice of His Son in our place gives us the privilege of coming to His throne. This is why we are thanking Him; we are praising Him for His grace towards us. *He hears our prayers!*

The world has the strange idea that anyone can pray to God and be heard. That is not true. In John 9:31 Christ clearly says, "Now we know that God does not hear sinners..." The Lord says that the Father only hears those "who do His will" (John 9:31).

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When Christ is asked by the disciples what it is to “do His will,” Jesus says, to “believe on Him” whom the Father has sent (John 6:29). In other words, God only hears the prayers of those who have been “born again,” who have become children of the Father through faith in His Son.

The thief on the cross was a “sinner” based on the world’s definition of sin. Yet the Lord assured the thief that he would be in paradise with Him. Why? Because the thief believed that Christ was truly Immanuel, God with us (Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:6).

We are invited to pour out our needs and our feelings to the Creator of the Universe. We are assured of being heard because we have received the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8, 9), the gift of God’s grace. For this, for the fact that we no longer are counted as sinners but as righteous in Christ, for this we give unending thanks as we come “boldly to the throne of His grace” (Hebrews 4:16).

Lord, thank you for this simple “formula.” We can talk to You about anything because of Your Grace that brought us into Your family. We do give thanks, abundantly.

Chapter 45

Seeking the Savior



It is time to seek the Lord...

—Hosea 10:12

*W*HAT TIME IS it for you or for me? King Solomon wrote that there is a time for a variety of activities and experiences in our lives: a time for weeping, for laughing, for war, for peace, for speaking, for keeping silent. Yet, perhaps more than any other activity or focus in our daily lives, “It is time to seek the Lord.” Both the Hebrew and the Greek words for “seek” reflect a searching for, an inquiring after, for the purpose of worship.

The shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem heard the Word of God, “Unto you is born this day...a Saviour which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). Their response? “They came with haste” to seek the Babe lying in a manger. The focus for the shepherds was seeking the Lord. Once they found Him, they glorified and praised God for all the things they had heard and seen (Luke 2:16, 20).

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The wise men, the Magi of Persia, had seen His star in the East, and they began a long-distance journey to seek the King of Kings. They followed the light they were given, and they found Him. When they arrived, they “fell down and worshipped Him” (Matthew 2:11).

When the Lord was passing through Jericho, there was a rich tax collector who “sought to see Jesus,” to see who He was. The crowd was massive, and Zacchaeus was short. So “he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree” (a kind of fig tree—not a sycamore). When the Lord came by, He looked up, saw Zacchaeus, and invited Himself to be a guest in Zacchaeus’s home! And Zacchaeus “made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully” (Luke 19:1–6).

In each of these events (the shepherds, the wise men, the tax collector), the seekers found the Savior and the result was incredible joy, awe, wonder, and worship! The Scriptures tell us that the Lord “is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). The shepherds simply responded to the Word of God given to them by the angel. They sought the Savior in the place they were told He could be found. The wise men sought the Lord in the same way. They followed the Light they were given. Zacchaeus had heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho. He positioned himself in a place from which he could see. In each situation, the seekers were rewarded by the Presence of God Himself.

Perhaps it is time for us to seek the Savior more diligently. The Scriptures tell us, “If...thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him...” (Deuteronomy 4:29). Notice that the angel came to the shepherds while they were in the dark. The star appeared to the wise men, who were far away. Jesus came

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to where Zacchaeus was, and the Lord invited the tax collector to have a personal encounter with Him. Do you sense the Spirit of God “calling” you to know Him more intimately?

In each of these significant encounters, the Word of God provided the clues that led the seekers. The shepherds heard the angel deliver the Word. The Magi had studied the Word and knew the significance of the Star (Numbers 24:17). Zacchaeus heard the Lord’s spoken invitation. Romans 10:17 states, “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.”

Lord, we sense that “it is time to seek You” afresh. Draw us nearer to You as we seek You in Your written Word to us. You have promised to reward us with joy and the reality of Your Presence. Thank you, Father.

Chapter 46

Walk in Newness of Life



As Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

—Romans 6:4

*W*HO AMONG US can explain the miracle of Christ's resurrection? We only know the facts: Christ was fully human, and He died. Yet in the glorious power of the Father, He rose again and walked on earth in His resurrected body for forty days before ascending into the heavenlies—in His new body (Acts 1:3, 9). And though we cannot explain the Lord's resurrection, we believe it happened. What causes us to believe, to know He truly rose from the dead? The gift of faith, supplied by the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul writes that, mysteriously, we personally died with Christ on the cross. Not only did we die, but also we rose from the dead; we were resurrected with Him to life eternal (Romans 6:3–11). Because of this reality, Paul says that

Walk in Newness of Life

we also “should walk in newness of life.” The word “should” is the Greek word *mello*, the idea of expectation. It does not mean that we “ought” to walk in newness of life in the sense of duty. Rather, there is the sense of what we can expect to unfold in our daily Christian life!

