

How the Christian Should Deal with Adversity

In Lesson Format

**How the Christian Should Deal
with Adversity**

In Lesson Format

Aaron J. Smith

JacLyn Enterprises

Atlanta

2008

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or copied in any form or by any means without the written permission of the publisher.

Preface

Many words have been preached and written about adversity as it affects the Christian. I too have often “taken pen in hand” and held forth on the subject. In the present Bible study I am tackling the bugaboo once again, attempting to distil all my previous writing efforts into one handy lesson format.

Suffice it to say this one thing: I have tried my best, by the grace of God, to give you what God has given me on how to stand up to the adversities that we continually go through. God give you an understanding heart as you immerse yourself in *How the Christian Should Deal with Adversity!*

For clear instructions on how to pursue this study, please read the Tips for Study immediately preceding Lesson One.

Contents

PREFACE.....	5
LESSON I.....	11
THE ORIGIN OF ADVERSITY.....	11
<i>God Gave All Rational Creatures Free Will</i>	11
<i>God's Purpose in Allowing Adversity</i>	15
LESSON II.....	30
CONFRONTING THE 'BLACK HOLES' IN YOUR LIFE.....	30
LESSON III.....	37
FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD.....	37
<i>The Apostles Did Not Advise Praying for Release</i>	39
<i>How to Handle Our Adversities</i>	41
LESSON IV.....	57
COMING TO GOD FOR HELP.....	57
<i>The Ultimate Joy and Glory Springing from Adversity</i>	64
ABOUT THE AUTHOR.....	75
INDEX.....	77

How the Christian Should Deal with Adversity

Tips for Study

1. First of all, relax – this is not a high-pressure study. It's your own private exercise in improving your knowledge of the will and the ways of God.
2. However – if you do decide to take this on, be sure to read every word of the main text and in particular read every Instructor's Note. The text and the Instructor's Notes are important. In this study what would ordinarily be endnotes or small relevant side comments at the end of each chapter are changed into "Instructor's Notes." They are actually, at times, relatively broad-ranging side comments made by the Instructor as he delivers the "lecture" (main text). As stated, the Instructor's Notes are located at the end of the chapter. They are referenced from the text by a superscript number (^{1,2} etc.) and may be accessed by going to the corresponding number in the "Instructor's Notes" at the end of the chapter.
3. Understandably the main text is key to the study. But the Instructor's Notes are equally important: they constitute a sizable part of the instructor's "lecture." The Notes will take you into relevant side paths that the main text does not cover. When you see a superscript number at the end of a sentence or paragraph in the main text, you should at that point refer to the same number in the Instructor's Notes at the end of the same lesson. If the note is long and has to be continued on the following page, continue reading it to the end. Then return to the main text. You must follow this procedure to get the full benefit of the study.
4. We will be nice and let you slide on the scriptural references, that is, the scriptures that are only referred to and not written out. It would be excellent if you did look up all the scriptural references, but we insist only that you go to your Bible for the ones that seem more significant to you – *and especially the ones that are noted as Priority Reading by this star (*) before them.* You should read them in their entirety.

5. Remember, this is your valuable time you are investing. The potential for learning is great: Don't make this study so casual that you end up wasting your time!

Lesson I

The Origin of Adversity

(For Lesson I a generous assist was provided by *The Sin of Man and the Love of God*, TOL Archives, 11/19/03.)

God Gave All Rational Creatures Free Will

We know that God has always been omnipotent. We know further that in the beginning of the Creation there was not an entity that dared to oppose Him nor one that wished to rise up against Him, at least not prior to the advent of free will.¹ But, of course, God wanted all His rational (having the ability to reason) creatures to serve Him by choice, not by mandate or because “it’s the thing to do.” He was not fully satisfied with the praise and adoration of beings such as angels and man who were brought into existence in the midst of a God-saturated environment and knew only to serve and praise Him. God wanted voluntary service; He wanted deliberate worship from all of His rational creatures. So God gave them all a choice.² He did this in a 2-step process.

He first gave angels a say in whether they would worship their Creator or not. When we read how God later presented man with two courses of action and then we look closely at Lucifer’s boast in the fourteenth chapter of Isaiah, we can get an idea of what the two choices were that God gave the angels. Consider this indictment that Isaiah laid against Lucifer:

“How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! ...You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’” Isa 14:12-14 NIV.

It is evident that God had presented the choice to all the angels by telling them not to ascend the “sacred mountain,” thus making themselves equal with God.. The choice was simple; the command was clear as we infer from the Scriptures: “You may *attempt* to ascend or not ascend the mountain [there has never been a time when anyone, man or angel, could actually become equal with or superior to God], but, if you do, you shall die.” The situation was not a complex one; it was simply a matter of obedience or disobedience.

The Results of Lucifer’s Fall

We infer from the Scriptures that Lucifer’s rebellion threw the newly formed Earth into chaos when God had him summarily evicted from heaven. Jesus said at one time, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.” (Luke 10.18) If you couple that statement with the belief held by some Bible commentators that Satan’s eviction occurred between Genesis 1.1, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,” and Gen. 1.2, “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters,” it appears that Satan’s literal fall caused considerable upheaval in the newly formed Earth. This scenario of how Earth was plunged into chaos cannot be proved or disproved, but to this writer it seems likely to be fact.

But, whether the foregoing assumption is true or not, Lucifer’s rebellion did not cause the adversities we experience today. Despite Lucifer’s lofty position,³ his defection, along with a great number of angels who joined him, caused possible chaos only in the primordial Earth.

The Results of Adam’s Fall

Later God presented the choice to Adam that He had given Lucifer, in a slightly different yet similar way. God told Adam, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Gen 2:17. The test God gave Adam was similar to that presented to the angels. In both cases the choice was simple,

the command was clear: You may obey or not obey. Adam failed his test and death immediately began its work in him.

Adam's sin not only brought divine wrath on Adam, it also caused confusion in the world around him. (Gen. 3.1-24) This was not the formless emptiness that prevailed on the primordial planet Earth before Adam was formed. At that time God "moved on the face of the waters" to bring order out of chaos. (Genesis 1.1, 2) As we have noted, some Bible students think that between Gen. 1.1 and 1.2 God had cast Satan down to Earth (Luke 10.18), thus causing Earth to be in its chaotic state.

Since this is not an unarguable assumption, we have two alternatives that are scripturally possible: 1) God either returned Earth to its former orderly state (if Satan's fall had traumatized it) or, 2) if Satan's defection did not cause a disruption of the perfect order of the earth, God still had to bring order out of what was a disordered and chaotic globe hanging in space.

There is no point in arguing that God would not create anything that was imperfect and therefore we know that Satan's literal fall from heaven caused the disorderly state of Earth. God often chooses to have His work evolve (this is no case to be made for Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection!) We know only this as a certainty: Satan's plunge into Earth could possibly have caused widespread chaos on that unfortunate planet, but it did not bring divine wrath on mankind and the entire Creation. This happened only after man had sinned. The account is there in the Scriptures ⁴to buttress this assertion.

To further prove the point, let's go back to the period of disorder on the surface of the new Earth before the advent of man. After that period of temporary chaos, order was mandated on earth as it already was throughout the universe. Before there was a sun, God brought light to a world in darkness. (Gen. 1.3) He was preparing it for the habitation of man, the creature on whom God had set His love before he created him. (Eph. 1.4) We have to assume that the entire creation was in order, although likely not yet perfect in God's view.

But we know that God did not make man to have him wander in darkness. Nor did God want man to be terrorized by every wandering celestial body that happened to crash into earth. Eden was perfect for its purpose. Creation was not then in turmoil. (Isa. 51.3; Eze. 28.13) Only when Adam – not Lucifer – had sinned did the climatological, astronomical and physical/mental/emotional disturbances arise that have plagued men since then. Adam's sin alone caused the shattering of the peace of creation. And the whole cosmos waits for the perfect order that God wills for it – and God will not be denied beyond the time He has set for the perfection of all Creation.⁵

¹⁹The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8.19-23-NIV)

When we casually look through a telescope at the worlds around us, at first everything seems to be perfectly in order in the vast expanse of space, the many celestial bodies orbiting and dashing here and there with incredible speed through the blackness of space without mishap.⁶ There is no doubt there is unbelievable precision in the movements of the planets and stars and whatnot. Nevertheless we can still see the effects of sin in the farthest reaches of space and even here on earth.

Our own bodies are examples in miniature of the blight sin has brought down on God's creative work. We have to acknowledge that our bodies are marvels of efficiency and self-protection with their various intricate systems (digestive, nervous, reproductive, etc.) and their means of repelling microscopic invaders that could harm us. Yet these systems can malfunction badly at times, causing a wide variety of illnesses.

And, despite our built-in means of self-protection, there are microbes that can slip by our defenses and can incapacitate us or kill us. This never happened to Adam before he sinned. There were no microscopic invaders to fear and consequently there was no need for repelling them. Adam had no digestive upsets and he knew no illness of body or mind.

God's Purpose in Allowing Adversity

The Inevitable Question: Why?

With the evidences of distress all around us, the question naturally arises: Why do these afflictions plague us so persistently?⁷ This is not easily answered. The broad answer, and that glibly given by Christians who are not in serious trouble at the time, is that our father Adam sinned and fell from divine favor. Thereafter trouble or adversity became a part of his life and a part of the lives of all men by inheritance. While this answer is factual, it is too general and does not deal with specific instances that cry out for specific answers.

Why do one Christian's troubles consist of minor ailments and mildly irksome setbacks while his brother's adversities are all major: a domestic crisis not of his own doing; a severe heart attack; a child who is mentally retarded? Why does one person writhe in the unbearable pain of terminal cancer and another know nothing more severe all his life than a mild headache, and then he dies peacefully of old age? Why indeed does anyone suffer so much regardless of the state of anyone else?

There is not a good answer that covers every situation. No easily spoken cliché will satisfy today's Jobs who are mired deep in abject suffering. Nevertheless, it is a matter we all must face: Adversity is our lot, like it or not. And we must come back to the premise that Adam sinned as a starting point from which to ascertain why we hurt and cry and are so wildly tossed about by life's violent upheavals.

But a word of caution is in order at this point: We should not look for definitive answers. There are no precise answers to

be found. Yet we can look at a few reasons and the various aspects of the problem of suffering and possibly find a balm that will effectively ease our hurts. We shall have to probe into the situation with the microscope of God's Word and find benefits that the unaided human eye cannot perceive.

Now to look again at the origin of all distress: Adam's first sin in the Garden of Eden. Before Adam ate the fruit God had warned him: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Gen 2:17b. It is notable that God did not say, as we tend to think, that all the distresses we now know would result from eating the fruit. He said only that Adam would die. It has been remarked, though, that the troubles we face in life are "disturbances of life" and the beginning of death. There is little doubt that the sentence of death God brought down on man carried with it a dying of joy and peace and contentment, those perquisites that were a part of Adam's life in the Garden. Now dying is all around us while we live. Mankind is trapped in a bewildering maze from which there is no escape, except by the death we fear so much.

We cannot escape affliction even by turning to God. Nowhere in the Scriptures is there an assurance that His people will be spared all pain and misfortune. Jesus Himself was tortured by the scourge of sin although He was without sin. God has not promised us an embargo on adversity; He has not guaranteed us a life free of pain. "By his stripes we are healed" does not primarily mean a body devoid of ailments. It refers to a new creature cured of the affliction of sin. Delivering us from the ravages of sin is much greater and more needful than healing the body, which is going to die anyway. Even though we are God's people, we are mortal beings and death and its attendant "disturbances of life" are our inevitable fate.⁸

Will God Let His Own Children Suffer?

Someone — perhaps even a saint — says in surprise, "Surely God doesn't will for His own people to suffer!"

Certainly no veteran disciple of the Lord could think that these things cannot happen to a saint. He has to know better from his own experience. Nor does the scriptural record imply anywhere that the believer will not experience reverses. Saints have of old had as much trouble as any sinner ever had. Faith has never eliminated all calamities from the life of the believer. Look at the many examples sprinkled throughout the Bible:

- Abraham (Gen. 12.1-25.8)
- Jacob (Gen. 25.24-49.33)
- Moses (Ex. 21-Deu. 34.6)
- Paul (Acts 9.1-30, 13.1-28.31)

And there are many more, such as many of the OT prophets who were often in danger of their lives. All the apostles of Christ were persecuted according to what we can glean from the Bible and from tradition. It is said by tradition that all of them except John suffered martyrdom.

If we assume that God is not willing to see His people suffer, then someone or some force greater than He must be overpowering Him because His people do suffer. They do hurt. The children of God suffer all kinds of pains and indignities despite their close bond with God. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews confirms this. Not all the heroes of faith mentioned there received natural deliverance. Not all quenched the violence of fire or stopped the mouths of lions. Some were sawed in two. Others were tortured and killed in a variety of ways, whatever ways their tormentors chose.⁹

Where were the miracles of deliverance then? Is it possible that God forgot His servants? Paul did not think so. As he was waiting in a dank gloomy dungeon for the martyrdom that he knew was coming, he declared without fear: "For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand." II Tim. 4:6. Further in the same epistle (verse 18) Paul wrote, "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom..." knowing all the

while that the deliverance would not be a literal one. Paul, the apostle who worked so many miracles in his time, had a faith that was not based on Christ's power to effect spectacular deliverances. His faith was based on Jesus Christ Himself, in pleasure, in pain, in miracle and in martyrdom.

