

Trusting God

In the Midst of

ADVERSITY

12 Lessons

Prepared By:

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PREFACE

My wife and I were privileged to attend the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions Lectureship that is overseen by the Karns Church of Christ in March of 2005. The theme of the series was on **“Life Daily Struggles.”** The messages were well done and made an appeal to all because of their practicality. We both felt uplifted by having been there during the lectures.

In the past I have preached sermons about struggles, adversities, trials, etc., and their value to our lives, but felt that a series of lessons would be of value in a Bible Class setting. This is the reason for this study. I have made use of some of the thoughts generated or stated during the lectures, especially those by Clarence DeLoach (on Job), Tom Holland (on struggles in the church), and Marlin Connelly (on Revelation).

We are hopeful that these thoughts in this study book will help to generate more discussion and evaluation of how we are able to handle our Adversities, trials, tribulations, sorrows, etc., in our lives.

Paul E. Cantrell

2005

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Lesson One

***TRUSTING GOD:
When Trials Overwhelm Me!***

Does God care when I am overwhelmed with the trials and tribulations of life? Does anyone care? All of us, even the most mature, will face trials in life. Some of us will possibly see worse trials than others, while some of us may face more trials than others. As humans, we are all subject to temptations (1 Corinthians 10:13; James 1:13-15), as well as to the trials and sorrows of this life. The Patriarch Job observed: ***“Man, who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil.”*** (Job 14:1). The Apostle Paul told Timothy: ***“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”*** (2 Timothy 3:12). We will face all kinds of problems and trials: physical health, loss of jobs, financial reverses, emotional problems, family problems, spiritual problems, relationship problems, etc. We can’t live in this life and not have to deal with such (Romans 8:20-23).

However, we can avoid some of the trials of life when we allow ourselves to be properly taught by God so that we can avoid some of the pitfalls of sin and immorality that causes many of our struggles in life. Youth in particular can avoid many of the heartaches that come from drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, and outright immorality (1 Corinthians 15:33; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Our biggest challenge is the willingness to listen to God, to parents, and to friends that are concerned for our welfare (Proverbs 1:20-29).

So, when trials come into my life, how can I successfully deal with such? How can I truly trust in God in the midst of all kinds of struggles and calamities—especially when I am overwhelmed with them? God has promised me that I will not be tempted beyond what I am able to handle (1 Corinthians 10:13), but He did not promise that I wouldn’t be sorely tried!

AN EXAMPLE TO LOOK TO

James was writing to Christians who were having to endure some pretty rough trials and in the midst of trying to encourage them he reminded them of another who had had to endure a lot—***“You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.”*** (James 5:11). What better place to turn to for help and encouragement than the Word of God! God not only tells us how to live, but as well, how to overcome the trials of life and be victorious. God wants his people to be victorious in life in spite of being the victims of wicked and cruel people (1 John 5:4-5; John 15:18). Job is a perfect example of one who was overwhelmed with trials and suffering, but was able to retain his integrity and trust in God (Job 13:15). A closer look may offer help to each of us who face similar trials in life.

Job’s Character and Condition in life! He was said to have been blameless, upright, and one who feared God and turn away from any evil (1:1). He seemed to have had a great family (a wife

who had given him seven sons and three daughters). He was a very wealthy man...one of the greatest in the east (1:2-3). Spiritually, morally, financially, and respectfulness—Job seems to have had it very good. And of course, this was the Devil’s criticism of God’s blessing Job so much. Who wouldn’t serve you, God, when you protect him and allow him to prosper? And Satan asked the pointed question—“***Does Job fear God for nothing?***” (1:8-10).

Why serve God? What is in it for me? Why serve God if I am going to have to face all kinds of struggles, trials, and even persecution? The Prophet Malachi voiced this same argument of the people against God (Malachi 3:14-15). What profit is it to serve God and have to endure so many trials when the wicked are arrogant, blessed, and test God and escape? So, Satan wanted to prove that Job served God for what he could get out of God. Satan’s challenge was—take away these things and Job will curse You to Your face (1:11). God agreed to the test—take away all he has and even touch his own body and see what Job will do (1:12; 2:5-6), but do not take his life.

Job’s Severe Trials! Chapter 1:13-19 tells of the terrible losses that came into Job’s life: his fortune, his servants, and all his children killed—all within a very short time! Talk about calamities hitting hard, this was it! Through it all Job did not sin nor did he blame God (1:22). Satan then turned on Job and afflicted him with boils from his head to his feet (2:7). He was in great misery and pain. He sought relief in a pile of ashes where he could scrape off the filth from his oozing sores. Now in desperation and affliction he cries out and curses the day he was born (3:1-2). Job had gone from joy, laughter, worship, plenty, and ease to great sorrow, sudden misery and pain, and a sense of worthlessness!

But these things were not the only trials that Job was facing. In the midst of all of this, he lost the respect of his friends, his family, and the community (17:1-2, 6; 19:14). He was accused of secret sin or sins! Everyone thought of him as a righteous man, but now they deeply questioned such. He has to be guilty of terrible sin or sins to be so greatly punished by God! And, the sad thing is, he will not own up to his sin or sins! The only problem with their thinking was—Job knew differently! It was hard for him to accept their false accusations, especially when they would question his honesty and integrity.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

How many of us have suffered the calamities that Job faced and can still praise God as he did—“***Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.***” (13:15; 19:25-27). Can we praise and glorify God when we are submerged in suffering? God does not promise that the righteous will not suffer—and suffer wrongfully! But He has promised us that we can survive or endure the trials of life by faith in Him (Habakkuk 2:4; Hebrews 11:32-40). Job is only one of many examples of trusting God in the midst of great adversity. “*Faith is not receiving from God what we want, but it is accepting from God what He gives us.*”

We should be encouraged by Job's example of holding up, enduring afflictions, and keeping his integrity towards God. Job was able to win over suffering because he had strengthened his faith in God before the evil days came. The time for us to prepare for the storms of life is before they come. Job triumphed over his suffering because he knew the true God of Heaven. Because Job trusted in God, his suffering matured him and made him more useful in God's hands (James 1:1-4). ***"When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."*** (Job 23:10).

REVIEW QUESTIONS

True or False

1. The Christian needs to be refined by trials to come out as "gold."
2. Job continually accused God of mistreating him unjustly.
3. God said that Job was blameless, so he evidently was not guilty of sin as his friends had accused of.
4. One of Job's trials was trying to hide his secret sin.
5. The Devil at first was not allowed to afflict Job.
6. Physical suffering is worse than emotional or spiritual suffering.
7. The Devil said that Job served God for what he could get out of God.
8. The Prophet Malachi deals with the question of "Does it pay to serve God?"
9. James uses Job as an example of a rich man who was not kind to the poor.
10. We can avoid some trials of life if we really want to.

Lesson Two

***TRUSTING GOD:
When Family and Friends do not Help Me!***

When we have trials, especially overwhelming trials, to whom or to what do we turn? One thing for sure, human philosophers do not have an answer! All they have to offer is futility and hopelessness. While men lash out at the idea of the existence of a Divine Being because of human suffering and trials of life that men must face—yet, they really have nothing to offer in the place of God! Their unbelief only leaves man with emptiness and meaninglessness. If there is an answer to why human suffering, it has to come from God. We believe that this is one of the reasons for the writing of the book of Job—to help man in his struggles to hold on to God even though he doesn't have all the answers. It is to help us to successfully endure the trials of life with trust or hope in God (Job 13:15). And in the words of the Apostle Peter, ***“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.”*** (John 6:68).

If suffering the trials of life were easy, everyone could handle them—there would have been no need of the book of Job! One of the reasons we struggle with suffering is that we cannot see and talk with God directly—face to face—in order to get some answers. This was what Job desired. He wanted to plead with God as a man would plead with his neighbor (Job 16:21). He shouted out to God, but there was no answer (Job 19:7). He did not understand why all of these things had come all of a sudden upon him. There was no plausible explanation that could explain his predicament. Yet, he chose to put his trust in God—for to whom else could he turn for an answer?

THE VALUE OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS

When we have to face up to trials, to whom would we naturally turn for comfort and help? We would hope that we would turn to God first. But being human, we need to have a human that we can talk with face to face. Of all the persons to whom we would turn, you would expect the first person would be one's husband or wife. Job's wife was there with him...and to a great degree suffering along with him over all of their losses. She had lost all of her children too! She felt the loss of their financial security as much or more than Job! And now, for her to have to witness the terrible affliction of her husband and to be unable to change his situation...she, too, was probably in deep despair. Of all the people that Job knew, certainly he could expect his wife to not only be by his side and to be in deep sympathy over his condition, but constantly reassuring him that this was not punishment for sin in his life. We are told very little about Job's wife and her reactions to all of these things. But what we are told is certainly not what you would expect to hear from the wife of Job. She was suffering greatly along with Job. She was also looking for answers as to why all of these things were happening to them, but none were coming. And, her husband did not have an answer; nor was God speaking to them to let them know why they were having to endure all of these calamities. She was at her "rope's end!" In desperation, she said to her husband: ***“Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!”*** It sounds

like that she expected God to strike them dead if they were to curse Him....and why not? Look what God had allowed to happen to them thus far; so, death would be expected as the next thing. She didn't know why, her husband didn't know why; so, to whom can they turn for an answer? But Job had not given up on God and made it clear to his wife that she was speaking like a foolish woman. He reasoned with her that if they could accept the good things from God, why can't they accept adversity as well. In the midst of all of this, Job did not sin with his lips (Job 2:7-9).

Often, we are able to make good, close friends in life with which we can share even our innermost thoughts. According to Job's own statement, his relatives were of no help in the midst of all of these calamities (Job 19:14), and he added that even his intimate friends had forgotten him. However, three of his friends did show up after they had heard about the happenings to Job and his wife. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar made an appointment to come together and show their sympathy to them and to try to comfort them. Job's condition was so bad that they did not recognize him and they wept, tore their robes, and threw dust over their heads to show their compassion for Job. And, as was their custom, they sat on the ground for seven days and nights without saying a word to show their grief at their great calamities. Up to this point they had been good friends and certainly were a comfort to Job in the way they conducted themselves. Sometimes just being there without saying a word is all that can be done.