Paul goes on to explain how we can walk in this “resurrected” reality. He says, “Reckon...yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:11). The Greek word for “reckon” is *logizomai*, which means to count on this to be true. Just as we count on the fact of Christ’s resurrection, we are told that we can count on our resurrected, eternal condition as believers. We believe the facts about ourselves. By faith, we count on the fact that what the Lord says is true.

When the Holy Spirit reveals this great truth to us, we live in freedom, peace, and confidence, content in our ordained circumstances. Living the Christian life is really all about learning to walk believing, by faith, the facts in the Word of God. As we believe, we are transformed by our grasp of God’s love and grace. We see who we are and live, by faith, in that reality.

It is helpful to contrast “walking in newness of life” by faith with the way we typically try to live the Christian life. Most of us tend to think that living the Christian life is about our performance, our attempts to be obedient, our battle to not sin. This is an exhausting Christian experience that usually leads to frustration and depression. Rather, the Lord is bringing us good news. He simply encourages us to walk in the new life He has given us.

Lord, we look to You for the Spirit-supplied faith to see and believe Your Word!

Chapter 47

Touching Jesus



She came up behind Jesus and touched the fringe of His robe...

—Luke 8:44 NLT

*Y*OU WILL REMEMBER this event that Luke describes for us. Jesus was surrounded by crowds and was teaching and healing. There was a woman in the crowd “who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years. She had spent everything she had on doctors and still could find no cure” (Luke 8:43 NLT). When she touched the Lord, her bleeding stopped immediately.

Can you identify with this woman in some way? There are often areas in our own lives (physical illnesses, financial failures, personal failures) that seem hopeless. We have battled with them, been plagued by them; we have spent all our energy on a “cure.” But we remain in the problem or the circumstance. We even may have prayed for relief or healing without seeing any positive response from the Lord.

Touching Jesus

Notice something very interesting in Luke's description. He says that the woman "came up behind Jesus." Perhaps she was afraid of Him; maybe she felt unworthy; maybe she was timid, lacking the faith she felt was needed to get the results she desired. For whatever reason, she did not come boldly to Christ; she came tentatively to Him. Once again, her approach may well be one to which we can relate.

Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher of earlier days, commented on this scene. He wrote, "Misery should always place itself right in the face of mercy."¹ Isn't that an incredible thought? In our misery we are to come boldly to Christ, not tentatively, but boldly, face-to-face. He is full of love and mercy and compassion for those who come to Him.

In the scene Luke describes, the Lord was aware of this woman's presence, and He turned to discover who had touched Him. She fell to her knees in front of Him and explained herself. The Lord's response was, "Daughter...thy faith hath made thee whole" (Luke 8:48). Notice that the Lord addressed her as a member of His own family. Why? Because she believed in Him as the Source to meet her needs. And she was pronounced whole, complete in every way, spiritually and physically.

The Lord has pronounced each of us who has come to Him for salvation as *whole*. The very word "salvation" in the Greek means to be rescued, delivered, brought to health and safety. The Lord has declared us healed in every way. If He has not delivered us from an uncomfortable earthly circumstance, it is because He is using it as the means of revealing more of Himself to us who are whole in Him.

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Lord, we continue to come to You directly, not from behind. You greet us with Your face of mercy. Thank You, too, that You always are aware of our presence and that You are always at work in our lives with a heart of love—even when we doubt that reality!

Chapter 48

Strong in Faith



He staggered not at the promise of God...but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.

—Romans 4:20

I SN'T THAT THE desire of each of us? That we might be *strong in our faith*? And wouldn't it be helpful to know how to increase the strength of our faith?

Let's take a closer look at this verse in Romans. The apostle Paul is talking about Abraham's faith. He writes that Abraham was strong in faith. The Greek word here is *enduramoo*, and it literally means Abraham *was strengthened* in his faith. Notice that Abraham is the *recipient* of being strengthened in faith.

In the book of Acts we are told that Paul himself increased in strength and was brilliant in his preaching. The same Greek word appears here, *enduramoo*. Paul *was strengthened* is the actual meaning. Once again, we see strength being given as a gift to the believer (Acts 9:22).

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Paul exhorts us in Ephesians 6:10: “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.” Again, the Greek word *enduramoo* appears here. This is the passive form of the verb, so the passage reads, “Be *empowered* in the Lord.” Why is this distinction in verb tense important to us? Because understanding *how* we become strong in faith determines *where* we look for *dunamis*, inherent power. We have no power in and of ourselves. So if we are *trying* to be *strong* in the Lord, we will experience fruitless effort and exhaustion. In contrast, if we look to Him and recognize that He alone must *empower* us to stand strong in faith, we experience release and hope. We are *strong* when we see how *weak* we are. It is this understanding that frees us to rest in Him, the All-Powerful One.

Have you struggled now and then with the longing to get some particular area of your life under control? You may have tried to shape up or live with a stronger faith in the midst of challenging circumstances. Well, understanding the *how* of experiencing greater faith can help us immensely. Instead of focusing on our failures and weakness of faith, we can rejoice in our weakness!

