

Overcoming the Trials and Tribulations of Life

By Dr. Donald W. Ekstrand

“OVERCOMING THE TRIALS *of* LIFE”

by Dr. D. W. Ekstrand

In order to overcome the “difficulties” believers face in life, it is necessary that they first understand the reason for those difficulties, and that they fully buy into that reason. Without fully appreciating the “reason for trials,” one will simply see them as “meaningless negatives” that serve no worthwhile purpose in their life; as such they will view them as “significant agitations that keep them from enjoying life.” The reality is, God uses “trials” to enhance and grow and strengthen our faith — so the divine reason for trials in our lives is “faith related,” it is a faith-based issue, and faith is that dynamic whereby believers relate to God. Trials test and prove and build our faith and produce the likeness of Christ in us. The word “trial” in the New Testament language of Greek is *peirasmos*, and has the basic meaning of trying, testing, assaying, or proving; this word *peirasmos* can also be translated “temptation” (e.g., Matt 6:13; 26:41; 2 Pet 2:9); obviously with every trial there is temptation — they are two sides of the same coin. God “tests our faith” — the term “test” (from the Greek *dokimion*), was a word that was commonly used in the ancient world to substantiate the genuineness or validity of something... when used of coins the testing established whether or not a coin was genuine or debased. When James speaks of the “testing of our faith,” he pictures faith as a precious metal which is being tried by the Assayer (God) to prove its genuineness. The metal is subjected to the fires of persecution, sickness, suffering, or sorrow, which ultimately removes the dross from it. The reality is, without problems, we would never develop an enduring quality to our faith. I find it interesting that even the men of this world realize that problems strengthen character — noted industrialist, Charles Kettering, said, “Problems are the price of progress... good news weakens me.” Those are pretty profound words by an unbeliever. In short, trials, affliction and difficulties not only prove and demonstrate the genuineness of our faith, they are used by God to refine and purify our faith, and produce a steadfast, enduring, persevering quality to our faith. So the ultimate purpose of testing is not to destroy or afflict, but to purge and refine — such is essential to Christian maturity (cf. Jam 1:4). By way of reminder, even Abraham’s faith had to be tested (cf. Gen 22:1-8). The term “test” is only used twice in the New Testament (cf. Jam 1:3; 1 Pet 1:7).

There are several possible attitudes one can take toward the testings and trials of life — we can rebel against them by adopting a spirit of defiance... we can lose heart or give up under the pressure... we can question God’s love for us (cf. Heb 12:5)... we can grumble and complain about them... we can indulge in self-pity... or we can be instructed and exercised by the difficulties and perplexities of life (cf. Heb 12:11), and say in effect, “God has allowed this trial in my life for some good purpose, and I want His purpose worked out in my life” (cf. Jam 1:1). So, don’t rebel! don’t faint! rejoice! Problems and trials are not enemies bent on destroying us, but friends which have come to aid us in developing Christian character. God is able to produce “Christ-likeness” in us as His children. By necessity, the process involves suffering, frustration, and perplexity — the fruit of the Spirit cannot be produced when all is sunshine; there must be rain and dark clouds. Trials never seem pleasant; they seem very difficult and disagreeable... but afterwards they yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness (cf. Heb 12:11). The apostle Peter tackles this subject in his first letter when he writes: “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while you may have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith (which is more precious than gold and is being tested by fire), may be found to result in praise and glory

and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:6-7). The reality is: we need to stop wallowing, whining, grumbling and complaining, and grab onto God’s joy... we must choose joy over bitterness, anger, and sorrow. As the apostle Paul said, “Be joyful always!” (cf. 1 Th 5:16). “Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith” (cf. Heb 12:2). The truth is, you can endure whatever circumstances are making you quake in your boots... Jesus Christ is a Rock in a weary land... a Shelter in the time of storm. As the psalmist David said, “The Lord is my strength and my rock and my fortress and my deliverer... my refuge and my shield and my salvation and my stronghold” (cf. Ps 18:1-2) — when you grow in the realization of these truths, you will experience joy in the midst of sorrow. It is to that end you must commit yourself.

If we struggle when being tested or stumble along the way, this doesn’t mean that we no longer belong to Christ or that our faith is not genuine. Peter denied the Lord three times the night before Jesus went to the cross (cf. Mt 26:69-74; Mk 14:66-72; Lk 22:55-62; Jn 18:15-18, 25-27)... he followed Jesus after His arrest and watched Him be falsely accused, beaten, and insulted (cf. Mk 14:57-66)... when people began noticing Peter and asking him if he was one of Christ’s disciples, he denied even knowing Him. As incredible as it may seem, after he publicly disowned Christ, his faith was actually strengthened, because it no longer rested on his strength and power (in and of ourselves we can do nothing [Jn 15:5b] so come down off your high horse like Peter did; every one of Peter’s friends knew of his utter failure; imagine how humbling that must have been to him); as such, he was now equipped to “strengthen his brothers” (cf. Lk 22:32). Not only did Peter strengthen the other disciples, he became the pillar of the early church in Jerusalem, exhorting and training others to follow the Lord Jesus (cf. Acts 2). We learn from our mistakes and our tribulations and our insufficiencies and debilitating weaknesses (cf. Rom 7:18-25; 2 Cor 12:7-10)... when we agree with God about our condition (that’s the essence of true confession), we are strengthened in our faith, and we persevere as believers in Christ (cf. Rom 5:3ff; 15:4-5; 2 Th 1:4; 2 Pet 1:3-10; Rev 2:3; 14:12). Remember, Jesus told His disciples that being His followers means “the world is going to hate you, just as they hated Me... that they would persecute you, just as they persecuted Me... that all of these things would be done to them for My name’s sake” (cf. Jn 15:18-21)... thus fulfilling the word of the Lord, “they hated Me without cause” (cf. Jn 15:25). Jesus is the reason why the world hates us; “men love darkness rather than light” (cf. Jn 3:19); “they hate the light” (cf. Jn 3:20) — that should not be a surprise to you; even our own diabolical flesh hates the light (cf. Gal 5:17). Jesus goes on to say to His disciples, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace... in the world you have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world” (cf. Jn 16:33) — in spite of their tribulations, they could rest assured that they are on the winning side; Jesus overcame the world at the cross. Even though as a believer you may feel overwhelmed and afraid at times, you must know that God is always with you & you should not fear (cf. Mt 28:20; Heb 13:5; Lk 12:4-5; 1 Jn 4:18).

