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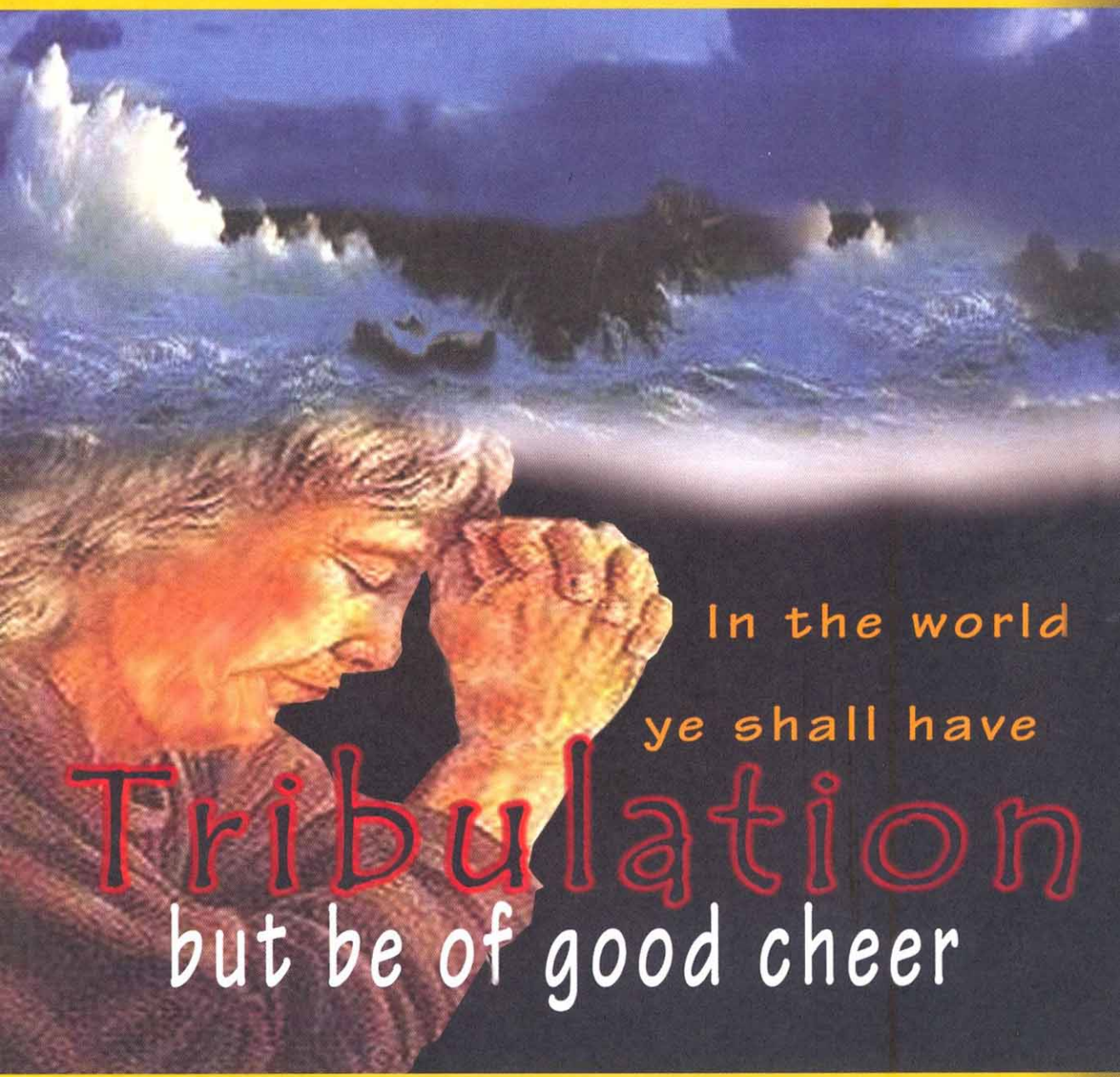

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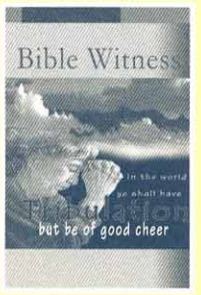
God's Sovereignty in Our Adversity
Why Suffering?
Why Do the Innocent Suffer?
Suffering Can Be Good for You!



Editor
Prabhudas Koshy

Publishing & Circulation Co-ordinator
Lok Kwok Wah

Technical Editors
Adrienne Foo, Carolyn Koshy, Jenny Lok, Lok Kwok Wah, Mah Lean Choo & Renee Stone

Cover Design & Layout
Prabhudas Koshy
Lok Kwok Wah

Illustrations
Prabhudas Koshy
Melissa Neo

Publisher
Bible Witness Literature Ministry of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church, Singapore

Printer
Chung Printing

Contact Information
By mail:
Bible Witness Literature Ministry
P. O. Box 369
Singapore Post Centre
Singapore 914013

Tel: (65) 6741-1910 **Fax:** (65) 6741-1016

Web-site: www.biblewitness.com

E-mail: editor@biblewitness.com

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Tribulation & Cheer

Prabhudas Koshy

Jesus said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33b).

"In the world ye shall have tribulation"

No Christian is fully shielded from troubles. Jesus said it plainly, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Jesus has not promised His followers a life totally free from sorrows, poverty, toil, sickness, slander, persecution or any of the common ills of mankind. Instead, He promised every follower a "cross."

You are not promised the admiration of the unbelieving world. In fact, you should not expect or accept much favour from the world. Worldly people will not gather around us to admire our piety or to appreciate our devotion to the Lord. The people of the world may like a Christian for some favours they can get out of him; but as a Christian they cannot love him. If the world does gather around a Christian in real admiration and support, it's because either the Christian has compromised or it has made a mistake about him!

Beware of the kiss of Judas with which Christ was betrayed, and with which you will be betrayed unless you are well on your guard. In the world and from the world, ye shall have tribulation. When the world pretends to love, understand that it now hates you more cordially than ever, and is carefully baiting its trap to catch you and ruin you. The Apostle John cautioned us, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you" (1 John 3:13). It's no surprise that the world hates Christians, because it hates their Master. Jesus said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). He also said, "The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil" (John 7:7).

The world's hatred and opposition to Christians are a reflection of its prince's hatred for Christ and His beloved ones. The enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman still continues. It is better that you understand that the serpent has not changed his nature. He is a vile deceiver and destroyer still. As soon as he sees in you a devotion to Christ and His truth, he hates you with passion.

We are all born into a measure of troubles. Now our Lord tells us that we, who are born again, are introduced to a second set of tribulations. I think almost all Christians would say that this prophecy of our Lord has been abundantly verified in their lives. If anybody shall have tribulation, it is the Christian. From the kingdom of this world whereof Satan is lord, we must expect fierce opposition; and we must contend against it even unto victory if we are to enter into everlasting rest.

Some Christians might have been enjoying a life of comfort and prosperity. Like Job, they might also have been increasing in riches and dwelling at ease with a hedge about them. They might be thinking, perhaps, they have no tribulation to bear. But may such Christians be forewarned that when the devil turns against them, great may be their trials.

Though there is tribulation in the world, many a Christian have grown very fond of the world. If we have no troubles in this world, we would become too comfortable with this world of sin. So through trials, the Lord stirs up our worldly tabernacle, that we may remember this world is not our eternal home. He allows trials to come our way that we may know we are not of this world, and that we are pilgrims here on earth. We are not to live here, but must soon be up and away to the glorious land.

When tribulations in this world arrive, let our thoughts and desires be turned toward the heavenly city of our God. Thanks be to God for the tribulation which shakes our thoughts out of the things of the earth and directs them toward heaven.

"But be of good cheer"

To comfort all His beloved ones who are troubled in this world, the great Conqueror of the world says, "but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Remembering Jesus as the overcomer of the world, will help us to be cheerful even in afflictions.

Our Lord was an overcomer both in life and death. No adversity was strong enough to distract our Lord from accomplishing all that His Father had appointed Him to do. Nothing could overcome Him, but He overcame them all.

If you take time to study the life that our Lord had lived while He was on this earth, you will see that He was a victor in all the circumstances of His life. A deep calm always pervaded His spirit whether it was the approbation or censure that He received from men around Him. He never lost His self-control. Nothing could frustrate Him that He might fail to perform His assignments perfectly to the pleasure of His Father. He conquered all circumstances and did everything perfectly. To hold Him in our view through our life's journey, is indeed a wonderful experience.

Our Lord also overcame the world by His fearlessness of the world's elite men. When the Pharisees, who had no regard for Him, and with sneer and disgust, confronted Him, He declared God's truth, rebuking and disproving them. Like a true Master, He outwitted them with His wise answers and actions. Their opposition could only prove that He is all-powerful and all-wise. Even the threats of Pilate, the governor, could not intimidate Him. He remained calm and undisturbed within when He was tried by Pilate. Even in death, He was a victor, for He ministered divine comfort and hope to the repenting criminal who was crucified beside Him. Finally, He overcame death and grave in His resurrection. Thus, He has defeated our last enemy, even death!

Since the Lord Jesus has tasted the severity of earthly tribulations and also the exultation of victory, we can trust Him to give us cheer in this hostile world. He understands the agony of our sufferings. He knows what it means to be rejected by people. He empathises with all our problems, because He experienced them. Now as an overcomer of every tribulation that He had faced, He assures us that if we follow His Word, we can "be of good cheer."

Jesus wants us not to give up our resolve to live for God's glory. Even as He had not neglected the work that His Father had given Him to do while He was on earth, despite being rejected and afflicted, we should also press forward. He wants us to set our eyes upon Him and follow His example.

We must look to Him not only as an example in overcoming our trials, but also as our strength and help to overcome our afflictions. He is able to see us through, for He is our victorious Captain. So, by trusting in Him, let's persevere; and He will see us through.

If we lose sight of our victorious Lord in our tribulations, we will lose heart. We need to remember that it is His desire that we will have joy even in our tribulations. He is neither ignorant nor inactive in our problems. He is with us, and He is actively at work through our afflictions and problems in making us better and happier Christians.

So let's persevere, and don't let our hearts be invaded by sorrows and fears. The problems are there in order to test our mettle and spirit in following Jesus. Fear not the troubles, for our Lord has walked that way ahead of us. Keep your steps behind Him, trusting and obeying Jesus through your troubles. Remember that as you endure, you are following the One who has overcome the tribulation of this world. If you keep your trust in Him, you can be of good cheer, because victory through Christ is in sight.

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Hebrews 12:2-3).

all things work together for good to them that love God

Timothy Tow

Romans 8:28 – "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

What a comforting thought this promise brings to every Christian who loves the Lord! It is for the Almighty hand of God to direct all events, whether good or bad, to work out good for the Christian.

But this is not the case for them who are outside Christ. And if they are outside Christ, they are without hope and without God (Ephesians 2:12). Being without hope and without God, life is a miserable struggle. Without the light by which Christians are led, they are left to grope in their dark superstitions. They are left to a blind fate. What they decide to do at each crossroad of life is to try to avoid every bad luck.

One of our residents in Beulah House who comes from China has found the Lord and is happily baptised. Before she was saved, she lived a life of doubts and fears. Indeed, she was without God and without hope. What she told me of her former life fits exactly what I have described here of those outside Christ.