But when the time came for them to speak to Job, they all with one accord had come to the conclusion that Job must have grievously sinned to have had such terrible punishment inflicted upon him and his family and possessions. They subscribed to the idea that if you are righteous, you will be prospered; but, if you are wicked, you will be brought low by God. There is good reasoning behind such a philosophy. Everyone knows, generally speaking, that the righteous person is promised blessings, while the wicked are promised judgment (Job 4:7; 8:4, 20; 20:4-5, etc.). If not, what incentive would there be to live righteous lives? When Job tried to reason with them and stated forcefully that he had not sinned, nor could they point out any sin in his life, they would not accept such. Job wanted consolation, not rebuked for sins that he had not committed. He called his friends "sorry comforters are you all" (Job 16:1-2). He chastises them with such statements as: ***"Is there no limit to windy words? Or what plagues you that you answer?"*** (Job 16:3). ***"Surely mockers are with me, and my eyes gaze on their provocation."*** (Job 17:2).

What do you do, when even your friends are of no help to you? To whom do you turn? The only alternative is back to God again! Job needed their understanding and help to understand why, but all they had to offer were accusations! Their words were hurting and piercing like arrows. Their many words were without comfort and their logical arguments were without love. Their view of God was too narrow. They had a pat answer and a fixed formula for every problem of life—but no comfort! Job needed to face up to his sin, confess it, and God would forgive and remove the suffering. But, what if Job had not sinned as they presumed? Then, explain why all of these calamities came upon Job....if you can! What has happened to your pat answers and your neat little formula that is supposed to explain everything? Job made it clear to them that he knew what they knew—but his knowledge has not come up with an answer to his suffering....and neither has their understanding (Job 13:1-2).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Job did not find an answer to his suffering from his wife, relatives, or his friends. He knew that he had to trust in God because there was no other to whom he could turn. How do we offer comfort to those in similar situations. We, too, may not know the reasons why such calamities come....so, what do we say or do? If we have turned to the God of comfort in our time of need and found the consolation that was so desperately needed, then, certainly we can offer this advice to others to turn to the "Father of all comfort," the God of heaven (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). As Satan brings struggles into our lives, let's be sure that we have deepened our faith and trust in the only One to whom we can turn for an answer.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

True or False

1. Job found consolation in his wife's statement of how to deal with his suffering.
2. Job's friends were very kind and polite to him when they first saw him.
3. Common sense teaches, as well as the Bible, that the righteous are blessed and the wicked are judged by God.
4. Job's wife was suffering as much as Job was in all of their calamities.
5. Job's friends assumed that Job had sinned grievously because of the terribleness of his suffering.
6. Job called his friends mockers.
7. The wife of Job expected God to take Job's life also if he cursed God.
8. Job's friends did not look upon God as a forgiving God, but a God who punishes the wicked.
9. Job said that he knew what his friends knew, so they were of no help to him in finding an answer to why.
10. There is no answer as to why God allows the righteous to suffer.

Lesson Three

***TRUSTING GOD:
When All Seems hopeless!***

The people that usually commit suicide are those who are at the “end of their rope.” They see no way out of their situation, no one cares, and it is useless to go on living. They come to the point in their life that all hope is gone. Job and his wife were facing just such a situation. It seems that she had given up on God and encouraged her husband to do the same. They could come up with no answer to the why for all of their calamities. But, neither could their family nor friends help them with an answer. Rather than being a help, they were a discouragement by accusing them of sin in their lives for all of the calamities. Job was calling out to God for an answer—he wanted to talk face to face with God over this whole matter. But God would not answer him and even when He finally did speak to Job, he did not tell him why he had suffered so much in spite of his righteousness. Job was not given the information that his book gives as to why. The book reveals the following ideas:

- 1) **It shows that there are some who will serve God even if they are not given all of the desirable things in life.**
- 2) **It certainly drives home the point that all suffering is not retribution for the sins of mankind....for even the righteous suffered as well as the wicked.**
- 3) **It helps to remind us of what Deuteronomy 29:29 says: “*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.*”**
- 4) **It certainly lets us know that God does care even when He allows us to be tempted or suffer greatly.**
- 5) **While the book gives some light as to why the righteous suffer, it does not provide all the answers to the why of human suffering in general.**

So, even though we may read the book of Job and understand some things that Job was wanting to understand, we still do not have all the answers ourselves. This is the reason why that the emphasis is placed on the concept or principle: ***“The just shall live (survive) through faith.”*** (Habakkuk 2:4). We trust in God’s care even when we do not understand the why!

JOB’S DELIMMA: DARKNESS, NOT LIGHT!

Job may have been walking in the light of God’s truth (he had not sinned); yet, he was in the dark when it came to knowing why he was suffering. He was not told of the scene that this book opens with and that gives some indication as to why Job had to deal with such great adversity. He needed enlightenment and sought it from God and from family and friends, but no one had an answer that made sense. Following are some of the expressions that showed the deep agony of his soul:

- 1) **Job 6:2-3—“*Oh, that my grief was fully weighed and my calamity laid with it on the scales! For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea.*”**
- 2) **Job 6:11—“*What strength do I have, that I should hope?*”**

- 3) Job 6:21—*“For now you are nothing. You see terror and are afraid.”*
- 4) Job 7:3—*“So I have been allotted months of futility and wearisome nights have been appointed to me.”*
- 5) Job 7:11—*“I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.”*

If he could only talk to God, or at least talk through a mediator with God, he could present his case for evaluation and an answer (Job 9:32-33).

We may have to walk where Job walked someday in our future, but we don't have to be in the dark as much as he was about why we have to have adversity. Trials can be looked at from two standpoints.

- 1) **Trials can be looked upon as a temptation to sin.** This is what Satan wants from us. He wants us to distrust God and *“curse God and die!”* He brings things into our lives to cause us to give up on God. He is like a lion going about seeking whom he may devour. We are admonished to resist him firm in our faith, to be steadfast and in a little while we will be called unto eternal glory in Christ (1 Peter 5:8-10). God does not tempt us to sin, but He allows Satan to do so (James 1:13).
- 2) **Trials can be looked upon as a testing of our faith in God.** To see if our faith is real. It puts our patience (endurance) to the test (James 1:1-4). If we survive (overcome), we will be complete, perfect, mature, and better able to serve God and our fellow-man. When we are tried in the fire, we come out stronger and more pure.

OTHERS WHO HAVE FACED THE TEST OF THEIR FAITH

1. The Righteous in Judah. The nation of Judah was about ready to be overthrown as a nation, many thousands would die, and a great number taken into Babylonian captivity. How do the righteous deal with such? Will they lose their faith in God because of the many adversities they will face? Habakkuk challenges them by stating: *“The Just shall live by faith.”* (2:4). How could a righteous God use a wicked, idolatrous nation to chastise Judah (God's own people)? They were to learn that God could use them, but punish them later for their ungodliness.

2. The Plight of David. In his younger years David seemed to have had things good, but in his middle and later years his life was filled with disappointment, heartache, and sorrow. It seemed that God had forsaken him (Psalm 42:9, 3). The rebellion and death of Absalom, the death of his baby, his wife and daughter assaulted, another son was murdered, and the kingdom was in turmoil and shame. The 23rd Psalm was written during one of the dark nights of his life. Faith in God was his only option.

3. Moses and Elijah. Both were great men of God, but both became so depressed at one time in their lives that they asked God to take their lives. They, like Job, did not have the answers to some of their questions, but they knew that God did. And not only did God know, but He has good reasons and purposes for allowing things of this nature to come into the lives of His people. Things can become very difficult and discouraging at times, but by trusting that God knows and cares about His people—we are assured that all things will work together for good (Romans 8:28).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Job became a model for generations to come after him because he did not allow the terrible calamities of life to cause him to abandon his faith and trust in God (13:15). Job was a human and in the midst of his suffering he said some things that he later regretted; but, through it all he kept his integrity and clung to his faith. Because of such, God blessed him even greater with possessions, sons and daughters, and respect of the people (Job 42:10-17).

REVIEW QUESTIONS

True or false

- ___ 1. Job had brothers and sisters that later came to offer comfort and encouragement.
- ___ 2. Job's daughters were very beautiful women.
- ___ 3. God was not pleased with the three friends of Job because they did not speak correctly about God.
- ___ 4. Moses and Elijah both asked God to take their lives.
- ___ 5. The 23rd Psalm was written by David in one of the dark and discouraging times of David.
- ___ 6. Trials can be looked upon in two ways: as a testing of one's faith or as temptation to sin.
- ___ 7. Since we have the truth revealed to us, trust in God is no longer a necessity.
- ___ 8. God never did tell Job why he was having to endure so many trials.
- ___ 9. God promises His people today that they will not be tried like Job was tried.
- ___ 10. God allowed a more sinful nation to chastise His people in Judah.

Lesson Four

TRUSTING GOD
When the Church Faces Opposition!

The early church, as described in the New Testament, had problems, trials, and tribulations that they had to cope with. The way they dealt with them can certainly be a help and encouragement for us today as we face similar situations. Their problems were basically two-fold: (1) Problems from within the church, and (2) Problems from without. In this lesson we want to observe how the church dealt with trials from without. Fortunately, their faith or trust in God was put to the test and they gave us some tremendous examples to imitate.

EARLY OPPOSITION TO THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

Acts 2 records the beginning of the preaching of God's way of salvation. Thousands heard the message on this first day and three thousand of them "***gladly received his word***" and were baptized for the remission of their sins (2:38). This kind of receptivity continued for a brief time until the religious leaders of the Jewish people begin to show open opposition to the preaching of the Gospel.

Acts 3:1-4:4. Upon healing a man who had been lame from birth, an opportunity to preach Jesus to a large crowd was open to them. Many of the people believed the message and responded in obedience to the Gospel. However, the priests, the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees were "***greatly disturbed over their message.***" They arrested Peter and John and put them in "jail" until the next day. They then were brought before the high priest and others and were warned and threatened severely not to preach Jesus any more. Their reaction showed their great trust in God: "***Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.***" (Acts 4:19-20). Upon release, the Apostles came together with the church and reported what had happened. The church was strengthened in their determination to continue supporting the preaching of Jesus with boldness in spite of the threats against them (Acts 4:29-30, 33).

Acts 5:11-42. The message of Christ continued to be received by multitudes of people (5:14). But opposition from the Jewish leaders again rose against the Apostles. They were apprehended and put in jail. However, an Angel released them with the admonition: "***Go, stand in the Temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.***" (5:20). Again, the Apostles were brought before the religious leaders of the Jews and reminded of the warning not to preach Jesus. Peter stated: "***We ought to obey God rather than men.***" (5:29). And then he set about to preach a sermon to them. They became furious and plotted to kill the Apostles. But at the advice of Gamaliel, they only beat the Apostles and warned them again (5:40). Instead of being cowered or intimidated, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name and continued daily to teach and preach Jesus in the temple and from house to house.