You will recall that Paul himself discovered this truth in his own personal circumstances. He had begged the Lord to remove the satanic thorn with which he was plagued. The Lord said (paraphrased), “No, I’m not going to remove this problem, Paul.” The Lord also told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you: for *My strength* is made perfect in your weakness.”

And Paul understood! His response was: “Most gladly therefore will I...glory in my infirmities...I take pleasure in infirmities...for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10).

Strong in Faith

The *how* of being strong in the Lord is giving up our constant self-effort to shape up or solve our problems. Rather, we simply look to Him for His empowering wisdom and strength and experiential faith. The Lord desires that He alone receive the glory for the outcome. And He is continually teaching us this essential truth.

Lord, we embrace afresh our weaknesses. Help us to see them as gifts used by You to train us in the walk of faith. Only then will we be strong in You.

Chapter 49

Arm Yourself!



Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh,
arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.

—1 Peter 4:1

*T*HE APOSTLE PETER calls all of us as believers to *strengthen our minds* as a form of protection against the evil and the danger that abound in the world. He writes to the saints, “The end of the world is coming soon...God has given gifts to each of you...Manage them well...Don’t be surprised by the fiery trials you are going through...Be happy if you are insulted for being a Christian...” (1 Peter 4:7–14 NLT).

The Lord Himself suffered tremendously at the hands of the unbelieving world. He was mocked, spit upon, made a laughingstock, beaten, and eventually murdered. Yet we read that He experienced *joy* in the midst of this horrendous treatment. “He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross *because*

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of the joy He knew would be His afterward” (Hebrews 12:2 NLT, emphasis mine).

Peter is calling us to have the same *mindset* that Christ had. This mindset will serve as our armor against discouragement and rejection. He reminds us that God will be glorified as we walk through similar sufferings for Christ’s sake. And “*afterward you will have the wonderful joy of sharing his glory when it is displayed to all the world*” (1 Peter 4:13 NLT, italics mine). In other words, Peter is encouraging us to set our *minds* on the heavenly world as a form of protection in this dark world!

So, *how* do we go about “arming” ourselves with the *mind* of Christ? The Greek word for “arm” is *hoplizo*, and it means to *equip with weapons*. What kind of weapons was Christ using to maintain His joy and His peace in the midst of an evil world?

The apostle Paul tells us exactly what is unique about the *mind* of Christ. He says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). And he continues, “Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God...he took the humble position of a slave...” (Philippians 2:6–8 NLT). Here are two important insights into Christ’s attitude, His mindset. He did not exercise His “rights,” and He walked in complete humility, focused on serving others and not on protecting His own reputation. He “made Himself of no reputation” (Philippians 2:7). The Greek actually reads that Christ “*emptied Himself.*” How often do we find ourselves “full of ourselves,” demanding to be appreciated or defending our rights? The Lord laid aside His own glory and was then free to suffer for God’s glory.

Paul, like Peter, exhorts us to see that the end is near and that is a good reason to set our minds on things above. He says,

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“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and *let us put on the armor of light*... Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh” (Romans 13:12, 14, emphasis mine).

The *armor of light* involves focusing on the Word of God. His Word is a “lamp” that provides us with *light* in the darkness of the world. The Word of God is a weapon with which we are to be *equipped*. “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword...a discerner of our thoughts...” (Hebrews 4:12). It is through staying focused on the heavenly perspective of life that we are able to function more freely here on earth. We are not as readily caught up in the world’s way of living and thinking when we stay immersed in the truths of the coming kingdom and the coming King!

Lord, this is our desire...that we “be not conformed to this world but...transformed by the renewing of our minds” (Romans 12:2). We ask this so that You might be glorified in us. Give us grace to store Your Word in our hearts and minds. Free us from the preoccupations and mindset of earthlings.

Chapter 50

Unfailing Love



I am...rich in unfailing love and faithfulness.

—Exodus 34:6 NLT

*M*OSES HAD AN amazing encounter with the Lord on Mount Sinai. We read that “the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him [Moses] there” (Exodus 34:5). This physical manifestation of God was in the person of His Son, the Messiah! (See John 1:18.) And the Lord’s purpose for appearing was to reveal *His character* to Moses. He wanted Moses to know Him in a very personal way.

You will recall that earlier in Moses’ life, the Lord revealed His Name to him from the burning bush. When Moses asked the Lord for His Name, He said, “I AM THE ONE WHO ALWAYS IS” (Exodus 3:14 NLT). It seems like Moses might have wanted to say, “You are...what?” There is a sense in which this statement sounds unfinished. Yet the Lord was really stating that Who He will be, moment by moment, is determined by what He knows

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our needs to be. He is Savior, Redeemer, Deliverer, Comforter, Shepherd, the Bread of Life, the Living Water, and much more, depending on what He knows we need at any given time.

In the Exodus passage we see the Lord giving Moses further insight into His Name. He says, “I am...rich in unfailing love and faithfulness.” The King James says, “I am...abundant in goodness and truth.” The Hebrew word for “goodness” is *cheved*, and it also can be translated as kindness and loving: “I am...loving kindness.” The Hebrew word for “truth” is *emeth* and can also be translated as faithful.