Some would consult the temples, mediums (the bomohs (Malay) and the dukuns (Indonesian)) to choose an auspicious day for marriage, a good day for travel or to start a business. Others believe in fengshui which is geomancy, whether a house lies in a good or bad location so as to bring them good or bad luck. If they go on a journey, they will buy insurance (not that they will have a foolproof flight but rather if they should die, they would be compensated, what irony!). They will consult the horoscope to avoid an evil fate. From these observations, whether they meet with good or bad luck, all things can only work for bad. To the rich fool Jesus says, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

Let us come back to the Christian, not the nominal one who knows not his God, but to the born again, one who not only believes with all his heart but also loves Him. Paul says it again, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

This does not mean that a Christian will not go through trials in his life. He also grows old like others, he is liable to sickness, he can meet with an accident, he may even meet with an untimely death. All these vicissitudes of life are part and parcel of earthly life. What makes the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is that, for the Christian there is a promise, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

What Paul says here, he speaks from his own experience. After his conversion, he waxed bold to testify Christ, so he was persecuted. "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in

despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8, 9). For an example of how God worked good out of evil, Paul tells the story of the governor of Damascus who tried to arrest him with a garrison of soldiers. But Paul was helped by friends to escape by being let down in a basket through a window over the city wall. A Christian is hated by the world. Many times danger surrounds him even without his knowing. But God by His Almighty hand will keep him.

During the Japanese occupation, the whole of Singapore went through the concentration camp. Many young men who were taken, never came back. They were mass-killed by the Japanese in revenge for stiff resistance by Chinese volunteers. As for the Tow families, we were staying in some country hideout and so escaped this concentration camp. When we emerged from our country hideout and innocently went into the city, the ghastly business was over. God had saved us without our knowledge of Romans 8:28.

In Paul's Second Missionary Journey, he was trying to go to the province of Asia, but the Holy Spirit forbade him. He turned to go to Bithynia, and again he was hindered by the Spirit. This channelled him to proceed to Troas. There he saw in a vision in the night, a man of Macedonia beckoning him to come over to help them. Assuredly gathering that God was calling him to preach the gospel in Europe, he made a straight course in the power of the Spirit.

Many times we have such an experience. "Man's goings are of the LORD: how can a man then understand his own way?" (Proverbs 20:24). In the Old Testament, we have the story of Saul's father who lost his asses. He sent Saul to search for them. In order to find them, Saul went to consult the prophet. The prophet told Saul that his father's asses were found. But Samuel had a higher appointment for Saul than finding the asses. God told Samuel before Saul came that he should anoint him captain of Israel. We see how Romans 8:28 was fulfilled in Saul's life.

Not to talk of lost asses, I had the experience of losing my mother and baby daughter within five weeks. I was bent on going to study law in London against the vow I had made to serve the Lord full-time. God had to use the two deaths at the time I was about to set out, to thwart my wayward purpose. This turned me around 180 degrees. Since that day I gave myself to study theology, and have served him without wavering for the last 50 years. The bad that I went through brought me good.

Are there disappointments in your life? Do you suffer any setback? Did you fail your exam so you cannot join the university? Are you engaged to be married but now the engagement is broken? Married, and now separated? Are you suffering from a bad disease when once you were robustly healthy? Have you lost heavily in any business undertaking? These messengers of disappointment are used by God to bring you to repentance. They are good for you if you love God. They will bring you joy and success if you yield to the Lord's hand. But if you are outside Christ, even the good will end in the bad. It will bring you good if it finally leads you back to God, to the salvation He has prepared for them that love Him. It will lead you to bad, if you, though rich and powerful, end up separated from God, in the everlasting darkness. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

The messengers of disappointment are used by God to bring you to repentance.

Are you a born again Christian? If not, there is only one way for you, and that is to come and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

God's Sovereignty in our adversity

Wee Eng Moh

Our daily newspapers carry reports of tumultuous events in almost every part of the world - wars, mass murders, political strife, natural disasters, currency turmoil, and economic recession. In these days when massive crisis have become regular news items, even the Christian is tempted to ask, "Where is God? Does He not care for the thousands who are starving in Africa or the innocent civilians who are being brutally murdered in many war-ravaged countries around the world? Why is God allowing the atrocities that are so prevalent today? Is He not going to act against the guilty, to judge and punish them for their crimes against the innocent?"

For most of us, even believers, life is full of adversities. None of us can tell what will transpire in a single day or hour that will affect our lives. The unexpected – like the death of a loved one, a terminal disease, retrenchment or failure in an important examination – may descend upon us. Confronted with these sudden afflictions, we often find it hard to accept that God is still in control. We are always happy and ready to receive good at the hand of God, but not the bad. People often ask the question, "If God is a God of love, how could He allow a certain calamity to happen?" If we respond in this negative way, we are no better than Job's wife who instigated him to give up his faith, to "curse God, and die." In suffering, Job stood loyally by his God, and rebuked her, saying, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" The Bible records for us that in his hour of deepest suffering, Job did not sin with his lips (Job 2:10).

Whatever our particular affliction may be, we can be sure that our gracious Heavenly Father has a loving purpose in allowing it. The Bible speaks much on the sovereignty of God over every event in our lives. Practically every page of the Holy Scripture tells the believer of His divine providence and control. The fact that God is sovereign should comfort our hearts.

God does not exercise His sovereignty capriciously, but only in such a way as His infinite love and wisdom deem best for us. Jeremiah wrote of his experiences with God's dealings: "But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men" (Lamentations 3:32-33).

Confidence in the sovereignty of God is crucial in trying circumstances. One Christian writer commented: "If there is a single event in all of the universe that can occur outside of God's sovereign control, then we cannot trust Him." His love and wisdom may be infinite, but if His power is limited and His purpose can be foiled, then He can fail and may not have the ability to keep His promises. But we thank God that He is sovereign and has absolute control over His creatures, and we can fully trust in Him. No creature, ruler or nation can either thwart His purposes or act beyond the boundaries of His will.

The sovereignty of God is a comforting doctrine. It encourages our hearts to trust Him in times of adversity. So let us meditate on how God's sovereignty functions in our adversity.

Understanding the Function of His Sovereignty in Our Adversity

We may never come to know all the reasons behind our sufferings. Sometimes God may cause us to know His purpose for afflicting us. But in many cases, He does not reveal what He is doing, or why. The Bible tells us that God never explained to Job why He had permitted his grievous affliction. As readers, we are taken behind the scenes to observe the spiritual warfare between God and Satan, but as far as we can tell from Scripture, God never gave His suffering servant the reasons for his afflictions.

Though God may not reveal all the reasons for our adversities, He promises to stand by us in our afflictions. God does not bring His people into trouble, and leave them alone there. He will stand by them and strengthen them when they are weak and worn. In the midst of his troubles, the Psalmist could speak confidently of God's presence: "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him" (Psalm 91:15). God will be there to sustain His children and to give them grace in time of need.

In His sovereignty, God will exercise protective care over His people. He acts by restraining people especially from decisions or actions that harm them. An incident in Abraham's life illustrates this aspect very clearly. When Abraham was in Gerar, he lied about his wife, Sarah, saying she was his sister because he feared for his life. Abimelech the king, therefore, acted to take Sarah as his wife. God, however, permitted Abimelech "not to touch her" (Genesis 20:6). In this way, God restrained the king from a physical relationship with Sarah. He intervened to protect Sarah's purity.

Every adversity permitted by God, whether big or small, is intended to help us grow in the faith (Romans 5:3-5; James 1:3-4). If it were not profitable, God would not allow or send it. God does not delight in our sufferings. He knows us better than we know ourselves. What we think may be our greatest need may not be so at all in the eyes of God. Like an expert physician, He dispenses the right dosage of affliction according to our needs. He knows exactly what we need and how to supply it. His training is carried out with exquisite skill.

God is never at a loss because He cannot find someone to co-operate with His plan. The Scripture tells us of many instances when He moved in the hearts of people – either positively to cause them to do His will or negatively to restrain them from doing what is contrary to His will. All too often, we read these accounts merely as biblical history without relating them to our lives and our situations. Let us be reminded that "...whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

God sometimes allows others to treat us unjustly though He never permits them to do anything that undermines His plan for us. We see this truth evidenced in the life of Joseph. The brothers of Joseph hated him because of his father's special affection for him. Moved with jealousy and hatred, they decided to do away with him. But divine providence so ordered that some Ishmaelite traders passed by just in time to prevent the murder of Joseph. God permitted him to be sold to these passing merchantmen who in turn sold him as a slave to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officers. We are told that while he was in Potiphar's house, "the LORD was with Joseph" and he found favour in the sight of his master. Later, Joseph was unjustly cast into prison, because of Potiphar's wife who had maliciously accused him of making improper advances towards her. But in God's perfect timing, He turned the circumstances around, and sovereignly directed the evil acts of people exactly as He planned in order to accomplish His purpose. He lifted up this faithful servant from the dungeons of Egypt and appointed Joseph to a place of honour in the courts of Pharaoh.

When his brothers later sought his forgiveness, Joseph responded without a trace of bitterness or resentment: "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Genesis 50:20). His response reflected a meek and humble spirit that willingly accepted God's sovereign purpose, even if it meant much pain and suffering. Joseph saw the higher hand of God working out His divine purposes through the evil acts of the wicked. His gracious words assured his brothers that revenge or retaliation had never been on his mind as he partook of the sufferings ordained by the Lord "to save much people alive."

The Christian life should be one of continuous growth. We desire to grow in our spiritual lives, but we often resist the process. We tend to focus on our trials and testings rather than the sovereign purposes of God for us. God intends that we grow through the disciplines of adversity as well as through instruction from His Word.

Appropriate Response to His Sovereignty in Our Adversity

What then should be our response towards the sovereignty of God that we may profit from our afflictions?

1) **Submit humbly to God**. Do not sink into despair, depression and bitterness. Rather endeavour to see the gracious purpose of God. Though we may not fully understand it, we must seek to learn the lessons He has for us. Accept God's perfect right to do with us as He wills. "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Daniel 4:35). In the words of Arthur Pink: "The one who bows to the pleasure of the Almighty will acknowledge His absolute right to do with us as seemeth Him good. If He chooses to send poverty, sickness, bereavements, even while the heart is bleeding at every pore, it will say, Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right!" May we say with Job: "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

2) **Be thankful**. It is easy to be thankful to God when things go well with us. But what of those occasions when things go contrary to our plans and desires? The Bible tells us that we are to thank God at all times – bad times and good times, for adversities as well as for blessings. "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). When we rejoice in the face of difficult circumstances, we are actually accepting God's will for us and trusting Him to work out all things for our good.

3) **Forgive those who have wronged us**. Adversity often comes to us through the actions of others. Our tendency is to harbour bitterness, and to even desire revenge. We are to look beyond the person, who is merely the instrument, to our God who has purposed the affliction for us. The Lord has ordained this trial in my life because He deemed it profitable for me. Like Joseph, may we appreciate the divine purpose, and forgive those who have hurt us or "brought about" our adversities.

Let us therefore accept all things as "good" knowing they come from God's loving hand.

Why Suffering?

An Exposition of James 1:1-4

Jeffrey Khoo

Introduction

The psalmist says, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow" (Psalm 90:10). The wise man of Ecclesiastes likewise says that the days of man "are sorrows, and his travail grief" (Ecclesiastes 2:23). One hymn writer says, "Days are filled with sorrow and care."

