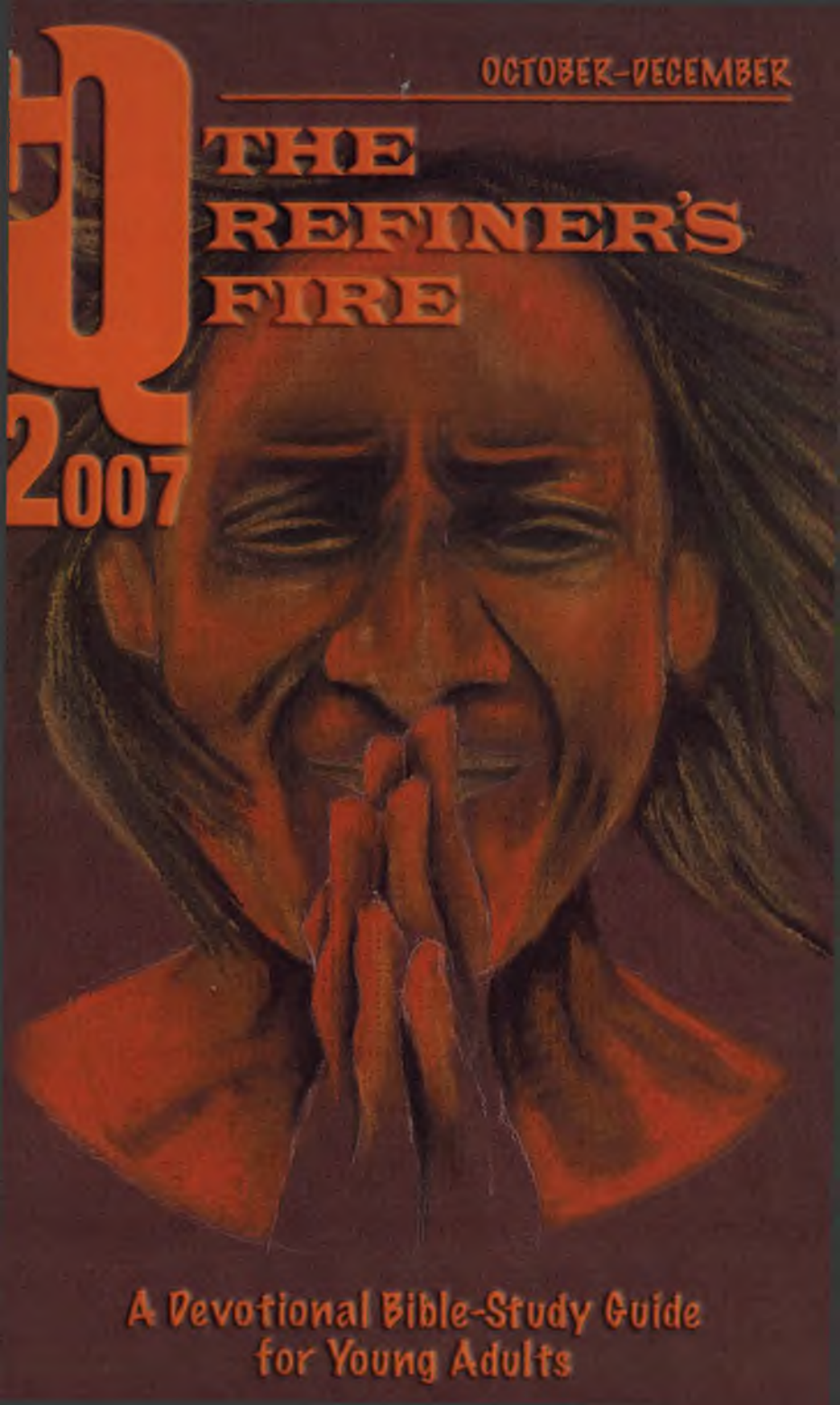


OCTOBER-DECEMBER

THE REFINER'S FIRE

Q
2007



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide
for Young Adults



<http://cq.adventist.org>

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This Quarter's Illustrator



Veronica Williams was born in 1985 and lives in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. She is just completing her Bachelor of Arts degree in architecture with a minor in art (spring 2007) from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Besides creating artwork, she also enjoys playing the piano, which she has done since the age of nine, and cooking vegetarian food. She has been an Adventist all her life and has an older brother and younger sister.

Getting the most Out of CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. CQ's purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the *Adult Bible Study Guide* find that because CQ deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

About 400 Adventist young adults contribute to CQ each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of CQ is about 70,000.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:
 - "Introduction" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
 - "Logos" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.
 - "Testimony" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
 - "Evidence" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
 - "How-To" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
 - "Opinion" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.
 - "Exploration" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference-approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.

Lesson 1
September 29–October 6

The Shepherd's Crucible



"He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Ps. 23:3, NKJV).

More Than a Feeling

INTRODUCTION

Rev. 21:4

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:4, NIV).

It's a feeling we've all known. All of us, the whole world. We haven't all felt love or warmth, connection or belonging. But we've all felt pain. It's the reason we're moved to tears when someone else is crying. It's the reason mothers want to shelter their babies from everything and sometimes wish they would never grow up. It's why all the scams using the faces of hungry children work. It connects us to each other. We can't love everybody, but we can understand pain. And pain brings suffering.

Why is Jesus depicted as the "Man of Sorrows" and not the "Man of Laughter"? It would seem that in our consumer-friendly society, a smiling God, one full of laughter, would have a wider appeal. I think it's because He wants to relate to all of us. There are some whose lives have never known joy, have never seen a smile, have never heard laughter or laughed themselves, but they know pain. And they suffer.

But why suffer? Wouldn't it be nice if our walk with Christ guaranteed no more pain, no more sorrow? Sounds like a plan to me. But I've found that I go to God faster when I'm in pain. I say "Lord, please help me" a lot faster than "Lord, this is great!" And the more I need Him and talk to Him, the closer I feel to Him and the more I grow.

You know the saying "Love is more than a feeling: It's a principle"? Well, pain is more than a feeling too. It's a road. It leads us to the One who promises that one day He'll take us to a place where "[He] shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain" (Rev. 21:4). And wanting to be there, that's more than a feeling too—it's a yearning, a burning desire, a need. Do you feel it too?

**Why is Jesus depicted as
the "Man of Sorrows" and
not the "Man of Laughter"?**

"I Shall Not Want . . ." Really?

LOGOS

Psalm 23; Rom. 12:18–21

We rarely stop to think about the things we really need as long as things are going well. But as soon as trials and problems come into our lives, the classic questions come to mind: Why me? Why now? What did I do to deserve this? How could he/she/it do this to me? Lord, why? And as often as we want to learn the reasons for our current situation, the questions go unanswered.

Suffering's Origin (Gen. 3:16–19; Isa. 14:12–15)

We can deduct that suffering began at the same instant that the mystery of evil surfaced—Lucifer's fall in heaven. It was there, in a perfect environment, that God suffered the rebellion of one of His children. Pain and adversity were introduced to our world with Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. But it was right there that God proclaimed that suffering wouldn't have the last word, and He painted the beautiful hope of a Savior, the picture of "'God with us'" (Matt. 1:23, NIV).

What did I do to deserve this?

Ever since sin entered our world (Gen. 3:16–19), humanity has been suffering more from the aftermath of

degeneration, and the human is left with the same questions: Why is there so much suffering and misery? Where is God when all these injustices are being committed? Habakkuk the prophet brought up these charges against God (Hab. 1:12–17), and God, after telling the prophet some of the things He'll do, concludes by saying, "'But the just shall live by his faith'" (Hab. 2:4, NKJV).

In order for us to face this life and its struggles, a lot of faith is needed. Faith to believe and accept God's written promises, faith to follow God's directions even when they seem illogical or senseless.

Inspired by this kind of faith, David the psalmist gives us through Psalm 23 an oasis of huge comfort and strength, so when we face adversity and read this psalm we can find peace, security, strength, and courage to keep on going.

Who better than King David to illustrate through the shepherd's figure this beautiful declaration of faith? Before he became Israel's king, he was a shepherd, so he understood and comprehended the kindness of a good shepherd. He fought wild beasts and even nature to protect and feed the sheep that were under his responsibility and care (1 Sam. 17:34, 35).

Maybe it's difficult for some of us to relate with the image of a shepherd, but in

the book of Ezekiel, God presents a beautiful description of Himself as the Good Shepherd and what He'll do for every single one of His sheep (John 10:14, 15, NIV).

Keeping It Real (John 10:14; 15:5; 16:33)

However, how can we make these words ours when we're facing difficult situations, when our reputation is at stake, when resources are lacking, when we feel betrayed, when sickness strikes us and death stalks us? It is through their constant relationship with the shepherd that sheep come to know and trust him or her. They wouldn't follow otherwise. The same thing happens with us—"I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine" (John 10:14). "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5, NKJV). The closer our relationship to the Good Shepherd, the better our way of facing trials will be. This does not mean that we will become immune to pain and suffering, or that we won't have any more trials, because this is not what Jesus promised. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, NKJV).

Overcomers (Hebrews 11)

Will we be able to overcome life's trials just like the heroes of faith that are listed in Hebrews 11:4–39, with our sight set on our objective, so we might be found faithful (Matt. 25:21)?

The adversities are faced in a better way when we have a well-defined goal to reach. It's motivating, and it gives us excitement. And it works the same for the Christian life. "By faith Abraham . . . went out, not knowing where he was going. . . . For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:8–10, NKJV). By faith Moses chose "to suffer affliction with the people of God . . . ; for he looked to the reward" (Heb. 11:25, 26, NKJV). "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:3–5, NKJV). "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2, NKJV).

REACT

1. How could you explain suffering to a grieving friend? Study three different scenarios: non-Christian friend, Christian friend, disenchanted Seventh-day Adventist friend (grew up in the church but left).

2. How do you cope with pain and suffering? Be prepared to share your experiences with the Sabbath School class.

In the Heat of the Furnace

TESTIMONY

Jer. 29:11

"He who reads the hearts of men knows their weaknesses better than they themselves can know them. He sees that some have qualifications which, if rightly directed, could be used in the advancement of His work. In His providence He brings these souls into different positions and varied circumstances, that they may discover the defects that are concealed from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to overcome these defects and to fit themselves for service. Often He permits the fires of affliction to burn, that they may be purified.

"God's care for His heritage is unceasing. He suffers no affliction to come upon His children but such as is essential for their present and eternal good. He will purify His church, even as Christ purified the temple during His ministry on earth. All that He brings upon His people in test and trial comes that they may gain deeper piety and greater strength to carry forward the triumphs of the cross."

**"It is by close, testing trials
that God disciplines His
servants."**

"God permits trials to assail His people, that by their constancy and obedience they themselves may be spiritually enriched, and that their example may be a source of strength to others. 'I know the thoughts that I think toward you,

saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil.' Jeremiah 29:11. The very trials that task our faith most severely and make it seem that God has forsaken us, are to lead us closer to Christ, that we may lay all our burdens at His feet and experience the peace which He will give us in exchange.

"It is by close, testing trials that God disciplines His servants. He sees that some have powers which may be used in the advancement of His work, and He puts these persons upon trial; in His providence He brings them into positions that test their character and reveal defects and weaknesses that have been hidden from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects and to fit themselves for His service. He shows them their own weakness, and teaches them to lean upon Him; for He is their only help and safeguard. Thus His object is attained. They are educated, trained, and disciplined, prepared to fulfill the grand purpose for which their powers were given them."²

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 524, 525.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 129, 130.

The Silversmith's Image

EVIDENCE

Prov. 25:4

A group of women were studying Malachi. They came across a verse that says, "And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver" (Mal. 3:3). This verse puzzled the women, and they wondered what this statement meant about the character and nature of God. One of the women offered to find out the process of refining silver and get back to the group at their next Bible study. That week this woman called up a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him at work.

She didn't mention anything about the reason for her interest beyond her curiosity about the process of refining silver. As she watched the silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire, where the flames were hottest, so as to burn away all the impurities.

The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot; then she thought again about the verse that says He sits as a "refiner and purifier of silver." She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined. The man answered that yes, he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed.

Suffering without a final objective destroys our soul.

The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silversmith, "How do you know when the silver is fully refined?" He smiled at her and answered, "Oh, that's easy—when I see my image in it."*

The first time I read this meditation a few observations came to mind. First of all, the silversmith has to sit pretty close to the fire to be able to see his own image in the silver. Too much distance and he'll lose his silver, so he has to be as close as possible to the fire. Second of all, because he is sitting so close, that must not be an easy position. The heat must be (almost) unbearable for the silversmith to work in those conditions. Finally, there must be a goal, a final checkpoint or objective to evaluate when the silver has been in the fire for enough time. Suffering without a final objective destroys and rots our soul. God knows this, and as we're put in the fire, He has a final objective all along for us in mind: His own image.

*Author unknown.

Shifting Perspectives

HOW-TO

Ezek. 11:19, 20

I want you to try something . . . no, seriously, you really have to try this. Close your eyes and put your hand right in front of your face; now open your eyes. Bet you didn't know that your hand was that big, huh? OK, now close your eyes again and stretch your arm as far in front of you as possible. Open your eyes. Call 911. Your hand shrank! Now, you and I both know that your hand didn't change size. So what happened? Your viewpoint changed.

A lot of times we get lost in the tunnel of our own problems and lose sight of the light at the end. Even though we know that God is with us (in theory, anyway), we don't always feel as though it is an everyday fact. Our troubles seem just *too* big for God to *really* be able to deal with. Well, here are three steps that I have used to help change my viewpoint when I am in a sticky situation:

1. When you think things are really bad, think about one way that they could be worse. A good old-fashioned reality check might help to keep you looking at the brighter side of situations.

A lot of times we get lost in the tunnel. . . .

2. Try to think of one good thing that could come out of the situation, no matter how abstract it is. When you focus on positive things you forget (eventually) the negative ones.

3. Find someone whose problems are bigger than yours, and help them out. Seeing how others struggle gives you a clearer picture of your own problems.

At this point you might be wondering, *Whatever happened to praying and reading my Bible? Why didn't he mention those?* To be honest, by the time you're feeling down in the pits, the last thing you want to do is pray or read your Bible. And that's exactly the reason you should read your Bible and get on your knees. God is the only One with the power not only to change your viewpoint but to pull you out of any kind of gutter.

Read Ezekiel 11:19, 20. This verse is talking about the *ultimate* viewpoint change. Can you think of any verses that explain how to get this gift? Here is a hint. Try the book that James wrote. Read chapter 1, verses 1–10, and halfway through you'll find it.

Roller-Coaster Life

OPINION

Ps. 91:4

Even at my short age, through my life experience I can say that life is like a roller coaster. Sometimes we feel good and we're happy; we live in a positive way. However, this lasts only as long as we're not facing any problems. At other times, because sin has covered the earth for such a long time, we have to suffer. We can't avoid death, illness, depression, broken families, economic problems, etc.

All those problems are also known as trials and are the enemy's tool. He's always trying to discourage us; and if we don't have a good relationship with God, we are more likely to fall into traps. And the worst thing is that the consequences can be suffered by our closer social relationships as well.

Personally I think that this is the main reason a person suffers. I admire Jesus, and I'm thankful because I cannot imagine the pain and suffering He felt on the cross—He suffered in solace more than I or anyone can suffer today. Nowadays we have a Shelter, Jesus. That's why He can understand every tear crossing our faces, every night without sleeping, and every time our chest hurts. But the most beautiful and comforting thing is that Jesus offers promises to anyone who puts their faith in Him, in those moments when the human starts to feel defeated and without a door showing the exit.

**Knowing Jesus' love is an
advantage. . . .**

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Cor. 10:13, NIV). We are not alone; if we put our trust in Jesus, He will understand us. God will do justice to suffering, and by the end of time, we'll hold that missed or hidden smile.

Knowing Jesus' love is an advantage that can be shared with people who are hurting or in pain and don't know anything about Jesus. Suffering could be a way we as Christians testify. Meanwhile, let's remember: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.' Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence" (Ps. 91:1–3, NIV).

Life Is Difficult

EXPLORATION

Rom. 8:28; James 1:12

CONCLUDE

Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck began his book *The Road Less Traveled* with these words: "Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths."

Life was never meant to be this way. But when sin entered the world, it brought pain and suffering. The good news is that as Christians we can face difficult times with courage and hope, knowing that any trial we experience is not an end in itself, but rather a channel through which God can work to draw us closer to Him.

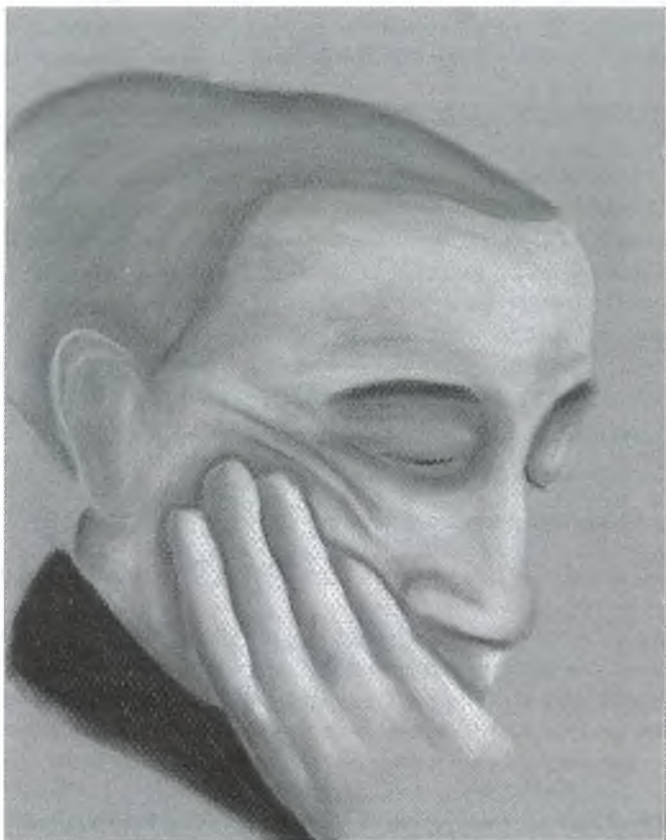
CONSIDER

- Going through newspapers and/or news magazines and cutting out articles and pictures that illustrate different trials people are experiencing. Make a collage from your findings. Then copy Romans 8:38, 39 and place the words in the middle of the collage.
- Listing five to ten trials you've gone through. Rank them in order of least difficult to most difficult. Then analyze what made certain ones more difficult than others.
- Responding to this statement: If God were a loving God, He wouldn't let His followers suffer and go through trials.
- Creating a new melody for the song "I Will Follow Thee" (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, number 623). Sing the words as a prayer of commitment.
- Thinking of someone you know who is going through a personal trial at this time. Write down a number of ways you could reach out to him or her. Choose one idea and carry it to completion during the next week.
- Taking a walk through nature looking for evidence that birds, animals, and plants also suffer because sin is so prevalent in our world.

CONNECT

Peter Kreeft, *Making Sense Out of Suffering*; Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith*, "Since Evil and Suffering Exist, a Loving God Cannot," pp. 33–76; Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?*

The Crucibles That Come



“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1 Pet. 4:12, 13, NIV).

Holes in a Bucket! Play Safe!

INTRODUCTION

1 Pet. 4:12–19

A bucket with a hole in it is useless. Five years ago I bought a new bucket with a faucet near the bottom. I filled it with drinking water, and then covered it tightly. When I returned home from work that evening, the bucket was empty, and water covered the floor. Upon inspecting the bucket, I discovered a leak around the faucet.

The Christian life is similar to a bucket. Satan is like a “roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8, NKJV). He is eager to destroy the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual attributes of human beings. As soon as he discovers your weak points, he’ll strike, so watch and pray! Never be off guard. He is eager to fill us full of holes, so that we will be useless like my leaky bucket. As long as the great controversy between Christ and Satan rages over the souls of women and men, Christians must expect a variety of problems designed by Satan to destroy their faith. But when we resist the devil, he will flee from us. And when we draw close to God, He will draw close to us (James 4:7, 8).

**The Christian life is similar
to a bucket.**

Many professed Christians are found wanting and doing nothing to advance God’s kingdom. Satan makes them feel they are weak and worthless. Such souls are shunning the truth of God’s great love and wonderful provision of victory against the adversary.

But Christ’s love is deep and earnest, flowing like an irrepressible stream to all who will accept it. When self is submerged in Christ, Christians can rejoice in the midst of great problems. Then the pervading presence of the power of God will enable them to face every problem. In persecution and suffering, Christians have the assurance that God will be with them to comfort, to encourage, to guide, and to bless.

Jesus holds our lives in His hands. He has a purpose for each trial that comes our way. He allows us to undergo the painful blows that put holes in our life’s bucket so that our characters will be refined and purified. We must do our best to stay safe within God’s grace in every circumstance that arises. Leave all to Jesus. He can fix your leaky bucket so that the Holy Spirit can dwell within you until the Second Coming.

The Hope Behind Christian Suffering

EVIDENCE

1 Pet. 1:1, 2; 4:12–19

The precise date for the writing of 1 Peter cannot be determined. However, the letter was written near the end of the apostle's life. The absence of any reference to Peter's presence in Rome in Paul's letters from that city suggest that Peter did not arrive there until "about the time of Paul's final arrest"—A.D. 66.¹ Although nothing definite can be said regarding the date of 1 Peter, the epistle reflects the existence of an unfriendly attitude toward Christians (1 Pet. 2:12; 4:12–16). This may suggest the time of Nero's persecution, which began in A.D. 64.

We simply see here that Peter wrote this epistle during his final days on earth. "In the providence of God, Peter was permitted to close his ministry in Rome, where his imprisonment was ordered by the emperor Nero."² He was facing death, but he never felt any regrets, nor did he murmur. Instead, he wrote an encouraging letter to God's people. How was he able to encourage others while at the moment he too was experiencing difficult times? Probably because he understood what was happening. Ellen G. White wrote, "This is the process, the refining, purifying process, which is to be carried on by the Lord of hosts. The work is most trying to the soul, but it is only through this process that the rubbish and defiling impurities can be removed. Our trials are necessary to bring us closer to our heavenly Father, in obedience to His will, that we may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness."³

**He was facing death, but he
never felt any regrets.**

To modern Christians, 1 Peter helps us to remember how Peter struggled to overcome his trials, how he learned bitter lessons from every mistake. Because he endured all of it through the help of Christ, he became firm as a rock. Surely he must have felt as Paul did when Paul wrote these words: "We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Rom. 5:3, 4, NKJV).

This same hope can be ours also—the hope that someday soon we will be with our Creator in heaven.

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 537.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 541.

Human Suffering on Earth

LOGOS

Jer. 9:7–16; Rom. 1:21–32; 2 Cor. 12:7–12; 1 Pet. 4:12–19; 5:8–11.

Sin has prevailed in this world since the Fall (Rom. 5:12). Prior to this condition, perfection characterized the whole of creation (Gen. 1:31). The general cause-and-effect principle portrayed in Genesis 3:5 is basic to understanding that hardships exist as consequences of sin. Sin alienates us from God and subjects us to physical, moral, mental, and spiritual deficiencies (Isa. 59:1, 2).

Sin affects the physical world as seen in the vast changes that occurred soon after the Fall (Gen. 3:17, 18; 7:12). Furthermore, sin works against the natural law of order to bring about humanity's rebellion against God.

Suffering and God's Backsliding People (Jer. 9:7–16)

Sin also brought consequences to God. His relationship with humanity, which was once free, was disrupted by sin (Gen. 38:10; Isa. 51:12). But God continues to open channels of communication with His erring creatures. He is not willing that

"any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). So God allows them to pass through sufferings that follow the course of their own actions. "For the Lord disciplines those whom he

loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts'" (Heb. 12:6, NRSV). God hates sin. But He loves sinners. So sinners must come to God and turn away from their sins.

Suffering and Godless People (Rom. 1:21–32)

In Romans 1:21–32 we read how evil people are handed over to their own shameful acts because they refuse to submit to the wisdom and the power of the living God. The power of sin grasps them and ultimately leads them to eternal death (Rom. 6:23). This is God's judgment because they identified themselves with godlessness. Indeed, they are permeated by it, and when that is gone—for sin must be destroyed—it takes them with it.

Is God unjust? No. Since Creation His works have testified of Him. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through

**Lucifer started it. Adam and
Eve fell for it.**

him" (John 3:16, 17, NRSV). "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life" (1 Tim. 1:15, 16, NKJV).

