



“LET MY TEARS FLOW!”

*(Finding Comfort Amidst Life's
Multiple Sorrows!)*

By

Ron G. Christian

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As author of this book, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Shirley Ruiz, who dedicated her great skills, abounding energy, and many hours of her time in typing the entire manuscript as well as adding illustrations in this book. I feel certain that her committed hands will bring great blessings to many persons.



Ron G. Christian

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>LEAVING A FAMILIAR ENVIRONMENT TO COME TO LIVE IN A NEW HOME!</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>IN THE MIDST OF THE LOSSES OF OUR PAST, CAN GOD GIVE US A NEW FUTURE?</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>I MUST BE SURE THAT THIS MIND-BOGGLING 'IDEA' IS REALLY FROM MY GOD!</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>THE DECISIVE COMMITMENT TO GOD TO LOVINGLY CARE FOR A MOTHER-IN-LAW!</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>SAINTLY MOTHER WHO BLESSED ME AND WHO'S KINDNESS TOUCHED MANY!</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>EXPERIENCING THE GRACE OF GOD!</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>SHEDDING A 'RIVER OF TEARS'!</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>STRUGGLING THROUGH THE DARK 'TUNNEL' OF DEPRESSION!</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>LONELINESS DEEPENS AND THE TEARS KEEP FLOWING!</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>EXPERIENCING 'TEARS OF REPENTANCE'!</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>IS 'SIN' REALLY THAT HORRIBLE?</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>HOW CAN I ADEQUATELY DEAL WITH ALL OF MY SINS?</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>HAVE YOUR CHEEKS BEEN 'WET' WITH THE TEARS OF GREAT SORROWS?</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>DOES JESUS UNDERSTAND THE 'HEARTBREAK OF MY LIFE'?</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>CHRIST'S PROMISED 'VICTORY' OVER ALL 'EVIL' AND 'SUFFERING'!</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>FACING THE 'WAVES OF ADVERSITY'!</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>TERROR OF REJECTING GOD'S 'CALL TO REPENTANCE'!</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>IT IS GOD'S DESIRE THAT ALL PERSONS REPENT AND GO TO HEAVEN!</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>WHY ARE 'GOOD WORKS' IMPORTANT TO GOD?</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>SHOULD I EXPECT BOTH 'SUNSHINE' AND 'RAIN' IN MY LIFE?</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>DOES GOD HONOR THE EXERCISE OF MY 'FREE WILL' IN MY DECISION?</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>WHAT IS THE 'BRIDGEHEAD' FOR SIN IN YOUR OWN LIFE?</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>DO YOU BELIEVE IN 'DETERMINISM' OR IN 'FREE WILL'?</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>HAVE YOU HEEDED GOD'S WARNING OF ONCOMING JUDGEMENT?</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>WHAT ACTIONS OF MANKIND MAKE GOD 'WEEP'?</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>CAN GOD BE 'SHOCKED' BY THE DECISIONS THAT I MAKE?</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>HOW IS GOD'S 'ANGER' EXPRESSED TOWARD ME WHEN I SIN?</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>THE FATHER AWAITS THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON!</i>	<i>76</i>

“Let My Tears Flow!”

<i>CAN GOD'S LOVING NATURE ACTUALLY INDWELL MY OWN HEART?</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>UNCONDITIONAL LOVE AMIDST AN UNRECOVERABLE ACCIDENT!</i>	<i>79</i>
<i>WHAT YOU 'COURT' YOU WILL LIKELY 'MARRY'!</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>IF THE MASTER WEEPS, WON'T HIS SERVANTS ALSO WEEP?</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>DO YOUR TEARS FLOW FOR THE SUFFERING OF OTHER PERSONS?</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>LOWER OCTANE SUFFERING' OR 'HIGH OCTANE SUFFERING?</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>DOES GOD REALLY 'BOTTLE UP OUR TEARS'?</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>ARE THE 'TEARS OF REPENTANCE' IMPORTANT TO GOD?</i>	<i>92</i>
<i>HEALING FROM A 'BROKEN AND CONTRITE SPIRIT'!</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>THERE IS 'WONDER-WORKING POWER' IN THE 'BLOOD OF JESUS'!</i>	<i>94</i>
<i>TRUSTING GOD'S 'ULTIMATE COMPENSATION'!</i>	<i>97</i>
<i>THOU SHALT NOT KILL - UNBORN BABIES!</i>	<i>99</i>
<i>WHAT ABOUT THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE SUFFERING FOR NO REASON?</i>	<i>99</i>
<i>"GUARD AGAINST YIELDING TO YOUR 'BESETTING SIN"!</i>	<i>101</i>
<i>AN 'OUNCE OF PREVENTION' IS WORTH A 'POUND OF CURE'!</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>BE YE HOLY, FOR I THE LORD THY GOD AM HOLY!</i>	<i>105</i>
<i>HAVE YOU YET DISCOVERED YOUR OWN 'BESETTING SIN'?</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR ME IF I WRONGLY CHOOSE TO SIN?</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>CAN I BE 'IN' THE WORLD AND YET NOT BE 'OF 'THE WORLD?</i>	<i>113</i>
<i>CONFUSED IN THE MIND, BUT TRUSTING WITH THE HEART!</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>SURVEYING LIFE 'S VARIOUS SUFFERINGS</i>	<i>115</i>
<i>SURRENDERING THE 'MYSTERIOUS EVENTS' OF OUR LIFE!</i>	<i>130</i>
<i>TRUSTING WHEN WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND!</i>	<i>135</i>
<i>SURVIVING A 'NEAR-DEATH' EXPERIENCE!</i>	<i>136</i>
<i>ACCEPTING UNFORESEEN DAILY EVENTS!</i>	<i>136</i>
<i>ACCEPTING THE INEVITABILITY OF DEATH!</i>	<i>139</i>
<i>PINPOINTING THE SOURCES OF SUFFERING!</i>	<i>141</i>
<i>EXPERIENCING THE 'PAIN' OF LONELINESS!</i>	<i>148</i>
<i>IT IS NOT GOOD THAT MAN SHOULD BE ALONE!</i>	<i>151</i>
<i>AS YOUR EYES ARE MADE FOR SIGHT, SO YOUR SOUL IS MADE FOR GOD!</i>	<i>151</i>
<i>OPEN-HEARTED TO GOD IN ORDER TO BE OPEN-HANDED TO PEOPLE!</i>	<i>152</i>

<i>WHAT CAN I DO DURING MY MOMENTS OF LONELINESS?</i>	<i>153</i>
<i>SURVIVING TWO DIFFICULT DIVORCES!</i>	<i>155</i>
<i>MY GOD KNOWS THE WAY THROUGH THE WILDERNESS, SO I WILL FOLLOW!</i>	<i>164</i>
<i>‘LOWER OCTANE’ AND ‘HIGH OCTANE’ SUFFERING!</i>	<i>166</i>
<i>TRAGEDY IN A ‘WINDOW WELL’!</i>	<i>168</i>
<i>DENTAL ‘IMPLANTS’ AND MORE DENTAL ‘IMPLANTS’!</i>	<i>174</i>
<i>WHAT ABOUT THAT SMALL ‘BLACK SPOT’ ON MY ARM?</i>	<i>176</i>
<i>LEARNING TO LIVE MORE GRATEFULLY!</i>	<i>184</i>
<i>IS THAT THE ‘SMOKE ALARM’ I HEAR?</i>	<i>185</i>
<i>DOUBLE MURDER ON THE CHURCH PARKING LOT!</i>	<i>187</i>
<i>GRIEVING THE NEEDLESS DEATH OF ONE SO YOUNG!</i>	<i>191</i>
<i>A GREAT WOMAN SUFFERS GREATLY!</i>	<i>193</i>
<i>BEWILDERED MIND BUT A TRUSTING HEART!</i>	<i>196</i>
<i>ARE SO-CALLED ‘NATURAL DISASTERS’ CAUSED BY ‘DEMONIC FORCES’?</i>	<i>198</i>
<i>IS SATAN ADEPT AT DECEIVING UNSUSPECTING HUMAN BEINGS?</i>	<i>199</i>
<i>GOD’S WAYS ARE HIGHER THAN OUR WAYS, AS HEAVEN IS ABOVE OUR EARTH!</i>	<i>201</i>
<i>GOD WILL ‘BALANCE THE BOOKS’ AT THE ‘END OF HUMAN LIFE’!</i>	<i>202</i>
<i>GOD IS THE ‘GREAT COMPENSATOR’ IN ETERNITY!</i>	<i>204</i>
<i>WILL GOD DISTRIBUTE ‘REWARDS’ IN HEAVEN?!</i>	<i>205</i>
<i>THE MOST SHOCKING NIGHT OF OUR MARRIAGE!</i>	<i>213</i>
<i>DEATH AT AN AMUSEMENT PARK!</i>	<i>218</i>

**LEAVING A FAMILIAR ENVIRONMENT TO COME TO
LIVE IN A NEW HOME!**

About nine months after both Venita and I had lost our jobs, my sister (Bobbie), who lived one block away from my elderly mother in Colorado Spring, revealed to her siblings (including me) that a change would need to be made. My sister and her husband enjoyed living close to my mother, and having the privilege of caring for many needs of my mother, during most of the long time that mother had been a widow.

Mother had a close and warm relationship with Bobbie and her husband for nearly 20 years, but, because of a change in Bobbie's circumstance, mother would need to live somewhere else. My mother, at this time, was nearly 90 years old and her health was gradually deteriorating, and it was apparent that she needed to be in a place (assistant living residence) where she could receive closer 'health supervision'.

My mother, the amiable and cooperative person that she was, recognized that she would have to move away from a daughter with whom she had a close and joyous relationship. She loved the house where she lived, a place that she cared for with great interest, but mother (a godly woman, a woman who was adaptable), prepared to make a 'major move'. She was a woman of prayer, so she knew that God would 'guide' her to the place that was best for her.

Mother's children started looking for an appropriate place for mother to live. Venita and I looked at one or two places, located in our own community. Mother had lived all of her married life, in the small, historic town of Fountain, Colorado, but about four years after my father passed away (1971), mother decided to move to Colorado Springs, to be near my sister.

***IN THE MIDST OF THE LOSSES OF OUR PAST, CAN GOD
GIVE US A NEW FUTURE?***

As the days became weeks and the weeks became months (from the time that Venita and I had lost our jobs), the urgency became stronger and stronger that we had to have some kind of employment. Although the time of rest and relaxation and recovery (from our grief-giving experiences) was essential and helpful, we both knew that the time had come for us to 're-enter' the 'work force' - not only for the benefit of our 'mental health' but also (obviously) for the necessity of a 'steady income'.

From the time Venita 'shockingly' lost her job (mandatory 'requirement' by the church officials), she was greatly 'struggling' with her 'feelings' of resentment regarding the 'closure' of this important 'chapter of her life'. Even though the administration of 'Choice City Christian School' was very challenging (hard work), she sensed that God had greatly 'blessed' the School, and she received immense satisfaction from her involvement since the founding of the School!

She had given 'birth' to the School, and she had seen the growth of the School, from one grade to thirteen grades, within a relatively short period of time! She had given her mind, emotions, spirit, talents, and prayers to the growth and stability of the School, in spite of 'many odds' against it (such as lack of adequate facilities and lack of funding). God truly had blessed this young School, and Venita envisioned that she would continue to see the School grow and grow, and minister to hundreds of more students (and their fine parents).

But, because of circumstances (primarily the circumstance of my serious illness) Venita's 'dream' suddenly and unexpectedly died! She knew, in her heart, that this 'dream' would never be 'resurrected'! If 'grief' means a profound sense of 'loss', then Venita's sense of 'loss' regarding the School would be called 'great grief'! Yes, 'grief is the crushing sorrow that one

feels when he/she losses something or someone that is very 'dear' to one's heart!

Venita suddenly lost something (her cherished job that God was pleased to bless and to prosper), and her 'loss' ('unfairly' rendered to her, as she 'saw' it), was great! During the unfolding months, following her 'sudden dismissal', Venita talked often to her precious Lord.

As Venita walked and walked alone, and as she seriously contemplated one of the greatest 'losses' of her life, she said that she had some strong emotions (even the emotion of 'bitterness') that she had to contend with. She prayed and prayed, seeking deliverance from 'unhealthy emotions' regarding her sudden 'dismissal' from her successful leadership of her 'thriving school'!

As an honest follower of Christ, she did not try to 'hide' her 'unpleasant feelings', but, instead, she 'poured out her heart' to her Heavenly Father. Even though, admittedly, her feelings were 'less than loving', she knew that the God, whom she had served for so very long, would understand her and that her God would give her healing and that God would guide her into the 'next chapter' of her life. She told her Lord that she was 'confused' as to why God would allow her to be suddenly 'removed' from the leadership of a School that was prospering and that was growing and that was seeking to glorify the Savior!

In her honest moments, she had to admit that she felt bitterness also towards her own husband, for it was her husband who precipitated the 'entire tragedy' as a result of his extended illness, an illness that brought about her removal from the very church and school that were important to him! After all, it was her husband who (years earlier) had received the 'vision' to start the School, and it was her husband who then quickly enlisted her (Venita) to actually implement the 'vision' and start the School!

The one who was so excited regarding the founding of the School (Venita's husband) was the same one who, because of his illness, removed Venita's job from administration of the School! How ironic can circumstances in life' be!

***I MUST BE SURE THAT THIS MIND-BOGGLING 'IDEA' IS
REALLY FROM MY GOD!***

One of the most important (life-changing) 'walks' that Venita took was probably in the first part of May 1995. Venita told me that, on that particular 'walk', she surrendered everything to God (i.e., she surrendered her feelings of resentment and bitterness regarding her 'dismissal from the School' and her 'bitter feelings' towards her husband).

She said that almost immediately the Lord told her that she was supposed to take her mother-in-law into her home to take care of her! She was rather 'shocked' when she received this distinct and unusual 'message' from her Lord!

Take care of my mother-in-law? Venita had long respected her mother-in-law as a woman of great 'faith', a woman who was known for her kindness and faithfulness, and a woman who had been loyal to her beloved church (Free Methodist Church) for a lifetime. But would it be God's will for her to actually care for her mother-in-law, during the period of her mother-in-law's life (in her 90's) when there would be no 'inhibitions' if she (Venita) was to properly care for her 'total' physical 'person'!

How could Venita maintain the 'dignity of her person', and, at the same time, care for all of her bodily needs? Venita said that, as soon as she surrendered her total 'self' to God (especially including all of her 'bitter' feelings regarding her past 'events'), she received this 'unusual direction' from her Lord!

The God who is so merciful and understanding (of our human weaknesses), accommodates Himself to our 'doubts and

fears'. For Venita to accept this 'message' (as authentic, as truly from God), would mean that there would have to be 'major changes' in Venita's life! Obedience to this 'message' (if it truly was from God) would mean that Venita would have to make major changes in almost every way.

It would mean that she would have to learn how to care for an elderly woman (an experience that she had never had). It would mean that she and her husband would need to learn to 'work together', work conducted in the premises of our own house. The job would be seven days a week and the care would involve being 'on duty' twenty four hours each day.

There would be 'little time off', and there would be few (if any) vacation times. She would need to 'accommodate' herself to the needs and to the wishes of the relatives of the 'elderly' ones - in this special 'case', with all of her mother-in-law's family (her husband's siblings and their families).

Venita, initially, was 'astonished' with what God was asking her to do - to do 'elderly care' in her own home (day and night, seven days a week)! Even if she was willing to undertake this task (i.e., to enter a 'new job' for which she had no 'experience'), the further question was a 'question of confidence' - namely, would she have the 'ability' to do this new 'job'?

