

The Church of God International

WINTER 2008/2009

infuse

COME UNTO ME, ALL YE THAT
LABOR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN,
AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST.



FOR MY YOKE IS EASY,
AND MY BURDEN IS LIGHT.
MATTHEW 11:28,30

infuse

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Suffering, pain, adversity, hardship and affliction are all part of life. At one time or another each of us will be confronted with this reality. Pain holds no boundaries. The test of our character is seen in these uncomfortable character building opportunities. Without misery, tribulation and fear how does one build sympathy, patience, courage

and endurance? The apostle Paul left a perfect example of how to rejoice in our tribulations and endure to the end.

During Paul's imprisonment in Rome, he wrote the books of Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians. When faced with hardship, I encourage you to read one, if not all, of Paul's letters from prison. Paul said, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation" (Philippians 4:12).

Circumstances never prevented Paul from losing his focus. Life's challenges aren't the focus, rather Christ Jesus is and that is the secret to Paul's contentment. In Christ, "all things hold together," says Paul (Colossians 1:17). The reality is God's plan and purpose for each of us is so much greater. We should never compare it with our human suffering.

When life turns to hurt and one's dreams do not become a reality, how does one follow Paul's example? What did Paul have that each of us yearns for? Paul's source of spiritual power and courage came from Christ and he was always sure to recognize Jesus Christ as that source. "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

Paul seemed to be motivated through suffering. "For Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 2:10). We like Paul must endure difficulties. The enduring reveals the power and glory of God through our weakness and we should be motivated by what the future holds, which is the Kingdom of God.

In addition to Paul's commitment and focus, he had gratitude in all things. He was always in the will of God because he was forever grateful for all blessings. Paul wrote the Ephesians, "To him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Encumbered with chains and sitting in a prison, Paul was thankful to God for his spiritual gifts. Paul's confident outlook on life came from the Holy Spirit. We too have access to the same Holy Spirit. When you are burdened, lean on the source of your strength, Jesus Christ. In Him you are secure and He is always with you.

After considerable time in prayer, I have decided it is time for me to resign as editor of Infuse magazine. I would like to thank each of you for allowing me the opportunity to serve you. It is my prayer that through Christ you are triumphant in every trial "and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Noni".

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ALWAYS

By Jeff Reed

The two men sat in their prison cell. Their captors had placed them in the innermost chamber and fastened their feet to the ground. Earlier they had been stripped and severely beaten. They had been accused of putting the owners of a psychic based enterprise out of business. They were now suffering the consequences of that accusation. They were, in fact, innocent of any crimes and were unfairly suffering punishment.

Many times in our life we may find ourselves in similar dire circumstances. We may not necessarily be beaten and in prison, but the situations in which we are caught may be similarly unbearable. At many points through our life we may lose a loved one, lose a job, find family or ourselves severely ill, fight with someone who we care for, or find ourselves in financial trouble. We may experience a disaster or severe accident. There are numerous extreme conditions that could cause us to be depressed and lose hope. There are also many smaller situations we face monthly, weekly, and daily that could give us a bad disposition. We may be harassed by our boss at work, wait in a long line at the grocery store, or find ourselves in traffic.

As I have grown older I have realized that things usually do not end up the way one would expect. Does this mean we should accept these facts and just be miserable at times in our life? Or is there a better way to look at things? Can we control our attitude?

Around midnight, the two men chained to the floor began praying and singing songs to praise God. Not a very typical response. We would expect them to curse their jailers. They did the opposite. They were expressing joy when they should have been feeling pain. One of those men would later write a letter that explained why he had such joy. His name was Paul and the letter was addressed to the church in Philippi.

In this letter he uses the word joy or a similar word an astonishing sixteen times. He sums up his approach in Philippians 4:4: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" No matter what the circumstance, he tells us we should always rejoice. He indicates that the source of joy comes from God.

When faced with troubles, people often seek to find joy in physical pleasures. Some turn to drugs, sex, entertainment, or other material things, which only give joy temporarily. Consider ice cream. I don't know of anyone who

isn't happy eating a pint of his or her favorite ice cream. But soon after the spoon scrapes the paper carton for that last tiny bite the joy comes to an end.

The joy that comes from God's Spirit doesn't end. This source of joy was the secret to Paul and his companion Silas praising God while in prison. He explains this concept: "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:12-13).

Rejoicing takes effort. If you are feeling sad, smile. If you are distressed, praise God. If you are in pain, pray. It is the tough situations in life that give us opportunity to build character. We should remember that God uses these opportunities to train us for service in His Kingdom. Some-

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By Anika Sandy-Hanson

I read a recent saying that was credited to Lee Holz, "Ability is what you're capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it." Our attitudes are very important and the Bible tells us we should have positive attitudes, we should rejoice, and we should be thankful. True, God created each of us with unique personalities and this means not everyone will be happy-go-lucky and some of us may not even like to smile on a regular basis. Well, let's praise God that rejoicing is not based on personalities or even on circumstances.

Now, I agree we should be genuine and that negative emotions are just as important as positive ones. That's the reason God gave us a whole range of ways to feel and He blessed us with the ability to express ourselves in many ways. No, I'm not suggesting giving up negative emotions such as sadness, anger, or jealousy. In fact, I'm not even suggesting that we "will" ourselves to always be happy, calm, or unemotional. Rather, I'm suggesting we stay constantly aware of our emotions, make sure they do not control us, and work on rejoicing in our circumstances. How can we do that?

Well, Paul tells us in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice." This is Paul, the man who was in perpetual trouble; he was stoned, beaten, shipwrecked, and held under house arrest, just to name a few of his circumstances. If that was his reality, why did he urge us to rejoice? I think for two reasons. First, when we change our

focus from our current situation to our real goal, eternal life, we won't be on the emotional roller coaster that this world can foster. Second, what if I told you hundreds of research studies show that it's people's attitudes that determine how their situations turn out. When two groups of people are compared, those who face things with a positive attitude recover from negative situations and overcome challenges much faster than those who are negative.

