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Christian Life

Three years before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus the Roman, an unknown author wrote a letter of warning and encouragement to the Hebrew believers in that city. In a time of impending national crisis, this author reminded these believers that their only safety was in individual orientation to and pursuit of the plan of God.

In Hebrews 12 he compares the Christian life to a race and Christians to athletes who, if they want to experience the ecstasy of victory, will have to endure the agony of training for and running the race.

God has set before every Christian a race to run, a Personal destiny in His plan. No one fulfills his destiny accidentally; it takes discipline, endurance, and focus on the goal to win the race.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us ... (Heb. 12:1)

In ancient sports arenas, the racetrack was in the shape of a horseshoe. Stands encircled the track, so spectators could see the whole race from start to finish.

"Cloud," from nephos, means "an innumerable throng." The word pictures a cloudy, shapeless mass covering the skies. In coliseums like the Circus Maximus in Rome, which seated 200,000, the crowds must have looked cloudy and shapeless to the athletes on the track. But, though they could not see the spectators clearly, the athletes could certainly hear the sound of their cheering.

"Surrounding" is the present middle participle of perikeimai, a word which can mean "to bind or encompass, and in this case means "to surround and support," as the cheering crowds would surround and support the athletes below

From the context, we know that this cloud of witnesses includes the heroes of faith chronicled in Hebrews 11. These great believers crowd the stands in the spiritual realm and watch us run. And they are not alone; they stand with every believer who has ever lived--all the men and women and children who have already finished their races and have had their faith approved by God. This innumerable throng constantly cheers us on to finish our race with honor and integrity.

We, the athletes on the track, cannot see their faces, but we can hear their cheers echoing from the pages of Scripture and from the accounts of their lives. As we study the Word

and the history of the Church, each of us finds people we especially identify with, people who faced difficulties, trials, temptations similar to ours, believers who had the same areas of weakness that we do. We naturally identify with these people, and their lives especially encourage us.

We have every reason to believe that they identify with us and take special interest in us in the same way. They are genuinely concerned about how we run our race because now they have perfect perspective. At the instant of their death, when they saw the face of Jesus Christ, they knew absolutely what is important and what is not. Now they can see how worthless are all the trinkets that distract us from our race. They know now that the only thing that matters in time and in eternity is that Jesus Christ be glorified

...let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us ... (Heb. 12:1)

"Lay aside" is *apotithemi*. It means "to put off, to set aside," as in taking off a garment. "Encumbrance" is *ogkos*, "excess weight, bulk." *Ogkos* could refer to body fat or to something external. Greek athletes would often run, in training, with weights. In either case the idea is that if we want to win, we have to run unencumbered.

In Luke 21:34 the Lord illustrated this when He told the disciples to be on their guard so that their hearts would not be "weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life." He was warning them of the very real dangers of being distracted from their mission by the things of time.

The author of Hebrews exhorts each of us to lay aside the sin that entangles us--literally, the sin that so easily ensnares us, the one that we so easily get tangled up in. He recognizes here a very basic principle of the sin nature. Everyone's is different. No two people are exactly alike physically; no two people have exactly the same personality traits. In the same way no two sin natures are alike.

Every believer has his own enemies. The thing that is my entangling sin--that area of weakness or strength that keeps me from relying on God--may not be a problem to you at all. We cannot compare ourselves to anyone else.

Notice that the author does not tell us to lay aside what entangles someone else. Each of us is responsible for running our own race. The instant we become preoccupied with someone else's race, we step out of our lane. We can cheer other people on, we can encourage them, but if we stop to criticize or judge or to give our opinion about someone else's running technique, we are asking for trouble."

God does not hold us accountable for how someone else runs. He does hold us accountable for how we run. Our responsibility is to understand ourselves, to recognize the things that hinder or entangle us and to set them aside so that they do not keep us from finishing our race (Eph. 4:22-23). The only way we can set aside our entangling sins is through confession and spiritual growth.

...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb. 12:1-3)

"Endurance" is *hupomone*, literally, "to dwell under." The author is telling us that in spite of our pain, we must press on. We must keep on constantly running with endurance. Every one of us faces different obstacles. There will always be times when we are tempted to quit. Especially after we fail, it is so much easier to quit than to get back up on our feet and start running again. But don't quit. Abide under the pressure, do not try to escape it.

The author of this book was not just ordering the Hebrews to keep on running. Using what is known as a hortatory subjunctive, he was encouraging them to join with him. "Let us run. I'm going; you come with me. Let's do it as a team. We have to run in our own lanes, but we can run together. We're all heading for the same place."

"Set before us" is from *prokeimai*, a word that means "ordained or established beforehand." Every race is tailor-made. We do not get to choose our race, God does. He gives us our niche, our destiny. What He chooses may not be the thing we would have chosen, but the thing that God calls us to is the one--the only--thing that can fulfill us and give us abundant life.

Though the race we are called to run is determined beforehand, we do have choices. We choose whether to run. We choose how to run. We choose whether to endure and to Press on to find the will of God for our lives.

Every race has three parts: the start, the middle, and the finish. In a long race, the beginning and the end are the easiest parts. At the beginning, there is always a great deal of excitement. Everyone's adrenaline is flowing and it is always easy to take off at the sound of the gun. At the finish line, the crowds are cheering, and though the runners are exhausted, they are still invigorated with the knowledge that they have accomplished something, they have reached their goal.

It is often the middle of the race that is the toughest, especially in an endurance race. It is in the middle of the race that the runner's mind may begin to wander. He starts to lose focus, to lose motivation. It is easy to forget how important that particular part of the race is.

An endurance race is very much like the Christian way of life. Phase one of the race, the start, is salvation. In a second, with a simple act of faith, we are born into the family of God (2 Cor. 5:21). It was our first real gaze into the eyes of Jesus Christ that sounded the start of the race for us.

Phase three of the race, the finish, is death or Rapture. That, too, happens in a split-second. We will break the tape and fall into the arms of Jesus Christ at the finish.

Phase two of the race, the distance, is spiritual growth. It is the hardest part. It is a process, and every process takes time.

When we first step out in the Christian life, we have the enthusiasm of the start, the challenge, the desire to tell other people about how they can have eternal life. We are still naive enough to believe everyone wants to hear about Jesus Christ. But when we get to the middle of the race, we start feeling the pain, the pressure, the opposition. The race becomes difficult. The enthusiasm, the challenge, the excitement are not always there. We start facing the difficulty of keeping and maintaining focus in our race.

In a horseshoe-shaped track, the finish line seems to be farthest away just as the runner approaches the middle of the race, at the turn. In the Christian life, Jesus often seems farthest away in the middle of the race. Of course He is no farther away in the middle than He was at the beginning or will be at the end. But He lets our vision be blurred because He wants us to learn to run by faith.

"Fixing our eyes on Jesus" is the only way we will be able to endure. Unless we look to the finish line, we won't make it. Conformity to Jesus is the goal of our race.

"Fixing our eyes" is from two words, ape, which means "away from," and horao, "to take in a panoramic view." The compound, aphorao, tells us to look away from everything on the horizon and to concentrate our gaze on one thing.

In Greek sports competitions, there was always more than one thing going on at a time. As the runners raced around the track, the center field was alive with other kinds of competition. A runner trying to critique the javelin throwers would not have much chance of winning his race. A shotput competitor who got distracted by watching the runners could kill someone with an ill-placed throw. Greek athletes, if they wanted to win, had to aphorao. They had to look away from the distractions and train their eyes to focus on one thing: the goal of their competition.

Our goal is to be conformed to Jesus Christ. We have to fix our focus on Him. This means that while we run we remember His race. We remember His courage, His training, His discipline. We remember how, from the virgin birth all the way to the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ had the one thing that makes running the race possible: the focus. He had His eyes focused on the goal, and because He did, He was able to overcome the obstacles and to endure the opposition. He was able to finish His race not by what He was running, but by what He was running to; He saw the joy beyond. He had His eyes on the celebration, the victory banquet to come.

He is the celebrity, the hero who has already won the gold and has come back to teach us and to enable us to press on. He is the author and the finisher. He was the first to run the race and now He runs our race with us every step of the way (Heb. 13:56). In the same

way His focus on the objective gave Him the strength and the courage to endure, so our focus on the person of Jesus Christ and our future celebration with Him gives us the ability to run our race with endurance.

The certain danger we face is that if we fix our gaze on anything other than Jesus Christ, we will grow weary and lose heart. If we quit, our race remains unfinished and God's plan for our life goes unfulfilled. How awful it would be to stand before Jesus Christ and have Him ask, "What more could I have done?" We will someday see--with the absolute clarity that we could have today by faith--that we had everything we needed to finish our race in glory.

Everyone feels tired or discouraged at times. That is no sin. The sin is quitting. When we reach the point at which we feel that we simply cannot go on, at that moment we need to consider Jesus and then just put one foot in front the other and take one more step.

Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave ... (1 Cor. 9:24-27)

"Run!" This is a command. Paul, who wrote this letter to the distracted Corinthian church, is now seated in the stands. But he still screams to us through the pages of Scripture, "RUN ! ! ! Run in such a way that you may win!"

In 1 Corinthians 9:19, Paul says that he has made himself a slave that he might win all men. Winning was on his mind. Paul was a free man, but by choice he became a slave to Jesus Christ. He exulted in his bonds because he knew that through his service people were being won to Christ and he was winning the race that he had been given.

"Competes" is agonizomai; we get the English word "agony" from it. If we want to win, we will have to agonize. What kind of agony is Paul talking about? An internal agony that comes from the struggle to achieve self-control. The phrase "exercises self-control" is a translation of one Greek word, egkrateuomai, from kratos, which means "rule or authority" and en, "within." No one ever becomes a great athlete as long as the only discipline he has is the coach's discipline. A great athlete is one who develops discipline within, so that whether the coach is around or not, he never lets up in his training. He demands more of himself because he is focused on the goal. Only that kind of self-control can drive him to the end of the race.

If athletes in physical competition can press on so single-mindedly toward a perishable reward, how much more driven should we be who run toward an eternal reward? We are called to do one thing: focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. As we study and meditate on and apply the Word of God, which is the mind of Christ, we are moving toward the goal.

Everything in the cosmos is deadset against our maintaining that focus. Each of us chooses for ourselves whether we will give in to the distractions and the entanglements or whether we will press on to finish the race with honor.

Lesson 3-2: The Danger--Reversionism Ephesians 4: 17-19 2 Samuel 15:30-37, 17:23

The Christian life is a life of absolutes. At every moment we either spiritual -- controlled by the Spirit and running toward the goal set before us--or else we are carnal-controlled by the flesh and running away from the goal.

When we sin, we can always get back on track by confession and correction. But the longer we refuse to confess, the farther adrift we go, and the harder it becomes to turn away from the distractions and entanglements that are so attractive to the natural man. If our spiritual digression--our carnality--is unchecked by confession, it will lead us into the more dangerous and destructive state known as reversionism.

In his letter to the Ephesian believers, Paul outlines seven steps in the downward spiral of reversionism.