The Old Testament saints, generation after generation, beginning with this revelation to Moses, counted on these characteristics of the Lord. Jonah, in prayer to the Lord, said, “I knew that you were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love” (Jonah 4:2 NLT). King David knew and counted on the Lord’s character. In his prayer he said, “For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; And plenteous in mercy...full of compassion, and gracious, Longsuffering and plenteous in mercy and truth” (Psalm 86:5, 15). Joel, the prophet, urged the Israelites to turn to the Lord, “for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness...” (Joel 2:13). Micah wrote, “Who is a God like unto Thee...He delighteth in mercy...He will have compassion on us” (Micah 7:18, 19).

What do we believe about the Lord’s attitude towards us personally? He says to each of us who knows Him:

- “I am...rich in my unfailing love for you.”
- “I am...rich in my ongoing faithfulness toward you.”
- “I am...overflowing with lovingkindness toward you.”

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- “I am...faithful in every aspect of your life.”
- “I am...full of grace toward you.”
- “I am...filled with compassion for you.”
- “I am...always forgiving you.”
- “I am...abounding with mercy toward you.”

Because we are in Christ, the Lord looks upon us with His eternal love and grace and mercy and kindness and forgiveness and compassion and faithfulness. So, are we personally counting on His character? Moses had a personal visit. If we know Christ, we have been visited personally as well.

Lord, may we embrace all that You are...as the I AM to each of us.

Chapter 51

His Great Supply



Wash me...cleanse me...Make me to hear joy and gladness.

—Psalm 51:2, 8

*K*ING DAVID, THE great saint, is described as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). He is listed with Abraham and Moses and Noah and all of the faithful saints described in Hebrews, chapter 11 (Hebrews 11:32).

Yet it was this David, from whose lineage Christ was born, who fell into serious sin. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, another man's wife. He then arranged to have her husband, Uriah, murdered. Later, David's sins were exposed by the prophet Nathan. David was overcome with guilt and grief and a complete agony of spirit. It was in that condition David penned his prayer in Psalm 51.

Think for a moment about what your prayer might have been in a similar circumstance. Would you have hesitated even to pray as a result of your sense of guilt? Would you, perhaps, have

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made promises to shape up, to avoid ever committing that sin again, or to be better? Well, David's prayer provides incredible hope for our sense of hopelessness over our own sin.

David began by asking for the Lord's mercy based on what he knew to be God's character of lovingkindness and tender mercies. He then asked the Lord to blot out his sins, wash him, and cleanse him. He knew God could and would do that for him!

The king then clearly acknowledged his sin ("My sin is ever before me.") and that he knew he had sinned against God alone ("Against thee...only have I sinned."). He stated that he knew himself to have been born as a sinner ("In sin did my mother conceive me").

Throughout his prayer in Psalm 51, David acknowledged that for every single need he had, the Lord alone would be the Supplier. David said, "Purge me...and I shall be clean. Wash me...Make me to hear joy...Blot out my iniquities...Restore me...Uphold me...Deliver me...Open my lips to praise You..." David knew every aspect of his entire life was in the Lord's hands. And David had the clear expectation that the Lord would restore him because of the Lord's grace and love.

What comfort and hope David gives us as sinners saved by God's grace. We experience little failures and utter failure. Yet we can return again and again to the Fountain of Grace. We can come boldly to this throne and be assured that He will not take His Holy Spirit from us. He will not cast us away from His presence (Psalm 51:11). He will restore unto us the joy of His salvation, and He will uphold us with a spirit of willing and unforced obedience (Psalm 51:12).

Finally, David reminds us that the Lord is not looking for vows or promises from us. Rather, "The sacrifices of God are a

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broken spirit: A broken and a contrite heart..." (Psalm 51:17). In other words, He treasures our coming to Him with a full acknowledgement of our sinfulness. It is proof that we are His children. And He takes pleasure in His own righteousness that is attributed to us, His children, by the new birth.

Lord, encourage us to trust in Your love and forgiveness, time after time. We acknowledge our sin and embrace Your saving work on our behalf.

Chapter 52

The Glory of God in You



And they glorified God in me.

—Galatians 1:24

THE HAND OF God is unmistakable in the circumstances that changed Saul, the murderous Pharisee, to Paul, a passionate follower of Jesus Christ. In a moment in time, God revealed Himself to Saul, and, miraculously, the apostle to the Gentiles was born from above. (Read Acts 9 and 22 to refresh your memory of this incident.)

In writing to the Galatian Christians, Paul recounted how *amazed* the Jerusalem Christian leaders were when they learned of Paul's conversion. Peter and James and other believers had known of Saul as the persecutor of the saints. And now they met this same man and witnessed the miraculous change in him. They knew the Source, "and they glorified God" in Paul.

Perhaps it would be a worthy endeavor for each of us to ask ourselves, "Do those who know me find in me a cause for

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glorifying God? Is my life a visible expression of the miraculous work of God Himself?” Are there qualities in our individual lives (amazing endurance, unending patience, constant joy, overflowing love for others, etc.) that are far beyond any *natural* human characteristics?