I can understand that sometimes it feels good to wallow in a bad mood. Sometimes we have to just let the negative emotion play out, because again, God gave us a spectrum of emotions so we can feel and express ourselves in a genuine way. What we should be striving for is an emotional balance that is not dependent on our circumstances and that doesn't tip our emotional scale one way or the other.

Paul, in Philippians 4:11, tells us we can achieve this balance by DEVELOPING the habit of being content in any state. This development can be a slow process; after all, it's against our human nature to be content when things aren't going the way we want. In order to start the ball rolling, we must realize there are a few things that stand in the way of our joy. Let's call them the joy-stealers.

First, we can't have joy if we're not thankful, and especially not if we're ungrateful. Spiritual, lasting joy comes when we're able to feel God's love and appreciate the blessings in our life. Throughout Psalms, King David provides a fabulous

YOUR EMOTIONAL SPECTRUM

example of a life filled with joy and thankfulness in spite of negative circumstances. In Psalm 140:1-5 we see the King downcast over the schemes of his enemies; by the second half of the chapter, he's noting that God is faithful to rescue his people and he urges us to give thanks. To reinforce the point, Psalm 30:4 tells us "give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness."

Second, when current circumstances make it difficult to be joyful, recall how our Father has blessed you in the past or in other areas. If you can't find any other reason, just thank Him for waking you up to see another day. If even that is a challenge, think of how He has been faithful to others. Focus on the men and women in the Bible if necessary. Think of Joseph and God's faithfulness to him (Genesis 37-45) or Hannah and the way God allowed her to finally silence her competition (1 Samuel 1 and 2). Each of us may have our own favorite Bible personalities. If you can't name one off the top of your head, just read Hebrews 11 and this chapter will provide the names of many faithful men and women. Read some of their stories and then select one or two who really inspire you. The memory of these Biblical accounts can buoy you when Satan attempts to overshadow your joy.

A third "joy-stealer" is a troubled spirit. Usually, if our spirit is troubled, it is God's Holy Spirit revealing something to us. There will be no joy until we acknowledge and work on whatever the Spirit has identified. Sometimes we already know

what is bothering our spirit and we know there is an action or thought from which we need to repent. At other times it takes more work to identify the source of the problem; we feel upset or depressed but can't really pinpoint the reason. In either case, the uneasiness can only be addressed when we pray and have a heart-to-heart with our Father. It's like when we have a huge fight with someone close to us, we dread having to bring up the subject, but we know it's the only way to make things right. Plus once we've patched things up, it's like a huge load has been lifted.

In order to continue in God's wonderful joy, we must be free from any loads, and that means we must constantly listen to what God is saying to us through His Spirit, which dwells in us. How empowering it is to feel confident about our actions, thoughts, and decisions. Even if everyone else around disagrees with our choices, we can be content if God is pleased. The opposite is also true; we may please people, but if our Father is disappointed, then the choice will only rob us of our joy. That is why Paul was able to say that he could rejoice at all times; he based his decisions on God's directions, so it didn't matter whether people rejected, reviled, or revered him. Paul's inner joy kept him focused on the ultimate goal, which is eternity with God. Once we learn to keep our eye on that prize, we too will be able to say with confidence "I will rejoice." I



mar you be

By Tina Chamberlain

Everyone we know has emotional injuries. Some are insignificant, trivial, not worth hanging onto. We just have to get past it. But for a great number of people there are large, serious, and deep wounds. What kind of emotional injuries do you have? Are you still hanging onto them? How have your wounds shaped you into who you are today? Did you think you were over them, but you notice the hurts more now than ever? Or something happens to reopen the wound? Have you held onto the injury, letting it become a piece of you? Do you think about getting back at the person(s) that did this injury to you? Do you replay the incident(s) in your mind?

You've been thinking about this injustice and just can't seem to get it off your mind. Often, when we are hanging onto our wounds, picking at the scabs, we can feel like justice will never come. So in our own wisdom, revenge becomes our chance to equal the injustice. In Romans 12:19, Paul cautions, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (NKJV throughout, except as noted). This is stated in Deuteronomy 32:35: "Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; their foot shall slip in due time for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things to come hasten upon them."

Have you tried to get revenge? How did you feel after the fact? If we take revenge after we get hurt, is it because we believe we can handle the situation better than God? My parents have a saying, "Two wrongs don't make a right." God has His own version of this saying in Mark 11:25: "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." Remember that God knows our hearts and sees everything. Proverbs 15:3 states, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good." This means that whatever wrong was done to you, God saw it.

You might be asking, "If God saw it, why didn't He stop it? Why did He let me get hurt?" Do you trust God to keep His promises of revenge for us? Forgiveness is sometimes the most difficult thing to do. You might be thinking your injury is so serious you will never be able to forgive them for what they did. What

...and how y bags will checking?"

if God said that to us? Why is our forgiveness of others so essential to God's forgiveness of us? In Luke 6:37, Jesus says, "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."

Forgiveness (noun): act of pardoning somebody

God doesn't say we are to be doormats.

James writes, "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you" (James 1:19-21, NIV). He wants us to be hearing what is being said, slow to respond and slow to anger.

Do we need to be around the people we forgive? God says we are to turn away from the wicked. Proverbs 4:14-16 states, "Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; Turn away from it and pass on. For they do not sleep unless they have done evil; and their sleep is taken away unless they make someone fall." Are you around people like this in your life?

When we forgive, we liberate ourselves from the bondage. We unburden our baggage. In Matthew 11:28-29, Jesus says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Are there people you need to forgive? You may want to do it today, because you might not have the opportunity tomorrow. How many bags do you want to check? I

SO WE MIGHT LIVE

By Brian Christensen

In the beginning, God created heaven and earth. He then created man and woman. This perfect creation and family pleased God very much. He knew, however, Lucifer was loose on the earth. This evil angel, and his following, would be a threat to God's perfection. Eventually, Satan did lead man into temptation and sin. God loved man so much, He chose to sacrifice His Son, Jesus, so we might have a second chance and He could remain close to man.