Suffering is no respecter of persons. In life, at one time or other, we are bound to go through patches of hard times, of difficulties, of troubles, of sorrows, of grief, and of pain. Normally, the first word that comes to our mind is "Why?" or "Why me?" The question "Why?" is an important one. The unbeliever in answer would probably say it is bad luck. When asked "Why?" what is your answer as a Christian, as a child of God?

Often we quote Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." That is a most wonderful verse to help us see things in perspective. But again the question "Why?" disturbs us. I want to know why I am going through all these trials in my life. God answers us, and He does so in James 1:1-4.

Historical Context

In verse 1, we are introduced to the writer who is the Apostle James, the son of Zebedee. James calls himself a "servant" of God. The word "servant" here in the original Greek text has the idea of bondage, of being bound. James says that he is a bound servant. This indicates that James probably wrote this letter while he was in prison.

So, when James wrote about trials and sufferings here, he was not talking about things he knew nothing about. He was not telling them to endure suffering while enjoying the comforts of life. He was definitely not sitting on a cushioned chair in air-conditioned comfort with his cup of nice hot tea or coffee. He was writing about these things in a dirty and smelly dungeon waiting to be executed. Indeed he was. James was the first Apostle to die (Acts 12:1-2).

To whom was he writing? This letter was written to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." The twelve tribes refer to Israel, to the Jews. The recipients were the Jewish Christians. James was writing to the Jewish church which went through severe persecution, not only from the Romans, but also from their own countrymen—the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees. Because of this intense persecution, they had to flee Jerusalem, and thus were dispersed or "scattered abroad." The Jerusalem church suffered no less than five persecutions (cf. Acts 4, 5, 6, 8, and 12).

The Christian Jews were probably asking the question: "Why?" Many were discouraged, dejected, and depressed. Some may have been thinking of giving up the faith. James had to write to teach the people what it means to go through trials in life, and why God allows trials to come into our lives.

When we encounter trials in life, how should we respond or react?

God Wants us to Respond to Trials in Life Joyfully

The natural thing to happen when trials come our way is to be sorrowful, and even to weep. James, on the other hand, tells us that we ought to rejoice. "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." The

word "temptations" here does not mean sinful temptations, as commonly understood. It is not temptation as in the motivation or desire to sin that comes from within the depraved heart (see verse 13). The word "temptations" here means "testings" or "trials." These testings or trials are the difficult situations or circumstances in life that afflict us from without.

When confronted with such trials and testings in life, James commands us to be joyful. The word "count," or "consider" here is written in the imperative. When faced with difficulties or hardships in life, to be joyful is not an option. James says we must rejoice. The joy expressed should not be partial, but complete - "count it all joy," i.e., "count it pure joy."

Now, when James calls us to be joyful when facing trials in life, he is not saying that we should be seen laughing or being jovial all the time. It is not a facade - not an outward display. It is an attitude. It is a confidence we have in our God that He knows all things, and He is in control of all things. And so with that confidence in God, you praise Him all the time despite the troubles, hardships, and sufferings. I see this in our prayer meetings when our church members come up to give testimonies. Many had gone through very severe hardships, and yet in their testimonies, every sentence is in praise of God. No complaints, no murmurings, no swearings, and no questionings. That is exactly what James meant when he said, "Count it all joy."

Some of us may say, I will only be joyful in only certain types of trials. For instance, taking care of a baby can be very trying, but it is ok - I can be happy about it; but don't give me cancer, I can't take that, and I won't be happy about that. No, James says we must count it all joy when we "fall into divers temptations." The word "divers" here means "of various kinds." There are different kinds of trials or sufferings - bereavement, sickness, poverty, failures, accidents, etc. We can't say, I will rejoice only over one type of suffering. We are told to rejoice in all types of sufferings that this life presents us, whether they be mental, emotional, physical or spiritual.

We should count it all joy when we fall into divers testings and trials in life because:

God Wants Us to be Strengthened in the Faith through Trials

Why does God allow us to go through sufferings in life? The answer is found right here in verses 3 and 4. "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." If we do not know why we go through sufferings in life, James here tells us that it is about time we start to know or to understand the reason or purpose why God sends trials to our lives.

God sends trials to put our faith to the test: "the trying of your faith worketh patience." The word "trying" here in the original means "to prove." It means "to try to learn the genuineness of something by examination and testing." So the word "trying" can also be translated as "testing," "examining," or "proving." The trials of life are meant to test our faith. Do we genuinely believe in Him? Are we truly born again?

Another thing we see here is that the testing of our faith will produce "patience." The Greek word translated as "patience" is very interesting. It literally means "to remain under." It has a picture of an object that is put under intense pressure, and being under that kind of pressure, it remains intact, it does not break up. The Lord, thus, sends trials in our lives not only to prove our faith, but also to build up our endurance - to make us stronger Christians.

In view of this, we should not shun the trials of life. God tells us in verse 4 to accept this testing of our endurance to achieve its goal. "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and

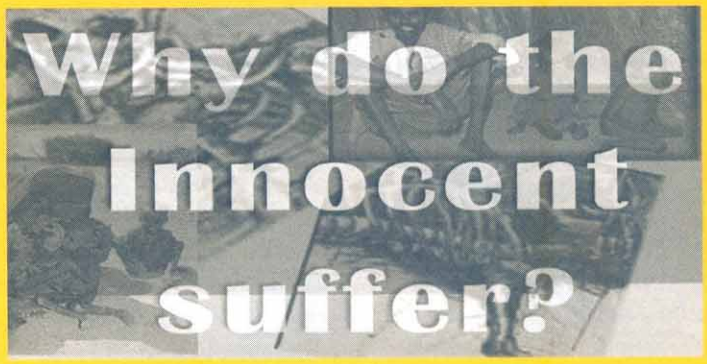
entire, wanting nothing." The word "perfect" is important. It has the idea of a process. To make something perfect requires time. This verse can be rendered in this way: "Let patience have her maturing work."

The virtue of endurance or fortitude cannot be gained overnight. It involves a process. But in time, the trials God sends in life's way will cause us to be spiritually mature and whole in every aspect of our lives, not lacking in anything: "that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

God is in "the diamond business." Do you know why is the diamond, the hardest rock on earth? Because it has undergone very intense heat and pressure for a very long period of time. As such, it is something very valuable and precious. Likewise, the Lord puts us under pressure through trials in order that we might become "diamonds." The more we are tested, the stronger we become, the more beautiful we will be, and the more useful we can be for God's purposes.

Conclusion

Are you facing much hardship and suffering in your life? Please know that God has a good purpose for all the trials that He has allowed us to go through. Please know that God wants us to face the trials of life joyfully. These trials will strengthen us in our faith for God's greater service. Finally, God assures us that we are not alone in facing trials. We have Him to help us in times of need. Look to Jesus always, He is just a prayer away.



Peter Chua

You might have been asking, "Why do the innocent suffer?" To answer this question, may I refer you to a passage in Luke 13:1-9. Jesus discussed this problem with His disciples on a public slaughter ordered by Pilate in the Temple area during the Feast of Tabernacles and the fall of the tower which killed eighteen people. "And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:2-5). Both of these calamities had stunned the city of Jerusalem. Such disastrous events raised the question as to whether it was God's judgment on the victims.

Jesus did not attempt to explain or interpret those terrible events – one, an accident, the other, an atrocity – but He did indicate to His inquirers what their attitudes should be: rather than judging the unfortunate victims of these tragedies, they should take warning and examine their own hearts. For, He declared emphatically, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5). Jesus' message to them had been clear: This tragedy must not lead you to judgment, or to complacency, but to repentance. Let us learn from this record that we should not be so concerned with our own questions about why tragedies occur that we cannot hear His voice speaking through those tragic events of our lives.

The Bible never teaches that an upright life will guarantee continuous peace and happiness. Nor does it imply that the wicked will invariably suffer here on earth. David confessed to having seen the wicked prosper, "spreading himself like a green bay tree" (Psalm 37:35). The study of Scripture and history will prove that many righteous men have been grievously afflicted. Those who maintain that all who suffer or die violently are the objects of God's wrath, are clearly wrong. Is it not true that afflicted persons have often

been God's best beloved children? Men like Abraham, David, Jeremiah, Paul all experienced periods of deep grief. There is evidence that the disciples all died violent deaths except for John, whose later years were spent in loneliness and imprisonment.

Many a time such good men were afflicted, not because God was punishing them for their secret sins, but to honour them by testing their faith, increasing their eternal rewards. Yet these purposes did not contradict the principle that all misery and pain, all trouble and anxiety, are related to sin, for it is sin that has brought forth suffering, death, and all discomforts. In a sinless world, sufferings would have no place.

In the instances in the Bible where God brings punishment on individuals, He specifies the sin which incurred that punishment. Miriam's leprosy was a penalty for her rebellion against Moses (Numbers 12:1-10), David lost Bathsheba's child because he had Uriah murdered (2 Samuel 12:1-14), the captivity of Israel and Judah was punishment for their years of idolatry (2 Kings 17:13-20).

But other instances of suffering are recorded with no accusation of offence: Naomi's loss of her husband and sons, Job's accumulated disasters, and Paul's thorn in the flesh. The Scripture records none of them having committed any particular sin, yet they suffered.

We should not always try to cite our sad experiences as a result of God's punishment. If we do, we are in danger of usurping God's prerogative. Let us look at some of the biblical instances of judgment.

In 1 Samuel 15:1-8, we read that King Saul was instructed by the prophet Samuel to destroy all the Amalekites. But God graciously spared the neighbouring Kenites. In all these, Saul was actually carrying out a judgment pronounced 300 years earlier when the Amalekites had made war against the tribes of the infant nation of Israel (Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19), whereas the Kenites had welcomed them (1 Samuel 15:6 is the only direct reference to this in Scripture).

Similarly, the severe judgments that fell on the house of Eli (1 Samuel 3:11-14; 4:10, 11) and on Saul himself (1 Samuel 15:10, 11; 31:1-6) came not only during their lifetime but also in later years. No one could have discovered the actual reason for these calamities had not God revealed them as His penalties for earlier crimes.

The Jewish historian, Josephus, ascribed the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 to the judgment of God on the wickedness of his countrymen at that time. To the Christians of later generations, it seemed like a direct result of the city's rejection of God's Messiah.

Jesus said that the victims of Pilate and the men who were killed when the tower fell were a sign for the living to repent quickly – "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

When Jesus used the word "perish" in Luke 13:5, He was speaking of an eternal loss as opposed to a temporal one. He wanted His hearers to take advantage of a temporal destruction by truly repenting, and thus avoid an eternal one. The term "repentance" as used by Jesus means nothing less than conversion. It is more than conviction of sin, because conviction is like the realisation that you are sick: it is the first step. Conviction without the next step, repentance, may make you miserable but it will never bring you peace. Repentance is not simply being sorry for your sin. Most men in prison would express sorrow that they got caught and had to suffer. God expects us to have a true change of heart and mind that causes us to forsake our sin and turn completely to Him.

Jesus' parable of the barren fig tree was given as a reminder to all that God does not overlook their offences. Doom hangs over unrepentant sinners, although God in His mercy may defer it while He extends His grace. God may wait. His is not human impatience. His grace may hold back the arm of justice for a while. Yet His patience is not indifference. His patience cannot make void the demands of His holiness. He is gracious but He is also righteous. Although He is loving and compassionate, He cannot be mocked.

Suffering can be good for you!