Acts 6:8-7:60. The preaching continued, not only by the Apostles, but others also including Stephen. He was falsely accused and brought before the council of the Jews. He took advantage of the situation and preached to them. Their reception was nil—in fact, they were cut to the heart and they gnashed at him with their teeth. They took him outside the city and stoned him to death. Stephen’s last words were: **“Lord Jesus receive my spirit.....Lord, do not charge them with this sin.”** (Acts 7:59-60). What a spirit! And what faith in God in the midst of great adversity!

PERSECUTION SET-IN

With the killing of Stephen, opposition increased against, not just those who preached publicly, but also individual believers. Saul took on the challenge to destroy this “new sect” that had sprung up among them (8:1-4). These actions caused the preaching to spread to other cities in Judea and elsewhere. But while some were receptive, almost everywhere they preached there was open opposition. The Apostle Paul’s statement indicates this: **“We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.”** (1 Corinthians 1:23). As the church spread to Rome, the church there faced cruel persecution encouraged by Nero (Caesar of Rome). And for over 200 years there was organized Roman opposition to the preaching of the Gospel until Constantine came to the throne in 312 A.D.

OPPOSITION TODAY

In some places in our world there is still strong opposition and resentment against the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. This persecution is brought on by individuals or groups of individuals as well as at times by governmental officials. In America, we are beginning to see some strong opposition brought on by some governmental officials and laws enacted against Christianity. There has always been strong resentment by religious groups that do not want the truth preached, but not open persecution as the Apostles and early Christians faced. One of our biggest challenges is to deal with the great indifference to truth that seems to be prevalent in our society today.

One of the sad things that is beginning to happen **IN** the church now is the wavering on the part of members of the body of Christ to upholding the truth and failure to encourage it to be preached in our pulpits. Their trust in God is wavering and it is shown by their desire to compromise the preaching of the truth. They want a watered-down Gospel that makes everyone happy. This same thing occurred later on in the early church (1 Timothy 4:1-5) and was strongly warned against by the Apostle (2 Timothy 4:1-5). It needs to be warned against in our midst today. Our preaching is not to satisfy the itching ears of the disbeliever, but to be true to the mission God gave us **“to preach the word”** regardless of what the hearers’ response might be. Preachers need to be reminded that their mission is not to preach their own ideas, but the message that comes from God. This message needs to be preached, heard, and responded to in order for men to be saved (Romans 1:16).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Does threat of violence or intimidation cause you to waver in your faith and trust in God's message to save the lost? Are we determined not only to believe God's message, but encourage and support the preaching of the truth everywhere? Do we have a zeal, enthusiasm, excitement, and dedication about the spreading of the Gospel of Christ? Indifference and unbelief will undermine the truth of God in the hearts of others. Do we truly trust in God in the midst of opposition to the preaching of God's truth? May our trust in God cause us to boldly proclaim the words of life to a lost world about us in spite of the opposition that may come.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

True or False

1. Opposition to the preaching of truth is only found in idolatrous countries.
2. Christians should not be opposed to truth, but to how that truth is proclaimed.
3. God warns that the time will come when even those in the church will opposed the preaching of the truth.
4. Physical persecution is still endured by some people in some locations in our world.
5. Our faith in God and His Word will cause us to uphold the preaching of His truth in spite of any opposition that may come.
6. Stephen is the first martyr for the cause of Christ.
7. The death of Stephen helped to slow down the opposition to Christianity.
8. The Church was persecuted up to the time of Constantine even by Roman officials.
9. God miraculously released Peter and John from jail so that they could go and preach to the people.
10. Opposition to the church and its preaching was almost immediate after it's beginning.

Lesson Five

***TRUSTING GOD:
When There is Sin in the Church!***

Discouragement comes from different sources and for different reasons. Persecution can easily deter a person from becoming a Christian or remaining as a Christian. Sin in one's life, not dealt with, can eventually cause a person to drift away from Christ. But when sin raises its ugly head in the church in its various forms, it has caused many to be discouraged and to turn from the Truth of the Gospel. But the real underlying problem in all of these is obviously a lack of trust in God or a "weak faith!"

Because the church is made up of humans there is always the danger of sin parading itself before the church. What do we do about such? How do we handle such? Do we turn from obeying God ourselves because someone else has done so? It should be obvious—we need to trust in God and stay faithful to Him even if all of our brethren disappoint us. Sometimes, we can see how others have dealt with the problem and be encouraged and strengthened by such. We believe that God has filled His Word with good examples for us to follow after that helps to keep us faithful to Him.

OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLE

When Israel was beginning to conquer the land of Canaan at God's direction, there was an incident of sin that God had to root out from among His people. Achan had disobeyed God by taking some of the spoil of the battle of Jericho. As a result of his sin, God was not with Israel when they went into battle against the city of Ai and were defeated (Joshua 7:10-12). God told Joshua that there was sin in the camp and it must be dealt with soon. Achan and all his family were punished for the sin (Joshua 7:22-26). Why does God punish so severely such sins as the above? (Joshua 7:12). Why did God punish Sodom and Gomorrah, Nadab and Abihu, and Uzzah? Why is it so important that sin be dealt with?

NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLE

The early church had gotten off to a wonderful start—thousands were obeying the Gospel. But as with most groups, there is one or more persons that will pollute the group by their actions. The incident with Ananias and Sapphira illustrates this. Other Christians were freely selling property for money and/or giving money to the Apostles to help the needy among them. Ananias and Sapphira wanted to be looked upon as very generous too, but were tempted to hold back part of the money that came from the sale of their property. They lied about the amount and were both slain by the Lord (Acts 5:1-10). Instead of the deaths of these two hurting the church, it seems to have helped (Acts 5:14). Why would God punish so severely a lie? It was clear that they did not have to sell their property, nor give the money. It was a voluntary thing. It was the lying to God (Holy Spirit) that seems to have been the real problem.

WHY DOES ACTION NEED TO BE TAKEN WHEN THERE IS OPEN SIN IN THE CHURCH?

God has abundantly shown us how He feels about sin in our lives. Fortunately, He does not treat all sinners like Ananias and Sapphira—here in this life! He certainly wants us to serve Him with all of our heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37). He also wants us to die to the way of sin in our lives (Romans 6:1-2); and to do so will help make His people salt and light to the world about us (Matthew 5:13-16). Thus, Christians have a choice as to whether to have a good or a bad influence on the world—and as well, upon one another in the church. We have to live in the world, but we should not be of the world, but separate ourselves from the wrong things and live holy lives. But we are primarily interested in this lesson on what do we do when a member of the church disappoints us by living in sin and will not repent? What action does God expect from His people towards such a person? Most of all, why does He want that action taken?

- 1. He wants His people to live holy lives.** (1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 2:1-4; 5:3, 11).
- 2. He expects His people to deliver such a one to Satan or withdraw fellowship from them.** (1 Corinthians 5:5, 11; 2 Thessalonians 3:14).
- 3. He wants His people to help save a soul from death by getting him/her to repent.** (Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20; 1 Corinthians 5:4-5; 2 Thessalonians 3:14).
- 4. He wants to keep the church pure and not be influenced to go into sin.** (1 Corinthians 5:6-7; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-14).
- 5. He does not want others to be discouraged and quit.** (1 Thessalonians 5:14; Hebrews 12:3, 12-13).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The church will always have “problems” or “challenges” because of our humanness. And not all people who come into the church are really sincere in their desire to serve God. Sin can thus raise its ugly head at any time in our midst. We need to be aware of not only the possibility, but the probability of such—and be prepared to handle it with strong faith or trust in God. When sin is openly and properly dealt with in the church, it usually strengthens people rather than to discourage them.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

True or False

- 1. When leadership allows sin to remain undealt with in the church, it is justifiable to quit the church.
- 2. God has given special instructions on how to deal with people who continue in open sin in the church.
- 3. Withdrawal of fellowship is a way rebuking the sinner and desiring that he will turn from his sinful ways.
- 4. God had Achan and his family killed because of the bad influence he would have had on the people of God.
- 5. Striking Ananias and Sapphira dead caused fear to come on the church and no one wanted to be associated with the church.

- 6. Inaction on the part of the church can be more harmful than taking action against sin in the church.
- 7. Sin in the church does more to keep people out than persecution does.

- 8. The nature of the church demands doctrinal and moral purity in the lives of Christians.
- 9. A divisive person can do as much harm to the church as an immoral person.

Lesson Six

***TRUSTING GOD:
When Erroneous Teachings are Held to in the Church***

Where there are people, there is always the possibility of differences in beliefs, judgments, and opinions. The admonitions found in Scripture for all of God's people to be of "one mind" and "one Judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 1:27; 2:2, etc.) might seem to be an impossibility. But the admonition is there nevertheless and it is our obligation to carry out God's will to the very best of our ability.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency on the part of people to go to extremes in their beliefs, judgments, or opinions. This will obviously make it harder to be of one mind and one judgment. Unity and harmony among God's people are constantly being challenged by these extreme positions taken by some. In most instances, the truth on an issue is often found in the middle between the two extremes. This is where the concept comes from of "balance." Balance is not a compromising of truth, but an adherence to truth and not to extremes. In many instances, if a person would just consider what all the Scriptures say on a given subject and make sure his understanding is in harmony with all Scripture, there would not be the erroneous or extreme positions held to.

TERMS USED TO IDENTIFY EXTREMES

While the Scriptures generally do not use such terms to identify extreme positions, men (with possible good intentions) have come up with such terms. One of the major problems with such use of terms is how each person uses them—whether they are used correctly as was first intended. We hope the following will help to illustrate this idea.

Liberal. In the religious world this term usually identified a person who **did not** believe in the following basic things:

- 1) The Bible as being the inspired and infallible word of God;
- 2) The Deity of Jesus;
- 3) The miracles of the Bible;
- 4) Faith in the God of the Bible,
- 5) etc.

However, in the Lord's church this term is usually used differently. It is used to identify a person who may still profess belief in all the above, but may differ widely on the understanding and application of Scriptures on certain topics. Such a person (identified as liberal) may reject the generally accepted process of establishing Authority for what one believes and practices (Commands, Approved Example, and Inference). He may reject the "pattern" concept of the Bible as the standard by which all beliefs and practices are measured. His opinions and judgments will usually replace the Bible as an authority, and he will probably expect all to conform to his opinions or judgments.