Following are a number of passages that address the matter of overcoming anxieties, worries, problems, trials, difficulties and tribulations. Though overcoming can be difficult, there are a number of very encouraging passages in Scripture that speak directly to the issue of overcoming when the vicissitudes of life seem to dominate the landscape of our lives. As is the case with all Scripture, one needs to prayerfully and humbly consider what God has written... and in so doing, God will open your heart to understand and apply His word to your life (cf. Acts 16:14; Jam 1:21; 1 Pet 2:2). In order for us to be renewed in the spirit of our minds (cf. Eph 4:23), we must humbly reflect upon the truths of God’s Word until the light displaces the darkness in our soul and settles peace-

fully in our heart; so merely reading the words of Scripture won't achieve this goal. Furthermore, as long as there is a tension in our minds with regard to a particular truth, we will not experience the confidence and peace of that truth. Our responsibility as believers is to meditate upon God's Word with a humble heart... that means giving very careful consideration to what it says (cf. Ps 1:2)... God's part is to awaken our hearts and minds to the reality of what His Word says (cf. Acts 16:14); it is the Holy Spirit who enlightens our minds to the truth (cf. Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13; 1 Cor 2:12-14; 1 Jn 2:20, 27). One of the significant dynamics of the Greek language is that it has the capacity to state things as "unequivocal fact," grammatically, this is referred to as "the indicative mood" — that means the essence of what is being said is not up for debate; when something is stated in the indicative mood, "it is a fact that needs to be accepted." Jesus Himself employed another means to "emphatically declare truth:" repeatedly He used the expression, "Truly, truly, I say to you," by the redundancy of stating the word "truly" twice, He in effect was saying, "Let there be no misunderstanding as to what I am saying, this is THE TRUTH! So listen up!" (cf. John 1:51; 3:3; 3:11; 5:19; 5:24; 6:26; 6:32; 6:47; 6:53; 8:34; 8:51; 8:58; 10:7; etc.). Now one can genuinely respond, "How can that be?" But we cannot respond, "I just can't believe that!" — in other words, you can't close the door on a biblical truth just because you are not able to completely understand it... when you do that, you are making "yourself" the final authority on what is true and what is not true, and not God's Word. None of us are able to fully understand the depths of God's Word; it won't be until the day we enter into the heavenly realm that much of what is perplexing to us now will be made known to us... it is also highly unlikely we will ever "fully understand divine truth" (that is, one hundred percent of it) — after all God is infinite in wisdom, and we will never have minds of that magnitude; we will probably continue to grow in our understanding of divine truth throughout all eternity... daily (if there is such a thing) we will probably be awestruck by the incredible genius and greatness of GOD; remember, God is infinite in wisdom... that is, His knowledge and wisdom is without limits.

David uses a fascinating Hebrew word to describe his interaction with divine truth — in the first psalm he says "he meditates upon God's Word day and night" (v. 2). The word meditate is also used of a cow "chewing his cud" — after a cow swallows his food after eating it out in the pasture, it doesn't immediately go into its stomach where it is digested... instead it goes into a secondary stomach that one could define as a storage compartment... the food is stored there until the cow brings it back up again to "chew upon" — this is what it means for a cow to "chew his cud." In like manner, "we are to bring up the truths of God's Word over and over again and 'reconsider' them," which is akin to a cow chewing his cud. Meditating upon God's Word amounts to reconsidering it throughout the course of a day, and thereby seeing its significance in our lives. This is the spiritual manna that God wants us to feed upon day and night (cf. Ps 19:14; 25:5; 63:6; 77:6; 119:15-16; 119:99; 119:148; 145:5)... by the way, there is a big difference between understanding this truth and applying it. As you reflect upon a particular truth, you will naturally ask questions and solicit answers from the Lord... oftentimes it will spur you on to study the concept in more detail that you might gain a more complete understanding of it. Remember, God's Spirit is resident in your soul, and works to implant divine truth in your heart through the agency of God's Word (cf. Jam 1:27). By the way, there is no satisfactory "Readers Digest Version" of the Word... neither is Scripture merely ancillary, supplemental truth — it is the very truth itself upon which the believer is to feed (cf. Ps 119:11, 105, 133, 148, 160, 169; Prv 30:5-6; Is 40:8; 55:11; Jer 15:16; Mt 4:4; Jn 8:31-32; Col 3:16; 2 Tim 2:15; Heb 4:12; Jam 1:21-22; 1 Pet 1:23-25). Take a moment and reflect upon the various passages referenced — they stress the import of God's Word to your life and faith.

As you work your way through the passages expanded upon on the following pages, let me encourage you to do so with “your Bible” in hand; that will give you the opportunity to study the context of each of these passages, as well as the different ways in which the material is worded. It should also be noted, “speed-reading” the following passages won’t benefit you much when it comes to overcoming those difficult realities you may be experiencing in life. God’s Word needs to be integrated into the very fabric of your heart and become alive in your soul for it to be efficacious and life-changing — that means “*God’s Word needs to become **your passion in life***” (cf. Jer 15:16). Remember, it is **God** who gives understanding and instructs the soul, and this He does to the humble of heart (cf. Ps 25:9; Is 66:2; Mic 6:8; Matt 23:12, 23; Jam 4:6). God’s Word is liberating, but it only sets a person free when it abides in his soul (cf. Jn 8:31-32). Simply knowing a forensic truth accomplishes little or nothing in the believer’s life; truth must become dynamic and alive for it to impact and transform your life. Divine truth is a powerful living reality, not merely a brilliant abstract reality (cf. Heb 4:12) — the question is, “Is divine truth alive in you? or simply an impersonal presence?” In the material you just finished reading I cross-referenced a number of passages — did you read them and reflect upon them? That is precisely how you must handle Scripture; anything else simply amounts to entertaining concepts and giving lip-service to the truth (cf. Is 29:13; Mt 15:8) — did you just read the two passages I just listed? Read them! One further reminder: if the Holy Spirit does not attend to your soul when you are wrestling with the truths of Scripture, it will profit you nothing; you must humbly and prayerfully interact with God’s Word if you are to experience the Spirit-empowerment of it in your life.

IT IS BY “GOD’S WORD” THAT WE OVERCOME

- **Deut 6:5** – Though life can be challenging and difficult, we are to love the LORD our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might (cf. Mt 22:36-39). This is the great commandment of God: we are to supremely love the only true God & keep His Word (Deut 6:6). All of the expressions taken together suggests that we are to love God with our whole selves; thus emphasizing the totality of our commitment. The covenant-treaty that God established with His people Israel was based on His love for them, and it required their love for Him in return; the concept ties love tightly together with the sense of obedience and loyalty.
- **Gen 50:20** – Joseph’s response to his brothers who had sold him into slavery was this: “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.” God overrides the actions of men (Prv 16:1), and works all things after the counsel of His will (cf. Eph 1:11). Just as He worked in Joseph’s life, so also He works in our lives (cf. Rom 8:28).
- **Ex 34:6** – When the LORD passed in front of Moses to give him two new stone tablets to replace the two he broke before the congregation when they violated God’s law, He introduced Himself thus: “JEHOVAH God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.” Though the love of God is vastly greater than man can conceive... yet God is still holy — His love does not negate His holiness, and neither does His holiness negate His love... to emphasize one over the other is discredit the very nature and character of God.