Venita had had involvements with small children (her 'home child care' business many years previously). Venita had, as a pastor's wife, been involvement with many persons of all 'age groups'. Venita, for the last several years, had had lots of contacts with grade school and high school grade children and youth. But, even though Venita had had 'casual contact' with several elderly folks, during her regular tasks as a pastor's wife, Venita had, in actuality, spent relatively little time with elderly folks (in any concentrated ways). Taking care of an elderly person (an elderly person who was on a

'downward slide' physically), that was a 'totally different matter'!

This was a drastic 'change' in a job requirement for Venita. To reiterate, several previous years (in her School), she had lots of contacts with children and with youth. But this was a 'different matter'! In the past, Venita had had only 'casual' (friendly) contacts with the 'elderly citizens'! And now, God was asking Venita to have a 'hands on' contact with her own mother-in-law! To love her even during her (what might be) 'difficult' aging years! To love her and to care for her during (what probably would be) her mother-in-law's most weakened and dependent years (and, likely, years when her mother-in-law would be 'mentally-challenged')!

To answer this particular 'call' from God was to answer a most 'challenging and a new type of call'-a 'call', if accepted, that would surely change the 'direction' of Venita's future life! The thought of embracing this 'assignment from God' brought some trepidation to Venita. But she knew that God had enabled her (many other times in the past) to 'tackle difficult projects'. Venita, even in her childhood, loved to 'solve problems' and to 'embrace difficult assignments'. One of the most awesome 'calls' of her life, was the present 'call' which God was giving to Venita! Indeed, Venita's response to this God-given 'call' would determine the 'direction' which Venita's life would take, for many years to come! Venita was, indeed, at an important 'crossroads' of her life!

Venita, all of her life, whether it was conducting a 'home day care', or involving herself in a hundred different 'assignments' when she was a 'pastor's wife' for 25 years, or whether it was the 'founding' and the development of a thriving Christian School, I say, Venita, all of her life enjoyed the 'challenge' of 'making things happen' - for the 'glory of God' and for the benefit of her fellow men!

Venita wanted to obey her Lord, but this was a 'high command' from the 'throne of God'! God was tender, but, nevertheless,

God was persistent, in His communication to Venita. Venita sensed a 'deep impression' within her own human spirit, that she was to accept this new 'course' of ministry/personal work! At a time when one makes important decisions, one usually experiences a mixture of emotions (like fear and faith and anxiety and excitement and surprise, etc. etc.) Even though she experienced a 'strong impression' that she should accept the responsibility of caring for her mother-in-law, Venita, nevertheless, experienced 'mixed emotions' regarding this 'new assignment'!

Venita was both 'stunned' and 'excited', as she 'faced this new challenge'! 'Stunned' by God's unexpected (unconventional) 'message' (for who takes care of her 90 year-old mother-in-law?). 'Excited' by this message, for Venita began to realize that it would be a choice 'privilege' to care for her mother-in-law (a godly woman) during her last years on earth!

Practically-speaking, Venita well knew that she and her husband definitely needed 'employment' (some immediate source of income). Apparently, God was going to solve two problems at 'one time' - caring for one of His long-time (loving and godly) servants during her old age, and providing some income for two 'life-battered' servants who needed a lot of further 'healing' from recent 'emotional wounds'!

Gideon (in the Old Testament.) was allowed by God to 'take some time', that he might find some extra 'assurance' that God was, indeed, moving in his life, regarding the battle plan against God's enemies.

So, likewise, Venita needed a little time to think and to pray - one week (following her 'supposed' communication from God). To 'confirm' such a major decision, Venita needed a few days to pray further about this 'vision', to reassure herself that this 'inner impression' which she received was, indeed, from Almighty God, and that it was not from some other 'source'.

She needed one week, for the 'clarification of her own thoughts', and for the 'witness of the Spirit' (together) to 'confirm' that this was, indeed, the 'new direction' for her life. Was this an 'open door of opportunity' (from the 'guiding Holy Spirit'), through which 'door' she must obediently 'enter'? She thought so, but, nevertheless, she wanted to 'further test' the 'green lights' of God's guidance!

Venita reasoned that, if this was truly a 'message' from God (a message, if she obeyed it her life would be changed 'drastically')! She reasoned that, if this was a 'true message from God', she would still 'feel' the impact of that clear message, seven days after what she honestly believed was a divinely-given communication. She knew that God would 'accommodate' her need for 'double assurance' that she was following the 'right course' for her life - a course that, if followed, would likely involve many future years of her life!

Venita believed that her kind Heavenly Father would 'accommodate' her (in mercy), and, thus, God would allow her to confirm what she thought was an 'authentic message' regarding the caring of her dear mother-in-law! Venita decided (wisely) that she would talk to no other person (not even to her husband) for a week, and during that time she would earnestly pray and she would 'wait upon God' in meditation and in reflection and in personal 'heart searching'!

After Venita waited in meditation and in contemplation and in continued prayer for one week, she 'sensed' that what she thought initially was God's 'message' to her, was, indeed, a real and authentic message! It was then that Venita shared with her husband (me) the 'unique communication' that she had received from God - a clear and distinct communication that she was to take her mother-in-law (my precious mother) into our home, where Venita would care for her.

Venita told me that there was no need any longer for any family member to look for a place for my mother to live! Venita told me that God wants my mother (one of God's 'choice' servants)

to live in the shelter and the care of our home! Needless to say, I was both surprised and excited - and I was profoundly grateful to my wife for her 'obedience to God'! I was profoundly grateful for Venita's 'compassionate act' towards my mother. Obviously, I was thankful for Venita's willingness to do a job that had, at least, some minimum income from it.

A meeting was arranged, to be held in my mother's home, in Colorado Springs. The family (including my three siblings, of course) gathered around my mother's dining room table (the table where she had served countless meals during the last nearly two decades). My mother was present (of course) and her four children. It seemed that my siblings had practically 'exhausted' the various options as to where (appropriately) our mother could go to live.

Then, in that rather 'tense' atmosphere, Venita simply and directly told everyone present about her 'communication with God', how that God had made it clear to her that she was supposed to take her mother-in-law into her home - and that she (Venita) would consider this arrangement to be, not only pleasing to God, but an arrangement that would be an 'honor' to her (Venita)! Venita then noted that she had always admired and loved her wonderful mother-in-law! Venita said that her home was 'open' to her beloved mother-in-law, and that she and I welcomed her to her new home - soon!

THE DECISIVE COMMITMENT TO GOD TO LOVINGLY CARE FOR A MOTHER-IN-LAW!

After Venita communicated this 'plan', there was, at first, a 'stunned silence', but quickly the silence way to expressions of overwhelming joy and gratitude. Of course, there was great relief from the anxiety that various family members felt as a result of concerns as to where mother would live. I glanced at my oldest sister (sitting beside me) and I saw some 'tears' trickling down her cheeks! My siblings could hardly believe that Venita would be willing to 'tie herself down' (seven days

a week) to care for their mother! A daughter-in-law that would care for her mother-in-law with love.

That type of 'caring relationship' was rather rare, but ennobling! My siblings were so surprised and so overwhelmed with this 'new plan' (a plan that likely would involve the care of mother for several years, until God called her 'home' to heaven). My siblings knew that Venita was making a very 'big commitment' - a commitment that only could have been made, because of the special 'message' that she had received from the loving Lord, only a few days previously!

The 'key' to the unfolding of the 'amazing and surprising plan' goes back, of course, to that all - important time when, during Venita's 'prayer walk', she decisively 'surrendered' all of her 'ill feelings' to God. Venita told me that 'as soon as I surrendered my bitterness to God' (regarding her past hurtful experiences associated with the School) - she found 'spiritual victory', and she was then able to receive a 'message' from God!

As it would eventually 'prove' to be 'true', that 'victory' (of surrender of her 'bitterness' to God) enabled her to hear the 'voice' of God', and, in turn, when Venita (cleansed of ill will from her heart) obeyed the 'new message' from God, my mother's 'long-term elderly care' needs would be lovingly met!

Like one domino 'knocking over another domino', there was a positive 'chain reaction' of God ordered events that took place in Venita's life, for many years to come after God came to Venita with that 'initial message'!

This is not to say that there were no 'challenges' along the way, as Venita cared for her mother-in-law (and as she also cared for nearly 20 other women in our home for nearly 20 years), but it is to say that God brought 'great blessings' (socially and financially and spiritually) to Venita and to many other persons, as a result of Venita's obedience to go through God's open door for 'elderly care' (May 1995).

To this very day (as I am presently writing on January 1, 2014), Venita's 'elderly care business' is still existing! Venita's consistent (and sometimes intense) work with the 'elderly ones' has brought great 'blessings' to many persons, not only to the elderly ones themselves for whom she has lovingly cared, but also for the family members of the elderly ones who have lived comfortably in our home.

Venita has received numerous words of affirmation from the lips of very appreciative sons and daughters of the aging ones, who have lived and who have died in our home, during the last nearly two decades! Truly, Venita has been a 'God-sent' in the lives of many persons during the last few years of their long lives.

As Venita has soothed and has comforted the elderly ones during their last hours of earthly life, Venita has been the visible presence of the Good Shepherd who holds His 'little sheep' in His tender arms of love!

As the aged ones (for whom Venita has tenderly given care, for various lengths of time - from a year to eleven years), have taken their last breathes, Venita has looked on the 'dying scene' with the sympathy of a loving caregiver!

The Bible says that "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His children!" And precious, too, in the sight of an unusually caring woman (Venita) whose hands have been 'dirty' and whose heart has been tender and whose voice has been soft and whose mind has been active - all for the caring of precious (and sometimes 'helpless') older and aging women!

Not an 'easy' job, but a job that Venita did (and still does) very 'nobly'! When Venita obeyed God's 'call' (to care for her mother-in-law) in May 1995, little did she know at that time that she would eventually be the 'care giver' for not only her beloved mother-in-law (for nearly 5 years - difficult job within itself), but that she would be honored with the challenging work of caring for many more elderly persons (all women)!

When one person obeys the Lord, many other persons will be positively affected! Or it is like throwing a rock into the middle of a pond, and then watching the ripple effect that comes from the one rock that is plopped into the middle of the lake!

Who knows how far your influence and my influence will go - how many lives we will affect for the cause of God - when we obey the 'voice' - the 'call' - of Almighty God? Venita's surrender (of her hurt and injured and bitter feelings) on that particular day (in early 1995) during her 'prayer walk' - that surrender not only brought her personal peace, but that surrender prepared her for a very significant message (witness to many), for a very significant ministry of 'loving care of elderly ones', for a significant job that very adequately fulfilled income needs.

Mother not only became our 'resident' (in June 1995), but her coming actually 'opened the door' for Venita (senior partner along with me as junior partner) to develop an 'elderly care business'. I am writing this (latter part of 2013), and one of our two final residents just passed away a few days ago. After our last resident (almost 98) passes away, we likely will 'close shop' (discontinue our 'business'). By that time, we will have been taking care of elderly 'residents' (all women) for nearly 20 years.

We, of course, did not know when mother came to live with us, that we would 'enjoy' working with several elderly ones. Several places in our home (including our upstairs bedroom) are sacred spots - the 'doorway' to heaven for several (including my mother and Venita's mother, who died in this same room, just a few feet apart, and just one year apart (Venita's mother, March 9, 1999, and my mother, March 2, 2000).

**SAINTLY MOTHER WHO BLESSED ME AND WHOSE
KINDNESS TOUCHED MANY!**

For a few months, after she moved into our house, my mother enjoyed it when I would take her on a ‘daily wheel chair ride’ (up and down the residential streets near our house) Even though my mother was certainly ‘no stranger to suffering and grief throughout her long life, mother, nevertheless, had a positive (faith-filled) attitude toward life. She loved to visit and to laugh. Usually she had a smile on her face, and she had a deep commitment of love for her Lord.

All of her life she had been a humble child of her Heavenly Father. She had long attended church, and she loved to sing the hymns of the Church. Spiritually-speaking, her ‘middle name’ was faithful’. Faithful to God, to her family, to her friends, to her church!

During the first few months, after she came to live with Venita and with me, during her regular wheel chair rides, I would have fun listening to her repeat her approximately 50 Bible verses. Her memory was ‘good’, and she enjoyed (time after time) repeating (word perfect) those numerous verses (which she had memorized long ago). She loved to converse with me and to laugh and to made comments about the beauty of the nature around her.

Those months, unfortunately, were short lived, because a few months after we celebrated her 90th birthday in the nearby Park (with several friends and relatives enjoying that ‘fun’ time), she had double knee replacement (and the drugs given to her apparently badly affected her mind). Then, a few months after that devastating knee replacement surgery, mother suffered both a heart attack and a stroke. In spite of all these troubles, she lived about four more years (eventually bedfast and totally helpless), before she finally died!

She was an earnest ‘prayer warrior’, and she believed in being both specific and persistent in her private prayer life. She interceded for many persons, including many unsaved loved ones. Her ‘faith’ was simple and direct. She simply took God ‘at His word’.

Her witness for Christ to others was truly winsome and attractive! She was the kindest person that I personally ever knew! Obviously, she was not without her personal faults, but (to me) she was truly a 'saint of God'! She was very humble and conscientious, very careful to speak charitably about everyone. She once told me that she wanted to guard against any 'bitterness' entering her heart, for she believed that bitterness would destroy the life of a Christian!

She loved to read her big Bible, and she loved to make notes of special bible verses. She loved to memorize several Bible verses, and often, throughout her long life as a believer, she found herself on her knees in fervent prayer. She loved to be with her several older friends who weekly came to her beautiful (well-kept) house for 'Bible study'. That weekly gathering at her home probably 'went on' for about 10 years!

She was supportive of the several pastors for whom she regularly prayed. Besides the 'weekly cottage prayer meeting' that she hosted in her comfortable home, mother went to her local church for Sunday morning and evening services, as well as Wednesday evening 'prayer meeting'. It was easy to love my mother, and, as a result, she had a host of friends.

Her radiant countenance, her friendly greeting, her ease in affirming and in complimenting folks, and her generous spirit - these were some qualities that made it easy for everyone to love mother and to give her frequent hugs.

Mother was seldom, or never, critical or judgmental towards others. Mother strove to be at peace with everyone, and when she detected some division or conflict among members in her church (or when she heard words of criticism regarding her pastor), this 'condition' greatly disturbed her!

What mother despised more than anything else was a 'bitter spirit' and a 'critical tongue'! She knew that no Christian had 'any business' indulging in such 'evil' - an attitude and a word that were not pleasing to God, and that were alien to the 'spirit

of Christ'! Mother sought to live a life that was 'charitable', 'forgiving', 'conciliatory', 'kind', and, above all, 'loving'!

The way of holiness is the way of love, and, therefore, mother carefully guarded her tongue and she guarded her heart (keeping her heart free from all bitterness). As I earlier stated, I think my mother was the 'kindest person' that I ever knew! When I reflect on the kind of Christian that she was I recognize that the quality of my own life is considerably 'less' than that of my mother!

My mother, throughout my own long life, has been my 'spiritual mentor' - the person whom I have long 'looked up to' as an example of a person who lived a consistently 'holy life', a life of cheerfulness and tender love! She was a woman who lived a Christ-centered, holy life! I will never be the great person that she was, but I, at least, wish to strive (day by day) to live a life of kindness and love, to obey the 'dictates of the Spirit'! Like my mother!

Even though she was a woman of 'humble circumstances' and of 'modest gifting and educational opportunities' she, nevertheless, 'ascended the heights' of godliness. I observed her life for many years, and I know that she lived close to God. She would probably be rather 'embarrassed' if she read what I have written (briefly) about her - but her reaction, of course, would simply be another demonstration of her 'deep humility'!