Paul considered the persecutions he suffered to be the necessary accompaniment of his eventual perfection. He endured many adversities and even gloried in the cross because it was the warp and woof of his salvation, which was the road to perfection, the means by which he could become more and more like his Savior Jesus Christ.

We have to go the same route. It is not likely we will suffer as much physical and mental persecution as Paul did, but we have to take the same path of knocks and bumps and bruises if we hope ever to "attain to the resurrection from the dead." We don't deserve our salvation; that is a gift from God not attained by works. However, we do "let endurance have its full effect, so that [we] may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1.4 - NRSV)

Why Me, God?

We have so much growing up to do! At the first sign of trouble we begin to whimper like little babies. Babies cry when they hurt because that is the natural response for an infant. Babies are really little complainers. That is the only way they know how to respond to pain and discomfort. It's what babies are supposed to do. But we are supposedly adults, and whining is definitely not becoming to a grownup. Perhaps if we could discern valid reasons for our troubles, they wouldn't cause us supposed adults so much hand wringing and mental anguish.

There are many origins to the troubles we encounter in life. Listed below are four of them:

- The natural ebb and flow of a sin-cursed existence.
- Reaping the harvest of seed sown in the past.
- Divine purging and perfecting.

- Divine chastisement.

So think before you question why God has not protected you better. Let's consider the four reasons separately:

1. The natural ebb and flow of a sin-cursed existence.

All men are under the curse of sin. Calvary did not lift the curse (see section 2 below). That was not God's intention, but it completely thwarted the judgment due us because of sin. Jesus Himself lived under the curse of sin during His mortal tenure. This was not just after Gethsemane, but before He took upon Himself the sins of the world in His hour of passion. If the sinless Son of God had to accept the curse of sin just to be like us in His humanity, can we wretched sinners do any less?

2. Reaping the harvest of seed sown in the past.

For an example of how this law works, a person who has lived a profligate life crammed to the portholes with booze and drugs and sex, can be forgiven, but that does not mean he will not reap in his body the evil seed sown before his conversion. Sowing and reaping are an inevitable part of existence. The sooner we learn to accept it, the better we can adjust to it.

All we can do is heed the less-than-deathless prose of some forgotten pundit who said, "just grin and bear it!" Better that than to die every time an unwanted harvest pops up just when we thought the seed sown had rotted and died under the sod. Be sure of this: That never happens!

Sometimes we recognize the harvest as the result of seed that was planted, often we don't. But somehow, when the evil harvest appears in our field, we know it came from sinful seed that was sown. That is, we know this if we look at our past misdeeds in the harsh glare of the Word of God. Then we can say with real meaning, "Thank you, Lord, for allowing me to gather in my crop in this life where I can do so sustained by your bountiful grace and mercy!" Any iniquitous reaping outside of this life will result in a millionfold harvest, lasting forever.

3. **Divine Purging and Perfecting**

Jesus said (John 15:1-2 NIV),

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. {2} He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

Jesus is here referring to the pruning or cutting off (of unneeded and/or sinful growth) that every saint needs in order to go on to perfection. Paul looked at it in this way (Phil 3:10-12 NIV):

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, {11} and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. {12} Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

Paul considered the persecutions he suffered to be the necessary accompaniment of his eventual perfection. He endured many adversities and even gloried in the cross because it was the warp and woof of his salvation, which was the road to perfection, the means by which he could become more and more like his Savior Jesus Christ.

We have to go the same route. It is not likely we will suffer as much physical and mental persecution as Paul did, but we have to take the same path of knocks and bumps and bruises if we hope ever to "attain to the resurrection from the dead." We don't deserve our salvation; that is a gift from God not attained by works. However, we do "let endurance have its full effect, so that [we] may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1.4 - NRSV)

4. **Divine Chastisement**

Let's make a difference at the outset between God's chastisement of His people and His punishing evildoers. The difference between the two methods is similar to that between a

father's spanking his child and a judge's handing out a jail sentence to someone who has broken the law. In the first instance, if it is done properly, the spanking is for the betterment of the child – whom the father certainly loves.

In the second instance there is slight thought given to the betterment of the offender. The judge does not necessarily love the offender. The offender has broken the law: he must be punished as an example to others who would break the law and he must be put away for the sake of society.

In a broad sense all disciplinary measures, whether the spanking of children or the incarceration of law-breakers, are punishment, but in the finer nuances of theology there is a substantial difference. While saying this, we have to admit that God dealt with the Israelites in both a corrective way and a judgmental or punitive way. An example of this is in the prophet Jeremiah's use of two different allegories to represent God's dealing with His wayward children. In the first (Jer. 18.1-6) Israel was like a moldable lump of clay on the potter's wheel, waiting to be shaped any way the potter wished to shape it. When it became marred in the making, the potter reworked it. This was chastisement or correction. No skilled potter wants a defective product. He works on the clay repeatedly until it turns into the beautiful object he has envisioned it to be.

In the second allegory (Jer. 19.1-13) Israel was no longer a pliable lump of clay; she was an earthen bottle that could not be reshaped. It could only be broken. This was punishment. It is clear then that it isn't always the practicing sinner to whom God metes out punishment. Sometimes, unfortunately, it is the saint who has turned intractable in some matter. When His children become obstinate in their erring ways, God will handle them in a punitive manner. This should make us very careful. God shouldn't have to treat us like common criminals, but only like the dear children He wants us to be.

We will make mistakes; we will sin inadvertently, and for these lapses in behavior we expect to be chastised. Actually, it should be some sort of comfort to us to know that God does think enough of us to correct us. If there be no chastisement,

there can be no family tie: we are illegitimate children. But we have to avoid at all costs the headlong rush to please our carnal natures. It is the pathway to punishment – which can ultimately lead to condemnation. If we insist on being birds of a feather with the sinner, we will doubtless flock together with him in his final damnation.

So let's quit complaining at every at every drop of rain that **MUST** fall in our lives. All men have to endure the pains and trials of this sin-cursed existence, but we who make our boast in the Lord have the grace to endure whatever God lets come upon us. We take our minor aches and pains and our major disasters in stride (oh yes, we may stumble here and there, but we don't give up) because we now have a better understanding of what is happening. We have seen that all troubles are the result of the reasons quoted above:

- The natural ebb and flow of a sin-cursed existence.
- Reaping for seed sown in the past.
- Divine purging and perfecting.
- Divine Chastisement

We know there is an end to it all, not just a cessation of adversities, but an end in the sense of there being a goal to attain, and it will be more than worth it all.

God Treats Each Individual According to God's Will

The will of the Spirit varies for each individual. No two persons have the same plan allotted for their lives. There are so many variables involved; some we know about and some we don't. God can arbitrarily decide what He wants you to do and to be. Who can tell Him no? When we fail to see why God makes certain demands of us individually, why, that is **our** problem, not His. Our only reasonable course is to submit to whatever He wills for us and to immerse ourselves into the fulfilling of His specific will for each of us.

God did not work in the life of Joshua the same way that He worked in Moses' life. Daniel's experiences with the Lord

were not identical with those of Isaiah. The careers of the apostles Peter and Paul took different pathways – but to the same end: fulfilling the respective will of God for each apostle. Your spiritual career will not be a duplicate of anyone else's. God works through differing circumstances and temperaments and, above all, He works when and in what manner He pleases. Don't attempt to bind Him.

God also works *on* the lives of different people in different ways, depending on what He sees the need to be in the life and character makeup of the individual person. It is similar to a parent's recognizing that each of his children requires a different type of handling. There are many, many subtle shades of difference among siblings; so there are among the children of God. There are examples to cite, but we have to be careful that, in looking at the examples, we don't bind God in our minds, permitting Him only one way to work in all similar instances. We must avoid putting God in a box.

For example, whereas in one person a native potential violent temper may require, say, a chronic affliction to counterbalance the fault, that may not be the case with another individual of the same makeup. There are so many quirks and foibles in the whole makeup of the one as against the other that we cannot know why God deals with each person differently. Nor can we forget that God's will is arbitrary; it does not have to accede to what the creature thinks is logical or fair.

I personally knew of a man who had something just short of what I would call a violent temper. It could not actually be termed violent, meaning explosive. Rather, he had a mean, determined disposition to harm anyone who would make him angry. He was not a criminal; he definitely was not a sinner: he had been begotten again by the Spirit of God. He was just naturally born with a propensity for hurting whomever would hurt him. Having come to Christ, it was necessary for him to "mortify" or kill that carnal trait, his temper. It was difficult, but see what God in His wisdom and mercy did: He allowed the man to be troubled with a chronic ailment that at times made his life (and body) miserable. Like chemotherapy for cancer, it seemed

to be a radical “treatment,” but it worked. The afflicted man lived a sweetly saved life despite the severity of the cure. It was not literally a cure in that his basic nature never ceased to be there despite its being “killed” by faith. He had to fight the propensity, which he did because of his living faith in God, but the “cure” affected his entire natural life, eventually cutting that life short.

At first glance this seems to be a tragedy, but what we often fail to see in such situations is the big picture. What is the big picture showing us? Two things: 1) God kept this man with the temper from a possible life of alienation from God by the man’s sinful nature, a nature that we all have in general; and 2) because of Christ and His grace upon him, the same man had a purpose in living. He lived a genuinely Christlike life as a testimony of what Christ can do with a life that is yielded to Him. Furthermore God kept the man’s temper in control and God alone gave him grace to endure what God alone allowed to come upon him.

Now let’s reason: Was this an instance of injustice to this unfortunate individual? There were then, and are now, others with the same native disposition – saved individuals – who live holy lives without such an extreme counterbalance. By counterbalance I mean anything that will tend to negate the effects of a bad native trait. Why could not God have simply given our unfortunate man grace to combat his inborn fault? Is God’s hand short that it cannot save? Is He limited in power?

We could debate the justice or injustice of the situation until the Lord returns and never find a definitive answer because we don’t have all wisdom and all knowledge – and we are not God. The last clause – we are not God – is the only answer we can arrive at in this life and it is the answer we will have to accept. Do not contend with God. Never say to Him, Why am I made thus? or Why do I suffer this or that?

²⁰But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is molded say to the one who molds it,

“Why have you made me like this?” (Romans 9:20 - NRSV)

Use what little wisdom you have and refrain from making an enemy of One who has all power and ability in His sole possession.

And yet there is another reason for the pains we suffer. We will deal with it in Lesson II, but be forewarned: If you did not like the reason given above for the man who suffered because of his temper, and if you do not have a passion for the fulfilling of the will of God in your life, the next reason we present for suffering in Lesson II may not be palatable to you. This is especially true if you have the very popular health/wealth, “name-it-claim-it” type of “faith.” God bless you, my brother, and keep you when you get sick and poor and unable to claim what you name! It can happen.

Instructor’s Notes on Preceding Lesson

1. It seems that Lucifer never sought to rebel against the authority and might of God before he was given the choice and the chance to do so. “You were blameless in all you did from the day you were created until the day evil was found in you.” (Eze. 28.25 NLT) The whole prophecy (Eze. 28.12-19) is directed primarily at the king of Tyre, but it is evident, upon close study, that its secondary and equally significant target is Lucifer. The intermixing a reference to one individual with an allusion to another one was a common practice in the days of the Old Testament prophets. Consequently, we should study the OT prophecies carefully and prayerfully in order not to lose any of their broader significances.

This is not directly bearing on the lesson, but the most significant and far-reaching examples of these hidden prophecies are the numerous prophecies (called the “Messianic” prophecies in reference to the Messiah) in the OT referring to Jesus Christ. Many of them are so skillfully interwoven with other items such as worship and praise that the casual reader can easily overlook

Instructor's Notes continued

them. The first Messianic prophecy, in Gen. 3.15, is one of the “hidden” ones in that the Messiah or Jesus is not mentioned by name. But no biblical scholar will deny that it is indeed a Messianic prophecy. There are many more such predictions of the coming Savior and this coming event is even interwoven in the ceremonies and the injunctions, other than the Ten Commandments, of the Mosaic Law.

2. This was not a completely free choice. There were, in fact, just two choices: God’s way or death! “...the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” (Eze. 18.4b) It scarcely seems fair to our “logical” minds. Consequently, to keep from foundering on the rocks of dismay and incredulity caused by God’s apparently highhanded method of dealing with man at this point in the lesson, we must remember that Creation is not a democracy and God is not a part of the creation He made. Rather, He is the absolute, total Sovereign who has to answer to no one. Whenever and wherever God moves, it is just and right simply because He decrees it so. Yet, if you observe God’s moves and decisions closely, you will come to the conclusion that He is indeed a just albeit a loving God. He is tender and affectionate to those who obey Him, and stern and judgmental to those who consistently disregard what He wants of them. As you continue in this study, you will see more clearly why God does what He does without consulting with anyone. Your thinking will be changed. It will have to change; God will not change for you or me. He cannot change and be God. “...I am the Lord, I change not.” (Mal. 3.6)

3. Paul refers to the pride of Satan in 1 Tim. 3.6, and Isaiah, in prophesying against the king of Babylon, weaves into the prophecy the cursed estate of Lucifer (Satan). Read Isaiah 14.4-15. As stated in Instructor’s Note #2, this intermixing a reference to one individual with an allusion to another one was a common practice in the days of the OT prophets. It takes careful study and the leading of the Spirit to discern the “secondary” prophecy, which often can be as important as the primary one.