This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. (Eph. 4:17-19)

The first step is negative volition to the Word of God (2 Pet. 3:18; 2 Tim. 2:15, 3:16-17). To walk as the Gentiles walk means to walk in unbelief. It is possible for believers to live as practical atheists. When we are bitter or jealous, when we indulge in self pity or fear, when we do not actively believe that God is in control--in these conditions of mind, we are saying no to the Word of God. When we give in to these kinds of mental attitudes, we are choosing to be energized not by the Holy Spirit, but by the sin nature. We are stepping off the path of growth and turning back--reverting--to the ways of our natural, unregenerate selves.

The second step is creation of a vacuum in the soul. When

The third step is the blackout of the soul. "Having their understanding darkened," Paul says. The soul, which was designed by God to function on the Word, actually shuts down. The way we think, our understanding, becomes shady as the things we have learned begin to slip away. We can no longer recall doctrines we once knew and understood. The light of the Word is being extinguished from our conscience, leaving behind, inevitably, only darkness.

The fourth step is alienation from grace. We are "excluded from the life of God." Having exchanged the truth of the Creator for the lies of the creature, having forsaken the light of the Word for the darkness of the world, we are cut off from the power of Christ. We are estranged from His abundant life. The Greek *apallotrioomai* means "to be alienated, estranged, shut out from fellowship and intimacy." Aside from God, there is no other source of grace. Outside of fellowship with Him, we become everything that is the opposite of gracious.

The fifth step is the build-up of scar tissue of the soul. As we continuously set our hearts against God, we intensify the process of scarring our souls. *Apalgeo* means "to cease to feel; to become insensitive, apathetic, past feeling." In the perfect tense and active voice, it could be translated here "having cast off all feeling." It is not that we have become calloused because of some outside force, but that we have calloused ourselves. As a result of our own negative choices, our sensitivity to the Spirit of God is gone, leaving a hunger in the soul that cannot be satisfied.

The sixth step is a frantic search for happiness. When Paul says the Gentiles have "given themselves over" to sensuality, he uses the same words that are used to describe the betrayal of Judas. *Paradidomi* means "to give over into one's power or use." When we reach this point we have betrayed ourselves, sold ourselves out, delivered ourselves up, to sensuality. Now we are in a crazed search for something to satisfy our starving souls. We have turned to the world for fulfillment, instead of to Christ, and our search for happiness becomes more and more degrading as the hunger of our soul intensifies. Chasing after the instant fix, the rush, the now, we are bartering soul for body. But the body is never satisfied, and so the search can only become more and more frantic.

The seventh step is arrival at the point of implacability. When Paul talks about the practice of impurity with "greediness," he uses the word *pleonexia*. It means "insatiability." When we reach this point, there is nothing that can make us happy, nothing that can satisfy us. No power, no wealth, no friendship, no physical pleasure is ever enough to satisfy us. The intensified scarring process has destroyed our capacity for appreciation. The prophet Jeremiah compares the implacable person, whose soul is shattered, to a ruined vessel, a broken cistern. "They have rejected the fountain of living water to hew out for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). When our soul becomes a ruined vessel, we have destroyed our ability to enjoy the normal functions of life.

At every step of this downward slide, God administers discipline designed to turn us around. If we refuse to heed His warnings and accept His correction, choosing instead to continue to harden ourselves, He will discipline us with increasing harshness. God takes no joy in giving pain, but as a loving Father He takes less joy in seeing His children waste their lives. He will continue to discipline us until we turn back to Him or until we reach the point at which He knows recovery has become impossible. At this point He will call us home to heaven in what the Bible calls "the sin unto death" (1 John 5:16). Dying the sin unto death is the most miserable and shameful way a Christian can end his race'.

In 2 Samuel 15-17, we have the story of a man who died the sin unto death. His name was Ahithophel. He was a cherished friend of King David, a mature believer who was on his way to becoming one of the greatest spiritual heroes of his time. His reversionism was of the most subtle kind. He did not--like David--fall into sensuality and lasciviousness. The temptations Ahithophel gave himself to were arrogance, self-righteousness, and passing judgment on another believer.

Who was this man Ahithophel? A native of Giloh, a town in the hill country of Judah, Ahithophel was counselor to King David. He knew the Word of God and had the understanding and wisdom that can only come from application of the Word. Second Samuel 16:23 tells us that the advice of Ahithophel "was as if one inquired of the word of God." This man was like an encyclopedia of the Word, and his advice was trusted by both by David and his son Absalom.

In 2 Samuel 15:12 Ahithophel joins in Absalom's conspiracy against David. Absalom was a handsome man with great strengths and tremendous charisma. He had stolen the hearts of the men of Israel by magnifying and amplifying the sin of his own father (2 Sam. 15: 1-6).

On the day that Absalom called for him, Ahithophel was in Giloh offering sacrifices, so we know that he was still involved in religious activity. From the outside Ahithophel appeared to be anything but a reversionist, so how could he be so far out of line that he would join in a conspiracy against the greatest believer of his age, whom God Himself called "a man after My heart" (Acts 13:22)?

A comparison of 2 Samuel 23:34 with 2 Samuel 11:3 gives us an idea of how Ahithophel had come to this choice. Ahithophel had a son named Eliam; Eliam had a daughter named Bathsheba. Ahithophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba. Now the plot begins to thicken. We begin to understand what has happened in the heart of Ahithophel. The king seduced his granddaughter; she became pregnant; he murdered her husband. Ahithophel's son-in-law Uriah, a valiant warrior one of David's own mighty men, is dead; his granddaughter is the talk of the town; and David does not appear to be suffering for his sins.

Ahithophel's reversionism must have started in the most subtle way. He took offense at David's sin; he got personal, self-righteous, judgmental. When he saw David apparently getting off scot-free, did he decide to help God bring about justice?

David was a sinner. He obviously had a lascivious trend in his sin nature. Ahithophel was a sinner. He obviously had a legalistic trend in his sin nature. The difference between them was that David understood grace. He had been in reversionism, but he had accepted correction and been restored through confession. He knew how to receive grace from God, and he knew how to extend grace to others.

At least 10 years passed between David's great sin and Absalom's revolt. All that time Ahithophel must have secretly nursed his bitterness.

When David learns that Absalom has won the hearts of the people, he leaves Jerusalem willingly. He does not want to see the city besieged and innocent people killed. Though his heart is broken over the treachery of his son, he knows that God had made him king and that when God gives and then sees fit to take away, it is only for greater blessing. David walks out of the city with nothing, willing to entrust himself entirely to the grace of God.

And David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went, and his head was covered and he walked barefoot. Then all the people who were with him each covered his head and went up weeping as they went.

Now someone told David, saying, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. " And David said, "O Lord, I pray, make the counsel of Ahithophel foolishness. "

It happened as David was coming to the summit, where God was worshiped, that behold, Hushai the Archite met him with his coat torn, and dust on his head.

And David said to him, "if you pass over with me, then you will be a burden to me. But if you return to the city, and say to Absalom, `I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father's servant in time past, so I will now be your servant,' then you can thwart the counsel of Ahithophel for me ... (2 Sam. 15:30-37)

As he begins to ascend the Mount of Olives, David is told that his friend Ahithophel is among the conspirators. A thousand years later at almost the same spot, the Lord Jesus Christ would be betrayed by His friend Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane.

David responds to the heartbreaking news with a prayer. God immediately responds to David's prayer by sending to him Hushai, a man of loyalty.

Look at the difference between Ahithophel and Hushai. Ahithophel had taken his eyes off the Word of God and gotten his eyes on David, a man who like all other men had feet of clay. When David fell, Ahithophel forgot the Word and fell into self-righteous arrogance and reversionism.

Hushai, on the other hand, had kept his eyes on the Word. He understood that our part is to make the Word of God the issue in life, give people the right to accept or to reject it, and then let God deal with those people and their decisions. It is not our job to convict or to judge any other believer. Those are rights reserved by God; He is capable of convicting and correcting His children.

Hushai knew that God could take care of David. He knew, too, that loyalty demanded that he remain faithful to the divinely appointed king. Where did Hushai learn this kind of loyalty to authority? Where did he learn how to serve even a king in reversionism, entrusting him to God, knowing that God would deal with His child? He learned it by Watching David in the wilderness and in the mountains, hounded by a reversionistic King

Saul. He watched David trust the Lord, and he learned from what he saw. Hushai became one of the most noble and honorable people in his generation

In 2 Samuel 17, Ahithophel advises Absalom to give him 12,000 men so that he can kill David that night. "I will come upon him while he is weary and exhausted," Ahithophel said, " and will terrify him so that all the people who are with him will flee. Then I will strike down the king alone" (2 Sam. 17:2).

Absalom likes Ahithophel's idea, but he wants to hear what Hushai has to say. Hushai reminds Absalom how fierce are David and his mighty men and h,, skilled in strategy. He tells Absalom to wait and not attack until he has gathered more

Ahithophel has given the better advice. He has not lost his accuracy, even in reversionism. Had Absalom followed that advice, David would have been defeated. But God answers the prayer of David--David the adulterer, the murderer, but David the corrected believer. Absalom took Hushai' s advice, "for the Lord had ordained to thwart the good counsel of Ahithophel" (2 Sam. 17:14). Ahithophel had become an enemy of God. He was warring now not against David, but against God.

Hushai sends spies to David telling him that he has time to cross the river, head into the wilderness, and gain strength for a counterattack. Because Absalom did not listen to Ahithophel, David and all his household were saved.

Note when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey and arose and went to his home, to his city, and set his house in order, and strangled himself; thus he died and was buried in the grave of his father. (2 Sam. 17:23)

The instant his counsel was rejected, Ahithophel knew that David would triumph. He knew that he would have to face the king, and he could not stand the thought. He could not handle the consequences of his own arrogant choices. He died, just like Judas a thousand years later, by his own hand.

Because the king's son Absalom emphasized and magnified the sin of his father, God determined to "bring calamity on Absalom" (2 Sam. 17:14). He judged Absalom with what David deserved. Because Ahithophel joined the conspiracy, he, too, would die the death that he sought for David.

Ahithophel's treachery was not a sudden thing. He had made decision after decision to set his focus on David, to let David's failure become a stumbling block in his life. David's reversion into lasciviousness could have led him to the sin unto death, but he accepted correction and turned back to God. Ahithophel's reversion into legalism did lead to death because he refused to respond to the discipline that God is faithful to set before all of us when we sin.

Lesson 3-3: The Promise-Spirituality Jeremiah 17:5-10 John 7:37-39

The only way any Christian can run his race and expect to win is by plugging in to the energizing power of God the Holy Spirit. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are energized. Our sin nature is rendered inoperable (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 5:16; 1 John 3:6), and we are able to run toward the goal. When we are not filled with the Holy Spirit, our flesh is in control, and we are 100% out of commission as far as God is concerned. Apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit, there is no growth, no service, no blessing, no reward. Satan's cosmic system opposes spirituality--the filling of the Holy Spirit--at every turn. The enemy does not want us to understand the simplicity of God's promise of power.