Most of us would be quick to agree that the desire of our hearts is to have God glorified through our visible lives. So how do we live a life that causes Him to be seen in us? Consider what Paul told the Thessalonian believers. He told them that when Christ returns, His glory will be visible in His people. “[He will] be marveled at and admired [in His glory reflected] in all who have believed—who have adhered to, trusted in, and relied on Him...” (2 Thessalonians 1:10 ANT). Paul indicated that *one* of the ways the Lord is glorified is when we as believers *trust* Him in difficult circumstances and *rely* on His faithfulness in the details of our lives. We are then worry-free and at peace (unlike the world of unbelievers around us). Onlookers realize this is not a *natural human* response to life’s challenges.

Then Paul went on to remind the Thessalonians that he, Paul, was praying “that our God may deem and count you worthy of [your] calling and [His] every gracious purpose of goodness, and *with power* complete in [your] every particular work of faith [faith which is that leaning of the whole human personality on God in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom, and goodness]” (2 Thessalonians 1:11 ANT).

Let’s see if we can decipher what Paul is saying here. His prayer is that *God* will empower us to complete or live out His purpose in us. This is achieved through our *faith*, defined as the leaning of our entire beings on God, confident of *His* power, *His* wisdom, and *His* goodness that *enable* our lives of faith. *Do*

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we grasp the fact that it is when we rely on the Lord for the faith to rely on Him that He is only then truly glorified?

There is a subtle but *vital* truth in Paul's words that is in stark contrast to much of what is taught today in Christendom. Paul says that true, powerful faith is supernatural, given to us from above. *We as believers are to look to the Lord to give us the faith to have faith!* However, many believers are taught that they should have the faith, the capacity within them, to live the Christian life and glorify God. As a result, they look within themselves for the ability to live a God-glorifying life.

The Jerusalem saints glorified God in Paul because they clearly saw that what had unfolded in Paul's life was a supernatural work of God. Paul could not have been the instigator or creator of his own conversion. The same kind of God-empowered peace or joy or sacrificial service in our lives is what causes others to see the *Source*. Onlookers then recognize that what they *see* in us exceeds what fallen humanity can produce.

“The Name of our Lord Jesus Christ be glorified and become more glorious through and in you...according to the grace...of God...” (2 Thessalonians 1:12 ANT).

Lord, this is the desire of our hearts: empower us by Your Spirit, for Your glory, according to Your grace.

Chapter 53

Sustaining Faith



I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not...

—Luke 22:32

*O*H, WHAT MIRACULOUS life-giving encouragement the Holy Spirit is teaching us in this passage of Scripture! Remember the situation: The disciples were having a dispute among themselves about who would be greatest in the coming messianic kingdom. Suddenly, the Lord turned to Peter and said, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you...” (Luke 22:31).

Let’s stop right there for a moment. How did the Lord know of Satan’s desire? Because Satan cannot touch the life of a saint without first asking for permission from the Lord! We see that most clearly in the life of Job. Satan entered the heavenly courts and received permission from the Lord to touch Job’s life (Job 1:1–12). Satan is an instrument in the Lord’s hand. He never

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is allowed to touch us unless it serves the Lord's highest and best purposes.

Christ told Peter that Satan wanted to "sift" Peter like wheat. This is a strange term. When wheat and chaff are "winnowed," the chaff is removed and the wheat, the valuable kernels, is gathered. The Lord "winnows" (Matthew 3:12), but Satan wants to sift out the "wheat" and destroy it. The wheat, of course, is a picture of believers. So, the Lord knew what Satan had as his evil intention in Peter's life. The Lord went on to say to Peter, "But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not." The Lord assured Peter that He already knew what temptation and failure were coming Peter's way. And Peter was to rest in the fact that Christ had interceded for him and Satan would not destroy him.

Each one of us has this same promise at this very moment. The Lord knows where and how we will stumble and fail. Yet He is interceding for us right now, assuring us that we will ultimately be rescued from our own flesh and the wiles of the devil (Romans 8:26, 27).

It is interesting to note that the Lord said He prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. He did not pray that Peter would not fail. And we know Peter did fail. Before the cock crowed that next day, Peter three times denied even knowing the Lord. So, how is it that his faith did not fail? This is a critical issue. It was Christ's faith in and for Peter that did not fail. Faith is a gift. Christ alone is the Author and the Finisher of our individual faith (Hebrews 12:2). He is the Supplier of our faith and, thus, our Ultimate Faithfulness.

The next words of Christ to Peter also are amazing. He said, "...when you have repented and turned to me again," you will strengthen other believers (Luke 22:32 NLT). Isn't it encouraging

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to know that God uses our failures for His glory? When we have suffered in our own sin and been comforted by His grace, we can comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4). It was Peter who later wrote, “Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil...be strong in your faith...After you have suffered a little while, he [Christ] will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation” (1 Peter 5:8–10 NLT).