SIN

Sin is an act of rebellion or disobedience. It separates us from God and will continue to pull us further away as it grows and spreads like an infectious disease. From the moment Adam and Eve committed the first sin, God's original plan of perfection was destroyed. As man continued to live and reproduce, God knew sin would only grow and manifest itself through Satan. It also committed us to endure through sin and suffer the consequences.

God is aware of and feels every act of sin. The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground" (Genesis 4:10). Sin can only be absolved by the shedding of blood through sacrifice. God established sacrifices for man to atone for his sins. "For the life of a creature is in the blood and I have given it to you to make an atonement for yourselves on the altar, it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (Genesis 17:10). Throughout the Old Testament, countless numbers of animals were killed in man's attempt to worship God and restore his life. God has continually been disappointed by man's lack of faith and worship of Him. At one point, God chose to cleanse the entire earth and save only one man, along with his family, who was faithful to Him. Can you imagine how painful this must have been for God as He heard each person cry out and die?

This was so terrible, God instructed Noah to have no additional openings in the Ark and to seal shut the main entrance. God wanted to shield Noah and his family from the horrible effects of sin. God knew man's sin would become greater and His pain would grow as well. Man could not continue this way, nor could God. The cleansing of the earth and the sacrifices on the altar would not be enough

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ERRORS & ADMIS SIONS

By Bonita M. Sams

Everyone desires to live a life completely saturated with perfection based on the world, as we believe it should be. However, errors and mistakes are likely to happen in our lives as a result of decisions we make. The reality is the world and its inhabitants are imperfect. Only God is sovereign and personifies the essence of complete perfection.

There is no doubt that as true believers we should continuously strive each day to override the errors of sin which the Apostle Paul talks about in Romans 7:21: "evil is present with me." That's just it; sin is always before us and among us. In actuality, it really comes down to the choices we make. God allows us to make the choice to sin or not to sin. He also has given us a venue in which to confess those sins and mistakes that we make. The key is knowing that if we live our lives according to His will for us, He will indeed embrace us. When we allow sin to resonant in us and control every aspect of our lives, we have given sin control rather than God. He makes it abundantly clear to Cain and to us in Genesis 4:7 that "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." He has given us the power to rule over sin rather than sin ruling us.

REPEAT OFFENDERS

The pressure to exude perfection is sometimes elevated for many Christians as so many believe

that making a mistake makes them of far less value to our Father or possibly diminishes their credibility in the eyes of others. We should never fear making mistakes because inevitably we will. What should be a red flag to us is when we repeatedly make the same mistakes and we never go to God with a sorrowful heart of admission. God knew that admission would serve as the initial steps to healing the gap of sin between Him and us. That is why He says in 1 John 1:9, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. God makes it clear that if we admit our sins and shortcomings, He is just to forgive and cleanse us from unrighteousness.

The giant step is admitting that sin is present in our lives and we need Him to wipe our slate clean, so we might begin anew. The problem arises when we don't recognize that we have a behavior or habit that is displeasing to God and we stubbornly refuse to admit to it. The interesting part is that He already knows our shortcomings but we sometimes pretend if we don't say it out loud or think it, then it really doesn't exist.

When I ask my 8-year old son if he has washed his hands or cleaned up his room, he is notorious for not answering me because he knows that it's highly likely I will be unhappy if he did not carry out the expected task. Somewhere in that incredibly amazing brain of his, he believes that if he doesn't answer me, he doesn't have to face

up to the true facts. He hangs all of his hopes on my eventually just letting it ride. In his world, by not facing the truth, there is no harm, no foul, and everybody is happy. That's when I say, "Sorry pal, you are the weakest link and you will tell me the truth!"

God has shown us throughout the Bible that there are consequences when we repeatedly refuse to go back to the place of conflict and take an honest look at it. We must humble ourselves and admit we are in need of correction. Healing and progression in any conflicting situation, whether it be with our family, friends, neighbors, children, or co-workers, is just not possible unless someone has the guts to admit an error has occurred. Otherwise, there will be a constant battle of being at odds with one another and resolution is just not possible.

MISTAKES BUILD WISDOM

The composer John Powell said, "The only real mistake is the one from which we learn nothing." Our mistakes should always be an opportunity to grow in wisdom, stature, and faith. When we dismiss our errors and choose not to embrace them as a source for true understanding, that in and of itself is the biggest mistake of all. When God calls one of His own to step out on faith and, at times, demand we do something the world may consider as radical, there will always be that nagging voice in the back of our heads that says, "You may not get this right. You might end up looking ridiculous. People will think you are a nut case." In spite of and because of all those negative thoughts, our faith must supersede those thoughts.

We were all designed to do marvelous works in the Kingdom but we must not fear making a mistake while working in His vineyard. We must trust that through our missteps, He promises to continue to order our steps. Our prayers should always be that we are open to God revealing our human frailties on an individual basis as a means to open our eyes to His truths. Being a believer is all about the desire to know the truth and to live the truth. In fact, the truth is, we are all prone to error. In the end, we must rise above those mistakes and determine we shall be overcomers of those things that are in direct conflict with God by readily admitting to our shortcomings. After all, when the smoke clears, it is truly the love of God that seals our perfection. |

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to atone for all of man's sin. Sin would eventually darken the entire earth, as it did in the days of Noah and later in Sodom. Those faithful to God would be few and man would ultimately perish.

OUR SAVIOR

Fortunately for us, God had another plan to help man become closer to Him and have a chance of achieving eternal life. Jesus would have to become flesh, prove that perfection was possible, and suffer for the sins of man. What an incredible sacrifice! Imagine the pain, fear, and love both God and Jesus had for us, as the plan became necessary. Jesus would suffer tremendously as He would carry the weight of all of man's sin in addition to the future of the world, as He did this.

God loved man dearly. If Jesus failed, man would have no hope of salvation and God would have been devastated by the loss of man. God wanted to be close to man again, but sin had separated us from Him. Jesus, God's Son, opened the way for us to renew our fellowship with God. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). This, however, did not come easily as Jesus would suffer more than any other person who ever lived. He was tempted, denied, betrayed, laughed at, beaten horribly, and killed. He experienced every emotion and pain possible. As He gave up His last breath, His Spirit of perfection was turned back over to God and the doorway was opened for man to renew his fellowship with God. Jesus made it possible for all to achieve the glory of God.