Such love drove Jesus to the cross, and it is this love that manifests itself against sin. In *The Desire of Ages*, page 753, Mrs. White wrote that the "wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation." How is it that some people do not comprehend this? "Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles" (Rom. 1:22, 23, NRSV).

Suffering and Godly People (2 Cor. 12:7–12)

The present and painful consequences of sin come to us in different forms. And when they come, we often question God. Where is He? We wonder about His integrity. Lucifer started it (Gen. 3:1–3). Adam and Eve fell for it (Gen. 3:11, 13). And it was reflected in their inability to confess their part in the Fall. Instead, they blamed each other and the serpent. But no matter how bad the condition we may find ourselves in, we can be confident that God longs to save us.

Through suffering, the apostle Paul found the Lord. Through suffering, he kept seeking God and moving closer to Him. God is always ready to bestow His grace on those who recognize their weaknesses. He will never allow us to suffer temptations above that which we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13). The more sufferings we overcome through the grace of God, the more refined our characters will become and the more prepared we will be to pass through the consequences of sin. In 1 Peter 2:21, we read that Jesus "also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (RSV). So rather than condemn Adam for the curse he brought upon humanity, let us meditate upon the lives of Paul, Job, and Jesus—lives that show us how we can be victorious over sin and suffering.

REACT

1. How do you view your personal hardships in the context of sin's consequences and faith-refining judgment?
2. What can you learn from the lives of Paul, Job, and Jesus that can help you with a trial you are currently facing?
3. How can these insights help someone you know who is dealing with a difficult situation?

The Heir of Faith

TESTIMONY

1 Pet. 4:12, 13

Florence had eight children. They lived in a place called Sugarlandia, where for 15 years he and his family were the only Seventh-day Adventists. His religious life and generosity marked the difference between his faith and other religions in the area.

Florence owned a piece of land upon which his family depended for food, shelter, and educational expenses. Two months before one harvest season, a rich widow came to Florence, wanting to buy his hectares of sugarcane. She wanted to turn her 97 hectares into 100. Florence refused the widow's offer and explained his reasons for doing so.

But the widow insisted, and said that if he did not sell his land to her, something bad would happen to his family. The next day a hired killer appeared on his doorstep. Florence, however, did not give up his land. When his life continued to be threatened, he turned to God.

The next day a hired killer appeared on his doorstep.

One night Florence received this assurance from his Savior: "I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust" (Ps. 91:2).

Then Florence truly understood that if he did not sell his land, he would be killed. God's promises had given him the strength not to compromise his children and their future. And resting in God's grace, he slept in peace and awoke refreshed. Later he signed the contract, but received only 500 pesos—the price of just three hectares. However, his decision to rely on God's promises during hardship gave his children and grandchildren a strong foundation of faith.

Florence was my grandpa!

"For every trial, God has provided help. . . . In every trial, if we seek Him, Christ will give us help. Our eyes will be opened to discern the healing promises recorded in His word. The Holy Spirit will teach us how to appropriate every blessing that will be an antidote to grief. For every bitter draft that is placed to our lips, we shall find a branch of healing.

" . . . Whatever our situation, if we are doers of His word, we have a Guide to direct our way; whatever our perplexity, we have a sure Counselor; whatever our sorrow, bereavement, or loneliness, we have a sympathizing Friend."^{*}

^{*}The Ministry of Healing, pp. 248, 249.

The Race of Life

HOW-TO

1 Pet. 5:8–11

Excitement grows at the sound of the starter pistol and as the runners sprint forward. With one goal in mind, they press onward. And in a matter of seconds, cheers erupt from the stands as the winner achieves victory.

Not all of us are capable of running professionally, but each of us is running the Christian race. Paul had this to say about it: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death. . . . Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:10–14, NRSV).

Now here are some tips on how to run the race successfully.

Forget what is behind you.

Imagine what would happen if a runner were to look back to see how far behind his companions were. That split second might cost him the prize he longs to achieve.

We are to forget our past deeds that

have prevented us from getting close to God. We will never reach our goal if we continue to dwell on them.

Lay aside excess baggage. Runners' clothing must be light so they will have a greater chance of winning. Once we have accepted Christ's robe of righteousness, we must cast aside our sins. Carrying them around after Christ has forgiven them is a burden that will prevent us from winning the Christian race.

Run with endurance. Runners train hard, because racing without training ensures injuries. Each trial we endure trains and strengthens us for the next step. Training also includes Bible study, prayer, meditating on God's Word, etc. Hebrews 12:3 reminds us to never give up.

Look unto Jesus. Runners have one goal in mind, and they set their eyes on that goal—the finish line. This is the only way they can reach it. Hebrews 12:2 tells us to keep our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from the beginning to the end. To reach Jesus and His gift of eternal life is our ultimate goal. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Him, and never allow anything to distract us from victory.

That split second might cost him the prize he longs to achieve.

OPINION

1 Pet. 4:12-19

*"Of the bitterness that falls to the lot of humanity, there was no part that Christ did not taste."*¹

During His childhood years Jesus began to experience rebuke and censure. Though He acted with gentleness, He was threatened and despised. The rabbis were often insulted when Jesus disapproved of their teachings with regard to the Scriptures. And when His brothers spoke harshly to the poor, He defended the less fortunate. All this displeased His brothers, the rabbis, and the Pharisees. Often they mocked Him and tried to intimidate Him. He was denied, rebuked, and harshly ordered to discontinue His goodness. Often He was accused of cowardice or marked as a dull, tiresome, annoying lad.

He could have thrown tricky questions to the rabbis or picked at their faults in order to humiliate them in front of the crowd. He also could have been disrespectful to His brothers. But He learned the hard lessons of silence and patient endurance. He devoted His life to the will of God. As a child of wisdom, He grew in sound judgment to become a young man with a tough yet sensible heart, worthy enough to be our perfect Example and fit to fulfill the plan of salvation.

**The path that leads to
victory is not the easiest
to travel.**

"The Lord frequently places us in difficult positions to stimulate us to greater exertion. In His providence special annoyances sometimes occur to test our patience and faith."² Our God does not say, "Do not fear; there are no trials and dangers in your way." Rather, He speaks to us plainly. He knows there will be temptations and trials in our lives, but He permits these things to come. God wants His people to be strong and faithful enough to trust Him. The path that leads to victory is not the easiest to travel. But we have the assurance that God's everlasting arms encircle us, to protect us from evil. He wants us to exercise earnest faith in Him, and to learn to trust Him in the shadows as well as in the sunshine. "But rejoice," Peter said, "inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4:13).

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 88.

2. *Mind, Character, and Personality*, p. 476.

God's personal development plan

EXPLORATION

Ps. 91:2

CONCLUDE

Satan is always on the lookout for our weak points—trying to see where he can attack us. Peter knew what it was like to fail spectacularly, but at the end of his life when he was facing enormous difficulties he encouraged others. He had learned the lesson that trials are God's tools for refining us and a means of bringing us closer to Him. God hates sin but loves the sinner; that was why He was willing to pay the ultimate price by sending His Son to die for us.

CONSIDER

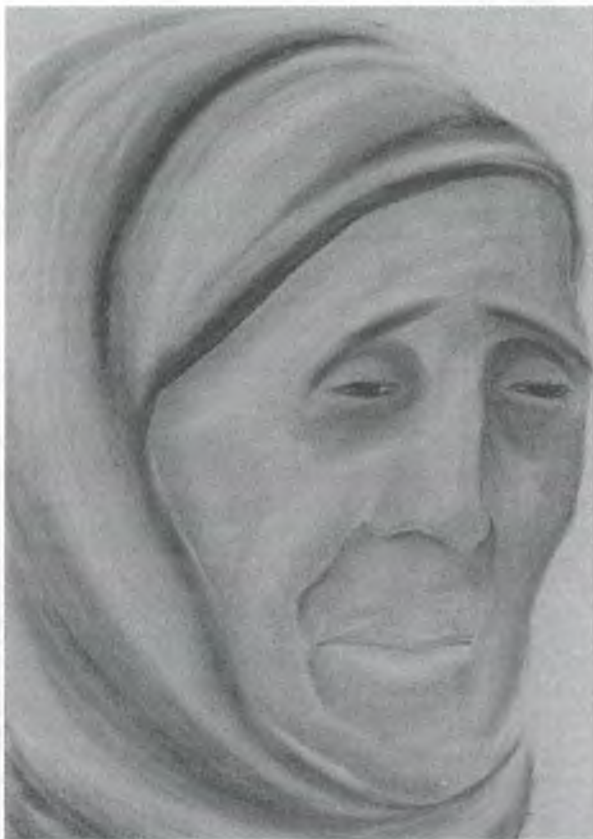
- Watching a sporting event. What do all the athletes have in common? How focused are they before the event? What parallels are there with the Christian life?
- Trying to run for ten minutes carrying two-kilogram/four-pound bags of flour or sugar. How did you feel at the beginning? How did you feel when you put the bags down? List the burdens in your life that are weighing you down. Place each burden before Jesus, asking Him to carry it.
- Sitting in a dark room for five minutes and thinking of the things that are casting shadows in your life. Light a candle. As you concentrate on the flame, think of the difference looking to Jesus can make in dark situations.
- Taking a paper cup and punching some holes in the bottom. Fill the cup with water. Put the cup with holes inside another paper cup and fill it with water. How can the Holy Spirit "plug" the holes in your life?
- Writing on small cards five promises that will encourage you when difficult times come. Ask God to give you an opportunity to share a promise with someone today.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, pp. 93–113; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 662–680.

David Marshall, *God's Little Book of Encouragement*; Randy Maxwell, *5 Steps to Christlike Living*.

The Birdcage



“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials” (1 Pet. 1:6, NKJV).

Burden or Blessing?

INTRODUCTION

1 Pet. 1:6–9

Bob was involved in a motorbike accident that left him with severe spinal injuries. It also left him without a full-time job. With three small children to raise, he and his wife felt lost as they struggled to put food on the table and to stay positive in the face of this hardship.

Several years later Bob was able to view this tough time in a new light. Although he did have a permanent injury, he realized there were blessings he hadn't noticed before. Being unable to work full time meant he had been able to spend more time with his wife and children. While most fathers were working, Bob was able to spend time with his kids.

Just like Bob, each of us goes through situations in life during which we think God has abandoned us or is looking the other way. Even those being led by God in the Bible had these types of doubts, including the Israelites before they crossed the Red Sea. Pharaoh and his army were coming after them, and all they could think of doing was laying blame for the situation: "They said to Moses, 'Weren't there enough grave sites available in Egypt that you had to bring us . . . out of Egypt and then [lead] us up here to the edge of the Red Sea! Didn't we tell you before we left Egypt that the king would come after us? It would have been much better to stay in Egypt as slaves and be alive than to be slaughtered out here in the wilderness!' " (Exod. 14:11, 12, *The Clear Word Bible*, an expanded paraphrase). God had just rescued them from Egypt and the slave drivers. He was promising to take them to the land of milk and honey, but as soon as things got a little tough they lost their faith that God would look after them.

**All they could think of
doing was laying blame for
the situation.**

What we as Christians need to remember is that even though we go through rough patches in our daily lives, there are always blessings to be had. Often, going through a difficult time helps us grow as a person and as a Christian.

Like Bob, we can think there is no hope. But we should take a step back to look at the situation from a new angle. Peter writes in our key text for today, "These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Pet. 1:7, NIV).

Suffering: An Act of God?

LOGOS

Exodus 14; 15:22–27; 17:1–7; Proverbs 3; Luke 4:1–13; 1 Pet. 1:6–9

Who's to Blame? (Exodus 14; Luke 4:1–13)

Of all the aspects of suffering, one of the most painful processes is trying to figure out who or what caused it. Random suffering seems so hard to deal with, and the pain seems easier to handle once you understand why it occurred. The explanation may not be easy to take: The crash occurred because the driver was drinking; you need to inject yourself daily with insulin because your family has a genetic disposition toward diabetes. But at least you know why.

However, the difficulty in finding an explanation is that sometimes the detective trail doesn't end there. It's possible to keep on asking why until ultimately your trail of explanations leads back to God Himself. "God allowed it to happen" is the cliché answer.

But imagine the pain when it seems God actually did cause your suffering. This happened during the Exodus when the Israelites were rushing toward the Red

**God provides for us as a
father in the midst of the
suffering.**

Sea. The Bible says God hardened Pharaoh's heart to the point that he led the entire Egyptian army in pursuit of the Israelites. As you would expect, the Hebrew slaves were terrified as they realized they were trapped with no way of escape

(Exod. 14:4–12). Is God just playing a game of cosmic chess with us, using us as His pawns?

It is not only Egyptian rulers and scared slaves that God moves at will. We find in the New Testament that "Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness" (Luke 4:1, NKJV). Mark puts it much more forcefully: "And immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness" (Mark 1:12, NKJV). The Greek text here has the connotation of the Holy Spirit throwing Jesus into the desert. Jesus—God's only begotten Son—being thrown out to suffer? Does God really know what He's doing?

The Active Agent (Rom. 8:28–39)

The answer lies in our picture of God. Many people—both secular and Christian—picture God as passive. For secular people He is a distant higher power who has wound up the universal spring and then left the universe to run by itself.

Similarly, some Christians view God as having His hands firmly tied behind His back because of our freedom of choice. However, this is definitely not the biblical view.

Within the Hebrew worldview, God was the cause behind everything that happened in life. For a Hebrew reading about the Exodus, it made sense that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exod. 14:4). When Job was suffering, he believed he was suffering at God's hand, and God never clarified who really caused Job's suffering when He responded to him (Job 38–41).

There is value and truth in realizing that in every situation and throughout history God always has been the most active Agent in human affairs. God is dynamically at work in all of life's circumstances, and one of the greatest keys to spiritual success is to be able to discern *how* He is working (Rom. 8:28). Grumbling against Him may be our knee-jerk reaction because of our spiritual shortsightedness, but the reality is this—it is God who is working the hardest in your life (Exod. 17:6). Coming face-to-face with Him in our suffering may be the most transforming part of suffering.

The Wisdom of Our Father (Prov. 3:5, 6, 11–20)

When we see the face of the Person who has led us into suffering, and when we understand His heart, we begin to realize why this could be happening to us. Our heavenly Father has a perspective beyond the limits of our own finite experience. He can discern our potential and see the future pitfalls. He actively leads us into suffering because He is motivated by love and the desire to help us grow.

An amazing realization is that God provides for us as a father in the midst of the suffering (Ps. 23:4, 5). Time and again as the Israelites grumbled their way through the desert, God provided for them in ways that specifically met their needs. For example, when they arrived at Marah after having wandered for three days without finding water, God already had prepared a log that would cure the bitter waters (Exod. 15:25).

Similarly, we can discern the same divine provision when Jesus was being tempted in the desert. The devil attacked Him with three rapid-fire temptations that touched His sore points. Jesus responded with three quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures. The point to note is that all His quotations come from Deuteronomy 6:13–8:3. The implication is that, as Jesus was fasting in the desert, He had been studying this portion of the Bible. Jesus' heavenly Father had intentionally led Him to this passage so that He could fill His mind with texts that would specifically help Him during His time of suffering and temptation.

God is as active in assisting us to grow beyond suffering as He is in leading us into suffering. His intention is that we will come through suffering with greater trust in His wisdom and more reasons to rejoice in His loving care.

The Bitter Cup Turns Sweet

TESTIMONY

1 Pet. 1:6–9

"Trials and obstacles are the Lord's chosen methods of discipline and His appointed conditions of success. He who reads the hearts of men knows their characters better than they themselves know them. He sees that some have powers and susceptibilities which, rightly directed, might be used in the advancement of His work. In His providence He brings these persons into different positions and varied circumstances that they may discover in their character the defects which have been concealed from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects and to fit themselves for His service. Often He permits the fires of affliction to assail them that they may be purified.

"The fact that we are called upon to endure trial shows that the Lord Jesus sees in us something precious which He desires to develop."¹

"Trials are essential in order that we may be brought close to our heavenly Father, in submission to His will. . . . The Lord brings His children over the same ground again and again, increasing the pressure until perfect humility fills the mind, and the character is transformed; then they are victorious over self, and in harmony with Christ and the Spirit of heaven. The purification of God's people cannot be

"The Lord Jesus sees in us something precious which He desires to develop."

accomplished without suffering."²

"God has shown me that He gave His people a bitter cup to drink, to purify and cleanse them. It is a bitter draught, and they can make it still more bitter by murmuring, complaining, and repining. But those who receive it thus must have another draught, for the first does not have its designed effect upon the heart. And if the second does not effect the work, then they must have another, and another, until it does have its designed effect, or they will be left filthy, impure in heart. I saw that this bitter cup can be sweetened by patience, endurance, and prayer, and that it will have its designed effect upon the hearts of those who thus receive it, and God will be honored and glorified. . . .

"We must be partakers of Christ's sufferings here if we would share in His glory hereafter."³

1. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 471.

2. *My Life Today*, p. 92.

3. *Early Writings*, p. 47.

The Side Effects of Sin

EVIDENCE

Isaiah 53

He sits beside me, his breath coming in short little gasps. He's eaten something that's not good—poison, actually. Now his life is ebbing away. I watch him as he struggles, trying to hold on to life. I've never been in his place. There's nothing I can do but watch.

When Jesus looks at us and sees us dying from the painful side effects of sin, He has a different perspective. Unlike me and my little mouse friend, He knows exactly what it's like to be in our place. Read Isaiah 53:4.

He also knows the cure. We all eventually have to face physical death, but Jesus has supplied a solution for the next life, which is even more important than this one. So we can say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55).

Consider Jesus hanging on a cross, pain coursing through His body from nails driven deep. The only crown He wears has thorns, which pierce His face. But deeper than the physical pain is His wounded heart as He bears the agony and weight of all human sin. In this moment, are we expecting Him to speak some words that will summarize why there's murder, rape, disease, car crashes, neglect, abuse, hopelessness, depression, despair, war, etc.? So many times in our pain, we stand at our Savior's feet—at the foot of the cross—and shout, "It's not fair! Why Jesus? Why?"

The answer is not something we can hear.

But our words become echoes. He doesn't answer. He simply hangs there, His arms outstretched. And before taking one last, shuddering breath, He cries, "It is finished" (John 19:30)! There it is—our answer. Did you hear Him say it? No? Good.

The answer is not something we can hear. How can mere words sum up the pain we experience in life? No. Our answer is not a word. Rather, it is *the Word*—the flesh-and-bone-and-heart answer God sent from His very Family. Jesus doesn't explain our hurt away with clichés. He is the expression of God's answer to our pain. And in knowing Him, we have Someone who can understand every hurt we feel.

Beyond the Cage

HOW-TO

1 Pet. 1:7–9

The story is told of a master bird trainer who must keep his bird in a covered cage so it will learn a specific song. In the darkness, with nothing else to focus on, the bird eventually does learn to sing this melody.*

In a similar way, we can trust that God allows our dark circumstances to teach us the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15:3)—a song of victory and praise to God for His gift of salvation.

What are some key points that we can take from this illustration that can help us through our “birdcage” experiences?

1. *Trust.* Just as the bird learns to trust its master, so we can learn to trust that whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, God has allowed it for a purpose. We need to trust God’s wisdom and resign ourselves completely to His plan (Prov. 3:5). Remember that God will not put you in any situation for which He won’t provide a way out (1 Cor. 10:13). When you cannot see the light, keep trusting God.

2. *Focus.* Never lose sight of the goal (Phil. 4:13, 14). The bird could have

Never lose sight of the goal.

focused on the darkness, the cage, or its inability to sing the song, all of which would have led to discouragement and possibly death. Instead, it

busied itself with learning the song.

3. *Perseverance.* Gaining any skill requires much practice. And practice takes perseverance. It’s important to keep in mind that no matter how rough the way, those who endure to the end shall be saved (Matt. 10:22).

4. *Praise.* When the little bird was finally released from captivity, it still sang the song as beautifully as it did when it was in the cage. While it may be hard at first, let praise to God flow from your heart in anticipation of how He will get you through. Then when He has brought you through your crucible, praise for what He has done will bubble forth (1 Pet. 1:7–9).

REACT

1. How do you think “learning the song” changes you as a person?
2. How can you apply trust, focus, perseverance, and praise to your everyday life?

*The Ministry of Healing, p. 472.

Life Isn't Meant to Be Easy

OPINION

James 1:2–4, 12

Advertising campaigns proclaim bonuses along with new-and-improved designs. They promise to make our life better and easier. Sadly, we've come to associate improvement with ease, advancement with efficiency. We're told that life doesn't need to be difficult.

However, this isn't what the Christian experience is about. We were never promised a convenient life. So why are we surprised when times get tough? In all things Jesus sets the benchmark. He didn't have an easy life, but it would be sacrilege to deny the presence of God in His journey. In the Garden of Gethsemane He asked for the torture that was before Him to be taken away, but only if it was God's will. And that's the point—it *was*. And it *is* God's will that we experience trials. In Luke 4 we read the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert. Notice that it was the Holy Spirit who led Him there to be tested. This was God's will. But also notice that it was not God, but the devil, who did the testing.

God's power does not fail under pressure, and we have the assurance that God will not submit us to more than we can bear (1 Cor. 10:13). The purpose God has for each of us necessitates a journey of personal growth. And just as God provided the disciples to pray for Jesus, so God provides support for us.

**The life of a Christian is
like a diamond.**

God knows the purpose He has for us and the journey we must undertake to get there—each devil-designed hill and gully we will encounter. And just like any qualified guide, He tests us to ensure we can handle what's coming. If we don't have the skills we require, He provides the opportunities for us to develop them.

"My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. . . . Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him" (James 1:2–12, NRSV).

The life of a Christian is like a diamond. We start as impure coal, then go through heat and pressure, until at the end of the journey we are made pure and more desirable than all else.

More Than Feel- Good Faith

EXPLORATION

1 Pet. 1:6–9

CONCLUDE

Our automatic reaction is that if something makes us feel bad, it must be bad for us. But the Bible suggests that feeling good is not necessarily God's top priority. Many of the Bible stories include times of suffering and doubt, through which God teaches His people to have a stronger faith in Him. That can be difficult to come to terms with, especially in the midst of suffering. Usually, only with hindsight can we begin to see benefits from what was a dark and bitter experience. God's call is to hang on by faith, especially when it seems that's all we have.

CONSIDER

- Designing a billboard that advertises suffering, then promoting the potential benefits of suffering to our spiritual life.
- Writing a psalm—a poem or song—reflecting on suffering, sorrow, doubt, and their solutions.
- Interviewing someone who has experienced suffering in their lives, particularly asking them how their faith helped them when facing suffering and how suffering shaped their attitude to life and faith. Write their story based on the interview, and submit it to your church newsletter or a church magazine.
- Researching the process whereby diamonds are formed or gold is refined. Report your research to your Sabbath School class, drawing analogies to the life of faith and the role of suffering.
- Watching a television news broadcast and making notes of the suffering reported. Work through the list, praying for the people and situations reported.
- Singing the hymn “It Is Well With My Soul” (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, number 530), reflecting on its statement about suffering.

CONNECT

The Ministry of Healing, pp. 470–473.
Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?*

Seeing the Silversmith's Face



**“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord”
(2 Cor. 3:18, NKJV).**

God: The Master Silversmith

INTRODUCTION

Zech. 13:9

"And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God" (Zech. 13:9).

"God is the refiner and purifier of souls; in the heat of the furnace the dross is separated forever from the true silver and gold of the Christian character. Jesus watches the test. He knows what is needed to purify the precious metal that it may reflect the radiance of His divine love."¹ Have you ever been involved in sports? No one is just admitted on a team. Everyone has to go through a series of drills and tests designed to show the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate.

Take basketball, for example. The coach is looking for the best defensive and offensive players, shooters, ball handlers, free-throw shooters, and individuals who prove to be team-oriented. The coach watches each drill intently. He or she knows

The strengths and weaknesses of each candidate are considered and weighed against the standard he has set.

what skills are needed to shape a winning team. After the tryout period the coach has to begin a refining process. The strengths and weaknesses of each candidate are considered and weighed against the standard set. The players selected have success-

fully passed through the trial period, and the pure skill of each player shines forth.

God allows us to go through different trials of life to test our faith and trust in Him. Seldom do we understand why we go through these things. Consider Job. He was a man of pure character and great wealth, and he walked with God. But God allowed catastrophes to come upon him, even to the point of losing everything except his wife and his own life. Job wanted his life to end because of the calamities that befell him, but he still honored and trusted God in the midst of it all. This was Job being tested and tried in the fire. And because of his great faith and trust in God, he was rewarded double of everything that he lost.