Thus says the Lord, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the Lord. For he will be like a bush in the desert And will not see when prosperity comes, But will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, A land of salt without inhabitant. " (Jer. 17:5-11)

Jeremiah vividly describes the curse that comes with confidence in human strength. Trying to solve the problems of life by relying on human good, human intellect, human technology: human strength, is stepping outside the power sphere of

If we think we can fight the spiritual battle in human strength, we are dead wrong.

When we discount God and turn our backs on the source of all goodness, all truth, all knowledge, all peace, we guarantee misery for ourselves. Any person or any nation who places faith in human strength will be cursed, and no one can blame God, because the curse is self-induced.

The result of reliance on human strength is isolation and spiritual dryness. Life will be unbearably harsh and utterly fruitless. The one who chooses this path will not see prosperity, the blessings of God. When we are where God wants us to be, we receive maximum blessing, because that is the place where God determined from eternity past to drop our supplies. If we are not receiving blessings, it is because the blessings are being dropped for us from the grace of God, but we are somewhere else. We have been distracted, misplaced, and are at the wrong place at the wrong time. God has promised to do everything necessary to make us great in His plan. If we want to do things our way, His prosperity will be there, but we will never see it.

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord And whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water That extends its roots by a stream And will not fear when the heat comes; But its leaves will be green, And -it will not be anxious in a year of drought Nor cease to yield fruit. " (Jer. 17:7-8)

On the other hand, if we realize that we are powerless and that only in divine strength can we stand, then God declares us blessed. "Trust" is *batach*, the Hebrew word for wrestling faith. To trust in the Lord is to fight our battles relying on divine power. We humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and cast our cares on Him, because He cares for

us (1 Pet. 5:7). We take our problems, our pressures, our adversities and body slam them on the Lord, remembering that the battle is His (1 Sam. 17:47).

To illustrate the blessing of trust in the Lord, Jeremiah describes a desert where the river is the only source of life. The river is a picture of God the Holy Spirit. Everything outside the bounds of the river is nonproductive. But by the river a glorious tree is planted; this fruit tree is a picture of the believer living by faith. The roots of the tree reach toward the river, illustrating the supply system that comes through spiritual growth. As the invisible root system grows, so does the tree, but the root system is always greater than the tree--there is more underground than there is aboveground. The supply system is invisible; the production is visible. For the Christian, inner character and greatness will always be more than that which is visible to other people.

The heat in Jeremiah 17:8 is a picture of testing, crisis, temptation; the year of drought refers to extended times of pressure. The green leaves are proof of the strength and health of the tree. The maturing believer will be spiritually strong, healthy, and vibrant in spite of testing. He will not only not be anxious or worried, but will also not cease to yield fruit.

Anxiety-worry-and divine production cannot coexist. Divine production requires the filling of the Holy Spirit. We are either controlled by the Spirit--spiritual--or controlled by the flesh--carnal--at any point of time. Worry is a mental attitude sin. Sin takes us out of the divine power sphere. Therefore, it is impossible to be worried and at the same time to be the channel of divine production.

The fruit that the believer will not cease to yield as he draws power from the stream is the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22-23--love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. "The fruit of the Spirit" in this passage is singular; it is one fruit, produced like grapes on a cluster.

In the physical realm fruit bearing takes time. We see signs of fruit on a young tree, but full, ripe fruit is found only on a mature tree. In the spiritual realm, as young believers when we are filled with the Spirit we will show signs of fruit. If we continue to choose to walk in the Spirit, we will grow, and the maturing fruit will be an evidence of our growth. At no time can we produce the fruit of the Spirit in our own energy. Jeremiah explains why we so desperately need the divine system of power.

"The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds. " (Jer. 17:9-10)

The heart--referring here to the inner man, the place where thinking takes place--is aqob, "deceitful," "fraudulent," "supplative." The mind without faith is under the dictates of the sin nature and absolutely cannot be trusted.

Not only is it more deceitful than anything else, it is anathema, "incurable," "malignant." Who can understand the heart of man? No one but God. Only God knows our real inner workings, and without God we could never understand ourselves. Without the convicting and teaching and illuminating ministries of God the Holy Spirit in our lives, we could never understand who we are and why we do the things we do.

"Search" means "to look for content." "Test" means "to diligently examine with the intent of finding function." God, of course, always knows what is in our hearts, but He wants us to know. He wants us to understand what is on the inside and who is in control there. We will never know what is going on in our souls until God brings it out. So He tests us by putting us sometimes in adverse situations, sometimes in prosperous situations, giving us the chance to apply what we know (Heb. 4:13).

The ultimate purpose of God's searching and testing is to give to each of us according to our ways, according to the results of our deeds. "Ways" refers to content. "Deeds" refers to function. God is not concerned only with what we do, but much more with how we do it. The Lord Jesus Christ told Nicodemus that there are two kinds of life: physical and spiritual. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," He said, "and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). Nothing that we do in the power of the flesh is acceptable to God (Isa. 64:6). Only what is produced by the Spirit of God through us is worth anything.

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37-39)

The thirst Jesus is talking about is spiritual. The Lord phrases His invitation in a conditional sentence. "if any man is thirsty" is a third-class condition that means "maybe you are thirsty and maybe not." The verb *liipsao*, "thirst," is a present active subjunctive. The subjunctive mood indicates potential. The active voice indicates that this is a matter of personal choice. We decide whether to be spiritually thirsty or not.

If we decide that we will be thirsty, then we decide whether we will quench our thirst or not. The solution to thirst is to take a drink. The phrase, "let him come to Me," reminds us that there is only one place where our thirst will be quenched--in Christ. In the imperative mood, it is the Lord's command to us. Hence, "drink" is a present active indicative. Again, the active voice indicates that we make the choice of whether or not to drink. In verse 38 Jesus makes it clear that to drink means to believe. Faith is analogous to the drinking that quenches our thirst.

Every one of these verbs--"thirst," "come," "drink," "believe"--is in the present tense, indicating continuous action. We choose whether we will keep on being thirsty; we choose whether we will keep on coming to Christ and drinking; we choose whether we will keep on believing. Only through moment-by-moment faith in Christ can we quench

the moment-by-moment thirst of the soul. John makes it clear that the Holy Spirit, who would be sent to indwell every believer after Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, is the source of the rivers of living water. Only faith can open the floodgates in our souls and release the power of the Spirit of God to flow through us.

Lesson 3-4: The Climb--Spiritual Growth Psalm 27:1-14 2 Peter 1:2-7

The climb of the Christian life is growth from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity. Spiritual growth, just like physical growth, does not happen overnight; it is a gradual process. But, unlike physical growth, spiritual growth is a matter of choice. We choose whether to be hungry for the Word; we choose whether to be motivated; we choose whether to advance in the Christian life.

In Psalm 27, David illustrates progression in spiritual growth through the seven circles of faith.

The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear?

Circle 1: Salvation. The foundation for all spiritual growth is salvation (1 Cor 3:11). "The Lord" in Hebrew is Jehovah; "salvation" is from Yeshuah, the Hebrew word for "Jesus." A thousand years after David wrote this psalm, Joseph was told by the angel, "You shall call his name Jesus for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). The person who has believed in Jesus Christ for salvation begins to see that faith, which lays basic assurance in the plan and the person of God, can conquer fear.

One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to meditate in His temple. (Ps. 27:4)

Circle 2: Study. After salvation, growth can only come from study. We have to be positive to the Word. Baqash, "seek," means to diligently study. It is similar to the Greek *spoudazo* found in 2 Timothy 2:15, implying strong inner motivation. It is impossible to study so that we grow unless we have made a personal decision to be spiritually motivated. "To dwell in the house of the Lord" is analogous to living in the Word of God, learning to let the Word be the priority, more real and absolute than anything else in life. The house of the Lord in David's time was the tabernacle--the place of teaching. The New Testament equivalent would be the local church, to be there every time the doors are open and the Word of God is taught.

For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; In the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock. (Ps. 27:5)

Circle 3: Faith-rest. David is saying that he knows that if he commits himself to live in the tabernacle of God, to meditate, to study, to be strong in his motivation for growth,

then in the day of trouble, God will spread His tent over him and he will receive divine protection from whatever may threaten him. Every time we hear the Word taught we choose whether to believe it or not. The only safe place in the universe is the place of faith, where we rest in the power of the Word. In this secret place we have an encapsulated environment that we carry with us. When we dedicate ourselves to living in the Word, then the Word of God will surround us wherever we go and we will have stability in life.

And now my head will be lifted up above my enemies around me; and I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the Lord. (Ps. 27:6)

Circle 4: Spirituality. In Hebrews 13:15 we are exhorted to "continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." The sacrifices of expressing joy which is gratitude to God, and of singing and praise, which declare the faithfulness of God, are expressions of the function of our priesthood in the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice, and be gracious to me and answer me. (Ps. 27:7)

Circle 5: Suffering. The Hebrew qara means "to call out loudly." Here it indicates intensive pressure which wrenches from the soul a cry for deliverance. Suffering is necessary for Spiritual growth. When we meet suffering with effective prayer, the process of growth is accelerated.

When Thou didst say, "Seek My face, " my heart said to Thee, "Thy face, O Lord, I shall seek. " (Ps. 27:8)

Circle 6: Occupation with Christ. The most extended part of this psalm deals with the sixth circle of faith because it is the most essential to the attaining of spiritual maturity. It is persevering through our sufferings to the point of occupation with Jesus Christ. David was able to persevere because when God said, "Seek Me," David said, "I will." He was motivated to know the Word of God and to understand the will of God. It is impossible to reach spiritual maturity unless we become occupied with the person of Christ. Christianity is not a religion; it is a relationship. The purpose of all our study is to go from the written Word to the living Word, to seek from the page the person of Jesus Christ.

I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord. (Ps. 27:13-14)

Circle 7: Waiting. David knew despair, discouragement, depression. He faced it all, but he came through it all because he knew that God would bring blessing if he persisted in spiritual advance. Qawah is the strongest Hebrew word for faith. To advance from the

cross to the crown, each of us must master the degrees of faith: amen, leaning faith; batach, wrestling faith; chasah, refuge faith; yachal, healing faith; and qawah waiting faith. Isaiah tells us that those who wait for the Lord will exchange their human strength for His divine strength. Not until we reach the waiting stage will we have that overwhelming strength of God, and not until we have that, will we have true courage in the spiritual realm.

There is no way in our own strength that we can either Teach or imitate spiritual maturity. It is a gift from God, a gift that is Y given in increments and can be received only by faith. We have C to follow God's plan, do it God's way--a principle, a promise, a doctrine at a time. To reach maturity, we have to pass through (I each of the seven circles of faith. It takes tremendous spiritual (I motivation. We have to be motivated to attain spiritual maturity more than anything on earth. If we have any other priority in (j life, we will not reach it.