The following may possibly characterize his beliefs or positions:

- 1) Refuse to oppose instrumental music in worship as sinful and may even advocate such to be used.
- 2) Having the Lord's Supper at other times besides Sunday.
- 3) Women to be used in leadership roles in the worship.
- 4) Fellowship with Protestant groups who do not teach salvation as the Bible does.
- 5) Acceptance of a person's "baptism" (even sprinkling in some instances) even though the person was not taught its necessity to be saved.
- 6) Worship should appeal more to man's emotions and excitement at the expense of doing it the way God says in His Word.
- 7) A view of grace that denies the part man must play in his salvation. This concept is taken to an extreme by advocating that there is nothing that man can do to be saved. This is advocated in the face of many Scriptures that plainly state what man is to do to be saved (Acts 2:37-38, 40; 6:7; 8:12-13; 22:16, etc.).
- 8) No longer believes in the concept of "one church." (Ephesians 1:22-23).
- 9) etc.

Legalists. This is another term that is widely used in the religious world to identify what is considered an extreme position. In its basic meaning it is applied to someone who believes that he can work his way to heaven—that is, earn or merit his salvation by his own works. It would be Law keeping to the point that God owns him salvation (Romans 4:4).

Erroneous use of this term is often applied to those who are faithful Christians that hold to the truth and follow it. Such could be considered misrepresentation and even slander of godly men and women who are merely striving to carry out Paul's injunction in Philippians 2:12: ***"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."*** They know they cannot earn or merit their salvation, but they can work it out by being faithful to the end (Revelation 2:10).

I personally do not believe the term "legalists" can be used correctly of people in the Lord's church. The very fact that they believed they had to obey the gospel to be saved by the blood of Jesus shows they are not legalists! But there are some in the church who do hold what would be considered an extreme position and at the same time manifest a mean spirit toward those that differ with them. We know that even truth can be taught from an extreme or wrong attitude (Ephesians 4:15; Philippians 1:15-17, etc.). The old restoration slogan is still very applicable—*"In faith, unity; in opinions, Liberty; in all things, Charity (love)."*

Extreme positions are arrived at by carrying Scripture statements further than intended and bound as Law. Following are some things that might characterize such a person's beliefs or position.

- 1) He will not compromise in areas of human judgment in order to be of one mind.
- 2) He comes across as being a very intolerant person.

- 3) He thinks his opinions are the Law of God.
- 4) He opposes any change from the methods previously used in the past.
- 5) His views are so narrow that only a minute number of people will make it to heaven.
- 6) He is mean spirited and harsh towards those with which he differs.

WHAT DO WE DO WHEN ERROR IS TAUGHT?

When we see such extremes being advocated in the church, what do we do or how do we handle such? May we suggest the following:

- 1) We need first of all to dig deep into the Word of God and place our roots there so that our faith and trust in God will be strong. We may not be able to change people from their extremes, but we certainly can keep from making the same mistakes they are making. We don't want to become extremists in the church (Colossians 2:6-8).
- 2) Certainly, we want to avoid extremes in our own lives. We need a balanced approach, not extremes. Truth must be upheld, error must be opposed, but extremes avoided. When there is a need to react, let's do so without over-reacting. Legitimate problems and issues must not become an excessive obsession in our lives (2 Timothy 4:1-4; 1 Timothy 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 2:24-26).
- 3) Let's call on all of God's people to let the Word of God guide us and not the opinions and ideas of men (Philippians 1:27). The way to Heaven is narrow enough (Matthew 7:13-14) without making it more narrow with the doctrines of men (Matthew 15:7-9).
- 4) Let's be sure we are speaking God's truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).
- 5) Most of all, let's seek to please our heavenly Father in all we do and say (Galatians 1:10).
- 6) And by all means—remain faithful, trust in God, be useful in a positive way to help the church remain faithful.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

True or False

- ___ 1. Over-reacting to what I consider to be erroneous teaching is justified by Scripture.
- ___ 2. False teachers must be stopped, but in the proper spirit.
- ___ 3. Only the grounded will survive when there is false teaching in the church.
- ___ 4. The purpose of special terms is to identify those who are extremists in our midst.
- ___ 5. Both the "liberal" and the "legalist" think that their opinions are Law.
- ___ 6. Truth is usually always found between two extremes.
- ___ 7. One should compromise truth in order for the church to be of "one mind."
- ___ 8. The term "legalists" cannot properly be applied to one who has obeyed the Gospel.
- ___ 9. The term "Liberal" cannot properly be applied to one who holds to the Word of God so it is their guide in all things.
- ___ 10. Man can do nothing in order to be saved.

Lesson Seven

***TRUSTING GOD:
When We Face Loneliness!***

A person was asked by a counselor to make a list of fears that she had in her life. Then, she was requested to circle the one most feared (dreaded). She circled the fear of being alone. In a class situation, quite a few people were asked to do the same thing. They also circled "being alone," or indicated that it was a root of their most dreaded fear. The pain of loneliness is more wide-spread than what most people imagine. In fact, loneliness is experienced by all at different times in their lives to varying degrees.

Loneliness knows no social, economic, or age boundaries. Both adults as well as teens admit in surveys that they have experienced feelings of loneliness. It is not just a feeling that nobody is around, but that nobody understands, cares, knows the real me. It afflicts people in isolation as well as people who live with crowds.

God gives us the first insight to this concept in Genesis 2:18, "***And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.***" So Eve was created as a compliment and companion for Adam. Mankind has been created and designed to live with others in fellowship and in relationships.

Indications of Loneliness

More, but less. The population of the world is growing rapidly. We are thrown into association with more people. But forces are at work that seem to separate us, rather than pull us together. Many live in loneliness with people all around them.

The Crave for more amusements. Many experts feel that our society's mad craving for more and more excitement, amusements, and diversions are an indication of the loneliness felt in their lives. They are trying to fill a vacuum or a void in their lives.

The High Divorce Rate. Such indicates several factors that are wrong in our society. And one of those is loneliness. Two people live in the same house together as husband and wife; and yet, they are distance apart! The place where the ties should be the closest, they are not there!

Suicides. Suicides are the highest among those who are single or single-again. Singleness is generally considered a more lonely way of life. So, a rise in suicides is indicating more loneliness.

An age of loneliness. Writers are consistently identifying our age as one of loneliness. It plagues more people than any other malady. A Psychiatrist calls it: "*The most devastating malady of the age.*" A Physician says: "*There is no human condition so acute, so universal.*"

Diagnosing Loneliness

The following list may be of help in letting you see indications of loneliness in your life. Put a check mark beside each statement that you identify with. Answer quickly....give your first impression.

- I sometimes hurt inside.
- I often feel empty inside.
- I sometimes feel "I don't belong here."
- I wish I could be more outgoing.
- I belong to few clubs or organizations
- Nobody really knows who I am inside
- I spend a lot of hours alone.
- I often withdraw into daydreaming.
- I don't feel I really need friends.
- I often feel desperate for friends.
- I have many physical aches and pains
- I often feel very guilty.
- I often feel angry or sad.
- I often feel put down by others.
- I am often preoccupied with my looks
- I wish I were more popular.
- I have not dated much.
- I sometimes have trouble trusting others.
- I have had few friends all my life.
- I have often felt inferior to others.
- I hate it when people criticize me.
- I often criticize others.
- I feel that being a leader is a lonely job.
- I feel awful when people reject me.
- I seldom associate with people my individual.
own age.
- I often enjoy my inner fantasy world more than being with people.
- I would rather talk about theories, issues, and intellectual subjects than talk about real feelings.
- I sometimes use humor to avoid facing my own loneliness or sadness, or to keep others from knowing how much I hurt inside.
- I wish I could be more open about my emotions.
- I rarely confront people who have hurt me; I would rather withdraw.
- When I'm alone, I sometimes do things I shouldn't—binge eating, drinking, take drugs, watch too much television.
- I often think about mistakes I've made; I frequently focus on regrets.
- I often help others, but others rarely help me.
- I am often preoccupied with work, achievement, and success.
- I sometimes yearn to be with another person
- I sometimes feel restless and bored.
- I frequently do not feel accepted by a group I am with.
- I frequently worry that others may not accept me.
- I occasionally suspect that other people avoid me.
- I sometimes feel that others are smarter than I am.
- I sometimes feel that others are better-looking than I am.
- I sometimes feel that others are more confident and talented than I am.
- Even though I belong to one or more groups, I don't really feel a part of them.
- I feel abandoned, misunderstood, or unsupported by people in my church or my family.
- I sometimes do not feel that God is close to me
- My friends have no idea of the problems I'm going through.
- I don't want anyone to know that I feel sad or lonely.
- I feel that no one can ever really know another

- ___ I was not very popular in high school or college.
- ___ I was not very active in social activities in school.
- ___ I have sometimes used alcohol or drugs to escape from feeling bad inside.
- ___ I work hard so I can forget my feelings or so I don't have to be home alone.
- ___ My relationships with others are often stormy and unstable.
- ___ I sometimes feel rejected, even by my closest friends.
- ___ Others seldom come to see me or call me.
- ___ People have told me I'm aloof or "stuck up."
- ___ I have trouble forming lasting relationships.
- ___ I would like to be around people, but I'm afraid they won't like me.
- ___ I don't really want to be around people very much.
- ___ I would rather vacation alone than with friends or family.
- ___ I often worry about my relationships with others.
- ___ When I am with other people, I feel anxious and uncomfortable.
- ___ I have sometimes felt so lonely that I had little reason to live.

It is suggested that if you checked 20 or less, you are probably not lonely very often. A score of 21 to 29 indicates that you experience loneliness at times, but probably do a fair job of tolerating, managing, and emerging from your loneliness. A score of 30 or more reflects a definite struggle with feelings of loneliness. Carefully evaluate these thoughts.

Examples of Loneliness in Scripture

Genesis 45:1-3. Joseph had been forced from his brethren many years ago and sold by them into slavery. He was taken into a strange new world knowing no one....no family....no friends.

1. How did he show the extent of his loneliness? _____
 2. What would be a similar situation for us today? _____
- _____

Psalms 142:4. The Psalmist is expressing a period of loneliness in his life. What expressions did he use to express this loneliness?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

1 Kings 19:10. God's prophets had been slain. Elijah had survived and was still trying to teach the people correctly. How did he express his loneliness?

1. _____
2. _____

Have you ever felt:

1. "Lord, I've done all I know to do, but to no avail."
2. "I've given everything I can give and all I get is criticism and misunderstanding."
3. "Nobody is on my side....I'm going to quit."