Instructor's Notes continued

Also note the prophecy of Ezekiel (Eze. 28.12-15), which is primarily aimed at the king of Tyre. There is strong indication that Satan was again, indirectly and secondarily, targeted by this prophecy.

4. Before Adam's transgression there was tranquility: "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." (Gen. 1.31) After Adam's sin and the discovery and judgment pronounced by God for it, there was an immediate dying of many things: hope and joy and peace, as well as physical life. (*Gen. 4.1-24; *Rom. 5.12, *8.22, 23; *2 Cor. 5.2-5)

5. The Scriptures do not categorically state that Adam's sin caused the general demoralization of Creation, but they strongly indicate it in Rom. 8.19-23 – NIV (quoted in the text). If this is so, it is a powerful indication of man's hierarchical standing in God's Creation. If the defection of angels did not disrupt the universe but man's fall did, it, along with other scriptural verses, seems to indicate that man in his redeemed state is destined to rank above the angels in the culmination of God's plan for Creation.

6. Psa. 102.25 says, "Of old thou hast laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands." God created them all and they were a marvel of symmetry. **But man sinned.** Death and decay were not rampant until then. Therein lies the cause of the confusion on Earth and the occasional lapse of order in an otherwise orderly universe: **Man sinned!** No wonder that the whole of Creation is waiting eagerly for our redemption to be fully accomplished.

7. Philosophers ever since the fall of mankind in the Garden have cudged their brains with the why's and possible justifiable ends to mankind's suffering. But they – that is to say, we – have not approached the subject in the right manner. To put it in proper perspective, we are slow-crawling slugs with just a

Instructor's Notes continued

slightly higher level of intelligence than the creeping creatures around us in God's Creation. The only thing that makes us special is that God set His love on us, thus making us unique among other creeping forms of life. God did not love us because we were special; God's love alone made us special.

But we have dared to stand upright in God's face and challenge His wisdom. We bustle around, trying to fathom situations that are unfathomable from a human standpoint. In this study we do not dare question the wisdom of God. We make no pretensions to intellectual nor even spiritual prowess, but we look into the matter of human adversities in a prayerful way, not inviting a confrontation with the Creator who subjected us to this crucible of pain. We unashamedly admit we are God's yes-men and have no wish to *demand* reasons of Him: we are merely inquiring, hat in hand, why is it so? And we have strong comfort in knowing that we were immersed in our pain not without hope. "...for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (Rom. 8.20, 21 NRSV) If we make no further advances in this study, this alone will suffice. But there is more that God wants us to see. It will not take away the pain, but it will make it bearable.

8. Now that we have disabused our minds of the idea that God is always obliged to heal where there is faith, we want to acknowledge freely that God does heal. He actually does want His children to be "healthy, wealthy and wise." The only difficulty with that statement is where the will of God, despite His wanting the best for His children, seeks out a better path for them to take in certain situations. Not all can be in perfect health, not all can have financial overabundance, and certainly not all are wise.

God sees the long view, whereas we often can see only what is right in front of us. God knows the future and He knows our

Instructor's Notes continued

individual characters with their many faults and blemishes. There is a perfect state He wants us to attain and He knows that we can only attain it by suffering. But we will touch on that in the next two sections of this lesson, particularly the one titled "God Treats Each Individual According to God's Will."

9. I don't want to paint a gloomy picture consisting of all shadows and no light as though the children of God know no joys and have to suffer all of their days on earth. If you have truly experienced God, you will know this is not so. All that I want to do here is to bring you face to face with reality. You can't live forever in a fantasy world where faith will give you all the good things of this life and everyone will love you. Abraham, Jacob, Moses and Paul all encountered opposition even while they trusted God, but they experienced the glories of heaven while they were in the midst of their troubles. Read the accounts and then press in to know God for yourself. He doesn't miraculously take away all your adversities, but He does give you joy and peace that surpass anything the world knows. You don't have to wait to get to heaven to know, in some measure, the joys of heaven.

Lesson II

Confronting the 'Black Holes' In Your Life

Scientists believe some regions of space exert such powerful gravity that they act like gigantic vacuum cleaners, sucking in any matter that comes too close. The matter –whether it is a comet, a planet, or a cloud of gas – is crushed to infinite density and disappears forever. The gravity is so intense that it presumes to tug at whatever space and time (those supposed invariables) are found within its steel grip, stretching out space and slowing down time. Not even light can escape the fierce gravitational pull of these voracious points of perdition, thus making them black and invisible. The American physicist John Wheeler fittingly named these dark, devouring voids “black holes.”

You who are familiar with my writings are aware that I am fascinated by the wonders of creation: the stars and planets whirling and rushing through space in their haste to go around and around, and out and farther out – to where? God alone can answer that question. Galaxies and their trillions of black holes (yes, trillions of these huge evil voids in our Milky Way galaxy alone) also intrigue me. To me black holes are symbolic of unmitigated evil that has no discernible good.

These awesome cosmic destructive forces are the counterparts of the “black holes of life,” which are likewise pure evil with no easily discernible redeeming features. The black holes of life are the other-than-normal adversities that plague us, here and there and with greater or lesser intensity, as God pulls back His restraining hand and allows them access to us. But God is always in charge despite our fears and lack of faith. If we will just believe in God, over and above our fears, God will take

what is unalloyed evil and restrain and master it and use it to mold, shape and refine us. Your own pit from hell may come in various forms, as follows:

- The black hole you encounter can be, as stated, a test that is more than the kind we confront on a daily basis, but it may not appear to be catastrophic at first sight. Like their architect the devil, who can assume the likeness of an angel of light (2 Cor.11.14), black holes can at first seem to be pleasant experiences or, at worst, only minor annoyances. In course of time they are unmasked and take on their true frightening appearance.
Or...
- A black hole in your life can be a heavy load of “genetic baggage” imposed on you at birth. Neuroses, phobias, a feeling of utter worthlessness, and many other inherent quirks of personality constitute our genetic baggage.

Whatever the problem is, it is neither something you can ignore nor is it one of those tests that you “pass” successfully (as in an academic setting) and then move to a higher grade. Not all tests are one-time things; some are with us for a lifetime despite what our well-meaning peers tell us. Satan hopes, by confronting us day after day with the same mildly irksome grain of sand under our mantle – irritating grains of sand have been known to produce pearls when placed under the mantle of oysters – or by an all-out threat to our mental stability, that he can destroy us. We will deal with these inherited traits a little further into this discussion.

Your personal black hole may be a full-blown temptation that engulfs you suddenly and then pulls and rips at you (for as long as God allows) so that it may wear you out and swallow you entire as a sort of whole burnt offering to the god of darkness. It is only by the grace of God that you weren’t annihilated instantly when you first felt the overpowering pull to perdition.

But our adversary is not dealing with one of his own minions who are quick to do his bidding. Whether he realizes it or not, Satan is poking at God when he prods us with his diabolical pitchfork. The Spirit of God is a powerful machine that takes an unbreakable steel bar and inexorably bends it to attain whatever the Spirit chooses. He works the same way with the black hole that looms large in our lives. God doesn't shatter the black hole in an instant; He refrains from demolishing it. If He should instantly annihilate it, this microcosm of evil could not serve God's purpose. The black hole's utter destruction will come later. Now, God bends this iniquitous tool slowly to the accomplishment of His purpose.

As in item #1 above, there are times that the black hole is not so easily recognized. But it may not be just another attempt by Satan to lull you into a false sense of security. It could be that God, who knows your capacity, has reformed it from its original totally malevolent appearance into a less fearsome tool with which to hammer you and pound you into the shape He wants. If it had come at you in all the fury the devil initially had behind it, you could not have withstood it at the time. Therefore, when you see it (after God has tweaked and modified it), the black hole will possibly be "only" a strong trial of your faith in some area. God may even metamorphose it into a bodily affliction. But be aware that all of Satan's thrusts at you are meant to be fatal. We do not always realize it, but they are all originally sheer evil, unmitigated forces of utter devastation. But God always bends the fury of the adversary to the accomplishment of God's purposes.

Yet, as in item #3, there are times that your personal black hole in life is exactly what it is called: a black hole, a damnable and potentially damning force of darkness. There is no disguising it by Satan or bending it by God into a minor experience. It comes at you seemingly untempered by grace or any other factor. You see it for what it is: a vicious concentration of the forces of the demonic world bent on your annihilation. The devil knows, when you feel yourself within the demonic pull of the pit of darkness, that you will panic. But God, at the

same time, knows what you can endure; that is why He allowed the cataclysm to suddenly appear in your previously well-ordered existence. Remember this in your panic: God foreknew that you would be turned upside down; He knew that you would be enclosed and terrified by the fearful realm of darkness; He **knew** – and He judged you capable of enduring it by His abundant grace.

When we focus too intently on the powerful malevolent forces in our personal universe, we can become very fearful. But God reminds us there is no power that doesn't come from Him. Satan and his demonic horde were given their power while they were yet upright angels. When they defected, God chose not to abrogate their force, but to redirect it toward the purging and purifying of His saints. Before the fury and blackness of your spiritual disorientation overtook you God had already seen it. He sensed your terror as you felt the black night closing in on you – **but God knew in advance that you could overcome.** God knew. He knew. And if God knows you can overcome, it is a certainty; you can bet the farm on it. If you can only remember this in the midst of your struggle: This is your purifying ordeal. It is the stuff by which metals are refined. You are gold; God wants you to be pure gold. You have to hold on in your fright; believe in Him while the panic strives to master you; call on God out of the hellhole of despair, “Jesus Savior, save me!”

You are certainly not perfect. None of us are. But if you can only maintain that spark of faith in Him, He will bring you out. You will not know how and you will be left shaken – but you will be purified. You will tremble, but you will be molded a little more into the vessel He wants you to be. A work of purging will have been wrought in you. God will have managed for you to somehow escape the satanic clutch of the black hole from which there can be no escape.

As you wipe your figurative brow, you will gasp wearily, “Satan tried with all his might, but he failed!” Perhaps you will then remember the simple little ditty that you heard long ago. It is not the most profound piece of poetry around, but it is so fitting here:

“Satan’s mad and I am glad; He lost the soul he thought he had!”

Simple but very descriptive.

Now – let’s talk to you who may be saddled with a potentially fatal load of genetic baggage. There is no apt description for it, as it comes in all shapes and fashions, but the baggage your ancestors passed on to you is not a one-time experience. It will last and last and last. Unless God intervenes in His wisdom and mercy, your only time to wipe your brow in victory will be in the hereafter. Then you will have the final victory.

Despite this somewhat gloomy forecast, you don’t have to wait for the final victory to rejoice. You can exult before that time in the ways by which God keeps you going from day to day and from moment to exasperating moment. When your genetic defect kicks in as you are trying to meditate before the Lord or when you are trying to frame your petition in faith – I know no better advice to give you than the old cliché to “hang in there.” The difference in my saying it and someone else’s glib remark is that I mean it from the depths of my heart. I am speaking from an experience that has lasted me a lifetime.

If God gives you just enough sanity to remember and think, you are one step up your Jacob’s ladder reaching from earth to the distant heavens. Keep one hand on the ladder and at least one foot on the first rung when you think God doesn’t hear you or that you are totally unfit for Him to hear you.

You have a habit of downgrading yourself: “Why should God look favorably on me?” you ask. “Who am I, what am I? I’m not like other people who go through a period of testing and then come out unscathed. They really have a testimony. I don’t even have faith to approach His throne. I’m just not in the flow of faith and overcoming and all the stuff that goes with being a good Christian.”

What does it take to be “a good Christian”? It certainly does not derive from doing good works and being innately good. If that were so, Christ would not have had to die for us. If we

were already “good,” we would have automatically qualified for the first tenancy open in the Heavenly Estates. You and I are evil creatures and have no righteousness apart from Jesus Christ. Our fate is eternal damnation. I have this to say to the person who “shouts the victory” and to you who think you are the least of all saints – no, at times you don’t even have the temerity to say you are a saint – you are both sinners by birth and both need forgiveness of the sins you inherited and the sins you have committed on your own. So why should you think you are inferior? Neither you nor the “faithful” brother can sink lower than the lowest depth, and that is exactly where you both are without Christ.

It should not be a matter of comparing ourselves one with another, but rather we should take an honest look at ourselves – with or without the heavy genetic baggage foisted on some of us – and admit that we all need God to the utmost. Without Him we shall all die forever: you, I and the saint who “shouts the victory” and looks askance at you in your never-ending struggles with faith and worthlessness and who you are.

This, then, is your black hole in life: Your supposed lack of faith and worthlessness (in which you are not alone) and not knowing exactly who you are and what you are supposed to be. You do not know where you should go nor do you know how to get there. But of course, if you are as worthless as you imagine, it neither matters who you are nor are you supposed to be anything but little old worthless you. And God certainly would not want you to go anywhere for Him. But you know deep inside yourself that is not so. The grace of God sparks your life and miraculously makes you **Somebody**. You know it, but your contrary other self can’t quite accept it. And so the mind struggle goes on and on and on.