Lord, thank You for demonstrating Your faithfulness to each of us by giving us the facts about Peter’s experience. We praise You for Your prayers for us and for Your faith at work on our behalf. And it is thrilling to know that You will place us on a firm foundation. That is your promise to us. Give us the faith to sustain us when we feel like we are on sinking sand!

Chapter 54

*His Purpose in Our
Afflictions*



In their affliction they will seek Me early.

—Hosea 5:15

I SN'T IT A fact of our human nature that when all is going well we are not so quick to look up to our Savior? Often it is in our pain that we finally recognize our great need.

In Luke, chapter fifteen, we read of the Prodigal Son, who only turned to his father after he ran out of money and food. Up until that time, he felt he had things pretty much under his control. He had money and a plan! But then he came to the end of himself. He said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight" (Luke 15:21).

King David felt he had his life under control as well. He ruled Israel with authority; he had a conquering army. His coffers were full of money. When he spoke, people obeyed. And then he found himself guilty of adultery and murder. Nathan the

prophet confronted David, and David confessed, “I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Samuel 12:13).

The Spirit of God faithfully brought David to his knees. David longed for the “joy and gladness” that had been his spiritually in previous days (Psalm 51:8). The Lord taught David afresh about His grace and love and forgiveness. David cried out, “O Lord, open Thou my lips; And my mouth shall show forth Thy praise” (Psalm 51:15).

The Lord in His wisdom knows each one of us completely. He is thoroughly aware of what is needed to help us know Him better. As Charles Spurgeon wrote, “Every event as yet has worked out the most divinely blessed results...the poisonous drugs mixed in fit proportions have worked the cure; the sharp cuts of the lancet have cleaned out the proud flesh and facilitated the healing.”¹

Don’t we really long for there to be some other way to turn fully to the Lord other than through pain and agony? Yet the Scriptures tell us that the Father’s means of “training us up” in Himself is through His chastening work in us. Hebrews 12:6 states, “For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth...” Then we are told the end result, the purpose of His chastening: “afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Hebrews 12:11). This is God’s means for bringing us to righteousness, to a life focused on Him!

Often we have the mistaken idea that we simply can “choose” to be good and escape God’s chastening work. That faulty thinking stems from the idea that God’s chastening is a form of punishment. That is not the case at all. Rather, He is teaching us that He alone is holy and righteous. It is when we see our inability to produce righteousness in our lives that

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we learn to look to Him alone. Christ is our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Lord, give us the grace to embrace the pain we experience in every arena—emotionally, physically, and spiritually—as confirmation of Your love and care for us. We long to “seek You early” and to give You praise for such mysterious, eternal love.

Chapter 55

He is Able



Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down.

—Psalm 37:24

*W*HAT PROMISES ARE ours in Christ! We shall always be in the Lord's protection. He has His hand on us even in our stumbling and our falling. David, the psalmist, gives us an abundance of promises in this specific psalm: The Lord will bring forth our righteousness (verse 6). He will uphold us (verse 17). He has ordered our steps (verse 23). He is always full of mercy and graciousness toward us (verse 26). He never forsakes us, and He preserves us forever (verse 28). And on and on!

I wonder if we actually believe God's promises to us as believers. It seems that often we doubt our relationship with Him based on our evaluation of ourselves and our own lives. Yet His grace and goodness to us are based on nothing good in us. They are based solely on His love and affection for His own. He is our Father. We are born from above into His family.

He is Able

He is crazy about us. He is loving us, protecting us, wooing us, and telling us of His love and commitment to us on every page of Scripture. Yet we look at ourselves and fall into doubt and worry and fear and anxiety.

Perhaps we need to ask ourselves how our daily lives would change if we were to dare to believe the Lord's words of grace and love toward us. In Jude 24 we read, "Now unto Him That is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy..." Here is another incredible promise. Not only does our Father keep us from being "utterly cast down," but also He is *able* to keep us from falling. So we can dare to assume that even when we stumble and fall He has engineered that experience for our good. If that was not true, then we never could believe the promise of Romans 8:28 that tells us He works all things for good for His saints or Ephesians 1:11, which says He works all things after the counsel of His own will. Imagine what would happen if we were to believe these realities!

The Lord speaks these truths from Genesis to Revelation as a means of inviting us to grow in our knowledge of Him. His desire is for us to experience a deeper and more intimate relationship with Him. And isn't that what we want in our deepest being? Perhaps it would be revitalizing to our daily walk if we were to look to Him afresh and ask for the faith to have faith in His incredible commitment to us individually.

Perhaps we need to ask ourselves whether or not we really believe that the Lord is full of grace, never again bringing condemnation against us for any act or thought (Romans 8:1). There is nothing quite like coming to an understanding that we are loved unconditionally, never to be forsaken, never to be

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abandoned, never to be accused, and never to be ashamed. To know that we are loved every single minute of every day and that He is holding us, to keep us from falling and to bring us into His presence with “exceeding joy,” faultless, blameless, and spotless. He does this for us because He has loved us with an everlasting love, which began in eternity past and will continue into the eternal future. This is the love the Savior is pouring upon us every single day. We need more grace to receive it!