Elijah said: *"It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."*(1 Kings 19:4)

Jeremiah 15:15-18. Jeremiah is called the "weeping prophet" because of the terrible things he had to endure, as well as what was and would happen to the people of God. How does he express his loneliness in these verses?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How do the following verses express Jesus' loneliness:

Matt. 26:56 _____

Matt. 26:36-40 _____

John 6:67 _____

John 16:31-32 _____

Matt. 27:46 _____

How do the following verses express Paul's loneliness:

2 Tim. 4:16 _____

1 Thess. 3:1 _____

2 Tim. 4:9-10 _____

Loneliness can often be recognized by the feelings that it produces: "Nobody understands," "Nobody cares," "Nobody needs me," "I do not belong," "I do not fit," "I am of no value to anyone," "I am a failure while everyone else is succeeding," etc.

There seems to be two major sources of loneliness: from without and from within. (1) It can come from situations in which we find ourselves: loss of a loved one, moving, sickness, divorce, being tied down at home with small children, retirement, old age, etc. (2) From within we can experience feelings of inadequacy or inferiority, fear of rejection, inability to be honest and open about ourselves with others, aloneness because no one understands me, feeling of isolation, etc.

Loneliness basically is a state of mind! A person can allow his circumstances or his feelings to so control him that he is lonely. But we still have the choice when we get up in the morning what our mindset will be, if we so choose. We can choose to try to deal with our feelings of loneliness or our undesirable circumstances or give in to them and feel sorry for ourselves and have a continual "pity party."

Kinds of Loneliness

Someone has observed that there are three kinds of loneliness: Isolation of space, Isolation of the Spirit, and separation from God.

Isolation of space. This is to be far away from home, longing for home. "Homesickness" is a form of loneliness. This can become quite acute. Letters, calls, and visits means so much to overcome this form of loneliness. Memories are a means of keeping human ties alive and strong.

Isolation of the spirit. This is loneliness in the midst of the city or crowds. It is to look at others and get a blank stare. It is to reach out to touch others and they pull away. We try to talk to others but the communication is little and shallow. A person can very easily get the feeling, "no man cares for my soul." Teenagers who feel misunderstood and unloved by parents are lonely. In many marriages there are feelings of estrangement, loneliness, aloneness. And there are the aged who feel useless and unwanted. A feeling of being cut off from other people, deserted, and banished. There is little or no emotional give and receiving between people. People need the support of friendly relationships. And when people withdraw to themselves, there can be hundreds of people about them and they will still be lonely.

The greatest loneliness is separation from God. Life has no real meaning or purpose apart from God. Life becomes empty with no real purpose for existence. Man's soul cannot find rest and peace apart from a close relationship with God. What man needs is not escapism in drugs, drinking, lustful indulgences, worldly success, etc.; but, he needs to return to God to heal his loneliness and give them the peace they seek. (Isaiah 59:1-2,8)

Surviving Loneliness

Loneliness does not have to be permanent...it can be coped with and one can survived even the worst that loneliness can bring. Signs of loneliness are indicating that your emotional needs are not being met. It is important to identify what these needs are and strive to satisfy them in the right way.

The following suggestions on how to cope with loneliness have been offered as avenues to pursue.

1. **Recognition.** It is important to realize that loneliness attacks the lives of every person to some degree or another. Even Christ experienced those moments of being alone (John 1:11; Matt. 27:37-39). He was misunderstood by the masses and only partially understood by His close disciples. His disciples slept while he agonized over the fate of the world in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46). His aloneness was also foretold by Isaiah 63:3. And possibly his greatest sense of aloneness was when he cried out from the cross: "***My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?***" (Matthew 27:46).
2. **Keep your guard up.** There are special times when we are especially vulnerable to loneliness: when we are forced to be alone, or isolated, or beset by trials, troubles, and calamities. There is danger of self pity and a feeling that no one cares, so why should I care. A person is in grave danger of sinning when lonely. We must be prepared in mind and heart for such moments (Luke 21:34-36).
3. **Learn from others.** Watch the lives of others and see what they do to cope with loneliness. Identify with those who have gone through loneliness and been triumphant: Christ, Elijah,

Peter, Paul, etc. Talk with and ask questions of people you know who have successfully dealt with loneliness. Learn how to assess your own emotional needs and see how others have satisfied those needs.

4. **Enhance your self-worth.** The feeling of worth comes from two sources: What the Word of God says about our worth, and our relationship with others. We need to know who we are and to whom we belong (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 1 Peter 2:5). Jesus knew who he was and to whom He belonged, and so did the apostle Paul. But this understanding needs to be deep down inside of us to help in trying times!
5. **Build Healthy Relationships.** The opposite of loneliness is a feeling of value, a sense of belonging, a closeness or intimacy with others. Loneliness is a breakdown in the emotional giving and receiving between people. We need healthy relationships with others as badly as we need food. Loneliness comes when a person withdraws into self and builds walls to separate from others. Example of a bed-ridden elderly lady can illustrate how she dealt with loneliness. She wrote letters each day to cheer others up. What do you think it did for her? It is important to reach out to others to build relationships. Relationships in which one can open him or herself up with confidence. We must let down the walls and let people into our lives. One needs to be a good listener and a good friend to others. We need to become involved in other people's lives. To take interest in others can encourage them to take interest in us. Ask people about themselves, their children, their concerns, interests, hopes, their faith, how they became a Christian, etc. **Sharpen your social skills.**
6. **Reach out to lonely people.** Place yourself in their situation and see what you can do to help them. Show a sincere interest, ask them out to lunch—get to know them well. Don't forget to smile. Be warm, open, friendly to people you do not know. You may have to turn off the TV, but it will be worth it. TV can help to keep us lonely if we are not careful because it cuts us off from being with people. Find value in reaching out to others (Matthew 10:42). But deeds alone may not satisfy. It is when we offer acceptance or receive acceptance and relationships that we feel loved and not lonely. Let them know that someone does care: both you and God (1 Peter 5:7).
7. **Most of all...seek friendship with God.** On the night of His betrayal He told His disciples: *"Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."*(John 16:32). The key to dealing with extreme loneliness is: *"the Father is with me."* (Rom. 8:31; Ps. 142:5). Isolation from God comes because of: (1) A wrong image of God; (2) Sin in one's life. The Lord wants to have intimate fellowship with us, but we must want it also (Rev. 3:20).

Concluding Thoughts

Loneliness is a terrible condition to come into and stay in! It must be dealt with or it will have a devastating effect upon our lives! *"The whole conviction of my life now rests upon the belief that loneliness, far from being a rare and curious phenomenon, peculiar to myself and to a few other solitary men, is the central and inevitable fact of human existence."* (Thomas Wolfe). So, in the midst of all of our loneliness, let's never forget that God is there and we need to place our confidence and trust in Him. *"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou*

disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."(Psalm 43:5)

REVIEW QUESTIONS

True or False

1. A person can be lonely because he does not have a relationship with God.
2. A person can be lonely because he has problems developing relationships with others.
3. Jesus evidently felt what it was like to be alone.
4. There are only a very few signs of loneliness, which makes it hard to analyze.
5. Only a few people really experience loneliness.
6. One's self-worth has a part to play in one's being lonely or not.
7. There are different kinds of loneliness.
8. Loneliness is basically a state of mind.
9. Loneliness can be recognized by the feelings it produces.
10. Loneliness knows no social, economic, or age boundaries.

Lesson Eight

***TRUSTING GOD:
When I am Tempted to be Resentful or Bitter!***

There two eruptive emotions that cause most of the problems mankind faces: FEAR & ANGER. Both are well illustrated in Scripture as being detrimental to man's well-being. Of the two, anger is probably the one that causes more harm to mankind, especially in regards to marriage and the family, as well as other interpersonal relationships. Fear and anger can lead to a marriage that no longer has communication in it. The problem is not lack of communication, but anger or fear are the real culprits. It is believed that these two emotions bring more people into bondage to sin than any other emotions or desires.

THE MANY FORMS OF ANGER

Anger and its varied forms are acts and attitudes or conditions of the heart that are condemned by God as sinful, and therefore harmful to man (Ephesians 4:29-32). In order to continue in fellowship with God, the Christian must deal with this culprit (1 John 1:7). Those who will not deal with their anger cannot inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21). A study of anger has led many to identify the following sixteen different attitudes and actions as related directly to anger:

<i>Bitterness</i>	<i>Malice</i>	<i>Clamor</i>	<i>Envy</i>
<i>Resentment</i>	<i>Intolerance</i>	<i>Criticism</i>	<i>Revenge</i>
<i>Wrath</i>	<i>Hatred</i>	<i>Sedition</i>	<i>Jealousy</i>
<i>Attack</i>	<i>Gossip</i>	<i>Sarcasm</i>	<i>Unforgiveness</i>

RELATIONSHIP OF TEMPERAMENT AND ANGER

It has been suggested by those who have made a study of temperaments that the basic temperaments of mankind are all predisposed to either fear or anger; and in some cases, a combination of temperaments may predispose one to both fear and anger. But generally, a person may have more of a tendency toward anger or fear. The basic fundamental then of the relationship between temperament and anger or fear is in their introvertedness or their extrovertedness. The more introverted, the more problem with fear. The more extroverted a person is, the more problem he will have with anger.

THE RESULTS OF ANGER (Resentment or Bitterness)

Anger affects not only the person who harbors it, but also affects others as well. Let's look at some of the ill effects of anger as it is expressed in one form or another.

1. **Results of anger expressed towards others.** More wives have been battered, children abused, and psychologically destroyed by violent outbursts of anger than anyone knows. Marriages, families, and interpersonal relationships are damaged, some so badly they can't be mended. Anger has probably started more wars, created more conflicts, and brought ruin to more countries than any other emotion. There is no way to fully know how many children have been alienated by angry parent(s). Anger caused the first murder (Genesis 4:5-8) and has been causing thousands every year, even today. Most emotionally scarred persons are the victims of someone's anger.
2. **Results of anger in one's own life.** Dr. McMillan stated in his book, *"None of These Diseases"*, that 97% of cases of bleeding ulcers without organic causes were caused by anger. Some fifty-one different illnesses can be brought on by anger or fear or both. Cases of serious internal complications can often be brought on because of anger. Suppressed anger and bitterness can make a person emotionally upset until he is "not himself." In this state, he often makes decisions that are harmful, wasteful, and embarrassing. When anger dominates, it squelches love. Anger can produce impotence in young men, make normal women frigid, and in short make the normal expressions of love impossible. An angry person is not a pleasant person to be around. As they grow older, they become ornery and cranky. With age, lack of desire to please others will be lost. In such a state, that person can be unbearable to be around. He failed to let God help him overcome anger in his life. Not only does anger bring on physical illnesses, but it increases the cost, outlay in money, to try to treat the symptoms and not the cause. When a bitter, rebellious Christian asks, *"Why has God permitted all this sickness to come into my life,"* he needs to be reminded that God did not cause it, but his anger did! Some believe that the rise of tranquilizers and other emotion-depressants can be laid at the feet of either fear or anger, not properly dealt with in one's life.
3. **The Spiritual damages of anger.** This should be even more important to the Christian. It can cause one to remain a spiritual infant, cause a person to turn away from Christ, or remain in the church and often be the cause of much strife and dissension. A Christian can go so far into sin that he will lose the promise of Eternal Life with God, and as well, an abundant life here.