We cannot do it alone as we have and need Jesus to help us along the way. We can go to Him with all our suffering as He genuinely understands our pain. Man must learn and grow by experiencing trials and tribulations, but through all of this, we have hope in our Master, Jesus Christ. Hope that we can achieve the glory of God and maintain a close relationship with Him by the power and authority of Jesus. Jesus also restored God's faith and closeness with man. The creation of man was not a mistake and He could now restore to all mankind the closeness He had with Adam and Eve.

Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. He was the Lamb of God and paid the full penalty for our sins. As Jesus cried out, "It is finished," just before He died, He proclaimed to God the sins of man were "paid in full" and God's plan for perfection and salvation had been restored. Until this time, only a system of sacrifices could atone for our sins. Sin had separated man from God and only through the sacrifice of God's Son could people be forgiven and become clean before God. Now we can freely approach God because of what Jesus did for us. Jesus had to suffer in order to restore the closeness between God and His creation. We should all take comfort and be thankful Jesus is there for us no matter when or why we need Him. |

The Glass

Half Full

By Mike James

Many of us become depressed or negative when things don't go our way. According to the Bible we should have a different reaction when things don't work out the way we want them to. This article will help us understand why we need to handle trials and suffering from a Biblical perspective.

Being a Christian itself will cause trials due to the nature of Christianity. Matthew 28:20 tells us we need to obey everything Jesus has commanded us. Doing what Christ commands will lead to friction with the world. For example, Jesus taught His disciples the proper observance of the Sabbath day. Some of us will run into trials with our employer if we follow Jesus on this command. Some of us have had to give up jobs or not apply for better paying jobs because of this command from Jesus. But

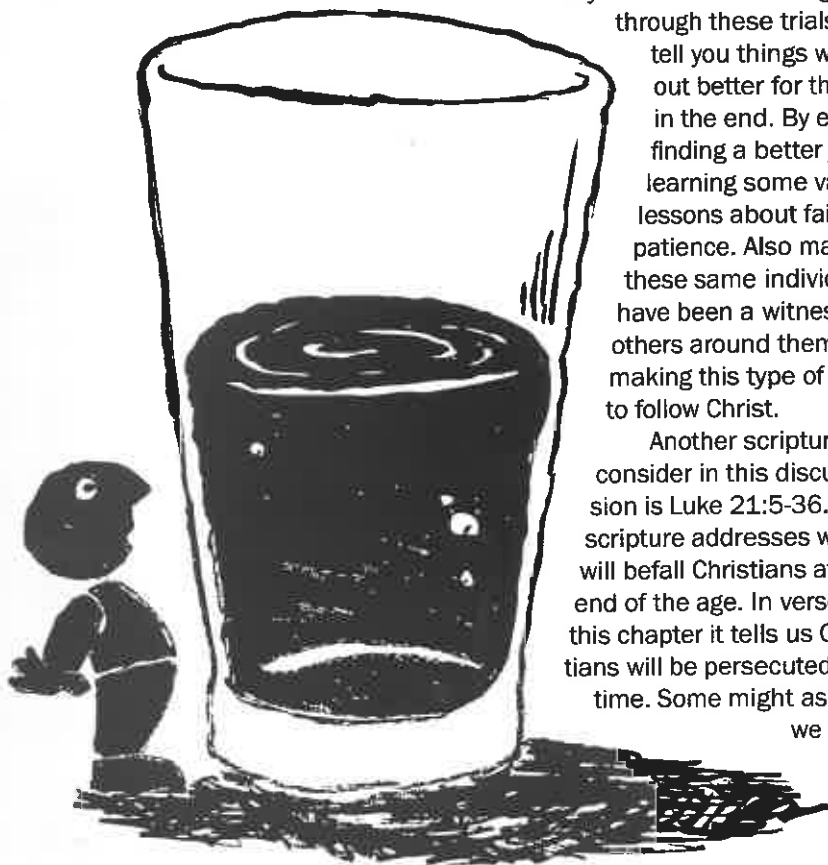
many of those who have gone through these trials will tell you things worked out better for them in the end. By either finding a better job or learning some valuable lessons about faith and patience. Also many of these same individuals have been a witness to others around them by making this type of stand to follow Christ.

Another scripture to consider in this discussion is Luke 21:5-36. This scripture addresses what will befall Christians at the end of the age. In verse 12 of this chapter it tells us Christians will be persecuted at this time. Some might ask why we would

have to suffer persecution if we are obeying Christ. Verse 13 provides part of the answer. It tells us that we will be witnesses for Christ by being persecuted. I believe our example of standing up for Christ when the world is against us will be a powerful witness for those who have not yet made up their minds for Christ at that time. We must remember even if the persecution leads to our demise it is not the end of us. Christ will resurrect us and we will live forever after this life ends. In verse 19 we read if we stand firm we will gain life. This is referring to the gift of eternal life from Christ. Don't forget this life is not what it's all about. We have to focus on the future and the Kingdom of God. By doing this we can put up with more of the trials and suffering we might experience in this life. Recognizing the trials and suffering are refining us and building our character for the job God has for us in the next life.

Let us not forget Christ had to go through trials and suffering. By experiencing those trials and that suffering Christ has qualified as a High Priest for us. Therefore we can go to him with the troubles and issues we experience in this life, knowing He can help us overcome because He has experienced what we feel as humans. Notice this in Hebrews 4:14-16. As the scripture says, we need to be confident about placing our faith in Christ. Thinking negatively when we are suffering will only exacerbate the situation. We need to welcome the trials and suffering because we know Christ can get us through anything.

One final scripture that can inspire us on this topic is Revelation 21:1-4. Here we read about the end and the time when God will come to dwell with man. Verse 4 states that there will be no more death, mourning, pain, or crying. Only then will our suffering and trials come to an end. But they will come to an end. Until that time we will have to endure the trials and suffering knowing what is in store for us. Keeping this and other positive scriptures in mind can help you overcome the temporary trials and suf-



ferings we all face in this life.