Someone (cleverly) said that the only thing that is predictable in life is 'change'! Life is made up of a series of 'changes' - some small changes, and some large changes. Even though Venita was glad and thankful to receive my mother into our home (so that Venita could become mother's caregiver, during mother's elderly years), this 'move', nevertheless, involved a considerable 'change' in Venita's lifestyle!

It involved the learning of new 'skills', in terms of sensitive understanding of the physical and the social needs of her mother-in-law. Learning to feel comfortable as she was re-

quired to carry out the daily hygiene needs (on the body of a lady that had long valued her modesty) - this, within itself, required a big adjustment for Venita.

Venita, the discrete woman that she is, was properly sensitive to the need for modesty and for dignity, on the one hand, and her need to be properly 'aggressive' in properly carrying out her responsibilities as a care giver, on the other hand. Venita was a conscientious 'worker' (in whatever her tasks in life required), so Venita quickly learned the 'dynamics' of a new job, and her new job soon became her 'regular, routine job'.

Venita, with love in her heart for her mother-in-law, found it rather 'easy' to adjust to her new responsibilities. Because Venita experienced a 'certain joy and satisfaction' in her new role (as a care giver), my mother more easily adjusted to her new (drastic) change in her own life.

Mother, of course, had to make a major change in her lifestyle (giving up her beautiful home in Colorado Springs, giving up her many friends, giving up her daily contact with my sister who was so 'close' to my mother, giving up her wonderful local church, giving up her own independence, giving up her long-time involvements as a cook in her own home which was a 'central part' of her life.

Even though mother was making a major change in her life, she seemed to know how to resign herself to the fact that she needed to 'leave the past behind her and to move ahead into a new chapter that God was opening up for her'. Even though she 'missed' her friends and she missed her daughter in Colorado Springs, I never heard her, even once, complain about the changed circumstances of her life.

She was a joyful, thankful, and positive presence, wherever she was, and she conveyed to me that she was 'happy' to be with Venita and with me. She manifested gratitude to Venita, for the care that Venita gave to her. She was so amiable and

adaptable and loving, in the words she spoke and in her actions.

She knew that it was not always easy for Venita to do what Venita was doing (care giving), but mother tried to make Venita's job as 'easy as possible'. Mother appreciated the work of Venita, and mother found it easy to give sincere compliments to Venita (for mother had always been an 'affirming type' person)!

Mother came to live with us, June 1995, just a couple months before her 90th birthday (August 3rd). During those summer months, right after mother came to live with us, during her daily wheel chair rides (up and down several blocks), mother recited for me about 50 Bible verses!

I knew that, during her long life, she loved to read the Bible and she also loved to memorize several verses. But, frankly, I was amazed that this 'classy' lady still had such a 'sharp memory' – that she could recite so many of her 'favorite verses' (Psalms 1, Psalms 23, Psalms 24, and New Testament passages). So many verses and she recited them 'word perfect'! Mother, so wisely, had 'fed' her heart and her mind on the matchless Word of God - for many years.

After these three events (knee replacements, heart attack, and stroke) mother was never 'herself' again! Mentally, she was 'off kilter'. She, sometimes, would verbally make some 'sense', but she increasingly became mentally confused. I was, of course, so saddened, to observe a 'total change' in my mother's speech and in her behavior.

I remembered how cheerful and glad and relaxed mother was in her demeanor, just before she was taken into the surgical preparation room for her knee replacement surgery. She 'changed' for the worse, following the three different mentioned medical events. Perhaps it was the 'drugs' that were used that affected her brain! Who knows? Only God knows! But the time and the effort required in properly taking care of my mother was intensified, considerably!

For a few months, following her heart attack, mother was able to be 'up and around' to a certain extent. But the time came when mother seemed to be 'oblivious' to the outer world. The only appropriate way that Venita and I could take care of her, was to keep her in bed full time. It was not easy, but Venita had to tend to all her hygiene needs while mother was in bed.

Mother was a 'perfectionist' in most things in her long life (including her care of her lovely home), and, if she would have been aware of what Venita had to do (in order to care for her), my mother would have been abashed and embarrassed! But, Venita, who made the commitment to care for mother (if at all possible) until she died, did not 'waver' from her commitment!

In spite of the unpleasantness of Venita's 'care giving responsibilities', I never once heard Venita complain about the 'messiness' of her job! (For years, after my mother's death, my siblings expressed their deep appreciation to Venita for the loving care she gave to our mother)!

It was difficult - over a three year period of time - for me to see my dear mother in her pathetic condition (bedfast)! It was my (glad) responsibility to 'feed my mother all her meals'. During those three years, with mother lying on her back almost motionless, I fed her every bite of food! Even though she appeared to be in a 'coma', she, obviously, was not, for she took from my spoon a lot of food!

I spent, maybe, hundreds of hours at the side of my mother's bed during the three years of mother's helpless (bedfast) state! Mother did not open her eyes, but I knew that she had a little awareness. At least, I believed so, since she did open her mouth countless times in response to my full spoon of food at her lips.

I had always felt 'close' to my mother, in childhood and in my youth and during my long adulthood. She was there for me during the difficult 'chapters' of my own life (depression, etc.).

What could I do for my mother, now that she was in the 'helpless stage of her life'?

It seemed so 'natural' for me to read the Bible Stories (from the identical old book, from which she read to me when I was a child). I was so thankful that I was in possession of that same old Bible Story Book, from which my mother read to me, when I was a child!

I read story after story to mother (the identical stories that put me to sleep when mother read them to me when I was a young child). Mother was so concerned that everyone around her accept Christ. A few years before she came to our house, I observed mother (in the home of my brother, who had invited a few friends to his home, for a graduation party). I could hardly believe what I was seeing (from a short, quiet distance away from my mother)!

While everyone was visiting (modest noise) at this party, I saw my mother, seated at a table with a lady from Asia (a foreign exchange student - working on an advanced university degree). The lady was courteous and most respectful (as is customary for students from some countries). My dear mother (who, because of difficult circumstances that she was engulfed in when she was young), had to drop out of high school. Here was my dear mother (with very modest formal education) visiting with this highly intelligent lady from Asia (who was presently enrolled at the university, working on an advanced degree).

Mother was a very wise woman (educated by the Holy Spirit and by the Word of God), but Mother did not have even a high school diploma. Mother felt a little 'intimidated', throughout her long life, when she was around highly educated persons. But, whether or not mother knew the level of education of this Asian lady, I don't know, but what I do know is that mother was talking to this strange lady about the Lord! I did not hear the entire conversation, but I do remember that mother was quoting some 'salvation-type Bible verses'. The highly-educated la-

dy was listening to mother, with greatest respect for mother (and, hopefully, for what mother was sincerely communicating)!

While the 'party' was 'going on', and amidst some 'modest noise', mother was 'focused' on sharing the Gospel with this precious (younger, well-educated, Asian) lady! Mother had hidden the 'Word' in her heart (memorization), and, therefore, mother was 'at ease' in witnessing! "When the Holy Spirit is come upon you (in purity and in power), you shall be my witnesses!" (Acts 1:8)

Mother memorized the Word, not only to reinforce her own spiritual life, but also to use the Word to witness to persons who are in need of Christ! No, mother did not see this highly intelligent Chinese lady accept Christ (at that party), but mother, nevertheless, 'sowed the seed' of truth. Only God can give the 'harvest' (the increase from the seed), but God assigns each believer to 'sow the seed' of the Word - and mother did just that (in a most unique setting - at a party)!

Perhaps, when I meet my mother in heaven (by God's grace), maybe I will sit at her feet, and maybe I will gaze up into her healthy (celestial) face, and maybe I will hear her again reciting her favorite memorized verses!

As I earlier recorded, Mother only enjoyed a few months (about 4 months) until the 'rug was pulled out from beneath her'. She had double knee replacement surgery in December 1995, from which surgery she never recovered. Even with therapy, she never was able to walk. The old (common) saying is: "When it rains, it pours!"

It was not too long after this failed knee surgery, that my mother suffered a stroke. Shortly after the stroke, she suffered a heart attack. These three 'happenings' left mother 'basically devastated', not only physically devastated, but (worse) mentally devastated. For three years, I read stories to my mother, and she seldom (if ever) opened her eyes!

Was I reading all those stories (from the Bible Story Book, from the Bible itself, and from interesting Christian books), I question, was I doing all that reading (hour after hour, day after day, year after year) for the sake of my mother, or for the sake of myself? I hope mother got 'some benefit' from all that reading - but it is 'doubtful'!

Venita told me (after mother's death) that, in reflection, she believes that this long bedfast experience (and my close involvement with my mother during those three years) was very possibly God's merciful means that He used to help me to 'detach' myself from my mother.

Venita believes that, since I was unusually 'close' to my mother 'emotionally' (and otherwise), I needed considerable time to 'surrender her to death' (and to heaven). I think Venita might be correct in her 'observation' (analysis), for, when mother finally died, I was 'very ready' for her to die! (God has various and unique ways that He expresses His mercy to us - even relating to 'issues' surrounding the death of our loved ones).

It is 'true' and it is 'easy' to declare that (in spite of the challenges that my mother faced during the 'long dying process'), my mother definitely 'finished her life well'! Mother faithfully followed her Lord during her long life, and she continued to follow her Lord to the very end of her life!

Simply stated, mother was 'true' to her Lord, and her Lord was 'true' to my mother! "Be thou faithful until death, and I (Christ) will give thee a crown of life!" My mother 'put her hand to the plow', and she never turned back. Even down to old age, our Lord promised to be with us! Even when we walk through the 'valley of death', we are assured that our God will walk beside us.

When we take our 'last breath', we will sense the 'eternal breath' feeling that 'last breath' that we take. After that 'last breath', the 'breath of the Spirit' will give to us our very first

“celestial breath” in that heavenly dwelling! We will wonderfully exchange our 'terrestrial breath' for our 'celestial breath', the very moment we die!

When my mother died, God took a great woman into His holy presence, where mother began to enjoy a 'timeless existence', a life of indescribable joy and peace! A brand new body! Worship of the King of kings! No longer does she see 'reality' with distortion and with confusion (as looking through a darkened glass), but she now sees 'reality' with full clarity, with no more haziness and fussiness and distortion!

She will look into the 'eyes' of her Savior, and she will become transfixed by those beautiful eyes! No longer does she need to kneel at her bedside to pour out her heart in prayer, for now she has immediate approach to the Lord whom she loved for a lifetime!

EXPERIENCING THE GRACE OF GOD!

It is true that 'humans' are 'unique creatures', because humans are 'creatures' that are made in the 'Image of God'. We are 'fallen creatures', affected by sin in every part of our lives. Our 'minds' are beclouded, thus, we fail accurately to discern the 'reality' of our world!

Our 'emotions' are affected, thus, we tend to desire what we ought not, and we fail to desire what we ought to desire! Our 'will' is weakened, thus, we are unable to choose the 'right' and to refuse the 'wrong'!

Even though these persons (unbelievers) feel the devastating effects of sin in their lives, they are, nevertheless, the objects of God's love, and they are the recipients of God's grace.

Humans are the recipients of God's 'general revelation'. To the sincere unbeliever (i.e., to the one who is in a 'spiritual quest') God imparts a certain degree of His grace! God's grace (His enabling power) is sufficient for the sinner to 'think some

objective thoughts', to 'feel some genuine compassion', and to make some unselfish decisions!

This type of grace towards sinners (the grace that touches the mind, and the emotions, and the will of a sinner) - this grace has a special 'name'! It is called 'prevenient grace' - the 'preliminary grace' of God that seeks to prepare a sinner for the powerful 'saving grace' of God!

God initiates His call of love to the sinner, to prepare the mind and the heart (emotions) and the will of the sinner, so that the sinner will have the 'ability' to respond to God's offer of salvation!

The kindness of God 'touches' the mind and the heart and the will of the sinner, and God seeks to persuade the sinner to make a major change in his life. God (Holy Spirit) offers the gift of 'repentance' and the gift of 'saving faith', and the Spirit (without 'forcing His will') urges the sinner to accept these all-important 'gifts' for the guarantee of salvation! When those 'gifts' are accepted and activated, the recipient (sinner) experiences new life in Christ!

The one who is 'born again' (through repentance and faith) is the one who enjoys new life in Christ! The 'old things' have passed away, and, behold, all things have become 'new in Christ'! The mind of the sinner is renewed, the emotions of the sinner are healed, and the will of the sinner is empowered (through personal 'surrender' to follow Christ's will)!

How does this 'divine transformation' change the way a person faces life, and the way a person faces circumstances with its various trials and tragedies? In significant ways that come to a 'surrendered person' - both gradually and spontaneously!

SHEDDING A 'RIVER OF TEARS'!

If our God is sovereign (i.e., if He is in 'charge of all of life'), then is it ever 'right' for a Christian to shed 'tears'? I knew of

a devout Christian woman who, after her elderly husband died, said she never 'shed a tear' (regarding his death). She was deeply in love with her husband, to whom she had been married, well over 50 years! This lady had a long and a joyous relationship with her husband, and also with her Lord. She was a dynamic Christian, in love with God, and a lady who overflowed with love for those around her (certainly including her dead husband).

She and her husband attended the same church for approximately 50 years! Very faithful to her husband, to her family, to her church, and, most importantly, to her Lord! Although, she was not 'theologically-oriented', but very practical in her approach to her 'Faith', she did have certain 'strong beliefs', and one of the strongest beliefs by which she (successfully) lived her life was her belief in God's sovereignty.

She believed (in a 'matter-of-fact' way) that it was God's will to 'take her husband' (who was 89 when he died), so why, she reasoned, should she weep about it! Why try to 'question' God's will? She knew her beloved husband (who was 11 years older than she was) was in heaven, so why should she 'weep' as a result of his departing? Some day she would be reunited with him. The fact of the matter is this: Just five years after that beloved husband entered the 'gates of heaven', she met him!

That woman (who was my sister) died suddenly and shockingly (in her sleep) on August 6, 2011. I talked to her on the phone, just two days before she died. No one knows the cause of her death! She was active and vibrant, it seemed, and she had plans to take her pastor (and wife) out to dinner (the day she died)!

A most wonderful Christian lady (a godly woman who placed great 'faith' in God's sovereignty), suddenly reunited with her husband! A woman, full of the Spirit, a long-time follower of Christ, a woman who possessed great wisdom, a woman who loved to cook and to entertain, a woman who loved to laugh

and to hug (everyone), a woman who was an unusual mother and grandmother, a woman who deeply loved her siblings and their families (including me and my family). Gone from this 'stage of action' (earth) so suddenly!

Unlike my mother's death (that was long in coming), Bobbie Lancaster's death was without any notice, without any anticipation! Bobbie said she did not 'shed' any tears after her husband died (I suppose because of her strong belief in God's sovereignty). I am sure that there were many tears that were 'shed' by loved ones, when they learned of Bobbie's unexpected 'departure'!

What a great loss to everyone, when this blessed soul left this earth! Admittedly, I am still 'shocked' and 'grieved' as a result of losing my remarkable sister - the sister who was so caring and so loving and so prayerful and so wise and so affectionate. I received countless hugs from her, during my long life and during my joy-filled relationship with her!

The 'hugger' in our family is no longer with us! There was something very special about this 'saint of God'. Earth's loss, however, is 'heaven's gain'! She is reunited with so many loved ones - including her beloved husband and her own parents and cherished grandparents! It seemed that everyone loved Bobbie Lancaster! Everyone who was around her was showered with her sincere love and her overflowing joy and her 'warm' embraces!

The joy of the Lord was, indeed, Bobbie's daily strength. God's love motivated her in all of her kind actions! Her hearty laughter was so contagious. Like a giant magnet, Bobbie drew countless persons to herself. Her cheerful outlook on life (loving and laughing and believing in her God) attracted people to Bobbie, like bees are attracted to honey!