Quek Suan Yew

Introduction

How could anyone ever say that it is good to suffer? This person must be a masochist! But is it not true that suffering is part and parcel of living? No one goes through life without suffering. The first sound we made when we entered into this world, was it not a loud cry?

As long as there is breath in our lungs, we must be prepared for suffering. It is as if suffering in life is the norm and the many moments where we do not experience any form of suffering are the exceptions! In this world of sin and evil men, it is a wonder that we do not suffer more than what we are experiencing today. This is because of the grace of God in our lives.

These sufferings we experience in life may be classified into two kinds, the good and the bad. It is the perception of most people to assume that sufferings in life are all bad. Hence, when we suffer, we cry, "Why me?" Yet when we examine our sufferings in the light of the Bible, we can see another side of our sufferings that is beneficial for us.

The Suffering that Draws us Closer to God

Sufferings come in many forms. The loss of loved ones, a limb, wealth, friends, jobs and health are all very painful experiences. They scar our lives for a life time. When we search our hearts in such ordeals and find that we have not done anything wrong, we ask, "Why must I experience this pain and this loss?" I believe that this is a wrong question to ask. The reason is that we assume that suffering is a result of sin all the time. This is faulty reasoning. In fact, suffering comes our way because sometimes suffering is good for us.

The life of Job is a very clear biblical example of good suffering. Job was a godly man. This is how the Bible introduces him in Job 1:1, "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil." What better way could God have described one of His own children! He was perfect, i.e., beyond reproach! He was upright, i.e., righteous! He feared God, implying that he was obedient to God! And he also eschewed evil, i.e., he fled from evil! He did everything correctly in the eyes of God and man. In short, he possessed one of the hallmarks of the qualification of an elder as he was "blameless."

But when we examine his life, we find that within a very short span of time, he lost everything. Job 1:15-19 says, "And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest

brother's house: And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee." Bad news came to him in succession. Before he could even wipe away his first wave of tears, the second and third waves followed. He must have been an emotional wreck by the time his servants came and told him that he had lost all his children! However, Job's response was rather amazing. Job 1:20-22 says, "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." He wept and mourned his loss but he also worshipped God. In other words, he saw the hand of God in the midst of his sufferings.

Did the sufferings stop there? No! Not only did he lose every child, every cent, every square centimetre of his land, he also lost his health. To compound Job's suffering, his wife told him to curse God and die! Job 2:9 records, "Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die." What a blow it must have been to godly Job! Instead of receiving comfort from his wife who is dearest to his heart, he received a harsh judgment and condemnation. Job suffered like no man on earth ever had to suffer. Did Job have to go through all these sufferings? "What wrong did he commit?", is the oft-asked question.

To compound his suffering, his three friends tried to help him, but they added salt to his wounds. When he faced the intense onslaught of his friends' most unkind advice, Job did blame the day he was born. But one thing this man of God did not do was to curse God.

Finally, when God rebuked him, Job had to acknowledge that God was right in allowing the sufferings. How long the suffering lasted, we are not told, but as far as Job was concerned, it appeared unending.

At the end, Job had correct perspective of suffering! His testimony in Job 42:1-6 speaks for itself. "I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*" [emphasis added]

The Suffering that is not a Result of Sin

Job's suffering was not due to sin. It was a test that God had allowed to occur in Job's life. Satan and God had an encounter that resulted in Job's suffering. Job 1:8-12 records, "And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD."

From this revelation, we conclude that not all sufferings are a result of sin in our lives. God allowed his children, like Job, to go through suffering because this is the only way in which God's children may grow in grace and knowledge of God, like Job did. Was the suffering of Job painful? Emphatically, yes! Words cannot fully describe the emotional, and physical pain that afflicted his fragile body as he was dumped unceremoniously by Satan from being the richest man in the land of Uz to the poorest. Was Job's suffering good for Job? The answer is yes.

Likewise, when we go through suffering, it is not going to be enjoyable but very painful. But we must never lose heart as if there is no hope. The first thing we need to do is to examine our hearts to see if the suffering was allowed by God in order to draw us back to Himself because of sin in our lives. Having examined our lives

sincerely and honestly and finding that it is not because of sin, we must begin to accept that this is a painful time in our lives that the Lord has allowed to draw us closer to Him. We pray and meditate on God's Word to ease the pain that is in our heart. Under no circumstance must we curse God and die! This kind of suffering is good for us.

The Suffering that is Part of the Christian's Calling

Suffering is part of a Christian's calling. Philippians 1:29, "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." The more he obeys God, the more the world hates him. This is the way of the cross. Our Lord Jesus Christ was perfect in life, teaching, and deeds and they crucified Him. What more His children?

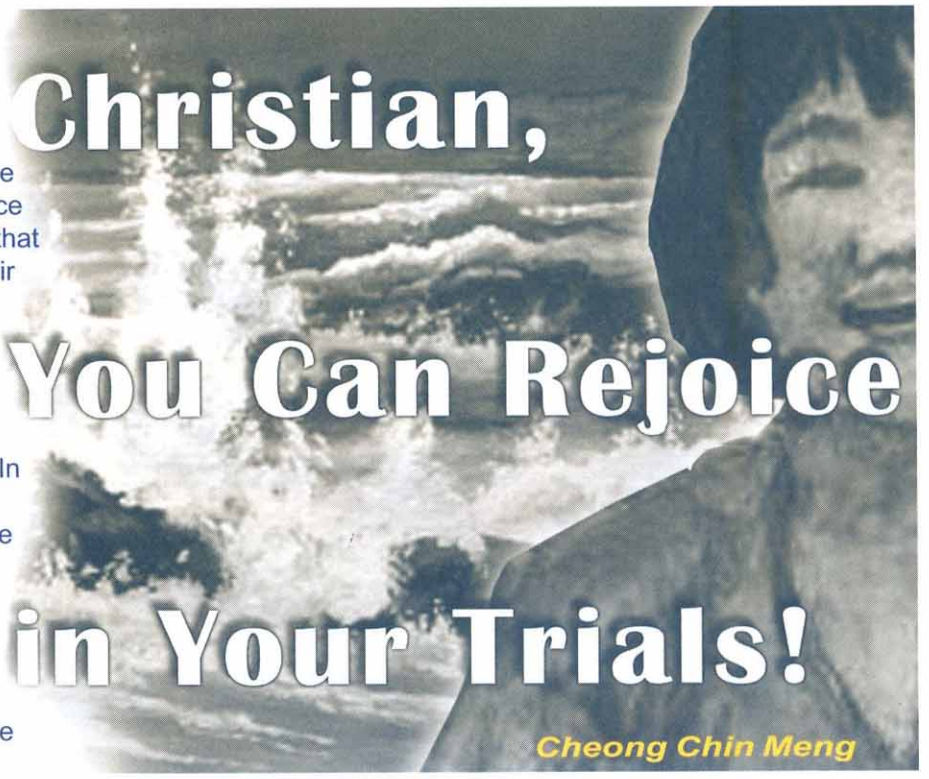
Do not go out of your way to look for suffering. The apostle Paul fled when news came to him that they wanted his life. He did not say "Come and get me!" Acts 9:22-25 says, "But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket."

But when suffering cannot be avoided, do not run from it. The apostle Paul did not shun from sufferings or death, when doing so would result in disobedience to God's will. He faced them squarely with the dignity of an obedient child of God. Acts 21:10-14 says, "And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done."

Sometimes sufferings are sent by God to keep us humble. When a Christian is used by God in a mighty way, he can become proud. Sufferings could be sent by God to force the Christian to see how much he needs to constantly depend on God in his ministry. The Apostle Paul had this testimony when the thorn on his side would not go away, although he prayed to God three times for it to be removed. 2 Corinthians 12:7-9, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Instead God told Paul to bear with it for it is allowed by God to keep him humble. This suffering was not only beneficial but very needful.

Conclusion

Have a healthy and biblical attitude toward sufferings in life. No man can escape sufferings. All of us have to go through suffering. Be sure that the suffering we go through draws us closer to God. Our heavenly Father would not allow anything to happen to His children that will not result in our good. If it is because of sin in our lives, then repent and return to God and ask Him for forgiveness. If it is not because of sin, then draw closer to God and submit to His sovereign will like an obedient child. Job did submissively endure his suffering, and so can we with God's help. Did our Lord not promise us that His grace is sufficient for us? Do not lose hope but be strengthened in the inner man knowing that we shall come forth as gold at the end of our suffering. AMEN.



Christian, You Can Rejoice in Your Trials!

Cheong Chin Meng

It is not uncommon that we pray for the removal of our trials of faith. For example, some pray for a change of office staff because they feel that that is the source of their unrest. But the joy of the Holy Spirit does not mean the absence or removal of all testing of faith through infirmities or afflictions. In fact, those trials, which we asked in prayer to be removed, may be intended of God to mould us to be more like Christ. Trials can produce within us spiritual joy, which is the fruit of the Spirit.

Joy Because the Lord is Moulding us through Our Trials

Our Lord encourages, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The apostle who was on his missionary journey exhorted the believers similarly - "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). And in James 1:2-4, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

Tribulations are not unexpected. Every Christian will have to go the way of the cross. But let there be joy in our hearts because of God's good purpose and His sovereign working in our lives. Know that the trying of our faith has the good purpose of perfecting our patience, causing us to be more prayerful, detaching our hearts from the things of the world, or in other words, directing our affections to things above, etc. Let's understand God's purpose. He has many "instruments" to use to mould us into the kind of person He wants us to be. Let's rejoice in the Lord.

Joy Because the Holy Spirit is Our Comforter

The Lord Jesus said to His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion, "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (John 14:15, 16). A comforter means "one called alongside to help; a consoler; an intercessor." The Holy Spirit is called "another" comforter because just as the Lord Jesus was a comforter when He was physically with them, so shall the Spirit be when Jesus is ascended to heaven. The Lord shall not leave them comfortless for He shall send the Holy Spirit to be with them forever. Thus, we are never alone for we have the Spirit of Christ indwelling in us.