How often do we go through trials in our lives and continue to trust and honor God? Most of us become angry with God for allowing certain things to happen to us. But if we would just trust Him through the fiery trials, we would emerge victorious with a refined character that reflects "the radiance of His divine love."²

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 86.

2. *Ibid.*

Superintended Suffering

EVIDENCE

Mal. 3:2, 3; 1 John 3:2, 3

"A Short History of Metals" identifies the seven metals of antiquity and the early process used to separate the metal from the ore. Three steps allowed ancient metallurgists to process precious metals. They first had to identify the ore. Next, they had to separate the metal from the ore. Finally, they had to concentrate the metal. This included a refinement of the metal, which was to increase its value and improve its usefulness.¹

An encyclopedic dictionary of words defining the process of refinement of metals revealed a good deal of intention and effort. Someone had to *smelt* the ore by high temperature to melt it. Someone had to add *flux*, a foreign substance added to enhance the melting of the ore. Someone had to remove the *slag* (dross) as it rose to the surface, leaving the pure metal behind.² No chance was ever taken in bringing about the desired result. The process was totally superintended.

Trials and suffering all pass through our Father's loving hands. Even Satan's flux is permitted to add to our suffering, but God overrules it for good in us (Rom. 8:28). God weighs the trouble we are to experience. He

checks the heat and the time we are to stay under the burden. He knows the end result He desires. He identifies the worth of the raw material.

God separates the worthless from the valuable in us by fiery trials, watching the entire process, so as not to waste any of the valuable in us. The process continues until the Refiner can see Himself in us. His is the face we watch in the process and the voice we hear approving of the end result of the trials we go through.

"The refining furnace is to remove the dross. When the Refiner sees His image reflected in you perfectly, He will remove you from the furnace. You will not be left to be consumed or to endure the fiery ordeal any longer than is necessary for your purification. But it is necessary for you to submit to the process the Refiner chooses for you, that you may be cleansed, purified."³

**God separates the worthless
from the valuable in us by
fiery trials.**

1. Alan W. Cramb, Carnegie Mellon University. Retrieved April 23, 2007, from <http://neon.mems.cmu.edu/Cramb/processing/history.html>.

2. *New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language* (Delair, N. J.: Delair Publishing Co., 1989).

3. *Our High Calling*, p. 312.

The Change That Trials Bring

LOGOS

Job 23:1–10; Dan. 12:1–10; Matt. 5:16; 25:1–12; 1 Cor. 4:9; Eph. 3:10; 4:11–16

Enduring Trials Is Not Enjoyable (Job 23:1–10)

Oftentimes when we discuss Job's trials, we focus on his faithfulness despite all he was subjected to. But one thing we cannot escape when reading Job is that, despite his faithfulness, he did not "enjoy" his trials. As chapter 23 begins, Job answers Eliphaz with these words: "Even to this day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning." Job is struggling with his trial; and by verse 4, he is admitting that if he could find God, he would fill his mouth with arguments.

How often do we do the same when faced with a trial! Even if it is a trial we've brought on by our actions, we want to complain and argue our plight before God. Even our Savior realized the disheartening effect of trials. As He struggled in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me" (see Mark 14:36).

**Trials make us pure so others
can see our Silversmith's face
in us.**

But how did these two "giants" of endurance obtain hope in the midst of their trials? Christ's response is our best example: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39,

NKJV). He trusted that God would not allow Him to be tried above that which He was not able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13).

Job seems to realize this too as he continues to reflect on his plight in chapter 23. We remember him starting out with the desire to complain, but by verse 10 he realizes whom he needs to trust. Thus, with unwavering faith he exclaims, "When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold" (NKJV).

Though trials may be hard to endure, let us remember to trust in God's sovereign will, and that the working of our patience brings faith. When He has tried us, we shall come forth as gold.

Trials Teach Us Humility (1 Cor. 4:9).

When reading 1 Corinthians 4:9 and the verses that follow, one cannot help seeing the humility Paul has concerning his position as an apostle. In the analogy of the silversmith's face, all the while the silver is in the fire, it is covered in a mixture of salt, tamarind fruit, and brick dust. In this state the silver probably looked worthless. The mixture of fruit and brick dust could represent the trials of life. While

we endure trials, we may look worthless. This experience can bring on humility.

Paul fully understood this type of humility. When he wrote his second letter to the Corinthian church, he spoke of a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7). The reason Paul gives for having this “thorn” is so that he would not be “exalted above measure.” After asking three times that it be taken away, Paul relates Christ’s response: “My grace is sufficient for you” (verse 9, NKJV). Like the silversmith’s silver, while Paul is “covered” by his “thorn” he doesn’t look like much. Thus, he can remain humble while doing God’s will.

That is what Paul is expressing in 1 Corinthians 4:9: The Corinthians were beginning to take more pride in who brought them to Christ, rather than in Christ and His church. The Corinthians were taking pride in being “of Apollos” or being “of Paul” (1 Cor. 3:4). However, Paul understands that through his trials, Christ will be exalted, and that he and Apollos are nothing (1 Cor. 3:7). So he tells the Corinthians in chapter 3, verse 6, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” (NKJV).

The Change That Trials Bring (Dan. 12:1–10; Matt. 5:16; 25:1–12; Eph. 3:10; 4:11–16)

“‘When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold’” (Job 23:10, NKJV). Job makes this statement after he remembers his finite nature in contrast to the infinite wisdom of God. He becomes aware that this trial will cause him to shine forth as pure gold. The texts we cite in this section bring out the same point. In Matthew 25 we read the story of the ten virgins awaiting the bridegroom. The wise virgins had sufficient oil in their vessels for their lamps. Where did this extra oil come from, and why couldn’t they share it? Simply because the oil represents the Holy Spirit. The wise virgins had possibly endured trials to obtain this extra oil, and now with that extra they could let their light glorify not only the bridegroom, whom we know represents Christ, but also their “‘Father in heaven’” (Matt. 5:16, NKJV).

Daniel 12 is another example showing how trials work to make us better. In verse 10 Daniel is told concerning the end time, “‘Many shall be purified, made white, and refined [tried]’” (NKJV). This test shows a connection between being “made white” and being “refined.”

But why are we concerned with being “made white”? As members of the body of Christ—the church—we are to be without spot. And as Ephesians 3:10 states, it is through the church that the wisdom of God and Christ are to be made known. This gives us a purpose beyond our earthly existence. Just as in the case of Job, we are being tried so that through our endurance and dependence on God, others can learn of His wisdom.

Now we can understand Paul when he writes, “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities” (2 Cor. 12:9, NKJV). Trials are not enjoyable, but they cleanse, purge, and make us pure so that others can see our Silversmith’s face in us.

"Purified Gold"

TESTIMONY

James 1:3, 4

"I saw that God is purifying and proving His people. He will refine them as gold, until the dross is consumed and His image is reflected in them. All have not that spirit of self-denial and that willingness to endure hardness and to suffer for the truth's sake, which God requires. Their wills are not subdued; they have not consecrated themselves wholly to God, seeking no greater pleasure than to do His will. Ministers and people lack spirituality and true godliness. Everything is to be shaken that can be shaken. God's people will be brought into most trying positions, and all must be settled, rooted, and grounded in the truth, or their steps will surely slide."¹

"In the religious life of every soul who is finally victorious there will be scenes of terrible perplexity and trial; but his knowledge of the Scriptures will enable him to bring to mind the encouraging promises of God, which will comfort his heart and strengthen his faith in the power of the Mighty One. . . . The trial of faith is more precious than gold. All should learn that this is a part of the discipline in the school of Christ, which is essential to purify and refine them from the dross of earthliness."²

"We desire to follow Christ and to be like Him; but we sometimes faint beneath trials, and remain at a distance from Him. Sufferings and trials bring us near to Jesus. The furnace consumes the dross and brightens the gold."³

"The trial of faith is more precious than gold."

God sought to refine Esau and Jacob. "Esau had despised the blessings of the covenant. He had valued temporal above spiritual good, and he had received that which he desired. . . . Jacob had chosen the inheritance of faith. He had endeavored to obtain it by craft, treachery, and falsehood; but God had permitted his sin to work out its correction. . . . From that night of wrestling beside the Jabbok, Jacob had come forth a different man. Self-confidence had been uprooted. Henceforth the early cunning was no longer seen. In place of craft and deception, his life was marked by simplicity and truth. He had learned the lesson of simple reliance upon the Almighty Arm, and amid trial and affliction he bowed in humble submission to the will of God. The baser elements of character were consumed in the furnace fire, the true gold was refined, until the faith of Abraham and Isaac appeared undimmed in Jacob."⁴

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 355.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 578.

3. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 83.

4. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 208.

How to Be Pure

HOW-TO

1 John 3:2, 3

First John 3:2, 3 tells us that we are to purify ourselves, just as God is pure. Many people in the Bible understood the difficulties of living a pure life. They also understood their own natural propensities to sin. Listed below are actions used by some of these people that we, too, can apply to everyday circumstances. These principles will enable us to be pure just as God is pure.

1. *Persevere! (Daniel)*. Darius, the king of Babylon, had been tricked into signing a decree that stated that for 30 days all people must pray to no one except the king himself. Daniel could obey the king's decree or obey the God of heaven. He chose to honor God. We, like Daniel, must persevere when faced with difficulties, knowing and believing that God will see us through. (See Daniel's story in Daniel 6:1–10.)

2. *Praise! (Job)*. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21, NKJV). Yet Job did not sin or accuse God of wrong. Job experienced a great tragedy. But he

remembered to praise God. When we praise Him, we are inviting His presence. Thus, He "inhabits" our praise. (See Job's story in Job 1:1–22.)

3. *Act! (Esther)*. Sometimes it is better to do something, rather than nothing at all. Esther and her people were facing certain death. She knew she must act. So she risked her own life to use her influence with the king (Esther 5:1–6 and 7:1–10).

4. *Run! (Joseph)*. When we are faced with temptation, the best solution is often to get out as quickly as possible. Joseph was in a situation like this. And he was smart enough to run! If you linger where temptation is, you will fall. The temptation could be that of thoughts, words, or actions. Dismiss the thoughts, rebuke the words, and run from the actions. (See Joseph's story in Genesis 39:7–12.)

5. *Abide! (Jesus)*. There are many examples we can apply to our lives to help us overcome trials. They point us to Jesus, who is our perfect Example in all things. He tells us in John 15:4–7 to abide in Him. When we do, He will enable us to persevere, praise, act, and run, and to do all that it takes to "purify" ourselves.

Sometimes it is better to do something, rather than nothing at all.

Going Through the Fire

OPINION

1 Pet. 4:12

Many of us ask God to make us more like Him, to take over our lives so that we will reflect the beauty of His character. God is always willing to come near to those who are earnestly seeking Him in prayer. However, many of us are not ready for God's plan for changing our lives. Take for example the children of Israel, who cried to God for deliverance from their Egyptian oppressors: "And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them" (Exod. 3:9, NIV).

God sent Moses to lead the way to their freedom. Although God heard the prayers of His children, He could not take them at once to the Promised Land, because they were not ready to be a nation that could reflect the kingdom of heaven.

They first had to suffer trial after trial for 40 years in the wilderness before they would be ready to inherit the Promised Land. In our Christian walk we are small reflections of Israel as we strive to reach our final destination—the kingdom of glory. We meet trials. We fall short and lose faith; but God is molding us and burning us in the flames of tribulation, as shown in 1 Peter 4:12: "Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you" (NIV).

**Many of us are not ready
for God's plan for changing
our lives.**

reflections of Israel as we strive to reach our final destination—the kingdom of glory. We meet trials. We fall short and lose faith; but God is molding us and burning us in the flames of tribulation, as shown in 1 Peter 4:12: "Do not be surprised at

REACT

1. Is there an experience in your life that you would consider to be a fiery trial? Share your experience with the class.

2. How do trials shape our characters and make us a reflection of Christ?

3. Is it possible to live a Christian life without going through trials? Explain your answer.

4. How is it possible to bring trials upon ourselves?

5. What types of trials are we most likely to cause?

6. What trial did the children of Israel face in Numbers 21:4–9?

7. What was the reason for the trial? What lesson should they have learned?

God's Grace— *Dayenu*¹

EXPLORATION

Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3:2, 3; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 John 3:2, 3

CONCLUDE

All trials pass through our Father's loving hands. Even what Satan intended as flux to cause suffering, God overrules for good. God regulates the heat, pressure, and transforming processes for each of us in order to achieve the perfect product. His grace is sufficient for us (2 Cor. 12:9).

CONSIDER

- Reading about a person such as Daniel, Esther, or Joseph from a modern Christian source or the Bible. Choose a Scripture verse to summarize how God's grace was sufficient for that person.
- Rehearsing what you would say to a friend who calls in the middle of the night suffering acute grief or unbearable pain.
- Listening to the song "Thank You, Lord."²
- Rewriting the first 3 of the 12 Alcoholics Anonymous steps to healthy spiritual living. The result should describe a conversion experience that doesn't depend on one's circumstances.
- Journaling your "dark night of the soul." Invite a close friend to review your thoughts and to discuss and pray with you how God's loving support can be real even when you feel utterly alone.
- Collecting hymns that summarize this quarter's lessons. Place this collection in a booklet so that you can easily share them with people you meet who are going through a difficult time.

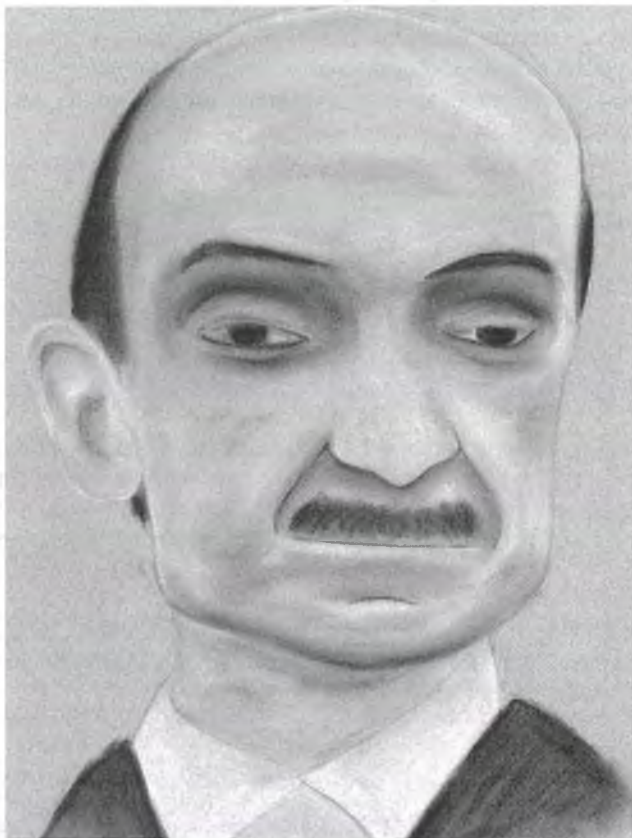
CONNECT

James Dobson, *When God Doesn't Make Sense*; Terri Fivash, *Joseph*; Max Lucado, *In the Grip of Grace*; Trudy Morgan-Cole, *Esther: A Story of Courage*; Philip Yancey, *Disappointment With God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud*.

1. Hebrew for "it is sufficient" or "it would have been enough."

2. From Cam Floria, *The Apostle* (Lexicon Music, Inc., 1973).

Extreme Heat



“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand” (Isa. 53:10, NKJV).

Our Guiding Light

INTRODUCTION

1 Cor. 10:13

It was almost 3:00 A.M. when I heard my grandmother shouting, "Fire! Fire!" from somewhere outside the house. I opened my eyes immediately, but I kept thinking that I was still asleep and that this was a nightmare. After a minute or two Grandma came into my room saying, "You have to pack your clothes as fast as you can and get out of the house!"

As I looked out of the window and saw the neighbor's house on fire, I realized I wasn't dreaming! My grandparents and I got out of our house and stood on the road waiting for the fire brigade to come. I was only ten years old, but I could understand the difficulty of our situation. It was windy, and the trees around our house would have caught fire had not the firefighters come soon. Luckily, I soon heard the siren of the brigade's car. Thank God for these brave people! How thankful we all were that God sent them to help us!

Our life is like a road that we are traveling on each minute of every day. While walking on this road, we meet many different people, take part in many different situations, and make many decisions. As members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we choose Jesus to guide our way on this road and to accompany us during our journey. We choose to follow in His steps. However, when bad things happen, we start to think that Jesus is no longer guiding us. We cannot see the Light who is showing us the right path. And we feel alone.

So many people are asking themselves, "Why is this happening to me? Why is God so unfaithful? Has He forgotten me?" But they've forgotten to open their eyes and see that Jesus has been and always will be next to them, if they believe in Him. Even during no trial and hardship are we ever without His help? So we must learn to search for Him—our Guiding Light. He knows each one of us, and He promises us that He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear, and that He will provide a way of escape for us (see 1 Cor. 10:13). If we want to reach the eternal life He promises us, we need to trust Him and believe that no matter what happens to us, He always will be on our side.

As I looked out of the window and saw the neighbor's house on fire, I realized I wasn't dreaming!

Are You Cold?

LOGOS

Genesis 22; Job 1:6–2:10; Isa. 43:1–7; Hos. 2:1–12; 2 Cor. 11:23–29

Every person born on this earth has experienced, or will experience, trials and hardships. Each and every one of us has been or will be faced with a fire test—a test that could have any one of the following aspects: insecurity, uncertainty, anxiety, starvation, illness, suffering, or even death. How great can such a trial be? Can one overcome it by oneself? Perhaps with God's help?

Much of earth's population lives in the temperate climate belt, where temperatures are usually mild. However, there are times in this area that temperatures rise to 100° F (approximately 40° C). There also are places on earth that temperatures exceed 120° F (approximately 50° C). Even so, people can adapt to such living conditions. But what can we say about the temperature in the core of the earth, which ranges from 5,500° to 9,000° F (3,000° to 5,000° C), or about the tempera-

ture in the sun's core, which is 13,000,000° to 15,000,000° C?

Earth is situated approximately 93,000,000 miles (150,000,000 kilometers) from the sun. How much closer together would these two heavenly bodies have to be before life on earth would cease to exist?

Knowing just what amount of the

sun's energy would reach us, God arranged the solar system in a way that made life possible. Thus, we can rejoice in earth's abundant plant and animal life and the beauty of nature.

Fire (sunlight) and motion are required so that there can be life. In the same way, God determines the "flammability degree" of temptation, knowing exactly how much we can take (1 Cor. 10:13). How "hot" can trials become? Today let's study some people in the Bible who were put through a fire test.

God determines the "flammability degree" of temptation, knowing exactly how much we can take.

Job (Job 1:6–2:10)

In Job's suffering we see the terror of ruin, and we hear the desperate cry of a father left without his children. We also witness the pain, disease, and isolation of a lonely man. From Job we learn that confrontation between God and Satan affects individuals. We also learn that faith is a source of the type of strength that can make us confident of victory. And last but not least, we learn from Job that no matter what the trial, the blessings we receive once we have endured the trial are

greater than the blessings we had before.

Hosea (Hos. 2:1–12)

What can we say about Hosea, whom God commanded to marry and have children with a whore? Imagine how “hot” this trial must have been. Hosea, God’s prophet, was to establish a family with a prostitute? It must have been difficult for him to overcome the ridicule and the gossip of the people. Nevertheless, God permitted this to happen so that He could illustrate His relationship with His people and so that we could learn to see people through His eyes.

Paul and Abraham (2 Cor. 11:23–29; Genesis 22)

Basically, the fire tests Paul endured had to do with his mission as an apostle. He had been tried not once, but twice. He also endured hunger, pain, thirst, cold, and threats from robbers, strangers, and people who pretended to love the Lord. Why was it necessary for God to put Paul through all of these trials?

But perhaps it was Abraham who endured the greatest heat. God had called him to be the father of the faithful, even though his faith was not yet perfect. After a series of mishaps caused by his weak faith (e.g., Genesis 16 and 20), God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son. Abraham knew he had to be faithful, even though God was asking him to do something entirely unreasonable. Can you imagine how “hot” this trial was for him? What kind of thoughts rushed into his head at that moment? To kill his own son for whom he had waited for so long? Surely such a test can either perfect one’s faith or ruin it.

“ ‘You Shall Not Be Burned’ ” (Isa. 43:2, NKJV)

No matter how continuous, severe, or different our trials are, our faith in God provides the support we need. We have God’s promise: “ ‘When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze’ ” (Isa. 43:2, NIV).

God will put our faith on trial, but He won’t let us be burned. The trials of Abraham, Job, Hosea, and Paul are prominent examples.

REACT

1. True or false: Hardship reveals character but doesn’t develop it. Explain your answer.
2. Why is it so important to remember during hardships that our hope of salvation exists not within ourselves but only in Jesus Christ?

Building Confidence

TESTIMONY

John 16:33

As a young person, you surely face the waves of fiery trials from time to time. "It's so hard!" you exclaim. Yes, it is! There always will be hardships and fiery trials. Jesus Himself said so (John 16:33). What can we do, then? Can we succeed if we try to change the circumstances? Trying to do so often proves to be difficult, even useless. God suggests a much better way. He would not remove our hardships. Rather, He wants to help us change our viewpoint regarding what we must go through. As we endure our trials, the Holy Spirit will smooth the unevenness of our character. He will make us victorious, because "the sacrifice made on Calvary is the pledge of a guarantee for [our] victory."¹

"Satan presents many temptations to the youth. He is playing the game of life for their souls, and he leaves no means untried to allure and ruin them. But God does not leave them to fight unaided against the tempter. They have an all-powerful Helper.

"He [Christ] is our Elder Brother."

"Stronger far than their foe is He who in this world and in human nature met and conquered Satan, resisting every temptation that comes to the youth today. He is their Elder Brother. He feels for them a deep and tender interest. He keeps over them a constant watch-care, and He rejoices when they try to please Him. As they pray, He mingles with their prayers the incense of His righteousness, and offers them to God as a fragrant sacrifice. In His strength the youth can endure hardness as good soldiers of the cross. Strengthened with His might, they are enabled to reach the high ideals before them."²

"Trial will come to you. Thus the Lord polishes the roughness from your character. Do not murmur. You make the trial harder by repining. Honor God by cheerful submission. Patiently endure the pressure. Even though a wrong is done you, keep the love of God in the heart. . . .

"Christ knows the strength of your temptations and the strength of your power to resist. His hand is always stretched out in pitying tenderness to every suffering child. To the tempted, discouraged one he says, Child for whom I suffered and died, cannot you trust Me?"³

1. *Messages to Young People*, p. 96.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 95, 96.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 97, 98.

Who Can Stand?

EVIDENCE

Isa. 43:1-7; Mal. 3:2

How can we understand God's providence when we go through the "refiner's fire"? Are we tested because He wants to teach us important lessons so that we can go through the pearly gates of the heavenly Zion? His promise that when we go through the fire we will not be burned should remind us that He is with us every single moment of our lives, even when He lets us go through the "refiner's fire." During such times we tend to complain about what is happening. But we need to remember that such times purge the slag in us so that we will reflect the gold of Christ's character.

In Daniel 3 we read about three young people who refused to bow to King Nebuchadnezzar's idol. Deciding not to bow was the beginning of their "fiery trial" in both a literal and a metaphorical sense. Remaining firm in their faith did not spare them from the scouring oven. Once amid the flames, however, they were rescued by the only One who could save them. The king saw Jesus talking to the three young men, and he also noticed that the fire was not destroying any of them.

The phrase "refiner's fire" is found only in Malachi. Two Hebrew words have been translated as "refine": (1) *tsaraph* literally means to "fuse" (Isa. 48:10; Mal. 3:2, 3; Zech. 13:9; etc.); the same word is rendered also as "tried" (Ps. 66:10), "melt" (Jer. 6:29), and "purge" (Isa. 1:25); (2) *zaqraq* literally means to "strain" or "sift"; in the case of silver and gold, the term probably referred to some washing process in connection with refining, as in Malachi 3:3.

Today we seem to be living in more difficult times than ever. Humankind is being tested with many "fiery trials." Terrorist attacks, devastating earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, and wars vie for space on the evening news. Then there are all the illnesses, accidents, etc. that never reach the news. All of our trials are "refiner's fires" to prepare us to stand in front of Him as pure as gold. Through them all, let us remember that God is merciful, because He knows exactly how much strength we have, and He will not allow us to face more than we can stand.