Her gift of hospitality brought warmth and comfort to friends and to family alike. She was a great cook, and her gift of hospi-

tality was well-known. She often 'graced' friends and extended family members around her table!

*She was a prayer warrior! She had an active prayer life, with a special prayer place in her home. The last phone conversation I had with my sister was centered on her burden regarding one of Bobbie's very *ill* relatives. She called to ask me to pray for this elderly relative. Considering these above listed 'facts' about my sister, is it any wonder why I miss her presence (her voice on the phone, her prayers, her joyful laughter, her hugs, her affectionate words of love toward me)!*

When (by God's grace, and in God's 'sovereign time'), I am 'called to my heavenly home', there is so much I look forward to - including the 'first hug' from my sister! Those who (rightly) wept and wept after my sister left her beautiful earthly home, will no longer weep, when they are reunited with Bobbie in that 'home beyond the blue sky'! I might be mistaken! When they first see her, there might be 'tears of joy' that flow, but those tears will cease, for the Bible says that "all tears will be wiped away!"

Does it demonstrate a 'lack of spirituality', does it show a 'lack of strength', for a Christian to weep? Shouldn't a Christian, during a time of difficulty, simply and quickly commit his sorrow to God, and then 'get off his bed', and 'stand tall', and 'march forward in life', and 'forget his past losses and grief's'? We must 'look' at Jesus, to find an answer to these 'penetrating questions'.

If Jesus (the most 'manly' of all "manly" men) - if He was 'deeply moved 'because of His own' heart-crushing sorrows', and because of the sorrow He felt for others - then why is it 'cowardly' and 'weak' for Jesus' followers to weep?

Is it a 'sign of unbelief and distrust' when we weep? Are God's people (followers of Christ) 'permitted to weep'? Is weeping (over the loss of one's friend or over the loss of one's 'dreams') forbidden by God?

Should we not, as Christians, simply 'bury our feelings', 'deny the fact that we are broken', quickly wipe away our tears, and hide from the sight of people who would probably be offended by our bawling and by our sobbing and by our bewailing?

After all, aren't Christians supposed to 'hold their head high' with their 'chin up', and aren't Christians supposed to 'walk away from tragic happenings with a fast gait', and then walk into the future (and simply 'forget the hurts of the past')?

Of course, it is obvious that every Christian faces his/her losses in a variety of different ways. Some people weep a lot, some people weep a little, and some do not weep at all. Simply because a particular believer shows little or no outward emotions (tears), does not, of course, mean that one is not weeping 'inside' herself/himself!

Those who show few outward 'tears' may be the very ones whose inner tears are 'flowing like a river'! God alone can accurately discern the 'place' where the tears are experienced (inwardly or inwardly). God alone knows the intensity of one's tears, and God alone knows how and when a person's 'tears' will cease!

Of all the various 'kinds' of losses, it is probably true to say that the loss (death) of one's own spouse is the greatest of all losses! Of course, this statement needs to be 'qualified', for there are some spouses (like the one previously mentioned) who seem to 'give up' their life-time companion with minimum feelings of sorrow or grief.

Such persons reason that it is 'time' for their lifetime companion to go to heaven (the very place where the 'dying spouse' had long waiting and wanting to go). If the dying spouse had been physically deteriorating for quite some time, it is an 'act' of God's mercy, for the spouse to die!

However, there are other situations when the death of a spouse nearly 'kills' the surviving spouse! I know of a situa-

tion when a fairly young man (a church leader) lost his wife very suddenly, and this man was left with three young children to raise! Several years later (after he had been married to his second wife for about 20 years), his second wife also died! The death of this second wife 'threw him into a serious valley of depression'.

This grief-stricken man was one of the most respected leaders in our denomination! He acknowledged that, because he was so 'entrenched' in the work of the Denomination (as a General Leader), when his first wife died, he did not take the needed time to 'process his grief and shock' (over an adequate period).

He said that his grief (from the death of his first wife) was not properly dealt with, for he was (at that time) too involved in his 'heavy responsibilities' as a denominational leader, and, of course, he was 'forced' to give needed attention to his young children.

The grief, from many years before in his life, was now 'piled on' the 'grief that he was now trying to deal with as a result of the death of his second wife! Grief upon grief overwhelmed this outstanding person. The 'unprocessed grief' from the past, added to the 'present grief' which caused this well-known leader nearly to 'crack' mentally and emotionally!

Even though, by temperament, he was a 'strong' person, this 'combined load of grief was almost more than he could bare! To experience 'compounded grief' (the grief as the result of the loss of two wives, though separated by many years) can 'knock anyone off their feet' - in almost every way!

This man, who had a 'jolly' (good-humored) temperament, who was well-liked by every one - magnanimous in personality) — I say, this endearing man of God had a drastic 'change in behavior'! He was not now his 'jolly' self - around the persons whom he loved the most, including his family members! Sadness and grief engulfed him!

I personally did not have a 'close relationship' with this respected leader, but, the few times that I did have communication with him, it was apparent that he was the kind of person that would be an 'endearing' friend. He was well-liked and he was admired, throughout the entire denomination - intelligent, wise, godly, friendly, and good-humored!

During the few times I was in his 'presence', I greatly enjoyed his 'humor', his 'wit', and his 'hearty laughter'. Highly-respected, but a 'down-to-earth', 'approachable', and 'outgoing' person! But, as everyone knows, 'grief and 'sorrow' and 'heart-breaking tragedy' - these are 'respecters of no persons'!

The grief and the depression became so intense for this 'choice man' that he wondered what it would take for him to be delivered from this debilitating and oppressive 'condition'! Finally, this man (who, by this time in his life, had become a pastor) made an appointment with his conference superintendent. This latter leader was led by God to 'lay his hands' (for healing) on the head of this 'weary-worn' pastor.

God answered the earnest (faith-filled) prayer of this superintendent, and this 'grief-stricken' (depressed) pastor was wonderfully healed! God miraculously delivered this pastor from his depression, and God healed this man's grief. A healing transformation! As every believer should know, God can turn a 'tragedy' into a 'triumph'! None of our sorrows and grief need to be wasted'!

We can derive some benefit from every back set and every loss and even every tragedy that happens in our life. This one-time grief-stricken and depressed pastor, now a healed and delivered man, was 'led' by God eventually to meet and to marry a beautiful and godly lady who became a 'partner in the work of God'!

The 'combined knowledge' (regarding the meaning and the dynamics of the 'grief process') that this 'now-healed' pastor

and his new wife had, prepared this 'new couple' to be God's 'mouthpiece' to share important 'information' with small and large groups of responsive persons.

This 'able couple', based on their own experiences with 'grief, were now prepared to conduct 'Recovery from Grief' workshops. Their 'stumbling block' (of grief) was now turned into a 'stepping stone' (personal experience of healing, which God could use to bring healing to others).

'Tragedy' can come 'knocking on anyone's door'! It can come without any 'warning' (no expectation). Tragedy can come in cruel 'garb'! A terrorist can destroy us or any one of our loved ones! A godly man (a father of 4 teen and young adult children) can slide off a roof of a building where he is working, and be killed (where his elderly dad is also working only a few yards away). This latter 'tragedy' happened in our city, about two years ago! I did not know the young man who was killed, but I have long been a friend of the father of this man who slid off his business roof. The elderly dad was the first one on the scene, and (in his heart) he knew that this fall had probably resulted in his son's tragic death. That dreadful thought was soon confirmed when this 48 year old man was taken quickly to the emergency room!

The funeral for this godly man was attended by an 'overflow' crowd of people. A Christ-centered service, that gave witness to the remarkable (godly) leader that this man was! Two of the children gave a glowing tribute in behalf of their loving father! For the next few weeks, following this tragic event (turned into a Christ-honoring event), I witnessed the grief that the elderly father was experiencing.

Who would ever imagine that, on a morning that seemed to be like any other morning, an owner of a 'garden nursery' (who was constructing a roof on a new greenhouse building) would slip and would fall to his 'tragic death' — a death that seemed so 'senseless', so 'beyond understanding', so 'premature'! He was only 48 years old when he fell to his tragic death!

As someone so wisely said, "In a time when all seems to be beyond understanding, so beyond human reasoning, we must say, 'God, thou art love, and I build my faith on that alone!'" This elderly father (whose beloved son lost his life when he was quite young) - he and I see each other often (sometimes weekly, in the small 'dinner group' that both of us have belonged to for many years).

It has been about 2 years since the sudden death of his son, and this elderly man acknowledges that there will be a place of deep sorrow in his heart (for the remainder of his life). This elderly father (now 80 years old) was very 'close' to this son. They worked together, often, in the nursery business.

Even though the 'grief' is 'felt' deep within this elderly father's heart, it is apparent that his strong faith in the healing Christ and in his strong anticipating of his heavenly reunion with his son - that is, because of his strong 'Christian Faith' (with its various dimensions), the father presently (every time I am with him) is 'joyous', 'satisfied', 'good-humored', 'socially-connected'.

The elderly father of this son is so enjoyable to be around. He loves to joke. His 'wit' is refreshing! His 'story-telling' is intriguing and interesting. Occasionally, he is even able to 'talk about his son' and, amazingly, he even talks about the specific circumstances of that dreadful morning!

He admits that he will never 'get over' the grief that he feels regarding the death of his son. But this remarkable elderly father, (Norman Jordon) has allowed his Lord to bring amazing healing to him. And this elderly father continues to be the vibrant and happy and joking and socially involved person, the same as he was before the fatal accident! Because of what he 'went through', this elderly father (a long-time believer) has an even more tender heart. He has a deep insight into the meaning of grief. He now can be a 'comforter' in a greater way, because of the comfort that he himself has received from God (the Divine Comforter)!

**STRUGGLING THROUGH THE DARK ‘TUNNEL’ OF
DEPRESSION!**

‘Tragedy’, in one form or another, comes to every person - at least to every person who has lived very long in this ‘tear-filled’, ‘death-dealing’ world! To the young and to the old, to the healthy and to the infirm, to the rich and to the poor, to the sinner and to the saint! Anyone who (by chance) is reading this book knows exactly what I am stating! When I was ‘existing’ (not ‘really’ living) in the darkness of my ‘tunnel of depression’ for 1000 days, I wept and wept and wept! (January 1992 thru June, 1994)!

Like a ‘river of tears’, day after day after day! Adjacent to my church office, there is a small ‘rest room’. When my burden was unbearable, I would often go into that small rest room, and I would sit on the rim of the toilet, with my head in my lap, and (away from the hearing of anyone in the church), I would ‘bawl like a baby’. I couldn’t contain myself. I felt like my ‘world was coming apart’.

I felt as if I was ‘in a prison’ and that I could not release myself from the ‘obligations of my long - term pastorate!’ I knew that I no longer was either ‘adequate’ or ‘worthy’ to be a pastor! I had (tragically) lost my ‘vision’ for any further ‘church growth’. I no longer had the energy or the ‘creativity’ to produce new sermons, or to reach out to present the Gospel to the lost and dying souls (as I had done for many previous years during my pastoral ministry)!

I was disappointed with the ‘direction’ my church ‘official board’ had taken (regarding the building program which had brought exhaustion to so many in our church, including me). I was ‘shocked’ when the City of Ft. Collins ‘socked’ our church with an expensive ‘bill’ for property improvements (stricter standards based on our use of the church for a Christian School).

In addition to all my other 'concerns' (worries), I wondered how our relatively small church would be able to 'come up with' another large amount of money for the city-imposed improvements. I was in the 'beginning' of my 1000 day 'depression episode' and my mind was 'befuddled' and my 'emotions' were 'strung out' and my 'inner spirit' was distressed!

At this time (in my personal life, and in the life of my long-term pastorate), I was deeply 'distraught', I was deeply 'discouraged', I was deeply 'despondent', I was deeply 'depressed'. In fact, whether many recognized it or not, I was very 'ill' (mentally, socially, physically, and spiritually).I

To be 'frank', I was in a 'pathetic mess', in almost every way! I was 'frightened' when I considered how very 'ill' I was, and, yet, I didn't know what to do! There were 'times' when I was in 'denial' (concerning the seriousness of my 'condition'), but usually I personally acknowledged that I was in a 'pit' - a dark 'pit' of depression, a 'pit' I did not know how to get out of! Frankly-speaking, I was a 'big mess'! I had entered the 'dark tunnel' of depression (a few months, previously, January 1992), and, to be honest, I must openly confess that I was very 'miserable' in my inner 'self'!

After the building committee spent several unproductive and 'exhausting' years seeking for a 'solution' to the needs of facility expansion, our church building committee finally 'found an answer' to having a larger facility! The building committee (approved by the church official board) chose to purchase another, much larger, older church building - instead of building a new structure, as had been planned for several previous years.

As a result of this decision (to relocate rather than to build), and as a result of several other church and personal issues which were 'troubling' to me, I found myself becoming engulfed in a state of 'depression' - ironically at the very time that our congregation was so happy with the relocation to a

'fine building'! While I was 'wallowing in the pit of depression', the congregation was feeling jubilation because of the success of the building program!

A 'success', however, which came at the 'expense' of many exhausting years of desperate searching for the answer to church expansion! I was personally exhausted, as a result of my failure to deal adequately with several issues, and the trouble surrounding the building committee was one of those 'anxiety-causing' issues.

As I reflect back on my 'dark days' (caused by several unresolved issues), I now know that it was a mistake for me (as pastor) to ever be an active member of the church building committee. I do not have the gift of administration (as my wife has), and, therefore, it was a source of frustration for me to 'sit in' on long building committee meetings. (On the other hand, my wife's gift of administration fitted her well for her presence on this committee; she loved this involvement)!

When I (as leader) should have been 'rejoicing' (with my people), I was 'down in the dumps'! How very pathetic, and how very unlike a 'leader'! Obviously, I 'failed' the congregation (the precious folks that had been so supportive of me for decades), and my continuing state of depression (that I fought long and hard to 'rid myself of', unsuccessfully), rightly, forfeited my 'right' to be the pastor of this loving congregation! My congregation was 'tolerant' towards me, but, objectively-speaking, my job as pastor should have been terminated long before it actually was terminated (July 1, 1994).

Not very long after the time that I was wonderfully healed (restored to health), I wrote the following account of that difficult 'chapter of my life'. The following is that accounting (with some editing).

I have known firsthand (not theoretically) what deep and dark and dreadful depression feels like. After enjoying nearly a quarter of a century of fruitful ministry as a pastor of a growing

local church, I found myself entrapped in a "downward spiral" of horrible depression - a depression that gradually became so intense and so debilitating that I was "forced" to leave the pulpit of the church where I was pastor for so long.

No words can be found to describe the terror and the horror of this "dark night of my soul" (which, since I have wonderfully recovered from it, I call "my valley of learning"). I had often, in scores of sermons, casually used the word "Depression", but little did I know experientially what such a devastating experience entailed.

After going through this dark valley of depression (call it a "nervous breakdown" if you wish), I was eventually able to gather my thoughts sufficiently into an objective framework in such a way that I was able to reflect and to record in my journal eight different and identifiable causes (or sources) of my deep stress which eventually led to my extended "living nightmare."

I experienced most of the symptoms and manifestations of clinical depression over at least a three year period of time (while most of this time I continued to at least "go through the motions of pastoral ministry"). During the last four decades, during which time I had sincerely sought wholeheartedly to follow Christ, I had gone through many "valleys of learning", but I had never experienced the kind or the intensity or the long duration of pain which I experienced during the three years of moderate to deep depression in the middle of my third decade of pastoral ministry!

The typical consequences of depression - compulsive thinking, sleepless nights, fear, worry, social alienation, guilt, loss of wholesome self-love, indecisiveness, hopelessness (despair and desire to die) and spiritual agony (doubt and difficulty in praying and in reading the Bible) - these terrible realities I knew for too long of a time in my life!