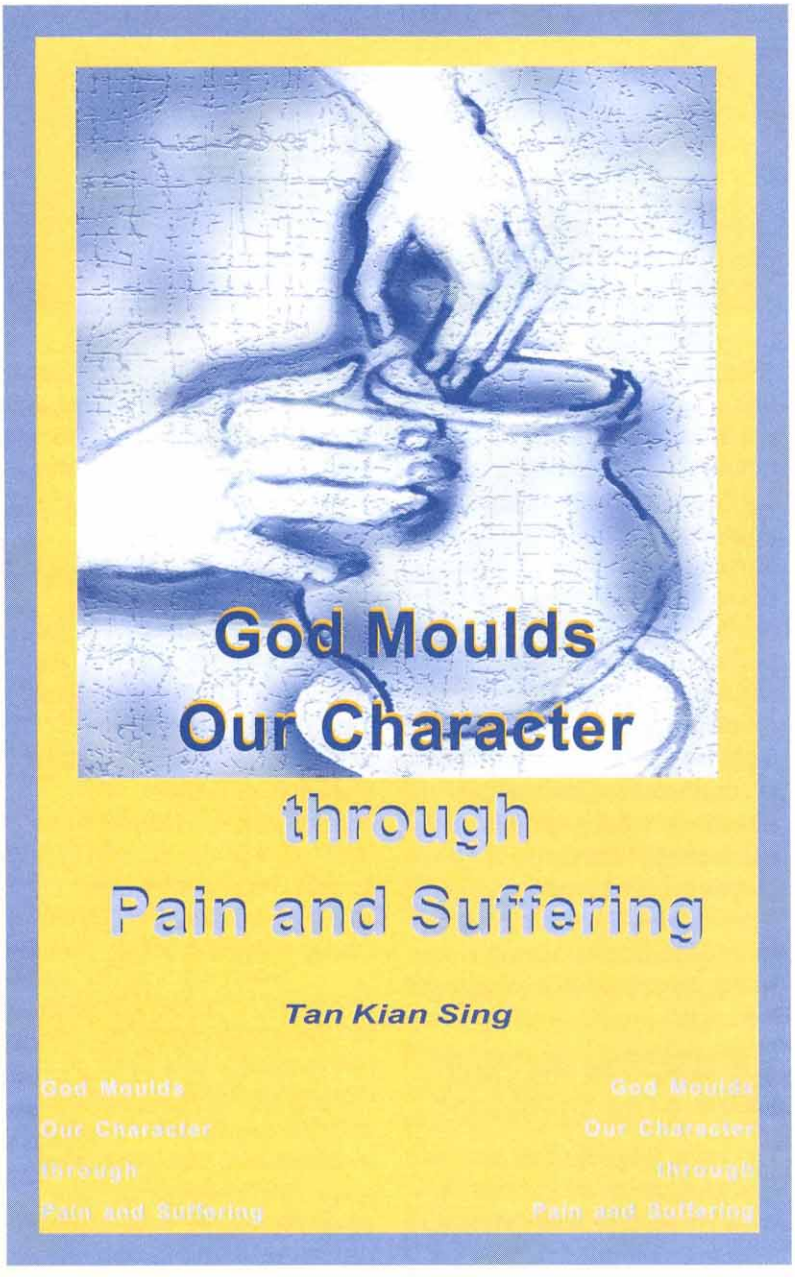
Since the Holy Spirit is within us, the apostle exhorts, "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye

kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:30-32).

Joy Because of Hope

Let's have hope. The Scriptures say, "Rejoicing in hope…" (Romans 12:12). Hope is our expectation or confidence of things yet to come according to all that God has promised. Hope concerns our future. The Scriptures record the matters of which we are to hope for.

Why was the apostle able to say, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18)? It was because he believed God's Word is truth. It was because he believed all that God's Word says concerning the future glory of all believers. It was because he believed in the resurrection hope of all who sleep in the Lord Jesus.



A young minister was called to visit an old woman, lying alone in a one-room flat. He was told that this woman had been crippled for years, and her body racked with pain due to arthritis and other disabilities. Life had been very hard for her.

Hearing her struggles, the minister decided to give her a booklet that encouraged people to place their faith and hope in God no matter what their circumstances might be. It testified clearly to the readers God's goodness and mercy. The minister visited the old woman and gave the booklet to her, saying: "I believe this booklet is relevant to your situation and will be helpful to you." She replied, "Yes, it is," and to the minister's surprise, she added, "I wrote it."

The minister learned that all those years of pain and suffering had not disheartened the old lady. Having known much suffering and God's comfort, she wrote that booklet to give comfort and hope to others. Her suffering moulded her to be a comforter.

The psalmist of Psalm 119 was also a man who had experienced much suffering. He said of himself, "I am afflicted

The hope of all Christians is also depicted in the parable of the talents. At the coming of the lord, he says to his servants, "...Enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:21, 23). Both the two-talent and five-talent servants were commended. Similarly, we are the servants of the Lord to do His bidding. Let's faithfully serve and do our best for the Lord. Our hope is the same as that of the two servants who became partakers or sharers of the joy of their Lord at the last. In the presence of the Lord is fullness of joy. Presently, let's have good hope even as we endure our trials in the service of our Lord. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalm 126:5, 6).

very much" (verse 107). Seven times in that psalm he wrote about his affliction (verses 50, 67, 71, 75, 92, 107 and 153). But what is of greater interest to us was his overall assessment of the benefits that suffering has brought into his life. He had a positive attitude towards his suffering. He wrote, "This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me" (verse 50). "It is good for me," he testifies, "that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (verse 71). He knew that the Lord does not make any mistake in allowing affliction in his life for he declares, "I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (verse 75). "Unless thy law had been my delights," he proclaims, "I should then have perished in mine affliction" (verse 92). And he humbly and submissively prayed to God for deliverance from his suffering: "Consider mine affliction, and deliver me" (verse 153).

All forms of suffering have lessons to teach us. Suffering and pain are necessities in life. Without them, we may not realise the path of danger, which we may be treading. Sometimes we are slow to learn God's lessons. The Lord may have dealt with us patiently. But patience alone may be inadequate for us. He needs to give us a sharp blow to wake us up to the urgency of our need. This is one form of correction that the Lord has for us. We need it from cradle to grave. "But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men," wrote Jeremiah in Lamentations 3:32-33. It is not of the Lord's pleasure and purpose to see His children suffer unnecessarily. He allows us to be stricken with affliction only for our good. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The apostle was writing to men and women who were suffering hardships, and experiencing trials and tribulations. God uses suffering to guide us in such a manner as to promote our good. He uses affliction to our advantage in order to bring His own great work in us to be fulfilled.

Do we see that, in the long term, our affliction is a good thing? Are we able to recognise that God is trying to teach us precious lessons from the unwelcomed affliction, which comes into our lives? Do we see suffering as a means of moulding our character? One who walks closely with God will be able to see his suffering the same way as the psalmist did. But many of us, in our short-sightedness, are not able to see our life of hardship, sacrifice, and suffering as part of God's plan in our lives. We often forget or do not realise that God always does the best.

When we begin to understand our suffering in the light of God's purposes, it will do something to our spirit. Our attitude toward suffering, affliction, pain, trials and testing will undergo a great transformation. We will realise that no matter how dark the present conditions may appear, the Lord is in complete command of the situation. We want instant relief right now. But God delays the relief that some changes in our character may occur through the crucible of suffering. It was Job, who had been much afflicted, who said, "But he knoweth the way

that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

If a diamond had feelings, it would go through much agony as it is ground, shaped and polished. It would be painful to have all those rough edges knocked off and then to have high-speed abrasive pads remove excess layers of dirt and imperfections. Yet, it is because the jeweller values the diamond greatly that he treats it in that way. Only by such means can it become a thing of true beauty.

Likewise, God does not allow suffering to discourage or harm us but to bring us to the full stature of the child of God that we are meant to be because He cares for us. Romans 5:3 tells us, "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience." Tribulation or suffering can be God's means of moulding and shaping our life to make us more like His Son. It shows that we matter to Him, and the very thing, which is a trial to us, a burden to us, is God's good means of transforming our lives.

The psalmist says that it is good for him that he had been afflicted that he might learn God's statutes. The Apostle Paul echoed the same sentiment when he said, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). Is this our experience?

If we love God, and humbly submit ourselves to Him, we will be able to say like Job who humbled himself before the Almighty saying, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him" (Job 13:15). The days of our sojourn here in this world of sin and suffering will soon be over, and at that time "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

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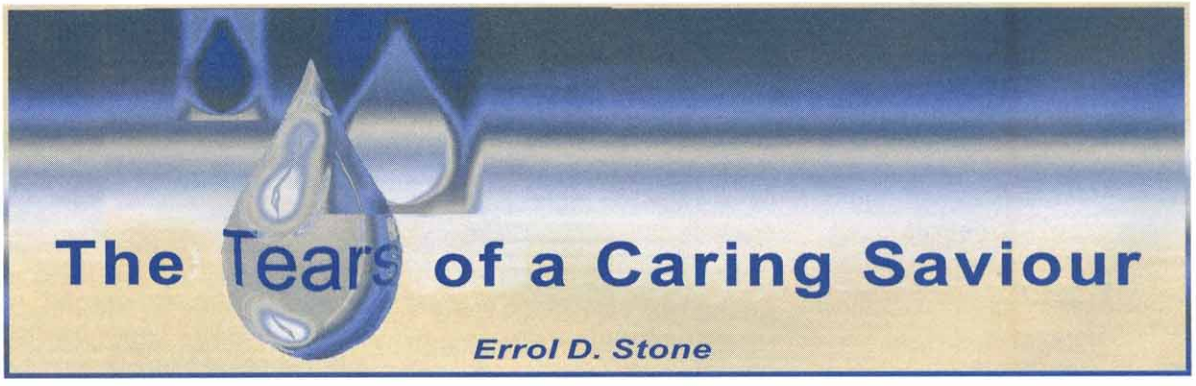
"For God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).



The Tears of a Caring Saviour

Errol D. Stone

When the home-going of a loved one draws near, there is much pain and grief. Therefore, it is only natural to shed tears when the departure of a loved one occurs.

The Bible has recorded the accounts of men who have wept over loved ones and saints of the past. Abraham wept at the death of his wife Sarah, "And Sarah died in Kirjatharba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her" (Genesis 23:2).

In Genesis 50:1-2, we read that "…Joseph…wept," upon his deceased father, "…And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father: and the physicians embalmed Israel." Similarly, King David wept over the death of his son, Absalom, in 2 Samuel 18:33, "And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

At the stoning and death of Stephen, who was the first Christian martyr, even devout men wept. Acts 8:2 records that "…devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him."

Jesus also wept. When His good friend, Lazarus, died, He faced the reality and shed tears. "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Jesus wept as a strong emotion swept over His soul. He experienced the joys of friendship and the distress of bereavement and mourned with the bereaved. His most touching act of sympathy in man's greatest grief is in the shortest verse in the Bible, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

Jesus also wept on two other occasions. (i) Jesus wept and lamented over Jerusalem, for destruction was coming as the people did not repent. "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it" (Luke 19:41). Jesus Christ cared for the people then, and He still cares for people today. (ii) In the Garden of Gethsemane, "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).

Although Jesus wept, He is the one who wipes away all tears. The tears of Jesus Christ were human tears showing Divine compassion. "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd" (Matthew 9:35-36). The Lord showed mercy by actively helping those who were afflicted by circumstances beyond their control. This mercy was displayed in the life and ministry of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He healed the blind men (Matthew 9:27-31; 20:29-34) and the lepers (Luke 17:11-19). It was out of an attitude of compassion and mercy, that these healings were performed.

Jesus also comforts us who face troubles and death with His words in John 14:1-3, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Let us trust in these

comforting words of our Lord when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

In conclusion, it is worthwhile for us to consider the familiar hymn of Frank E. Graeff, "Does Jesus Care?" To help us in our meditation, this hymn is placed below in question and answer format.

Qn. Does Jesus care when my heart is pained too deeply for mirth and song; as the burdens press, and the cares distress, and the way grows weary and long?

Ans. O yes, He cares, I know He cares! His heart is touched with my grief; when the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Saviour cares.

Qn. Does Jesus care when my way is dark with a nameless dread and fear? As the daylight fades into deep night shades, does He care enough to be near?