Deciding not to bow was the beginning of their "fiery trial" both in a literal and in a metaphorical sense.

When There Is No Way Out!

HOW-TO

Ps. 56:8–13

When you feel as if you have reached the outer limit and you need a change, then what? People around you may come up with a lot of “recipes” that can help you out of the crisis, but will any of them really work? Don’t forget—tests and trials are too personal! Each person’s strength to endure varies. That is why in the Christian life there is no such thing as a one-for-all recipe. God has His ways to help you in every situation, and His ways will be exclusively for you.

I will share some things with you that I learned about myself—something that helped me stand firm the last time I really felt as though the world was falling apart. Hopefully, these suggestions will be helpful to you also.

Don’t be afraid to cry. God will not think you weak if you shed tears.

1. *Do your best not to take it out on others.* It’s not their fault. We all have our personal anxieties. We all carry our own crosses and think that our problems are the most serious problems in the world. Only God can care about us always and at any moment of our lives.

2. *Spend time alone with God.*

- a. Don’t be afraid to cry. God will not think you weak if you shed tears. Even Jesus cried (John 11:35).
- b. Listen to Christian music. In times of trial, music can have a greater influence than words alone.
- c. Admit that you can’t handle your trial by yourself. This is probably the hardest thing to do. Unfortunately, it’s often only when we reach the bottom that we can admit our weakness before God and ourselves. In addition to His guidance, God also might send a friend or counselor who can help you.
- d. Look for God! He is right there by your side. He longs to wipe away your tears and hold you. He knows how you feel, and He loves you more than anybody in this world can love you.
- e. Try to find the light that He wants to give you so that you can find your way through the darkest moments. When you find this light, you will feel peace and joy. This will be your personal experience with the King of kings and Lord of lords!

The Privilege of Being Refined

OPINION

Mal. 3:2, 3

The Bible contains many allusions concerning the power of fire to either destroy or save. Is there any “fiery trial law” in the Bible that applies to the faithful? When conflicts arise, we all need God’s grace. Why is it so difficult to let God mold and discipline our mind and body in order to achieve physical, mental, and moral excellence?

The “extreme heat” period of trial corresponds to the second-to-the-last stage of the faith-building process. This process includes (1) having a dream, (2) making a decision, (3) experiencing delay, (4) going through difficulties, (5) facing a dead end, and finally (6) delivery.

The last stage before reaching the final one proves to be the most difficult, because it requires all our energy and concentration. You may feel as if everyone and everything is against you. The only question that matters here is “Where is God?”

Think about God holding us, much as the silversmith holds the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames are the hottest, so as to burn away all impurities. Not only does he have to hold the silver; he must keep his eyes on it the entire time it’s in the fire. If he leaves the silver in the flames a moment too long, it will be destroyed.

You may ask, “How does the smith know when the silver is fully refined?” The answer is easy—when he sees his image in it.

Today, if you are feeling the heat of the fire, remember that God has His eye on you. And He will turn off the fire of the trial you are going through when He sees His image reflected in you.

The only question that matters here is “Where is God?”

REACT

1. Why can we have confidence in God when it comes to His reshaping and refining of our character?

2. Does being aware of the purpose of your hardship make any difference to you? Explain.

Trials and Encouragement

EXPLORATION

Isa. 43:2

CONCLUDE

"The fact that we are called upon to endure trial shows that the Lord Jesus sees in us something precious which He desires to develop. If He saw in us nothing whereby He might glorify His name, He would not spend time in refining us. He does not cast worthless stones into His furnace. . . . The Lord allows His chosen ones to be placed in the furnace of affliction to prove what temper they are of and whether they can be fashioned for His work."*

Trials are a part of living on earth, but by looking to Jesus we can realize our true worth and receive strength to carry on. We can look at our trials as a way to grow closer to Jesus.

CONSIDER

- Preparing a note for a friend who is discouraged. Include some Bible promises and remind them you are praying for them.
- Writing a blog about how you have grown closer to Jesus as a result of a particular trial.
- Preparing a casserole for a person who has recently lost a family member or had some other major trial. Include an encouraging Bible text.
- Interviewing several people at church with the question "What helps you get through trials?"
- Rewriting James 1:2–4 in your own words. Share it with a friend.
- Calling your pastor or spouse and sharing a verse of encouragement and prayer.
- Listening to some uplifting music. Decide what makes it encouraging. Share it with someone who is discouraged.

CONNECT

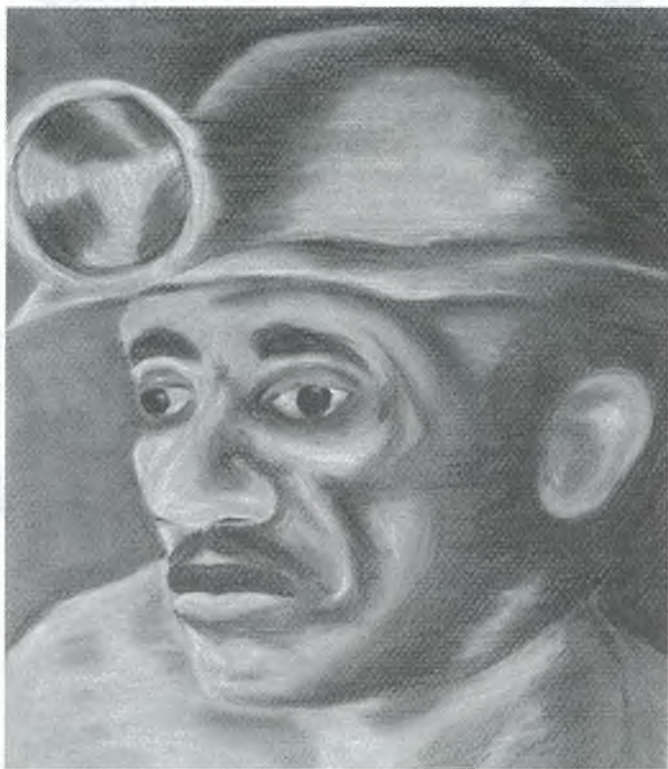
James 1:12.

The Ministry of Healing, pp. 469–483.

Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Patience in the Midst of Trials and Afflictions*;
Gerald R. Nash, *Why God Allows Trials and Disappointments*.

**The Ministry of Healing*, p. 471.

Struggling With All Energy



“To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Col. 1:29, NIV).

INTRODUCTION

Isa. 40:29–31

“I’m grown and old enough to make my own decisions!” Those were some of the last words I spoke to my mother before I was in a car accident that cost me one leg and left me with partial use of the other. I was 18 and unaware that this was merely the first of many traumatic episodes I would experience.

Shortly after surviving the horrors of my initial accident, I was seriously injured by a drunk driver. Within the next ten years I lost a host of relatives, including my parents, to illnesses. Shattered by the nightmare that had become my life, I no longer believed the promises of the Bible. So I began searching for texts to discredit the Bible. To my amazement, each scripture I found only reiterated how God had kept His promises to me. Isaiah 40:29–31 reminded me of how, even after losing seven pints of blood, I had survived having my legs crushed between two cars. Realizing that the average person does not survive the loss of four or more pints of blood, I was forced to admit that God had, indeed, kept His promise by saving my life.

... I no longer believed the promises of the Bible.

What has become clear to me throughout my experiences is that God’s primary objective is to save us. The devil is angry and determined to claim as many souls as he

can. Only God holds the future and can protect us from things that will prevent us from being saved. Because we cannot foresee the future, it is vital that we trust, surrender all, and ask God to lead.

A scene from one of my favorite films explains it best. When asked why the God he prayed to would let unthinkable things happen to decent people, a farmer replied, “My daughter could fall down and hurt herself even if I’m walking right beside her. That doesn’t mean that I allowed it to happen. But she knows with a father’s unconditional love, I’ll pick her up and carry her.”* In all the moments of my life, God has been right there beside me. The truth of God’s love is not that He allows bad things to happen. Rather, it is His promise that He’ll be there with us when they do.

**Love Comes Softly*, director Michael Landon Jr., perf. Corbin Bernsen, Dale Midkiff, and Katherine Heigl, DVD, 20th Century Fox, 2003.

Where Is Your Hope?

EVIDENCE

1 Pet. 1:13

Because of sin, we can guarantee that we will not have an easy, perfect life. Instead, we have a life filled with violence and suffering. Pain, sorrow, and fear stand on the doorstep of our lives, waiting for a chance to destroy our joy and our hope. The scary thing is that trouble can hit at any time, and many people are not ready for it. Unfortunately, when it does hit, many never recover from the blow.

The Word of God was written to give us hope. What is hope? To hope is to anticipate an expected end. *Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary* defines it as "to look forward with confidence or expectation."¹ Hope is hidden in the promises of God's inspired Word. And when trouble hits, we should seek comfort in His Word.

First Peter 1:13 states: "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (NKJV). To *gird up* means "to bind" or "to tighten up," and *loins* means "sides." Peter wanted us to see that in order for us to have any hope, we must first start by controlling our thoughts. To gain control is to give God control. To give God control is to trust Him at His Word and expect His Word to accomplish what it says it will do.

**To gain control is to give
God control.**

"Courage, energy, and perseverance they must possess. Though apparent impossibilities obstruct their way, by His grace they are to go forward. Instead of deploring difficulties, they are called upon to surmount them. They are to despair of nothing, and to hope for everything. With the golden chain of His matchless love, Christ had bound them to the throne of God. It is His purpose that the highest influence in the universe, emanating from the Source of all power, shall be theirs. They are to have power to resist evil, power that neither earth, nor death, nor hell can master, power that will enable them to overcome as Christ overcame."²

With God, we have nothing to fear. We need only to believe in His power and to wait for Him to work His power in our lives. He will see us through everything. Read the following verses and allow them to inspire you to hope and trust in the Lord today: Psalm 16:9; Psalm 31:24; and Proverbs 13:12.

1. *Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984).

2. *Gospel Workers*, p. 39.

LOGOS

Genesis 32; Matt. 5:29; John 16:5–15; Col. 1:28, 29; 1 Pet. 1:13

Suffering: An Inevitable Occurrence (Gen. 32:25, 31, 32; Isa. 53:5; Matt. 5:29; 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Pet. 4:6)

There is a saying in the sport of bodybuilding: “No pain, no gain.” In this sport the individual painfully breaks down muscle tissue through weightlifting and exercise. As the tissues heal during intervals of rest, they increase in size and strength. The process of activity and rest is repeated over and over. This, along with proper nutrition, gives the bodybuilder the physique he or she desires.

This principle of “no pain, no gain” applies to the Christian’s struggle for eternal life. Salvation comes through an intimate faith relationship with Christ. But to pursue this relationship, one must endure hardships, trials, and pain. Peter wrote, “Do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Pet. 4:12, 13, NKJV). And Isaiah 53:5 reminds us that Christ, who leads us by example, was Himself “wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities” (NKJV).

The experiences of Jacob give us an example of the “no pain, no gain” philosophy. In Genesis 32:25, 31, 32, we find him wrestling with an unknown assailant who gives him a painful injury. (The injury is so severe it cripples Jacob for the rest of his life.) Yet Jacob holds on.

“With a Made-Up Mind”: Perseverance in Suffering (Gen. 32:24–26; Matt. 5:29; 10:22; Gal. 6:9; Phil. 2:5; James 1:12)

How is it possible to continue striving and fighting when you’re suffering? What must be our mind-set? “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5, NKJV). When it was time for Christ to be crucified, Luke 9:51 tells us that He didn’t run away from persecution and death. Job said, “ ‘Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him’ ” (Job 13:15, NKJV); Galatians says we should “not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Gal. 6:9, NKJV). The recurring admonition is to persevere with determination, to sacrifice till it hurts (Matt. 5:29, 30).

This was the mind-set Jacob had as he struggled with his assailant. After receiving the injury, Jacob realized that it must have come from a supernatural being. So instead of letting go, he held on tighter, until he received a blessing. What

started as a struggle for survival became a struggle with spiritual and eternal consequences.

“What’s in It for Me?”: The Benefit of Perseverance (Gen. 32:28–30; 2 Tim. 2:12; 4:7, 8; James 1:12)

With all this talk about trials, sacrificing, and perseverance, we ask, “What gain could possibly come from pain?” Paul encourages us in 2 Corinthians 4:17 that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (NKJV). James adds, “Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him” (1:12, NRSV).

In his letter to Timothy, Paul repeatedly refers to the reward for spiritual perseverance as a crown. Furthermore, he consistently references the victorious soul as one who receives royal benefits and treatment. “But,” you say, “that’s pie in the sky by and by. What here-and-now blessing could I possibly get out of suffering?” Based upon God’s Word, Jacob is more than able to give us the answer. After wrestling all night with a formidable stranger, he receives a crippling injury. Yet this life-changing “curse” proves to be a blessing in many ways. Realizing that he is in the presence of a divine being, he refuses to let go until he is blessed. His request is honored, and his name is changed from “Usurper” to “Overcomer,” signaling God’s forgiveness (Gen. 32:28, 29).

His “curse” helps save his life.

He receives divine assurance of heaven’s favor “ ‘because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared’ ” (Gen. 32:30, NIV). His “curse” helps save his life. “He was pale and disabled from his recent conflict, and he walked slowly and painfully, halting at every step. . . . At the site of that crippled sufferer, ‘Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck . . . and they wept.’ As they looked upon the scene, even the hearts of Esau’s rude soldiers were touched. . . . Though they beheld the patriarch’s infirmity, they little thought that this weakness had been made his strength.”*

Jacob’s “midnight brawl” and blessing proved to be a profound spiritual experience for him and all who would follow in his footsteps. He became a link in the chain of believers who sacrifice all, and with divinely inspired perseverance “press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14, NRSV).

**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 198.

In the Crucible Fired by Pain

TESTIMONY

Ps. 26:2; Prov. 17:3; Isa. 48:10; 1 Pet. 5:10

"The Lord permits great trials to come upon His loved ones. He tries them as gold. Now is your opportunity to show that you do trust in your Redeemer, even though in the crucible of affliction. Be cheerful. Let your cheerfulness be seen in your countenance, because you have Jesus by your side, to watch with you. You may converse with Jesus. You may say, 'The Lord is my helper. I shall not be moved.' You may find blessed opportunities to speak to some soul words of courage, and sow seed that will spring up and bear fruit. Let all see in whom you place your trust."¹

Are you struggling with all the energy you have? It's a real place visited by the Jacobs of today, including me. Seated at my computer, I'm wrestling with which wonderful experience I should share. That the doctors refused to believe that the lymph nodes were not cancerous? That because of my commitment to my Savior,

**I had the nerve to believe I
had been through enough
in my lifetime.**

I declined to follow the recommendation to eat certain protein sources, yet I continued to gain weight? Should I omit that my blood levels were so low that my doctor told me I should have died? Which prayer, phone call, visit, card, amount of

money, food, love, and care that was shared with my family and me should I mention?

I had been comfortable with myself, and I had the nerve to believe that I had been through enough in my lifetime. So I settled down to live in the spiritual comfort zone that I had decorated and padded for my safety. Now to be able to tell the experience in a few words that will help someone else—there is just too much to say. Days spent talking to others who were enduring heartache and disappointment. Sleepless nights crying into my pillow so my wonderful husband could get some much-needed sleep. Asking the Lord to ease the pain so that I too could get some rest. Then waking up in the morning to realize that the lovely Jesus had heard my plea. Yes, I've had some hand-to-hand combat and have spent some time in a refining pot.

"Not one of us is known or read of all men, till the crucible of God tests us."²

1. *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 12, p. 305.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 540.

How to Persevere During Your Trial

Wednesday
November 7

HOW-TO

Rom. 5:3-5; James 1:12

As Christians we are sometimes called upon to face difficult times. We certainly would not voluntarily subject ourselves to pain and sorrow. However, an all-knowing God, who realizes our frail human nature, allows us to be tested and refined in order for us to be partakers in His holiness (Heb. 12:10). James 1:12 states, "Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him" (NRSV).

Making it through difficult circumstances begins long before you experience the trial. It begins with you making that vital connection with God in order to do His will. This connection is crucial, because as Philippians 2:13 states, "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (NKJV).

So how do we make this connection?

Plug in to God's power. Isaiah 40:29-31 says that the God of the universe renews our strength. When we are weak, He is strong. Second Timothy 1:7 reminds us that "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (NKJV).

Plug in to prayer. James 5:16 urges us to pray for one another. Thanks be to God for the privilege of prayer, which gives us direct access to God Himself. He takes the trials in our lives and miraculously makes something good out of them.

Plug in to the promises. In Matthew 5:10 Jesus promises that " 'blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' " (NKJV). Revelation 2:7 promises that "to him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (NIV).

Plug in to His peace. John 14:27 comforts us as only God's peace can, not the world's type of peace, but the peace that passes all understanding. John 16:33 continues to assure us that we can be of good cheer, because Jesus has already overcome the world.

Yes, it's a given: As a Christian you will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). But remember, you have God's power through prayer and His promises for peace in the midst of your storm.

Making it through difficult circumstances begins long before you experience the trial.

Suffering for Jesus

OPINION

Acts 7:57–60; Phil. 1:29; Heb. 2:10, 11

Many Christians believe that the true sign of a saving relationship with God is material prosperity. While some believers are blessed with material gifts, the universal sign of a relationship with God is not how much we receive but how much we give of ourselves. Jesus is the Example of the true follower. All who follow Him will be called to sacrifice for His kingdom.

People may see our suffering and wonder why we continue to praise the Lord. God is working in us, and our personal journey with Him is something that others may not understand. But it's not about understanding; it's about faith. Our faith is strengthened when we hold on to the hand of God when others fail us—be it family, friends, money, education, etc.

Suffering for Jesus may mean losing everything, which may or may not include our own lives. Stephen suffered for Christ when as a result of his faithfulness he was stoned to death (Acts 7:57–60). But from that experience a seed was sown that led to the conversion of Saul, the one apostle most instrumental in the devel-

It's not about understanding; it's about faith.

opment of the early Christian church. Stephen himself never saw the blessing that came from his suffering for Christ. He was just being faithful.

Suffering is a necessary and active ingredient in a Christ-led life (Phil. 1:29). If God's Son Himself could not fulfill His mission and become what God wanted Him to be without suffering, it is impossible for the follower of Christ to become mature in Him without suffering (Heb. 2:10, 11). Through suffering we learn more about Jesus. He paid the ultimate sacrifice for all humanity. His reward is a seat at the right hand of God.

When we go through the trials and tribulations that only God can bring us through, we gain a better understanding of our powerlessness and His omnipotence and love. Jesus understands pain better than anyone, and He is the only One who can bring us through it for His glory and our own spiritual benefit.

REACT

1. What do you think it means that Jesus was made perfect through suffering?
2. What difference do you see between the results of Stephen's suffering and the blessings of his suffering?

Blessings Abound

EXPLORATION

Col. 1:29

CONCLUDE

Life is hard! But not without blessings. Life can be a struggle, a trial, and tribulations may abound; but that does not mean that God has abandoned you. Rather, perhaps in the midst of all this worry and woe, we see a God who is ultimately more consistent than we ever thought He could be. He is the place from where we can draw energy and sustenance. Throughout this lesson we see an unwillingness on God's part to let us withdraw into our bitterness. He is tirelessly working in our lives, and working toward a reunion with Him. Our time is limited on this planet, but our time with God is boundless. Even through struggles we can see that the kingdom of heaven is now and that He is right here with us.

CONSIDER

- Videotaping an interview with someone in your church. Ask them if they ever had any trials that they had to overcome. Edit it, and show it for an encouragement to others.
- Listing all the different things you were able to overcome in the last month with God's help. After each one, write how God helped.
- Writing your own personal testimony and sharing it with those you love.
- Taking a walk in nature to see how God takes care of even the smallest creatures. Surely He will take care of you as well!
- Seeking out those less fortunate than you and seeing what you can do to help them in their situation. You might be the face of Christ to someone.
- Making a covenant with yourself that you will not allow troubles to get in the way of your relationship with Christ. Do it in an artistic way, and frame it for your wall.

CONNECT

My Life Today, p. 94.

Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.

Indestructible Hope



“And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Rom. 5:5, NIV).

Hope in the Heart of Darkness

INTRODUCTION

Jer. 6:14

Jeremiah lived in a time of great national trouble. He saw the end of the Jewish nation coming. His people hated him because he kept talking about the trouble they were in. Plenty of others had comforting words to say, but they, said Jeremiah, were false prophets: “‘They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace’” (Jer. 6:14, NIV). A critical look at the book of Jeremiah brings out the depth of his anguish over the trouble facing his people. But neither can you avoid the profound hope he had for the future. When the time to rebuild finally came, the honest and hopeful writing of Jeremiah was the foundation for the new and hopeful Israel.

Yet the tough question in the midst of such crisis is a question of concern to many: How can one hope for a better tomorrow when conditions are so damning? How can I—when I have faced the greatest of trials and temptations—hope in a future unseen? These questions, and more, strew the thoughts of the saint. The answers lie in God’s promises and in the fact that all He has promised shall come to pass.

**How can I hope in a future
unseen?**

Hope in times of trouble lies in a deep knowledge and trust in the Lord. Hope is kept alive by faith and is sustained by patience. To mark Refugee Day in 2006, the United Nations Refugee Agency mounted a poster that spoke thus of hope: “I hope they won’t kill me. I hope we can build a future here.” The hope is for a dwelling place right here on earth where turmoil, war, and rumors of war may never again arise and the hatred of one group toward another may never be rekindled.

However, real and enduring hope anticipates complete rest, and that rest can be realized only in eternity, in the earth made new, in the establishment of God’s reign, when no more evil can be wrought. Hope that relies on God is hope built on a strong foundation. Such hope cannot be destroyed even if the body is. It is a hope that anticipates higher heights—eternity.

REACT

1. What is the role of faith in developing hope?
2. What hinders hope?
3. How can we hope for a better future in the midst of trouble?

Unshakable Hope

LOGOS

Job 38–41; Isa. 41:8–14; Jer. 29:1–10; Hab. 1:1–4; Heb. 12:1–13

Hope—a Definition

The Hebrew words for hope—*kawah*, which means “to expect,” and *batah*, which means “to trust” or “to have confidence”—do not meet the English dictionary definition of hope. The English definition of hope combines expectation and desire with the belief that one’s desire may be attained. One thing, however, is certain—the Bible is full of promises of hope.

Hope in the Old Testament

The Old Testament oozes with hope. Hope rests upon Jehovah, “the hope of Israel” (Jer. 14:8). He is also the hope of the individual Israelite. He who hopes in another person is cursed and lost (Jer. 17:5), but he who hopes in Jehovah is blessed (Jer. 17:7). The Old Testament emphasizes that even though it may appear

All that could have contributed to his success seemed as ropes of sand.

that God is hiding His face and that everything seems to be doomed, hope still exists (Isa. 8:17; 26:8).

Hope is built on all that God has done and on His power and ability to accomplish His promises (Gen. 17:8; Exod. 3:8, 17; 6:4; Deut. 1:8).

Before the Assyrians captured Israel in 721 B.C. and before the Babylonians overtook Judah in 587 B.C., hope was put to a new test, though the test was given with a warning (Amos 5:18–20).

Ezekiel 37:11–14 expresses the hope that even though things appear doomed, restoration will occur.

Hope in the New Testament

The Greek words *elpis* and *elpizein* mean “expectation” and “expect.” They are neutral and therefore mean to expect either good or evil. The expression and appreciation of this sense of the word is stronger in the New Testament than it is in the Old Testament. The concept of hope is fully developed in Paul’s writings—especially in the book of Romans. The paradox of Romans 4:18—“Who against hope believed in hope”—is an expression of both forbidding and hindering circumstances and a hope that stands. Paul says of the patriarch Abraham that “without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since

he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised" (Rom. 4:19–21, NIV).

Paul exposes Abraham's hope when, despite the fact that all appeared lost, he was convinced that what God had promised would come to pass.

We are saved through hope (Rom. 8:24). We rejoice in hope (Rom. 12:12), even though it is produced through patient suffering (Rom. 5:4). Hope is sustained through patience and the encouragement afforded by God's Word (Rom. 15:4).

Our God is the God of hope (Rom. 15:13). As we hope to receive from Him the means by which we can attain hope, we have the one hope of our calling and the same spirit (Eph. 4:4). God is our safe and secure Anchor (Heb. 6:19). Hope is not only a fruit of patience (Heb. 6:11); it also motivates us to have patience. The object of hope is made real through faith (Heb. 11:1), a faith that enables us to give an account of our hope to any inquirer (1 Pet. 3:15).