ANGER AND SIN

While all anger is obviously not sin (Ephesians 4:26-27); yet, most anger is sin and must be dealt with as such. A short term unselfish anger that is not injurious to anyone would not involve sin, but could still have a bad effect on the person if not dealt with properly. Some fourteen times the Scriptures condemn anger as sin (Psalms 37:8; Ecclesiastes 7:9; Proverbs 15:17; 17:1; 21:19; 15:18; 25:28; 22:24-25; 16:32; 10:12; Colossians 3:8; James 1:19-20; Ephesians 4:31-32). Anger is sin because it is selfishly induced. It is this kind of anger that wreaks so much havoc. It is strongly suggested that when bitterness and resentment is harbored in one's heart, it will eventually spill over into the good relationships that we have and destroy them. But it is obvious that when sinful thoughts are harbored against someone in our hearts, it will eventually spill over into overt actions. God calls upon man to love Him with all their mind (intellect), soul (will), and

heart (emotions). To do so will definitely help to control sin in one's life.

OVERCOMING ANGER

The following things need to be evaluated carefully and used to overcome anger (resentment or bitterness) in one's life.

- 1. Anger needs to be faced as sin.** If we try to justify anger, explain it away, or blame another, there is no hope of really conquering anger in one's life. There is no way to gain a victory over something you do not consider as wrong.
- 2. Angry thoughts and deeds must be confessed.** Facing up to anger as sin involves confessing to others and/or to God that you have done wrong (1 John 1:9). Just to think on good things does not deal with those sins that have already been committed. They need to be confessed and forsaken.
- 3. Ask God's help in putting away angry thoughts and deeds.** We are encouraged to seek God's help because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). He wants us to crucify sin in our lives (Romans 6:6).
- 4. Forgive the person who caused the anger.** Christians are to be forgiving people because of the great debt that we have been forgiven of (Ephesians 4:32). We need to keep praying for strength to forgive.
- 5. Learn to give thanks for all things.** We not only need to be thankful for the "good things," but for the "bad things" as well. God will work all things out for our good (1 Thessalonians 5:18; Romans 8:28). Thanksgiving is a good way of dealing with insults, injuries, and rejections. And, let's not forget, we can sin too (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- 6. Concentrate on the need to love one another.** Think on, concentrate on, pray about my need to love as God loves (Philippians 4:8; 1 John 4:7-10).
- 7. Constantly repeat the above things as needed!**

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. What are some of the various forms of Anger?**
- 2. How is anger related to the Temperaments?**
- 3. What are some results of anger when expressed towards others?**
- 4. What are some results of anger when harbored in one's heart and life?**
- 5. What are some suggestions on ways to overcome anger?**
- 6. Have you given yourself a test that follows on the next page?**
- 7. Have you asked a close friend to test you?**

TESTING FOR ANGER AWARENESS

(The following inventory can possibly help you to become more aware of the operation of anger in your life and your relationships. Check the statements that apply to you.)

- 1. Impatience comes over me more frequently than I would like.
- 2. I nurture critical thoughts quite easily.
- 3. When I am displeased with someone, I sometimes shut down communication or withdraw.
- 4. Tension mounts within me as I tackle a demanding task.
- 5. I feel inwardly annoyed when family and friends do not comprehend my needs.
- 6. I feel frustrated when I see someone else having fewer struggles than I do.
- 7. When facing an important event, I may obsessively ponder how I must manage it.
- 8. Sometimes I walk in another direction to avoid seeing someone I do not like.
- 9. When discussing a controversial topic, my tone of voice is likely to become passionate & strong.
- 10. I can accept a person who admits his or her mistakes, but I have a hard time accepting someone who refuses to admit his or her own weaknesses.
- 11. When I talk about my irritations, I don't really want to hear an opposite point of view.
- 12. It's hard for me to forget when someone does me wrong.
- 13. When someone confronts me from a misinformed position, I am thinking of my rebuttal as he or she speaks.
- 14. Sometimes my discouragement makes me want to quit.
- 15. I can be quite aggressive in my business pursuits or even when playing a game just for fun.
- 16. I struggle emotionally with the things in life that are not fair.
- 17. Although I know it may not be right, I sometimes blame others for my problems.
- 18. When someone openly speaks ill of me, my natural response is to think of how I can defend myself.
- 19. Sometimes I speak slanderously about a person, not really caring how it may harm his or her reputation.
- 20. I may act kindly on the outside while feeling frustrated on the inside.
- 21. Sarcasm is a trait I use in expressing humor.
- 22. When someone is clearly annoyed with me, I too easily jump into the conflict.
- 23. At times I struggle with moods of depression or discouragement.
- 24. I have been known to take an "I-don't-care" attitude toward the needs of others.
- 25. When I am in an authority role, I sometimes speak too sternly or insensitively.

NOTE: If you checked ten items, your anger level is probably more constant than you might like. If you checked fifteen or more, you can probably recount many disappointments and irritations. This indicates you are vulnerable to the extreme ill effects of open anger and rage, or to repressed anger in the form of guilt, bitterness, and resentment. If you would like a broader perspective of yourself, ask a close friend to give you the test.

Lesson Nine

TRUSTING GOD: When We are Tempted to Worry!

Man's emotional nature is important to his health and happiness. Physicians indicate that a high percentage (65%-80%) of all illnesses are emotionally induced. When bad emotions are indulged over a long period of time, it cannot help but hurt the health of that individual. But on the other hand, the wise man says about emotions: ***"A merry heart does good like a medicine: but a broken spirit dries up the bones."*** (Proverbs 17:22). It is obvious that **emotionally** controlled decisions are the ones people regret the most because they didn't think them through. Also, youth are bad about making emotionally controlled decisions because this is the time when their emotional nature is the strongest (ages 14-24), and they haven't developed their minds to make logical decisions based on wisdom, experience and facts. The emotionally upset person is usually an irrational person—his thinking is affected!

THE EMOTIONAL CULPRIT—FEAR (Worry)

Fear surfaced just after man's fall in the garden (Genesis 3:10). It was a fear of punishment for wrongdoing (a sense of guilt). Guilt-induced fear has greatly multiplied among the human race ever since. The following are some Biblical admonitions about fear:

- ***"And Joshua said unto them, Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage: for thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies against whom ye fight."*** (Joshua 10:25)
- ***"In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me."*** (Psalm 56:4)
- ***"Fear ye not, neither be afraid...."*** (Isaiah 44:8)
- ***"Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."*** (Matthew 10:31)
- ***"Fear not little flock..."*** (Luke 12:32)
- ***"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murders, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."*** (Revelation 21:8)

Fear works toward our destruction here and hereafter. It limits our potential. This is obvious from the statement in 2 Timothy 1:7: ***"For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."*** Fear can inhibit normal feelings of love, confidence, a sense of well-being. It can trigger negative thought patterns, breed anxieties, worry, etc., and gradually consume a person's life. Any study on worry needs to be in the context of its basic root problem—FEAR! Those who have made a study of the various forms of fear give at least sixteen different ones, as illustrated below:

Anxiety	Doubts	Timidity	Indecision	Superstition	Worry
Withdrawal	Loneliness	Inferiority	Cowardice	Overaggression	
Hesitancy	Depression	Haughtiness	Suspicion	Social Shyness	

Fear can be like cancer of the blood, invading the total person. Examples of such:

- Fear of failure, breakdown, and poverty.
- Fear of being unequal to demands.
- Fear of material insecurity.

Everyone faces fear in his life, but some have to work harder than others to deal with its grip on their lives. First-time-fears about doing something can be normal. Fear that keeps us out of danger is normal. But when fear inhibits us from doing what we should, then it becomes destructive fear and sin.

The Bible teaches us to **“fear God”** (Ecclesiastes 12:13). But it is not the sense of worry, anxiety or dread. These do not cause us to serve God, but to run from Him in terror. Proper fear of God is one of reverence, respect, awe, honor, that causes us to serve God.

But now we turn to the more specific problem of “worry!” We are physical beings with constant physical needs! Such needs are a real struggle for some people because they just barely have enough to survive on. To tell such people not to worry is almost like a slap in their face. If worry is ever justified, it certainly would be on what we need to eat, drink, and wear. But Jesus boldly and plainly states: **“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?”** Thus, we are faced with a choice—whether to believe **common sense** (these are legitimate things to be concerned about) or **God’s Promise** to provide these things for us (Matthew 6:33)? This should be an easy choice—to trust in God’s promises—but in most people’s lives this can be a real struggle. Why should Jesus have to warn us not to worry, is it because we put too much emphasis upon the physical and not enough of the spiritual? Are we still struggling with the belief that physical things are the ultimate values of life? Again, the answer should be obvious to all that Jesus is trying to help us put first things first (Matthew 6:33)—that God and His kingdom should be the primary concern of our lives.

WHAT CAUSES FEAR (Worry)?

- 1. Childhood experiences.** Some basic needs of man is love, understanding, and acceptance. The child needs love most of all. When children do not receive satisfaction in these areas, it can cause fear in their lives. Even over-protection can make a child self-centered and fearful. It is far easier for a broken bone to be healed than the emotional scars of fear brought on by a worrying parent. A dominating parent that constantly brings out the faults of their children can cause hesitancy, insecurity, and fear. While correction is needed in the lives of children,

it must be done in a proper way: (1) Emphasizing their strengths as well as their weaknesses; (2) Reassuring them of love. Constant disapproval is devastating. Parents need to build up their children and show approval to them.