It is a great exaggeration, of course, but someone called 'depression' a 'living hell'! I don't want to minimize the suffering that other persons suffer, but I must say that 'depression' (to me) was, by far, the greatest pain that I have ever endured!

I know that I was, by my own wrong decisions (some non-Christian attitudes towards fellow believers), the main 'cause' of my own problem, and, recognizing that fact, simply amplified my feelings of depression for me.

I wondered (during the time I was engulfed in the darkness of that long tunnel of depression), if I would ever be able to leave the 'darkness' of that horrible and agonizing 'tunnel' experience! Every day of the 1000 day journey through that dark 'tunnel' was drudgery and agony for me, days that were dark and despairing and fear-wrought!

I cried out to my dear Heavenly Father for deliverance, time and time again, day after day, but I could not seem to find much relief from my mental anguish and my emotional disruption!

My wife was tenacious and she was enduring and (as difficult as it was) she was very patient with me! She wanted to help me (and she arranged several appointments for us to see 'professionals' in various places - even out of town, like Seattle and Southern California) in hopes that we would finally discover the 'right professional person' who could give us the needed 'formula' for my deliverance and for my healing.

None of them seemed to help, but finally (after nearly 3 years in my depressed 'state'), a psychiatrist in our own city prescribed a new medicine - a 'miracle medicine' that brought almost immediate healing to my mental functions. Miraculously, after taking that particular medication, I soon 'came out of the tunnel of depression'!

Words could not be found (at that time, so long ago) to describe my relief and my joy, as a result of my finding new

health in my mind and body - health that had eluded me for so many months (30 long months)!

That experience of depression can only be described as 'the night of my soul'! Emotionally, psychologically, mentally, spiritually and even physically - my entire 'being' was 'challenged' by the depression. God was the 'healer' of this dreadful condition (directly through prayer, and indirectly through proper medication).

Clinical (chemical) depression, of course, calls for the use of proper chemicals (medications) to reinforce the body and to bring the mind back into the 'right balance'! The 'dynamics of the body and the mind' are, of course, beyond my very limited understanding, but, whatever were the causes of my healing, I am grateful!

I am grateful for the 'direct touch' of God, and I am, likewise, grateful for the proper medication which God led us to! Of course, Venita and I know that the power of prayer was also operative in the process of my healing!

During the depth of the depression, I felt that there were so few who understood what I was feeling and experiencing! I wondered if I would ever get through this long and dark tunnel! Physically, I was so weak (with little ability to relax and to sleep); mentally, I was so confused and troubled; emotionally, I was so ambivalent with intense anger mixed with cold indifference; socially, I was so lonely because of my inability to 'connect' and to 'bond' with my peers and associates and parishioners; spiritually, I was so desperate, plagued with a sense of both founded (real) and unfounded (false) guilt.

God was faithful to me and my dear wife and family, and a host of committed friends never "gave up on me." They continued to listen, to call, to pray, to express their love through words and letters and hugs. I continued, through this extended "night of my soul", to believe in God, to pray, to read the Bible, and to open my ears to godly counselors.

Through the faith of my family (especially the faith of my godly wife), and by the competent medical and psychiatric care of loving doctors - combined with the direct and miraculous intervention of God - I was able finally to welcome the "bright dawn" of wholeness and health and mental balance again into my life.

I found wonderful victory through Christ for which I had longed for so long! The joy of the Lord was once again restored unto me. The peace of Christ which passes understanding swept into my soul again! The love of God again was shed abroad in my heart through the Holy Spirit!

A thrilling sense of hope replaced my feelings of despair and despondency, and my deep discouragement was replaced by courage and faith and God-imparted encouragement. Fellowship with God's people was deepened and broadened. The healing (deliverance) for which I had long desired - this wonderful healing was given to me by the 'Great Doctor' of my sick soul! God lifted me out of the 'pit of depression'. Words cannot be found to express my gratitude and praise to my wonderful Lord and Friend! May God enable me to remain whole and healthy in my soul, and loving in my relationships (free from all bitterness and resentment and anger). Forgive all as I am forgiven!

LONELINESS DEEPENS AND THE TEARS KEEP FLOWING!

After my 'forced retirement' (a dismissal from the pastorate that was actually overdue), I chose (the very first Sunday, after I left 'my' church) to attend a rather large, well - known Church. A much larger church than the church where I was pastor for over 25 years, I found the preaching and the music and the 'general tenor' of that church to be inspiring, and instrumental for my spiritual growth. The messages of (in my opinion) were 'second to none'. I was impressed with the pastor's insights into the scriptures. I missed very few Sundays, for a period of about 12 years during that time the minister completed his long-term pastorate of over 20 years! I knew

that the wife of this pastor had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, several years before we met the pastor.

This outstanding lady (in spite of her medical challenges) remained active in the church, and she was a 'favorite' of many persons. She had the gift of 'hospitality', and this gift was 'put to use' many times, as reflected in her many company meals, hosted in her home.

This minister's wife was a faithful companion to her beloved husband, but she lived with her disease for many years. With the full support of her 'able' husband, she received multiple 'treatments' and some extensive surgeries, all in an attempt to 'curb' this debilitating disease.

This 'crippling' disease was reason enough for the shedding of many 'tears', but the greatest cause for tears came on one dreadful day (in 2011) when the minister's wife (challenged by her unsteady walking) fell in her house! It was a 'hard fall'! She hit her head, and she never regained consciousness. In a few days, she left this earthly 'stage of action'! Words cannot be found to describe the 'devastation' that her long-time, supportive husband felt on that 'dreadful day' of her death!

Even though this minister, obviously, did not know that she would die from a 'fall' (rather than as a direct result from her disease), she, at some point in her conversation with her husband, asked her husband to 'briefly share the plan of salvation', rather than to give a typical eulogy about her, whenever the time would come for her departure from this earthly existence. A unique request, but a request that her devoted husband fulfilled during the memorial service for his wife. Even though he was, of course, filled with sorrow, he, indeed, did present the plan of salvation (expertly and clearly and simply), at his wife's memorial service.

Even though I had long admired and appreciated this minister, , admittedly, I never experienced a 'close' relationship with him. We showed mutual respect for one another, and we exchanged a few notes (by mail) with each other. He knew that I

loved him, and that I highly esteemed him. He is highly educated, he is the 'scholar-type' minister, although his sermons were understandable and interesting and relevant.

Most persons (in the congregation) considered him to be an 'excellent preacher', a 'rare expositor' of the Bible. To be honest, I sometimes felt 'intimidated' around him, but I always esteemed him as a 'godly man'. I knew that he was rather 'introverted' (quiet and contemplative). I sensed that he probably preferred to be closed up in his office, with lots of books surrounding him, rather than to be often in 'social company'. In contrast, his wife was quite 'extroverted' and 'outgoing' among the hundreds of folks in the church. This 'husband and wife' ministry couple together was a 'great team' in the church and in the community!

It has been nearly two years (at the time of this writing) since the pastor's wife died. I knew that this wonderful man was still grief-stricken from the loss of his wife. How could he 'go on' in life without his wife, whom he loved deeply and in whom he 'confided' for so very much?

Recently (less than 2 years since his wife's sudden death), on a parking lot, I 'happened upon' my beloved and highly-esteemed pastor. He was walking away from the grocery store, at the same time that I was walking toward the grocery store. I think both of us were surprised to see the other person.

My pastor quickly thanked me for a communication that I had recently mailed to him (a note of thanksgiving to God for a personal healing in my life). Instead of my responding to his 'thanks' for my mailed note, I immediately asked him how he was 'getting along'. What I saw and what I heard next (i.e., how the pastor responded to my simple question), surprised me. With 'tears' flowing down his cheeks (a rare 'observation' for me), my godly pastor said that he was so 'lonely'!

Then my pastor said something that caught me by 'surprise'! He said to me (with great openness and transparency): "I just want to leave! I just want God to take me home!" I had heard hundreds of sermons by this esteemed leader and pastor. I was rather taken 'aback' by this pastor's response to my question, by his 'plea to God' to take him 'home' soon to heaven!

Obviously, this esteemed pastor (my own long-time pastor) was a 'broken and a grief-stricken' man, a man (at his own admission) who was very 'lonely' - a man who was desperately missing his life-time partner and companion!

I struggled to find words to respond to my pastor and friend. His 'despairing feelings' regarding the importance of his continuing his life on this earth. What he was saying (as I understood him) is that his life, without his wife, did not seem at times 'worth living'! His loving wife was an integral part of his life, and he was having a hard time getting along in life without her sweet presence! Of course, when one is 'full of grief' his/her 'vision for the future' is terribly 'clouded', is not 'realistic'.

When healing finally comes to one's broken heart, then vision is restored, then one begins again to embrace his future! I realized that my pastor was 'not himself' when he briefly expressed himself to me, on the parking lot on that particular day.

I was 'scrambling' in my mind, as to how I should respond to my pastor's despairing statements. I wanted to affirm him, so I simply said: "Pastor, you have touched thousands of lives during these last many years. I believe God has a wonderful, continuing ministry for you in the future!"

Unlike his 'normal responses', when he is in the company of others, this pastor/friend was unusually affectionate to me. Unlike his usual responses, my long-time pastor, with great 'ease', gave me two or three large hugs, during my brief time with him! A broken-hearted, grief-stricken man, this esteemed

pastor (pastor to thousands of persons) was seeking a 'new peace and direction for his life'!

Tears are no strangers to anyone - including esteemed and well-known pastors! I am confident the 'day' will arrive when my dear pastor will experience the 'deep healing' which only the blessed Comforter (Holy Spirit) can give!

One of the few sermons that this (now retired) pastor preached (in his former church) was a fascinating sermon on the subject of 'Tears'! Is it any wonder that my pastor chose this topic for that 'rare Sunday' when he preached? I had listened intently to hundreds of his well-prepared sermons, during the dozen years that I attended 'his' church (while he still was the pastor), and almost every sermon that he preached was a 'home run'!

This particular message was a sermon that was 'special', a sermon that was prepared in the 'context' of the pastor's own 'heartache' (deep sorrow). Prepared from his 'head', of course, but prepared more from his own 'heart' (from a broken heart). I suppose, out of a need to maintain his own 'dignity', and his own emotional 'composure', the pastor never (in the sermon) referred to himself (as an illustration).

His 'unique' message was framed around the life of Joseph (in the Old Testament). In the message, he focused on the several occasions in which Joseph found himself 'weeping'. He said that, in spite of all the times that he had read about Joseph and had preached about Joseph, he had never realized, before this time, that Joseph had wept so often!

From this study of Joseph, Pastor Jim said that it was affirmed to him that weeping is not 'wrong', that weeping is a normal part of life. I think, by implication, that the pastor was communicating that 'weeping is a normal part of the healing process'! He was communicating (through this 'unique sermon') that 'tears' were approved by God, and that, therefore, no one should ever be ashamed of shedding 'tears'!

EXPERIENCING 'TEARS OF REPENTANCE'!

When is it 'good' (proper and beneficial) to shed 'tears'? The Bible declares that the most important 'tears' that human beings can shed, are the 'tears of repentance'! The Bible says that 'godly sorrow works repentance'. The 'tears of repentance' express the kind of sorrow that leads to forgiveness and to personal salvation!

When God awakens a sinner to the reality of his sin, and to the seriousness of his lost condition, the 'proper' response to that disconcerting 'vision' of himself and of his sinful condition is a deep sorrow - issuing forth in tears of repentance and of utterances of confession!

For a sinner to see what 'sin' is (namely, rebellion against God's holy laws), and for a sinner to see what the deserved 'penalty' for sin is (eternal death), there will be an inner 'fear', and an inner 'humility of heart', and an inner 'contrition of spirit', and a 'release of tears'! Godly sorrow (the evidence of genuine repentance) results in God's forgiveness, in God's reconciliation with the sinner!

The Bible talks about another type of sorrow (a sorrow that probably is also accompanied with tears). The Bible calls this type of 'sorrow', a 'worldly sorrow'! The Bible says that this type of 'sorrow' leads to 'death'! I have often asked myself why this type of 'sorrow' leads, not to 'life', but to 'death'. Whatever may be the 'full explanation', I am sure of one thing: 'Worldly sorrow' (unlike 'godly sorrow') does not lead one to 'repentance' (that is, it does not lead one to a turning away from a life of sinning)!

The man of the world (i.e., the rebellious person) may sometimes 'shed tears', but his 'tears' are 'tears of regret' or 'tears of remorse' or 'tears of anger', or possibly even 'sentimental tears' associated with 'religious observance'.

Persons (sinners) who accept the 'awakening ministry' of the Holy Spirit are those who, at first, are filled with 'regrets' and 'remorse'. Such persons (sinners) have 'regrets' that they (years before in their lives) chose the way of the 'flesh' rather than the way of the 'spirit'.

They 'regret' that they have wasted so many of their years in the 'pig pen' in the 'far country', when they could have (should have) been living their last many years in the 'Father's nurturing house'. That knowledge of what 'could have been', in contrast to what has been (wicked living), gives them a sense of 'regret' (a sense of 'deep sorrow')!

The 'regrets' lead to a feeling of deep 'remorse', deep sorrow because of 'lost opportunity'! Remorse that 'life has passed them by', and that their past years were wasted years, years that were lived for the devil, rather than years that were lived for the blessed Savior!

Repentance is an all-important 'step' that one must take, if he/she is to find a vital relationship with Almighty God! Repentance is changing one's direction, from one of 'embracing sin' to one of 'embracing the righteousness of Christ'!

Repentance is a 'moral U-turn', a change from the 'way of one's flesh' (fleshly living), to the 'way of the Spirit' (holy living)! Tears of repentance, that leads one to the 'foot of the Cross', where confession, (acknowledgment) of sins, is made. "If we confess our sins, He (Christ) is able and willing to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness!" (1 John 1:9)

Repentance is the 'turn of the will' from self-centered living, to a life that is centered in God. 'Tears' that bring a person (sinner) to the 'arms of God's mercy' are 'tears' that are God-honoring and that have 'eternal significance'! The Bible indicates that sinners are to 'feel very bad' about their sins, for sins are what 'crucified the Son of God' on a cruel cross.

IS 'SIN' REALLY THAT HORRIBLE?

Even though we (modern-day) persons (sinners) were not actually present when Jesus was crucified, the sins that put Jesus on the Cross then, are the same sins that dwell in our own hearts. So, in that sense, your sins and my sins helped 'crucify' Jesus Christ! We, along with the ancient Jews and the Romans who actually crucified Jesus, are 'guilty' of killing the most pure and innocent person in the universe!

My 'jealousy' and my 'bitterness', along with the 'jealousy' and the 'bitterness' of the ancient ones, helped 'crucify' the Lord of Life, the King of kings, the innocent rabbi from Galilee! When we look (honestly) at the Cross, we should 'see' the sheer 'terror' and the great horror of Sin. It was Sin that crucified Jesus Christ - your sin and my sin, and the sin of every human who has ever lived!

HOW CAN I ADEQUATELY DEAL WITH ALL OF MY SINS?

After 'looking' at the agony of the 'Crucified One', we should have a 'greater hatred for sin' - as we personally experience sin and as we see it visibly all around us! We should want to 'forsake' sin in our own lives, and we should seek to avoid sin, at 'any cost'. When we sin, we should want quickly to confess it to our Advocate (Jesus Christ, the Righteous One), and we should ask the Spirit to give us a daily awareness of temptation, and the strength to 'turn our back' on all sin!