Conclusions

From the foregoing, it is evident that we will face challenges, trials, temptations, and even times during which it seems as if God is unaware of our situation. Yet our hope lies in the fact that because God has kept His promises in the past, He will keep His promises to us. He is able. Nothing is too hard for Him. He is the Creator, the Hope of Israel, the Mighty Commander of the armed forces of heaven. He can defeat all enemies—situational, circumstantial, human, or spiritual.

Our reliance on God in times of peril will enable us to have hope. Our ability to withstand a storm will build our confidence to withstand other storms. Abraham's faith corresponded to the power and never-failing faithfulness of God. Even though he did not have the best foundation of hope, he still believed that he would be the father of many nations as God had promised.

Abraham's faith is a good example to all who would develop faith. Circumstances were against him, and all that could have contributed to his success seemed as ropes of sand. But he held on to God's promise, believing that He cannot lie (Num. 23:19). All who desire peace in this world must believe that God will keep His promises, even when circumstances seem impossible.

REACT

1. How is it possible to hope for something we cannot see?
2. How can we develop a strong hope in the future even when we undergo trials and temptations and our souls are in anguish and pain?
3. How do prayer and Scripture keep hope alive?

Patience in Tempest

TESTIMONY

1 Cor. 13:13

"The fact that we are called upon to endure trial shows that the Lord Jesus sees in us something precious which He desires to develop. If He saw in us nothing whereby He might glorify His name, He would not spend time in refining us."¹ No wonder then that James tells us to "consider it nothing but joy" whenever we face trials of any kind (James 1:2, NRSV).

If we incorporate into our minds that God has seen something precious in us, we will not be discouraged when we suffer. "God has shown me that He gave His people a bitter cup to drink, to purify and cleanse them. It is a bitter draught, and they can make it still more bitter by murmuring, complaining, and repining. But those who receive it thus must have another draught, for the first does not have its designed effect upon the heart. And if the second does not effect the work, then they must have another, and another, until it does have its designed effect, or they will be left filthy, impure in heart. I saw that this bitter cup can be sweetened by patience, endurance, and prayer."²

The process of cleansing is continuous, and until it is clear that the cleanliness desired is obtained, purification must continue.

Patience is related to endurance and prayer. "The test of true patience is the capacity to endure hardship under all circumstances. . . . Patience consists of distinct yet interrelated elements; objective patience is the true capacity to bear long and graciously with others in their shortcomings and imperfections. Subjective patience is the capacity to endure imposed pain, suffering and abuse without retaliating or revenge."³

Patience will fail if the root—which is love—is not there. "Love is a plant of heavenly origin, and if we would have it flourish in our hearts, we must cultivate it daily. Mildness, gentleness, long-suffering, not being easily provoked, bearing all things, enduring all things—these are the fruits upon the precious tree of love."⁴

1. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 471.

2. *Early Writings*, p. 47.

3. George W. Brown, *The Fruit of the Spirit*, p. 53.

4. Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 1091, 1092.

Hope Against All Probability of Hope

Tuesday
November 13

EVIDENCE

Titus 1:2

In one of the camp meetings I attended as I was growing up, the guest speaker told a story that has since remained embedded in my mind. It was the story of a faithful dog's death at a railway station.

The pastor explained how the dog and its elderly owner loved each other and how the owner took such good care of the dog. He expected he would have the dog by his side until the day he died.

One day the man set out to go visiting. The dog went with him, only to be stopped at the train station by a sign that read "No dogs beyond this point."

Because he would be gone only a few hours, the owner decided to leave the dog behind. The dog waited and waited. But an accident happened, and the owner was killed. With each passing week of waiting for his master, the dog grew weaker with hunger. Every time it thought of giving up, the dog comforted itself by believing that when his master returned, he would reward his diligence. However, the man never returned, and his faithful dog died where he had been left.

The sign read "No dogs beyond this point."

Like this dog, many people put their hope in material things or heroes that cannot deliver as they promised or who consider first their own needs and desires.

But hope built on God can stand pain, shock, error, and turmoil, because it is grounded in the deeply rooted foundations of His good works and His proven ability to fulfill what He has promised. The Bible gives clear evidence of that which God has done. Many people we read about in its pages had hope in a future yet unknown and unseen. They were convinced that God could and would deliver on His promises. Read about some of these people and what they wrote in Ruth 1:11–22; Proverbs 13:12; Ezekiel 37:11–14; Mark 5:35–43; Acts 27:1–25; and Romans 4.

REACT

1. How has the Word of the Lord inspired you to have hope in the future?
2. Why is it possible, based on previous works of God, to build trust in God?
3. In times of uncertainties, how can we be assured of God's love?

Making Others Strong

HOW-TO

Rev. 22:20

The biblical view of history finds its axis in the first coming of Jesus to this earth. He came the first time at just the right time (Gal. 4:4), and from that point onward, human history moves toward its great climax—Jesus' second coming. We don't know the exact date of this event. Only God knows the day and the hour. But we know that it's not far off. The last promise in the Bible is the assurance that " 'I [Christ] am coming soon.' " And with John the revelator, we cannot but lift up our head and answer, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

Our times are unpredictable and uncertain. Only what God has already done in history and what He has promised to do in the future propel us to hope in His return. God assures us that He will do for us in the future all the good things He has done in the past. So He gives us a bright hope—sparkling in the promises of His words.

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1, NIV). In these uncertain times, how can we be a refuge and strength to others? The following suggestions might seem

Our times are unpredictable and uncertain.

small at first, but like ripples in a pond, their effects can spread throughout many people's lives:

1. Find a charity organization in your community that needs help.

Even stuffing envelopes for a good cause can make a difference.

2. Visit a nursing home on a regular basis. Read to the residents or help them write letters to loved ones.

3. If anyone in your church or neighborhood is suffering from a long-term illness, cook for them, run errands for them, or help them with yard work or housework.

4. If you're sitting in a traffic jam and someone needs to get into your lane in front of you, let them. Smile and wave.

5. Just being a pleasant person with your friends and family, and when you're out and about, can make a big difference. The world is so stressful that smiles and kind words are always welcome and will therefore always make a difference and inspire others to do the same.

Fully Refined

OPINION

Mal. 3:3

More often than not, Christians find themselves engulfed in fires that provoke them to question God's existence. Who can know God's mind in such situations, and who can know if He cares?

In such times, we should remember two things: (1) Evil and desperation will not continue forever! They are for just a while, and we will not feel pain in heaven or the new earth. (2) Jesus is always by our side. We need to truly believe that "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28, NKJV).

There have been times in my life that I couldn't understand Malachi 3:3. So I decided to learn how a silversmith works. As he holds a piece of silver over the fire, he lets the silver heat up. As this process continues, the silver is being refined. One needs to hold the silver in the middle of the fire—where the flames are the hottest—to burn away all the impurities present in it.

Just as the silversmith has to sit before the fire to watch the silver while it is being purified, so God is always with us in times of distress and grief.

How does the silversmith know when the silver is fully refined? When he sees his image in it! When we feel the heat of the fire and when the hottest of flames seem to devour us, God is refining us. When He is able to see His image in us, He will lift us up to greater heights, where love reigns and happiness never ends.

"The only thing we need to fear is fear itself."

In his first inaugural address American president Franklin D. Roosevelt had this to say to a nation disheartened by the Great Depression: "The only thing we need to fear is fear itself."* The Bible reveals God's great plan for us—"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God" (Isa. 41:10). The only safe course is to trust in God's promises, for His promises are true, and they can empower us to live for His name's sake.

REACT

1. In what ways do hard times have significance in our lives as Christians?
2. When we are in trouble and affliction, is it wrong to question where God is? Explain.
3. How can we, in the midst of fire, maintain hope in a future yet unseen and unknown?

*U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C., March 4, 1933.

Where Hope Lives

EXPLORATION

Ps. 39:7

Sometimes life can seem strange and harsh. When it is, we long for a place that feels safe, familiar, and warm. That place is hope. Hope helps us make sense of life and gives it meaning. But hope has no strength of its own. The strength of hope lies in what it hopes for. So if we put our hope in the things of the world, we set ourselves up for disappointment. But if we put our hope in God's provision for our lives, we have put our hope in something strong enough to sustain us. As we hope in Him, we find that we are safe and at home.

CONSIDER

- Using your Bible concordance to look up the word "hope" in Psalms. How many verses did you find? Next, add up all the times you find "hope" in Romans, Ephesians, and the rest of the epistles. Add to that the number of times Jeremiah speaks of hope in his book and in Lamentations. Total your findings. Check out how many more times "hope" is in the Scriptures. How many verses did you find?
- Reflecting upon where you turn when you are looking for hope. Do you turn to God first? Or do you turn to friends or family? Why?
- Writing a poem, a song, or a testimony based upon one of the Scripture passages from this week's lesson. Or pick a verse, and use your favorite art medium to create a poster for your wall or to use as wallpaper on your computer screen.
- Listening to some worship and praise songs and spending time in His presence, thanking Him for His promise and plans for a future and a hope for you.
- Visiting someone from your church or family who is going through a rough time. Bring your smile, your Bible, and some flowers. Pray, sing, share your testimony, or read scriptures with them to build their hope.

CONNECT

Jud Wilhite, *Hope That Goes the Distance*; Mark Finley and Steven Mosley, *To Hope Again*; Lewis Smedes, *Keeping Hope Alive for a Tomorrow We Cannot Control*.

Seeing the Invisible



“By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27, NKJV).

Life: A Flood of Risks

INTRODUCTION

John 14:1-5

Life is a flood of risks. And most of us go through life debating whether to swim or not. Following God is no exception—a life of faith implies great risks.

A godly man was told to build an ark. In doing so, he willingly ran the risk of being ridiculed for wanting to save lives.

A father was asked to leave it all behind and flee with his son to Egypt. Thus Joseph became a means of protection for the Savior.

A deity who chose to come into this world in human form took numerous risks to ensure our salvation.

Jesus must have known how tricky risks can be. Perhaps that's why He told His disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me" (John 14:1, NIV). I think this is true even now, considering that with the spiritual life, doubt can creep into any person's heart. Neither time nor personal circumstance can

lessen that risk. At times we ask the same question Thomas asked: "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (John 14:5, NIV).

There is more to be said about risk taking. In most cases you do not

In most cases you do not jump out on a limb unless you have faith holding you.

jump out on a limb unless you have faith holding you. Throughout the following week the lesson will teach you to gaze through the looking glass so that you can learn to see the invisible through the eyes of faith. You also may learn to rely on God even if it calls for the risk of believing without any evidence. In fact, at this very moment, Jesus knows us. He made us in His image, and He wants to save us. He called us. And He justified us so that we could finally be glorified! (Rom. 8:29, 30).

Isn't it a risk to trust someone? To do so, you have to have complete faith in that person. Such faith teaches us to trust Jesus because of what He does for us in the process of glorification.

I ask myself: In light of the evidence, isn't it actually easier to believe, easier to take risks? For "who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:35, 37, NIV).

So be careful. Don't turn the page unless you want to risk believing as well as living!

"I See It! But I Don't Believe It!"

EVIDENCE

John 14:1-3

In his commentary Adam Clarke writes of the first part of John 14:1, "If [the disciples] reposed their confidence in God, he would protect them; and that, howsoever they might see him treated, they should believe in him more firmly, as his sufferings, death, and resurrection should be to them the most positive proof of his being the Messiah, the Savior of the world."¹

Of the second part of verse 1 Clarke writes that "it is best to read both the verbs in the imperative mood:—Place your confidence in God, and in me as the Mediator between God and man [see John 14:12-14]; and expect the utmost support from God; but expect it all through me. The disciples began to lose all hope of a secular kingdom, and were discouraged in consequence: Christ promises them a spiritual and heavenly inheritance, and thus lifts up their drooping hearts."²

In John 14:2 Jesus gives hope to His disciples by telling them about a new place. In essence, verse 2 is "a beautiful representation of heaven. . . . These words were designed to comfort the disciples. Jesus was leaving, but He would not forget them. He would eagerly anticipate His reunion with them in the Father's house. In the interval He would prepare for the glorious home-coming."³

**"Jesus was leaving, but He
would not forget them."**

In verse 3 Jesus assures His disciples that He will come again. "The Greek expresses this promise in the present tense. This so-called futuristic present gives emphasis to the certainty of the event. The event is thought of as being so certain as to be already taking place."⁴

REACT

1. How can Jesus' commandment to love one another help us during difficult times?
2. Why does knowing that Christ will return reassure us during hardships?

1. Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 621.

2. Ibid.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 1034, 1035.

4. Ibid.

Seeing the Invisible

LOGOS

Isa. 40:27–31; John 14:1–14; Rom. 8:28–39; Eph. 1:18–23

The Invisible Can Be Visible (Rom. 1:20)

To say that we can see the invisible at first seems to be a contradiction. But the invisible can be visible. It depends on which pair of eyes we are using. The Bible provides a key to help us understand how we can see the invisible. “There are things about him that people cannot see—his eternal power and all the things that make him God. But since the beginning of the world those things have been easy to understand by what God has made. So people have no excuse for the bad things they do” (Rom. 1:20, NCV).

No one is able to stand before God and say that they turned away from God because He did not give them any light. God's revelation is accessible to all humans. Faith in God is not blind or illogical. Neither is it a personal idea only. Rather, it is objective. It is based on real promises and on the fulfillment of God's Word in the past and present time.

Jesus' willingness to help us maintain our spiritual eyesight occurs in three areas.

The Invisible Is Evident in His Sustaining Works (Isa. 40:27–31)

Faith is like electricity. Electricity is invisible, but its effects are quite noticeable. You cannot see the power of gravity, but its attraction is evident (and sometimes dangerous!). You cannot see the wind. But again, its effects are noticeable. Just consider typhoons, hurricanes, and tornadoes. Jesus said, “The wind blows where it wants to and you hear the sound of it, but you don't know where the wind comes from or where it is going. It is the same with every person who is born from the Spirit” (John 3:8, NCV).

Faith is built upon the fact that we do not go unnoticed by God. We cannot say, “The Lord does not see what happens to me; he does not care if I am treated fairly” (Isa. 40:27, NCV). We've heard that “the Lord is the God who lives forever, who created all the world. He does not become tired or need to rest” (Isa. 40:28, NCV). We could testify about people who were tired but who received strength from God, who were weak but who received power from Him (Isa. 40:29). Could you be one of them?

The Invisible Was Made Visible in His Greater Revelation—Jesus (John 14:1–14)

We don't need to see God when we have His revelation in Jesus. "I am the way," He says, "and the truth, and the life. The only way to the Father is through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father, too. . . . Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or believe because of the miracles I have done" (John 14:6–11, NCV).

His Willingness Helps Us to Keep Seeing the Invisible (Rom. 8:28–39; Eph. 1:18–23)

Jesus' willingness to help us maintain our spiritual eyesight occurs in three areas. First, there was His willingness to save us before sin even entered our world. "He chose us before the world was made" (Eph. 1:4, NCV).

Second, He was willing to become one of us. "Christ himself was like God in everything. But he did not think that being equal with God was something to be used for his own benefit. But he gave up his place with God and made himself nothing. He was born to be a man [a human like us] and became like a servant" (Phil. 2:5–7, NCV).

And third, He was willing to pay the wages of our sin by dying on the cross. When we accept His sacrifice on our behalf and continue to grow in His grace, we can be sure "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor ruling spirits, nothing now, nothing in the future, no powers, nothing above us, nothing below us, nor anything else in the whole world will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38, 39, NCV).

REACT

1. How has God revealed Himself to you? How have these revelations helped you to see the invisible?
2. What people in the Bible can you think of who received strength and power from God when they were at their weakest (Isa. 40:29)? What can their ability to see the invisible teach you about taking risks when the path before you is dark and foreboding?
3. Jesus shows us what God is like. Think about the life Jesus lived, how He treated people, and how He dealt with sinners. Based on your observations, how would you then describe God to someone who thinks He is a tyrant just waiting to condemn sinners to hell?
4. What might be trying to blind you to the invisible? How can Jesus' willingness to save us, to become one of us, and to die for us, give you 20/20 vision?

Living Promises

TESTIMONY

John 14:1-3; Rom. 8:35-39

Jesus is more than willing to help us when troubles come, but we need to ask for His help in faith. "At times the arm of faith seems too short even to touch the Saviour's garment, but there stands the promise, with God behind it: 'Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; and if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day: and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not' (Isa. 58:9-11)."

The message is clear: "Jesus gained the victory through submission and faith in God."² "Our Saviour clothed His divinity with humanity. He employed the human faculties, for only by adopting these could He be comprehended by humanity. Only

**"Jesus gained the victory
through submission and
faith in God."**

humanity could reach humanity. He lived out the character of God through the human body which God had prepared for Him. He blessed the world by living out in human flesh the life of God, thus showing that He had the power to unite

humanity to divinity."³

Many promises have been given to us as He closed this gap: "When the Saviour was about to be separated from His disciples, He comforted them in their sorrow with the assurance that He would come again: 'Let not your heart be troubled. . . . In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself.' John 14:1-3."⁴

1. *The Upward Look*, p. 133.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 130.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 924.

4. *Maranatha*, p. 21.

How Do We See Him?

HOW-TO

Ps. 23:1–3; 27:1; 46:1, 2; 91:11, 12

One day, when she woke up, he wasn't there. "Where is Dad, Mom? Is he coming back?" There was no answer. Many young people ask this question of God when they feel abandoned, alone, needy, and sad. They wonder if He knows that they're sad and that they need Him. They want to know how to find Him, how they can feel His presence.

Yes. God is interested in you. If you want to see Him, open your ears and your eyes. God may be answering your prayers through a person, a picture, a song, something in nature, or a poem. Ask Him to open your eyes and your ears to His answers.

Following are ways that you can be more alert to God's presence in your life:

1. *We need to be alert.* Psalm 23:1–3. These verses give us peace when we need something, and the confidence that we will receive it. "As the Lord is the good shepherd, so we are his sheep—not frightened, passive animals, but obedient followers, wise enough to follow one who will lead us in the right places and in right ways. This psalm does not focus on the animal qualities of sheep, but on the discipleship qualities of those who follow. When you recognize the good shepherd, follow him!"¹

2. *Open your eyes.* Psalms 27:1; 46:1, 2. These texts give us strength in difficulty. They help us to know that He is there. "God is our refuge even in the face of total destruction. He is not merely a temporary retreat; he is our eternal refuge and can provide strength in any circumstance."²

3. *Observe nature.* Psalm 19:1–4. When we observe nature—the birds, the animals, even the insects—we can learn many things about God's care for us. Read what Jesus had to say about this in Matthew 6:25–34.

4. *Open your ears.* Proverbs 25:11. Sometimes through friends, sermons, songs, etc., God speaks to us. We just need to pay attention.

In these four ways we must remember not to expect instant answers. God knows the best time to answer our prayers and to fulfill our needs.

"Where is Dad, Mom? Is he coming back?" There was no answer.

1. *Life Application Study Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers), pp. 924, 925.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 953.

Thursday
November 22

Creation and Redemption: Two Parts of the Same Story!

OPINION

Rom. 8:32

Through my high school and college years I navigated between gnosticism, atheism, and dialectic materialism. And I was avidly interested in how nature operated. Evolution for me was the primary answer to life. But just after finishing my genetics course, I began thinking that maybe randomness had no place in explaining the world's origin. I believed that it was so highly improbable to form something as perfect as DNA out of nothingness that, if this were the case, there would be no life on earth at this moment. Thus it went as I began to question myself and to look for answers about God. All of this eventually led to my acceptance of Him as the perfect Author of a perfect design. Accepting Genesis 1–3 as a literal passage, including Sabbath as a holy day, aided in my conversion to Christianity.

For me as a scientist, the story of Creation is a landmark in the history of this world. I am now passionate about a mighty Creator, with a flair for flawless design:

from the complex water molecule to the most intricate galaxy. This is power in action!

However, if you accept Genesis 1–3 as a story of the divine power, you must also recognize the fact

**Evolution for me was the
primary answer to life.**

that we have made a grave mistake. “‘And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel’” (Gen. 3:15, NIV). I came to realize that the story of Creation is part of a bigger picture that would later reveal itself: incarnation, humiliation, Calvary's tree, nails, and a tomb. All of these things do not outwardly embody power. In the end, however, these things taught me something fundamental about God. Not only is He a mighty and perfect Creator, He is a loving Redeemer as well. “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32, NIV). God employs the same power and passion in Creation as well as in Redemption.

When I try to decipher nature's secrets and its perfection, I see nothing but the Cross. It is then that the invisible becomes visible. It seems that when things get difficult the real question is this: Does the One with the power to do all things use that same power to solve even the most insignificant of my problems?

The challenge today is to acknowledge “his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 1:19, 20, NIV).

Miguel Lopez, Arlington, Texas, U.S.A.

Seeing Through the Eyes of Faith

EXPLORATION

1 Pet. 1:8, 9

CONCLUDE

This week we are reminded of the role that faith is to play in our lives. The glimpses of God that we see in His Word, in nature, and in the working of the Holy Spirit on our hearts provide us with a solid foundation upon which we can build our faith and, at the same time, make it possible for us to see even that which is yet invisible.

CONSIDER

- Reviewing your life to this point by graphing the major ups and downs you have experienced. Consider how each event has affected your faith. Which were more faith-building—the ups or the downs?
- Reading Hebrews 11. Choose two of the individuals mentioned, and then contrast and compare the experiences of these champions of faith.
- Printing the word “faith” in the center of a piece of paper. Write down all the words that come to your mind when you think of faith. From these words, create your own definition of faith.
- Looking at page 779 of *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, where you will find a list of songs under the theme of Faith and Trust. Choose one and sing it, paying close attention to the words.
- Using a medium such as Play-Doh to create a sculpture that symbolizes faith.
- Interviewing a senior citizen, asking about the faith-building experiences he or she has encountered.
- Reading Matthew 6:25–34, where Jesus used examples from nature to reassure His followers of the Father’s love and care for all His creatures.
- Spending some time outdoors looking for additional illustrations in nature that help build your faith in God and His ability to supply all your needs.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, “What to Do With Doubt,” chap. 12.

Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith*; Morris Venden, *It’s Who You Know*, “The Good Fight of Faith,” pp. 15–28.

A Life of Praise



**“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”
(Phil. 4:4, NIV).**

Sweet Vinegar

INTRODUCTION

Phil. 4:4

Not so long ago a noontime game show featured contestants having to do specific dares to win money.

One of the dares involved the contestants having to smile for ten seconds. Quite a simple dare, you might be thinking. But here's the twist: They had to smile within the allotted time after they drank a cup of pure cane vinegar! Just imagine—a full ten seconds' smile without reacting to even a trace of the sour taste of cane vinegar!

Ten contestants participated in this dare. Only two, however, passed the challenge. When the host interviewed the winners, he asked them how they had managed to smile for so long with the sour taste of the vinegar in their mouths. They said that instead of focusing on the vinegar, they concentrated on the purpose of the game, which was to smile.

It's hard to smile when a difficult situation first makes its way into your life, but if you are focused on your goal, nothing is impossible; you can smile for a very long time.

In our daily walk "it is easy to worship God when things are going great in your life—when He has provided food, friends, family, health, and happy situations."¹ But how about those moments when tears, heartaches, and miseries are present? Can a smile then be found on your face and in your heart? Do you consider praising God in spite of such times?

"The deepest level of worship is praising God in spite of pain, thanking God during a trial, trusting him when tempted, surrendering while suffering, and loving him when he seems distant."²

As the song from our hymnal says:

With voice as full as strong As ocean's surging praise,
Send forth the sturdy hymns of old, The psalms of ancient days.
Yes, on through life's long path, Still chanting as ye go;
From youth to age, by night and day, In gladness and in woe,
Rejoice, Rejoice, Rejoice, give thanks, and sing!
—"Rejoice, ye pure in heart!"³

1. *The Purpose-Driven Life*, p. 107.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 27.

Ten contestants participated in this dare. Only two, however, passed the challenge.

The “Fruit of Our Lips”

LOGOS

Josh. 5:13–6:20; 2 Chron. 20:1–30; Psalm 145; Acts 16:16–34; Phil. 4:4–7

Fruit of Our Lips (Heb. 13:15)

From Genesis to Revelation we can read many stories that involve praise. Abraham, Miriam, Job, David, Joshua, Elizabeth, Paul, Silas, and the jailer at Macedonia are some of the great men and women who praised God more than anything. “What is praise? Webster defines it as ‘an expression of approval or admiration.’ A secondary definition is ‘the extolling of a deity, ruler, or hero.’” In the Bible “praise is commending, by speaking or singing, the perfections of God. The writer of Hebrews explained that praise as a sacrifice is the ‘fruit of our lips’ (Hebrews 13:15, NKJV).”²

Why Should God Be Praised? (Ps. 96:4)

“Praise to God is what we offer in acknowledgment of God’s excellent being.