2. **A traumatic experience.** Child molesting or assault leaves a lasting emotional scar upon some children that carries over into adulthood. It can cause fear in marriage relationships and other close relationships of life.
3. **A negative thinking pattern.** A defeatist pattern causes a person not to try anything. The “*I can’t*” outlook tends to destroy a person’s ability to do a lot of things that he could otherwise do. Even ordinary task will become difficult. A more positive attitude is needed to overcome fear (Philippians 4:13).
4. **Anger.** Anger can erupt in harmful ways. It can even cause one to be fearful of what he might do.
5. **Sin.** Many people in mental institutions have religious backgrounds. They are there, to a great extent, because of fear-induced-guilt-complexes. People have guilt complexes in most instances because they are guilty of doing something wrong, or what the Bible calls SIN (1 John 3:4).
6. **Lack of Faith.** When a man will not really believe that his past sins have been forgiven by God upon his submission to God’s Will, he will be fearful. But it really shows a lack of faith on his part. Or, when a man worries about what the future holds, rather than listening to the assurances of God, it will bring fearfulness.
8. **Habit can intensify fear.** Habit can intensify any negative force. If one allows his fearfulness to become habitual, it will make him a life-time servant of fear. Such habitual response of fear must be broken one step at a time.
9. **The basic cause of fear is selfishness.** Man is fearful because he is too self-centered. Fear is caused by too much concern over self and not enough over others. Man needs to get out of himself and seek to reach out to help others.

THE RESULTS OF FEAR

Emotional results of fear. It can be a cruel taskmaster! In some instances it has brought on an emotional collapse. It can cause one to withdraw within a shell and let life pass him or her by. It certainly can limit one in doing a lot of good and right things because of a fear that something bad will happen. It has been estimated that one out of every twenty persons in American will have a psychotic disturbance severe enough to be hospitalized for the insane. Mental disease is the nation’s number one health problem.

Social results of fear. Fear dominated people do not make good company, so their social calendar is not too booked up. Their pessimism and complaining causes them to be shunned by even neighbors and relatives.

Physical results of fear. In Mr. McMillan’s book entitled *None of these Diseases*, he illustrates over and over the harmful effects of fear in people’s lives. He listed a possible fifty-one diseases resulting from prolonged fear, worry, and anxiety, etc. Some of the more obvious are: *Ulcers, Colitis, High Blood Pressure, Heart trouble, Strokes, Arteriosclerosis, Kidney Disease, Headaches, Mental Disturbances, goiter, Diabetes, Arthritis*. It should be obvious that one who has love, joy, and peace in his life will certainly be much better off than one with fear, worry, and anxiety. Some fear situations are temporary and cause no real lasting harm to the body. But

prolonged fear can result in danger to the body. We are warned by God: ***“Don’t worry about anything”*** (Philippians 4:6; Matthew 6:25). Man needs to: ***“Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.”*** (Psalm 37:5). Man needs to learn to cast his care upon God (1 Peter 5:7).

Spiritual results of fear. Fear can certainly keep us from being as fruitful as we could be and should be. It can keep us from being happy, joyful, and radiant as a Christian. Fear can make us thankless, complaining, defeated, and even unfaithful. A Christian will lose much of his influence for good on others by being fearful. Paul and Silas did not allow a beating and imprisonment (Acts 16) to cause them to be fearful, but were optimistic instead. It certainly opened the door to help the jailer spiritually. Fear can keep us from pleasing God and thus lose our reward.

OVERCOMING FEAR

- 1. Fear is overcome by faith.** Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). The more we read and study and accept what the Bible says, the less reason we will have for fear in our lives. We need to come to a complete trust in God and his promises.
- 2. Fear needs to be faced as sin.** When we allow fear to keep us from doing what is right, commanded by God, then we are sinning. We must not try to justify fear, but face up to it for what it is. Only by doing so can a person ever be able to overcome fear in his life.
- 3. Fear needs to be confessed to God.** God promises that he will forgive our sins if we confess them (1 John 1:9). It is God’s good pleasure to forgive those who are really trying to deal with sin properly in their lives. When we do confess our fears as sin, then we should be able to go on our way rejoicing.
- 4. We can ask God to help us come to grips with our fears.** We are told that we can have this confidence in God that He will hear and answer our petitions (1 John 5:14-15). Certainly God does not want our lives dominated by habitual fear, but He will not help those who will not make a determined effort to face up to their fears.
- 5. Express Gratitude to God when you are victorious over your fears.** We certainly should be thankful people. Expressing gratitude to God for our overcoming of fear is a way of showing faith in His promises (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. Illustrate how fear has brought on bad consequences for mankind.**
- 2. What are some forms of fear?**
- 3. What are the four basic areas of man’s life affected by fear?**
- 4. What are some things that help to bring on fear in one’s life?**
- 5. How can we overcome our fears?**

Lesson Ten

***TRUSTING GOD:
When We are Facing Death!***

It has been said over and over that there are two things we cannot escape in this life: **Taxes and Death!** Unless Jesus returns before we die, we shall all go the way of mankind (Hebrews 9:27). If it is all that obvious, **then why do not people better prepare for it** (and what follows)? Growing old is a part of “life” or “living.” It is as natural as being born into this world. It may not be as pleasant as birth, but nevertheless it is just as natural. As men and women live longer upon this earth, there are physical and financial problems that have to be dealt with. Our society is struggling to deal with such problems for their citizens, so that growing old will still hold some value for us. What most of us do not consider natural is for a younger person to be faced with the fact that their life will very soon be over. In this lesson we are not as concerned over the aging process and its challenges, as we are over the ultimate challenge of being prepared to face death “eye to eye” whether we are young or old. Have we been delivered from the “fear of death” to which all mankind have been made subject?

While a large percentage of people in this country will live to a “ripe old age,” there are also many who die in their younger years. Many will hear the dreaded words: “*You only have a few weeks to live!*” But whether we are young or old, we will all face death and what lies beyond death’s door. Is our faith and trust in God strong enough to help us face such a challenge with courage, contentment, and assurance? Will we be prepared to leave all behind and be ready for what lies beyond death? Man faces many challenges, trials, and adversities in this life, but possibly the greatest adversity is facing death. There is no greater time where trust in God is called for than at this time.

EXAMPLES OF THOSE WHO FACED DEATH

Jesus was only 33 years old and was facing death, a horrible, slow death, face to face. He was taken unjustly, tried illegally, beaten unmercifully, scorned and made fun of, and finally crucified until He died. What do the Scriptures indicate about how He faced the end of His mortal life upon earth?

- 1) Mark 10:33-34. Jesus knew that death awaited Him, but He could speak about it in a calm way.
- 2) John 12:32-33. Jesus even knew beforehand the horrible death He would die; and yet, He could speak of it with assurance of the great good that would come from His death.
- 3) Mark 14:34-36. But the humanness of Jesus began to show more as death was imminent. On the night before his death—knowing what lay ahead—it was said that His soul was exceedingly sorrowful, he prayed earnestly to the Father that He might not have to “drink this cup,” but resigned himself to the inevitable.

- 4) Luke 23:34, 39-43. After much of the physical terribleness of His dying had taken place and before He gave up spirit unto God, Jesus showed great concern for others. He prayed that the Father would forgive them for what they were doing. He also promised one of the thieves that he would be with Him in Paradise that day.
- 5) Hebrews 2:9; 12:1-3. It is said of Jesus that He tasted of death for every man. His death had a purpose, a good purpose that made it easier for Jesus to face His death. He could see the outcome of His death for the good of mankind and rejoice in such.

Can you and I face death as Jesus did?

Stephen also faced a cruel death. He had become a Christian and was a man of good reputation, and he was “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.” He had been chosen by the church to be one of the seven who could handle a critical problem in the early church (Acts 6:1-7). Later, we find him being brought before the Jewish Council because of his preaching Jesus. He took advantage of the opportunity to preach to the Council—knowing they might react unfavorably to his preaching. They did react violently (Acts 7:51-54). They took him outside the city and stoned him to death. He seemed to not only handle his death very well, but showed that he was prepared for it (Acts 7:55-60). His attitude in death was like Jesus—he prayed for his murderers. Stephen was one of the first of many who were martyrs for their faith in Christ. In Revelation 2:10-13, Jesus tries to prepare His people for not only facing persecution, but even death itself. And then, He tells them that he knows about Antipas who was His faithful martyr. He urged them all, in the face of death, to hold fast His Name and not deny His Faith.

The Apostle Paul probably has more about his facing of death than any other person in the New Testament—other than Jesus! Upon becoming a Christian He constantly faced death and was willing to die for His faith in Christ. He expressed gratitude, however, that God had delivered him from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2), which obviously offered no hope. He was thoroughly convinced that neither tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or even death itself could separate him from the love of God (Romans 8:35-39). Death even became a welcomed guest to the Apostle as he grew older and expressed his desire to go on to what lay before him after death. It was not so much that he wanted to “experience” death with all its challenges as it was to be given a new body (spiritual body) and to be with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:1-6). And as he realized that his death was imminent, we can see several things about him from his last words that he penned by inspiration (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

- 1) He was ready for death and looked upon it as a drink offering unto God.
- 2) The reason why he was ready was because of the way he had lived.
 - a) He had fought a good fight;
 - b) He had finished the race;
 - c) He had kept the faith!
 - d) His life had been given in service to God and man faithfully.
- 3) He was convinced that there was something far better that awaited him after death—a crown of righteousness.
 - a) Because of his life;
 - b) Because of the Lord will be a righteous judge;
 - c) He will keep His promises to those who love Jesus’ appearing.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

These and other examples in the Word of God should be a great help as we too are having to come face to face and closer and closer as our lives draw to a close. None of us look forward to experiencing the “pangs” of death, but we can face such courageously and with great faith in God because of what lies in store for us after death. The last enemy of man to be dealt with by God will be death (1 Corinthians 15:26). But death’s sting has already been taken away by the great and precious promises the Lord has given to us (1 Corinthians 15:56-58; 2 Timothy 1:10; Revelation 1:18; 2:10). Trust in God and His promises will see us through the worse that death can bring upon us.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

True or False

1. Jesus has been able to take the sting out of death.
2. Jesus is said to have the keys of hades, but not of death.
3. Paul’s facing of death courageously was made possible by his faith in God as well as his godly life.
4. Paul’s expression in 2 Corinthians 5 about being unclothed is talking about the death of the person.
5. God will not leave our spirits naked, but will give His people a new “spiritual” body.
6. Paul seems to have welcomed death as he grew older.
7. Stephen’s facing of his cruel death was made easier by his vision of God, the Father, and of Jesus standing at the right hand of God.
8. Jesus’ ability to deal with the terribleness of His death came from His understanding of His relationship to His Father.
9. It was said of Jesus that He was exceedingly sorrowful as He faced the trials and death that lay before Him.
10. Young people do not have near the help that older people do to face death.

Lesson Eleven

TRUSTING GOD

Because Adversity Can Build Character!