I still throw the cliché at you to “hang in there” and add another: “Don’t give up!” When you do that, you have lost. Do you think there would be a battle in your mind if Satan believed what you believe about yourself? Sure, your troubles are basically genetic, but Satan is using your genetic flaws to harass you into surrendering your sword. “Give up,” he whispers, “you

can't win." But he is a liar and the father of lies, as Jesus so strongly denounced him in John 8.44.

If you have the ability to reasonably understand what I am saying here, you CAN overcome. I can't promise you a life of unalloyed pleasure, but I can promise you the peace and joy of the Spirit and victory in spite of the worst horrors the adversary can throw at you. Black holes are a good name for these worst of experiences, but God, through the Apostle Paul has said, "Ye are all the **children of light**, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness." And he could have remarked what John said about Jesus: "The light shines in the darkness, and **the darkness has not overcome it.**" (John 1.5 – RSV) No hellish force, not even that coming from the force that can bend the rays of light itself, can destroy the light of the children of light. You belong to God, so "Let your light so shine..."

Lesson III

For the Greater Glory of God

We have already inferred that there can be certain extremely unpleasant events in the believer's life that will eventually crush him in a natural way. Hardships of that nature can overwhelm the fainthearted. The crushing of a life under the heavy hammer of contrary circumstances is a gruesome scene, but even this can show forth the glory of God. It is not so easy for the victim to understand this, however, when the crisis leaves him battered, lifeless and completely without natural hope.¹⁰

Jesus let Lazarus die when He could have healed Lazarus any time. Read the full account in *John 11.1-44. Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, had sent word to Jesus, "Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick." But Jesus did not lift a finger to help Lazarus. According to our reckoning Jesus should have gone immediately to His friend's side and healed him. Or (and our faith may even go this far) Jesus could have stayed right there in Perea and healed Lazarus by a spoken Word of power. But no; Jesus remained where He was for two days while Lazarus and his sisters eagerly awaited His coming. And there was no remotely spoken word of power for His friend. To us, with our severely limited human reasoning, this seems to be a cruel way to treat a friend.

Yet the Scripture tells us that Jesus loved Lazarus. "Well," someone is saying, "if Jesus loved Lazarus so much, what kind of love could it have been to fail Lazarus so miserably? Lazarus died!" Jesus did not fail Lazarus. He waited as He did because of the same principle that should work in all our lives. Jesus waited for the *greater* glory of God.

We need to think clearly now: If Jesus had healed Lazarus it would have been a notable miracle and would undoubtedly have glorified God. But He did not heal Lazarus. All He did was let death claim Lazarus and then snatch him in a striking show of power out of death's tenacious grasp. It is clear from the scriptural record that Jesus deliberately let Lazarus die. We can't

sugarcoat it, we can't lightly dismiss it: Jesus in effect stood by doing nothing while Lazarus' condition worsened by the minute and he eventually breathed his last gasping breath. This is love?

God is possibly merely standing by now while some harassed saint and his hopes are literally dying.¹¹ It can be so very trying. But we have to rally our dismayed senses and look at the picture as God sees it. The will of God is always paramount. It always takes precedence over the will of the individual. Mark this well: God will not be swayed into overriding His will for us for a mere expedient or what will be easier for us to endure. What Lazarus' sisters thought was the worst possible scenario turned out to be an opening for God to show forth His power and glory. Lazarus had died, but the God of Lazarus was still alive. And we must be practical about this. Although, as in Lazarus' story, the powers of hell may obliterate all natural hope, it is no catastrophe: we are not destined to live forever in this life. God still lives and we too shall live far away and beyond these present light afflictions.¹²

In a world full of hard realities, so unfortunately distinct from our fantasies, we must draw certain lessons from God's dealings with the faithful through the centuries. Let's be honest with ourselves. We know from Scripture and personal experience that God may not literally deliver us from whatever it is that is threatening us. We also know that God may not heal us while we are slowly succumbing to the ravages of time and disease. At the same time we know that as long as God lives, we too shall live and reign with Him forever. This is a practical angle from which to view our troubles, but there is another and better angle. It is simply that what God allows to befall us will always work to the greater glory of God. So we wait for Him. And so we gain experience. And so we grow in grace and glorify God to the utmost – here in this life.

There is one kind of glory; and there is yet another and greater glory to God that should continually radiate from our lives. If attaining this glory takes waiting, if it takes enduring, if it takes dying: amen. And even though it takes a continuous dying while we live — *amen, amen, amen.*

The Apostles Did Not Advise Praying for Release

The Apostles Urged Acceptance by Their Teaching

In writing to the saints, the Apostle Peter did not imply that they should seek to escape the suffering that was necessary for their perfection.

¹²Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: ¹³But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. ¹⁴IF YE BE REPROACHED FOR THE NAME OF CHRIST, HAPPY ARE YE [text enhancement mine]; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. ¹⁵But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or *as* a thief, or *as* an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

This was the man who was twice miraculously delivered from prison (Acts 5.18-20, 12.1-11). But Peter knew that when it was the right time, he too would be imprisoned and not delivered by a miracle. He also knew there was still much more refining of his character and person that only suffering – as directed and controlled by the Master Refiner – could accomplish. God does these things in His own way and in His own time. Like the other apostles of the Lord, Peter was a dedicated man who went with the flow of the will of God in his life. You may note too that, while Peter was urging them to accept persecution for Christ's sake, he cautioned them against doing wrong, for which they should properly suffer. Other scriptures attesting to the glories of **suffering for Christ's sake** are these: *Rom. 12.12; *Jas. 1.3; *1 Pet. 1.6, 7.

The apostles remembered their Lord's words about suffering. Jesus did not say, "When they persecute you, stay and pray for a miraculous deliverance." Rather, Jesus commanded His disciples, "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another..." (Mat. 10.23a) This was equivalent to saying there would be few miracles of deliverance.¹³

The Apostles Urged Acceptance by Their Examples

“A single incident isolated from the rest of God’s operations does not give us a full scan of God’s methods of operation. This would be like saying that one separate verse of Scripture can give us the fuller knowledge of the nature of God that we can glean only from the Bible as a whole.

“For example, at their first imprisonment, God did not miraculously deliver Peter and John. The authorities held them overnight until their appearance the next morning before the Sanhedrin. In the future, however, the apostles would not only suffer imprisonment, but death — because it would be the will of God for them at that time. Yet, on this occasion God did not want them kept in jail for even one night. God’s own will, wisdom and love dictate His ways of working.” Excerpted from *Acts: History and Theology*, second edition, 1994, Aaron J. Smith.

If you have read the book of Acts and Paul’s epistles to the various churches, you know that Paul was a very courageous man. He would, as Jesus taught the disciples, leave one city and go to another when persecution arose, but he would later go back to the same city to witness again. He used wisdom in his actions, but he knew that he was called to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles and nothing could stop him. Time and again Paul walked into the very den of the lion lurking there to slay him.

At Lystra, during Paul’s first missionary journey, a mob stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, leaving him for dead. But, while the disciples all stood around Paul in sorrow, God raised him up. (Acts 14.19, 20) He then did something amazing: he went right back into Lystra where his persecutors were! The next day he and Barnabas his traveling companion went on to Derbe. Then after preaching the Gospel in Derbe, he returned to Lystra! Unthinkable! Later in his travels he would come again to Lystra – as though he dared the enemy to take him down. Why would he do these seemingly foolhardy things? He had a mission to fulfill and God did not tell him, “Paul, you

won't have persecutions because you are my apostle." No, God expected Paul to fulfill his mission no matter how vicious his adversaries were.¹⁴

Paul would not water the Gospel down, not even when he stood before the Roman seat of justice with his accusers snarling and barking at his heels. In Caesarea at a hearing before Felix the Governor, Paul made this one statement that was so revealing of his character,

¹⁴But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: ¹⁵And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. ¹⁶And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and *toward* men. (Acts 24.14-16)

If we judge from the writings and actions of Peter and Paul, all of the apostles were men who believed in suffering for the name of Christ.

How to Handle Our Adversities

An Example in the Life of Joseph

Joseph's life seems to have been one of adversity and blessing. That he was his father Jacob's favorite son contributed to his adversities; his brothers were jealous of him. (Gen. 37.3,) The down periods in Joseph's life could be casually attributed to Jacobs partiality and to Joseph's lack of wisdom. He snitched on his brothers (37.2), He more than likely wore the "coat of many colors" (some translate it, "a long robe with sleeves") as though he were the favorite son, which he was, and he told his brothers the dreams he had about them in which they were bowing to him in obeisance (vv. 5-11). He was only a youngster and youngsters do not have an abundance of wisdom.

Look at items A and B below, each of which has a low point and a high point, adversity and blessing, in Joseph's life:

<u>A. Adversity and Blessing</u>
<u>Adversity</u>
He was hated by his brothers and sold into slavery (vv. 18-33), ending up in Egypt as a slave of Potiphar (v. 36).
<u>Blessing</u>
In Potiphar's house the Lord "was with him" and he became the administrator of his master's affairs.
<u>B. Adversity and Blessing</u>
<u>Adversity</u>
Potiphar's wife tries to seduce Joseph. When he continually rejects her, she claims that he tried to rape her. He is thrown into prison (39. 3-20).
<u>Blessing</u>
In prison the Lord again gives him favor, this time with the "keeper of the prison." Joseph is put in charge of the administration of the prison. (vv. 21-23)

But this last blessing did not end merely with his "success" in prison. This blessing grew into being the capstone of Joseph's life. All that he had gone through previously was in preparation for God's ultimate plan for him. God kept him during all his up's and down's – during which God was preparing him – to become the savior of the known world's population. In this process Joseph was made second in command of all Egypt and gained such renown and respect as he could not have imagined while he was in his father's house tattling on his brothers. (Gen., chapter 41)

Joseph's experiences made him outgrow all of his pettiness and foolishness and he had now evolved into a much honored man and a man on whom God set his love.

The various stories in the Bible about the men of God are written for our learning. We are expected to profit by their examples of faithfulness and, yes, even by their mistakes. Some of those mistakes were major departures from the ways of God,

as in David's adultery and murder (*2 Sam. 11.2-27) and Peter's sleeping during Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and, shortly after that, his triple denial of His Lord who was at the very same time in the harrowing process of saving him from his sins (*Mat. 26.36-75. Ref: Mark 14.29-41, 66-72; Luke 22.34, 39-46, 54-62; John 13.37, 38; 18.15-17, 25-27))

I venture to say much more is expected of the majority of us than of the Old Testament heroes who did not have, as we do, many examples or precedents they could look back to. They were in many cases trailblazers who proceeded by trial and error. We don't have to make their mistakes; we can't say, "I didn't know!" The record is there for us to see and profit by it. Beyond all doubt, God is expecting more of us.

Rejoice in Tribulation

²²Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you *from their company*, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. [Note this] ²³**Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy:** for, behold, your reward *is* great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. (Luke 6.22, 23. Ref, Mat. 5.11, 12)

At first it seems to be ridiculous that we should rejoice when we are hurting in any manner. In preparing this lesson, when I decided to use the scriptures quoted above, I thought there must be another meaning to the original Greek word for "rejoice." But – no, there wasn't. It means what it says. So we now come to this conclusion: We need to be like the apostles and the Early Church who actually did exult in their tribulations. There is a scripture relevant to this theme that we should look at closely here. Please read it with open hearts and understanding, and note that the persecuted disciples not only rejoiced, but they continued to do what their Lord had commanded. They taught and preached despite their being beaten and sternly commanded not to do so. As Peter had told the Council on a previous hearing, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts 4.20)

⁴⁰...and when they had called the apostles, and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹And they departed from the presence of the council, **rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.** ⁴²And daily in the temple, and in every house, **they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.** (Acts 5.40-42; ref, Acts 4.21-31; 1 Pet. 4.12, 13)

These early disciples of Christ were so tied up in His teachings and the life He lived and the sufferings He went through that they thought it only appropriate (and actually a privilege) that they should suffer with Him. It is a hard lesson to learn in these days of comfort and convenience. Nevertheless it is a lesson that we must learn in order to avoid shipwreck when we run upon the shoals of persecution of any kind. We need to pray now that God will give us the mind and heart of a suffering servant such as Jesus was. We are not praying for suffering – we are hardly ready to do that – we are praying for the attitude that can rejoice when the suffering comes. To be quite candid, we have our own modest forms of persecution at this moment. We never need to pray for persecution. “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” (2 Tim. 3.12) You will have to bear distress caused by men or devils or your own carnal nature – or all three. God give you His grace when they all come down on you at the same time! But we know this: If we view it properly, we can rejoice in our suffering.

Knowing How to Pray for Others Like Us

It is one thing to pray for another who is afflicted, and it is another thing altogether to pray from experience for one who is afflicted. There are some experiences we can never appreciate unless we have been pressured by the same circumstances. You can pray for a person with a mild headache even though you may never have had a headache in your life. The experiences you have had with other types of pain can help you to empathize with your fellow sufferer.