God has so designed the system that we either do it His way or we don't do it at all. His way is centered on the church. Apart from involvement in a local church and apart from the exercise of our spiritual gifts, we can „t reach maturity.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pas tars and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ ... (Eph. 4:11-12)

Two of these--apostleship and prophecy--were temporary gifts. When the apostle John finished writing the last books of the Bible and died, both apostleship and prophecy Passed from the scene. The other teaching gifts are given for the purpose of ,quipping believers for service.

The Greek word katartizo, "equip," was used three ways in the ancient world: medically, it meant to set a broken bone; militarily, it meant to get supplies to an army on the front line; economically, it meant to provide needed funds. The word means to equip according to the need. In the spiritual sense in this passage, it means for the believer to find his spiritual gift and function in it.

After we have sat in Bible class and received the Word, the next step is to go out into the world and act on what we have heard. If we have no service, no function, no operation in the supernatural exercise of our spiritual gift, we will have no spiritual maturity.

The purpose of service is for the building up of the body of Christ. "Building up" is oikodomeo, from oikos, "house," and domeo, "to build." The word means "edification" The pastor teaches the congregation; the members of the congregation, having been equipped by the pastor, now all function in their spiritual gifts. Because the spiritual gifts are all functioning, the believers are edifying each other and strengthening each other so they can do what the Church is supposed to do: evangelize, tell the world about Jesus Christ. This is what makes for a dynamic local church.

... until We all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13)

The ultimate objective is expressed in four pictures of what we want to attain:

1. The unity of the faith. "Faith" here is not subjective but objective, referring to that which we believe. "The unity of the faith" means that because the Word of God is taught in its entirety, we have a systematic development of our understanding of the Word of God.

2. The knowledge of the Son of God. This is functional, experiential knowledge. We know Jesus Christ not because we have heard or studied about Him, but because we have experienced Him. We see His power in our lives, His confidence, His boldness, His courage, His humility. And we see these things in the live of others in the local church, and we come to a practical, experiential knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ. He is not someone who is absent; He is someone who is present. He is not someone who is weak; He is someone who is powerful. He is someone who lives and breathes within individuals and within a local church.

How will we ever come to the experiential knowledge of the Son of God? Only one way, we have to come to systematic unity in our understanding of Bible doctrine. If we do not accept the full counsel of God, we will never see the full glory Christ.

3. A mature man. Mature, from teleios, can also be translated "complete. This means that we have put all the pieces of the puzzle together. We have a dear understanding of the full scope of doctrine and have applied it to life. We have been taught and because we have the unity of the faith and because we have the experiential knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ, we are mature.

4. The fulness of Christ. To reach this point means that we are filled with quality, controlled by our occupation with Christ and influenced by Him in everything we do. We start out in the Christian life just working toward Christ and in time begin to be occupied with Him. But then what happens? As we develop a systematic understanding of the written Word, Jesus Christ the Living Word becomes alive to us. He becomes real, more real than anything else. He becomes important to us. As He does, we begin to have epignosis, experiential knowledge of the Son of God. We reach spiritual maturity and then He fills our life, controls our thinking, influences our actions. Jesus Christ has become the most important thing in life.

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ. (Eph. 4:14-15)

If we persist in the teaching and application of the Word, we will not have to be children all our lives. The Greek *meketi*, "no longer," says, "It is time to move on." The writer of Hebrews admonishes his readers by telling them that by now they ought to be teaching others, they ought to be functioning in their spiritual gifts, but they are not. Why? Because they have become dull of hearing, reversionistic (Heb. 5:11-14).

The word Paul uses here for "children" is *nepios*. The word refers to an adult who is childish. In the spiritual realm this is someone who has been a believer for a long time, but who is still trying to make Christianity an outward thing instead of an inward thing, human production, human effort, human good, instead of the inward thing. He still doesn't understand that Christianity is supernatural and invisible; he is still trying to make an issue of invisible divine production.

"Tossed" and "carried about" are both in the present tense, indicating Persistent action. This is the childish believer's C lifestyle--constantly shifting, constantly unstable, constantly affected by external shifts in the wind, living a life built on circumstances. No believer can attain maturity if his life is built !! on conditions around him. !!

But instead of remaining children, we may grow. "Speaking the truth in love" means communicating Bible doctrine in the power of the Holy Spirit. The phrase takes us back to where Paul began in verse 11 with the communication of the Word by gifted teachers in the filling of the Holy Spirit. When doctrine is taught this way, we will grow up in all aspects. *Atlxano* refers to natural, normal growth. This is the normal Christian life--spiritual advance from the cross to the crown.

Lesson 3-5: The Goal--Spiritual Maturity Romans 12: 1-2 Philippians 2:3-11

Spiritual maturity is the point at which we begin to live the normal Christian life. By the time we reach maturity, we are able to maintain the filling of the Spirit for prolonged periods of time. Because of this we are ready to start using to the full the resources that God makes available to us. At maturity we recognize how awesome are the responsibilities and opportunities God has given us, and the question we face is this: "Am I going to be faithful in using what God has provided to accomplish the task He has given me to do?" If we say yes, we will begin to see what sacrifice is really all about.

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. (Rom. 12:1)

With the word "therefore," Paul brings everything he has taught so far in this epistle to the point of practical application. He wants us to put shoes on our theology. He is saying that somewhere along the line our theology has to relate to our lives.

Oiktirmos means more than "mercy." While it does refer to the compassion that arises from a recognition of someone's need, it also always implies a provision to satisfy the

need. God has compassion on us because He recognizes our need, and He holds out to us resources, provision, wealth--the riches of His grace.

"Present," is *paristemi*, from *histemi*, meaning "to stand or set," and *para*, "beside." It means to make something available. The word is used in Luke 2:22 for the presentation of the baby Jesus at the temple. Joseph and Mary were, in effect, making Him available to God. In Romans 6:13, we are urged to make the C members of our bodies available to God as weapons of righteousness.

The issue in the Christian life is never our ability; God has resources to take care of that. The issue is our availability God has chosen to give us free will. AS unbelievers we had the right to believe in Jesus Christ or to reject Him. As believers we have the right to utilize the provisions of God's grace or to squander them

Paul is telling his readers that it is the purpose of God that we Present our physical bodies as a living sacrifice or offering. This would have been shocking to the people to whom this was written in AD 65• To the Greco-Roman mind, the body was something to be despised; only the mind mattered. But Paul wants them to understand that the body is important because it is the temple of the Holy Spirit and He wants it to be an instrument God can use in accomplishing His plan.

According to Hebrews 10:5-10, at the time of His physical birth, Jesus said essentially this to the Father, "You would not accept animal sacrifice and offerings as a cleansing of sin for the human race, but a body y., have prepared for Me.... I have come to do Your will." The second Person of the Trinity entered the human race to offer His body as a sacrifice for sin. In the person of Jesus Christ, undiminished deity and perfect, sinless humanity were, welded together forever. Now God carries on through the spiritual body of Christ the work He began in the incarnation We are instruments to accomplish the will of God on earth.

In the Old Testament, all sacrifices had to be killed. But Paul says our sacrifice is to be "living" and "holy." The plan of God is that every believer be in full-time, 24-hour-a-day Christian service. "Holy" means "set apart" or "sanctified" and refers to the filling of the Holy Spirit. When we have no unconfessed sins in our life and are filled with the Spirit, we are acceptable to God. As believers, we are positionally righteous and sanctified always. We are practically righteous and sanctified only when we are walking in the Spirit.

This is our " spiritual service of worship." "Spiritual service" comes from two words, *logikos*, meaning "logical," "reason) able," "sensible," and *latreia*, a word used for priestly service, but referring in ancient Greek to the work of a common day laborer. It is logical and reasonable that God would require 24-hour-a-day service from His servants. Christianity is a full-time job, and working at it full time is our act of worship.

Think about what this means. When you pull on your grubbies to go to work in the morning, you ought to be going to worship. If you work in an office, you ought to say, "I

have to go to the office from nine to five to worship." If you are a carpenter, the logical place for you to worship is out there where you are every day sawing boards and slamming nails. If you slop hogs for a living, you ought to have an attitude that says, "I carry in my physical body the Spirit of God. I am the sanctuary and because I carry Him with me, every single thing I do is important to Him, and I will make it an act of worship."

The first indication that we are arriving at spiritual maturity is that we worship every day, wherever we are. What does it take to have that attitude? It takes focus. We have to be able to concentrate, to fix our minds on reality, and not be sucked in to the lies all around us.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1-2)

"Be conformed to" is *suschemntizo*. Schema is outward appearance. Paul uses a present passive imperative here. The imperative is a command; the present tense tells us not to keep on being conformed. The passive voice tells us that we receive this action because we live here in this world. The world is constantly putting pressure on us, and the pressures cause us to conform. Paul says do not allow yourself to be pressed into a mold. Outward conformity is the problem here.

The word translated "world" is not "world" at all. It is the Greek *aion*, "age." It refers to the trends of human history. Paul is saying, "Do not allow yourself to be molded by the trends of society. Do not allow yourself outwardly to take on the appearance of the world, the age in which you live."

Instead, we are to be transformed, *metamorphw*. *Meat* means "to change;" *morphoo* means "form." It refers to a transformation or a change that is inner and involves essence. Paul is telling us to be changed on the inside. As we are transformed, C the changes that begin on the inside will work their way out and ? will affect what we look like on the outside. This passage is calling for a little bit of spiritual non-conformity. It is a challenge to us as believers to go against the tide, to stand on our own, based on our own understanding and knowledge of the Word of God.

This is exactly what Paul means when he tells us in Philippians 2:12 to work out our salvation. The principle is this: Every thing of the world--the cosmic system--works from the outside in, trying to change the inner man by making the outer man look or talk or act in certain "acceptable" ways But God's plan is different. It works from the center to the outside. Everything God does in our lives starts inside with our attitude, our thinking, and works its way outward. The change God wants will take place first in the hidden recesses of our essence, our spirit and our soul, and then will transform what is on the outside. Christian growth will be seen last of all in what we do.

Just how is it that we are to be transformed? "By the renewing of your mind" Renewing" is anakainoo. Ana means "again and again." Kainos means "new in quality." The renewing of the mind means the constant improvement of the quality of our minds through the repetition of the teaching of the Word of God. Isaiah 28:10 tells us that God's plan is "order on order, order on order, line on line, line on line, a little here, a little there." We put promise upon promise, precept upon precept and we advance step by step by the renewing of our minds.

God's plan is not to change people by requiring them to wear certain clothes or talk certain ways. The plan is to have the Word taught, and wherever the Word is received, it will change the recipient from the inside out. When someone changes his activity by his own free will, as a response to the Word of God, there is genuine growth. That is the only kind of growth that counts. God's plan starts at salvation when we become new creatures by regeneration because of union with Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Then we move to Romans 12:2, to the renewing of the mind. The result will be that we will eventually fulfill Romans 6:4, walking in newness of life. If we renew the mind through consistent long-term study of the Word of God, we will find experiential newness of life; our life will have quality because our thinking has quality.