- **Josh 1:9** – As Joshua prepared to lead God’s people into the Promised Land, the Lord said to him, “Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” Three times the Lord told Joshua to “be strong and courageous” (vv. 6, 7, 9) — the task ahead... the pressures of leading an obstinate people... and the absence of his spiritual mentor “Moses” no doubt weighed heavily on his mind. The reality is, the Lord doesn’t call us to do anything that He does not enable us to do.
- **Ps 16:11** – God makes known to us the path of life; in His presence there is fullness of joy... at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. The psalmist David here develops further the nature of life with God — its origin lies with God... Christ alone shows us the path of life; i.e., the way that leads to life (cf. Prv 5:6; 10:17; 15:24). God’s blessing attends the life lived in the presence of God; the psalmist conceives of life in fellowship with God both in this world and in the world to come. The goal of life is to one day reside forever in God’s presence, and know a level of joy that is unspeakable.
- **Ps 23:4** – Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, because God is with me; His rod and His staff, they comfort me — the significance of the rod and the staff speak of God’s presence, provisions, protection and guidance. God’s saving care, even in the darkest moment of life, is able to bring a level of comfort to the soul that surpasses our understanding (cf. Phil 4:6-7) — “Jehovah is my shepherd, therefore I shall not want” (v. 1).
- **Ps 27:1** – The LORD is my light... my salvation... the stronghold of my life; therefore, whom shall I fear? The Lord alleviates all fear, because His light overwhelms the darkness (cf. Ps 18: 28; 43:3)... His salvation saves us... and His strength gives us the power to overcome that which lies before us (cf. Ps 28:8; 31:2; Jer 32:17). You’ll notice, the psalmist’s confidence does not lie in his own abilities and strength, but in the Lord.
- **Ps 34:17-19** – When the righteous cry out to the Lord for help, He hears and delivers them out of all their troubles... He is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. Though the Lord dwells in a high and holy place, yet He stoops down to be nigh with the humble (i.e., with those who acknowledge their lowliness and their weakness – cf. Ps 10:17; Prv 11:2; Is 66:2); the reality is, no one has reason to think highly of himself (cf. Rom 3:10; 2 Cor 12:10b).
- **Prv 3:5-6** – Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and don’t lean on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him and His ways, and He will make your paths straight. We are not to be thrown into doubt or consternation by external circumstances, because we trusted in our own fleshly understanding... instead we are to trust in the wisdom of God, His power, and His providence and goodness. The word trust in Hebrew means to “place all your weight on something” — rather than leaning on our own understanding, we are to lean on the Lord. The Old Testament concept of “trust” is encompassed in the Greek word “pistis,” which is generally translated “believe” and “faith” in the New Testament — the various forms of this word appear nearly 500 times in the NT. Incidentally, this word is used exclusively of God in the New Testament (never anyone else). The author of Hebrews tells us that, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (cf. Heb 11:1) — that is, faith makes things hoped for as real as if we already had them (our eternal future in heaven)... and it provides us with the evidence of that which we do not see (cf. 2 Cor 5:7). So faith is confidence in the trustworthiness of God, and the conviction that what God says is true and that what He

promises will come to pass... such faith is *effected in us by the Holy Spirit* when we *humble* ourselves before God (cf. Acts 16:14; Jam 1:23); so faith is not the by-product of human wisdom, human intelligence, or human effort — “*it is the gift of God*” (cf. Eph 2:8-9; Rom 12:3). I cover the concept of faith in considerably more detail under the heading “**Heb 11:1.**”

- **Is 26:3** – *God will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee*, because he trusts in Him — Jesus can create perfect peace within the mind, even though the storms of life may rage without (Mk 4:39). Our peace does not depend upon the state of the world, but upon God. Perfect peace comes from leaning hard on Jehovah and focusing on Him. As the hymn says, “Rock of Ages, cleft for me, *let me hide myself in Thee.*”
- **Is 41:13** – I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your hand; *do not fear, I will help you* (cf. Deut 33:26, 29). It is interesting to note, Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as “*our Helper*” (cf. Jn 14:16, 26; 15:26) — the psalmist writes, “*God is a very present help in trouble*” (cf. Ps 46:1).
- **Is 43:1-3** – Thus says the LORD, O Israel, who created you and formed you, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; *you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you... when you walk through fire you shall not be burned... for I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.* We need not fear the dread of unpleasant circumstances, because the One who created, formed, redeemed and called us will be *with us* in the flood and the fire; remember, the Lord brought His people through the Red Sea.
- **Is 46:9-10** – Thus says the LORD, “*I am God, and there is no other... declaring the end from the beginning... My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.*” This is our God, not some silly piece of clay fashioned by the hands of men... the proofs of the Godship of Jehovah have been established from all eternity (cf. Is 40:13, 18; 41:21-24; 43:13; 45:5-7, 22; Rom 9:19; 11:34-36). The reality is only GOD transcends space, mass and time... just as He spoke all things into existence, there is nothing He can't do (cf. Jer 32:27); He could actually speak all things out of existence; *above everything, make sure God is “GOD” in your thinking.*
- **Is 55:8-9** – *God's thoughts are not our thoughts... and His ways are not our ways... as high as the heavens are above the earth so are God's thoughts and ways higher than ours.* That men judge God's ways and God's thoughts with the depravity of human thought is ludicrous; it would be more sensible for a baby in the womb to explain the essence of metaphysics. We have an IQ of 150 at best... God's is in the endless trillions! Beloved, do the math.
- **Jer 1:5** – The Lord told Jeremiah, “Before *I formed you* in the womb *I knew you*... before you were born *I consecrated you*... *I appointed you* a prophet to the nations.” God is the author of all life; we are to honor Him as such. All of us as God's children have a unique calling in life (none of us were made for “*no purpose*”)... all of us as God's children have been consecrated, sanctified, and set apart unto the Lord (the concept of being “*set apart*” is the essence of what it means to be “*holy*” or be a “*saint*” (they are the same word in Greek and Hebrew — cf. Deut 7:6; Ps 34:9; Jer 2:3; Rom 1:7; 8:27; 1 Cor 1:2; Eph 1:1; Col 3:12; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 1:16). The long and short of it this, “*we have all be set apart unto the Lord and His service*” — “*you are not your own... you have been bought with a price*” (cf. 1 Cor 6:19-20; Col 1:13). No believer is to live for himself (cf. Mt 16:24-25), instead we are to be servants of the Most High — we have been “gifted” for just such work (cf. 1 Cor 12:7).

- **Matt 19:26** – *With man salvation is impossible, but with God all things are possible.* Humanly speaking, it is simply not possible for a person to save himself; only God can save. The problem many believers have is that they actually believe they possess some inherent goodness that makes them “worthy” of salvation in some way; which is exactly what our diabolical world believes. This just shows you how strongly influential our flesh is in controlling the discourse in our minds. The Lord Jesus emphatically said, “No one is good but God alone” (cf. Lk 18:19); both the psalmist David and Paul confirmed this truth (cf. Ps 14:3; 53:1; Rom 3:10-13). When we see ourselves in a more favorable light than is actually the case, our “proud heart” makes it very difficult for us to continually see our need of Christ and walk humbly in this world (cf. Mic 6:8; Phil 2:3; 1 Pet 5:5).
- **Matt 4:4** – The Lord Jesus’ response to Satan’s temptation in the wilderness was this: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” Contrary to the voice of the flesh, getting bread [or getting what you want in life] is not the most important thing — the most important thing is obeying God’s Word. This verse shows us how important God’s Word is in comparison to everything else in life... the reality is, our fleshly minds place an inordinate value on everything else that exists; and it is these things that often produce consternation in the soul. Giving God’s Word (Christ) preeminence in your mind and heart is the number one challenge of life (cf. Mt 16:24-25; 1 Cor 15:31).
- **Matt 28:20** – *God is with believers always, even to the end of the age.* It is critically important for us as believers to know that we do not go forth alone or unaided in this world... in all our service and travel we are to confidently know the companionship of Christ... we are to continually abide in His love and walk with Him through all of life (cf. Jn 15:9; Col 2:6; 1 Jn 1:7) — the idea of “continually” walking with Him excludes any thought of only walking with Him on certain occasions (church, etc.); that’s the significance of a “present tense verb” in Greek; though none of us walk with Christ every moment, that is “goal” of the Christian life... we don’t lower the goal because we lack perfection — “we continue to press on!” (cf. Phil 3:12-14).
- **Lk 10:41-42** – The Lord asked Martha, “Why are you worried about so many things... only a few things are needed; actually only one... your sister has chosen what is best — sitting at Christ’s feet and learning from Him. Our Lord prizes our affection far more than our service. The truth is, our service may be tainted with pride and self-importance... pride is a disease every human being suffers from (it’s the foundation of our flesh). Occupation with Christ is the one thing that is needed... and the only thing that will quell pride.
- **Jn 16:33** – In Jesus there is peace... in the world there is tribulation... take heart, Jesus has overcome the world. As mentioned earlier, in spite of the fact that there is much tribulation in this life, we can rest assured (because of the cross) that we are on the winning side. When one considers the words of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He went to the cross: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not My will but Yours be done” (cf. Lk 22:41-42)... it becomes very apparent that the anxiety that Jesus experienced was equally God’s will (cf. Mk 14:33-36; Heb 12:2) and is a part of our human destiny (cf. Jn 16:33). The humanity of Jesus showed forth powerfully in the Garden of Gethsemane; yet He was perfectly obedient to the Father, and desired above everything that the will of the Father be done.