But a migraine headache is something else; it is a pain for which you certainly can pray, but not as effectively as if you had ever had a migraine. Some pressure chambers we cannot fully empathize with until we have been thrust into the chamber ourselves. A person who has never known the pain of an impacted tooth can only try to put himself in his fellow sufferer's shoes when he prays for his relief. This is not to say that we should never pray for one who is in a situation in which we have not been. It is only pointing out one key benefit of experiencing adversity.

The more painful the adversity becomes, in a physical or mental/emotional way, the more necessary it is that we experience it firsthand. Now, of course no one would happily thrust himself into an extremely painful situation, but as we walk with God and let Him have free course in our lives, He will lead us where He sees the need for us to go. We should never complain or – God forbid! – rebel against what God wills for us; we can't know what lies ahead. We can't know, as we move from day to day, when God will need us to pray for someone who is in a critical state of affairs. He will make our path cross that of someone who is going through the same thing we have previously endured. In His consummate wisdom, God had sent us through the test, knowing that we would come to this exact place – this opportunity – where we would have to pray *out of our own painful experience* for our brother's very life. It's so very clear: If we want to pray consistently the “effectual, fervent pr

ayer of the righteous man [or woman],” we will have to suffer.¹⁵

Handling Our ‘Genetic Baggage’

We know that God often factors individual temperaments or personalities into what He requires of us. Looking at our whole makeup with a discerning eye, we not only can see the positive and negative traits, but we see there are two types of negative traits. There are those weak negative traits we can suppress by ourselves or by the grace of God, and there are traits

that are strong and very stubborn. We may suppress them (and only by the grace of God), but they refuse to leave us.

They are like rebellious children who have reached adulthood. They insist on living with us, but refuse to be submissive unless we their parents bring them before a judge. And in this we are blessed; we have the Judge of all to whom we can appeal! But we have to be ready to abide by the Judge's decision. He may allow the unruly children to stay with us, but only on this condition: they must live by God's rules; they must be submissive. God has laid down the law, but of course we will have to see that the rebellious children submit. He will give us grace to enforce His ruling, but we have to make the effort – and we are strengthened by that same ruling, that the unruly children have to submit to His will.

Since not even God will remove these quirky kids, they constitute our lifelong “genetic baggage.” He leaves them with the individual for whatever reason He has in mind. It is similar to alcoholism or drug addiction, but there is a difference. God can and usually does remove alcoholism or drug addiction upon the person's turning to God. But often He leaves negative genetic traits entrenched in their victim and He gives the victim grace to operate despite them. There is a higher likelihood that God will not change a person's inherent makeup than there is that He will not take away addictions. Yet, in every instance, **if the victim of this inherited curse can find the capacity to cultivate an intimate acquaintance with God, God will give him grace to live and be what God wants him to be despite the curse.**

Of course it seems to be close to impossible for some of these victims to grasp what they need; they can't seem to get it into their minds that they need a very close walk with God. Without that intimacy with the Divine, it is not possible for them to live up to their potential. I am not attempting to be an authority on such matters. I have no case histories to cite. There is only a lifetime of experience, mine and other's, to back this thesis.

Of course not everybody is harassed to the same degree by these negative factors. Only we of the “lunatic fringe” (this is only a clumsy attempt to be facetious: we are not lunatic; we are harried victims: weep for us) have our lives drastically affected by them.

Unmanageable Genetic Flaws

Before going further into this quagmire, let's first recognize that, in infrequent cases, genetic baggage is forced upon us that is not manageable, bearable, nor treatable by less than heroic means. Even with heroic treatment, too often the victim cannot live a so-called normal life. The baggage is willy-nilly dumped on him and his life is forever blighted by it. An extreme condition like this is not within my purview. Only a trained, Christian counselor should deal with it. The strong emphasis here is on **Christian** counselor. Yet, even in such tragic instances, **the premise stands, that if the victim can find the ability to trust God (and that is certainly the key), he or she can successfully cope with what would seem to be a fatal genetic flaw.** It is to be hoped that the right counselor will offer this sort of lifeline to his client sinking deeper and deeper in a morass not of the client's making. He has neither the ability to objectively look at these flaws nor to handle them.

Less Catastrophic Genetic Flaws

Other only slightly less catastrophic genetic flaws we can manage. This section of the lesson is not primarily dealing with minor annoying traits of character. The emphasis here is on those genetic flaws that are “only slightly less than catastrophic.” Character blemishes of that nature may have the potential of wrecking our life, but we have a choice: The defects can be lifelong and intimidating or they can be lifelong and manageable, as the individual himself determines. As indicated, in either case they are lifelong unless God works a miracle of deliverance (and who can say positively that He will not?) But there is this overriding certainty: 1) If God does not grant the miracle; and if 2) you have a reasonably sound mind (it doesn't

have to be free of flaws; there is no such mind); and if 3) you will do as I have touched on and cultivate an intimate relationship with Him, you – and this guarantee extends to me with my own baggage – can successfully handle the burden your genes have dumped on you.¹⁶

You may wonder just what are these specific “slightly less catastrophic genetic flaws” that we supposedly can handle. They can be any of the well-known phobias of the psychologists’ jargon, such as claustrophobia (an abnormal fear of closed spaces), agoraphobia (an extreme fear of open spaces), acrophobia (an obsessive fear of heights) and other phobias beyond my knowledge; they could be panic attacks; any number of neuroses,¹⁷ or just simply a fear of living, never knowing what tragedy can befall one next. All of these disorders go beyond the average person’s fears of this or that. Phobias and neuroses (as we use the term here) and other like **inner** states consist of extreme, abnormal fears and bizarre mental states (**not** insanity or psychoses) that can cripple a person’s ability to function in what we would call a normal, everyday fashion.

Some persons are born with a proclivity to be cruel toward animals, insects and people, any form of life. Whereas some genetic baggage doesn’t show its presence until later in life, those who have the innate urge to be cruel can manifest it as children. Some persons have a slight mental weakness (not psychosis or insanity) that tends to put them into a different world. Yet they are alert enough in this world to know they are different – and to be very disturbed by the knowledge.

The amount of stuff that can be termed genetic baggage is large. The unwanted baggage can be a severe hindrance to our social lives as well as our spiritual attainment. It acts like a continuous black hole strongly trying to suck us into its voracious maw. Whereas most of our genetic traits (even the odd quirks and foibles) are not significant in either a positive or negative way, many are. The “genetic baggage” we are dealing with in this treatise is definitely neither positive nor neutral; it is negative and can have a very strong adverse impact on our lives.

What we need here is God. Not the God we speak casually about and talk to only when we have an emergency. We don't need a God we can refer to as "the Man upstairs" – that's trivializing Him. We need a down-to-earth, solid, warm, intimate acquaintance with this Person we too often view as being too high or unconcerned or whatever our excuse may be. There are too many of us who need, and don't have, a God who is right at hand, a God with whom we are on very close speaking terms. Yet we desperately need Him. We will pursue this thought in Lesson III.

Instructor's Notes on Preceding Lesson

10. If ever a man should have been battered completely senseless and hopeless, it was the Apostle Paul. It seemed that everywhere he went following the leading of the Holy Spirit, people would soon or later turn against him. Paul was a walking lightning rod, drawing persecution to himself and often away from other believers. When the Judaizers or the Gentiles would have attacked the body of believers in a certain area, when Paul came along, they forgot about the other believers and struck at their chief opponent Paul.

Then, as if his suffering was not enough, God permitted a "thorn in the flesh" (whatever it was we cannot say) to torment Paul. (2 Cor. 12.7-9) He asked the Lord three different times to take the painful thorn away, but no, God let it remain in addition to all the other persecutions Paul had to bear! If it were a man who was directing Paul's life, we would have to say what Paul went through was not fair. It was an impossible mix of physical and mental and spiritual torture for any man to slog through without succumbing to it. But this was God, and we know that He is always right, He is always fair, He is always wise beyond our comprehension. The proof is there in Paul's life. Only God could have taken him through the persecution of men and devils and make him say at the end, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith..." (2 Tim. 4.7)

Instructor's Notes continued

What God did for Paul, He can and will do for you. Just keep the faith.

11. Let's look at this from the long view. Are we better than Jesus the "uniquely begotten" Son of God? God turned His back on Jesus because Jesus had assumed the sins of the world. God literally rejected His only Son! It is not so with you and me. When God seems to ignore us and not care – His heart aches for us. But He is like a loving parent who has to discipline his child even though it crushes the parent to do it. There is a mountain of remaking that God has to put us through and a mountain of good He wants to bring us to. And neither of these things can happen without adversity in our lives. There has to be some suffering. I can't tell you why, but it is a divine axiom that where there is no suffering there is no gain. No cross, no crown.

In the world of Nature we can find examples of the "no cross, no crown" law, as follows:

"There was once a well-known naturalist who had taken a cocoon out of the wild and kept it in his home. He wanted to observe the pupa inside the cocoon as it emerged from its confinement. What made the experiment more interesting was that the lowly pupa was destined to become a strikingly beautiful emperor moth. One day he noticed the cocoon begin to shake. As the naturalist watched, the insect within made a small hole in the cocoon and began trying to squeeze its body through the very small hole.

"The observer waited expectantly as the moth struggled valiantly to free itself from what was fast becoming its tomb. He felt a twinge of empathy and thought he would help this insect in its efforts to live and become a thing of beauty. Gently he took a penknife and enlarged the opening, thus permitting the moth to escape. What happened then was a big disappointment to the moth's would-be benefactor.

Instructor's Notes continued

“The moth didn’t look at all like the lovely creature the naturalist had expected. It was a bulbous ungainly insect with wings too small for its body. The unfortunate insect never became beautiful or delicate and capable of flight. As it crawled awkwardly about, weakly fanning its tiny wings, a hard truth struck the naturalist. He realized — too late — that the struggles the insect had to go through to escape its entombment were vitally necessary for its becoming the exquisite creature that God meant for it to be. The intense struggle was intended to slim it and dehydrate it as it pushed its way to freedom. The naturalist’s help was woefully misguided and fatal.

“There is certainly a lesson here. There are certain adversities in life that we have to go through in order to develop and become the thing of beauty God wants us to be. If a friend or brother mistakenly frees us from our struggles, it will severely hinder our growth and development. After our release we will lie there, misshapen and ungainly, awkwardly trying to fly as the divine will has always meant for us to do. But, by being prematurely released from our prison, we will have stumbled badly in our press for excellence.” (Excerpted from *Spiritual Gifts and Individual Personalities, Part III*, TOL Archives, 10/21/03)

Even Jesus, who was a perfect Man, “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered...” (Heb. 5.8) That is, Jesus’ role as our Redeemer was completed by – suffering, and such suffering as we can never know. Are we, imperfect, fault-ridden humans that we are, any better than Christ that we should know only the pleasures of life? They who seek to know only the pleasures of life are dead while they live. We are like a seed planted in the ground: we have to die in order to live.

To extrapolate on this thought of dying to live, if we live only by our dying, then, like the seed, we will eventually grow into something much more glorious than our bodies (the “seed”) that were planted. We shall become heavenly beings, untrammled

Instructor's Notes continued

by decadent bodies of flesh. We shall one day literally be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

It is absolutely worth dying for.

12. It is so difficult for us to walk in moderation. We believers have a tendency to go to extremes on one end or the other. In an effort to be “spiritual,” some of us think we should ignore this life completely while focusing on the life hereafter. Then there are those who are so wrapped in this life they cannot appreciate spiritual values, those values which shall eventually prevail throughout Creation.

But it is impossible to live in this life and ignore what is going on all around us. Not only is it impossible; it is not pleasing to God. We have to be concerned about what is happening to our fellow creatures, we have to be witnesses, we have to love, not in heaven, but on this earth. At the same time we have to be careful not to be swallowed up in getting the “things” of this world, nor should we run with the world to their carnal excesses in drink and sex and drugs and anything that displeases God.

While we are living on this planet and while we are walking with God, it has to be a walk of moderation and self-control, not giving over to the intense appeal of carnal pleasures. And we should always be aware that health, wealth, fame or power is not an item for which we should strive overmuch. And certainly this mortal life is not all that important. What God wills for the individual for the day and for the moment is all that should concern the individual.

Who wants to live, in the manner we are living, forever?

13. You may wonder why we today don't “flee to another city” when we are persecuted. There are two reasons that come to mind: 1) In our time and in this land we don't often suffer physical abuse on a large organized scale; and 2) that was one way God could root those Jews of a nationalistic bent, out of their homeland so that they could carry the Gospel to other

Instructor's Notes continued

peoples and other lands. (It seems incredible, but today we have dedicated missionary-minded people who leave the security of home and friends and deliberately go into persecution in other lands to carry the Gospel to all who will hear them. We cannot forget these souls who risk life and property to follow the call of God.) It is nevertheless true that if God said to us lay believers, *flee*, we would flee. That is how dedicated we are to the will of God – aren't we?

14. We should not for a moment suppose that Paul committed these apparent acts of foolhardiness on a mere whim or to prove something to himself. He was only doing as the other apostles had done before him: He was following the leading of the Spirit. In Acts 8.1, when the rank and file of the believers fled from Jerusalem, the apostles stayed at their post, no doubt obeying the leading of the Holy Spirit. However, in Acts 14.5-7, Paul and Barnabas escaped persecution in Iconium by going to Lystra and Derbe, cities not too far from Iconium.

