



**Cherreguine Bible Doctrine Ministries**  
dikaosune.com

## The Race God Set Before Us

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 as 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 aphaoro. 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 *apallotriomai* 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 anash, "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 minis tries 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 o~ 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 o~ the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). Nothing that we do in the power o~ the flesh is acceptable to God (Isa. 64:6). Only what is produced by the Spirit o~ 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. Pine, "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.