When we 'look' (honestly) at the Cross of Jesus, these are the appropriate responses! Also, we should be 'lost in wonder, love, and praise' because we serve a God who loved us so deeply that He was willing to give Himself as a 'substitute' (sacrifice) for our sins. "Greater love can no man have, than a man (Jesus) should lay down His life for His friends (and for His enemies)!"

According to the Bible (the book of James), when we look at that 'old rugged cross', we should 'weep and wail' because of

our sins! A deep 'regret' and 'remorse' and 'repentance' because of the way we have been living (i.e., a rebellious life of disobedience against God's holy laws, and a life that has 'broken the heart of God')!

'Sin' is both a violation against the laws of God and a violation against the love of God! When we break the laws of God, that is tragic enough, but, worst of all, sin breaks the heart of God - the greatest tragedy of all! We human beings are created to enjoy an ever deepening love relationship with our Creator, but (tragically) sin destroys that love relationship with God - the very relationship which gives meaning to one's life and which realizes the very purpose for which humans are created!

Godly sorrow first, and then grateful trust! 'Turning from sin', repentance, and then quickly turning towards the Savior (faith). Repentance and Faith take place almost simultaneously. Not quite, for repentance is what quickly leads to faith.

When I am heart sick, sorrowful regarding my sin, I turn from my sinful lifestyle. Almost immediately, after I make the 'moral U-turn' (repentance), I turn (in trust and in faith and in commitment) to the 'Living Savior'.

The purpose of repentance is not simply to 'turn away' from a godless lifestyle, but the act of repentance is meant (naturally) to lead me quickly and decisively to the only One who can 'save' me.

Repentance without surrender to the Savior is, of course, incomplete. The two steps must work 'hand in hand' if a sinner is to experience the 'forgiveness of sins'. Only Christ can forgive me of my sins, and it is only as I 'turn to Him' for that needed forgiveness will I actually 'step into a new life' (a life of regeneration and reconciliation and justification)!

I must 'weep and howl' because of my wretched life, and I must allow my weeping to carry me to the 'foot of the Cross' where I confess all my sins to the 'forgiving Savior'.

When I do these 'acts', I am meeting the 'conditions' that bring me a wonderful 'new life'. "If anyone be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creation; the old life has passed away, and, behold, all things are become new!"

Simply stated, 'repentance' and 'faith' are the two all-important (non-negotiable) 'steps' that must be taken, if a person (sinner) is to 'enter the kingdom of God' (to become 'born again', to become a 'true Christian')! "Could my tears forever flow, Thou must save and Thou alone!" Tears that don't lead one to Christ are needless tears! Tears are precious and valuable only if they lead a sinner to confess his sins to the Savior! The 'tears' of repentance (godly sorrow) are the most important 'tears' that can ever be shed!

HAVE YOUR CHEEKS BEEN 'WET' WITH THE TEARS OF GREAT SORROWS?

Following the 'tears of repentance' (the most important 'tears'), a believer will shed many other types of tears, throughout his long life. Even the believer, who seldom reveals 'tears' on his 'cheeks', will, at times of loss and grief in his life, shed many 'inward tears'. In the 'rough and tumble' of life, which inevitably renders many kinds of losses and sorrows to everyone, the 'inner reservoir of tears' will sometimes overflow!

If the tears do not 'flow down our cheeks', they surely will 'flow down our heart'! No one (saint or sinner) can get through this life without knowing, to one degree or another, the 'sharp pangs of sorrow and loss'! No one in this 'fallen world' is immune to 'heart-shattering' loss, of one kind or another, to one degree or another. That is just the way it is, as long as we live on this planet!

Jesus said that it 'rains on the just and on the unjust!' Jesus was, Himself, a 'man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief'. There was no human being (and Jesus was fully human, as well as fully divine), I say, there was no one on this planet who suf-

ferred more than Jesus Christ. Therefore, He understands our sorrows, and He sees our 'tears'. He is the 'sympathizing Christ'!

DOES JESUS UNDERSTAND THE 'HEARTBREAK OF MY LIFE'?

There is no sorrow that you 'feel', but what Jesus also 'feels' that pain with you! For every loss (tragedy) that you experience on earth (i.e., the tragedies that defy reason, the losses that have come to you as the result of another's unjust treatment of you) - I say, there are no losses that you experience but what God will (in eternity) 'compensate' you.

God will never be 'in debt' to any of His children. Eventually, and wonderfully, Jesus will 'make it up to you'. In eternity, God will 'redress' all of your 'losses' on earth.

Because God is a 'perfectly just' God, He will see to it that all unjust treatment (on earth) will be vindicated (in eternity). God loves you with an everlasting love, and that love will be demonstrated (applied) in ways that are most wonderful (complete) in eternity. Suffering that seems senseless here on earth, will (in God's own timing) be explained in eternity.

It is God's will that we 'use' all suffering while we live on this planet (even though some of the suffering seems senseless and unnecessary), and 'by and by' in eternity God will give a complete and understandable 'reason' for the suffering.

CHRIST'S PROMISED 'VICTORY' OVER ALL 'EVIL' AND 'SUFFERING'!

There is no one who 'hates' suffering more than Jesus Christ, and He will totally eliminate all suffering in eternity. But, because everyone (including Christians) are presently living on a planet that is terribly affected by the original 'fall' of mankind, everyone must (temporarily) 'endure' the suffering (of many

kinds) that is the direct result of that 'fall'. Christ came to 'destroy' sin, suffering, death, and the devil.

The victory over these 'enemies' has been guaranteed by God, because of the 'finished work' of Christ on the Cross, but the 'guaranteed' victory (because of Christ's 'It Is Finished') won't be 'sealed' (totally manifest) until Christ return to this 'redeemed planet'.

In the meantime, the Holy Spirit has been given as a gift from God, in order that the 'victory' over sin (in this present world) can become a reality in the hearts and lives of all human beings (sinners). "Sin abounds (in this fallen world), but grace super abounds" (in this fallen world, all because of the 'finished work' of Christ).

When Jesus said (on His cross), "It is finished", He meant that the 'wicked one' (Satan) had been defeated. His evil work will continue for a while, but his destiny (in the 'lake of fire') is sure and certain!

When Jesus died that day, Jesus signed the 'death warrant' for Satan. He is a 'defeated foe', all because of Jesus' sacrifice for sin. No person need, any longer, be his 'slave of sin'! Jesus, by his death and resurrection, was able to declare Satan's day of 'execution'!

While Satan is still 'on the loose', doing great damage to the 'sons of men', it may seem that Satan is not defeated, but, nevertheless, the devil has totally lost, and Christ has totally won.

It is simply a 'matter of time' until the total defeat of Satan will be manifest, and when the total victory of Christ will be revealed and consummated! Christ has 'said' it, and that 'settles' it! No debate! Christ meant what He said (from the Cross): "It Is finished!" Not, 'will be finished!' "It Is Finished!" Christ can do no more than what He has already done - the

‘innocent’ one dying for the ‘guilty ones’! Christ will make a complete elimination of sin, suffering, death, and the devil.

The victory has been ‘purchased’ decisively by the ‘Great Conqueror’ - the Lord Jesus Christ! All things, in heaven and on earth, have been placed under Christ’s feet! Satan is a ‘defeated foe’, and some wonderful day Satan will be a ‘destroyed foe’!

No more will Satan be able to ‘take out his bitterness’ against mankind! By ‘right’ of creation, and by ‘right’ of Christ’s redemption, the human race belongs alone to Christ! Christ is in the process of ‘claiming’ what rightfully belongs to Him.

The ‘plan of salvation’, when willingly accepted by humans, means forgiveness from sins, cleansing from ‘heart pollution’, reconciliation of all relationships, strength for living abundantly, renewal and healing to the body on earth, and final redemption of the body in eternity! Jesus’ sinless life, Jesus’ sacrificial death, Jesus’ victorious bodily resurrection, and Jesus’ glorious ascension - these facts regarding Jesus spell ‘total victory’ over sin, suffering, death, and the devil!

Sin can be forgiven; suffering can become redemptive here on earth, with the promise of an eventual ‘new body’ in eternity, death becomes the open door into Christ’s nearer presence, and the devil will meet his final destiny in the ‘lake of fire’! All of the believer’s ‘enemies’ (sin, suffering, death, and devil) will be destroyed, in God’s own way, and in God’s own time! “What a Friend we have in Jesus!”

FACING THE ‘WAVES OF ADVERSITY’!

Man is ‘born for adversity’, and adversity brings forth a ‘river of tears’! Jesus, Himself, wept when He saw the covered cave that contained the dead body of His dear friend, Lazarus! When He realized (predicted) the coming destruction of His beloved city, Jerusalem, (that destruction the result of His unrepentant Jewish brethren), Jesus’ heart broke! Jesus wept! Jesus’ sor-

row was heard in those pitiable words: "O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered you to myself, like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not!"

Weeping over unrepentant sinners! Those are tears of regret that someone we know refuses to 'take the way with Christ', sorrow that they have (like Jerusalem) refused to come under the 'wings' of the blessed Savior!

Jesus wept because of the impending doom of Jerusalem! It was only a few years, after Jesus' prediction, that Jerusalem was destroyed (in A.D. 70)! If you are a 'believer', you probably (along with me) have shed some 'tears' because you realize that your unsaved friends and your unsaved relatives are facing 'impending doom' (spiritual destruction) as a result of their refusal of God's overtures of love, because of their rejection of God's offer of repentance and faith which lead to salvation.

'Tears', because of God's impending judgment that comes to unresponsive sinners! These 'tears' can be 'bitter tears'! Tears can stream down one's cheeks, because a believer is heartbroken that a loved one has rejected the Spirit's call to repentance and faith! Loved ones who are determined to have their own 'will' rather than God's good 'will' - what hurt and sorrow and fear this can cause the onlooker who is a Christian!

TERROR OF REJECTING GOD'S 'CALL TO REPENTANCE'!

There are those who, because God has often approached them with the offers of forgiveness, are now so angry against God, that they show terrifying 'tears of anger'! It is not a 'light and trivial thing' for a person to 'hold out on God', year in and year out!

God is patient and God is forbearing with sinners, but it is (frighteningly) possible for a recalcitrant sinner (who continues to 'harden his heart' against God's overtures of love and against God's offer of forgiveness), 'to sin away his day of

grace'! Hopefully, this sad set of circumstances does not often happen, but the sinner who continues to 'harden his heart' is ultimately 'courting the wrath and the judgment of Almighty God!'

It is dangerous for anyone to 'take the grace of God for granted'! "God is not willing that anyone should perish, but that everyone should come to repentance." That signals God's intention for every human being. Hell was not made for humans. It was made for the devil and his demons. God definitely does not 'will' that anyone should perish eternally! God loves all persons. Jesus died for all persons.

God wants everyone to accept His offer of salvation (made possible through Christ's death). Everyone is called to repentance. Everyone is 'savable' (i.e., capable of being saved). The Holy Spirit calls all persons to repentance. God has a place prepared in heaven for every person, and God, through the Holy Spirit, is seeking to get everyone prepared for that prepared place in heaven. The 'gift' of repentance and the 'gift' of saving faith are offered to every person (because of God's special 'initiating grace' - called 'prevenient grace').

Every person (of all times) has received the 'light of truth' in one form or another (either general revelation or particular revelation), and each person has received 'sufficient light' of truth to enable him/her to make a commitment to God, sufficient grace from a loving God to give every person a 'passport' to heaven!

IT IS GOD'S DESIRE THAT ALL PERSONS REPENT AND GO TO HEAVEN!

Why should I briefly 'outline' these 'statements of truth' (basic doctrines of Christian conviction)? Simply to 'declare' that God has made His intention abundantly 'clear' and God has openly offered His 'gifts' to everyone. No one has any 'excuse' to be 'in the dark' regarding the 'will' of God for the human race.

All persons (sinners) can be saved! None need perish! Where sin abounds, grace super abounds! Whosoever will may be saved! What more can Jesus (who gave His total 'self' to save mankind), I say, what more can Jesus do, other than what He has already done?

If a person (sinner) is lost eternally (in hell), it will not be the fault of the triune God! If someone decides to exercise his 'will' (choice) negatively, in rejection of the 'greatest offer in the universe', he will go to 'hell' where he will have all of eternity to reflect on his 'horrible decision' (to reject the 'Lover of his soul')!

Greater tragedy there cannot be, than the tragedy of saying 'No' to the Savior of the World! It is a 'terrifying description' - a 'description' that should 'capture' the attention of every human being! I am sure that Jesus spoke these words, with deep sorrow in His heart, and maybe even with 'quivering lips'.

Jesus said that in 'hell', the lost ones are 'weeping and wailing, and gnashing their teeth'! The 'weeping' in hell is so horrible that it cannot even be 'compared' with the weeping that is experienced anywhere here on earth! The 'weeping' of regrets! The 'weeping' of suffering! The 'weeping' because of 'lost opportunities'. The 'weeping' because of the realization that there is no chance to be near to the One for whom you are made. The 'weeping' because of 'lostness' or of 'loneliness'. The 'weeping' because of a barren life, lived on earth.

The weeping because of 'sheer horror', or the 'ugliness' of the atmosphere of 'hell'. The weeping because of one's separation from his loved ones and his friends. The weeping because of the 'fellow sufferers' around one, none of whom are capable of offering 'comfort' to you.

ACCEPTING GOD'S 'GIFT OF LIFE' IN THE 'ABUNDANT CHRIST'!

"Weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth" - a description of both sorrow and of suffering! God does not desire that anyone should perish, that anyone should have to endure the 'pangs of hell', that anyone should ever have to shed tears in a most horrible place - a place not prepared for humans, but for the devil. "Prepare to meet thy God" - to 'meet thy God' in peace, because of the 'forgiveness of sins' made possible by the agonizing death of Jesus on that cruel cross!

Jesus 'paid it all' (the price of redemption), so it is imperative that you and I accept the 'purchase price' for our redemption. A 'free gift' of forgiveness, but you and I must, nevertheless, accept that gift! "To all who accept that gift, God gives the privilege of being called sons/daughters of God!" So freely offered, but will you humbly accept that 'costly purchased gift'?

It cost Jesus His death (a terrifying death on a cross) - the purchased gift cost Him everything! A gift freely offered to you! Yes, free, because you could not 'purchase' the gift, you could not 'earn' the gift, you could not 'deserve' the gift!

While you cannot purchase or earn or deserve the gift (since the gift comes from the 'graceful hand' of God), on the other hand, if you accept the gift (by repentance and by trust in Christ), you become a 'child of God', and there are certain obligations that you must accept if you are a 'child of God'. You must learn to obey your 'Father'.

You must learn to love your fellow brothers and sisters. You must, as a child, forgive your fellow brothers and sisters if (when) they offend you. You must learn to live a 'Spirit-filled life', with the 'fruits of the Spirit' increasingly evident in your life. You must accept persecution, in many forms, for the sake of the Gospel, and you must learn to 'return good for evil' when you confront persecution.

WHY ARE 'GOOD WORKS' IMPORTANT TO GOD?

It is true that 'Jesus paid it all'! It is true that salvation is the product of God's unmerited favor (grace), but it is also true that persons 'saved by grace, through faith' are the same believers who are 'created to do good works'. We are 'saved by grace, through faith, for good works'. Works, of course, do not give us entrance into the 'family of God', but 'saved persons' are persons who are 'eager to do good works' - the works of love and service to our fellow men!

Those persons who are 'caught in the web of God's love' (that is, those persons who are 'born of the Spirit') are 'on tiptoe with joy', and their 'hands are equipped to do good works'. Not out of compulsion, but out of deep desire to love their fellow men, all because they are now 'in love' with their newly-found Heavenly Father. New motivation to worship the Father, and to love their newly found 'brothers and sisters' in the great 'family of God'! These 'twice-born' folks gladly sing: "Were the whole realm of Nature mine that were a present far too small; Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all!"