The purpose of this growth, Paul says in Romans 12:2, is to "prove" something. Dokimazo is an athletic word that means "to prove through testing." God has tests--trials, pressures, adversity, even prosperity--planned for every life. When are we going to present our body a living sacrifice? Every time we face a test. And what are we going to prove? What is called here the "good and acceptable and perfect" will of God. "Perfect," teleios, is a word that is used in the Bible for maturity. It means to be complete, to be without lack. Every time we are tested we have the chance to prove, by facing pressure and overcoming, that the will of God works in life.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus ... (Phil. 2:5)

"Have this attitude" is the present active imperative of the verb phroneo, which means "to think." This is a command to keep on thinking like Jesus Christ thought. The active voice tells us that we choose whether to do this or not. First Corinthians 2:16 says that the Bible is the mind of Christ. If we ever hope to think like Christ, we have to know and understand how He thought. This only comes through consistent study and application of the Word in the filling of the Holy Spirit. Being conformed to Christ begins with thinking.

Apart from study of the Word, we cannot know how or what to think, because the mind of Christ is totally opposed to all human perception and human logic. Paul illustrates this in the verses just before and just after his command to have the mind of Christ.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Phil. 2:3-4)

The Lord Jesus Christ treated every member of the human race as more important than Himself, and He was God in the flesh. He made people know that they were valuable by the way He treated them. His whole life was spent looking out for the interests of others. Mark tells us that Jesus "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45), and all the gospel accounts bear witness to the fact that He served every day of His life on earth.

What a radical change it would work in society if we thought that way. Think what it would mean in your life and mine if 24 hours a day we were offering our bodies as a living sacrifice to God in this way. What if we offered the encouragement, the consolation, the affection, the compassion of Christ to every one we came in contact with today? What if we put other people and their needs before ourselves? What if our attitude was that this other person's concerns are just as important as ours; his problems are just as pressing; his feelings matter as much?

If we had that attitude then every day would be a day of true worship, because we would be living every hour as a sacrifice to God, experiencing the very life of the person of Jesus Christ. But it can only happen one way: the mind has to gorge on the Word of God, the soul has to be saturated with the Word of God. As we feast on the Word day after day, the transformation slowly takes place, and it causes us to think and act like Jesus Christ thought and acted.

... who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:6-11)

Lesson 4-1: Perspective--Grace Romans 5: 1-2 Luke 18:9-14 1 Corinthians 15: 10

Spiritual growth should do something to our self-image. It did something to Paul's. When he wrote to the Corinthians in about AD 59, Paul called himself "the least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9). Four years later, he had grown to the point that he saw himself as "the least of the saints" (Eph. 3:8). A few years--and many tribulations--later, writing his last letters to the young pastor Timothy, Paul declared himself to be the worst sinner in the world (1 Tim. 1:15).

As he matured and his intimacy with Jesus Christ deepened, Paul saw both God and himself more clearly. Instead of causing him to feel better about himself, growth opened Paul's eyes to the fact that his sin nature was worse than he had ever imagined; it was incorrigible. He saw with greater clarity every day the depth of his need for grace from God. And that was the secret of his greatness.

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand. (Rom. 5:1-2)

We stand in grace or we do not stand at all. Grace is all that God is free to do for mankind on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ. It is a resource that can never be earned or deserved, but only received as a gift. We are saved by grace through faith; we grow in the Christian life by grace through faith.

Because grace can be initiated and sustained only by God, anything we try to do other than respond is worthless. Anything we try to do on our own takes us out of the sphere of grace and puts us into the sphere of "works" or "law." Paul explained this to the Romans when he said, "If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace" (Rom.

No one can work his way to God or earn God's approval through human effort. Paul, the former Pharisee who had been found "blameless" by the strictest standard of righteousness that had ever been devised (Phil. 3:4-7), knew about trying to work his way to God. He understood how the legalistic mind sets itself against grace, refusing to accept the fact that in man there dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18).

Most people can see that sin is a violation of the righteousness of God, so they understand why it had to be judged on the cross. But not very many people are reconciled to the fact that the good things man does on his own are abhorrent and are absolutely unacceptable to God.

In the Hebrew, Isaiah 64:6 is graphic in its description of the good that man can produce. "All our righteousness," it says, "is as the rag of a monstrous woman." Why would the Holy Spirit inspire Isaiah to use this particular analogy? Because the flow of blood in the menstrual cycle is evidence that there has been no conception. No conception means there will be no birth, and no birth means no life. Isaiah is saying that all human good is dead in God's sight.

That is exactly why human good is referred to as "dead works" in Hebrews 6:1-2. The author is not talking about sins here. Sins are never called "dead works" in the Bible. "Dead works" is a reference to man's attempts to work his way to God, to earn His approval. But he cannot do it. All our good is relative good; all our righteousness is relative righteousness. Compared to other men, we may appear good, righteous. But compared to the absolute goodness and righteousness of God we are less than nothing.

At every moment we have two choices: we can trust in ourselves--relying on our intellect and our strength and our goodness--or we can take a realistic look at ourselves and see that our only hope is to trust in God and rely on the riches of His grace. In Luke 18, the Lord has a story to tell about two men and who they chose to trust.

And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt ... (Luke 18:9)

The most natural thing in the world is for men to use one standard to measure themselves and another to judge everyone else. The men to whom Jesus directs this parable look at them selves from the stand point of all their virtues. They are preoccupied with all the wonderful things they do. But when they look at others, they minimize anything that might be worthwhile and magnify the flaws they see. They measure themselves by comparing their strengths to other men's weaknesses. Of course, by this kind of comparison they tower above others. So of course they look at others with contempt.

Exoutheneo means " to make of no account, to despise utterly. " This is the mental attitude sin of scornfulness--the basis of hatred, hostility, enmity. The word translated "others" is loipos. It means "the rest." As far as these men were concerned, everyone who was outside of their little sect was not worth spitting on.

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. (Luke 18:10)

The Pharisees were pillars of the community. They were respected and honored. The name "Pharisee" means "the separated ones." The Pharisees were, first of all, separatists. They stood apart, aloof. They wore special clothing to make sure that everyone would be properly impressed with who they were. They were legalists, preoccupied with keeping not just the Mosaic Law but the thousands of regulations that had been added to it through the years. Especially they liked to concern themselves with the externals like tithing and ritual purity. The g Pharisees thought they could meet God's standards by keeping all the outward rules. Like all legalists, they were very proud-of themselves, of their association, of their own righteousness. They expected to be looked up to. Tax-collectors, on the other hand, expected nothing but contempt. They did, after all, work for the hated Roman conquerors. The Romans did not pay the tax collectors, but gave them total freedom in collecting taxes from their fellow Jews. Everything they could weasel out of people above what was owed to the Romans was theirs. So they became very adept at chiseling people out of their money. It was a lucrative business. They were considered traitors and were despised by almost everyone. Especially did the Pharisees look down on these "sinners," classing them with harlots and Gentiles.

The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, "God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get. " (Luke 18:11-12)

Notice that Jesus says that the Pharisee was praying to himself. It is no wonder, because in his mind he really was god. He was convinced that God was made in his image; he was convinced God held his standard.

The Pharisee said "thank you," but there was no thanksgiving here. He was thankful that he was not like other people, which of course was a bold-faced lie. He was exactly like other people.

He made no request of God. Why would he ask God for anything when he was unconscious of any need? He did not feel that he needed anything; he was very content with himself.

He had no praise for God. In the place of praise was self-exaltation. He congratulated himself first for all the things he did not do and for being such a fine individual. As he prayed, he looked around, because he had to look around at other people to remind himself of how wonderful he was. As his eyes fell on the tax-collector, he reminded himself how much better he was than all the others. Of course, he measured himself and others by the human standard of relative righteousness. He built himself up by beating others down. By zeroing in on the failures of others, he could make himself look pretty good. But not to God. Relative righteousness is despicable in God's sight.

Finally he began to list his good deeds, and everything he had to say was an expression of law and of the externals. Jesus cuts the account of the Pharisee's prayer at this point, but you can bet that his prayer went on and on and on, into all the details of how many good things he did and how wonderful he was.

This man had a system based on two things: what he did and what he did not do. But nowhere was there a place in his system for what he was. Everything he was concerned with was external; there was nothing inside--no relationship with God, no fellowship, no faith.

But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" (Luke 18:13)

The tax-gatherer--hated, rejected, an outcast in his own nation--stood in the temple and uttered seven words. The fact that he felt he must stand apart from God, as well as from the Pharisee, indicates that he knew he was an outcast. He did not have any inflated ideas about being good enough for God.

The Pharisee acted as if he and God were old buddies; the publican had a reverent fear of God. It shows in his posture and in his refusal even to look up.

Beating his breast, he cried for mercy. Everything about this man said that he was defeated, ashamed, grieved. He saw how great his need was, and he knew that nothing but God's mercy could sustain him.

Whereas the Pharisee chose to magnify his good points, this man focused on his flaws. The Pharisee saw himself as better than everyone else. The tax-gatherer saw himself as worse than everyone else. He was so concerned about his sinfulness that he did not even

have time to think about the Pharisee's flaws. He considered himself the sinner of sinners, the worst of all, and all he asked for was mercy.

God's mercy withholds from us what we deserve. Because God judged Jesus Christ on the cross for all our sins, He can offer us mercy He can also offer us grace. God's grace gives us what we do not deserve--the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the riches of His glory, inheritance, power, and much more. But the only people who can lay hold of grace are those who realize a their need f or mercy.

What was Jesus' evaluation of these two men and their prayers?

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be exalted. (Luke 18:14)

The word "justified" from dikaiou, means "declared righteous." No matter how proud and righteous the Pharisee felt when he walked out of that temple, he was not justified before God. "The sacrifices of God," David wrote in Psalm 51:17, "are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." We are not told how the tax collector fell when he left the temple, we only know how God saw him. A part of maturity is being able to see ourselves as God sees us--knowing absolutely when we are out of fellowship and displeasing to Him and just as absolutely when we are functioning in His grace and causing Him pleasure.

But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. (1 Cor. 15:10)

Grace is a resource that we choose whether or not to use. Every believer stands in the sphere of grace, in an encapsulated environment where all the riches of God are available to us. The same power, the same wisdom, the same historical impact, that was available to Paul is available to each of us.

Why then do some believers seem to be blessed and prospered while others are not? Maybe it is because some work harder. Paul took the resources of God's grace and he worked and sweat and did without sleep and went without all kinds of comforts so he could accomplish the plan of God for his life. He labored past physical and mental exhaustion, because he knew that he would never understand divine power until he had pushed past Paul's strengths and abilities. God honored that, and it was all grace, because on Paul's part it was all faith.

A German proverb says, "God gave us nuts, but He didn't crack them." O.A. Baptiste said, "God gave us wheat, but we must bake the bread. He gives us cotton, but we must make the clothes; He gives us trees, but we must make our homes. He provides raw materials, we must make the finished product." This is the principle of grace at work.