Another great Biblical example that can help deal with our trials and suffering is the example of Job. Job was a man who followed God and His way, yet great calamities came upon Job. He had great wealth and a large family and he lost it all. He also lost his health too. Despite this, Job remained faithful to God for a time. But as time went on he began to doubt his faith in God. He could not understand why all these bad things had happened to him. As time went on God had a conversation with Job and helped him understand. Job learned that in the big scheme of things he was nothing compared to God and His power.

This bad experience helped Job learn some things he could never have learned if his life had remained blissful. Going through the tough experience had refined Job and made

him into a man of even greater character and humility. In the end God restored Job's physical wealth, family, and health. When we suffer trials and suffering we need to look for what we can learn from the experience and how we can grow. Sometimes the answer will not immediately be apparent to us. But we need to be patient that something positive can come from these experiences. Always keep in mind this life is not the end.

The next time you are suffering remember the old adage "no pain no gain." This may sound simplistic, but it helps me sometimes put up with my trials. But don't forget: even though you may experience pain, what you suffer can never equal the gain you will receive. If we endure to the end we can partake of the very glory of God (Romans 8:17-18). Nothing could be any better than that. Suffering? Trials? Bring them on! i

CHRISTIAN PARENTING

By Elizabeth Barnett

ENCOURAGEMENT

Remember to always encourage your kids. Tell them you are proud of them. It means so much to a child to know their parents are cheering them on. When your children know you care about their success and you want them to do well, they will work to make sure you are proud of them. If there is a sport or activity they want to try, tell them they can do it. Don't hold your children back by telling them they wouldn't be good at it. Children are sensitive and will remember when they hear words that tell them they don't have the ability to do something. They will give up and soon they won't try anything new. For example, when you meet your child's teacher and ask how your child is doing in class, do it when your child is not around. If your child is not doing well in a particular area, it is better for you to hear it and not your child. Once you find out what your child needs help with, go home and work with your child on it but in a positive manner.

TRIALS AND SUFFERING

Everyone, at one time or another, is faced with trials and suffering, even children. It is your job to teach your children how to handle a trial and the attitude to have when suffering. Spend time reading and teaching the story of Job. Ask your children about the trials they have faced. Maybe as a family, you have suffered some difficult times. Think about how it was handled and the attitudes everyone had. Could you have handled it differently?

BIBLE STORY

Job was a God-fearing man. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he was very wealthy. Satan told God

that if he took everything away from Job, Job would turn his back on God. God knew this would not happen so he turned Job over to Satan. All of Job's animals were stolen and killed, which was his wealth. His children were all killed as well. Job lost everything. What do you think he did? What would you do if you lost everything?

Job praised God. "He said: 'I was naked when I was born, and I will be naked when I die. The Lord gave these things to me, and he has taken them away. Praise the name of the Lord'" (Job 1:21). Job didn't curse God like Satan was hoping he would. After Job praised God it only got worse. It was like the saying goes: when it rains it pours. Then Job's health was taken from him. "He put painful sores on Job's body, from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. Job took a piece of broken pottery to scrape himself, and he sat in ashes in misery" (Job 2:7-8). Job still did not curse God.

Three of Job's friends went to visit him. For seven days they sat together and no one said a word because they knew how much Job was suffering. "After seven days Job cried out and cursed the day he had been born, saying: 'Let the day I was born be destroyed, and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!'" (Job 3:1-3). Job's friends told him this was all happening because God was punishing him for a hidden sin. Job refused to believe his friends. A young man named Elihu showed up to talk with Job. Elihu told Job that a person's suffering is not proportional to the person's sinfulness. Elihu also told Job that his thinking was wrong. He had forgotten that God is in control and instead elevated his own righteousness.

God then spoke to Job and told him that Elihu was right. Job had gotten wrapped up in feeling sorry for

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himself. Job realized what he had done and repented to God. God told Job's friends that they were wrong for how they spoke about God. They were to present an offering and Job would pray for them. When Job prayed for his friends, God healed him. He also blessed him with twice the wealth he had before and another seven sons and three daughters. Job received God's mercy. Job had suffered immensely and had given in to Satan. We need to remember that when we are suffering we are to continue to go to God, praise Him, and thank Him for what He has given us. It is a trial we have to go through and the suffering will be painful but God is always there for us. He will see us through the good times and the bad times. We just can't forget to go to Him!

STRESSED OUT!

Living in the year 2008 gives a kid a lot to be stressed out about. There is

“And God’s peace, which is so great we cannot understand it, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:7

constant pressure at school, both with homework and with friends. Then, you get home and find mom and dad fighting...again. To top it all off, the whole world seems to be at war and everyone is worried about terrorist attacks. This stuff really piles up and can create a lot of stress and worry in your life. The question to ask is, “What does God want me to do with all this stress?” Simple, He wants you to THROW it away. 1 Peter 5:7 says, “Cast all your anxiety [stress] on Him, for He cares for you.” The word “cast” means to throw. In other words, when you feel stress coming on, you can throw that stress to Jesus. When you start to worry if things will ever be okay, you can turn to Jesus and ask for

His help. You can trust Him to take your stress and give you peace. All you have to do is find a place where you can spend some time talking to Jesus. Tell Him what's going on in your life and exactly what is stressing you. You will be amazed at how Jesus draws close to you and surrounds you with His peace and love. Another part of God's plan for “throwing” away stress is to talk with people who care about you. The next time the stress piles up, talk to one of your parents or another adult such as your teacher. You can also ask God what you can do to make the situation better. He'll show you. He always does! So start throwing away your stress and spend more time with God and having FUN! i

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times doing the opposite and rejoicing in a tough situation will change it.

As Paul and Silas sang in the prison a miracle occurred. There was a great earthquake, all the doors were opened by the tremor, and all the chains binding the prisoners came loose. The warden was so sure that all the prisoners had escaped and was about to kill himself until he found the prison still full. Inspired by Paul and Silas' joyful prayers and singing, no one left. Because of their joy the warden and his family began to believe in God and his entire household was baptized. That is astounding. Paul and Silas went free the next day. Rejoicing changed the entire situation in a tremendous way.