- **Acts 14:22** – *Strengthen* the souls of God's people... *encourage* them to continue in the faith, *for through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God*. As Paul writes in his letter to the Colossians, "Our goal is to bring every man up to his full maturity in Christ Jesus; this is the work to which we are to give ourselves" (cf. Col 1:28)... and the work for which God has gifted us (cf. 1 Cor 12:7; Gal 5:13; Eph 4:11-13; 1 Pet 4:10-11).
- **Rom 5:3-5** – *Glory in your tribulations*, knowing that they produce *perseverance*, which produces *character*, which in turn *increases our hope*... and this hope does not disappoint, because the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit makes it very clear to us that *God loves us*. This is one of the great paradoxes of the Christian faith – that joy can coexist with affliction. One of the by-products of tribulation is that it produces perseverance or steadfastness of faith – we would *never* develop perseverance in our faith if our lives were trouble-free. What's the message? We are a people of "*weak faith*" (not nearly as strong as some might think), and the only way to strengthen our faith is to experience distressful situations – think about how frustrating tribulations are, and how difficult it is to rejoice in them... well, that should convince you of the fact that you don't have nearly as strong a faith as you may think. With that in mind, God send tribulations into your life to not only remove the "*dross*" from your faith (*i.e.*, the erroneous aspects of your faith), but "*build*" your faith; obviously God's program for growing your faith isn't something that can be accomplished at a little weekend seminar on "*faith*." By the way, your faith will never be *fully perfected* until the day you enter into glory; that's why the Christian life is always referred to as a "*growth process*" – no matter where you are on your spiritual journey, you still have a lot of room to grow (cf. Phil 3:12-14; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18). If you don't believe that – how much do you think you resemble Christ today? Beloved, stop viewing the Christian life as a destination... *it's a journey*.
- **Rom 8:17-18** – Since we are children of God, we are heirs of God and *co-heirs with Christ*; as such, *we are called to share in His sufferings* that we may also *share in His glory*... the truth is, our sufferings (as painful and discomfiting as they can be) are *not worthy to be compared* with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Elsewhere Paul speaks of our present sufferings as "*light afflictions*" which last only for a moment, but he describes the glory as an exceeding and eternal weight (cf. 2 Cor 4:17).
- **Rom 8:28** – *God causes all things to work together for good in the lives of His children*. In this verse Paul describes believers as those who love God, and are called according to His purpose. It is important to note, *this is not a conditional promise; it applies to every believer*; God is causing everything in every believer's life to work together for that person's good... not only for the most spiritual among us, but for the least spiritual as well. Though our sufferings at times may cause us to question this truth – "How can God cause good to come of this?" The reality is, whatever God permits to come into our lives is designed to "*conform us to the image of His Son*" (cf. verse 29). Our lives are not controlled by happenstance, luck, or fate, but by the Lord Jesus who loved us so He died for us (cf. Jn 3:16; Heb 12:2). The perplexing construct for the believer is truly seeing "*value*" in difficult circumstances – "*pain*" is a discomfiting oxymoron to the believer, because he so desperately wants it to go away; frequently it dominates the discourse in his mind... thus he needs to immerse himself in the Word until the Lord speaks to his heart and displaces the angst with peace. Beloved, contrary to what some may think, none of us have any "*merit buttons*" whereby we can instantaneously get our "*wants*" met! ☺ That is not Christianity.

- **Rom 8:29** – *God has predestined us as believers to be **conformed** to the image of His Son.* From all eternity, God foreordained that we be transformed into the image of Christ; just as we were *created in God's image* (cf. Gen 1:26), so also by His grace we were born again after the fall that we might ultimately be "*recreated in Christ's image*" (cf. Eph 1:4; Phil 3:21; 2 Tim 1:9). Now, "*if God is for us, who can possibly succeed against us?*" (Rom 8:31)... in other words, who can possibly frustrate God's will and cause His plan to fail? (cf. Jer 32:27). That's right, nothing and no one can! So we should glory in that incredible reality. **Nothing** can disrupt God's plan or snatch us out of God's hands! (cf. Jn 10:28-29; Eph 1:5, 11-14; Phil 1:6). On the other hand, however, if we should *dwell on the vicissitudes of life*, the goal of *being conformed* to the image of Christ will no longer be *the hope that constrains us* and brings joy to our lives (cf. 1 Jn 3:1-3; 1 Pet 1:3; 2 Pet 3:13); rather deliverance from the problem will be our chief concern. Again, the reality is, our flesh simply despises pain and sorrow, and insists on controlling the discourse in our minds.
- **Rom 11:33** – Writes Paul, "*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways.*" After he expounded upon God's marvelous plan of salvation, he responded with this incredible doxology. When you truly reflect upon the wonder of God's gift of life to you, it can't help but overwhelm your soul and blow your mind. Charles Wesley responded thus: "*How can it be that Thou, My God, shouldst die for me?*" When the truth of God's salvation is really made manifest in a believer's heart, it creates a level of praise and thanksgiving in the soul that is absolutely confounding, mystifying and bewildering. Imagine the apostle Paul reflecting upon the fact that he had been a persecutor of the church (cf. Acts 22:4; Eph 3:8; 1 Tim 1:15-16); it is possible he may even have contributed to the murder of some believers. He writes, "I am the least of the apostles... not fit to be called an apostle (*i.e.*, a messenger of God)... I persecuted the church of God... it is by the grace of God alone that I am what I am" (cf. 1 Cor 15:9-10); in a word Paul was saying, "God's saving me had absolutely **NOTHING** to do with me; it was one-hundred percent by grace (just as it was for you and me). Paul never sought God out (neither did you or I – read Rom 3:11), yet here he was, the choicest, most gifted spokesman of God in the history of the world. *Beloved, you and I were purchased off the auction block of sin by grace alone...* it wasn't because we were cute or had a level of innocence... we were nothing but despicable children of Satan who *loved darkness* (cf. Jn 3:19-20) and *hated God* (cf. Rom 7:18; Gal 5:17); there wasn't one thing we did to merit God's incredible love. Either that construct of faith characterizes your life as a believer, or the best you can ever hope for as a genuine believer is a "*false, rigid piety*" (because the main focus of your faith will be on your performance). Stop beating yourself up for who you are, and glory in the wonder of God's love for you.
- **Rom 12:1-2** – *In view of God's abundant mercy, present your body a living and holy sacrifice to God* — this is the essence of true and proper worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but *be transformed by the renewing of your mind...* and thus prove the will of God. When we give serious consideration to the mercies of God, we will live our lives as "*living sacrifices*" unto the Lord — "*this is our reasonable service.*" That our lives are to be a "*holy sacrifice,*" means they are to be set apart for the Lord's use; such devotion is the only reasonable, rational response to the extraordinary goodness God has showered upon us.
- **Rom 12:12** – Paul enjoins us to *rejoice in hope... be patient in tribulation... and be constant in prayer.* No matter what our circumstances may be, we can rejoice in our *eternal hope* (the

redemption of our bodies and our eternal glory)... bravely endure our *tribulations*... and continue steadfastly in *prayer* (it is here where victory is won); prayer brings the power of God into our lives and peace to our hearts.