Lesson 4-2: Perception-Discernment Romans 12:21 Hebrews 5: 13-14 Philippians 1:9-11

Most of the pain in our lives is self-induced. Every day we bypass wonderful things that God wants to give us for our pleasure and for our good. Every day we take hold of horrible things that Satan wants to give us for our pain and for our destruction. The main reason we make stupid decisions to spurn what God offers and to grab what Satan offers is that we lack discernment.

The enemy is a master of illusion; he knows how to make evil things look beautiful. We fall for his enticements because we have not cultivated the ability to distinguish between good and evil. Without discernment--the ability to make wise distinctions and decisions--our spiritual defeat is inevitable.

Do not be overcome by evil ... (Rom. 12:21)

"Do not be overcome" is a present passive imperative of the verb *nikao* with the negative *me*. In Greek, when a negative is used with a present imperative, it is a command to stop doing something that you are doing. These believers in Rome were being conquered by evil.

The preposition *hupo*, translated here "by," means "under the control of." There are several words for "evil," but the word used here, *kakos*, refers to something rotten to the core, harmful, malignant, but something which may look very, very good. The Romans were being deceived by appearances. They were thinking of some evil things as good. But Paul orders them by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop being conquered by this rotten cancer.

The prophet Isaiah issued an even harsher injunction to the people of his day: "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight!" (Isa. 5:20-21).

Perhaps the greatest test in our lives as believers is the test of evil, and yet most believers do not even know what evil is. Evil is the policy of Satan. As such, it is anything that opposes God's creative intent. The essence of evil is independence of God. Anything that man does on his own is evil, because man was never intended to function independently of God.

Christianity is weak today because most Christians think that evil is simply sin, and because they think that, they are waging a war that has already been won and totally ignoring the war that is still in progress. Sin is only one manifestation of evil. The war against sin was won at the cross, where judgment for every sin that had ever been or would ever be committed was poured out on Jesus Christ. No one will ever be judged for sins.

But evil has other manifestations, the most often ignored of which is human good. The human good produced by believers is the wood, hay, and stubble that will be burned up at the Judgement Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). The human good produced by unbelievers is the deeds judged at the Great White Throne. Apart from faith in Christ, no one will measure up to the righteousness of God, and therefore their deeds will condemn them (Jude 14-15; Rev. 20:11-15).

... but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:21)

Paul had a solution for the evil in these defeated believers' lives. Instead of being conquered, Paul says, "overcome." He uses *alla*, the strongest conjunction of contrast in the Greek language, with the present active imperative of *nikao*. He is saying, "In total and complete contrast to your being conquered, you choose to stand up and keep on conquering evil."

How are they going to do that? There is only one way evil can ever be conquered--with good. The phrase translated "with good" is *en to agatho*, "in the good" or "in the sphere of good." *Agathos* is one of two Greek words for "good;" it means absolute good, intrinsic good. Paul is talking about divine good, that which can be produced only by God.

Divine good is produced through believers by the working of the Spirit of God together with the Word of God. The Spirit works through us only when He is in control, when we have no unconfessed sins in our lives and so are filled with the Spirit. But if we do not have truth stored in our souls, we have made the Holy Spirit a workman without tools. The work He wants to do in and through us He will do only with the Word. That is why we feed on the Word every day. The more we store in our souls, the more the Holy Spirit has to work with and the more He will accomplish through our lives.

Active discernment is a product of this balance of the Word and the Spirit in our souls. Wisdom, which comes only from the Word, is insight into the true nature of things and the ability to know what action to take. But knowing what to do is never enough--we need courage, and the kind of courage we need comes only from the Holy Spirit, the *Paraklete*, the Encourager

For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Heb. 5:13-14)

The word "partakes" here is the present active participle of *metecho*. It refers to someone who is constantly feeding only on "the milk" of the Word, the basic doctrines. The author calls that person "unskilled". *Apeivos* is a Greek word that was used for an unskilled workman, someone lacking in experience, someone who was unable to make practical application of a certain tool or a certain amount of information.

He who partakes of milk is unskilled--he lacks experience--in the Word of righteousness. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 2:15 to study to show ourselves approved unto God. The only

way we can be approved is through our study and application of the Word, but if we are lacking, unskilled, unable to apply the Word, then we are what the author here calls "babes, nepios.

Nepios does not refer to physical infants. Homer used the word to describe grown men who were childish and infantile in their thinking--heroes who came home from battle and then could not handle life. The nepios in Homer's writings were military heroes who had the inspirational courage to stand firm on the field of battle, but who lacked the moral courage to stand in the day-to-day grind of normal life. The author is saying here that the believer who has had time to get to spiritual maturity, yet who is still feeding on milk, is childish, infantile, lacking in the perseverance that is the hallmark of moral courage.

In contrast to the nepios and the teleios, the people who have arrived at the goal or objective, in this case spiritual maturity. The solid food of the Word, the advanced doctrine, is for the mature. These people have discernment, but not by accident--they have sweat it out in the gymnasium of the soul.

"Practice" is the Greek hexis, which means "a habit resulting from consistent, Perpetual discipline" Discipline produces habits. Good habits are just as easy to establish as bad habits. They come the same way; they come through repetition of decisions. Bad decisions, repeated over and over, lead to bad practice. Bad practice leads to bad habits. Bad habits lead to bad character.

But the mature have practiced making good decisions; they have established a pattern of personal self-discipline. They have their senses--their perceptive faculties--"trained". This is the Greek gymnasium, from which we get "gymnasium". Mature Christians have good habits because they live their lives in the gym. Every day they work with the Word; every day they function in the energy of the Spirit. Every day they strive for higher achievement in the spiritual realm. And because they work out in the Word, every single day they have their senses trained, they have learned discernment. "Discern" is diakrino. Krino means "to judge;" dia means "between." They have the ability to judge between good and evil.

And this I pray, that Your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment ... (Phil. 1:9)

Paul's prayer for the Philippian believers begins with hina, "that," which introduces a purpose clause. His prayer has a purpose, "that your love may abound." The love here is agape, the unconditional love that can be produced by no one but God. Every reference to agape in the Scriptures is a reference to the Power, the dynamic, of the Spirit of God.

Agape is not human love. Human love cannot begin to match the love produced by the Spirit of God (Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 13; Gal. 5:22). Agape is the foundation of the Christian's orientation to reality. If we want to orient to the way that God sees things in this world, we have to start with love. There are two paths we can take in life: the path of love, light, and truth or the path of hate, darkness, and deception.

Agape in Scripture always has a two-fold connotation for man. In Matthew 22:37-39, we are given two commandments: to love God and to love others as ourselves. Our love for God is personal love, love based on the virtue of the one loved. God is worthy of our love. Love for others is impersonal love, based on the virtue of the one loving. The highest expression of the love of God operating in our lives is when we love those who are absolutely unlovable. But it is impossible to love others if we do not love God and if we have not learned to love and accept ourselves based on God's love for us.

This love, Paul tells the Philippians, is to abound, to overflow. The "real knowledge" he wants them to have is epignosis, experiential knowledge. "Discernment" is from aisthesis, a word that means "insight, perception, skillful application." It was originally used of common sense and the ability to make distinctions. Paul's prayer is that their love will overflow in two areas: practical application of the Word to life and the ability to make common-sense distinctions in life. This is the beginning of discernment.

... so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:10-11)

When the ability to make common-sense distinctions leads to making common-sense decisions, we have "approved," dokimazo, to prove by putting to the test. We have put something to the test with a view toward approval. We need to develop through experiential knowledge and discernment, the ability to put things to the test. Discernment is proof by testing.

"Things that are excellent" refers to things that are of value, worthwhile, as opposed to things that are worthless. We put things to the test, we identify the things that are excellent in order to be "sincere and blameless." "Sincere" is from eilikrines and means "to be judged by the sun, to be open to the light, to be unmingled with darkness." Aprosokopos, "blameless," means "without stumbling." When we approve the things that are proper, excellent, and fitting in God's plan, we can stand in the light because we have nothing to hide and we can walk in the light without stumbling. Paul wants these believers to be open to the light and without stumbling until the "the day of Christ," a technical New Testament term for the Rapture of the Church.

"The fruit of righteousness" in verse 11 is a reference back to the love of God. "Having been filled" comes from the Greek verb pleroo, a word with four shades of meaning: to fill a deficiency, to fill with quality, to fully influence, and to fully possess.

We all have deficiencies in our lives. But they are filled when we allow the Word of God, in the function of the love of the Holy Spirit, to become practical and experiential, to work in our lives. Only then do we begin to orient to God's reality instead of our subjective emotions. We begin to understand where we stand with God, that we are forever accepted in the Beloved.

Once we really understand what that means, we are able to take the rejection of other people and to do what no one is able to do apart from the Spirit of God--to love unconditionally, impersonally, to love others not because of anything attractive in them, but because God loves us and pours that love through us. Unconditional love is a wonderful thing to be able to give. When we can love unconditionally, we have been filled with the fruit of righteousness.

That love gives us the ability to have discernment and to make good decisions. It gives us the ability to adjust to whatever conditions we face in life. Because we are filled with the fruit of righteousness, which comes through Jesus Christ, God receives the glory and the praise.

Lesson 4-3: Testing--Temptation 1 Corinthians 10: 13 James 1:2-4 1 Peter 1:6-7

The Lord repeatedly reminded His disciples that temptation is a very real and a very great danger. He did not see temptation as a minor interruption or--as we sometimes do--as something enjoyable. He saw it as a threat to spiritual well-being. He warned in Luke 8:13 of the tremendous danger of temptation and challenged his disciples to be constantly alert to the things by which they were tempted.

Because of the great danger, Jesus saw temptation as a cause for disciplined prayer. His position was that the first step in facing and overcoming temptation is to anticipate temptation by constant prayer. In praying for deliverance from temptation, we are acknowledging that in our flesh we are powerless to resist, but that God is able and willing to deliver us (Matt. 6:13, 26:41; 2 Pet. 2:9).

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Cor. 10:13)

The Greek here literally says that all our temptations are "of the human kind." Any temptation we have is a human type of temptation. There are temptations that are beyond the human kind, but we are not going to be faced with them. The Lord Jesus Christ not only faced every human kind of temptation, but He also faced the superhuman kind (Heb. 4:15; Matt. 4:1-11).

However difficult our particular temptations may seem, they are no more difficult than anyone else's. We all have a tendency to think that no one has ever been tempted as greatly as we have or that no one has ever sinned as terribly as we have. But that is simply not true. All our temptations are typically human temptations.

In any case, no matter how difficult our temptations, God is faithful. This faithful God, who is perfect, designed a perfect plan for imperfect people. In eternity past He

anticipated every problem that would ever be and designed the solutions before the problems existed. And He set a limit on every temptation that we would ever face.

At this point the sovereignty of God enters the equation. While we are here on this earth, we are tempted from many directions--from the world, the flesh, the devil. But God, who is sovereign, still controls human history. He is able to keep all our temptation within the limit He set in eternity past. And that limit is given here: He will never allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able.

Our temptations will be limited to things that we can handle. As we grow and gain strength, our temptations will become stronger and more intense. But they will never be beyond our level of growth or our ability to discern.