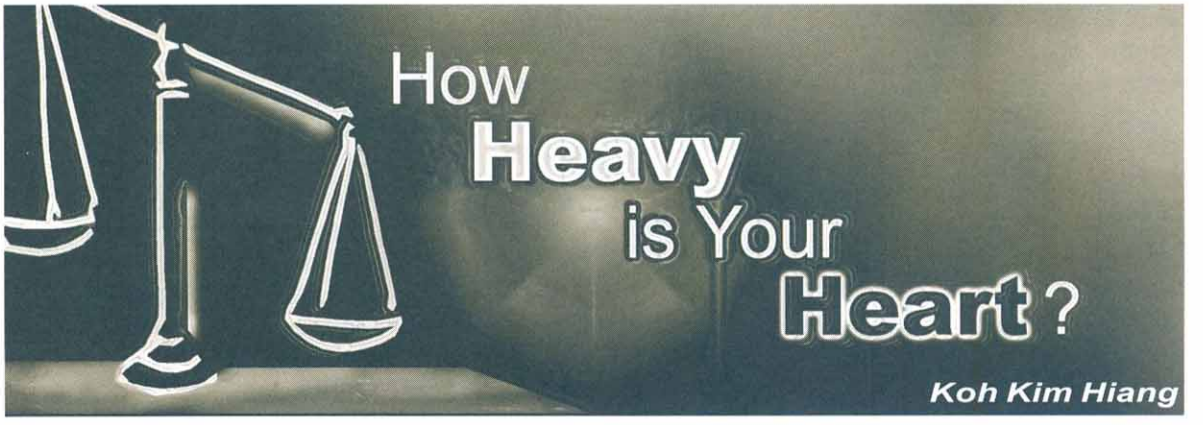
Ans. O yes, He cares, I know He cares! His heart is touched with my grief; when the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Saviour cares.

Qn. Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed to resist some temptation strong; when for my deep grief I find no relief, tho my tears flow all the night long?

Ans. O yes, He cares, I know He cares! His heart is touched with my grief; when the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Saviour cares.

Qn. Does Jesus care when I've said good-bye to the dearest on earth to me, and my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks – Is it aught to Him? Does He see?

Ans. O yes, He cares, I know He cares! His heart is touched with my grief; when the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Saviour cares.



Proverbs 21:2 says, "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts."

The Lord weighs the hearts. Man looks on the outside but God looks on the inside. When the Lord ponders the heart, He does it accurately because He is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, perfectly just and holy. Proverbs 16:11 testifies, "A just weight and balance are the LORD'S: all the weights of the bag are his work."

The Lord uses circumstances to weigh our hearts. Often He uses trials. James 1:3-4 read, "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

The trials are sent to produce patience and maturity needed for the successful running of our Christian race. Some who are under trials may become very impatient. Instead of growing in faith, they grow in unbelief until it breaks out into open rebellion. That was the case with the Israelites at Kadeshbarnea. Twelve spies sent out from the Israelite camp had scouted the Promised Land and returned with news that it was indeed flowing with milk and honey. But, ten of them also reported that the land was unconquerable because it was occupied by giants. Only Joshua and Caleb (the remaining two spies) favoured the immediate possession of

the land and said, in effect, that we are well able to overcome the enemies... the Lord is with us: fear them not. (See Numbers 13:30; 14:9.) But the hearts of the Israelites were found wanting with unbelief and all the adults in the forty-year wandering were condemned to die.

How heavy is our heart, when it is weighed by the Lord under trials?

God could also send persecution to weigh us. The Lord tells us in His parable about the types of ground in which the Gospel seed is sown, which is representative of the heart of fair weather Christians. He says in Matthew 13:5, 6, "Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away." In Matthew 13:20, 21, He explains, "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended."

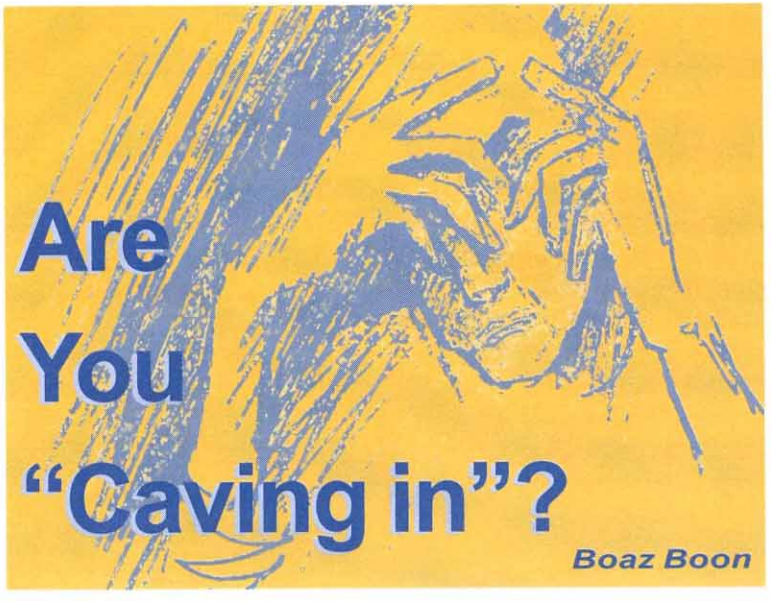
The day may come when He will weigh our heart with persecution. Will we be found wanting?

Today, we do not face fierce persecution. What we encounter is relatively mild. But, how do we fare under such trials? Dare we be different from the boys in our office, our military camp or our school? We may stick out like sore thumbs because of our testimony for the Lord. The pressure will be on us to conform - to drink, paint the town red or use profanities. Will our hearts be of good weight so that we may taste the blessing of being persecuted? Matthew 5:10-11, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake."

Our hearts are not only weighed in adversity, but also in prosperity. Regarding another type of ground, the Lord in His parable says in Matthew 13:7, "And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them." He says further in verse 22, "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful."

In our material prosperity, it is easy for us to forget God. The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches can very well choke His Word in our hearts. We can become too busy making money and have no time for the Lord.

Friends, how does our heart fare when weighed under trials or in prosperity?



You and I face many challenges daily. Some are too personal to be shared freely amongst church members. Singapore's 'pressure-cooker' society has caused many breadwinners to work doubly hard to avoid unemployment. Keeping up with the expensive lifestyle has made it worse. The youths subject themselves to painful hours of studies to excel or even to catch-up. Misunderstanding between parents and youth further aggravates the 'generation gap.'

Many families are breaking down and the pursuit of living up to others' expectations is at the expense of spending time with God. Many a time you feel you need a break. Otherwise, you might 'cave-in' with the crushing burden. Why not pause for a while and meditate on what David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, learnt in the cave – which did not 'cave in'?

David was chased by King Saul and hid himself in a cave. Though dark be the night, and cold was the cave, David poured out all his sorrows and cares upon God. Through the inspiration of God, David wrote Psalm 142 as a prayer to God. We will now focus on four lessons from the psalm.

Cry Unto the Lord

"I cried unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble" (Psalm 142:1-2).

When David was distressed with troubles as a fugitive, he turned to the Almighty God who had helped him in the past. As a young shepherd boy, God enabled him to kill the giant Goliath – humanly impossible but possible with God. So, in his running away from Saul, he could only turn to the same God. He could not turn to his 'swallow-friends' who fled during winter, i.e., difficult times. Indeed, "some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7).

When you are in trouble, how do you cope? Some would turn to alcohol, drug abuse, self-indulgence, infidelity or escapism. Some could not cope and fall into depression. However, God has a solution for us. Just cry unto Him, trust and obey. For there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

God Knows Our Path

"When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path" (Psalm 142:3).

David said that God knew his path even when his spirit fainted within him. God knows the end of each path that we take. So, don't worry for we can entrust our future to the God who knows our future. Furthermore, He has a plan for each one of us. When we obey Him, He will bless. When we sin against Him, He will discipline us. It is so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take Him at His Word.

So, don't be overly anxious as to what social status we shall be in tomorrow. Godliness with contentment is indeed great gain. That is the way forward. God has prescribed it and we will be blessed to follow His instructions.

God is My Refuge

When David was in the cave, he could temporarily hide from King Saul. But he needed a more permanent refuge. He cried unto God and he said, "Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living" (Psalm 142:5). In the midst of a great storm, we can seek refuge in our Almighty God. With Christ in the vessel, we can smile at the storm. You may say it is easier said than done. But it is true. We only need to trust in Him and find refuge in Him and He will protect us. "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

God is My Deliverer

Not only is He our Refuge, He is our Deliverer. David said, "Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I" (Psalm 142:6). God has delivered David from King Saul. Subsequently, God took Saul's life in a raging battle.

Remember Exodus? If God could deliver the Israelites from the mighty power of Pharaoh in Egypt, He can deliver you from your troubles today. Is there any trouble too great for our God? He who created the heavens and the earth will deliver you out of your troubles if you put your faith in Him and obey Him. Don't 'cave-in' to your troubles. Cry out to Him for He is your Refuge.

In the stillness of this moment, in the darkness of this night,

I can hear a voice so tender, I can see a wondrous light.

Be still and know that I am God, Be still and know that I am God.

Come find your strength in the quiet place; Be still and know.

Jesus, the Healer of My Soul and Body

John Peh

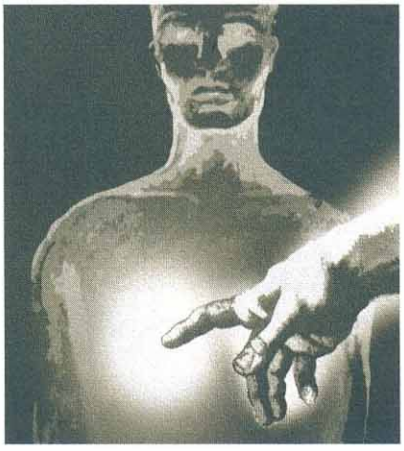
Mine was a life of many troubles. But the Lord has delivered me out of all my troubles and blessed me with His salvation. For the glory of His wondrous saving name, I share this testimony with the readers of Bible Witness.

My First Encounter with Christ

My struggle with sadness and fear began at a very young age when my mother died. I often looked up to my sister who told me stories about Christians; that they were confident in life and lived without fear. So I was eager to know of Jesus Christ, whom they worshipped. When I was in Secondary Three, I approached a classmate who was a Christian and asked him to tell me about Jesus. I was excited from then onwards to live as a Christian. I made every effort to attend Christian fellowships and was convinced by the grace of God that I should trust Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of my sins and be free from fear. I believed in the Lord Jesus and was eventually baptised.

My Wandering Away from Christ

I began my Christian life with great zeal. I would tell my unbelieving father to put his trust in Christ. However, I failed to sustain my interest and zeal in Christian living after I entered the polytechnic. My interest in Christianity was replaced with a fascination in secular psychology, other religions and their spiritual experiences. I immersed myself in the philosophy and ideologies of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and William James. I also ventured deeper into Buddhism. All these prompted me to speak



against Christianity and I stopped going to church completely.

My Plunge into Darkness Outside Christ

Little did I realise that when I fled from Christ, I was quickly drifting into a horrible dark spiritual realm. Though I managed to complete my army service successfully and obtained a reasonably good job, peace and spiritual satisfaction eluded me. I searched desperately for the meaning and joy of life. I sought after peace through religious meditations. Looking for solace, I often went for meditations in deserted places. I went to all the wrong places for real peace; even to a cemetery for meditation. I was desperate! But I was venturing deeper into Satan's dark world. I became a helpless, troubled and desperate wanderer!

Depression gripped my mind. None of the meditational techniques could set my mind free. I could hardly bear my misery. I tried relentlessly to break the bondage of horror and anxiety that kept dragging me into greater danger.