This book ("Let My Tears Flow") will, obviously, center on several 'situations' that brought 'tears' to the persons themselves who were 'attacked' by life's 'adversities', but this book will also 'center' on those 'sad situations' that I or others observed, but which I or others did not personally participate in. Whether I was the personal recipient of a kind of suffering, or whether I happened to be the observer (alongside) of the sufferer, adversity was 'real', and it took its 'toll'.

SHOULD I EXPECT BOTH 'SUNSHINE' AND 'RAIN' IN MY LIFE?

As believers, we are taught to look for 'choice fruit' while we are 'living in the valley of adversity', that is, we as believers are to allow God to bring about some kind of 'good' (benefit) as a result of the adversity that we are enduring.

James (in the New Testament) says that we are 'to count it all joy when we experience trials of many kinds', for these trials enable us, through the imparted wisdom from God, to grow in our Christian life - to become more mature in our 'journey of life'.

No one should deliberately 'invite' trials to come into his life, but, on the other hand, we need to remember that, as much as we 'hate' the trials and the temptations and the tests that come into our life, it is during the difficult times that we can 'learn the most' and that we can 'grow the greatest'. Again, remember, it is in the 'valley' (the rich soil of adversity) where the 'lush fruit' (of the Spirit) best grows. On the 'mountain top' (of 'airy happiness') there are a lot of 'bare rocks' and 'little fruit'!

The top of the mountain is a place where it is 'fun' to be, but, nevertheless, it is a place where little 'fruit' can be grown. God will allow us to enjoy many mountaintop 'experiences'. It is acceptable to God if we 'relish' those 'mountaintop' experiences (when, in our lives, all seems to be 'perfect' in terms of prosperous circumstances).

God expects us to be 'thankful' for the 'happy times', the 'times' when we seem to be 'free' from life's 'aches and pains'. But during those times, when we are enjoying the 'warm sunshine' of life's enjoyments and pleasures, with no 'storm clouds' in view, we must remember that God is the One who is 'sovereign' of all 'events' of our lives. He is the One who, according to His 'mysterious ways', allows (and sometimes directly 'sends') both 'sunshine' and 'rain' into our lives. He knows the 'proper' (needed) 'blend' for each of us. He knows how much 'sunshine' we need, and He knows how much 'rain' we need in our lives - and both are for the purpose of maximizing our total growth (mentally and spiritually, etc.). Jesus, who made each of us, is the 'Master of Life'. He knows each of us perfectly. God knows everything there is to know about each of us. God, who knows us best, loves us best!

The Bible says (regarding the temptations that each of us faces), that He stands 'guard' over us when we have to 'suffer being tempted'. Why does Jesus (God in human form) understand? Because Jesus was tempted in all the ways that we are tempted, and yet (of course) Jesus never once sinned. Jesus knows and He understands and He cares for each of us.

DOES GOD HONOR THE EXERCISE OF MY 'FREE WILL' IN MY DECISION?

The Bible says that God 'knows our ways afar off'. He honors our 'free will', and, therefore, He will not 'force' His will on us. Without knowing (absolutely) the decisions we will make (in our future), God allows the 'honest decision-making process' to operate. He, nevertheless, knows what LIKELY OPTION we will choose.

It is true (as one views God's reactions to our own personal decisions, or to national decisions, recorded in the Old Testament), I say, it is true that even God (at times) was 'shocked' when a person (and particularly the nation of Israel) made certain decisions (against God's will).

When idolatry was chosen by Israel, rather than the worship of the true God, it is recorded that God was 'shocked', that God was even deeply 'angered'! So, when it is recorded that God 'knows our ways afar off', this is not meant to be a statement of 'divine determinism'.

God knows the options that you and I will have (in our future living), and God also knows the 'Likely Choice' that you and I will make. But God, nevertheless, allows the exercise of 'free choice'.

If God knew 'ahead of time' what choice Israel would make regarding their decision to be 'Baal worshipers', then why would God (after they made the choice of idolatry) be so 'shocked' and so 'angry'? An individual person (including the person of

God) is not 'shocked' (surprised) and he is not 'angry', if he knew ahead of time a decision that a person (or nation) will make!

It is important to 'honor' (to respect) the 'doctrine' of the 'omniscience' of God (on one hand), and the genuine exercise of man's 'free will' (on the other hand). God knows everything that it is possible to know about each one of us, but God never 'forces' His will (of goodness) upon any human being (including Christians).

God knows the 'likelihood' of our choices (that is, what we, as 'free will agents' will probably choose), but - out of respect for the dignity and for the freedom of 'free will creatures'- God Himself 'waits' upon each person to 'make his own moral decisions'!

There are many things that God (independently) chooses to do, but, when it comes to 'dealing' with human beings, God (even with all the divine influence that He exercises towards each human) must allow each human being finally to 'decide' his/her own ultimate destiny!

As Jesus wept, because of the 'wrong choice' of rebellion made by the city of Jerusalem, so Jesus still weeps when any sinner chooses to reject the 'loving invitation' to new life. Jesus still declares: "How often would I have gathered you to my intimate presence (for new life), 'as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings', but you would not!"

Even with all the 'power of influence' that resides in God Almighty, God cannot 'force' a person to come under the 'wing' of the Loving Savior! In light of all the special knowledge that Israel was privileged to possess (knowledge of the one true God), the living God thought 'for sure' that Israel would 'be true to their God' and would 'turn their back' upon all idols.

Instead, Israel (tragically) chose to worship 'Baal' (the licentious god of paganism). God allowed Israel to make her 'horrible choice'! But God (the all-knowing God), who allowed

Israel an 'honest choice', stood back with 'horror' and with 'shock' and with 'anger'!

God's 'omniscience' must always be understood in light of man's 'free will'. God (our Creator) knows us better than anyone else knows us, and God knows us better than we know ourselves! God 'knows our way afar off'.

God knows our 'uprisings and our down sittings' - our 'successes and our failures', our 'virtues and our sins!' God knows us 'altogether' - our hidden motives and our true intents and our untarnished desires!

There is nothing about us that God does not know! God made us; therefore God alone truly knows how we 'tick'! (Henry Ford knew more about the mechanics of his car than anyone else, because Henry Ford made the car!). God knows all the different 'options' (the moral options and all the amoral options) that are going to be 'presented' to us - in our present life and also in our future life.

As the all-knowing God, He knows, not only all the various options that will be presented to us, but God, of course, knows what options we will LIKELY CHOOSE. God is fully aware of all the various 'moral alternatives' that we will have presented to us (now and in the future), and God knows which 'moral alternative' we will LIKELY CHOOSE.

It is important to stress the word 'likely', for God Himself (to preserve the sanctity of the free will of man) cannot know ahead of the time what the outcome of a person's moral decision will actually be, what a human decision-maker will actually choose to do (what course of action he will choose)!

The omniscience of God must always be 'respected', alongside the sanctity of the 'free will' of man! If God knew (for certain) what choice a person would make, before the choice is actually made between moral alternatives, then there is no longer the existence of human 'free will'! There would be no such

thing as 'authentic free will', but, instead, there would simply be 'divine determinism'.

Instead of God waiting patiently and respectfully until a person exercises his 'will' to make a moral decision, if 'divine determinism' describes moral reality in our universe, then God will merely 'use' a human to carry out His determined 'will'! If it is true that 'divine determinism' truly defines moral reality in this God-created world, then so-called 'free will' would not be 'free' at all, but rather 'free will' would be a 'divine trick', a mere 'play act' (i.e. if 'divine determinism' is what defines 'reality', then God is deceiving humans into thinking that they are independently choosing between moral alternatives - when actually it is God who is using humans like a magician who pulls strings on a puppet!).

A key question to ask is this: "Does the God of this world genuinely respect the exercise of authentic 'free will' (the exercise of which either helps or hinders the cause of the Creator), or, instead of 'free will', has God designed this world such that God simply 'pulls all the strings' - a world in which God determines everything that happens, without recourse to human choices?

As in the case of ancient Israel, who chose differently than what God wanted it to choose, and differently than what God expected, it is possible for a 'free moral agent' (you and me as believers), to choose wrongly and tragically. When that happens, God will be deeply saddened, and He will be 'shocked', and possibly He will be even very 'angry'!

Offended divine love incites deep holy anger - anger because God has to stand back to watch Israel becoming ravished by its sins (idolatry, adultery, national chaos, exile and destruction). Just as Jesus wept, as He looked over unrepentant Jerusalem, and as Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70), so the ancient prophets of the Old Testament were greatly angered (sharing God's holy anger), as they pled in

vain for the wandering and heart-hardened people of Israel to return to their loving covenant relationship with Jehovah!

As Jesus was 'shocked' by the stubborn rejection of the Jews (the consequence of which would be eventual destruction of their capital of Jerusalem), so the prophets were 'shocked' (reflecting the 'shock' of Jehovah) when they observed the indifference (and mockery) of their fellow Israelites.

Just as Jesus had to 'wait' to learn of the kind of decision that His listeners would make (acceptance or rejection of the light of God), so Old Testament Prophets (reflecting the mind of God) had to wait to see what the 'outcome' would be, based on the positive or the negative decision that the Israelites would make (when the light of God's truth was presented to them).

God does not know ahead of time what the outcome of a moral decision will be. Even God (the One who is 'all-knowing') must respect the exercise of a human decision (the authentic exercise of 'free will')! Both the 'all-knowing power' of God and the authentic capacity of 'free will' must be profoundly respected. Both God and Man are called to work together, to change the world in a way that the world will better reflect the nature of the Kingdom of God!

Most sadly, I heard of a certain leader - a long-time church leader - who, in the latter years of his life-after his retirement- fell into 'sexual sin'! I believe that, surely, this well-respected leader, who long served his denomination, deeply repented of his 'great sin', before he was killed in a head-on car crash!

I feel sure that the God, whom this church leader served for so long, was 'weeping' when His servant 'fell' so miserably into the 'web of sin'! The 'web' of sexual indulgence and sensual pleasure is a deceptive web, and it is a 'web' that is hard to get out of!

God must have been 'moved to tears' and He must have been 'shocked' when He gave close attention to this 'church leader' developing an 'unwholesome relationship' with a certain woman. And God may have even 'felt' some 'anger' when He saw this illicit relationship developing! God could hardly believe what He was seeing - namely, one of His choice servants falling into the 'trap' of sexual attraction - having a secret relationship with a lady, other than his own wife, to whom he had been married for decades!

God was 'shocked', and so were every one of his family members (including, of course, his wife) - and the denominational leadership, of course, was deeply saddened and 'shocked' and, no doubt, angered by his 'immoral actions! Sadly, 'sin had found a toehold' in this leader's life, and the leader had opened the door to 'open transgression against the known laws of God' (adultery)! Tragedy of tragedies!

WHAT IS THE 'BRIDGEHEAD' FOR SIN IN YOUR OWN LIFE?

Lest any of us become 'self-righteous' in our attitude, let us remember, that all of us are capable of committing any sin, at any time. "When you think that you stand (confidently), take heed lest ye fall!" We must all 'keep our guard' against the temptations of the devil (blatant temptations or subtle temptations)!

If a 'bishop' of a denomination can 'fall headlong' into a 'terrible sin', then anyone else can also fall 'headlong' into sin. Keep the spiritual armor on at all times (Ephesians 6). Jesus said, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak!"

Satan seeks to find a 'bridgehead' (entrance) into the life of every person. We must use all the defensive weapons, but, especially, we must use the offensive weapon - the Word of God - in our battle against sin. "Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee, O God!" The Bible says that all be-

lievers are 'vulnerable' to the attacks of Satan. Never be over-confident in your spiritual battle.

All of us have a special weakness in our character. Some are 'over-sensitive' and therefore they tend to easily take 'offense' by people's comments or remarks. Some have a very 'affectionate nature', and such persons need to guard against being overly-affectionate with persons of the opposite gender. There are, obviously, numerous other 'weak and vulnerable areas' which particular persons will need to 'guard', lest these vulnerabilities become 'entrances' into 'full blown sin'!

God knows the 'way we walk', the 'people with whom we often associate', the places we often visit, the T.V. shows and movies that we watch, the music with which we entertain ourselves, the books that we read, the type of entertainment that enthralls us, the luxuries with which we indulge ourselves, the thoughts that compose our meditations!

What do you think the Bible means when it declares that every person (Christian) has a 'besetting sin'? Perhaps it means that every Christian has one particular 'sin' that has often become the occasion for 'stumbling', one sin that is hard to 'resist'!

For instance, an individual Christian may find it rather difficult to obey the commandment 'Thou shalt not covet!' Covetousness so often leads to other sins (stealing, adultery, slander, etc.) But some Christians may find that this dangerous sin is their 'besetting sin'! Some Christians tend to covet a lot of things - possessions that belong to other Christians, whether it be the personality of another, or whether it be the spiritual gifts of another, and on and on and on!

DO YOU BELIEVE IN 'DETERMINISM' OR IN 'FREE WILL'?

But, not even the all-knowing God 'determines' the option that we will choose. If He did 'determine' our options, then there would no longer be the operation of 'free will'. God made each

of us with this wonderful, and frightening capacity to 'choose' (to freely choose) between 'options' in our life. God allowed Adam and Eve (in the beginning of history) to choose.

Frankly, as God was 'shocked' when Israel chose 'idolatry' (Baal worship), instead of worship of Jehovah, I believe that God was 'shocked' when Adam and Eve chose to disobey God's command in the Garden of Eden! When we choose to do wrong, God is both 'shocked' and He is deeply saddened. Wonderfully, He makes provision for our sin (I John 1:7- 2:2)

God, in His infinite knowledge, is fully aware of all the various 'options' that are available to each person, when he must make certain decisions. The Spirit of God (without any coercion) strongly influences every person to make the 'right' decision - the decision that not only brings glory to God, but the decision that will greatly benefit the decision-maker!

God, who wants 'only the best for me', rejoices greatly when I make the right moral decision, and, God also 'weeps' greatly if (when) I choose 'wrongly' (i.e., if I yield to temptation, if I 'crumble' rather than 'trust' during a severe trial, if I 'fail' to pass a test that God gives to me, rather than prove myself 'strong' during a special 'test').

The 'sympathizing Jesus' does not abandon me when I 'fail' rather than when I 'succeed', when I 'yield' rather than when I 'resist' temptation, when I become 'bitter' rather than 'better' during a severe adversity. God had so hoped that I would be a 'victor' rather than a 'victim', and God weeps when I prove to be 'faithless' instead of 'faithful', but, God still loves me! God (through the Spirit) seeks me (to find me), He chastens me (to cleanse me), He humbles me (to restore me), He enlightens me (to guide me), He forgives me (to heal me), and so much more!

HAVE YOU HEEDED GOD'S WARNING OF ONCOMING JUDGEMENT?

Jeremiah, in the Old Testament, is called the 'weeping prophet'. God called the prophet to go to the wayward and sinning nation of Israel (God's chosen people), to warn them of impending doom and destruction. Jeremiah, who loved his Israelite brethren so very much, saw the downward spiral of his people.

The Israelites, for many decades, had been given the warnings from God, opportunity to repent and to return to the worship of the one and only true God. But, instead, God's people had chosen to forsake Jehovah and to follow after the pagan gods.

Idolatry was the 'millstone' around the neck of Israel, which eventually brought destruction to Israel (captivity in the pagan country of Babylon)! It is no wonder that Jeremiah 'wept' and 'wept'. His people (Israelites) 'turned their backs' upon Jeremiah and they persecuted him bitterly! Jeremiah watched his brethren (the brethren he greatly loved) go 'headstrong' into 'captivity', and Jeremiah knew that this long-in-coming judgment from God was because of the hardened heart of God's apostate people!