You might think that praise is the same as saying ‘thank you,’ but there is a difference. Thanksgiving describes our attitude toward what God has done, while praise is offered for who God is. Psalm 18:3 says, ‘I call

**Praise as a sacrifice is the
“fruit of our lips.”**

to the Lord, who is worthy of praise. . . .’

“All believers are commanded to praise God! In fact, Isaiah 43:21 explains that praise is one reason we were created: ‘This people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise.’ Hebrews 13:15 confirms this: ‘Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.’

“Praise originates in a heart full of love toward God. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.’ Are you a Christian today? If so, you know that you love God because He first loved you! Without God’s love, any praise you can offer is hollow. Love, born from a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, is an essential part of your praise.”³

“Praising God has the power to change our lives. Praise takes the mind off self and helps us identify God and His reality. It transforms the perspective from which we approach life and places us in the context of who God is. Praise helps us recognize God and His ability to impact our lives. It reminds us that He loves us and

is deeply involved in the details of our daily living.”⁴

The Reward of Praise (Ps. 50:23)

“We cannot embark on the true joy and benefits of praising God unless we have received Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. As children of God, He dwells in our bodies through the Holy Spirit. This means that wherever we go, God is to be praised. First Corinthians 6:19, 20 states, ‘Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.’”⁵

“Praise God. Let your conversation, your music, your songs all praise Him who has done so much for us. Praise God here, and then you will be fitted to join the heavenly choir when you enter the city of God. Then you can cast your glittering crowns at the feet of Jesus, take your golden harps, and fill all heaven with melody. We shall praise Him with an immortal tongue.

“As our Redeemer leads us to the threshold of the Infinite, flushed with the glory of God, we may catch the themes of praise and thanksgiving from the heavenly choir round about the throne; and as the echo of the angels’ song is awakened in our earthly homes, hearts will be drawn closer to the heavenly singers. Heaven’s communion begins on earth. We learn here the keynote of its praise.

“Praise the Lord; talk of His goodness; tell of His power. Sweeten the atmosphere that surrounds your soul. . . . Praise, with heart and soul and voice, Him who is the health of your countenance, your Saviour, and your God.”⁶

“As Christians we ought to praise God more than we do. We ought to bring more of the brightness of His love into our lives. As by faith we look to Jesus His joy and peace are reflected from the countenances. How earnestly we should seek so to relate ourselves to God that our faces may reflect the sunshine of His love! When our own souls are vivified by the Holy Spirit, we shall exert an uplifting influence upon others who know not the joy of Christ’s presence.”⁷

1. Benjamin C. Maxson, “Learning to Praise,” Stewardship Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, <http://www.adventiststewardship.com/article.php?id=152>.

2. “Praise,” <http://www.porn-free.org/praise.htm>.

3. “All About Prayer,” <http://www.allaboutprayer.org/praise-to-god.htm>.

4. Maxson.

5. “All About God,” <http://www.allaboutgod.com/praising-god.htm>.

6. Ellen G. White, “I Will Sing Unto the Lord,” The Ellen G. White Estate®, Inc., http://www.whiteestate.org/devotional/mlt/03_28.asp.

7. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1148.

A Life of Praise

TESTIMONY

Ps. 100:4

"If we will consecrate heart and mind to the service of God, doing the work He has for us to do and walking in the footsteps of Jesus, our hearts will become sacred harps, every chord of which will send forth praise and thanksgiving to the Lamb sent by God to take away the sins of the world. . . .

"Christ would have our thoughts center upon Him. . . . Look away from self to Jesus Christ, the life of every blessing, every grace, the life of all that is precious and valuable to the children of God. . . .

"The Lord Jesus is our strength and happiness, the great storehouse from which, on every occasion, men may draw strength. As we study Him, talk of Him, become more and more able to behold Him—as we avail ourselves of His grace and receive the blessings He proffers us, we have something with which to help others. Filled with gratitude, we communicate to others the blessings that have

**"Let the fresh blessings of
each new day awaken
praise in our hearts."**

been freely given us. Thus receiving and imparting, we grow in grace; and a rich current of praise and gratitude constantly flows from our lips; the sweet spirit of Jesus kindles thanksgiving in our hearts, and our souls are uplifted with a sense of

security. The unfailing, inexhaustible righteousness of Christ becomes our righteousness by faith.

"Let the fresh blessings of each new day awaken praise in our hearts for these tokens of His loving care.

"When you open your eyes in the morning, thank God that He has kept you through the night. Thank Him for His peace in your heart. Morning, noon, and night let gratitude as a sweet perfume ascend to heaven. . . .

"The angels of God, thousands upon thousands, . . . guard us against evil and press back the powers of darkness that are seeking our destruction. Have we not reason to be thankful every moment, thankful even when there are apparent difficulties in our pathway?"*

*Ellen G. White, "Thanksgiving and Praise," Ellen G. White Estate®, Inc., http://www.whiteestate.org/devotional/mlt/06_16.asp.

The Power of Praise

EVIDENCE

2 Chron. 20:1–30

“Praise is a powerful weapon to break down walls, open closed doors, and win battles as we fight to extend God’s kingdom into places and hearts that the enemy holds in bondage.

“King Jehoshaphat set his heart on following God’s ways and destroying idolatry in Judah. But the threat of war from three hostile nations gripped him with fear. As he contemplated the powerful advancing enemy and his own meager army, he gathered his people together to seek the Lord’s help. With the enemy drawing ever closer, Jehoshaphat prayed: ‘O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you’ (2 Chron. 20:6).

“Jehoshaphat also recounted God’s faithfulness in past battles, claimed His promises, and humbly acknowledged total dependence upon God. He concluded: ‘For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you’ (v. 12).

“King Jehoshaphat further demonstrated his confidence in the power of praise by appointing those who praised and sang to the Lord to go before the army (v. 21), ahead of Judah’s greatest warriors. The result? Look at verse 22. ‘As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. . . .’

“In the New Testament, we continue to see praise bring down strongholds. After being stripped, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison, Paul and Silas began to pray and sing hymns of praise to God (Acts 16:25). In response to their supplication and praise, God sent an earthquake that burst open the prison doors. Not only were Paul and Silas physically released, but the jailer and his entire household were spiritually released and baptized in the Lord Jesus (vv. 26–33).”*

“Praise is a powerful weapon.”

REACT

1. How can praise be a powerful weapon against the hardships we bear?
2. How can praise make the daily routine of life less boring?

*Stacy S. Padrick, “A Life of Praise,” *Discipleship Journal*, <http://www.navpress.com/EPubs/DisplayArticle/1/1.108.12.html>.

First Before Anything Else

HOW-TO

Ps. 134:1, 2

"Do you know that praising God is the best thing to do first before anything else? Have you ever been in a situation that you feel all alone? Or have you encountered a difficult situation in your life and you don't know what to do, like losing your job or suffering the loss of someone very close to your heart? Consider the good times such as when you receive a raise from your boss or earn high marks at school. What do you usually do during these moments? Praising God makes every circumstance of our lives complete, essential, and eminently worthwhile."*

There are countless reasons we should praise God, and there are also countless ways to praise Him. Here are some of these ways:

Praise the Lord and sing to Him. "Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre" (Ps. 33:1, 2, NIV).

**"Praising God makes every
circumstance of our lives . . .
worthwhile."**

Praise the Lord continuously. "I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips" (Ps. 34:1, NIV). "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a

sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Heb. 13:15, NIV).

Praise the Lord together. "Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together" (Ps. 34:3, NIV).

Praise the Lord with singing and music. "It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp. For you make me glad by your deeds, O Lord; I sing for joy at the works of your hands. How great are your works, O Lord, how profound your thoughts!" (Ps. 92:1–5, NIV).

Praise the Lord for making you. "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Ps. 139:14–16, NIV).

* "Praising God—The First Thing!" All About God, <http://www.allaboutgod.com/praising-god.htm>.

Converted by Praise

OPINION

Acts 16:16–34

Praise is so important that it can actually help bring nonbelievers to Christ. During their stay at Macedonia, Paul and Silas were imprisoned because Paul had cast an evil spirit from a slave girl. “The apostles suffered extreme torture because of the painful position in which they were left, but they did not murmur. Instead, in the utter darkness and desolation of the dungeon, they encouraged each other by words of prayer and sang praises to God because they were found worthy to suffer shame for His sake. Their hearts were cheered by a deep and earnest love for the cause of their Redeemer. Paul thought of the persecution he had been instrumental in bringing upon the disciples of Christ, and he rejoiced that his eyes had been opened to see, and his heart to feel, the power of the glorious truths which once he despised.

“With astonishment the other prisoners heard the sound of prayer and singing issuing from the inner prison. They had been accustomed to hear shrieks and moans, cursing and swearing, breaking the silence of the night; but never before had they heard words of prayer and praise ascending from that gloomy cell. Guards and prisoners marveled and asked themselves who these men could be, who, cold, hungry, and tortured, could yet rejoice.”*

There was a sudden earthquake that opened the prison doors.

There was a sudden earthquake that opened the prison doors and loosened everybody's chains. “The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, ‘Don't harm yourself! We are all here!’ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.’” (Acts 16:27–31, NIV). That same night “he [the jailer] and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:33, NIV).

When you stop to think about it, praise is faith in action. Praising God may not always be easy, but the more we do it, the more it will become a natural part of our lives, and the more power it will have to convert others. Even when we are persecuted for the sake of the gospel, God can make us a powerful testimony. His Holy Spirit will work through us as we reach out to those around us.

**The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 213, 214.

Praise Power Prevails

EXPLORATION

Phil. 4:4

CONCLUDE

When everything is going well, it's easy to praise God. But praising Him gets harder as life becomes more complex. We often ask, "How can I praise God in difficult times?" What we should ask, however, is: "Why should I praise God?"

Praise is faith in action. When we praise despite pain, trust when tempted, surrender when suffering, and continue to love Him when He seems far away, we are worshiping Him at the deepest level. Such worship does not come naturally, but with practice, praise can be the powerhouse in our lives.

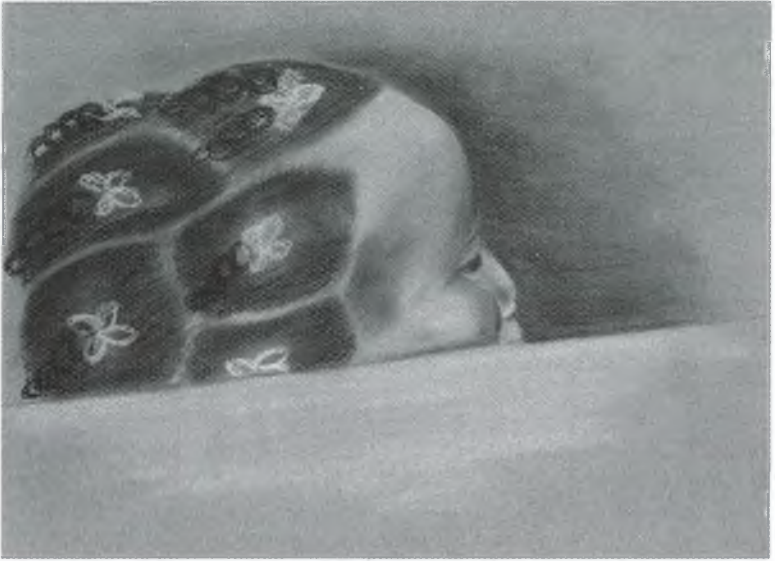
CONSIDER

- Taking pictures of people smiling or doing things they obviously enjoy. Put the pictures together to form a portrait of praise.
- Going for a walk in a crowded place. Deliberately smile at people and note their response. Why do you think people reacted the way they did?
- Choosing one of your favorite praise psalms or taking Psalm 100 and trying to read it several times in a sad voice. What happens to you when you read a psalm of praise? Write your own praise psalm. If you are going through a difficult time, thank and praise God for the situation you are in.
- Listening to a type of praise music that you normally would not listen to. Pay special attention to the words. Now sing one of your favorite praise songs by yourself.
- Analyzing what your world would be like without electricity, gas, and oil. What power sources would you have left? Now analyze what your life would be like without the powerhouse of praise. What happens when you do not take time to praise God?
- Reading Philippians 4:4, which says rejoice always. Brainstorm how many Bible characters you can think of who praised God in difficult situations. Read their stories. What can you learn?

CONNECT

"Rejoicing in the Lord," *Steps to Christ*, pp. 115–126.
C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*.

Meekness in the Crucible



“ ‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth’ ”
(Matt. 5:5, NIV).

How Much?

INTRODUCTION

Job 1:22

To what extent are we supposed to endure? Can we be sure that what we are enduring is for the sake of the gospel?

An Indian family who had converted to Christianity and raised their children in the Adventist faith faced a crisis. How did they understand their God through their trial?

Their daughter had married a Hindu and had given up her Christian beliefs. Now she followed her husband's beliefs according to his custom. Some time later she gave birth to a beautiful baby boy; however, on dismissal from the hospital they discovered that he was unusually blue. When tests revealed that his arterial connection to the heart was seriously impaired, a team of surgeons operated. Many prayers of intercession by Adventist families took place, and the whole family anxiously waited to see if the operation had been successful.

While the Adventist grandparents were visiting their grandson in the hospital, they received news that their son—who had just the previous year dedicated his life to the Lord by being baptized—had been killed in a car accident. Overcome with the news, the father collapsed. On that same

The family was left with many questions.

afternoon their grandson lost the struggle for life.

The family was left with many questions. Was God not pleased when their son chose a better way of life? Did God not want to prove to a Hindu family what faith in a living God could do?

Among the many questions that confronted this Seventh-day Adventist family, the one which probably stood out the most was: "How do we accept this?"

This is more than a question—it is a state of mind. It calls for reviewing one's relationship with God and a deep understanding of the great controversy. Surely the same question must have plagued Job (Job 6:1–4), John the Baptist (Luke 7:18, 19), Christ on the cross (Matt. 27:32–44), and God Himself when His people deserted Him (Exod. 32:1–14).

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2, NIV).

The Beatitudes as Eschatological Justice

Sunday
December 2

EVIDENCE

Matt. 5:5

"Most Christians assume that *beatitude* refers only to those in the Sermon on the Mount. . . . In fact, the beatitude is a not uncommon literary form in the Hebrew Bible as well as in the New Testament and other contemporaneous literature. It is a short cry of joy, like 'You happy man!'"¹

Similar statements are found in Psalms 1:1; 32:1, 2; 40:4; and 41:1–3; in Proverbs 28:14; in Isaiah 56:2; in Tobit 13:14; in the Wisdom of Solomon 3:14; and in Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus) 14:1, 2, 20; 48:11. Tobit, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Sirach are known as deuterocanonical books—part of a collection of writings not regarded as part of either the Hebrew or the Protestant Christian Bible. They are, however, accepted as Scripture by the Catholic Church. Beatitudes also are found in the Dead Sea scrolls manuscript 4Q525: "Blessed are those who hold fast to its statutes and do not hold fast to the ways of injustice. Ble[ssed] are those who rejoice in it, and do not burst forth on paths of folly. Blessed are those who seek it with pure hands, and do not search for it with a deceitful [hea]rt."²

**Jesus' beatitudes remind us
of our priorities.**

A reading of the beatitudes in the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish literature reveals their concern with the present life.³ In contrast, Jesus' words in Matthew and Luke are primarily concerned with the next life—they look "at what God will do in the future."⁴ "Jesus' beatitudes promise eschatological justice."⁵

Jesus' audience was familiar with beatitudes. What astonished them (Matt. 7:28, 29) was both the subversive content—"Blessed are the meek . . ."—and His emphasis on a future eschatological fulfillment in a promised life to come. Jesus' beatitudes remind us of our priorities: We are to look for ultimate happiness and fulfillment not in this life, but rather in the life to come.

1. Benedict T. Viviano, "Beatitudes Found Among Dead Sea Scrolls," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Nov/Dec 1992, p. 53.

2. Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (Britain: Hodder & Stoughton Publishing House, 1997), pp. 423, 424.

3. Viviano, p. 54.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Christlike Meekness

LOGOS

Exod. 32:1–14; Ps. 62:1–8; Ezek. 24:15–27; Matt. 5:43–48; 1 Pet. 2:18–25

Sacrificial Meekness (Exod. 32:1–14)

Moses had gone to the mountain to receive God's revealed will written on two tablets of stones. The Israelites could not wait any longer for him to return, so they forced Aaron to make a golden calf for them to worship. God warned Moses that the Israelites had sinned, and He threatened to destroy all of them. Moses pleaded with God to destroy his life in the place of the lives of the Israelites. Moses reminded God that He had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Israel that He would make of them a great nation. When God saw the sacrificial meekness of Moses, He reconsidered His decision to destroy the Israelites.

Moses described himself as the meekest man on earth (Num. 12:3). This is a Christlike meekness. Christ gave His life as a sin offering at the cross for the sins of humankind (John 3:16). He invites us not only to receive the gracious gifts of rest and easy yoke, but also to learn meekness from Him (Matt. 11:28–30).

A meek person will stand firm even in the face of peer pressure.

Meekness Is Not Weakness (Exod. 32:1–14)

Exodus 32:1–14 highlights two figures—Moses and Aaron. Moses chooses to lose his life to save the lives of the sinful Israelites. Aaron, however, acceded to their request for a golden calf to worship. Moses expressed meekness, but Aaron expressed weakness. Meekness will not bow or compromise God's principle as Aaron did when put on trial. Meekness is not weakness, but strength. A meek person will stand firm even in the face of peer pressure. Meekness manifests itself in trials or tests. The source and example of meekness is Jesus Christ (Matt. 11:28–30). Meekness is a gift of grace from Jesus Christ.

Meekness in Action (Ps. 62:1–8; Matt. 5:43–48)

David pointed out that sinful people were out to destroy him. They used all kinds of weapons against him, but he chose to make God his Refuge. David had the option of retaliating, but he chose to allow God to be his salvation and place of safety. He chose not only to leave his life in God's hands, but to "Wait calmly for God alone . . . because my hope comes from him" (Ps. 62:5, GW). David was not

just meek; he was also calm despite the attacks of his enemies. The reason for David's calmness is that he had anchored his trust in God (Ps. 62:8).

Christ encourages us not only to remain calm and refrain from harboring a retaliatory spirit but also to engage ourselves in acts of kindness toward those who attack us (Matt. 5:44). He says, "But I tell you this: Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44, GW). He encourages us to move beyond meekness to loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us.

Our motivation for loving and praying for those who mistreat us is that we are following the example of Christ. Christ did not retaliate but forgave all those who mistreated Him at the cross (Luke 23:24). He wants His disciples to follow His example. Peter encourages Christ's followers to be Christlike in dealing with those who are unfair and cruel to them, because doing so is pleasing to God (1 Pet. 2:20).

"The difficulties we have to encounter may be very much lessened by that meekness which hides itself in Christ. If we possess the humility of our Master, we shall rise above the slights, the rebuffs, the annoyances, to which we are daily exposed, and they will cease to cast a gloom over the spirit. The highest evidence of nobility in a Christian is self-control. He who under abuse or cruelty fails to maintain a calm and trustful spirit robs God of His right to reveal in him His own perfection of character. Lowliness of heart is the strength that gives victory to the followers of Christ; it is the token of their connection with the courts above."*

God Humbles the Proud (Ezek. 24:15–27)

Ezekiel warned the worshipers of God who chose to harbor pride in their hearts because of the gracious gift of the holy place, or sanctuary. The Israelites forgot the God of the sanctuary but bragged about their safety, which they based on the sanctuary itself. They forgot that the God of the sanctuary was, and still is, mightier than the sanctuary itself. Thus, God threatened to remove the same sanctuary in order to teach them meekness and trust.

God illustrated His displeasure against the Israelites through the pain Ezekiel was about to experience when He allowed his wife to die. Ezekiel loved his wife deeply, but God had instructed him not to publicly mourn for her. God wanted to use the death of Ezekiel's wife to teach the Israelites to put their faith, not in objects, but in Him. God was about to remove the sanctuary from the Israelites so that they could humbly return to Him—their only source of strength. Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). God wants us to learn about meekness from Jesus in order for us to receive the blessings of meekness. Pride triggers God's displeasure.

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 301.

Accepting the Unacceptable

TESTIMONY

Matt. 5:43-48; 1 Pet. 2:18-25

Even the most seemingly pious Christian often forgets to act in a Christlike manner when wronged. "Far better would it be for us to suffer under false accusation than to inflict upon ourselves the torture of retaliation upon our enemies. The spirit of hatred and revenge originated with Satan, and can bring only evil to him who cherishes it. Lowliness of heart, that meekness which is the fruit of abiding in Christ, is the true secret of blessing. 'He will beautify the meek with salvation.' Psalm 149:4."¹

In our struggle to overcome our self-centered tendencies, we often lose sight of the fact that God is using these situations to refine our characters. "Meekness in the school of Christ is one of the marked fruits of the Spirit. It is a grace wrought by the Holy Spirit as a sanctifier, and enables its possessor at all times to control a rash and impetuous temper. When the grace of meekness is cherished by those who are naturally sour or hasty in disposition, they will put forth the most earnest

efforts to subdue their unhappy temper. Every day they will gain self-control, until that which is unlovely and unlike Jesus is conquered."²

"Lowliness of heart is the strength that gives victory to the followers of Christ. . . ."

Although the world may see humility as a sign of weakness, self-denying meekness actually brings us closer to the powers of heaven. "The difficulties we have to encounter may be very much lessened by that meekness which hides itself in Christ. If we possess the humility of our Master, we shall rise above the slights, the rebuffs, the annoyances, to which we are daily exposed, and they will cease to cast a gloom over the spirit. The highest evidence of nobility in a Christian is self-control. He who under abuse or cruelty fails to maintain a calm and trustful spirit robs God of His right to reveal in him His own perfection of character. Lowliness of heart is the strength that gives victory to the followers of Christ; it is the token of their connection with the courts above."³

1. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 17.

2. *Reflecting Christ*, p. 264.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 301.

The Greatest Commandment

HOW-TO

Matt. 5:5

When challenged by a lawyer from the Pharisees to point out the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments as love for God and love for our fellow human beings (Matt. 22:34–40). Fundamentally, sin is an expression of selfishness: Every transgression of the law arises from loving ourselves more than we love God or our neighbors. The question that naturally arises is How then do we become like Jesus, our ultimate Example of selfless love?

It is humanly impossible to become meek. It clearly goes against the sinful and selfish nature with which we are born. We can't go to a bookstore and find a book titled *Meekness for Dummies*. We need to become *new* creatures in Christ in order to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, which includes meekness (Gal. 5:22–24).

Following are a few suggestions that when practiced *often*, will help you to be more easily impressed by the prompting of the Holy Spirit to exemplify an attitude of meekness:

1. Periodically deny yourself things that you like (sweets or TV, for example) to follow Jesus' command in Matthew 6:24: "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (NRSV).

We cannot go to a bookstore and find a book titled *Meekness for Dummies*.

2. Find ways to become more involved in your church and your community, giving up of your time so that you use your talents to bless others.

3. Pray for your enemies (Matt. 5:44), and give up any ideas about seeking vengeance when wronged. "He who under abuse or cruelty fails to maintain a calm and trustful spirit robs God of His right to reveal in him His own perfection of character."*

4. Study the life of Jesus. After all, He said in Matthew 11:29, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart."

5. Place yourself under His continual influence through prayer (Gal. 5:25).

* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 301.

Where Are the Blessed?

OPINION

Matt. 5:5

With tongue firmly in his cheek, Adrian Barnett reported the following news on his Web site: "In a surprise announcement this morning, it was revealed that the Meek have inherited the Earth. The actual change of ownership itself happened three weeks ago, but the spokesperson for the Meek was too shy to contact the press. . . .

"A representative for the Meek gave us these comments —'As you know, the Earth was promised to us almost 2000 years ago by Jesus Christ himself, during his famous Sermon on the Mount. We have been Blessed for all that time, which was quite nice, but simply had to wait for the momentous event itself.'"

Surely this isn't the type of announcement we expect to see on CNN any time soon. Why is the concept of meekness so foreign to our world today? After all, Christians—we who are to be the meek—make up approximately one-third of the world's population. Should we not have had a greater impact by now?