Sleeplessness became unbearable. I visited doctors and psychiatrists for help, but to no avail. I became very reliant on the psychotropic drugs that doctors prescribed for me. Instead of bringing cure, those drugs added new problems, both physical and mental. Thinking that I have no deliverance and being extremely tired of living my depressed life, I attempted suicide. I took an overdose of medicine. My family members acted quickly to rescue me. They succeeded and my attempt to free myself from a miserable life failed.

I was warded in a mental nursing home. There I underwent Electric Charge Therapy to jolt me out of my depression. I suffered a certain amount of memory loss, but with no cure to my mental troubles. After some time, I left that nursing home.

I thought to myself that I should try once again to break free from troubles by taking a

job. At the new place of work, I met my wife, a very loving, patient and encouraging lady. She was a great help and relief to me in my ongoing struggles with life. I married her with the hope of happily living together.

However, like a bubble, my new dream of a happy life quickly burst. Within a month of my marriage, depression set in again and I attempted suicide for a second time. My wife desperately attempted to save my life. The doctors who attended to me could not give my wife any hope of my survival. After much effort, to her relief, my life was spared once again, nonetheless against my wish. "Man proposes, God disposes." "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Under heavy medication, I started to move on with my new lease of life. The struggle continued. The arrivals of my two sons gave me greater fears than joys. Again I ventured into new realms of meditation, spending as much as four hours every day in meditation. I became a vegetarian, adding more stress to my family. Eating together as a family became a chore. But my wife patiently bore all these and more burdens to see me happy and healthy.

My Restoration through Christ

The relentless search for deliverance from my depression continued. One day, my psychiatrist advised that I should seek a counsellor, who could listen to my problems and provide wisdom. Hence, I called a Buddhist counselling centre for help. But since I lived far from their centre, they advised that I looked for a counselling facility near my home. This marked an amazing twist to my quest for peace and deliverance. The Buddhist centre's recommendation of a counselling centre near my house happened to be a Christian counselling centre. This moved me to reconsider Christianity. The counsellor prayed for me. I then looked for an old Christian friend, who kindly took me to his church. With his guidance, I prayed and confessed my sin, though I did not yield my heart fully to the Lord. Through him I met a Christian doctor who prescribed medicine for a very severe muscle tension that I was suffering. Meanwhile, a school teacher of my second child who came for house visitation, noticed my struggle. She then sought my permission to request her pastor to come and talk to me. To this I agreed.

The teacher came to my home again with her husband, a deacon of the church, and their pastor. The pastor then shared the Gospel with me. By now I was familiar with the Gospel of salvation. So I decided to clarify my doubts and ask questions about Christianity. The pastor answered them from the Bible and I was convinced that my wandering from Christ and adventure into the dark world of human psychology and meditations had brought much of my troubles. That night, I confessed my sins sincerely to the Lord Jesus, and He forgave and restored me fully into His abundant life.

When I went to their church, the other members of the church gladly received me. The church is sound in doctrine and practised brotherly love. My doubts and confusion were eliminated through the hearing of clear and powerful preaching of the whole counsel of God's Word. I was very attracted to the Bible study groups and fellowships of the church. I started to experience peace and joy, which I long craved for. My life started to change so dramatically that my family and friends could not help noticing it. My wife, who was totally disinterested in all my past spiritual quests (sometimes she was even disgusted with them), also became pleasantly surprised by the enormous change that had been taking place in me. On Sundays, she accompanied me to church with my children. As I regularly attended the Neighbourhood Bible Study of the church, I encouraged her to come. She came and attentively listened to the teaching. To my surprise, she was convicted of her sins and believed on the Lord during a Neighbourhood Bible Study. With much enthusiasm, and almost no hesitation, she positively indicated her faith to Pastor who challenged her to believe in Christ. She prayed in repentance and received the Lord Jesus as her Saviour. My joy was indescribable.

Then came my children's salvation. Through the Sunday school and Saturday children's programme, their hearts were brought to faith in Christ. Our family has found salvation and peace in Jesus Christ. Today, we, as a family, joyfully serve the Lord in our church in its various ministries.

An additional blessing came when my nephew came to our church and was gloriously saved upon hearing the gospel. We now pray for more of our relatives and friends to come to the Lord.

As I learned to trust and yield in obedience to the Lord, He granted me steady recovery from my depression and struggles in life. Though there were times of doubt and fear, I was encouraged by my pastor to learn God's Word and apply it in my life. Frequently, I sought his help to learn God's Word and to receive godly counsel. This has brought a great change to my life.

Today, I am totally free from all the different kinds of psychotropic pills I was consuming. I can even sleep without any sleeping pills, upon which I was reliant on every day for fifteen years.

I am saved, sanctified and healed! Praise the Lord! Submission to the Lord and His Word by faith is the only way out of our souls' sorrows and misery. As I end this account of the restoration of my soul and body through Jesus Christ and His Word, I would like to mention two Bible passages which are so true to me today.

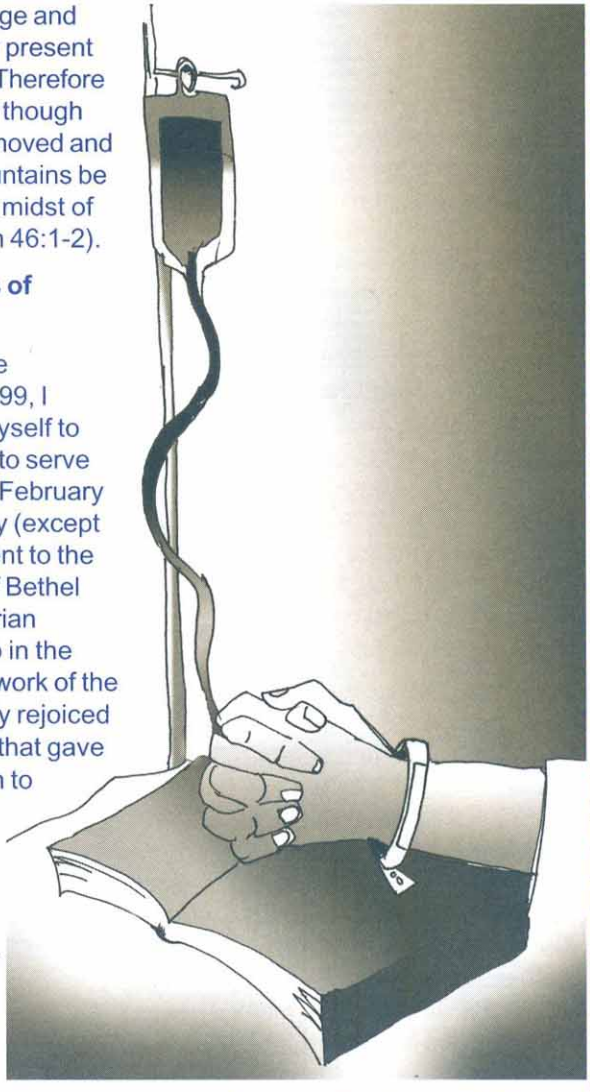
"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Psalm 23:1-3).

"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7a).

God's Strengthening in the Struggle against Cancer

Victor & Gek Choo Nah

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (Psalm 46:1-2).



The Diagnosis of Cancer

After leaving the workforce in 1999, I consecrated myself to give more time to serve the Lord. From February 2000, every day (except Tuesdays) I went to the church office of Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church, to help in the administrative work of the church. I greatly rejoiced in God's grace that gave me good health to serve the Lord.

A year later, in July 2001, I suffered from persistent fever and felt some 'tenderness' in my upper abdomen. On 22nd July, I made an appointment to see the doctor.

While I was preparing to see the doctor, I heard that two of my ex-colleagues had been diagnosed with cancer. One of them was recuperating well after surgery. This news was timely in preparing me to receive my diagnosis of cancer.

I went to the clinic on 24th July and the doctor sent me for a CT-scan and blood test. Three days later, the doctor called my wife and I to his clinic to give us the results of the tests. We were told that the scan revealed a large growth (14 cm x 10 cm) on my left kidney, which could be malignant. The doctor then made an appointment with a

specialist and advised us to meet him the same day. The specialist was a urologic surgeon and a uro-oncologist.

He examined my abdomen and reviewed the scan images with us. He was pleased that the surrounding organs were in good condition. However, the tumour was large, and he suggested its removal, complete with the left kidney. He also wanted me to have a chest X-ray and take two nuclear-medicine scans to check the functionality of my right kidney and ensure that my bones and chest were not affected. He called on Thursday (2nd August) to inform me that he had all the results and that the areas checked were fine. My operation was set for Tuesday, 7th August 2001.

I thank God for giving me the one week period, prior to operation, to complete tasks at the church and hand over responsibilities and duties to the other deacons and brethren of our church. I also had enough time to clear up some paperwork at home - thus enabling me to go for my operation with peace of mind. Truly, God is in control because He cares. As the Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 5:7, "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you."

During and after the operation, God's Word has been my comfort and strength. The Lord has drawn me closer to Him through many ordeals in life. I praise and thank the Lord for His grace and mercies that drive away fear and provide for our every need. Below, my wife, Gek, relates how we have found strength in His Word during our hours of toughest battle with cancer.

God's Promises and Strengthening

When Victor was diagnosed with cancer of the left kidney, what was my first reaction? Cry in despair! I felt that we were handed a death sentence, but the promises of God's Word became our source of strength.

Promise #1 - "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up" (James 5:15). Indeed, how true God's promise is to me! Daily, as I pray and draw strength from the Lord, He removes all fears and anxiety. I experience a calm, quiet confidence that He is in control. We learn to cast all our cares upon Him, for He careth for us (cf. 1 Peter 5:7).

Promise #2 - "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Yes, God knows the amount of testings we can withstand and He gives only what we can bear. Victor's cancer, though malignant, was confined to one organ and was entirely removed. He still has a good functioning right kidney. We thank God for this. On the eve of Victor's discharge from hospital, I met a lady whose husband also needed treatment as he had three tumours growing over his two kidneys. This could have happened to Victor but God is merciful. After the operation, he started recovering well. The future is in God's hands.

Promise #3 - "... and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation..." (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4). Yes, whilst tribulation and testing are permitted by the Lord, He also comforts us. The diagnosis was on the 27th July 2001 and we were comforted by the Night of Sacred Music held at Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church the following night, on 28th July 2001. The singing and music of Deborah Mae and Judith D'Silva, the message from God's Word by our pastor, Rev Stephen Khoo, comforted us and lifted our spirits. Who appointed the dates of these events for our comfort? It is none other than the Lord our God, for He only can foresee events. Praise be to the Lord!

Promise #4 - "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). How true! We were overwhelmed by the love, care, concern and prayers of our friends and members of Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church. We received blessings physically and spiritually. The amount of fruits, beverages, biscuits, tonic, herbs, and vitamins that we received, could almost start a provision shop! We also received flowers, love-gifts and encouragement cards, which cheered our hearts. Some were willing also to take time off their work, to take Victor to

hospital. Jason (our son) and I were most pampered by the home-cooked meals provided by our church members. Besides, we also received advice on diets and post-operative care. God has certainly supplied all our needs.

Promise #5 - "Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read: no one of these shall fail ..." (Isaiah 34:16). We had close communication with the Lord through His Book - the Bible. Pastor Khoo shared with us his daily devotional reading from Psalms 116, 117 and 118 on the day of the operation. Psalm 118:17, 18 were especially meaningful to us on the day of operation - "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD. The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death." Reading God's Word daily has been my greatest excitement each morning as I eagerly read and learn what God has to say to me, specifically. Yes, the Lord speaks to us through His Word.