Father, we long to believe Your incredible promises in order that we may know You more fully and walk in You more freely. Grant us our hearts' desires, for Your glory and our peace.

Chapter 56

God, My Great Deliverer



He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me.

—Psalm 55:18

*A*S BELIEVERS, WE experience battles of every kind. The Enemy battles for our minds, wanting to fill them with fear or evil images or guilt and worry. The lust of our own flesh, the lust of our eyes, and the pride of life all battle for our attention. In addition, our battles can involve unhealthy relationships, deception by others, unfair treatment, and even outright persecution.

King David faced battles of every kind. He had very real enemies who wanted to kill him. There were traitors among his friends and family. He spoke often of “the oppression of the wicked” who “cast iniquity upon me” and who “hate me” (Psalm 55:3). Yet it was David himself who knew God alone to be the Great Deliverer.

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The Hebrew word for “deliver” is *padah*, and it literally means to be powerfully plucked from a difficult or dangerous place. David said that the Lord not only plucked him out of the grasp of his enemies but also that he was delivered into a place of peace. Literally, we read that David’s soul was set in peace (Psalm 55:18).

True to his humanity, David came to this knowledge of God as his Deliverer out of a desperate need. He wrote, “Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, And horror hath overwhelmed me” (Psalm 55:5). “Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle” (Psalm 56:8). At times, David wanted to run away from his circumstances, to give up the battle. He said, “Oh that I... could fly away, and be at rest...wander far off...remain in the wilderness” (Psalm 55:6, 7).

Have you felt this kind of oppression or fear or pressure or personal agony in life’s battles? Have you shed some tears over broken relationships, heartbreaking circumstances, or your own failure and sin? Every one of us would agree that we have agonized over these very things. That is the plight of every human being, especially a believer who experiences the battle of flesh and spirit.

David provided us with abundant testimony of his own personal experiences of God as his faithful Deliverer. Pressed to the uttermost, he experienced the Lord coming to his rescue again and again. In his war with Goliath or in his struggles with King Saul or in his failures with Bathsheba, David ultimately learned that the Lord loved him and protected him through it all.

God, My Great Deliverer

Listen to David's words:

- "I will call upon God; And the Lord shall save me...He shall hear my voice" (Psalm 55:16, 17).
- "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee" (Psalm 55:22).
- "What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee" (Psalm 56:3).
- "In God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me" (Psalm 56:4).
- "When I cry unto Thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: This I know; for God is for me" (Psalm 56:9).

The apostle Paul raises the rhetorical question, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). Paul also reminds us that God "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us" (Romans 8:32) and that the Spirit of God continually prays for us in accordance with the will of God (Romans 8:27).

Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief! You have promised that no evil shall befall us. You have given Your angels charge over us to keep us in all our ways. You will be with us in trouble and deliver us. You will set us on high because we know Your Name (Psalm 91:10–14). Anoint Your Words to our hearts for Your glory, O God, our Deliverer.

Chapter 57

The Ongoing War



For the flesh lusts against the Spirit...so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

—Galatians 5:17

*H*ERE LIES THE agony in the lives of all true believers, it seems! We are consistently faced with being “less than” what we feel the Lord wants us to be. And so the questions plague us: “How can I live the Christian life in a fully committed, responsible manner?” “What do I need to do or be to achieve this kind of consistent Christian life?”

The biblical answer to these questions is rather shocking. Paul says, “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But *ye* are *not* in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if...the Spirit of God dwell in you” (Romans 8:8, 9, emphasis mine). If we are born again, made alive by the Holy Spirit, we are not in the flesh. We live in the realm of the Spirit. And our peace is in direct proportion to the Lord’s revealing this reality to us.

The Ongoing War

So, why is it that we still experience a battle with our flesh (our sinful cravings and selfish preferences)? The answer lies in this mystery: I am a new creation, born of the Spirit, free from the law of sin, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2). Yet I still am residing in a mortal body that continues to be tied to this world. This body of death (the flesh) has no power to separate me from Christ. (“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” [Romans 8:35].) And yet these fleshly desires plague my daily experiences and steal my joy in Christ.

Paul gives us the only answer to the dilemma. He challenges us to remember who we are—new creations living in the Spirit. Then we are to stand in the awareness that our flesh, this body of death, is being put to death by the work of the Holy Spirit in us, for the Spirit alone mortifies the deeds of the flesh (Romans 8:13).

We also are covered in God’s armor. He has given us the helmet of salvation. The Scriptures say to “take the helmet of salvation” (Ephesians 6:17). The Greek word for “take” is *dechomai*, and it means to receive, *to recognize what is ours*. The Lord alone can subdue the works of the flesh. As Paul writes, “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:24, 25).

Ultimately, the ongoing war has been won for us, and our peace in Him and our joy are experienced only as we look to Christ’s finished work on our behalf. We look for deliverance from our earthly struggles by thanking God that through Christ, in the power of His Spirit, He will reign in us. “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit” (Zechariah 4:6).

Lord, may we dare to believe that You have fought our battles and continue to stand for us and never against us.

Chapter 58

The Lord is the Director!