Our world runs on money and power—and those who have these write the rules for those who have not. Imagine Donald Trump saying on his reality TV show *The Apprentice*, "What I'm really looking for here is meekness." Or how about using meekness as a selling point in your next job interview? That would hardly impress a prospective employer.

Should we not have had a greater impact by now?

The message in most societies of our world today says, "Blessed are the arrogant, the proud, the violent, the powerful; those who dominate and oppress." Quite a contrast to the message of Jesus—"Blessed are the meek."

Meekness is so far from the mainstream values of our self-centered consumer culture that it could be considered subversive. And like any subversive movement, those who espouse meekness are often misunderstood or even actively persecuted. In this way, then, first-century Mediterranean culture was not so distant from our own. It too was materialistic and self-centered, and it also persecuted those who threatened the comfortable status quo. In Acts 17:6 the early Christians were charged with "turn[ing] the world upside down." Their preaching of a God who loves and blesses the marginalized was seen as threatening the very foundations of their society, as turning it upside down.

Jesus said that the meek would be blessed. Where then are the blessed today?

* Adrian Barnett, "Earth Inherited by Meek," <http://www.abarnett.demon.co.uk/atheism/meek.html>.

Meek Is Good— Jesus Said So

EXPLORATION

Matt. 5:5; John 13:1–17

CONCLUDE

A few years ago a sportswear manufacturer was selling a T-shirt that read “The meek may inherit the earth, but they won’t get the ball.” The concept of meekness seems so out of place in our competitive society, and describing someone as “meek” is unlikely to be considered a compliment. But Jesus continually proclaimed—and demonstrated—a different way of measuring life and judging success. In the kingdom of God, perhaps “getting the ball” just isn’t that important. Jesus was talking about a different kind of strength—a strength embodied in humility.

CONSIDER

- Creating a work of visual art—painting, drawing, collage, sculpture—to express or portray meekness.
- Watching some or all of the film *Forrest Gump*. Discuss how well this film might portray meekness.
- Reading the Russian novel *The Idiot*, by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Engage in a book club–type discussion themed on this portrayal of meekness.
- Participating in or organizing a foot-washing ceremony in the context of a Communion service, focusing particularly on John 13:1–17.
- Organizing a sporting match (pick whatever sport is popular in your region) in which the aim is to help the other team win. Explore as a group whether there is a way the sport could work, or the rules could be modified, for this to make sense.
- Writing someone a letter, letting them know that you admire their meekness. Make clear in your letter that you mean this in the best possible way, and remind them of the beatitude in Matthew 5:5.

CONNECT

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, chaps. 6–9.

Waiting in the Crucible



"But the fruit of the Spirit is . . . patience" (Gal. 5:22, NIV).

How Long?

INTRODUCTION

Rev. 6:10

When you live in Los Angeles, as I do, waiting is a regular part of everyday life. When I first moved here, I would sit for an hour in traffic that barely moved and stew about how long it was taking, expending immense amounts of energy on something over which I had absolutely no control. What shocked me, about a week into this routine, was the relative calm on the faces of my fellow commuters. Whether they were listening to the radio or talking to others in their car, they appeared calm—almost serene. I watched this in amazement for a few weeks until it finally hit me—these folks have learned to wait. They've mastered a skill that comes largely from accepting what they cannot change.

I don't commute much anymore because I live just two miles from my office. But the lessons I learned during those early weeks come back to me any time I have to venture out into the wasteland of the Los Angeles freeway system. Waiting is learned.

Throughout Scripture we encounter these two poignant words of lament: *How long?* We find these words on the lips of Job in the middle of his suffering: " 'When I lie down I think, 'How long before I get up?' The night drags on, and I toss till dawn' " (Job 7:4, NIV).

We also hear this cry in the book of Revelation. There, all those who have suffered for the gospel beg for an answer to this question. How long, O Lord, will we have to wait in our suffering? How long until justice has the last word?

Most of us in the developed countries of the world know very little of real deprivation and suffering. But we experience hardship and pain nonetheless. Our families suffer broken relationships. We lose jobs, and we struggle financially, emotionally, and relationally. The hardest thing to hear in the midst of our suffering is the word "Wait." But during these times waiting is what we learn to do.

Just as southern California drivers learn to wait, productively, in traffic (listening to books on CD or talking on the phone), so we must learn to wait productively as Christians. God has graciously given us tools to help us learn the art of waiting well. The Sabbath is one such tool that can teach us how to wait. The example and experience of spiritual companions can also help us learn to be patient in the crucible of life's trials. If we can learn this, we will discover that patience produces the type of character that God needs in our world (Rom. 5:3, 4).

Waiting is learned.

Delightfully Waiting for Christ's Righteousness

LOGOS

1 Samuel 26; Ps. 37:1–11; Rom. 5:3–5; 15:4, 5

The Temptation of Impatience (1 Samuel 26)

It's tempting to be impatient—to take matters into our own hands. When circumstances seem to present themselves in our favor, we sometimes try to run ahead of the Lord. This could certainly be said of David. Anointed at a very young age to be the next king of Israel, he spent his adolescent and young-adult years waiting for the Lord to place him in that position. It took longer than he expected.

Saul didn't like the idea that David was to replace him, so he tried to end the young man's life. He commissioned whole military campaigns, consisting of thousands of soldiers, to pursue the would-be king.

On two such occasions Saul found himself at the young man's mercy. David had the perfect opportunity to end Saul's life right then and there and take the throne that had been promised him. David's men reminded him of this. No doubt he was tempted to "help" the Lord. He was up-and-coming. He had been waiting for years

to fill the position God had anointed him to fill. The people loved him! He was their military hero! Surely this was his opportunity to finally fulfill the job for which God had ordained him.

**The people loved him! He
was their military hero!**

After all, what were the chances Saul would be sleeping at the exact same place David was hiding? No doubt Providence had led him there. But David's faith brought him back to reality. This wasn't God's idea. It wasn't his time. To the chagrin of his followers, David replied, "The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed" (1 Sam. 26:11, NKJV).

Waiting on the Lord (Ps. 37:1–11)

Although David wasn't perfect in his faith (he sought refuge with the Philistines a short time later), he certainly shows us the righteousness of waiting on the Lord.

We don't know when he wrote Psalm 37, but we can conclude that the spirit of the chapter correlates with David's mind-set in his situation with Saul. "Trust in the Lord, and do good" (Ps. 37:3, NKJV). Thus he tells us that while we are to trust in the Lord, we are not to sit around moping, upset that God hasn't yet fulfilled His promises to us. While we trust, we are to "do good."

He solidifies this idea when he writes in the next verse, "Delight yourself also in

the Lord" (NKJV). Our English word "delight" doesn't do justice to what David means here. He literally tells us to "take exquisite delight in the Lord." This is really the ultimate goal of the Christian experience—to have such an experience with God, that we take pleasure in Him. As we wait for God to move, we shouldn't spend our time lusting after the things He has promised us. Oftentimes the exact thing God wants to give us becomes an idol to us.

But David simply tells us to "delight." Though the result of delighting in the Lord is that God "shall give you the desires of your heart" (verse 4, NKJV), we do not delight in Him simply to get our own way. We don't delight in the Lord so that He will give us a new car or the job we've always wanted. We delight in Him because He is good.

When we delightfully wait on the Lord, He will fulfill our deepest desires because they are His desires as well. When our hearts are joined to Him, we can be assured that His desires and our desires do not exclude one another. Thus David continues, "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (Ps. 37:5, NKJV). In the Hebrew, David emphasizes that it is God who will bring it to pass. While we are tempted to take matters into our own hands, David reminds us that God Himself will bring it to pass.

The Real Goal of Waiting (Rom. 5:3–5)

While many of us have fantasies about grandiose achievements or getting what we want, David reveals the true goal of trusting and waiting on the Lord. Sometimes this goal gets lost in our human pursuits. He writes, "He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday" (Ps. 37:6, NKJV).

To trust in the Lord is not simply to get what we want or to have our own way. God's ultimate desire for us is that His righteousness will be reflected in our lives as brightly as the sun shines at noon. He desires, above all else, to have a people who have responded to Him by faith and who reflect His loving character to an on-looking world. There are millions dying each day, desperate to understand what God is truly like. We have the privilege of shining forth brightly as His representatives.

As Paul reminds us, "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:5, NKJV). We see that love on Calvary. Our hearts are compelled to respond, to wait patiently on the Lord as He fashions us into the loving people He desires us to be.

Becoming One With Christ in Suffering

TESTIMONY

Psalm 22

"Behold the cross, and the Victim uplifted upon it. . . . Christ bore our sins in His own body. That suffering, that agony, is the price of your redemption. The bitter cup was apportioned to us to drink. Our sins mingled it. But our dear Savior took the cup from our lips and drank it Himself, and in its stead He presents to us a cup of . . . salvation. We cannot measure how much deeper our afflictions would have been, how much greater our woes, had not Jesus encircled us with His human arm of sympathy and love, and lifted us up."¹

In order for us to comprehend our own suffering, we must identify more fully with the sufferings of Christ and, in a sense, become one with Him. David, the man after God's own heart, had entered into this type of relationship with Christ. In Psalm 22 he becomes one with Christ on the cross. He was poured out like water. He feels abandoned by both people and God; and in a desperate final plea, he asks for deliverance. David ends this psalm with a promise: "I will tell of your name

to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you" (Ps. 22:22, NRSV).

He now can praise God with a deeper, fuller appreciation for the redemption that cost the life of His Son. David was lifted up higher than human effort could ever accomplish

because he accepted the gift of suffering and because he embraced the love that poured forth for him personally. This experience is to be ours.

"When we see Jesus, a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, working to save the lost, slighted, scorned, derided, driven from city to city till His mission was accomplished; when we behold Him in Gethsemane, sweating great drops of blood, and on the cross dying in agony—when we see this, self will no longer clamor to be recognized. Looking unto Jesus, we shall be ashamed of our coldness, our lethargy, our self-seeking. We shall be willing to be anything or nothing, so that we may do heart service for the Master. We shall rejoice to bear the cross after Jesus, to endure trial, shame, or persecution for His dear sake."²

**"Looking unto Jesus, we
shall be ashamed of our . . .
self-seeking."**

1. *The Faith I Live By*, p. 97.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 255.

The Apparent Prosperity of the Wicked

Tuesday
December 11

EVIDENCE

Ps. 37:1–6

Forged in the crucible of trials, sufferings, and injustices, and tempered with joy, relief, and vindication, the psalms reflect the passions and concerns of the human heart. Written close to 3,000 years ago, Psalm 37, which calls us to have an expectant hope in the Lord despite injustices and suffering, is as relevant now as when it was first written. Penned when David was in his old age (vs. 25), it reflects the mature judgment of a man who had experienced more than his share of life's inequities. To aid in memorization, David wrote it as an acrostic—every other verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

In this psalm David addresses the issue of how God's people should relate to the apparent prosperity of the wicked. Evildoers carry out their wicked plans, have an abundance of material goods, and seem to lack nothing. They lay plans against the righteous and carry out these plans. How should God's people respond to this situation? The evil in the world seems overwhelming. It continues to strengthen and grow. God's people are tempted to feel abandoned.

God does not respond to the world's arrogance and violence with more arrogance and violence. He does not respond to oppression and injustice with more oppression or injustice. He responds with vulnerability, compassion, and a "weakness" that reveals His true power (2 Cor. 13:4). Thus He calls us to trust Him, despite all outward events.

**How should God's people
relate to evildoers?**

Three times the psalmist exhorts us to "not fret" (Ps. 37:1, 7, 8, NKJV). Using the singular form of the verb, David thus speaks to us individually. Instead of pointless worry and angst, he calls us to trust in the unfailing goodness of the Lord. Anxiety over the prosperity of the wicked will lead only to evil itself (Ps. 37:8). David tells us that though injustice currently appears to have the upper hand, it is only a temporary triumph.

Ultimately God will bring forth a righteous and just world. Then, those who have believed in God's unchangeable goodness and love will see the fulfillment of His promises. They will dwell with Him in righteousness forever (Ps. 37:29). Even now the "little" that God's people have is better than the abundance of the ungodly. This is so because God's presence continually and characteristically sustains the righteous (Ps. 37:16, 17).

How to Rejoice in Pain and Suffering

HOW-TO

Phil. 1:29; 1 Pet. 4:12, 13

1. *Our Natural Obsession: Avoiding Pain.* We naturally avoid pain, both physical and psychological. An avoidance reaction toward physical pain is considered the only rational option. We tend to believe the same is true of social, emotional, and spiritual suffering: We should avoid it at all costs. To welcome it is considered irrational. However, the Word seems to suggest a disturbing alternative perspective.

2. *A Biblical Paradox: Embracing Pain.* "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4:12, 13, NKJV).

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29, NKJV).

3. *God's Need: Our Fellowship in Suffering.* God has suffered more than any other being in the universe. And His suffering continues in the present. The Almighty has never exercised His power simply to avoid that which we so earnestly seek to avoid. And He needs us to enter into His pain.

**He needs us to enter into
His pain.**

4. *"The Highest Honor": Suffering.* "God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as coworkers with Him. Not Enoch, who was translated to heaven, not Elijah, who ascended in a chariot of fire, was greater or more honored than John the Baptist, who perished alone in the dungeon. 'Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake' (Phil. 1:29). And of all the gifts that Heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor."*

* *Conflict and Courage*, p. 278.

And Still We're Surprised

OPINION

Ps. 37:7, 8

Recently, in the course of only one week, I received a total of five phone calls and e-mails from friends in distress over serious crises in their lives. Each situation had come up suddenly, and each person was taken by surprise. These crises ran the gamut of physical, mental, emotional, and relational traumas. Each crisis appeared to be a blatant attack from our common enemy. As we talked and prayed, several friends frankly revealed that they had not spent personal time with the Lord in weeks.

Ephesians 6:12 tells us that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (NKJV). Even though we may understand this verse clearly, and most likely have experienced firsthand the reality of it, many of us still live our lives expecting to awaken each morning in the Garden of Eden, rather than in the bloody, war-torn reality of our fallen planet. And even if we do not see any physical war in our neighborhoods, the spiritual war is hot and as inescapable as the air we breathe.

Many of us still live our lives expecting to awaken each morning in the Garden of Eden.

Resting in the Lord is not the same as waiting with fear and dread for the next assault of the enemy, nor is it living with our heads in the sand. We will never be able to rest in the Lord, waiting patiently for Him, if we are constantly being surprised by the reality that we have an enemy whose purpose is to destroy us. We cannot wait patiently for Him unless we are truly resting in Him. We cannot rest in Him unless we actually do just that! Spending time with the Lord daily, wrapped in the stillness of His grace and His unfathomable sacrifice, lifts us into His presence. In His presence we are able to truly "cease from anger, and forsake wrath" (Ps. 37:8, NKJV) And only from God's presence can we begin to grasp the advice not to fret, because it only causes harm. In His presence only, even in the midst of personal trauma, can we experience the peace "which transcends all understanding" (Phil. 4:7, NIV).

Life Will Never Be OK— But I Will

EXPLORATION

Phil. 4:7; Matt. 26:39

CONCLUDE

This life will *never* be OK—but by God's mercy we will *always* be OK. Waiting patiently for God means relaxing peacefully into His presence—letting His comfort (and the Comforter) insulate us from our senseless anxiety. It means shutting off all our demands and relying on His timetable instead of trying to make Him conform to ours. In His presence *only*, regardless of external events, we absorb “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding” (Phil. 4:7, NIV). The only way to win in suffering is by becoming one with Christ.

CONSIDER

- Making a poster board “thermometer” showing your feelings in painful times—from mad at God for waking up alive to praising Him for the gift of life and the honor of serving Him. Frame your thermometer with a symbol of God's unchanging love, such as a cross.
- Memorizing a familiar hymn from your childhood that reflects this week's theme.
- Wrapping yourself in God's peace by making a white blanket from soft material.
- Requesting God to send particular angels to help you in specific ways—for example, the wilderness-certified Master Guide angels to help you through a particularly dangerous experience. If you're artistic, draw or sketch your idea of these angels.
- Surveying groups by age, gender, health status, and occupation. Ask these groups this question: “True or False? Pain is inevitable; suffering is optional.” Graph the results. Note personal responses from any who wishes to share scriptures or other reasons for their answers.
- Asking friends to share with you humorous anecdotes from their life that illustrate God's perfect plans—in spite of themselves!

CONNECT

Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *The Gift of Pain: The Gift No One Wants*; C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*; Edith Schaeffer, *Affliction: A Compassionate Look at the Reality of Pain and Suffering*.

Dying Like a Seed



“ ‘I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds’ ” (John 12:24, NIV).

A Seed's Life

INTRODUCTION

John 12:24

Have you ever tried to imagine yourself as something other than what you are? A bird, for instance, soaring on a draft high above a mesa? Or a tree sinking your roots deep into the earth, searching for moisture that will sustain your foliage? Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be lightning flashing between heaven and earth? Or what about a drop of rain running down a child's nose?

Can you imagine what it would be like to be a seed? Maybe in a packet of other seeds to begin with, all comfy and cozy with your friends and colleagues surrounding you? Imagine all of a sudden your package is torn open—you're dumped out and tumble head over heels into a dark hole that will be your home for the next several days at least. Probably there's water poured over you in your dark bed, and maybe over the next several days you feel a few minor earthquakes in the vicinity of your new home (don't worry, it's just the gardener pulling weeds).

And then something starts to happen. You're losing your svelte figure, you feel yourself beginning to swell, and then

**All of a sudden you're
about to burst.**

all of a sudden you're about to burst. Something feral fractures your facade, and you're suddenly, forcefully pushing toward the surface.

Pushing out of the darkness, reach-

ing for the sun in a way you could never have managed when you were all closed up tight as a clam—or a seed.

Those roots you've kept deep in the earth are drinking in the morning dew, nourishing the unfurling of your tender green leaves. You stretch and stretch, and reach for the sun, all the while feeling the soil feeding your protoplasm—the nutrients necessary to encourage enlargement.

What kind of seed did you imagine you were? A vegetable seed that grows into something that nourishes an entire family? A flower seed that brightens someone's life? Or an acorn that grows into a mighty oak that provides oxygen?

Now imagine you're a Christian. Are you dormant, or bursting out of your shell? Sinking your roots deep into the soil of God's Word, or living on the surface? Soaking up the Son, or living in the shade of denial? Are you budding or decomposing?

As you study this week's lesson, I hope you'll dig up the answers to some of these questions.

Die Like a Seed

EVIDENCE

John 12:24

Wheat is frequently mentioned in the Bible, first in Genesis 30:14, when Reuben finds mandrakes during the wheat harvest. Biblical stories mentioning wheat include Gideon secretly threshing wheat (Judg. 6:11), Ruth gleaning wheat in Boaz's fields (Ruth 2:23), Solomon giving wheat to Hiram (1 Kings 5:11), Solomon comparing his true love's belly to a "heap of wheat" (Song of Sol. 7:2), Jesus telling parables about a farmer who had a bumper crop of wheat (Matt. 3:12), and about an enemy planting weeds among the wheat (Matt. 13:25–30). Almost everyone listening to Jesus was knowledgeable about wheat.

However, most of us today are not knowledgeable about wheat growing. So we have a hard time understanding the idea of a "dead seed" producing many new seeds. Dead is dead, isn't it? In 1 Corinthians 15:31 Paul states that he dies daily. Obviously Paul's daily death is spiritual rather than physical in nature. He died to self just as Jesus did (Phil. 2:5–9), in order to grow. The grain of wheat must cease being a grain of wheat in order to grow, just as our sinful, selfish natures must "die" in order that we may grow in Christ.

**God expects "many seeds"
from each of us!**

The memory text is scary if we believe that all we have to do is repent and believe in order to meet our obligation to God. According to this text, God also expects "many seeds" from each of us!

I don't think it's just a coincidence that Jesus chose a grain of wheat for His example. A brief Google search for articles on wheat* yielded the following information:

- Each grain of wheat produces a plant with one to three stalks.
- Each stalk produces one head of wheat.
- Each head contains 30 to 75 grains of wheat.
- Each grain of wheat that reaches full growth has the capacity to produce from 30 to 225 grains, depending on the type of wheat and growing conditions. This certainly qualifies as "many seeds."

* "The Structure and Function of the Expressed Portion of the Wheat Genomes," <http://wheat.pw.usda.gov/NSF/?educationframe.html>.

Powerless Submission Versus Empowering Submission

LOGOS

1 Sam. 2:12–3:18; 13:1–14; Zechariah 4; Rom. 12:1, 2; Phil. 2:5–9

Times were hard in the days of Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas. These priests were to protect and guide their people. Instead, they made harsh demands on those who depended on them. They did so in the name of God, adding guilt to fear. The people felt powerless. They felt they had no other option but to submit to the corruption of worship demanded of them. The child Samuel was left in the hands of these dangerous men. But he kept serving the Lord in this temple environment. In this place where people came to sense God's presence, fear reigned. Women who assisted in the worship service were being seduced. We can only imagine how intimidated Samuel felt while following the instructions of these corrupt men.

Eli may have kept his eye on the boy, protecting him as much as possible from his sons. Hopefully, what little, flickering strength of character Eli still possessed was a guiding light to Samuel. His mother could only hope for the best as she looked forward to seeing him once a year.

**Success would be won, not
by force, but by God's Spirit.**

Hannah must have missed her son and felt some comfort imagining that he would one day communicate a truer picture of God to the people. Meanwhile God appointed someone to give Eli and his sons a reality check.

Innocent Submission (1 Sam. 3:1–18)

Consider the willingness of Samuel, growing up under the leadership of these degenerate priests, who did not teach him to love God. The very act of worship they had corrupted was supposed to be the enactment of salvation for the people. How could God communicate salvation with His people under such conditions?

Samuel's innocent submission speaks to our hearts as he responds to the call of his name time after time by going to Eli, thinking he was the source of wisdom and guidance. Finally Samuel is directed to the only One who can model true leadership. Finally he communicates with God Himself.

God's pronouncement of judgment on Eli and his household must have been liberating to the boy who had grown up under their control. Encountering God for the first time in his life must have been very reassuring, but a trace of the old fear remains. Samuel avoids Eli by going into the sanctuary to obediently perform his

duties. Eli interrupts him by demanding to know what God said. Eli projects his own brute force onto God by saying that God will strike Samuel dead if he leaves anything out. Eli receives the undiluted report from a child in the role of a servant.

From that point on, God Himself was Samuel's Mentor. Samuel grew up to be the prophet he was meant to be, and all of Israel could see God's authority in him.

Manipulative Submission (1 Sam. 13:1–14)

Many years later Samuel is again faced with speaking out against the corruption of worship. This time he has the courage to speak out against King Saul's manipulation of a peace offering. Saul had used a form of worship to promote and protect himself, instead of waiting for Samuel to come and perform the sacrifice in the correct way. Again, misrepresentation of God to the people must be stopped, and Samuel is the one to show true leadership.

Empowering Submission (Zech. 4:1–14; Rom. 12:1, 2; Phil. 2:5–9)

Another servant of God was awakened from a sleeplike condition. Zechariah was asked to describe what he saw. He rubbed his eyes and listed sacred objects much like those Samuel had tended as a child growing up in the sanctuary. Like Samuel, Zechariah needed courage to deliver a report. Success would be won, not by force, but by God's Spirit. Unlike Saul, we must wait for God to act, rather than take matters into our own hands. Zechariah saw the source of God's Spirit in the symbolism of the sanctuary. Oil is the symbolic source of light that helps us to see God's character more clearly.

The history of Israel had repeatedly shown that the type of force exhibited by Hophni and Phinehas would be laid low. The Lord's house would be rebuilt by God's Spirit, the same spirit shown by a small child's willingness to obey and to lead others in true worship.

Samuel's understanding of God's will was badly distorted by those who were meant to lead him, but he came to the point of communicating with God directly. Paul advises us to determine what God really desires, looking past the corrupted versions of truth in our time. Thus, we discover what worship is meant to be. Because we have learned of God's compassion firsthand, we are inspired to praise and honor Him. Worship becomes a willing act of gratitude.

Christ Himself showed us the way. He came to rebuild the worship of God on this planet, damaged by thousands of years of corruption. Out of the rubble Christ restored in our hearts and minds an understanding of what it means to "worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (Rev. 14:7) by His willingness to become a servant.