Undeniably the Holy Spirit was a vital help in the travels and experiences of Paul and his traveling companions. It was the Spirit who kept them and directed their every move. This was necessary for their safety and the accomplishment of the will of God in their lives. We need to be similarly alert in our daily living. If the Spirit says, "Go!" then we go. If He says, "Stay!" then we stay. There would be more of the power and glory of God in our lives if we were so sensitive to His guidance.

15. I have held myself back throughout the preceding three paragraphs, waiting for the right moment to speak on something of great concern to me, that is, the matter of intercessory prayer. It is an elementary fact of Christianity that the love of God reaches out to help others. It follows then that the requests the sincere Christian makes he makes primarily for others or for interests outside of himself. This, simply, is the essence of intercessory prayer. You pray for others who are in need. Clearly, no Christian can truly be Christlike, as the name

Instructor's Notes continued

Christian connotes, without praying for others. We know that Christ “ever liveth to make intercession for them [those who ‘come unto God by him’]”. Hebrews 7:25]. In like manner, the bulk of the Christian’s prayers should consist of interceding for others. This concern for the welfare of persons outside the constricting confines of their own selves is an outstanding trait in the lives of New Testament stalwarts. If you, a Christian, find yourself lacking this Christian hallmark, you should pray earnestly to God for it.

“No one is alone in the world. Somewhere he or she has a brother who is in great pain, a sister who has been wounded and left dying...

“It must be stated again that intercessory praying, whether a special gift of the Holy Ghost or the ordinary outgrowth of Christian love, calls for a heart that reaches out for a sufferer and feels what he is feeling. It is a heart that hurts when its brother hurts, weeps with its brother, and when the brother’s heart is broken this kindred heart is also torn apart.

“But we do not like to hurt, even in this vicarious type of situation. The pain is so real at times for the one who prays that he almost literally feels his brother’s or sister’s anguish. And we dislike being stressed. We have no wish to be extremely discomfited. That is why we subliminally avoid getting into our brother’s and sister’s shoes of distress. The pain is too real, too great. So we pray for our suffering fellow saints a little. We gingerly reach out a delicate hand that recoils from the muck of distress and agony and try to help the victim from an arm’s length away.

“We have to forget such genteel efforts and clasp to our bosom this man or woman who needs more than a delicate touch. Love requires us to get ourselves down in the sweaty grime of pain. It demands that we agonize and cry repeatedly to God until our brother’s torturous moment has passed. We must, we must, feel

Instructor's Notes continued

the need even if it wrenches our own souls in two.” (Excerpted from *Feel the Need*, JE pamphlet #TP-46)

You have been looking for a way to ease your suffering – well, it is here. Pray for your brother and sister who are suffering. Pray for your fellow creatures who are sinking in sin or who are distressed in various ways. Forget yourself and pray earnestly for others.

16. I can hear your unspoken question: “Why doesn’t God remove these genetic flaws as He often removes drug addiction from people who turn to Him?” It is for the same reasons that He did not remove Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” or the tendency of the young man in lesson I to do bodily harm to anyone who hurt him. He kept Paul and the man with the temper safe and saved despite, or rather, by means of, their grievous afflictions.

In lesson I we also dealt with four reasons that could be in effect while someone is suffering and wondering why. We are briefly repeating the reasons here. They are 1) the curse of sin on all men; 2) reaping; 3) purging and perfecting; and 4) chastisement or corrective action by God. Except for the first reason, they all bear directly on the sufferer’s salvation. He has salvation without the suffering, of course, but his having salvation causes him to reap *in this life*, and it automatically brings a concomitant purging and chastisement. It is God’s way of perfecting the sufferer.

Do you want to be like Christ? If you do, you can’t avoid the adversities that attend the attainment of the goal.

I wish I could tell you more to alleviate your suffering or that of someone close to you. I can only say what I have often said before: Get as close to God as you can. Cry out to Him – He hears you, and when, for some reason, God doesn’t immediately answer your prayers, take consolation in the fact that it is for your own good and His glory. If you are committed to Christ and the accomplishment of His will in your life, this awareness

Instructor's Notes continued

definitely helps. This is not theory; it is extracted from personal experience.

17. “An emotional disorder in which feelings of anxiety, obsessional thoughts, compulsive acts, and physical complaints...dominate the personality.” *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*.

Lesson IV

Coming to God for Help

We need God to help us surmount these genetic hurdles in our lives, but how do we approach Him? First, we need to have faith in our divine Friend. It doesn't have to be as big as a mountain to begin with. If we would just use the faith we have, we could go on from there. The Scripture tells us of a man who had a son overwhelmed with seizures (Mark 9.24): What did he do? Wait for more faith? No. The situation was tragic and he had to use the faith he already had. Desperately he cried out, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief"! meaning, Shore up my faith because I do believe that you can do it.¹⁸

Jesus answered him right away and healed his son, but God does not always work that way.¹⁹ He may make you wait in order to purge you in the fire. When He does that to us, we just have to wait in faith. Too often we sell God short. When He doesn't answer a request in the way and time we dictate, we wonder where is the vaunted power of God. We fail to realize that only two things can hinder God's power: 1) our lack of faith and 2) our lack of full submission to Him. With regard to item #1, if we don't have the necessary surge of faith, we should fall on our faces in entreaty to God to help us.

Then there is the all-important item #2 to consider: **submission, submission, submission** -- complete submission to the will of God. God has an infinite variety of ways in which He works in the lives of His children. But, however God chooses to work, the individual believer has to surrender to the particular will of God for his life. He can't demand that God work with or through him as God does with Jim or Sue or Betsy. What God wants to do with you is unique; therefore He works in a unique way with you. Faith for this type of submission is as great in its way as faith for healing or other dramatic miracles. Hanging on

to a belief and a trust in God even when your life seems to be completely without meaning calls for great faith.

There is something urgently needed in your life and God is trying to reveal it to you 1) through the troubles He allows to bedevil you; 2) through His Word, preached and written; and 3) through such teachings as this. What He is seeking to show you is that God will always answer *in His own way and His own time*. Be sure of this, however: He will never override His will for the individual who is suffering in submission. That would be counterproductive for the individual; the adversities of the saints are meant to make them literally into the likeness of Christ. Nevertheless God always answers the prayer raised in faith and in submission to His sovereign will. Just let Him have control of your life and be patient.

Use the Faith You Already Have

Now to return to our discussion on genetic baggage, which is just one of the hurdles we may encounter as we walk with God. Many negative genetic traits are very serious in the lives of the ones who are afflicted by them. Often there is a problem that complicates the situation. The problem is that these people need much faith – but where and how do they get it when they have trouble grasping what God wants? They are like most of us in this respect: We all believe in God; we just need more faith. Meanwhile we cannot afford to wait; we will have to use what we have. This makes it incumbent on us who have the advantage of experience or training over our more unfortunate brothers and sisters, to help them with the elementary faith they possess.

They should come to God with the faith they already have, then use it to call on God for more faith. I have seen people with personality problems who I felt could handle them if they could only give God what He wants. God wants to be first in our lives. He wants us to give Him everything we possess, whether material or physical or spiritual. If we give Him our all, He will give us His all – and that is a pretty big “all.” Yet, effectively telling our victimized brother or sister that God wants their all can be a difficult task. It’s not always that they don’t want to

surrender all to Christ; their particular genetic flaw makes it hard for them to grasp the scope of giving all. They have difficulty with the concept that God wants the minutest details and possessions we have. He wants our lives to be led from morning to nightfall by His Spirit. If we have a spiritual, mental or physical malfunction, whatever it is, God wants us to bring it all to Him. In a word, He wants to be our God. If we, the creatures God created perfect, have since been malformed, He demands that we bring all our defects to Him for repair. He made us; He can fix us.

We cannot always tell whether our unfortunate brothers and sisters don't want to give their all or whether they can't get a handle on what it means to give all. We have had the same mental block at times until the Spirit of God revealed to us what the blockage was. We have also had to determine at those times if we were really willing to surrender our all to Christ.

The carnal nature does not fall over and play dead. You have to kill it – and it can feel as though you were killing yourself. You are. That's what the cross does to you: It kills you – or perhaps we could better say that we do as the Savior did. The Romans did not really kill Jesus; in effect He killed Himself by not using the great power that was inherently His. He wanted to die. That was part of the reason for which He came to earth. We can also say that the cross does not kill us: we have the power to refuse our crucifixion, so in effect we impale ourselves on the cross. It is a voluntary act – it hurts nevertheless.

At times I have wanted to get into the mind of a person saddled with his own genetic baggage and make him see how to get the grace from God to handle his personality problems. But that is not possible. I can only pray that God will touch the person and open his eyes to what he really needs to do. And I pray again and again, and believe that it will be done. This is where vicarious faith plays such a vital role.

Using Vicarious Faith

Some of us, only by the grace of God, have carried our genetic baggage with us as we forged ahead. Others with similar

genetic baggage are faltering along the way. We can't leave them struggling in the way; we have to do for them as the friends of the palsied man did in *Mark 2:3-13. Perhaps the afflicted man was in no condition to believe for himself, so his friends had faith for him. This is vicarious faith. Vicarious faith in its true theological meaning is having faith for another only when the victim cannot have faith for himself or herself. We can pray effectively for the individual who does not believe for himself, but the true meaning of vicarious faith indicates that the sufferer is *unable* to have faith for himself.

The Scripture informs us that when Jesus saw **their** (not necessarily the palsied man's) faith, He healed him. We who have the ability to grasp what Jesus wants are obligated to have faith for our invalid brother or sister. This does not necessarily mean that the afflicted person is mentally incompetent, only that he or she needs the help of others who are not afflicted in that manner.

What we need to do for our brother or sister's personal flaws (or for our own) is to give up everything to Christ. Becoming intimate friends of God is a priority. Get close, very close to Him. Don't ever be satisfied with what you have attained. And cry earnestly to God out of your despair – your despair for yourself or for your friend who is hurting. God can and will step in and help your brother or sister or neighbor, whoever it is for whom your heart aches because he or she hasn't the ability to grasp fully what God wants. Moreover, there may be times when we can discreetly discuss his problem with him and give him our listening ear as well as our earnest prayers. But whatever you do along this line, do it in wisdom and love. You don't want to kill one for whom Christ died.

Even persons who are "well-adjusted" need to get close to God because there is no one who is so well adjusted that he can manage life on his own. If it isn't quirks and foibles within, it is pressures from without; often it is both. There is no doubt: We all desperately need the help of God.

‘Hanging Tough’ with God

Don’t cry just once or twice to God for help, whether it is for yourself or your fellow sufferer. God responds sometimes only to our persistence and “hanging tough.” I’m sure you have seen a small stupidly determined dog yapping at the heels of a 170-lb man. At first the man tries to ignore the dog, but the dog keeps coming at the man. In frustration, the man kicks at the dog, not meaning to hurt it, just to drive it away. But the dog keeps coming at the man. The man could kill the small annoying bundle of unrelenting energy, but he doesn’t want to go to that extreme, so he endures the assault on his heels and ankles until he can get away.

We have to be like that small stupidly determined dog. God won’t kick at us, although when He apparently ignores our “yapping,” it may seem to us that He is kicking us. But don’t you see, if God didn’t care for us, He could blast us into nothingness at any time. And we are more fortunate than the dog because when we have come at God untiringly, He will reward us for our persistence and faith: He will give us what He has wanted us to have all along. But too often we can’t see farther than our present unanswered prayers; we lack the faith to pursue our requests until heaven is moved to help us.

If you don’t want to humble yourself to flood God with your entreaties, you are in a desperate state because you need Him more than you know. You had better call on Him and plead with Him as though your life or the life of your invalid friend depended on it. It undoubtedly does.

God is not hard-hearted when He waits a while before answering your prayers. If you only knew! He yearns for your deliverance or that of your brother’s, but there is something that He wants to perfect in you by letting you agonize in prayer. You have to get this in your mind and let it sink down deep into your heart: Our God is a warm, sensitive Friend who is waiting for us to open the door of our hearts and let Him manage all of our problems, including those of a genetic nature.

God sees you when you sincerely try to do all of His will for your life. He is the Jesus who looked on the people with compassion because they were as sheep without a shepherd. He is the One who died for you because His love could not see you be lost. He is the One who said, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." You have to believe Him. You have to take Him at His word.

It would greatly help us to deal with our genetic problems if we would look on them as just another part of the curse of sin under which all men labor. We who can grasp this fact for ourselves have the responsibility to pray earnestly for our brothers and sisters who are similarly afflicted and have not as yet been able to see and accept their lot as just another fact of life. Accepting their lot and determinedly serving God in spite of it will bring a great change in the attitude of those who are carrying a frustrating burden of genetic baggage.

Giving Our All to and for Christ

When we heed Christ's call and come to Him, we have to give up everything for Him. Christ is not responsive to a half-hearted submission or a sacrifice that doesn't include all that we have. If we don't give Him our total being and possessions, how can we expect Him to respond in kind? After we give our all TO the Savior, He lends us back what He wants us to have. At that point we must give our all FOR Him by using the mental, physical and financial resources that He has given back to us, in furthering the Kingdom of God. You know how we "help" God. We help Him by reaching out a helping hand to the creatures who are made in His image. When the will of God becomes our consuming passion, we are well on our way to successfully coping with the troubles of this sin-cursed life, including whatever genetic baggage we may be carrying around with us.