Even our testimonies are ordered by the Lord because in Psalm 116, verses 14 and 18, twice the psalmist says, "I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people." In verse 17 also, we found encouragement to share our testimonies - "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD."

As Christians, the Lord has given us many promises. It is said that there are about 80,000 and I have only mentioned five. Our lives have been enriched, made more meaningful, and taken a positive direction since the Lord called us to Him in 1992. We rejoice and count it a privilege and blessing that He reveals His truth to us in the study of His Word.

I conclude with two of the Lord's great promises which touched my heart:

Jesus said, "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). What comfort and true security!

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

When we finish our time here on this earth, we will forever be with the Lord. How wonderful and how assuring! These are great promises given by the Lord Jesus Christ and I believe them.

The Philosophy of Thanksgiving

Timothy Tow

"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (Psalm 103:2).

Giving thanks to God is a characteristic of Christians. The first thing in the morning that we do is to thank God for His safe-keeping of the night. We say "grace," i.e., "thanks" before our three meals. When we go to bed at night, we take time to thank the Lord for that day's provision. For this reason, Paul exhorts: "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20).

What is the Philosophy of Thanksgiving?

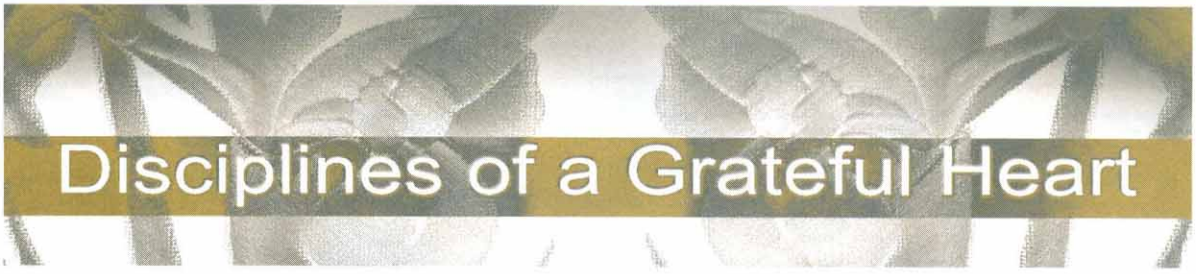
According to Psalm 103, thanksgiving should, first of all, arrest our forgetfulness. "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (verse 2). How human it is to forget – not the wrong of others, but their good! And as to God's goodness? How many a vow uttered in groaning illness, in the throes of writhing pain, in dark moments of grim danger or haunting fear, are forgotten on the morrow of deliverance! How many a Calvinistic Christian is obliviously slumbering in his armchair of salvation! Forgetfulness of God's mercies is a sin of omission.

Secondly, thanksgiving is a rebuke to the ungrateful. These are the people who take the blessings of God for granted. These belong to the "familiarity-breeds-contempt" class. Once, there were ten lepers cleansed as they were on their way to see the priests according to Jesus' word (Luke 17:11-19). Only one, a Samaritan who was an alien, returned to thank the Lord at His feet. "Were there not ten cleansed?" asked

the Saviour. "But where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." Ingratitude occupies not a few pews in every church today! It seems she is harboured in the hearts of old-timers more than in the newly-converted. The ungrateful serve the Lord with their pout than with their purse. Truly, none of us can escape from the sin of unthankfulness. Let us heed the Chinese saying, "Let those who drink the water think of its source."

Thirdly, thanksgiving should isolate the downright insolent, nominal members of the church. These are they who have grown rich and powerful under the aegis of devout parents, like Esau under the benignity of his father Isaac. These who have never thanked the Lord from the heart upon an occasion for thanksgiving, demand rather that the Lord thank them! What travesty of Christian logic! Once, a poor country pastor approached a big town elder for a donation to his church building fund. Because this servant of God did not flatter and fawn, the self-esteeming elder told him off, "Here's $50, for that's all you are worth. Take it or leave it." Did the elder realise that in so doing he was not insulting man but God? "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me" (Luke 10:16). "Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD" (Jeremiah 9:23, 24).

Thanksgiving is the delight of the humble. He worshipfully brings his gift into the Lord's storehouse. He also hears the Lord pronounce blessings upon his children and children's children, since he trusts in the Lord with godly fear and has striven to keep His covenant and commandments. Since the day that the Lord gave him a job, he has not forgotten to budget in the tithe first for his God. He gives thanks not once a year only, but upon every occasion of receiving goodness at His Hand.



Disciplines of a Grateful Heart

Prabhudas Koshy

Most of us have experienced moments when our hearts spring up with thanks for certain special mercy and goodness, which we received. But most of the time, we find ourselves in wintry spiritual seasons, when our sense of gratitude freezes over.

Thanksgiving should not be based on just feelings. We must move beyond our slavish dependence on the way we feel moment by moment, in order to be thankful people all the time. It must become a holy discipline independent of feelings. It must be our habit. Let's remember that praising God is not a polite courtesy but an urgent duty of every child of God.

Here are some Scriptural insights into the disciplines of a believer's grateful heart. (Please take your Bible and read the references along with the truths mentioned below that you may see how they are taught by commandments, exhortations and examples.)

1. Give thanks for small and ordinary things. Psalm 103:2 says, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." We must keep ourselves alert that we will not forget to be thankful to God for both big and small, as well as both extraordinary and ordinary blessings. So Paul exhorts us in Colossians 4:2, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." (Cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:18.)

2. Give thanks before eating a meal as Christ and Paul

have taught us through their examples (Cf. Matthew 15:36; Mark 8:6; John 6:11, 23; Acts 27:35; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Romans 14:6b).

3. Give thanks for the church and fellow believers. Praise God for their salvation, love, zeal and service (Cf. Romans 16:4; 2 Corinthians 1:11; 8:16; Ephesians 1:16; Colossians 1:3, 12; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

4. Give thanks for God's Word. Psalm 119:62 says, "At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments." We must be grateful that the keeping of His Word, keeps us away from sin and its miserable consequences.

5. Give thanks for every victory we have over sin and Satan. "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57; cf. 2 Corinthians 2:14).

6. Thankful believers must appreciate God's holiness and then must live with an awareness of His holy presence. "Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name: the upright shall dwell in thy presence" (Psalm 140:13; cf. Psalms 97:12; 106:47).

7. Thankful believers must partake in the holy communion with thanksgiving. "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it" (Matthew 26:27; cf. Corinthians 11:24).

8. Thankful believers must give themselves and their possessions generously to the need of the Lord's work and His people. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17). "For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God" (2 Corinthians 9:12).

9. Thankful believers must not use their tongues and lips for any kind of unwholesome speech but always for the praise of the Lord. "Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks…Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:4, 20). "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (Hebrews 13:15).

10. Thankful believers, even in the midst of adversity and need, must give thanks for His power and wisdom which can turn the situation to be good. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6; cf. Romans 8:28).

11. Thankful people must set aside daily a time of prayer to express thanks to God. "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime" (Daniel 6:10).

12. Thankful people must publicly testify His goodness with thanksgiving. "I will give thee thanks in the great congregation: I will praise thee among much people" (Psalm 35:18).

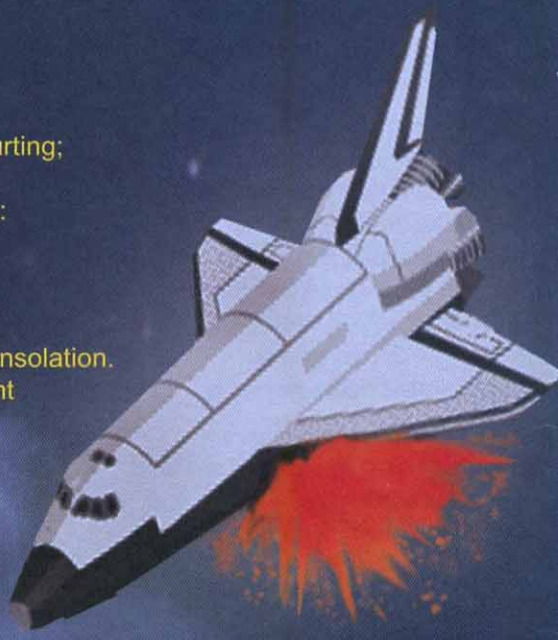
Contributors of Articles

Boaz Boon, *Elder of Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church (Tengah);* **Cheong Chin Meng,** *Pastor of Gospel Light Bible-Presbyterian Church;* **Errol D. Stone,** *Pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church-Perth;* **Jeffrey Khoo,** *Academic Dean of Far Eastern Bible College;* **John Peh,** *Member of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church;* **Koh Kim Hiang,** *Elder of Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church (Pandan) who now ministers in Sydney Bible-Presbyterian Church;* **Peter Chua,** *Pastor of Sharon Bible-Presbyterian Church;* **Prabhudas Koshy,** *Pastor of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church;* **Quek Suan Yew,** *Pastor of Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church (Pandan);* **Tan Kian Sing,** *Preacher of Berean Bible-Presbyterian Church;* **Timothy Tow,** *Pastor of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church;* **Tow Siang Yeow,** *Elder of New Life Bible-Presbyterian Church;* **Victor & Gek Choo Nah,** *Deacon and his wife of Bethel Bible-Presbyterain Church;* **Wee Eng Moh,** *Pastor of Berith Bible-Presbyterian Church.*

When Tragedy Strikes

January 16, 2003 - a day to remember with nostalgia!
The skies were blue, the mood upbeat when
Space Shuttle Columbia lifted off with seven
astronauts on a 16-day research mission, not just
"on a wing and a prayer" but with confidence
of completing the mission and landing safely
to the accolade of thousands!

But that was not to be! For some reasons unknown
the Shuttle disintegrated with a loud 'boom'
in a shower of flames and trailing smoke
as it came in to land at Kennedy Space Centre.
None survived! Only myriad pieces of debris
strewn over a vast area in Texas to be
retrieved to determine the cause of the tragedy!



Awaiting family members and friends were shocked and hurting;
happiness turned into sorrow, joy into mourning!
NASA spokesman, in an emotional speech, had this to say:
"There was not a better crew than that of these
who gave their lives." "How are the mighty fallen!"
(2 Samuel 1:19) may well be our lament!

America 'the beautiful,' is stressed and numbed beyond consolation.
The world mourns in empathy with the families of the valiant
dead. And Koel birds, singing a dirge echoes with
'ko-el,' 'ko-el,' 'ko-el,' in a moving consonance!

Regretfully, pacifists and recalcitrants, spouting
the same declamation with unabated glee
that this tragedy is indeed
God's punishment for unprovoked "war-mongering!"
But what does the Bible say?

The Lord was asked whether the eighteen that died
when the Tower of Siloam fell on them
were more sinful than others.
He replied, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent
ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).
Our lives are in God's hands, but we must be ready
to meet Him if tragedy should strike suddenly!
The Lord will then say, "Well done, thou good and faithful
servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things,
I will make thee ruler over many things:
enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:21).

- Tow Siang Yeow

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- A magazine for the nurture of individual spiritual life
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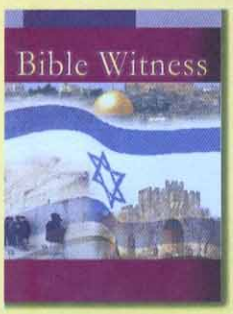

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