To All Appearances, *Lost!*

TESTIMONY

John 12:24

"By the casting of the grain into the soil, Christ represents the sacrifice of Himself for our redemption. 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die,' He says, 'it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.' John 12:24. So the death of Christ will result in fruit for the kingdom of God. In accordance with the law of the vegetable kingdom, life will be the result of His death.

"And all who would bring forth fruit as workers together with Christ must first fall into the ground and die. The life must be cast into the furrow of the world's need. Self-love, self-interest, must perish. But the law of self-sacrifice is the law of self-preservation. The seed buried in the ground produces fruit, and in turn this is planted. Thus the harvest is multiplied. The husbandman preserves his grain by casting it away. So in human life, to give is to live. The life that will be preserved is the life that is freely given in service to God and man. Those who for Christ's sake sacrifice their life in this world, will keep it unto life eternal."

"The grain of wheat that preserves its own life can produce no fruit."

"Those who till the soil have the illustration ever before them. Year by year man preserves his supply of grain by apparently throwing away the choicest part. For a time it must be hidden under the furrow, to be watched over by the Lord. Then appears the blade, then the ear, and

then the corn in the ear. But this development cannot take place unless the grain is buried out of sight. . . . lost.

"The seed buried in the ground produces fruit, and in turn this is planted. Thus the harvest is multiplied. So the death of Christ on the cross of Calvary will bear fruit unto eternal life. The contemplation of this sacrifice will be the glory of those who, as the fruit of it, will live through the eternal ages.

"The grain of wheat that preserves its own life can produce no fruit. It abides alone. Christ could, if He chose, save Himself from death. But should He do this, He must abide alone. He could bring no sons and daughters to God. Only by yielding up His life could He impart life to humanity. Only by falling into the ground to die could He become the seed of that vast harvest."²

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 86.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 623.

How to Die and Multiply

HOW-TO

Matt. 28:19, 20; John 12:24

No one wants to die. No one wants to give up their free will. We like to think of ourselves as independent and capable of almost anything. We are told that we must "have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) or we must always think WWJD (what would Jesus do?). We are also told to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19, 20).

In our daily lives it is easy to lose contact with our Creator. We get so busy just living and doing what we think is right that we forget God has a plan for us and that it starts with dying to self. This is the way we multiply and make disciples.

Now, how do we go about dying and multiplying?

1. *Be willing to turn our lives over to God.* First of all, we have to want to turn our lives over to Him. Praying in the morning that we want God's will to be done in our lives and then forgetting about it the rest of the day will not work. We must think about our purpose in life throughout the day and pray for guidance.

2. *Don't sweat the small stuff.* Trials will come. They always do. Things may not go as we planned. Relationships matter, so we should treat others as God treats us. We must be willing to forgive the mistakes of others.

3. *Follow His lead.* How do we know where He is leading? That's a tough question. Prayer is a good way to start. Heeding the advice of godly people is another way. We should look for ways to serve others as Jesus did. We should discern God's will in Scripture.

4. *See the big picture.* The big picture is that God loves us, and therefore we must love others. Showing the love of Christ to others is the perfect way to start the process of making disciples. Our actions speak louder than our words. We must not just preach. We should live our lives in accordance with God's will. Evidence of multiplying (making disciples) may not be seen immediately. For example, our Vacation Bible School each year may not produce disciples till many years later.

**Our actions speak louder
than our words.**

REACT

1. When you have many choices before you, such as which school to attend, which job to take, or whom to marry, how can you know God's will for your life?

2. How do you keep from becoming discouraged when things don't go as planned even when you are sure it is God's will?

Pushing Up Daisies

OPINION

Phil. 2:8

Have you ever heard the expression “pushing up daisies”? “Daisies and other flowers of the field have figured large in a number of botanical images of death and burial. Daisy imagery, like the flower itself, seems to be the commonest and to have originated with the expression ‘to turn one’s toes to the daisies’ (to decay).”^{*} But to produce those cheery daisies topside, one has to evolve into fertilizer below. The human body, broken down by time, temperature, and elements, eventually serves to nourish new life. The seed analogy comes full circle.

Christ humbled Himself and became obedient even in the face of death. His body was not in the tomb long enough to benefit any plant matter, but His example, His sacrifice, touched all creation.

I recently attended the funeral of a classmate’s wife. They had four children. The woman was only in her early forties. She was loved. She was needed. She was gone. But in her place were 2,000 mourners testifying of the difference she had

made in their lives. Of course you can then multiply exponentially by the witness those mourners bore of her life to others. She had known she was going to die, yet she submitted her life to God without reser-

**She was loved. She was
needed. She was gone.**

vation. Is she pushing up daisies? She sure is. And roses and hyacinths and tulips and . . . How do we get to that place in our lives?

Christ has to be so important to us that we would be willing to suffer and die for Him. However, these are not pointless sacrifices. God can and does bring blessings out of our adversity. Often we are not the recipient of the blessings. We may not figure out who is, or even live to contemplate it. But that’s the job of a seed—to be used as the gardener sees fit.

Here’s some good news. You don’t have to make the ultimate sacrifice to propagate. You can die daily (1 Cor. 15:31). By doing so, you yield your will and witnessing potential to Christ for His glory every day, rain or shine. However it happens—and if you love the Lord, it *will* happen—know that your seeds, timid as they may be, have power.

^{*}Judith S. Neaman and Carole G. Silver, *Wordsworth Book of Euphemism* (Hertfordshire, United Kingdom: Wordsworth Editions, Ltd., 1995).

Dying to Live

EXPLORATION

John 12:24

CONCLUDE

The Pilgrims were starving and had only a small amount of seeds left. It would have been easy to eat these seeds in order to satisfy their hunger. But only by planting the seeds and letting them die could they reap a harvest that would save their lives. This same principle applies to our spiritual lives. We must die to self before being reborn in Christ. This might take a dark time of "death" or trial when we learn to trust in God. As we grow in Him, devotion for God will show in our loving care for our fellow human beings. In this way we die unselfishly daily and are brought forth to new life. We have been used as the Gardener sees fit.

CONSIDER

- Finding five Bible texts that talk about seeds and the rebirth experience. Memorize one of them.
- Writing on a plain piece of paper the Bible verse that portrays your conversion experience. Decorate this paper with symbols of your conversion.
- Making a salad, or a loaf of bread, using seeds. Share it with a person who may need some spiritual rejuvenation. Pray with them.
- Writing out a mission statement that expresses your desires for service for God. In what ways do you think God might be able to use you? Are you willing to be used by God? If not, why not?
- Reading *The Desire of Ages*, page 668. How is rebirth a part of our daily activities?
- Interviewing several church members with the question, What does it mean to die daily?

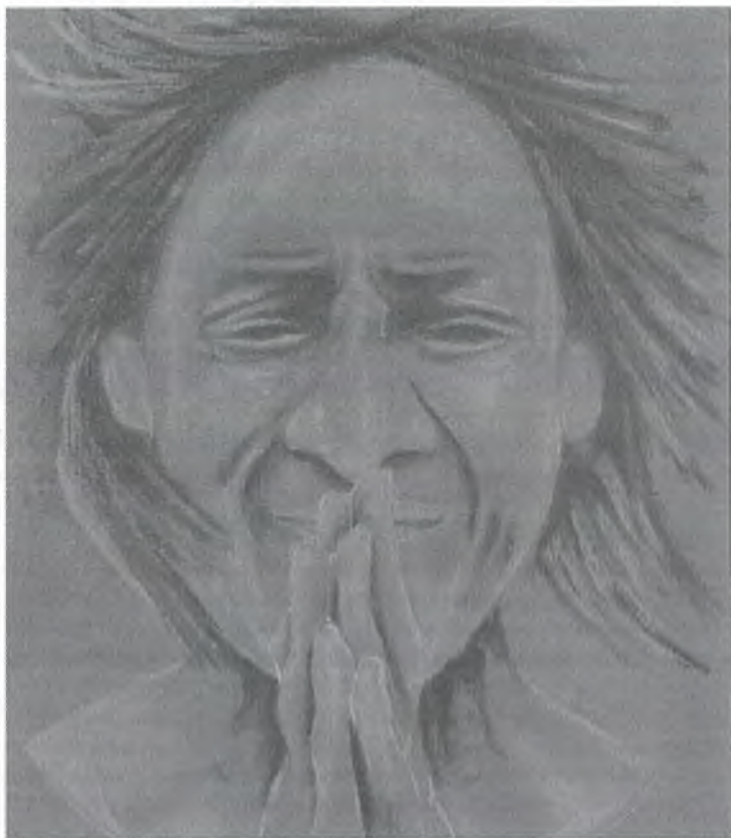
CONNECT

Matthew 13.

Education, pp. 102–112.

Philip G. Samaan, *Christ's Way to Spiritual Growth*; Barbara Folkenburg with Eileen E. Lantry, *Falling in Love With Jesus*.

Christ in the Crucible



“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ ”
(Matt. 27:46, NKJV).

Oh, God! Why Me?

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 27:46; Luke 22:41–44

In the midst of the movie *The Hiding Place* there is a scene set in the Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany. Corrie ten Boom and her sister, Betsy, are there, along with ten thousand other women, in horrible, hideous conditions. They are gathered with some of the women in the barracks in the midst of the beds. They are all cold, hungry, and lice-ridden, but Betsy is leading a Bible class. One of the other women calls out derisively from her bunk, mocking their worship of God. They fall into a conversation with her, and she asks the question that is so frequently flung at Christians: “If your God is such a good God, why does He allow this kind of suffering?” Dramatically she then tears off the bandages and old rags that bind her hands, displaying her broken, mangled fingers, and says, “I’m the first violinist of the symphony orchestra. Did your God will this?”

For a moment no one answers. Then Corrie steps to the side of her sister and says, “We can’t answer that question. All we know is that our God came to this earth, and became one of us, and he suffered with us and was crucified and died. And that he did it for love.”*

“If your God is such a good God, why does He allow this kind of suffering?”

Sometimes when we experience our personal crucible—an occasion of severe trial, such as that endured by the women at Ravensbrück—we cry out in despair, “Why me, Lord?” However, when we struggle with the issue of suffering, it is well that we should recall Jesus’ turmoil in Gethsemane amid the deep shadows of the olive trees—His loneliness, prayers, and disappointment with His disciples; His bloody sweat; the traitor’s kiss. Then there is the awful road to the cross and the cross itself—the binding, the blow in the face, the spitting, the buffeting, the mocking, the scourging, the crown of thorns, the exhaustion and collapse, the stripping, the impaling, the jeers of His foes, the flight of His friends, the darkness, His thirst, and His being forsaken of God.

And He did it for love.

This week we focus on Jesus—His life of tests and trials, and the lessons we can learn from Him as we face our own sufferings.

*Michael P. Green, ed., *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), p. 365.

Christ in the Crucible

LOGOS

Matt. 2:1–18; 27:51, 52; Luke 2:7, 22–24; 22:41–44; John 8:58, 59; Rom. 6:23; Titus 1:2

Two Motives for Seeking the Christ (Matt. 2:1–18)

The Scriptures tell us that anyone wanting to find God must first accept that He exists and “that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). The Magi—pagans, strangers to the environs of Jerusalem, and motivated by the search for truth—inquired where the Christ-child was to be born so that they might “worship him” (Matt. 2:2). Their searching was rewarded in the courts of Herod, when the chief priests and teachers of the law told them to look toward Bethlehem. Then armed with the strength of the Word of God and a miraculous celestial light, they found the King they were seeking and worshiped Him and gave Him gifts.

Herod, motivated by his own self-interest, sent the Magi out as his agents (Matt. 2:8, NKJV). We discover that Herod’s motivation for seeking the young King was not

How often would He have gathered them and given them eternal life, but they would not allow it.

so that he might worship Him, but so that he could maintain his power base. “Crowned heads cannot endure to think of successors, much less of rivals; and therefore nothing less than the blood of this infant king will satisfy him; and he will not give himself liberty to think that, if this newborn child should be indeed the

Messiah, in opposing him, or making any attempts upon him, he would be found fighting against God.”¹ The awful solution that he devised—the murder of harmless infants—proved insufficient to thwart the will of God to save humankind.

The Crucible of Truth (John 8:58, 59)

We expect many times that truth, whether known or newly revealed, will always be greeted with thanks. Some truths, however, are greeted with anger, violence, and hatred toward those that express the truths. Notice the conflict and the victory in John 8:58, 59. Jesus met an angry reaction when He revealed a great truth to the people of His day. “I am” in the Greek language is *ego eimi*. When it is used in the absolute sense, as it is in verse 58, it represents a claim to divinity by Jesus. This was also how the Jews understood it. However, it was not how they accepted it.² Thus, they picked up stones to cast at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and escaped.

Once more, His hour had not yet come, and their fury proved impotent. The crisis of His ministry in Jerusalem was approaching. How often would He have gathered them and given them eternal life, but they would not allow it (Matt. 23:37).

Jesus in the Crucible of Gethsemane (Luke 22:41–44)

Isaiah 53:4, 5 gives us some insight into the terrible anguish that Jesus experienced in Gethsemane: “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him” (NKJV). As the weight of the “iniquity of us all” (verse 6) pressed down on Him, Jesus said, “‘Father, if it is Your will, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done’ ” (Luke 22:42, NKJV).

“This was the language of that innocent dread of suffering which, being really and truly man, he could not but have in his nature. That he, knowing it to be his Father’s will that he should suffer and die, and that, as the matter was now settled, it was necessary for our redemption and salvation, presently withdrew that petition, did not insist upon it, but resigned himself to his heavenly Father’s will: ‘Nevertheless not my will be done, not the will of my human nature, but the will of God.’ ”³

The Ripped Veil (Matt. 27:51, 52)

“The veil. That is, the curtain that separated the holy place from the most holy. . . . Access to the most holy place was restricted to the high priest, and he could enter but once a year. The rending of the veil, and the consequent exposure of the heretofore sacrosanct place, was Heaven’s signal that the typical service had ended—type had met antitype. This occurred at the hour of the regular evening sacrifice, as the priest was about to slay the lamb of the daily burnt offering. The time was probably about 2:30 in the afternoon, or about the ‘ninth hour’ according to Jewish reckoning.”⁴

The Promises of God (Rom. 6:23; Titus 1:2)

John 3:16 is probably the most well-known verse in the Bible and the verse that is most often scrawled on highways, billboards, and signs at sporting events. Romans 6:23 places the promise of eternal life in another perspective and relates it to our individual responsibility in appropriating the promise of God. Be assured that this “revelation is as reliable as the unchangeable nature of God.”⁵

1. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 1615.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 994.

3. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 1903.

4. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 550.

5. *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 359.

Pain With a Purpose

TESTIMONY

1 Pet. 4:12, 13

When we are going through pain and trials, how can we have confidence in God's plan? We must first understand that "as long as the great controversy between Christ and Satan rages over the souls of men the Christian may expect a variety of tests and problems designed by Satan to destroy his faith in God."¹

"The very trials that test our faith most severely, and make it seem that God has forsaken us, are designed to lead us more closely to Christ, that we may lay all our burdens at His feet and experience the peace He will give us in exchange."²

"We are seldom, in all respects, placed in the same circumstances twice. Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Daniel, and many others were all sorely tried, but not in the same way. Everyone has his individual tests and trials in the drama of life, but the very same trials seldom come twice. Each has his own experience, peculiar in

its character and circumstances, to accomplish a certain work. God has a work, a purpose, in the life of each of us. Every act, however small, has its place in our life experience. We must have the continual light and experience that come from God. We all need these, and God is more than willing that we should have them if we will take them."³

"The very trials that . . . make it seem that God has forsaken us, are designed to lead us more closely to Christ."

"Our trials are all necessary to bring us close to our heavenly Father, in obedience to His will, that we may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness."⁴

"Sickness, suffering, and death are work of an antagonistic power. Satan is the destroyer; God is the restorer."⁵ We have a hope that the world the way we know it will pass away and a better day will come. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4, NKJV).

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 581.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 220.

3. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 541.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 113.

Revived to Die

EVIDENCE

Luke 22:41–44; Heb. 9:22

As we consider Christ's struggle in Gethsemane, we realize that its intensity is beyond human comprehension. In Luke 22:44 we find that "being in agony, He prayed more earnestly and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (NKJV). In *The Desire of Ages* we find that after Christ made up His mind to go to Calvary, "He fell dying to the ground . . . [and that Gabriel came] not to take the cup from Christ's hand, but to strengthen Him to drink it" (p. 693).

In Gethsemane, Christ, under so much stress from the weight of our sins, bleeds while He sweats, is about to die, and yet is strengthened to bear a much more cruel death. According to Hebrews 9:22, "without shedding of blood there is no remission" (NKJV). Since Christ lived a perfect life and had already shed blood, would the penalty for our sins have been paid if He had died in Gethsemane?

Colossians 1:20 says, ". . . and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross" (NKJV). The ministry of Christ was not simply to redeem us but to settle the great controversy in the minds of all inhabitants of the universe.

**If Christ had died in
Gethsemane, would the
penalty for our sins have
been paid?**

"Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds. The archapostate had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles."¹

Therefore, the Cross was necessary to reconcile all things in both earth and in heaven, for fallen and unfallen beings. Satan's cruelty to Christ demonstrated the nature of his rebellion and of sin. His "administration was laid open before the . . . heavenly universe. He had revealed himself as a murderer. . . . [and] uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings."²

Therefore, wouldn't it be good for us "to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ," "especially the closing [scenes]"?³

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 758.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 761.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

How to Overcome Trials and Suffering

HOW-TO

Prov. 3:5; Isa. 54:17

"In this life we shall be proved to see whether or not we shall be able to bear the test of God. Satan's temptations will come upon us, and we shall be tried, but the question of most importance to us is, Shall we be overcome? or shall we be overcomers?"¹

Your life may be strewn with what seems like meaningless anguish, hurts, agony, trials, and suffering. Your situation may be too difficult to handle. It may cause you to question why God is allowing it. Jesus suffered what you are now suffering and much more. "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Pet. 2:21–23, NIV).

You must entrust yourself to Him who judges justly and endures all things through your acts of faith. Here's how:

Weapons will form, but they don't have to prosper.

1. Accept that weapons will form against you (Isa. 54:17), and do not resent trials, pain, persecution, and suffering, because God is in them. In

spite of inevitable struggles, try not to murmur.

2. Cry out your feelings to God. Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46, NIV), thus expressing His feelings of abandonment.

3. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5, NIV). Turn your situation over to Jesus. When He is on your side, what can anyone do to you (Ps. 118:6)? "No forces may operate except as He shall permit. . . . No enemy may pass the bounds God has set for him."²

4. "Submit yourselves, then, to God" (James 4:7, NIV). Surrender your will and life to His authority. Resist the doubts of Satan. Don't allow him to make you forget how God has led in the past. Sincerely pray for strength to endure until Christ's peace rests upon you.

1. *Signs of the Times*®, Aug. 28, 1893.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 295.

No Pain, No Gain

OPINION

Rev. 2:10

No one is more acquainted with suffering and pain than Christ. The Bible describes Him as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3, NKJV). That sure seems like a strange way to describe the Son of God, the One who creates with a spoken word. Nevertheless, Christ's time on earth was riddled with pain, suffering, trials, and tribulation. Why? Well, pain and suffering are key tools that Satan uses to deter anyone who would follow God's commands.

Satan even uses these tactics to press us while we attempt to talk with God. Look at Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. The dread of being eternally separated from God the Father weighed so heavily on Him that He fell prostrate to the ground. The weight and anguish of sin was so intense that it even changed the face of Jesus. When His disciples awakened, they hardly recognized Him. Imagine struggling so hard that you start to sweat blood. It's hard to believe that could happen, but the Bible says that Jesus' sweat was like blood during this conflict. In utter agony Christ prayed three times, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39, NKJV).

Even during our most difficult struggles, we are not alone.

Even during our most difficult struggles, we are not alone. Christ, strengthened by His angels, was urged not to give up or to give in. He persevered through the suffering and pain in order to complete His Father's will. Oftentimes we attempt to escape the suffering and pain we experience in God's service. Then, like Christ in the Garden, we must fall to our knees and pray and agonize with God to strengthen us so that we will persevere. Through trials we are made strong. We are promised in Revelation 2:10, "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (NKJV).

REACT

1. How does Christ's victory in the Garden help you with your battles?
2. How can you find joy in the midst of your trials?

All Alone

EXPLORATION

Matt. 27:46

CONCLUDE

On the cross, Jesus experienced the isolation that comes from complete separation from God. This feeling is something we all have experienced. In this way, Christ reveals Himself to us in His true incarnational ministry. However, God is never separated from us. Regardless of what we are going through, there He is. We are the object of His desire, and His love for us compels Him to be our constant Protector and Guide. What a powerful and loving God we belong to!

CONSIDER

- Reading Matthew 27 and meditating on the situation. Then draw a picture, write a poem, paint a painting, or write a song that relates to what Jesus went through.
- Making a list of the times you have felt abandoned by God. Then create an opposing list of these times you have felt God was with you. You might be amazed how often He has been by your side.
- Reading Mark 15 while standing against a wall. While this is in no way near the discomfort Christ felt on the cross, you will be physically tired from all the standing. This will help you identify with Christ's suffering.
- Listening to, or singing, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" in order to focus on Jesus' sacrifice.
- Calling someone and, when there is no answer, spending five minutes in prayer, thanking God that He is always listening. When Jesus was on the cross, He felt as if no one was hearing His prayers.
- Having the people you are with on New Year's Eve say what the Cross means to them. Write down their answers and place them in a holiday album.

CONNECT

Matthew 27; Mark 15.

John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*.

Next Quarter's Lessons

Discipleship

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for first quarter 2008, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: An Overview of Discipleship

Logos: Matt. 4:18–22; 10:24, 25; Mark 3:13, 14; 8:34, 35; Luke 14:25, 26.

Memory Text: “As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people’” (Matt. 4:18, 19, NRSV).

The Week at a Glance: What is discipleship? Who is a disciple? Can one volunteer to be a disciple? What are the requirements of discipleship? What is the essence of discipleship?

Lesson 2: Crisis of Leadership

Logos: Matt. 24:14; 28:19, 20; Mark 16:20; John 3:21–30; Acts 5:34–39.

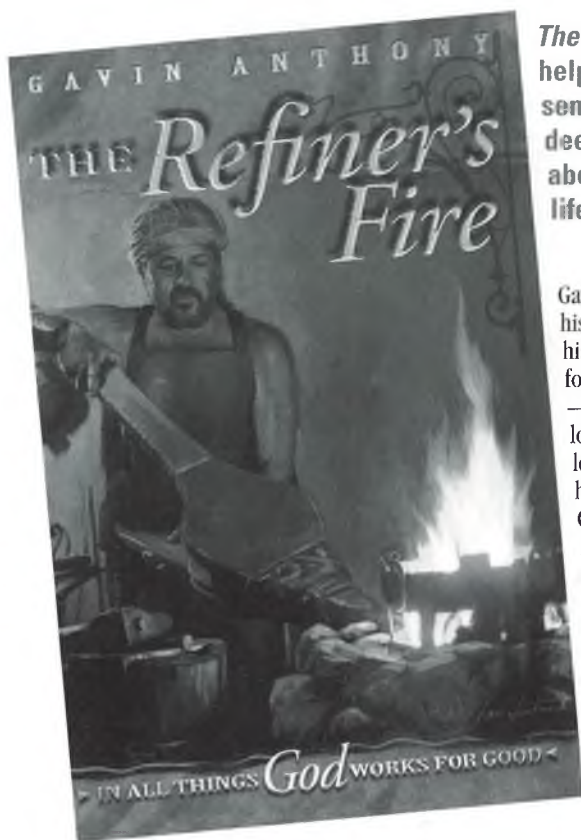
Memory Text: “Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it” (Mark 16:20, NIV).

The Week at a Glance: What was discipleship like among the Greeks and the Jews? How was discipleship different with John the Baptist and with Jesus of Nazareth? What applications for the contemporary task of discipleship can we gain from discipleship in the time of Jesus?

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Where
will
they
go?

I saw hundreds of people in India flock to evangelistic meetings and step forward to accept Jesus as their Savior. My heart was touched as I thought of the lives forever changed and the joy these people would find as Christians. But they will face difficult times, too, especially those whose families reject their new faith.

And most of these new believers have no church to welcome them. They are the church! In many places we have no schools where these new believers can send their children to receive a Christian education.

Membership growth is wonderful, but it's up to us to see that they have the tools they need to grow, such as a simple chapel, a school for their children, a pastor or teacher. I'm glad our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help provide for some of the fastest growing areas of this division. For me it's personal.



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ADVENTIST
MISSION

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