Have you ever known about someone's reputation, but were disappointed when you came to know them? There may be a good reason for that. Reputation is generally what people think of us, while character is the real person. Reputation, like riches, can be deceitful; but, character is the real you. It would be wonderful if everyone's reputation was a true reflection of their character. The wise man observed: "***A good name is more to be desired than great riches; esteem is better than silver or gold.***" While the world may be busy building a reputation, Christians should be busy building a great Christian character!

THREE OBSERVATIONS ABOUT CHARACTER

1. Real character is what makes Bible heroes acceptable to God. Daniel is pictured to us as a person who had position, power, fame, and wealth. But all of these were incidental or secondary. He had a great reputation (Daniel 6:4-5; 9:23), but his character was the same as his reputation. He believed in God, no matter what he might have to face. He did what was right, no matter what the cost would be. He trusted in God's way as the only way to live...and lived it! He was truly a person of great character. The Apostle Paul also had position, power, fame, and wealth, but gave them all up to gain Christ (Philippians 3:7-8). He has come down to us as a man of real character.
2. Real character is something WE build. We are not born with character, nor is it automatically given to us by God. He doesn't do it for us! We must put forth the effort required to be men and women of character (2 Peter 1:5-8).
3. Real character determines our destiny! The judgment of God will be based on our "works" or our character (Revelation 20:12). The one-talent man learned this truth the hard way (Matthew 25:24-30). So did the rich fool as well (Luke 12:21). Character is not determined by how much money or possessions we have, or how many friends we can make, or on our good intentions; but, on our works, our attitudes, our helpfulness, and our convictions. God is well able to judge between a person's reputation and his character.

FOUR THINGS THAT BUILDS CHARACTER

1. Keeping a good conscience. Our conscience approves or disapproves our actions by what we have been taught. We are designed by God to have a conscience. It is a good safeguard, especially if we want to do right. If we go against what we believe is right, our conscience will hurt—prick us. If we do right, our conscience will approve of our actions. The Apostle Paul could look back on his life and a Jew when he persecuted Christians and gave consent to their death and could still say: "***I have lived in all good conscience before God unto this day.***" He

really believed that he was doing right in persecuting Christians. There are two problems with conscience: (1) If it is improperly taught and accepted, it is not a correct guide for us; (2) We can allow our consciences to be seared and lose their value in our lives. Keeping a good conscience is good character building.

2. Exercising our Will Power. Often, we know to do good, but don't! It is easier to follow the course of least resistance, but this doesn't build character. James says that this is sin which will alienate us with God (James 4:17). When we don't do right we don't feel good about ourselves. When we exercise our will power to do right regardless of the consequences, we feel good about ourselves. Our will power must be involved in making proper decisions and then following through with them (Hebrews 5:14). This will build a strong character.

3. Keep our Hearts and Thoughts Pure. Our hearts is where the real battle is fought! We are strongly encouraged to keep our hearts with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23). Great emphasis is placed on the heart of man being right with God (Proverbs 23:7; Matthew 15:17-20). Paul's solution is found in Philippians 4:8-9 where he stresses what our minds and hearts should dwell upon—the noble, honest, just, lovely, the pure. Another strong emphasis is that we should love God with all of our heart, mind, and soul—and our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40).

4. Deal correctly with struggles in life. **Abraham** was called by God to leave his homeland and go into a strange land. He faced a lot of adversities and wandered in this land with all its dangers. He lived for years without a son whom God had promised. But, he was shaped in adversity to learn dependence upon God. Finally the son came and he became the father of the faithful. **Moses** was raised as Pharaoh's son, but he made a decision that caused him to lose all that Egypt had to offer. He went into a hard land to serve as a shepherd for 40 years. Only then was he ready to be God's leader of His people. **David** found early fame in the court of King Saul. But he had to flee for his life for years. He endured much hardship. Only then was he ready to be king over God's people. **James** tells us to "*count it all joy*" when we have to go through the trials or struggles of life. Why? Because if we have the correct attitude of heart, our faithfulness will develop maturity and our enduring will make us complete or mature (to have real character).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Why do we have to face the trials of life? We may not fully understand, but God has told us that they can be a blessing to us (Romans 8:28). So, we are encouraged to give thanks in all situations (1 Thessalonians 5:18) because we are convinced that adversity, not ease, is the way to build Christian character. Adversity forges character! Character is forged, not by avoiding adversities, but handling them properly. How well is our "character building" going? Do we handle well both blessings and adversities? Can we see growth as a result of handling adversities?

REVIEW QUESTIONS

True or False

- 1. Facing adversities can cause some people to turn from God.**
- 2. Character and maturity go hand in hand.**
- 3. Adversities should bring joy, not sorrow.**
- 4. Most people want it easy in life because it is the best way to build character.**
- 5. Exercising of one's will power requires our making decisions and carrying through with them.**
- 6. Paul's conscience guided him to persecute Christians.**
- 7. Real character is a gift from God.**
- 8. Reputation and character are synonymous words.**
- 9. Heroes in the Bible are people who trusted in God.**
- 10. Character and a seared conscience does not go together.**

Lesson Twelve

***TRUSTING GOD:
Because Victory is Assured!***

If there is one lesson you have to learn from reading **Revelation**, it is—“***Victory is assured***” for God’s faithful people! Yes, we will have struggles and trials and tribulations. Some may even have to face martyrdom. But ultimate victory is assured (1 Corinthians 15:55). This victory is made possible by Jesus’ death and our continued faith in Him (1 John 5:3). The imagery at times—of the great battle that wages between good and evil—is not very pleasant when we view the beheaded souls in Revelation 6:9-11. But the unpleasantness is removed when we see these same beheaded souls living and reigning with Christ in Revelation 20:4. In the letter to the seven churches in Asia, the emphasis is “***to him that overcomes....***” God will reward them richly for their faithfulness to Him (Revelation 2-3).

WHY THE BOOK OF REVELATION?

“Victory” is the theme of the book of Revelation! God’s people will be triumphant because of their faith in the promises of God. They did not need to know about future coming historical events, but they did need to know that in the midst of these coming events (whatever they are) that God’s people will be the ones who will be victorious. Common sense should help us to see why such a book was needed in the first century—and is still needed in the twenty-first century!

- 1) God’s people are a small minority in the world—whether then or now! People feel more comfortable with being a part of a large group. It is a harder struggle being in a small group going against the majority of people around us. We need assurance that we are not only on the right track, but that we will be victorious.
- 2) God’s people, generally speaking, will undergo persecution in some form or another from the larger group (Revelation 2:10; 2 Timothy 3:12). They and we need to know that the persecutors will be rewarded according to their deeds (Revelation 6:9-11; 16:5-6).
- 3) Everyone, generally, wants to be on the winning side—who wants to be a loser? The only trouble is—people want to be on the winning side without having to pay the cost. Christians needed to be assured of such because of the price they had to pay to follow Christ.

God does nothing by accident...they are always good and valid reasons for what He does or requires.

Someone could “promise us the moon,” but could he deliver it? Jesus’ promise to His
THE POWER OF THE PROMISER

followers of absolute victory is of little value unless He can make good on His promises. This is possibly the reason why Jesus is constantly portrayed in the book of Revelation as the One who

can deliver on His promises. The book begins with this emphasis and carries it throughout the book.

1. He is the faithful witness (1:5).
2. He is the first One to rise from the dead to die no more (1:5).
3. He is the ruler over the kings of the earth (1:5).
4. He is the Alpha and the Omega, who was, is, and is to come—the Almighty (1:8).
5. He was dead, but now lives forevermore (1:18).
6. He has the keys of death and hades (1:18).
7. He is the One who has delivered us from spiritual death and is worthy of our praise and worship (4:11; 5:9-10).
8. He is the One who will sit in Judgment upon all mankind (20:11-15).
9. He is the One who can make Heaven possible for the faithful (21:1-7; 22:1-7, 14).
10. etc.

The book ends with an appeal for all who like to be recipients of these promises to come and freely receive such (22:17). Jesus has the ability, the power, to make good on His promises.

THE DESIRABILITY OF THE REWARD

Rewards vary in what is held out to people who will do whatever is requested of them in order to receive the promised reward. Not only must the person be able to carry through on his promises, but the rewards must make an appeal to the person to cause him to be willing to pay the price to receive them. *"Heaven will surely be worth it all"* is a thought in a song written by W. Oliver Cooper. It is indicating the great desirability of what is promised to the faithful child of God. Following are a few of the points of emphasis that makes heaven so desirable:

1. Heaven is where God the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit will be (Matthew 6:9). Its desirability is made clear by the opposite concept. Hell is to be where God is not (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10). All the varied descriptions of Hell (what it means to be lost) makes it very clear that being with God is most desirable!
2. Heaven is a place where righteousness will prevail (2 Peter 3:13). Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be with all the wicked people who have ever lived?
3. Heaven is portrayed as the place where the ultimate justice of God can be seen (Revelation 6:9-11). All the wrongs that have ever gone unpunished will then be punished. To escape such will be very desirable.
4. Heaven will be a place of rest from our labors, trials, struggles, sorrows, etc. (Revelation 22:1-5; 14:13). This physical body will be replaced with a new spiritual body that is fit for eternity with God (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 51-54). What a relief to be out of such a body!
5. Heaven will be a permanent home for us (1 Thessalonians 4:17). The song expresses our condition now so well: **"Here we are but straying pilgrims...."** Our sojourn here is only for a short time, but Heaven will be a permanent place for us.
6. We will miss going to Hell (Matthew 25:46). Who in their right mind would want to go to a place that is so vividly described in Scripture as ***"everlasting punishment?"*** Missing Hell is what makes Heaven so desirable.

These and other thoughts should help us to see the great desirability of heaven and want to go there bad enough to pay whatever the price that is required.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Victory is assured—the reward of Heaven is held out before us to encourage us to keep on keeping on, to be faithful unto or even in the face of death. He is faithful who has promised and He has the power to carry out His promises. Heaven will surely be worth the price that we have to pay to receive it.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

True or False

- 1. If there was no Hell, then we would not really appreciate fully the blessing of Heaven.
- 2. Heaven is pictured as a place of rest, not work.
- 3. Heaven will be desirable to us because the wicked won't be there.
- 4. Jesus said that he had the keys (power over) death and hades.
- 5. The significance of Jesus being raised from the dead is the fact that we too can be raised up either to eternal life or eternal damnation.
- 6. Smallness in numbers has no bearing upon the Christian's desire to go to heaven.
- 7. All faithful Christians will undergo some form of persecution.
- 8. Rewards are promised to all of God's people without restrictions.
- 9. Death of the early martyrs can be a discouragement to Christians.
- 10. Adversities of life can help to makes us more effective as God's people.