- **1 Cor 10:13** – *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.* God is faithful and *will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able to endure*, but with the temptation will provide a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. The various temptations we experience in life are *normal*; believers throughout the ages have all had to resist temptation... yet God does not subject any of us to anything for which we have not been *prepared*, and for which He does not give us the grace the handle and the power to endure. It is the fleshly discourse in our minds that we must battle (cf. Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23; Phil 4:6-9).
- **2 Cor 3:18** – With unveiled face we behold the glory of the Lord [through His Word]... and in so doing, *we are being transformed into the image of Christ from glory to glory* (i.e., from one level of glory to another) just as from the Lord, the Holy Spirit. When we *behold* the glory of the Lord in His Word (i.e., when we are *occupied* with the glory of the risen Christ), the Holy Spirit does a transforming work in our lives and conforms us to the likeness of Christ — this is a description of the gradual process of sanctification (cf. Jn 17:17; Rom 6:19; 1 Th 4:3; 5:23). The key part the believer plays in his transformation (sanctification) is “*occupation with Christ*” (as opposed to being occupied with self). When you are occupied with Christ the Holy Spirit is actively transforming you into the image of Christ.
- **2 Cor 4:16** – *Do not lose heart*; though our *outer self* is wasting away, our *inner self* is being renewed day by day. A proper focus on our glorious future with Christ will empower us to endure any kind of trouble — though the process of *physical decay* is constantly taking place in our lives, the process of *spiritual renewal* enables us to go on in spite of adverse circumstances; it is this spiritual renewing within that inspires us to press on and not lose heart. Without recognizing the imminent downward plight of the physical, and the miraculous growth and renewing of the spiritual... we will lose heart. Many believers struggle greatly with the dissolution of the physical, as if it should somehow not be necessary — the reality is, we begin life being totally dependent upon others... and we generally end it being totally dependent — that's the life cycle of that earthly dwelling we inhabit.
- **2 Cor 12:9** – *God's grace is sufficient for you; His power is made perfect in your weakness.* Therefore you should most gladly *boast of your weaknesses* (cf. Rom 7:18) that the power of Christ may rest upon you. God did not remove the “*disconcerting thorn*” from Paul's life that he pleaded with God to do (2 Cor 12:7ff)... instead God gave him the grace to bear it. Essentially, God told Paul, “*The best way for you to be an effective servant of Mine is to be kept in a place of weakness, where you are wholly dependent upon Me.*” After carefully considering what God had told him, Paul said in effect that that was the only way then that he would want it to be... so instead of complaining and grumbling about the thorn, he boasted about his infirmities. Our lives will produce far more fruit when we do things *God's way* than our way; incidentally, arriving at that position involves a lot of prayer and dying to the self-life.
- **Gal 2:20** – This is probably “*the most loved verse*” by the servants of God in this world, because it articulates so well the essence of the Christian life. Writes Paul, “*I have been crucified with Christ... it is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.*”

Let me begin by first drawing your attention to the *four words* that have been **emboldened** — these words in the New Testament language of Greek are **emphatic**, meaning they are the most **strongly emphasized** words in this verse... so when you reflect upon what this verse says, read it in such fashion. The impact of *those four words* should strike a chord in your heart — the more familiar you are with what the Scriptures teach, the more meaningful this verse will be to you. Obviously the *gospel* is the foundation of this verse — “*the old me*” was crucified with Christ and no longer has claim on my life, Christ now lives in me. Jesus didn’t die for me in order that I might go on living life however I choose... He died for me that He might live His life in me. The believer’s *old self* is dead — it was crucified with Christ (cf. Rom 6:6; Gal 6:14). The believer’s *new self* is indwelt by Christ (cf. Eph 3:16-17; Col 1:27); thus giving us the privilege of letting Christ live His life in us. “*The life we now live we live by **FAITH** in the Son of God, who loved us so much that He died for us on the cross.*” Don’t miss this point: the motivation to “*living a life of faith*” is grounded in the fact that God loves us with an everlasting love — without question, that is the most important truth of the Christian faith. Even with that incredible reality in mind, I want you to focus on the fact that **we are to live by FAITH!** (cf. Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38). Faith is a difficult construct by which to live, because the flesh is ever inserting contrary thoughts into our minds... and more often than not we buy into them in some measure. The reality is, **we don’t walk by SIGHT!** (cf. 2 Cor 5:7) — that is not an option for us, yet we often insist on doing so! The “*conditions*” of the little world in which we live are vastly more important in our minds than they should be, and constantly drag us down in our faith; they not only get us to *question our faith*, but can even cause us to become disappointed with God... Why? *because things don’t go the way we want them to go!* “*Our wants*” are very prominent in our lives, and oftentimes are the “*sole determinant*” of our happiness in life — when things don’t go the way we want them to go, we become frustrated and disillusioned with life. You have probably noticed, even *your prayer life* is governed by your conditions. Beloved, it is “*this perspective on life*” that God wants you to deal with — at some point you are going to have to give significant attention to “*dying to self and your own wants*” (cf. Mt 10:38; 16:24; 1 Cor 15:31b). As mentioned earlier, if the reality of “*God’s love for you*” is not foundational to your faith, you will never live a “*life of faith*” when your world is turned upside down (because “*your conditions*” will dominate the discourse in your mind). Though none of us as believers are continually subjected to “*challenging conditions*” (the Lord knows our frame and knows we could not handle that — cf. Ps 103:14; 1 Cor 10:13)... nearly all of us will go through a “*season of life*” when the conditions of life will be very distressing, perplexing and painful (cf. Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 4:8-9; 1 Pet 1:6). Why? *to build our faith* (cf. 1 Pet 1:6-7).

- **Gal 5:16** — “*Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.*” This is probably one of the most profound verses in the entire Bible. The reality is, either *we walk by the Spirit* or *we walk by the flesh* — those are the only two options. Either we live according to the directives of the Spirit, or we follow the directives of the flesh; incidentally, “*the flesh and the Spirit are in opposition against each other*” (cf. Gal 5:17), that means there is an ongoing war in the believer’s soul for control — and one thing is sure, the flesh will always get its foot in the door and give its input... that’s why Paul says, “we must not obey its lusts/desires... and let sin be our master” (cf. Rom 6:12-14). Therefore the defining issue in life is this — either we are occupied with Christ, or we are occupied with self... either we defer to the God-life, or we defer to the self-life — we cannot be occupied with Christ and sin at the same time, any more than we can walk in two opposing directions at the same time. In short, the only consistent way to overcome the “*sinful desires of the flesh*” is to live moment-by-moment in the power of the

Holy Spirit. Remember, sin is anything that is contrary to the will of God. The Scriptures teach the following:

1. *That which is not of faith is sin* (cf. Rom 14:23).
2. *Without faith it is impossible to please God* (cf. Heb 11:6).
3. *The righteous shall live by faith* (cf. Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38).