Galatians 5:22 lists joy as a fruit of God's Spirit. If we have been baptized and received the Spirit after laying on of hands, then we are guaranteed access to that joy. We may and probably will find ourselves in tough situations that we can do nothing about. We must not let ourselves forget about that joy. We must rejoice. Always! i

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The Ways of Your Heart

By Emmanuel Donkor

“Be happy young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see but know that for all these things, God will bring you to judgment.”
Ecc. 11:9

These are the words of Solomon, arguably the wisest king in the history of Israel as he offers this piece of advice to the youth of his time and by extension to the young men and women of today. Solomon encourages us to make the best of every opportunity that comes our way. We should not only “be happy” but also “let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth.” And as he rightly puts it, “This too, I see, is from the hand of God” (Ecclesiastes 2:24b).

The 21st Century has presented the world and the youth of today with unprecedented opportunities for the fulfillment of one’s goals and dreams. Until this period, it has been incredibly difficult for a person to attain his dreams, often making it the exclusive preserve for a few “elite.” The new century characterized by the explosion in information and communication technology has made it much easier for the youth to fulfill their ambitions. In the age of Facebook, Bebo and other social networking media, the younger generation are expressing themselves in different ways. However, in pursuing the dreams and ambitions, certain boundaries of human existence have been pushed to the extreme. For many a youth, there seems to be no end to such legitimate pursuits even when the pursuit of such venture is clearly not in the interest of the wider society.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon encourages young men and women to live lives to the fullest potential; he is also quick to add the imminent judgment on us by God. In other words, we have every opportunity to not deny ourselves our heart’s desires but for every activity we engage ourselves in, we are going to be held accountable. Solomon reiterates the value in living out life within the confines set by God. This means we can enjoy our lives the way God wants us to without compromising on our values and integrity. The other side of this is that we could live our lives outside God’s confines, enjoying whatever there is to enjoy, giving in to our fleshly desires which is always opposed to the will of God and faced up to the consequences of our actions.

A good example of this is Solomon’s father, David. He had an illicit affair with a married woman, Bathsheba, and then went a step further by instigating the murder of Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11 and 12). As a consequence of his actions, the child born of the affair died as God used it to punish David for what he had done. Clearly, a boundary was crossed and that brought judgment on David. So, how can we enjoy our lives within the boundaries set by God?

THE LIFE OF PURPOSE

The apostle Paul reiterates the value in living a beneficial and purposeful life; a life of happiness and joy set by God:

“Everything is permissible for me but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me but I will not be mastered by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

There are certain lifestyle choices and decisions that may look and sound ‘cool’ but as Christians, young men and women, these lifestyles do not bring glory to God who created us in His image and likeness. It is all right for instance to have genuine relationships and friendships with members of the opposite sex but it is not beneficial to get intimate with them. God’s rule is for intimacy to be enjoyed within the boundaries of marriage as a way of expressing love to one another (husband and wife). It is a case of enjoying life devoid of all the boundaries and facing up to the consequences of such life or enjoying a life of purpose and fulfillment within the confines set by God.

A LIFE LIVED IN GOD

Solomon by reference points us to a life with God as the foundation. He is the one who created us from the dust of the earth and made us in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). Jeremiah also indicates that He knows us even before we were conceived and born (Jeremiah 1:5). What this means is an enjoyable, purpose-driven life can only be realized in God. Without Him, there is not much we can do and achieve since He is the one who knows our today as well as our tomorrow. So to the young men and women of today, look to the rock from which you have been cut. |

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"As He went along, He saw a man blind from birth." His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

-John 9:1-5

By Loren Chamberlain

In ancient times, blindness was a problem, much more common than we would ordinarily think. Eye disease had few cures, and unsanitary conditions (especially in water) increased the risks of blindness considerably. Blindness was so common Jesus used it metaphorically to represent spiritual darkness.

RETRIBUTION PRINCIPLE

There is such a thing known as the "Retribution Principle." Most Israelites believed that if God were to be considered just, rewards and punishments in this life would have to be proportional to the righteousness or wickedness of the individual. These beliefs led most Israelites to believe that if someone was prospering, it must be a reward for righteousness, and if someone was suffering, it must be a punishment for wickedness. The greater the suffering, the greater the wickedness must be.

Remember what the first thing was that the disciples asked Jesus! "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" This kind of thinking comes from one of the so-called friends of Job, Eliphaz the Temanite. "Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished being innocent or where were the righteous cut off? Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same" (Job 4:7-8). Verses seven and eight explain what is referred to as the Retribution Principle. In its most basic form it contends that the righteous will prosper and the wicked will suffer. Most Israelites believed that if God were to be considered just, rewards and punishments in this life would have to be proportional to the righteousness or wickedness of the individual.

SUFFERING IS NOT ALWAYS SIN

These beliefs led most Israelites to believe that if someone was prospering, it must be a reward for righteousness, and if someone was suffering, "as this blind man," it must be a punishment for wickedness. The greater the suffering, the greater the wickedness must be.

We live in a world society where good behavior is not always

rn

Blind

rewarded or appreciated and bad behavior is not always punished. Therefore, sometimes those who are innocent suffer. If God always took suffering out of our lives when we ask Him to, we would not be following Him around out of love and devotion but rather to improve our comfort zone. Never the less, no matter the reasons for our suffering, Jesus is always capable and available to help us deal with it. When we suffer, and we will suffer, perhaps we shouldn't ask, "What did we do wrong?" or "Why did this happen to me?" but rather, beseech God in prayer to give us strength, wisdom, and understanding to deal with the trial and a clearer picture about just what is happening.

Jesus went on to explain that He must work so that God's work would be displayed in this man's life. God had not made the man blind in order to show glory; rather, God has sent Jesus to do works of healing in order to show His glory! The work of Jesus must not be interrupted because He is the light that illumines the day, and night is coming when He will be absent and such miracles at His hand will cease.

SUFFERING IN LIFE

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:1-4).