Get Involved with the Troubles of Others

It's an accepted practice in the world to cope with adversity by becoming involved with a good cause. When a victim of mounting adversities becomes occupied with the

distresses of others, it is a positive way to deal with the adversities. It takes the focus off of his personal problems and directs it toward helping the other fellow who has as many troubles or more than he. If this positive step helps those who aren't following Christ, how much more should immersing ourselves in the service of the Lord help us to weaken the damaging effects of our character flaws! Find a cause; look for a need in others even though you have such a glaring need yourself. Don't become self-centered as though you and your obvious wants are the sum total of the universe. Be positive. Volunteer for work in the church or the community. Get your mind off yourself as much as possible. You will find there is a good feeling that you get when you do something for someone or for some group (church, community, etc.) outside of your four walls of interest. God smiles on such efforts.

Being Consistent in Your Efforts

Never neglect your prayer life. If you are physically able to fast, do so on a regular basis. Attend church services. Read the Bible daily and try to understand what it is saying. God will bless your attempt. What I am saying is simply this: Be active, always with the sense that what you are doing is for Christ's sake. And don't be an overnight sensation. By that I mean, try to avoid doing things by spurts. The little engine that scaled the mountain (read "A New Resolve for a New Year" TOL Archives, 12/30/01) didn't do it by herky-jerky efforts. Making it to the top of the mountain called for a continuous push. If it had *herked* and *jerked*, in between the herking and the jerking it would have lost the ground it had gained.

Some of us today are serving the Lord in the same herky-jerky fashion. I'll not flatly say this will not get us to heaven, but it certainly makes for a journey full of doubts and uncertainty. If serving God is the right thing to do, why not serve Him constantly? Spiritual accomplishment requires a consistency of effort. Push today, and tomorrow, and the day after. Keep pushing. Keep trying. Keep calling on Jesus to help those of whose needs you are aware – including yourself. When you fall,

don't lie there weeping for yourself. Get up! What else is there to do than get up and try again – and again – and again?

The Ultimate Joy and Glory Springing from Adversity

Of course the heading above is referring to adversity that is taken in the right way, in humbleness and without continual complaining. If adversity were to guarantee every wretched soul peace and happiness, everyone would eventually experience peace and happiness because we all have adversity in this life. Some seem to have more than their share and others less, but all suffer reverses of some kind. This is the outcome of the original human sin in the Garden of Eden. In direct and wondrous contrast to this sin-cursed life will be the “ultimate joy and glory springing from adversity” in that blessed place we call heaven.

What and Where Is Heaven?

Attempting to Describe the Indescribable

There is a superabundance of pleasure and glory in heaven that will completely and forever outstrip any suffering we may have endured in life on earth. Heaven is where it all ends for the believer in Christ, that is, all the suffering and tragedies of this life will be over. If you want to know where heaven is, it's the place where God and the good angels dwell. (Gen. 28.17; Psalms 80.14; Isa. 66.1; Mat. 5.12; 24.36) I cannot be any more precise on the location of heaven other than to say it is “up there,” as any place away from this wretched planet has to be up. Further, in Jacob's dream (Gen. 28.12-17) he saw a stairway the foot of which was on earth and “the top of it reached to heaven.” I don't necessarily believe that heaven is “up” as we think of the word, but the Scriptures refer to it that way because it is very definitely up in a spiritual sense. Heaven is up and away from materiality and carnality; it is the abode of the God to whom we lift our arms in prayer and our thoughts in meditation.

In this life we do not have a literal nor even a figurative continuing presence in heaven. We have snatches of time, moments, when we feel that we are in “heavenly places in Christ. Jesus.” But it is not an actual presence in heaven and it does not last longer than a fleeting moment. These thrilling moments are good and needful for us, but they are only the “earnest [pledge] of our inheritance” awaiting us in heaven. When we get to heaven, what we thought of as heaven in this life will be a useless discarded memory in the light of the real thing.

Once again, where is heaven? It is “up there,” “out there,” “over there,” anywhere away from this troubled planet. Heaven will be where the presence of Jesus in all His fullness and glory is focused. It cannot be here because there is no such thing as “heaven on earth.” Paul and John both had to be temporarily transported out of this life to have the little taste of heaven they experienced.

Now back to the “what” of heaven. I have a difficult task here, that of conveying to you what awaits us in the Great Beyond. It’s difficult for two reasons: 1) I myself have only the smallest shred of what to expect, and no one who has never been to heaven can have any more than a thimbleful of information on what heaven is like; and 2) even if I knew how wonderful heaven is, I could not tell you as there is nothing in this life with which to compare it.²⁰

How can we who have not seen the inexpressible glories of heaven have any idea of what it will be like except that it will be “wonderful,” “glorious,” “thrilling,” “indescribable.” These are the hackneyed words we are forced to use because our language is too limited and our power of thought so restricted. Even with our restricted thought, people let their imaginations run wild and spin some fanciful tales about life in the hereafter,²¹ but all we know is what the Bible tells us, and that is not very much. Paul says that we shall know as we are known,²² which would seem to indicate that our knowledge will be complete. (1 Cor.13.12) That’s one bit of information on heaven. Furthermore, we know there will be no sorrow or weeping or

negatives of any kind because the Scriptures categorically tell us so. (*1 Cor. 2.9; *Rev. 21.4)

The scriptures quoted above give us enough of a glimpse of heaven to make us long to go there, but nothing we have known or experienced can serve as a matrix in which to develop a full and valid concept of heaven. In this life we can imagine what something we have never seen looks like if we are told it looks like something we have already seen. We need to compare the unknown with the known. Analogies and figures of speech are required to describe to us that with which we are unfamiliar. It is impossible to draw mental pictures out of nothing.

For example, if someone had actually seen the fabled Loch Ness monster and were attempting to describe it to someone who hadn't seen it, he would have to express it by saying what it is like. He might say that the monster looks like a gigantic snake, or a monstrous alligator; it has claws and fangs as sharp as razors, etc., etc.. The eye witness could give the other person a fairly good description of the monster because the other person would be familiar with the terms the eye witness would use. The one who had not seen the monster would know what a snake and an alligator look like; he would be familiar with claws and fangs and the sharpness of a razor. The eye witness could describe the beast to the other person who had never seen the monster because the two persons would have a common frame of reference.

Describing heaven is an altogether different matter. First, only John or Paul or someone who had been there could even begin to attempt to describe its glories and peace and wonders. And even they would totally fail in the effort. Paul, who was caught up to paradise (2 Cor. 12.4), said – even though he had not yet reached the “final” heaven (New Jerusalem-Rev. 21.2-4)²³ – that he heard words that were “not lawful” for a human to repeat (“unutterable sayings, that it is not possible for man to speak” – Young’s Literal Translation). John the writer of Revelation was wholly unable to describe the substance and glory of the New Jerusalem (heaven) he saw and was forced to resort to imagery and metaphors (*Rev. 21.10-25). We can

imagine that John's mouth dropped in awe and he was left speechless by the magnitude of the vision that was opened before him.

How can we visualize something to which there is no comparison in this world? Similarly, how can those persons, like Paul or John, who have briefly experienced the inexpressible wonders of heaven, give us anything more than a vague picture of their dazzling glory and utter splendor? It's completely impossible.

Of course there will be more to heaven than its splendor. There will be personal relationships. In that vast assemblage of people there will be saints from all ages, from Adam (oh, you thought Adam would be left out?) down to the last soul to be saved before the closing of humankind's day. Since we will "know even as we are known" (1 Cor. 13.12), we will recognize every child of God from the little maid in Israel who testified to Jehovah's power before her Syrian mistress (2 Kings 5.1-14), to the great Prophet Elijah who awesomely demonstrated that power during his lifetime (1 Kings 17.1-2 Kings 2.11). Above all else, we will "see" Jesus! "Perceive" would be a better word. How can we as spirits see a spirit? Nevertheless we will encounter Jesus "face-to-face," and what a thrill that will be!²⁴

As for fellow believers we now know and love, we will still know them, but relationships will be different in heaven from those we have on earth. We will all be siblings in the great family of God the Father. There will be no teacher-student, parent-child, husband-wife relationships that exist in our present world. This may not be appealing to some at first glance – we die hard to old customs – but the bond among this great family of God will be immeasurably stronger and more satisfying than any natural bond can be in this life.

What of the friends and relatives who won't be there? How can we rejoice with the knowledge that they are enduring unbearable damnation for an eternity? No one can give a definitive answer to that question, but there are some things we know. One is that we will positively experience no heartaches or

sadness, which leaves two possible ways for God to ensure our continuing peace and joy: 1) The joys of heaven will be so overwhelming that they will wash away any worries we had on earth about those who opted to reject the Savior (now that is supreme euphoria!); or 2) we will know about those we left behind, but we will not care any longer for those sinners who didn't care enough about the One who died for them. We shall then do even as God will do: We will consign to the limbo of nonexistence those who rejected the One who cared so much for them that He gave more than they could possibly imagine for them. Unsaved friends and relatives, please don't let this be you!

Heaven will be a place of positives. There will be nothing there of a negative nature. If you can, picture in your mind a place where there will be no concern for the future, where there will be no worry about children getting hooked on drugs or parents who are getting older and sickly. Imagine, if you can, a life with absolutely no worries, no sorrows and none of the wrenching anguish of losing wife, husband, children, parents or friends. These calamities presently batter our emotions with terrible regularity. We feel like saying, "Oh Lord, I can't take any more of this!" But what can we do other than take it and take it and take it? Let's assume that I am a person who has borne up under a lifetime of unceasing calamities (it really hasn't been quite that bad!); that does not automatically mean that I was such a valiant person. There was nothing else I could do. I can run, but I definitely cannot hide from life.

There is no apparent way out, but there is a refuge in Jesus who has promised never to leave us or forsake us. We can't escape all of life's personal torture chambers, but we can find comfort and hope in Jesus Christ. He has assured us in John 14:18, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." And again in John 14:1-3 (NIV) he has lessened our hurts with this promise,

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God ; trust also in me. {2} In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. {3} And if I go and prepare a

place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

You see, there is always hope, there is still a brighter future, there are yet the wonders of heaven awaiting those who trust in Christ. Only stay the course: it will be infinitely more than worth all your present pain and suffering.

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” (2 Cor 4:17 NIV)

What more can I say to you whose world is falling apart and all you can see overhead are dark thunderclouds shutting out all hope? All I can say, from the very depths of my heart, is there is without fail a silver lining folded away in those foreboding thunderheads. There is no doubt a blessed ending, and at this moment a required work of transformation is being wrought in you as you submit to your adversities and the working of the will of God.

Hold on just a while longer, “For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry [delay].” (Heb 10:37) Our final destination is heaven, the awesomely wondrous place where Jesus waits for us! This is the unquenchable hope of the believer in Christ.

Instructor’s Notes on Preceding Lesson

18. This “Help mine unbelief” can be expected from a man who did not know Jesus as a disciple. The man had heard the fame of this Person and was impressed enough and had faith enough to come to Him in the man’s exigency. However, I find it strangely disturbing when I hear this cry from someone who knows the Lord well. We do not have all the faith we want; we have not reached the place of supreme trust in God that we want and need, but to refer to that shortfall of faith as unbelief is as jarring to the nerves of a believer as scratching the fingernails

Instructor's Notes continued

across an old slate blackboard. Christ's disciples don't have "unbelief"; they do not yet have all the faith they should have.

The father of the demon-possessed boy had some residual unbelief even though he believed enough to come to Jesus for his son's healing. But, in trying to get to Jesus, he first encountered the disciples who, as Jesus told them later, did not have sufficient faith – and they failed miserably. After this bitter disappointment, the father of the lad had to screw up his courage and his faith to continue his quest for healing. He believed: of that there is no doubt, but his hopes and his faith had been dashed badly by the failure of the disciples in their attempts to cast the demon out of the lad.

"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!" This can be expected of one who does not know Christ as we do. Theoretically we have not one shred of unbelief; we just don't yet have the faith or belief that is required to exorcise some of the demons that plague us. But we have "faith as a grain of mustard seed," and we will soon cast them out. We simply need to keep the faith, the faith that will not be denied.

This was not intended to be a long harangue against the saints' using the phrase "Lord, help mine unbelief." If you have ever said it, it is unlikely that God will vindictively seek you out for punishment and I am sure you will go to the same heaven to which I plan to go. I am merely trying to get the children of God to think and be logical and consistent in what they say.

19. If you view the situation with a discerning eye, you can see that the Church is in a different mode today. I believe the Holy Spirit is trying to tell us that God is not as interested in spectacular miracles now as He was in the early days of the Church. No, I am not saying God does not go by the miracle route now (how could anyone say that? – we are products of miracle after miracle, albeit not many are the eye-catching kind for which the "miracle workers" strain), just that He is more

Instructor's Notes continued

concerned that we perfect ourselves by lining up with the perfect model Jesus Christ. Perhaps you have noticed that there is no record of Paul's working many miracles among the saints, and Paul's day was not too far removed from the days of Jesus. It seems that the Spirit's changing from the physical deliverance mode to the "be-ye-transformed" (Rom. 12.2) mode for the Church was not long in coming after Jesus' death and resurrection, although some of that day still clung to the belief that miracles are the believers' sign of God's acceptance.