It is only when we walk each moment by faith in God's Word, under the control of the Holy Spirit (we do this when we consciously submit to Him), that we will experience victory over the sinful desires of the flesh. Incidentally, being controlled by the *Spirit* and being controlled by the *Word* are essentially the same thing – carefully compare Eph 5:18-19 *and* Col 3:16 – when we let the Word of Christ *dwell in us*, we are letting the Holy Spirit *fill us* (control us), and we will walk according to His leading – remember, *“the Word of God is living and active”* (cf. Heb 4:12). Regarding the matter of *“faith,”* see the notes below on Hebrews 11:1.

- **Phil 3:12-14** – Says Paul, *“Not that I have already obtained perfection,* but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Again, though I have not laid hold of it yet, this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, *I press on toward the goal* for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ.” None of us as believers are anywhere near perfect in this life. Though some may erroneously conclude that they are already *“pretty good,”* they need to consider how much better they are going to be when they arrive in heaven – if they somehow think they are only going to be made *“a little better,”* they have completely misunderstood the holiness of Christ. The long & short of it is this: if you are only *“made a little better”* when you enter into the eternal realm, you better get a refund because a transformational mistake was made on you at the pearly gates! ☺ In these verses, Paul attested to the fact that *“achieving a state of sinlessness in this life”* was outside the realm of possibility... He simply felt the believer needed to *“press on”* in order that the purpose for which the Lord Jesus had saved him might be fulfilled in him. Though his *“being fully conformed to the image Christ”* was still yet a future experience, Paul was deeply exercised that this work of God's grace might continue and deepen. The apostle enjoined believers to *“forget those things that lay behind”* (sins, failures & accomplishments), and *“reach forward to the responsibilities God has ordained for your life”* (growth, ministry and worship)... *exerting every effort toward the goal* for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. The Greek verb *“dioko”* means *“to pursue”* or *“press on”* – it is used as a metaphor in the foot race, *“of speeding on earnestly”* (cf. Rom 9:30; 14:19; 1 Cor 14:1; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22; Heb 12:14).
- **Eph 4:22** – Perhaps I should insert this verse at this point: *“Our old self is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit”* (cf. Eph 4:22)... that is, our old unconverted nature is in a *“constant state of decline”* (it is not improving). The Greek verb that is translated *“being corrupted”* (*phtheiro*) is in the present tense, meaning that our old unconverted self is *continually* getting worse and worse... the passive voice of that verb means that this continual corruption is being *caused by the lusts of deceit* – all the worldly and fleshly desires are the tools that are causing the continual corruption of our old self. Though some may think the *“old man within”* is actually getting better, that is not the case. The logic is pretty simple: None of us are as *“good”* today as we were when we were little children; as little children we possessed a degree of innocence (in spite of the fact that we were totally sinful, our sinfulness wasn't as developed then as much as it is today); as we grew older, it should have

become very apparent to us that “*we not only were not improving, we were getting worse!*” So to somehow think that we can “*take our old fallen self and make it a better creature*” is completely contrary to what the Word teaches — God isn’t even going to transform our unredeemed humanness; when we arrive in the eternal realm it is simply going to be jettisoned from us (at that point it will no longer exist). The reality is this: *God has asked us to “live with our unredeemed humanness”* (i.e., our old self; our flesh), “*and put it to death every day; die to self*” (cf. Mt 16:24; Rom 6:12; 1 Cor 15:31; Gal 5:16; Eph 4:22). That’s the challenge that lies before every believer. Is it easy? of course not! That’s why it is referred to as “*spiritual warfare*” (cf. Gal 5:17). Keeping the foregoing in mind — due to the fact our flesh is in a constant state of decline (it’s becoming more angry, more polluted & more stubborn every day), the battle obviously gets far *more intense* with age... but as we grow older in the Lord we should be more battle-ready and have a stronger faith to fight that battle (cf. Eph 6:10-18; 1 Tim 6:12).

- **Phil 4:6-7** – *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and thanksgiving* let your requests be made known to God... and *His peace* (which surpasses all understanding) will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. You’ll notice the answer to anxiety is *prayer*. Furthermore, *thanksgiving* should accompany all Christian praying — it is here where we acknowledge that whatever God sends is for our good; without being thankful, we will be inclined to simply focus on the negative that we want removed from our life, and such a perspective actually removes God from the picture; as stated earlier, “*the self-life trumps the God-life;*” it is only when we die to the self-life that the God-life takes center court.
- **Phil 4:8-9** – *Whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good repute... dwell on those things that are excellent and worthy of praise...* if you practice doing so, the God of peace shall be with you. Scripture frequently addresses “*the believer’s thought life.*” Dr. Caroline Leaf is one of the world’s leading authorities on the “cognitive neuroscientific aspects of the brain;” she’s a devout believer with a PhD in “Communication Pathology” from the University of Pretoria in South Africa, and has studied the brain and the science of thought for more than 30 years. Dr. Leaf and a number of other scientists have discovered that human beings think between 30,000 and 50,000 thoughts a day. That’s a lot of thoughts! The truth is, our minds never rest while we are awake... we are constantly thinking about some-thing... and that something more often than not is motivated by our flesh. When Christ died for us, He redeemed us of our sin (i.e., He paid the price for our sin), but He didn’t redeem our sinful flesh (it is that part of us that will be jettisoned on the final day). Jesus made us a brand new creation, but He didn’t remove our unredeemed humanness from us; and it is our unredeemed humanness with which we must live — we are called to “*die to it daily;*” that is, we are not to let it reign in our members (Rom 6:12). Because of the presence of the flesh in our lives, we are constantly inundated with “*its sinful thoughts;*” at every juncture of life the flesh gives its input, and it is this diabolical thinking that we must reject and counter with godly thinking. Thus Paul tells us to “*take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*” (cf. 2 Cor 10:5)... to somehow think that one can simply let his mind wander contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture: “we are not to conformed to this world, but *be transformed by the renewing of our minds*” (cf. Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23; 5:17). Obviously, dying to the flesh is not easy, because it has been a part of us since birth, but that is God’s mandate for us (cf. Rom 6:12-14; 1 Tim 6:12).
- **Phil 4:13** – *We can do all things through Christ who gives us the strength;* that is, we can do anything that [obviously] is in accord with God’s will (cf. Mt 6:10; 1 Jn 5:14). Remember, life

is not about us and our desires, it is about God and His desires (cf. Mt 6:24-25). Paul learned that God's commands are the Lord's enablements; he knew that God would never call him to do something without giving him the grace to do it. True sufficiency in the Christian life is found in the strength of Christ; without depending on Him we can do nothing (cf. Jn 15:5b). It is also important to remember, we are not simply called to live by a number of precepts (that's religion), we are called to walk through life in personal relationship with Christ.