When I was a little boy we had chickens that roamed free. Occasionally I would get to see the little chicks hatch out of the eggshell. It was fun to watch the shell crack and then little by

little the chick would peck a hole in the shell until it was large enough to allow him to escape. It was very tempting to help the chick break the shell but my Dad warned me that the little chick would probably not be strong enough to survive if we took the struggle of getting out of the shell away from it. It was the struggling to be hatched that gave the chick the strength to live.

In a somewhat similar manner this is true for the Christian.

As James said, it is the trial of our faith that builds and develops perseverance. The only way we can become mature and complete Christians not lacking anything is to go through various trials, even though they can be very painful. Therefore, instead of complaining about our struggles, we should see them as opportunities for growth. Be very thankful to God for His promises of being with us in the rough times. We must ask Him to help us solve our problems

and give us the strength to endure and He will stay close and help us grow in faith and perseverance.

CONCLUSION

God is more than faithful to all His children, and although we may suffer great hardships here, He promises that someday we will live eternally with Him. What will this involve? It means believers will live in Christ's Kingdom, and that we will share in the administration of that Kingdom. This was Paul's comfort as he went through suffering and death, and it can be ours, too. Are we facing hardships at times? Yes we are, but let us not turn away from God. For if we suffer with Jesus Christ we shall also reign with Him! |

*"Consider it pure joy, my brothers,
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and complete, not lacking anything."
- James 1:1-4*

HOW

STEP ONE YOU SAY WE NEED TO TALK
HE WALKS YOU SAY SIT DOWN IT'S JUST A TALK
HE SMILES POLITELY BACK AT YOU
YOU STARE POLITELY RIGHT ON THROUGH
SOME SORT OF WINDOW TO YOUR RIGHT
AS HE GOES LEFT AND YOU STAY RIGHT
BETWEEN THE LINES OF FEAR AND BLAME
YOU BEGIN TO WONDER WHY YOU CAME

WHERE DID I GO WRONG, I LOST A FRIEND
SOMEWHERE ALONG IN THE BITTERNESS
AND I WOULD HAVE STAYED UP WITH YOU ALL NIGHT
HAD I KNOWN HOW TO SAVE A LIFE

LET HIM KNOW THAT YOU KNOW BEST
CAUSE AFTER ALL YOU DO KNOW BEST
TRY TO SLIP PAST HIS DEFENSE
WITHOUT GRANTING INNOCENCE
LAY DOWN A LIST OF WHAT IS WRONG
THE THINGS YOU'VE TOLD HIM ALL ALONG
AND PRAY TO GOD HE HEARS YOU
AND PRAY TO GOD HE HEARS YOU

AS HE BEGINS TO RAISE HIS VOICE
YOU LOWER YOURS AND GRANT HIM ONE LAST CHOICE
DRIVE UNTIL YOU LOSE THE ROAD
OR BREAK WITH THE ONES YOU'VE FOLLOWED
HE WILL DO ONE OF TWO THINGS
HE WILL ADMIT TO EVERYTHING
OR HE'LL SAY HE'S JUST NOT THE SAME
AND YOU'LL BEGIN TO WONDER WHY YOU CAME

By Tyler Barnett

Have you heard the song by The Fray, "How to Save a Life?" Maybe you've heard it on Gray's Anatomy, on a local mix radio station, or maybe even on a Christian radio station. I've wondered how this song can be significant to such a wide array of listeners, both secular and Christian. For me there is something that stirs when I listen to the words. As Christians we desire to see everyone around us saved. But how are we saved? Why are we saved? What can we do to deserve salvation? The song talks about the despair of not being able to help someone in need but the Bible teaches that we may be saved, not through righteous acts, but through the grace, love, and mercy of God.

Upon researching the song I found it was based on true-life events of the lead singer and songwriter Isaac Slade while working as a mentor at a teen camp. Slade said, "One of the kids I was paired up with was a musician. Here I was, a protected suburbanite, and he was just 17 and had all these problems. And no one could write a manual on how to save him."

Are there times when you wish you had a manual for life? Wouldn't it be great to know exactly how to reach out to those around you? I think you get where I'm going with this: The Bible teaches about being saved and that this Salvation is available to ALL. Isaiah 55:1 reads "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." Anyone can partake of His salvation free of charge. The only requirement is that they come. In verse 6 Isaiah urges everyone to "seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near." Seek help from the Lord early and often and

TO

SAVE
A LIFE

you will be blessed.

Our manual not only teaches that all can be saved but also warns against seeking salvation through the law, as was commonplace among the Israelites. In Romans 10:1-13 Paul says in regard to the Israelites “they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.” The Israelites had a manual too and while they were zealous for God, “their zeal is not based on knowledge” which comes from Christ Jesus. The Israelites dwelled on righteousness that is by the law and so Paul broke it down simple for them, “confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” That works for me, simple enough for you too? I find it curious that the knowledge of God can be found in the most organic of actions.