Now God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ,
direct our way unto you.

—1 Thessalonians 3:11

THE SAINTS OF old seemed always to be focused on the Lord as the Director of every detail in life. Paul, the apostle, relied on the Lord to direct his journey to the Thessalonians. He went on to ask on behalf of believers that the Lord would cause them to increase and abound in love...“To the end He may stablish [establish] your hearts unblameable in holiness” at His coming (1 Thessalonians 3:12, 13). Paul stated that “the Lord is faithful, Who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil” (2 Thessalonians 3:3). And he asked that “the Lord *direct* your hearts into the love of God” (2 Thessalonians 3:5, emphasis mine).

The Greek word for “direct” is *kateuthuno*, and it means to guide. Isn’t it interesting that Paul suggests that it is the Lord who will guide and direct our hearts? Have you ever attempted

The Lord is the Director!

to guide your own heart? How is it possible to direct our own hearts? It's not! It requires the active work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts for us to be moved to love God. In fact, Paul says that the love of God is "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost," Who was *given* to us (Romans 5:5).

Virtually all that unfolds in our lives as believers is the result of the Lord providing consistent "heart operations" on us. And the Holy Spirit is the One who carries out this supernatural work. The Spirit directs or guides us into loving God and being patient; He produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, faithfulness, etc. (Galatians 5:22). Paul says that we do "the will of God from the heart" (Ephesians 6:6).

So, do we live in the positive expectation that the Lord will direct our hearts, day by day, to reflect His image and do His will? The Word of God promises that He is the Director of our lives if we know Him. And He moves us from the inside out!

The prophet Ezekiel seemed to have a clear understanding of the Spirit of the Lord as the Sovereign Director of our hearts and our lives. He quoted the Lord, saying, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you...and *cause* you to walk in My statutes, and ye *shall* keep My judgments and do them" (Ezekiel 36:26, 27, emphasis mine).

This is the same Lord that David knew. David wrote, "He *maketh* me to lie down...He *leadeth* me...He *restoreth* my soul..." (Psalm 23:2, 3). David looked to his Shepherd, Who would lead him in the path of righteousness for the sake of the Shepherd's own name.

Lord, thank You for directing our hearts and lives by Your Spirit. We are humbled each day by Your love and Your gracious care for us.

Chapter 59

The Lord Pleads!



O Lord, Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul.

—Lamentations 3:58

*J*EREMIAH, THE OLD Testament prophet, lived in heartfelt agony over the condition of God’s people, Israel. And he had personal agonies of mind and heart, a result of being disrespected, unloved, persecuted, and abused.

It seems that we as individual believers experience similar pain in our hearts and minds. There are physical and/or emotional and spiritual hurts that cause us to feel abandoned or even hopeless. We pray, but we often do not sense that the Lord is responding. It is in this precise condition that we can stand in the truth of Lamentations 3:58. The Lord Himself has pleaded our cause!

Yet here is a major question: to Whom does the Lord plead? We discover in Romans 8:26, 27 that the Holy Spirit prays for us when we don’t know how or for what we should pray. “And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying...”

The Lord Pleads!

(Romans 8:27 NLT). Then we read in Romans 8:34 (NLT) that Christ Himself is “sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, *pleading* for us” (emphasis mine). So the Spirit and the Savior *plead* for us before the Throne of the Father, “making intercession for us.” The word “plead” in Hebrew is *rib*, and it means *to strive*. Amazingly, the word translated “causes” is also the Hebrew word *rib*. It is as if Jeremiah is saying that the Lord has *strived* (pleaded to the Father) on behalf of all our *strivings* (causes)!

David, the psalmist, prayed to the Lord, “Plead my cause, and deliver me...” (Psalm 119:154). He sensed that *deliverance* is a result of the Son’s *striving* on our behalf. King Solomon, when discussing the needs of orphans, wrote, “For their Redeemer is mighty: He shall plead their cause with thee” (Proverbs 23:11). And in the New Testament we discover that Christ prayed for Peter’s faith! The Son *pleaded* with the Father on behalf of Peter, asking that Peter’s faith not fail in the face of Satan’s siftings (Luke 22:31–34).

What *causes* or *strivings* do you have at the top of your mind at this very moment or at this time in your life? The Son and the Spirit already have brought these striving of yours before the Father. And their prayers always include the request that the answers will be “in harmony with God’s own will” (Romans 8:27 NLT).

Perhaps, instead of agonizing or worrying over our own issues (*strivings!*), we should, by the revelation of the Spirit, simply *believe* that our *causes* all have come before the Father already! And He will answer because these Three are in agreement, Father, Son, and Spirit. And They are working all things together for our highest good (Romans 8:28).

More Heavenly Treasures

Oh, Redeemer, thank You for knowing the most intimate strivings of my heart. Thank You for speaking urgently to the Father about my deepest concerns. Give me the grace to rest in Your perfect completion of my greatest longings.

Endnotes

Chapter 41

1. John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), 305.

Chapter 47

1. Charles N. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 91.

Chapter 54

1. Charles N. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 436.

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