Paul and Peter, of whom we have the most extensive records, saved many souls and worked many miracles, even some among the saints (Acts 9.36-41, 20.9, 10), but they were also wrapped up in the perfecting of the children of God. Jesus worked on His followers to perfect them while at the same time He was performing the many miracles that attested to His Messiahship. The apostles also worked numerous miracles to attest to their being the bearers of the torch that Jesus passed on to them.

There are today no more of the original Twelve and consequently the miracles are not as profuse as they were in the early days of the Church. But we think we have to see spectacular miracles as a sign of God's approval upon us. It's not so much the miracles that we need: we need the miracles of holy lives shining forth as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. There are many good preachers of the Gospel who do a fairly good job of instructing their parishioners, but it's not often we hear one who consistently teaches good fundamental holiness (not the label of Holiness). We have long healing lines and we strain and we agonize over some afflicted person, trying to force a miracle to happen. I will be frank with you. I know there are miracles happening today, but I fail to see the attention-grabbing kind for which we twist the Lord's hand to see. Yet, despite the lack of hard evidence of these mind-blowing events, the work of making disciples goes on apace: that is the will of the Holy Spirit.

Instructor's Notes continued

As for teaching the disciples we make, we have lagged behind the will of God in that area. Paul travailed, as he put it, “until Christ be formed in you [the Galatians]” (Gal. 4.19b) and you can tell from his epistles that he had the same goal for all of his congregations. Peter was similarly involved in the perfecting of the saints (2 Peter 1.12-15). What is lacking in today’s Church is the regular, solid, elemental teaching of new converts (and old) and the lack is painfully evident in the lives and beliefs of many of these Christians. They are stunted in their spiritual growth by the lack of spiritual nourishment. Nevertheless, I have referred to them as Christians and that they are despite their slow development.

The Church needs to do what it is doing: save as many souls as it can, but the Church also needs to bring these newly saved souls into the fuller light of the Word of God. It should teach them, for instance, how to handle adversities when they come, as they surely must. It should teach them about the requirement for water baptism in Jesus’ name. There is much the new convert has to learn. In order to help fill the gap in teaching, we are doing what we can on the JacLyn Enterprises Web site and in our literature, searching out the ways and the will of God.

Let’s leave the working of miracles in the hand of God. He’ll give the miracles when and where they are needed.

20. There are some things about heaven that I do know. For instance, in heaven there will be no more hope, no more faith, no more prayers. Now wait – before you turn away in disgust and disappointment, read a little further. Consider this: In heaven there will be nothing we have to hope for. Our hopes will have been realized. Paul wrote, “...hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” (Rom 8:24.)

We won’t have any need for faith. We know that faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen, so faith will not be necessary. The things that formerly

Instructor's Notes continued

were not seen nor in evidence will be heaped upon us in abundance. As for prayer, nothing will be lacking to us, there will be no enemies and no more fear of anything. No rage on the highways, no silent thieves in the night, no murderers, no rapists – nothing negative in all of God's Kingdom, which will be a universal kingdom. Prayer will be a relic of the uncertain past.

All we'll need, it seems, is Jesus. He'll be there.

21. Let's dispel some of the myths about heaven:

Your loved ones are NOT “looking over the banister of heaven,” checking up on you. If they were, they would be as unhappy in heaven as they were here because of your mistakes and sins.

They are NOT praying for you. To pray for you, they would have to be aware of your troubles – and what kind of heaven would that be?

Your loved ones can NOT help you in any way. Their participation in the affairs of this life is over forever. You can eventually join them in their supreme joy if you choose, but they cannot come back to you, not even by praying for you.

22. This passage refers to the end state of the righteous, when they shall have arrived in their new home, New Jerusalem (Rev. 3.12, 21.2) There they will “know as they are known.”

23. The notion that Paul had not yet reached the “final” heaven is admittedly conjecture on my part. He referred to the fabulous place both as the third heaven and as paradise. I am sure neither you nor I will lose any sleep or faith over the matter.

24. None of us believers has “moved” to heaven yet. We will all take up residence there together, at the end of all the tribulations of the book of Revelation and when all judgments and punishments and rewards have been assigned. It will be an eternity of unimaginable peace and joy – and what more there will be we can't say, but God has prepared great things for us who have endured the pain and suffering of the cross as our

Instructor's Notes continued

Master did. He went through the horror of Gethsemane and Calvary for the joy that was awaiting Him just beyond that dreadful moment of anguish. If we elect to suffer with Him, we will know the same joy.

But what am I doing? I know only a thimbleful of what there is in heaven, so why am I posing as some savant who knows it all? I don't. But I hope you get what I am saying by this avalanche of words: Heaven is beyond description. It is the Grand Prize of all grand prizes and worth every ounce of unpleasantness and pain we experience in this brief lifespan. The joy of eternity and the eternity of joy will swallow up all the bitterness of this mortal life. Don't seek to save your life: lose it for Christ's sake and you will find a life that will make this present one look sickly and putrid in comparison. Keep the faith; you are almost there.

About the Author

Aaron J. Smith is a third generation Apostolic/Pentecostal who does not look on the term as a rigid mold from which there can be no scripture-based variation. The son of Karl F. and Josephine Smith, Aaron and his siblings were taught early on to deliberately choose their faith, not inherit it. His father, a bishop in the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc., was the pastor of the Church of Christ of Apostolic Faith in Columbus, Ohio and was what might be termed an "enlightened Pentecostal thinker" of his day. He had the penchant for examining doctrinal thought in the clear light of the Scriptures regardless of tradition. This trait was passed on from father to son.

Aaron married Pat Herring Ross in 1981. She has been a tremendous help to him in his career at Aeon Bible College and in his various literary efforts. Aaron contributed articles regularly to the Christian Outlook in the early 60's and in the period between 1982 and 1984. He is the author of seven published books, •A Devout Man, •Acts: History and Theology: •From Eternity to Eternity: Jesus Christ, • Pulled from the Web, •Just Between You and Me, vols. I & II, and •The Grand Plan of Salvation.

In 1991 Aaron retired as the director of External Studies of Aeon Bible College in Indianapolis. He had also served, during his tenure with the college (1975-1991), as coordinator and occasional instructor of the Aeon Mini-Academy seminars held each year at the General Convention of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc., and editor of the Aeon Forum newsletter. His wife Pat was also on the Aeon staff as coordinator of the Aeon Bible Institutes and, following his retirement, she replaced him as the director of External Studies until her own retirement in 1993.

Aaron and Pat now reside in Sugar Hill, GA, where they publish books and other literature written by him as she acts as the technological specialist and keeps the wheels of their Internet/computer world running smoothly.

Index

- "disturbances of life", 16
- Abraham, 17, 29
- Acts, 17, 39, 40, 41, 43, 44, 53, 71, 76
- Adam, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 27, 67
- adversity
 - adversities, 5, 12, 15, 18, 20, 22, 28, 29, 41, 51, 55, 58, 62, 63, 69, 72
- affliction, 16, 23
- angel, 12, 31
 - angels, 11, 12, 27, 64
- apostles, 17, 23, 39, 40, 41, 43, 44, 53, 71
- Babylon, 26
- Barnabas, 40, 53
- black hole, 31, 32, 33, 35, 48
- branch, 20
- Caesarea, 41
- call of God, 53
- carnal, 22, 23, 44, 52, 59
- character, 23, 39, 41, 47, 63
- chastisement, 19, 20, 21, 55
- children of God, 14, 17, 23, 28, 29, 70, 71
- Christ, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24, 25, 39, 41, 44, 51, 54, 55, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 65, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 74, 76
- cocoon, 50
- condemnation, 22
- Creation, 11, 13, 14, 26, 27, 52
- Creator, 11, 28
- creature, 13, 23, 51
- cross, 18, 20, 45, 50, 59, 73
- crown, 50
- curse, 19, 46, 55, 62
- David, 43
- death, 13, 16, 20, 26, 37, 40, 71
- delivered, 39
- Derbe, 40, 53
- devil, 31, 32
- devils, 44, 49
- disciple, 17, 69
- disposition, 23, 24
- drugs, 19, 52, 68
- Earth, 12, 13, 27
- earthen bottle, 21
- Eden, 14, 16, 64
- Egypt, 42
- existence, 11, 18, 19, 22
- family, 21, 67
- fault, 23, 24, 51
- Felix, 41
- Free Will, 11
- fruit, 16, 20
- fruitful, 20
- genetic, 31, 34, 35, 46, 47, 48, 55, 57, 58, 59, 61, 62
- Gentiles, 40, 49
- Gethsemane, 19, 43, 74
- glory, 28, 37, 38, 39, 53, 55, 64, 65, 66, 67, 69
- God's Will, 22, 29
- Gospel, 40, 41, 52, 71
- grace, 5, 19, 22, 24, 38, 44, 45, 46, 59
- greater glory, 38
- harvest, 18, 19
- heal
 - healing, 28, 37, 38
- heaven, 11, 12, 13, 29, 43, 52, 61, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 72, 73, 74
- heresy, 41
- hope, 14, 18, 20, 27, 28, 37, 38, 41, 68, 69, 72, 74
- humanity, 19
- injustice, 24
- Isaiah, 11, 22, 26
- Israel
 - Israelites, 21, 67
- Jacob, 17, 29, 41, 64
- Jerusalem, 53, 66, 73
- Jesus, 12, 16, 18, 19, 20, 25, 37, 39, 40, 43, 44, 50, 51, 57, 59,

- 60, 62, 63, 65, 67, 68, 69, 70,
71, 72, 73, 76
- John, 17, 20, 37, 40, 43, 65, 66,
67, 68
- Judaizers, 49
- judge, 20, 21, 41, 46
- justice, 24, 41
- knowledge, 9, 12, 24, 40, 48, 65,
67
- Law
- Mosaic Law, 26
- Lazarus, 37, 38
- life, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24,
25, 27, 28, 29, 37, 38, 39, 41,
42, 44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52,
53, 55, 57, 58, 60, 61, 62, 63,
64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 73, 74
- long view, 28, 50
- Lord, 17, 19, 22, 24, 26, 37, 39,
42, 43, 49, 57, 63, 68, 69, 70,
71
- love, 13, 21, 28, 29, 37, 38, 40,
42, 52, 53, 54, 60, 62, 67
- Lucifer, 11, 12, 14, 25, 26
- Lystra, 40, 53
- makeup, 23, 45, 46
- Mankind, 16
- martyrdom, 17
- Master Refiner, 39
- mercy, 19, 23
- Messiah
- Messianic, 25
- miracle, 18, 37, 39, 47, 70, 71
- misfortune, 16
- Moses, 17, 22, 29
- mount of assembly, 11
- native trait, 24
- naturalist, 50, 51
- nature, 24, 37, 40, 44, 47, 59, 61,
68
- new creature, 16
- obey
- obedience, 13, 26
- offender, 21
- Old Testament, 25, 43
- pain, 15, 16, 18, 28, 44, 45, 54,
69, 73, 74
- passion, 19, 25, 62
- Paul, 17, 18, 20, 23, 26, 29, 40,
41, 49, 50, 53, 55, 65, 66, 67,
71, 72, 73
- Perea, 37
- perfect, 13, 14, 20, 28, 51, 59,
61, 71
- perfecting, 18, 22, 55, 71, 72
- perfection, 14, 18, 20, 39
- persecute, 39
- persecution, 18, 20, 39, 40, 44,
49, 53
- persecutions, 18, 20, 41, 49
- Potiphar, 42
- power, 18, 20, 24, 25, 37, 38, 52,
53, 57, 59, 65, 67
- pray, 39, 44, 45, 53, 54, 55, 59,
60, 62, 73
- pride
- proud, 26
- prison, 39, 42, 51
- prophecy, 25, 26
- prophecies, 25
- punishment, 21, 22, 70
- purging, 18, 22, 55
- resurrection, 18, 20, 41, 71
- sacred mountain, 11, 12
- saint, 16, 17, 20, 21, 38
- salvation, 18, 20, 55
- Satan, 12, 13, 26, 27, 31, 32, 33,
34, 35
- save, 24, 72, 74
- Savior, 18, 20, 26, 59, 62, 68
- Scripture, 37, 38, 40, 57, 60
- seed, 18, 19, 22, 51, 70
- sex, 19, 52
- sin, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 27,
55, 62, 64
- sinner, 17, 21, 22, 23
- Son of God, 19, 50
- Sovereign, 26
- space, 13, 14, 30
- Spirit, 12, 14, 22, 23, 26, 49, 53,
59, 70, 71
- suffer, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 24, 25,
29, 39, 40, 44, 45, 52, 64, 74
- suffering for Christ's sake, 39**

sufferings, 20, 39, 44

temptation, 31

Ten Commandments, 26

thorn in the flesh, 49, 55

torture, 49, 68

tree of the knowledge of good

and evil, 12

trial, 39, 43

Tyre, 25, 26

vine, 20

will of God, 23, 25, 28, 38, 39,

40, 53, 57, 62, 69, 72

wisdom, 23, 24, 25, 28, 40, 41,

45, 60

works, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 47, 57

worship, 11, 25, 41