- **Phil 4:19** – *God will supply **every need** of yours according to His riches in Christ Jesus.* Keep in mind that this promise follows the description of “faithful stewardship,” in other words, because the Philippian believers had given their material resources to God, Paul did not want them to fret over their potential endangerment... for God would supply their every need. This verse was not meant to be used by Christians who are squandering their money on themselves with seldom a thought for the work of God. Live responsibly and in accord with God's Word, and rest on God's unending love and grace; obviously one can't live outside the will of God (*i.e.*, live in sin) and then expect to have access to all the incredible goods in God's warehouse. Humble yourself and experience His boundless grace (cf. Jam 4:3-10).
- **1 Th 5:16-18** – *Rejoice always... pray without ceasing... give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* Joy can be our constant companion in life because Christ is the source of our joy; it is when we remove Christ from the picture and focus on the problem, that joy exits the scene. We constantly need a God-conscious awareness as we navigate through life, because life is a continual challenge; thus dialoguing with Christ needs to be commonplace for us, not just an occasional experience — continual communion with Christ is the joy of the believer's heart. Additionally, giving thanks to God should be the Christian's native emotion; if Romans 8:28 is indeed true, then we should be able to praise the Lord at all times, and be grateful for all things.
- **2 Tim 3:16** – *All Scripture is God breathed* and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. Paul emphasizes the preeminence of all Scripture — it is the authoritative word of God (cf. 1 Pet 1:20-21), and is profitable for teaching truth, refuting erroneous thinking, correcting us, and training us to live godly lives; you'll notice that three of the four elements mentioned involve a “change of life.” Right doctrine should produce right practice. It goes without saying, if God's Word is not highly cherished, its impact will be minimal in your life.
- **Heb 4:15** – *We do not have a **High Priest** who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses*, but one who was tempted in all ways such as we, yet was without sin. Jesus was not only fully God, but fully man; as such He knows what it is like to be a human being... He understands the testings that we are called to endure, the temptation to cave in to those testings, and the difficult nature of those testings — He was tempted in all ways such as we, though He never gave in to temptation; He was completely without sin; “in Him was no darkness at all” (cf. 1 Jn 1:5). The key point in this Hebrew passage is the fact that our High Priest (the Lord Jesus) can sympathize with our weaknesses; He knows exactly what we are going through; that's what makes Him such a great High Priest. The Hebrew word for “priest” (*kohen*) means “to draw near” (cf. Ex 19:22; 30:19-20; Num 16:5) — as our High Priest, Jesus represents us before God and intervenes on our behalf; conversely, He represents God to us (cf. Heb 7:21-8:1); if you are not aware of it, you and I are in desperate need of a High Priest (some one to draw near to God on

our behalf) — “*it is only by **His intercession** on our behalf that our faith fails not*” (cf. Heb 7:25; Lk 22:32). The word “*sympathize*” literally means “*to suffer with*,” and expresses the *feeling* one has who has entered into such suffering. Because Jesus fully understands what we are going through, we can “*approach the throne of grace with boldness, that we may receive **mercy** and **find grace** to help in our time of need*” (cf. Heb 4:16).

- **Heb 10:35** – Do not capitulate and throw away *your confidence*; rather *endure* (see v. 36) — it has *great reward*! As the renowned preacher F. B. Meyer put it, “*Don’t miss the harvest of your tears.*” We are now nearer to the fulfillment of God’s promise than ever before... this is no time to turn back. What we need is *endurance* — “*the determination to remain under*” — and not try to escape everything. We must learn to face the difficulties of life head on, with the grace and wisdom of God... always keeping in mind the value of our commitment to the Lord. Again, *where anxiety flourishes, prayer is essential* (cf. Phil 4:6ff).
- **Heb 11:1** – The letter of Hebrews provides us with a description of faith that defines its foundation: “*Faith is the **assurance** of things hoped for, the **conviction** of things not seen*” — without assurance and conviction, we would simply be asked to live with constructs that were nothing more than wishful thinking. Since faith is a by-product of the Holy Spirit (*i.e.*, it is produced in us by the Holy Spirit), there is a *substantive level to it* that transcends anything we could develop on our own — it possesses an “*assuring quality*” that we could not conjure up on our own, and it provides us with a “*deep abiding conviction*” that what God says is true, and that what He promises will come to pass. So faith is not a “*leap in the dark*” as some might claim... nor does it require us to “*believe the unbelievable*.” If the Holy Spirit did not provide us with the assurance and conviction and understanding of divine truth, we would never arrive at such a position. You may want to cross-reference the following verses — cf. Acts 16:14; Rom 1:17; 4:3; 5:1; 10:17; 12:3; 14:23; 2 Cor 5:7; Eph 2:8; 1 Tim 6:12). It is also helpful to remember the difference between the flesh and the Spirit: “*the chief dynamic of the flesh is **feeling**, whereas the dynamic of the Spirit is **faith***,” with that in mind, our feelings often run counter to the truths of God’s Word, thus challenging our construct of faith. Here in the “faith chapter” (Romans 11), the author goes on to say that “*without faith it is impossible to please God*,” *i.e.*, without believing God one can-not please God (cf. Heb 11:6) — how could one possibly please you if you knew they weren’t telling you the truth? If your spouse thought you didn’t believe her, when in fact she was telling you the truth, how in the world would that be pleasing to her? If you would like to look at the subject of faith in far more detail, let me encourage you to read a study I did on it titled, “*The Dynamics of Genuine Faith*,” check my website: www.TheTransformedSoul.com
- **Heb 12:1-11** – *Run with **endurance** the race that is set before you... looking unto Jesus*, the author and perfecter of your faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross.... *Do not grow weary or faithhearted.... Do not regard lightly the **discipline** of the Lord*, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for *discipline* that you endure.... Though all *discipline* for the moment does not seem to be joyful, but sorrowful; *yet those who are trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness*. The root word for discipline in Greek is “*paideuo*,” and principally has to do with the idea of “*instructing, teaching and training a child*,” not the idea of spanking a child (as the word “*discipline*” is frequently interpreted); incidentally, no where in Scripture is the child of God ever “*punished*” for his actions (though unbelievers are punished, believers are not; instead they are “*chastened*” — yes, it is equally

painful, but the motive is entirely different). The noun form of the word (*paideia*) is used by Paul when he tells Timothy that “all Scripture is profitable for **training / instructing in righteousness**” (cf. 2 Tim 3:16). The main idea being communicated here is that we are being taught and trained by God in the classroom of life; and the reality is, it’s not a fun, pain-free experience, because in and through it all you will have to learn to “die to self” and “live for Christ.” Regarding punishment, Jesus bore all our punishment on the cross (cf. Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 2:24). Before exiting the book of Hebrews, notice again the word “endurance” (see the comments on it under Hebrew 10:35). Throughout the race of life we must keep our eyes on Christ, and not turn away and look at some other object. When we have a tendency to grow weary and discouraged, we should think of what Jesus went through; the cross of Christ was the most horrific death ever experienced – our trials are trifling by comparison. Beloved, don’t think lightly of the education & training of the Lord; it was designed to cultivate Christian virtues and drive evil out of our lives. By remaining submissive to the will of God, we permit His discipline to mold us into His image. Though the discipline of the Lord is painful, it yields a wonderful result – “the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