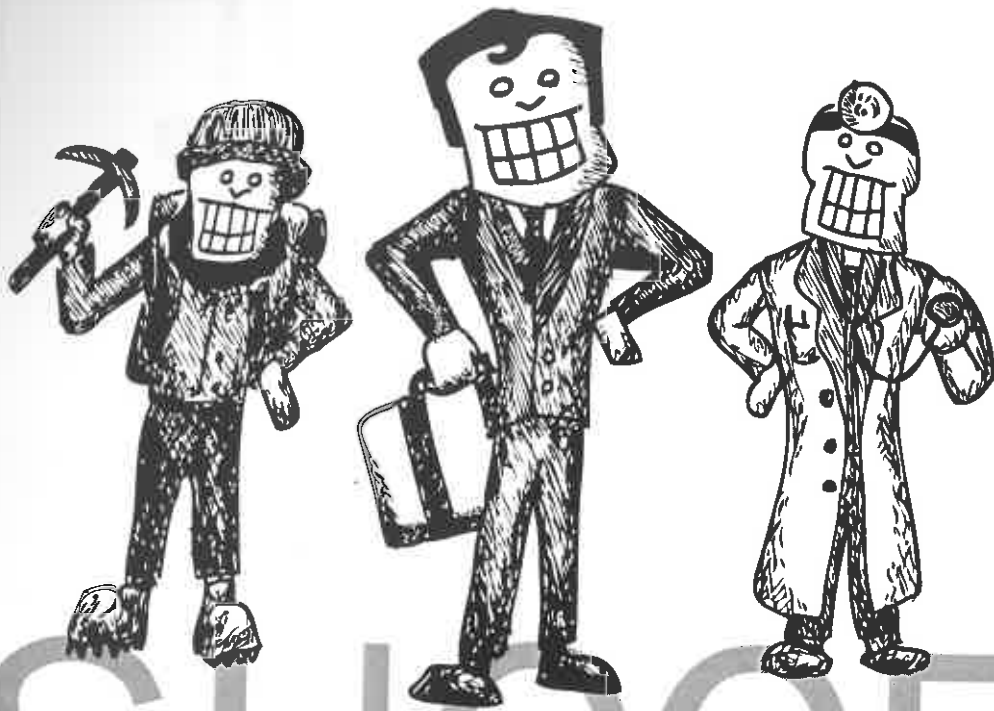
How does God save lives? He saves them through faith and by grace. In Philippi Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown in jail for being “servants of the Most High God,” and for “telling you the way to be saved” (Acts 16:16-34). While they were singing hymns behind bars, an earthquake freed them, yet they stayed behind to literally save the life of the jailer. The earthquake woke the jailer and as he saw the open prison doors he drew a sword to kill himself, knowing his fate. Paul and Silas stayed and told him “Don’t harm yourself, we’re all here.” I don’t know about you but I probably would have missed that opportunity to save the jailer because I would have been long gone! In the song, “How to Save a Life”, Slade too would have left as he says “I would have stayed had I known how to save a life.” Paul and Silas stayed because they knew how to save a life, “believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.” The jailer’s life was literally saved by the insight of Paul and Silas and through his faith.

In Ephesians 2:1-10 Paul teaches “Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you

have been saved.” How does this verse apply to you? If you are saved, remember you got there not by rituals of rule keeping, or “works” as Paul refers to it. You are saved only by the grace of God. We initiate, and God allows, despite our disobedience. This is great news for anyone who needs saving! You don’t have to be perfect to be saved, in fact its not even about your actions, it’s about God’s mercy and love.

Finally, in Titus 3:3-8 Paul teaches, “He saved us, not because the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.” Sometimes the best way to understand why God saved us is telling us why He didn’t save us. These verses show that we as Christians have a desire to do things for God, to display our righteousness through works. I believe that as a follower of Christ you should do things however Paul teaches that “righteous things” do not earn us acceptance by God. Now I feel silly just thinking that I could earn something so great!

“How to Save a Life” is a song about all the people who tried and failed to save a troubled boy’s life because they did not have the knowledge to do so. The Bible teaches us that we need only seek Him, not the law or works, and by the grace, mercy, and love of God may we be saved. Perhaps there’s someone in your life that needs saving or maybe you do not know what it means to be saved. If God has given you the knowledge, use it to share God’s gift of salvation. Who knows, maybe someday you will be the one to save a life. I



By Sarah Hoeck

Success: it's a statement heard by everyone. It's a goal that every human being hopes to accomplish. It's a word with many different definitions, depending, of course, on the person doing the defining.

Many in the world today would say that to be successful is to be rich and to therefore be able to live comfortably and have whatever you desire. Others would say it is having a spouse and children running around a large house in the suburbs. There are others that would say success is being able to be a free spirit, to do whatever you want whenever you want to do it. Many think success is being happy with all you have: your job, your relationships, your family, your living situation, etc. But what does the Bible say determines success?

Joshua 1:5-9

“No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land, which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (, NKJV).

According to Joshua 1:5-9, God said Joshua would be prosperous in all he did. And really, being prosperous in all you do, everyone should agree, is what success is. But in order to achieve this success, Joshua had to do something. He couldn't just lie around all day, doing nothing. No, he actually had to do something in order to be successful, and that something was to do what God told him to do. If he did that, if he was strong and brave enough, he would be absolutely successful in everything that he did.

But it wouldn't be because of what he did. No, he couldn't do it all by himself. It would be because, by doing as God commanded, God would be with him in everything he did. And with God everything is possible. This didn't just apply to Joshua though; it applies to everyone. And so does this: by not doing what God says, God will not be with you. And humans can fail, which is why success wasn't (and isn't) an absolute, not without God at least. So, ultimately, what determines success is if you follow God, if you have Him in your life, leading you down the right path.

But does this then mean that because you are successful, because God is with you, that you have the right to think you are automatically going to be the best in everything? Well, let's look at another scripture to find out.

Then He came to Capernaum.

And when He was in the house He asked them, “What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?” But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “if anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:33-35, NKJV).

Okay, so what do we learn by the disciples' example and Jesus' reply? Well, the disciples all wanted to be the greatest. They all wanted to be the most successful. Now, does that sound familiar? I would think so. It sounds like today's world in which everyone is always trying to be better than the next person. The only difference in the disciples' story is that they were fighting about who was the greatest in the Lord.

But either way, they were fighting about being the greatest; each thought that it was himself; each was being proud and cocky. But then, Jesus set them straight. He told them, that by being so proud of their success (which God had

given them), that by desiring to be first in the Kingdom so that they could be called the greatest, they would surely be last to enter. Not only that, but they would be servants also to all. That would show them not to be so proud.

So, success is accomplished by doing what God says and is available to you if God is with you in all that you do. But, if your success makes you feel as if you are better than all (which no one is except for God himself), that success is practically worthless. It doesn't mean as much because you let it go to your head.

So, really the definition of success is this: God being with you. And how is this success accomplished? That would be by following God's laws and to do so throughout your life. But when you do become the success you always hoped you'd be, that success is not to go to your head. That way, not only will success be yours, but also it will be yours forever and always, in the place that really counts, in the end when you'll be with God in His amazing, awesome, perfect Kingdom. |

in the next issue:

CULTIVATING THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Spring 2009

• • • • •
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