"Able" is *dunamai*, the Greek word for inherent power. Every believer has the inherent power necessary to overcome the temptations he faces. "Temptation" is *peirasmos*, a word that indicates solicitation to evil, something that can never come from God. He will test faith, but He will never solicit to evil.

In our temptations, He will provide a way of escape never away from, but always through, the problem. He provides the way of escape so that we will be able to endure, from *hupophero*, which means "to bear by being under, bear up; to bear patiently." Endurance is the key in temptation and trial.

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

Why does God allow us to be tempted at all? James tells us. The word that dominates these three verses is the word "consider." The Greek *hegeomai* has a number of meanings including "to consider; to lead the way; to go before." Originally a mathematical term, it means to add up the facts, to weigh and compare the information at hand.

James says that when we find ourselves in testing situations we need to take into consideration all the facts about that testing and then let joy lead the way through that temptation. What are the facts we need to weigh--that God is faithful to limit testing to our spiritual and physical abilities; that while not all things are good, God works everything together for good for those who love Him; that temptation is a trial of our faith allowed with a view toward reward; that in times of adversity and opposition we have the opportunity to advance more rapidly in the faith. If under testing we will stop and add up the facts that we know about who God is and why this is happening to us, then joy will lead the way through.

Jesus had to add up the facts as He faced the cross. Hebrews 12:1-3 says He considered the purpose of the cross and the results of the cross and when He did, He was able to endure the humiliation and the pain and even the judgment of the Father for the joy that He saw before Him.

We have the opportunity to add up the facts in a variety of trials. "Various" is *poikilos*, a word that means multicolored. Satan offers temptations in colors that we like. He studies and analyzes us and brings just the things that are beautiful to our particular area of weakness in the sin nature.

When we face these different temptations in their lovely hues, we have to keep something in mind: there is a reason for it all. God is limiting this temptation, and it does have a divine purpose. The secret of letting joy lead the way is knowing what is happening. "Knowing" is the perfect form of *oida*, and it means that we have complete information on which to act. *Oida* is used for mature, complete understanding. We know that the testing of our faith produces endurance.

"Produce" is *katergazomai*. *Ergazomai* means "to work," *kata* means "according to a norm and standard." The testing of our faith is working, according to a norm and standard, endurance in us. The word translated "endurance" here is not the same word used in 1 Corinthians 10:13. In that passage the word is *hupophero*, "to bear patiently." Here the word is *hupomeno*, "to abide under, to persevere." It carries the idea of refusing to flee or recede, of enduring bravely and calmly. *Hupomeno* is persistence, tenacity, the ability to endure, to last. The only thing that will produce this in us is the testing of our faith.

When James talks in the first part of the verse about "various trials," the word he uses for "trials" is from *peirasmos*, which is almost always translated "temptation" (as in 1 Corinthians 10:13). The word he uses for "testing," *dokimazo*, means "to put to the test for the purpose of approval." Both words refer to the same situation. When we are in a tempting situation, the temptation is coming from the source of our old sin nature backed by Satan and the cosmic system. But the test is coming from the Lord. The temptation is to sin, but the test is to exercise faith.

Because it is the testing of our faith that produces endurance, God permits us to be tempted. So we should "let endurance have its perfect result." The "perfect" result is from *teleios*, which means "brought to its end, finished; full-grown, adult." James is not talking about sinless perfection; he is talking about spiritual maturity.

This is how it works: As believers, we start moving forward in the Christian way of life, functioning in the realm of faith. Faith will run into testing. When we pass a test we take a step upward to stronger faith. That faith will meet with a stronger form of testing. When we pass the next test, we come to a stronger form of faith. And that form is going to have a stronger and more subtle form of testing, and on and on and on. That is the rest of the Christian way of life. It is the testing of faith.

How does God test the faith? With our knowledge of doctrine, of His Word. The test proves not what we have written down in our notebooks, not how great is our intellect or our academic prowess. The test proves what we really know and understand and believe of the Word of God.

God is a good teacher. He gives us exactly the information we need, He lets us know that we are accountable for that information, and then He tests us on that information. He gives us the information in the Word, and that is why Bible class is so important, because the class we skip may be the one where God is giving the information we are going to need for a big test that week.

It is not unfair for God to allow the test to come to us on information that was covered in the class we skipped. If we did not show up, we did not get the information, but that is not God's fault. It is just like cutting class in school. We cannot blame the teacher when we fail a test because we cut class. The C~' teacher can say with all honesty, "I gave the information, and you chose not to be there, or You were there but YOU Were C thinking about other things while the class was being taught. God can say the same thing. God makes teaching available; we will be tested. Whether we pass or fail is based on our ability to use the information that was available to us.

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 1:6-7)

Peter, like James, reminds us that we will face multicolored tests and trials in life. The purpose for the tests is, as in James 1, related to the dokimazo, the testing or proof of our faith. God wants us to know how strong our faith is, so He is going to allow us to be tested to the limit so we can find out how we will respond.

In the ancient world a goldsmith would put gold in a vat. Underneath was a fire and as the heat from the fire melted the gold, it became molten metal. With the heat, the impurities would come to the top. The goldsmith would skim off and throw away all the alloy and the Impurities, and he would turn up the heat.

When we start out in the Christian life, we are given baby heat. Impurities rise to the top, and they are skimmed off and thrown to the side. As we advance, our faith increases, and the heat is turned up. The hotter it gets, the more impurities will rise to the top.

What does this process do? It keeps us from thinking that we have "arrived," that we are as good as we can possibly be. God makes sure that things get hotter and hotter in our lives, because if they did not, then our impurities, our flaws, would not rise to the top to be cast off. And we might start thinking we were perfect believers. God does not want anyone thinking he has attained perfection. Paul makes that clear in Philippians 3:12-14.

When things get so hot in our lives that we snap under the pressure and ugly comes out of us, we should be encouraged. That Is exactly what was supposed to happen. The whole purpose of the pressure is to show us our flaws so we can deal with them.

When the goldsmith could look down into the molten metal and see his face reflected, he knew that he had the pure gold he was working to produce. In God's plan the goal is that we be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. What will it take to work that in our lives? Heat. A lot of fire. We will have to Pass a lot of tests and get rid of a lot of flaws and impurities. They all have to come to the surface and be dealt with one at a time. The Lord's desire--His purpose in the tests--is to one day be able to look down into our lives and see the reflection of His own face. With every test. that we pass, the reflection grows clearer.

Lesson 4-4: Proving--faith-rest Hebrews 4: 1-3 Philippians 4:6-7 Daniel 6: 16-23

We live in a world designed to rob us of inner peace, to drive us crazy with frustration, turmoil, and fear. What we need is the ability to rest. It just so happens that what we need is exactly what God wants us to have. And so He holds out to each of us the possibility of finding true rest, that inner Peace and tranquility through which alone we will be able to become heroes in the fray.

The only "problem" with His offer is that we can take Him up on it only by faith. Every one of us will choose whether to accept or reject His rest. If we accept it, we will be equipped to move on to spiritual greatness. If we reject it, we will waste our lives in bitterness in the wilderness.

Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. (Heb. 4:1)

The author of Hebrews is writing to warn the Jewish believers in Jerusalem that God's judgment is coming on the nation. He wants these people, who have turned away from the reality of fellowship with Jesus Christ to dead ritual, to have a healthy fear of one thing: failing to enter the faith-rest life. To teach this lesson, he points, beginning in Hebrews 3, to Moses and the Exodus generation.

One year after their exodus from Egypt, the Jews reached Kadesh-Barnea near the border of Canaan, the promised land. God had given His Word that in that land He would give them rest. He told Moses to send 12 men to spy out the land (Num. 13). When the 12 came back, they brought a report of a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey, yet a land with fortified cities and strong inhabitants. Two of the men-Joshua and Caleb--were all for going in and taking the land. They knew, because God had promised, that they could conquer it. But the other ten convinced the people that they were not able, that the enemies were too strong, that the land would devour them. Joshua and Caleb had faith-rest. The others did not.

So God took the Exodus generation on a circuit through the wilderness for 39 more years, and every test that came their way was a test of their ability to rest in faith. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul describes what took place during those years. Every time God tested

them, they failed. He pulled them miraculously out of one difficulty after another, testing them over and over again looking for a spark of faith. He never found one. And so every adult in that generation--with the exception of Joshua and Caleb--died in the wilderness.

The land of Canaan is not a picture of heaven; it is a picture of the faith-rest life. In the promised land there were giants; there were enemies to fight. But the Jews were not expected to go in alone; with them was the God who had proved He is able to deliver. The younger generation went in and did what their parents could have done; they claimed the land by faith, by constantly obeying in faith-rest.

When the author of Hebrews says, "Let us fear," he is urging his generation to learn the lesson from the Exodus generation. He is saying, "They failed; you can too. Their children succeeded; you can too. And this is one place where you ought to be terrified of failure."

None of us knows how many years of life on this earth God has allotted to us. Whatever our individual allotment, it is just enough for us to fulfill the destiny God has set before us. There is no time to waste. As believers we ought to be afraid of living out our lives in a wilderness experience--test-failure, test-failure, test-failure. We should not fear death; we should not fear our enemies; we should not even fear sin. But we ought to fear failing to take God at His Word, failing to enter the promised land.

God has the same kind of experience waiting for us, the same promise of blessing and victory and joy that he had for the people in the Exodus generation. The author does not want these people to 'come short,' from husterio. The word means 'to fall down on the track and fail to finish.'

God planned for every believer to progress from salvation pictured in the Passover and the Exodus, through testing and spiritual growth, pictured in the trek through the wilderness, to maturity, pictured in the Canaan experience. And what is waiting in the land of spiritual maturity? Great blessings and giants.

What the Exodus generation had faced in the wilderness looked small compared to what they saw ahead in the promised land. So they let their fears stop them at the border. But their children did not. They said, 'We can take it.' And so at Jericho they faced their first big test. All God wanted to find out was how well they could take orders. He told them He did not want them to do a thing except march around this fortified city once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day. Do those instructions sound at all strange?

If we want to enter the faith-rest life, we should study those instructions, because someday we will be given orders just as strange. When we in our spiritual growth come to the point of cracking the maturity barrier and entering the promised land, we will face a fortified city, and it will probably be one inside us. God will likely give us instructions that sound totally illogical. It is His way of asking, 'Do you trust Me? How well can you do nothing? How well can you rest?' Jericho was a test of the Jews' ability to rest. Every one of us will face a Jericho somewhere in our lives.

For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest. (Heb. 4:2-3)

God made provision for the Exodus generation, but they failed because they did not believe. They had one of the greatest Bible teachers in all of history and yet all they could do was criticize. They knew all of Moses' faults. They could always find things that Moses did that he should not do and things he did not do that he should have done. But their problem was not the communicator. Their problem was that they never mingled the message with faith. Moses constantly challenged them to believe God and His promises. But they would not.

Now the first-century author of Hebrews is saying, "We have had the same message preached to us. Are we going to believe or to doubt. If we believe, we will enter the promised land. If we fail, we will live in the wilderness."