- **Jam 1:2-4** – Consider it joy when you encounter various trials, knowing (that’s the operative word) that the testing of your faith produces endurance (a steadfastness of faith; literally it means “to remain under,” rather than running from the problem)... and let it accomplish its perfect goal in your life, making you mature and complete (lacking nothing). So literally it says this: “Remain under the trial and let it build Christlikeness in your life.” The Christian life is filled with problems that God permits to grow our faith (trials are “faith related,” as mentioned earlier in this study). Because of the importance of trials in our life, we should not view them as meaningless negatives, but as powerful positives that strengthen our faith; thus we should rejoice in them rather than rebel against them – we should rejoice in them because they are God’s instruments for developing Christlike character in us... in much the same way, it is “the rigors of practice” that make a ballplayer a much better one; though the experience is not necessarily a fun one, “it does produce the most coveted results.” The ultimate goal is what is to constrain us as believers – if our goal is to be conformed to the image of Christ, then we must “embrace the challenges of life” that bring that about. As believers we must prayerfully wrestle with this truth until we see its benefit, and desire it for our life... without “knowing” the benefit of trials – and buying into them – we will never see “the joy of trials.” Beloved, this is a “faith issue,” you need to “fight the good fight of faith” (cf. 1 Tim 6:12).
- **Jam 1:12** – Ultimately, you will be blessed if you remain steadfast under trials; by withstanding the test you will receive the crown that consists of life that God promises to those who love Him. The “life” God has promised is more than the eternal life that is given to every believer at salvation (cf. Jn 5:24); this particular life refers to a higher quality of life, because it is accomplished subsequent to salvation (*i.e.*, after one has already been saved). Remember the words of the Lord Jesus: “I have come that you might have life, that you might have it in abundance” (cf. Jn 10:10); though all believers are alive in Christ (cf. Eph 2:4-5; 1 Jn 5:12), all believers do not experience the abundant life (cf. Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 5:15; Gal 2:19-20; 5:25; Phil 1:21; 1 Pet 2:24; 2 Pet 1:3-11). Again, the “context” for experiencing the abundant life is remaining steadfast under trials. Because most believers fixate on their physical life (rather than their spiritual life), they view trials as very undesirable negatives in their lives – “mere roadblocks to happiness.”

- **Jam 1:19-21** – Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. *Put aside all that remains of wickedness, and in humility receive the word that is planted in you.* Believers need to be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath — are you “*listening?*” in so doing, what is the message God is teaching you? The main focus of this passage is “*being open to what God has to say to you,*” and not just stubbornly pressing on doing things the same way you have always done them (that is what the vast majority of us do) — are you “*listening?*” The word of God has been implanted in every believer’s heart... it is to be received with *humility* (that is, it is to be received with a “*teachable spirit*”). Let God’s Word inspire you to “*die to self*” and “*live for Christ*” — that’s one of the primary functions of the Holy Spirit in your life; though He won’t impose His will on you, He will keep on working in you until you acquiesce and surrender your will to Him (cf. Ps 32:8-9; 25:8; 33:18; Prv 26:3; Phil 2:13). Remember, you are no longer your own, you are now God’s property — “*you were bought with a price*” (cf. 1 Cor 6:19-20).
- **Jam 4:7** – *Submit yourselves to God... resist the devil*, and he will flee from you. We submit ourselves to God by abandoning our self-centeredness, being open to what He has to say to us, and immersing ourselves in the truth of His Word (cf. Jam 4:1-10; Eph 6:11-18). In so doing, we then resist the devil by closing our ears and hearts to his suggestions and temptations... it is when we consider and entertain what he has to say to us that we succumb and fall — it is not in us to listen to Satan and stay upright; when you listen to him... you will fall. The key is to “*draw near to God*” (we do this by prayer), and He will then “*draw near to us*” (cf. v. 8), and victory will be assured. The word “*submit*” in Greek (*hupotasso*) is a compound word which means “*to place or rank under*” — it was primarily a military term and was frequently translated “*subject / subjection / subordinate*” (cf. Eph 5:21; Titus 2:9; 3:1; Heb 12:9; 1 Pet 5:5). When we submit or subject ourselves to someone, it is an action that requires us to “*make a choice,*” submission to God is choice you must make every day at every juncture of life — will you submit to the will of God or not? That’s the question you will be forced to answer hundreds of times every day — the Holy Spirit will encourage you to submit to Him; conversely, the flesh will do everything it can to get you to submit to its diabolical ways... these two forces are strongly opposed to each other (cf. Gal 5:17); hence, this is the essence of *spiritual warfare*.
- **1 Pet 1:6-7** – In this you rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been *distressed by various trials*, that the *proof of your faith*, which is more precious than gold, even though *tested by fire*, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Peter makes it very clear that trials are “*distressing,*” in spite of that fact they are instruments that God uses to build our faith... so in that sense they are a *perplexing paradox*, because we can experience joy in the midst of sorrow. An encouraging comment from Peter is that “*trials only last for a little while;*” God doesn’t keep the pedal to the metal until it completely destroys us — what would that accomplish? “*God is mindful that we are but dust*” (Ps 103:14). Peter reminds us that trials serve a very worthwhile purpose: they prove the genuineness of our faith, and ultimately that will result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is incredibly amazing to think that at the end of the age *God will reward us for our small faith* — think about that.... and then He will say to us, “*Well done, good and faithful servant*” (cf. Mt 25:21, 23) — those are mind-boggling thoughts. Is it any wonder that the twenty-four elders of Revelation 4 “will worship the Lord and cast their crowns before the throne?” (Rev 4:10). Once you are fully convinced of your incredible unworthiness and God’s unbelievable love and grace, you will choose to do the same thing.

No wonder *Charles Wesley* penned those unforgettable words to his hymn, “How can it be that Thou My God shouldst die for me?”

- **1 Pet 4:12** – Writes Peter, “Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to test you, as though something strange was happening to you; to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that at the revelation of Christ you may rejoice with exultation. Many believers find it strange that they have to “suffer as Christians,” such was very common in the first century church. As previously stated, the purpose of suffering is to prove one’s true character... to remove the dross of sin... and to allow the pure nature of Christ to show itself. As Paul said to Timothy, “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (cf. 2 Tim 3:12) — spiritual warfare is an integral part of the life of the believer. Persecution is increasingly manifesting itself today here in our own country... it is only a matter of time until the gauntlet fully drops on us. Our world is becoming so perverted and diabolical... the eleventh hour is already here. Beloved, when things speed up, they will do so incredibly fast. I am astounded at how rapid the demise was in our culture... it is mind-boggling for those of us who are seniors today. The reality is, we are already in the final hour; only minutes away from the fullness of corruption. Young minds probably can’t fathom that, because they don’t know from whence we came. Spiritual slothfulness will also be unveiled for what it truly is... there is only one answer, and that is “an uncompromising allegiance to Jesus Christ.”
- **1 Pet 5:7** – Cast all your anxiety on God, because He cares for you. Believers are privileged to cast all of their anxieties on the Lord, knowing that He truly cares for them. Worry is futile; it has yet to ever solve a problem... but it can deeply trouble the soul. Worry is sin because it denies the wisdom of God... it says He doesn’t know what He is doing, and that He doesn’t care... lastly, Worry denies the power of God, and says He is not able to deliver us from our fears and problems. Because God truly does care for us, we need to present all our worries, anxieties, and problems to Him in order to let Him handle them (cf. Jer 32:17, 27; Phil 4:6-7).
- **1 Pet 5:10** – After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. No matter what our trials may be, we should remember first of all that GOD is on the throne, and that He is the God of all grace. This incredible title of our God reminds us that His dealings with us are not based on what we deserve (cf. Ps 103:10; Lam 3:22), but on His thoughts of love to us. No matter how fierce our testing, we can always be thankful we are not in hell where we ought to be. Another strong consolation is that He has called us to His eternal glory... thus we are able to look beyond the sufferings of this life to the time when we shall be with our Savior and be like Him forever. Think of it! We were picked up from the scrap heap and called to His eternal glory! Yet a third comfort is that suffering is just for “a little while” — when contrasted with eternity, life’s afflictions are less than momentary. The final encouragement Peter gives to us is that God uses suffering to educate us and mold our Christian character — He is making us fit for His eternal glory... He is confirming us, despite the instability we feel in this world... He is strengthening us that we might succeed in His work... and He is establishing a firm foundation under us that we might stand steadfast and immovable. As Peter writes, “To HIM be the glory and dominion forever and ever!” (v. 11). God is in control of all things both in this world and the eternal realm. “Amen.”