Until we learn the principle of doing nothing in our faith, of standing still and simply believing that the battle is the Lord's, we will not see victory. God does not deliver through strength or power or speed; He delivers through His Spirit.

This is not to say we will not be afraid of the giants. In fact, it is our fears that should constantly drive us to fellowship, to occupation with the person of Jesus Christ. As we keep on believing, we enter a new realm of life, the realm of faith. The consistency of passing tests in fellowship will bring us to the place of rest.

This place of rest is not in the world; it is not outside us. The refuge God designed for us--the place where we can be refreshed and strengthened for the battles of life--is in our souls, and its door only opens to faith.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4.6-7)

"Be anxious for nothing" is the verb *merimnao*, a present active imperative, with the negative *medeis*, "nothing." *Merimnao* means "to be anxious, troubled, fretful; to worry." The phrase literally means, "Stop worrying!" By using this particular construction, Paul is urging the Philippians to stop doing something they are habitually doing: "Stop being anxious."

"In everything" is simply the positive of "nothing." The "nothing" says, "Don't worry." The "everything" says, "Give thanks." They are two sides of the same coin.

Paul uses four different words for prayer to explain the alternative to anxiety. "Prayer" is *proseuchomai*, meaning "to approach face to face." This is a word used only of prayer to

God. By praying to Him we admit that He is able to take care of our needs.

"Supplication," *deesis*, means "to ask for something, to make a petition." *Deesis* is used for prayer that recognizes great personal need. The giants in the promised land are there to make us realize that we cannot do anything on our own. We need God.

"Thanksgiving" is *eucharistia*. The root of this word is *charis*, "grace." When we give thanks, we acknowledge that everything comes to us from the grace of God. "Request" is from *aiteo*, a word used for petitions made to someone who is superior to the petitioner.

When we find ourselves tempted to be anxious, if we will simply go face-to-face to God, communicate our needs and desires, and give Him thanks for the situation and for the solutions He has already provided, then we will have peace.

This is not just any peace, but the peace of God. The definite article indicates that this is specifically God's peace, the peace that He has all the time. God is never ruffled, never upset, never anxious. The perfect peace of God reflects His control of all circumstances. This peace is above and beyond all comprehension, above all human reason and beyond all human ability to grasp.

This is not a Peace man can produce. It is the peace that only God has, but that we can share. *Eirene* is peace that results from reconciliation (Rom. 5:1). It is the birthright of every believer. Jesus warned that in the world we will have tribulation (John 16:33). But with the warning He gave a promise of His peace—the only power that can see us through the tribulation (John 14:27, 16:33).

The peace Jesus Christ gives will guard our hearts and minds. The word "guard" is *phouveo*. It refers to a garrison, to the posting of warriors on guard. When the guard has been mounted, the city is safe. When the Peace of God becomes the garrison of our souls, we have an absolutely secure place to rest and find refreshment even in the heat of battle.

Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you.

And a stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing might be changed in regard to Daniel.

Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him and his sleep fled from him.

Then the king arose with the dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions' den.

And when he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?"

Then Daniel spoke to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O King, I have committed no crime. "

Then the king was very pleased and gave orders for Daniel to be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. (Dan. 6:16-23)

In this wonderful illustration of faith-rest at work we see a king pacing in a palace and Daniel resting in a pit. King Darius, who had been tricked into signing an injunction that would condemn this faithful commissioner to death, was deeply distressed at the prospect of feeding Daniel to the lions. But there was nothing he could do--except entrust Daniel to God.

Darius, surrounded by luxury and abundance, spent a miserable, sleepless night. Because he did not know how to rest, the king had to rush out in the morning to see if what he feared would happen had happened. The believer, by the way, who is waiting on God never has to hurry. God is never in a hurry and neither are those who rest in Him.

When the king heard from Daniel's lips that God had been able to deliver him, he was delighted. This is the life of those who live in the wilderness--up and down, up and down, their emotions always swinging wildly back and forth. They are very happy and then suddenly they are very miserable, and then just as suddenly they are very happy again.

But Daniel knew how to trust his God. He did not need anything changed. He was not living under his circumstances, and so no matter how hungry the lions looked, Daniel was able to relax. He got a good night's rest. Nothing puts the enemy to shame like faith-rest in the believer.

Lesson 4-5: Empowering--The Spirit Zechariah 4:6 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 2 Corinthians 4:7-10

In 538 BC, the people of Israel began to return to the promised land after 70 years of captivity in Babylon. As they set their focus on rebuilding the temple, re-establishing worship in Jerusalem, and fulfilling God's plan for the nation, the Lord reminded their leader Zerubbabel that there is only one source of power for spiritual life.

"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, " says the Lord of hosts. (Zech. 4:6)

Growth in our ability to tap that power is always preceded by a deepened awareness of our own inadequacy. It is part of God's plan to show us just how weak we are on our own because not until we are overwhelmed by our weakness will we take hold of grace. And not until we learn to take hold of grace with every breath will we become a serious threat to the enemy.

And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me--to keep me from exalting myself, concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:7-10)

The entire book of 2 Corinthians is a defence of the ministry. It was written by Paul to defend not just himself, but every pastor-teacher who would ever teach the Word of God. Paul was under tremendous attack by the carnal, critical, judgmental Christians in Corinth, who were letting the things they did not find attractive about the apostle distract them from the message he carried. The theme running all the way through the book is that it is always the message--and never the man who delivers the message--that is the issue, that God has devised a way to use imperfect people as vehicles for a perfect message.

So important is this that Paul states it twice in verse seven with the phrase "to keep me from exalting myself." God knew that when He poured the power of His Word through Paul there would be a very great danger that Paul would be tempted to magnify his importance. After all, Paul had a tendency toward self-righteousness which he had exploited to the full as an unbelieving Pharisee.

So God allowed what was apparently a high-ranking demon to be assigned to the apostle to inflict bodily pain and damage on him. He calls it "a thorn in the flesh," but identifies it as an *aggelos*, a word usually translated "angel," of Satan. The Greek word translated "buffet" means "to beat to a pulp."

Under this intense pressure, Paul asked the Lord three times to take it away, and finally the Lord explained to Paul why He would not: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Grace is sufficient. Grace--not human ability, not human talents, not human intellect. God's grace plus our weakness equals power in ministry.

Paul's reaction to this news was to begin rejoicing because he had so many weaknesses. Once he oriented to the fact that grace works through weakness, he found that he always had something to celebrate. He wanted the Corinthians to understand that he agreed with their assessment that he was not perfect and that it was this very fact that made him eligible for grace and a fit carrier for God's message. o

Being able to celebrate our weaknesses is a key to contentment in the Christian life. Paul wrote in Philippians 4 that he had learned the secret of being content. How do we do that? We have to learn to accept ourselves as we are--weaknesses, cracks, flaws, and all. God does. God takes us as we are. When we learn to be thankful for our weaknesses and our adversities and for the things we are not strong enough to control, then we never run out of reasons to give thanks and to celebrate grace.

When Paul talks about the power of Christ dwelling in him, he uses a word that means "to tabernacle. In doing so, he conjures up images of the rough tent the children of Israel carted around in the wilderness in which dwelt the Shekinah Glory. Just as the tabernacle housed the Shekinah Glory then, we-frail and ragged tents that we are--house the power of the God today.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from our selves. (2 Cor. 4:7)

The treasure Paul is talking about here is "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). Jesus Christ is the reflection of divine glory. He, the only visibly revealed member of the Trinity, was the Shekinah Glory that illuminated the tabernacle; He was the glory of the presence of God in the midst of the nation of Israel.

Paul says that we carry this light in "earthen vessels, physical bodies as fragile as clay pots. And why does the glory of God rest in us? So that the source of the power in our lives will be evident to the world.

I am convinced that what Paul had in mind at this point was the story of Gideon from the book of Judges. Gideon Is a great illustration of grace made perfect through weakness. He was a coward living in a time of warfare. But God needed someone He could turn into a hero, and Gideon was His man.

The story of Gideon begins in Judges 6 with a description of how "Israel was brought very low" because of raiding bands of Midianites who would regularly sweep over the land like locusts, destroying Israel's crops and livestock and devastating the land.

In Judges 6:11 young Gideon, who is so terrified of the enemy that he is hiding in a pit stomping out wheaties for his breakfast, looks up and sees Jesus Christ in His preincarnate state. And the Lord does to Gideon what He does to each one of us--He looks at Gideon not as what he is at this moment, but as what He was going to make of him. Jesus Christ sees us from the standpoint of what we will become in His plan. o

And the Lord looks down on Gideon and says, "The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior," and Gideon Is at this point probably wondering, "Who in the world He is talking to? Can't be me. I'm scared to death." But Gideon is chosen anyway.

In Judges 7:2, after Gideon has gathered a force of 32,000 Israelites to attack a force of 135,000 Midianites, God says an amazing thing: "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, lest Israel become boastful saying, 'My own power has delivered me.'" The Lord is saying, "You are too strong, Gideon. My power only works in weakness.

Gideon is told to release any soldiers who are afraid and want to go home. Immediately he loses 22,000 men. Gideon was just as afraid as the 22,000 who left. The only difference between his fear and theirs is that their fear caused them to quit and his did not. That is the difference between heroes and cowards. They are all afraid, but heroes do not quit; they never give up.

But the Lord says the troops are still too many, so He has Gideon conduct a test of the men's alertness and eliminates all but 300. Now He has a team He can work with.

When Gideon's men heard their leader's battle plan, they must have wondered whether they shouldn't have turned back when the others did. With the Midianites and the Amalekites "lying in the valley as numerous as locusts ... their camels ... without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore," Gideon divides his men into three companies and gives each man a trumpet, an empty pitcher, and a torch. These are the weapons that the 300 will use against the 135,000.

Judges 7:21-22 tells us what happened when the three companies came to the outskirts of the enemy camp in the darkness and at Gideon's word blew the trumpets and smashed the

Pitchers that were in their hands: "Each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled. And when they blew 300 trumpets, the Lord set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army; and the army fled."

When the apostle Paul talks about treasure in earthen vessels, he is talking about torches and clay pots. We are the clay pots, the common, everyday vessels. The glory of Jesus Christ is the torch, the light of the world. We put the light inside the clay vessel and then blow the trumpet, which is the message of the gospel. And what happens? When the vessel is broken, the light shines through. And that is exactly what God is trying to do in our lives every day--break the vessel, so the light can shine out.

We are afflicted in every way. but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about: in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (2 Cor. 4:8-10)

Why do Christians have to suffer? It is the only way God's glory will be seen through us. If we are going to blow the trumpet, God is going to break the vessel. If we are not prepared to be broken, we had better just set our trumpets down and go home because we are not ready for the battle.

The battle that we face cannot be fought and won by our power or our strength. It has to be fought in weakness. That is how God displays His power--through the weakness of the missionaries, of the pastors, of the believers on the job every day who keep blowing the trumpet. Every time we blow the trumpet, the vessel is broken, and God routs the enemy.