As Jeremiah carefully observed the downward spiral of sin, of his own people, Jeremiah had to 'weep'. It is important to note that the tears of Jeremiah were simply the expression of God's 'invisible tears'.

When God saw the wayward ways of Israel, the gross practices of pagan worship, the insensitivity of the Israelites to the tender voice of God's love - when God, through many decades, had been 'seeing' all of these wicked actions and attitudes of Israel, God's heart was very heavy and His eyes were 'full of tears'.

When God viewed the wicked practices of pagan religious practices, God was very 'shocked'! How could Israel, who had

received abundant 'blessings' from Jehovah (primarily, the established 'special covenant'), how could Israel become so 'unfaithful to its covenant', how could Israel (like a 'dog in heat') chase after the disgusting worship of 'Baal' (with all of its 'degrading' and 'licentious' religious practices)?

God is 'shocked' and God is 'surprised' that His own people (Israel) could forsake their 'ancient teachings' (10 Commandments, etc.) and embrace such 'evil pagan practices'! And, we can easily add to this 'sad picture', that Jesus, doubtlessly, was not only 'sad' (He wept), but that Jesus was also 'shocked' when He realized that His own people (Jews) would choose wrongly (legalism, ritualism), rather than would choose rightly (transformed life through the Messiah, who lived and who taught, among other places, in Jerusalem).

God (through Jesus) 'thought better' of the Jews, who were exposed to the truth of Jesus, during the time that Jesus traveled throughout Galilee and Judea. When Jesus 'wept' on that historic day, as He looked at the great temple in Jerusalem (and declared its immanent 'doom'), God (in heaven) was also 'weeping'.

Jesus' weeping was an 'outward and visible' revelation of the 'weeping' of God Almighty. Not only was Jesus' heart 'heavy' (grief-stricken) on that 'sad day', but the very heart of the Heavenly Father was 'very heavy'. Also, as noted, when Jeremiah was 'weeping' because he anticipated the destruction of Jerusalem (which, indeed, happened in 587 B.C.), God also was 'weeping'.

WHAT ACTIONS OF MANKIND MAKE GOD 'WEEP'?

When the Jews wrongly chose the way of legalism, and chose to reject the way of 'justification' through the 'way of Christ', Jesus was filled with sorrow (for there is no way to heaven except through the 'regenerating power' of Jesus).

When the Israelites (hundreds of years before the coming of Christ to earth) chose 'Baal' instead of 'Jehovah', not only was Jeremiah filled with sorrow (issuing forth in many 'tears'), but God, too, was filled with sorrow (issuing forth in 'tears')

Jeremiah was known as the 'weeping prophet', but we must remember that Jeremiah was simply the 'outward' instrument of the invisible God (whom Jeremiah was serving and obeying). When Israel was carried into 'Babylonian Captivity' (587 B.C.), and also when the city of Jerusalem was near to being razed to the ground, by the Romans (70 A.D.), God was the 'weeping God'.

The 'tears of God' are 'bigger' than the 'biggest tears' of the most 'grief-stricken' and 'sorrow-filled' person on earth! There is no grief but what God 'feels' it. "Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love thou art. Enter every trembling heart!"

HOW DOES GOD REACT WHEN HUMANS MAKE WRONG DECISIONS?

When the Jewish temple was first destroyed in 587 B.C., and then much later when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., God 'wept'! But I believe that God also (understandably) was filled with 'anger'.

Think of this simple illustration: When a son 'goes astray' (leaves his parents and abandons his moral standards), the reaction from a caring (godly) parent is at least threefold: (1) great sadness and grief and 'tears', (2) great shock ('how could my child, who was given so many privileges and so much Christian teaching, decide to reject his parents and decide to abandon the precious principles of Christianity?') (3) Great anger - 'I am incensed and, frankly, I am angry, that my wayward son has chosen the 'low path of evil' (immorality and selfishness), and that he is wasting valuable time that

could be spent building his life and his character and developing his talents’.

To see what he is now (careless and wild and purposeless), in contrast to what he could be just now, if only he would have made wise decisions! Says the heartbroken parent: "I am very angry, because he is not the kind of person that he was created to be! He is spending his 'resources' on 'evil endeavors' which will 'take him nowhere' in his future life! How could my son, who had so many 'advantages', waste his life, living in the pig pen?"

If humans (fathers), whose children have abandoned the 'way of righteousness', experience all three of these reactions ('tears', 'shock', 'anger'), why shouldn't God (whose emotions are perfectly integrated) also feel these three 'emotions' (and why shouldn't God express these three emotions) - when a nation today makes 'foolish' and 'selfish' decisions (like the tragic decision of the Supreme Court in 1973, to 'abort' babies)?

We love to speak about the 'love of God' (and rightly so, since God's love is the major focus in the New Testament), but we seldom mention the 'wrath of God'. God's wrath is stirred (provoked) when I choose evil rather than righteousness, when I choose dishonesty rather than integrity, when I choose unfairness rather than justice, when I choose impure thoughts rather than holy thoughts, when I harbor ulterior motives rather than sincere motives, when I choose deceptive schemes rather than transparent actions, when I choose resentment rather than forgiveness. God's wrath is stirred when I choose 'the way of evil' rather than 'the way of righteousness'!

CAN GOD BE 'SHOCKED' BY THE DECISIONS THAT I MAKE?

By the 'way' we live, do we make God 'wept' or do we make God rejoice? There is no 'being' anywhere that possesses a 'wider range of emotions', than the 'being' of Almighty God. Because God is infinite, He, of course, can feel and He can ex-

press many different emotions (such as 'joy' and 'anger') 'at the same time', that is, simultaneously!

God can express great joy because a sinner just now got 'saved', and, at the same time, God can express great 'anger' because another person has just now left the 'fold of goodness' to enter the 'fold of evil'! Not only does God have a 'large range' of emotions, but God also has the ability to express all of His emotions, according to His appropriate reaction to every single human being.

Because He is the 'perfect' God, He is able to feel perfectly with every single person (and, of course, simultaneously)! If it is 'appropriate' (just) for God to express 'shock' because of an unanticipated 'decision' by a person, then, of course, God will express 'shock' (and this response is not a 'play acting' stunt, by God; in other words, God is honestly 'shocked' because of a certain person's decision!).

The moral decision that some persons (or nations) make 'appropriately' causes God 'great sorrow' ('tears')! There are some moral decisions that provoke God's 'anger' (a redemptive anger, not a vindictive or a revengeful anger)! These emotional reactions are 'basic reactions' which all human beings experience.

If Man is made in the 'image of God', if humans (imperfectly) 'mirror' the being of God, then the fact that humans sometimes feel 'sorrow', sometimes feel 'shock', and sometimes feel 'anger', strongly suggests that God Himself expresses the same 'kinds' of emotions that humans experience.

Obviously, the God who made us humans is the God whose emotions are 'perfectly under His control', whose emotions are 'totally pure and unpolluted', and whose emotions are perfectly expressed! God reacts to persons at the right time, and with the right degree of emotional reaction, and always for redemptive purposes (i.e., for correction and for healing of 'hurting' persons).

**HOW IS GOD'S 'ANGER' EXPRESSED TOWARD ME
WHEN I SIN?**

When I take the 'low road' of sin, rather than the 'high road' of righteousness, I invoke the 'anger' of God. God's anger is not a 'vindictive' anger, not a 'resentful' anger, not a 'destructive' anger'. It is 'anger' borne out of the 'deep hurt' of God's heart. Like the illustration cited above, God is 'shocked' that I would fail to embrace all of the resources and the benefits and the advantages that God makes available to me!

The resources were available to me (during my particular trials and tests and temptations), so why did I not avail myself of those God-given 'resources' (resources that are capable of enabling me, in spite of my 'struggles', to 'overcome' my many problems, rather than to be 'overcome' by my many problems)? For instance, regarding 'temptation', the Bible tells me that, during my temptation, God 'will make for me a way of escape'!

God is with me during temptation, and He (wisely) has a specific way for me to 'escape pitfalls' of evil! God's anger, when I fail in a God-given test, is not a vindictive anger (a 'hurtful' anger), but, instead, God's anger is a 'holy anger', an 'anger' that motivates God to help me and to restore me to wholeness once again! It is the kind of 'anger' that a good parent experiences, as the parent eagerly awaits the return of his wayward child!

This divine 'anger' is borne out of the sad heart of a holy and loving God, the anger that God feels because of His knowledge of what His dear child is (tragically) experiencing because of the ravishes of sin, in 'the far country'! God is 'upset' (emotionally disturbed) when I fail morally.

God (like a good parent) knows that I should maintain my steadfast 'walk' on the 'high road' of spiritual growth and dynamic involvement with people. That I should maintain my

steadfast walk on the 'high road', that is, that I should maintain my creative involvement in God's work through the use of my 'spiritual gifting' and my particular talents.

There is never any need for me to 'waste' my life in selfish and in 'fleshly' living! God's resources are available to me, to enable me to 'stay my steadfast course' on the 'high road' of holy living.

If I leave that 'path', through my willful sinning, it is no wonder that my loving God is provoked to holy anger regarding my wrong actions! God sees what I could be (faithful), in contrast to what I have become (unfaithful, causing sin to 'ravish' me)!

As in the case of Adam and Eve, who were (tragically) devastated by sin (disobedience), so it is, likewise, true of every other person (including every Christian) - anyone can disobey God, and, thus, anyone can lose his fellowship with the Creator!

When a Christian sins, God 'weeps', God is 'shocked', God is 'angry'! God is angry because He well knows how devastating (ruinous) sin can be, in the life of the one who sins, as well as in the lives of persons around the sinning person! God hates sin, with a 'holy intensity', and God hates what sin can do to His 'choice creatures'!

THE FATHER AWAITS THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON!

The story of the Prodigal Son well illustrates these truths. The loving father (in the parable) shared abundant resources with his son, but the wayward son, nevertheless, chose to leave his devoted father. (The father, and his resources, could be a representation of the Heavenly Father, and the 'family of God', the Church).

The father (representing God) had to honor (respect) the 'will' (choice) of the wayward son. The wayward son enjoyed the 'pleasures of sin' for a while, but those 'pleasures of sin'

turned into the 'miseries of sin'! He ended up in the 'pig pen', and that is what eventually happens to pleasure obsessed sinners.

The tragic consequences of sin (shame and guilt) were replaced by the pleasurable 'features of sin' ('wine, women, and song'). Sinful ways often take one to the 'bottom of the pit' (pig-pen existence). What happened to the prodigal son (in the parable) often happens to other sinners.

The son, now humbled and desperate and self-despising (in the pig pen), one day has an 'awakening'. An 'awakening' is very difficult, for a sinner has to take a serious 'look' at himself.

When he 'observes' himself, he recognizes the 'toll' that his sin has had on his life! He humbly acknowledges, to himself, that he is a 'moral wreck and wretch', in desperate need of help 'outside' of himself. He awakens to the fact that he has been an 'utter fool', to think that he could 'make it on his own', an 'utter fool' to believe that his sinful lifestyle has been 'good'!

He realizes how deceived (self-deceived) that he has been, to think that independence from his father was a 'good' thing, to think that sin could satisfy his empty soul. Pride and rebellion and a spirit of independence are what motivated him to leave his father. Now, humility, a broken spirit (issuing forth in tears of regret, tears of remorse, tears of repentance) are driving him to his loving father, from whose presence he has long been departed!

He desires, now that his 'eyes are opened' to his 'broken' condition in the 'pig pen' of sin, to humble himself before his estranged father, and to make open confession to his father! If his father is 'open' to take him back, he is willing to take a 'lowly place' in his father's house! These actions and attitudes motivate him to come back to his father! (Aren't these the same motivations that bring a wandering Christian back to the arms of the Heavenly Father?)

The Heavenly Father (like the father in the parable) allows every person (including every Christian) to exercise his 'will' (choice) to take the 'low road' or to take the 'high road' in life! Christians can choose (and many do choose) to 'leave the Father' and the Father's house (to leave the loving God, and to leave the fellowship of Christians - the Church).

To decide to follow the ways of the 'world' is a horrible decision, but some believers (in spite of all the positive and persuasive influence that is 'brought to bear on them' by fellow believers), for some reason, choose to 'leave the Father's house'! When that happens, God 'weeps', God is 'shocked', God is 'angry'!

Learning to separate one's self from worldly practices and from worldly ideas is the 'negative aspect' of holiness; seeking to live a Spirit-filled, love-directed life is the 'positive aspect' of holiness. Separated FROM sin, and separated TO the Savior - in simple terms, this is what 'holiness' is all about! "Be ye holy, for I the Lord thy God am holy!"

CAN GOD'S LOVING NATURE ACTUALLY INDWELL MY OWN HEART?

The miracle of all miracles is this: We humans (believers) can 'become partakers of Christ's holy nature!' "Christ in us is the hope of glory"! Anything that is contradictory to the nature and the character of Christ will be excluded from heaven! God is love, and (thankfully) that same love is 'shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit'.

A supernatural 'Source' (the Spirit) imparts a supernatural kind of love! "Love divine, all loves excelling; joy of heaven to earth come down; fix in us thy humble dwelling; all thy faithful mercies crown!"

A heavenly love (God's kind of love), given to us by the heavenly Agent (the Holy Spirit), that we (believers) might enjoy a

'heavenly life' (ability to love God supremely, to love our neighbors sincerely, to love ourselves wholesomely and unselfishly). God is love (intrinsically and inherently)! It is the essence of God's character!

Love, by its very nature, wishes to 'reach out in fellowship' to others. God, because of His inherent love, desired to manifest that love, when He (out of love) created the human race. God, because of His inherent love, desired to rescue a 'fallen race'. "For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son", as a ransom for man who was bound by the cruel 'chords' of sin.

God, because of his inherent love, chose to send the Holy Spirit into the world, to convict men of their sins, and to convince men that the Righteous One (Jesus) wants to rescue everyone from their plight of sin, and He wants to give them an abundant life here and an eternal life hereafter!

Love, powerful love, love that is in the very 'core' of God's being, it is this divine-love that is the 'driving force' for all that is 'good' and 'precious' and 'life-giving' in this world and in the glorious world to come!

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE AMIDST AN UNRECOVERABLE ACCIDENT!

A relatively short time ago, I participated in the funeral service of one of my long-time (best) friends. He was a loving and caring and enthusiastic Christian man - a hard worker and an active participant in the life of the church (where I was pastor for a long time). I admired him for his zeal for the 'things of God'.

He was a man who, after he and his new bride (many years ago), were traveling away from their wedding reception, was involved in a serious automobile accident (a head-on collision, I believe). For the next ten years this godly man cared for his wife (who, as far as I know, never regained consciousness)!

My friend, of course, practically-speaking, did not have a wife, but, nevertheless, he waited on her and he prayed for her and he kept hoping that she would, somehow, be healed. Only after he had cared intently and devotedly for this woman (whom he loved a lot), and only after he had shed a 'multitude' of tears during those ten difficult years, did 'wisdom' dictate that this relationship (mutually shared for only a few hours, following the wedding ceremony), should be dissolved, legally.

His many hopes, often dashed through those ten years, had finally died 'once and for all'! My friend knew that there could be no 'conscious relationship' with her, even if he waited for his entire lifetime! After ten long years of waiting and waiting, and crying and crying, and praying and praying, the relationship had to be officially (legally) terminated!

That same man, Paul Halseide, eventually remarried, and he and his new (godly) wife eventually became the grateful parents of four outstanding children. I enjoyed a friendship with this husband and this wife (very talented persons, and very dedicated believers) for a few decades.

I had some contact, through the unfolding years, with their four children. The four children married, and they all became parents. For several years, I was privileged to serve as the pastor of this 'extended family' at the Ft. Collins Free Methodist Church.

Because of a 'bout' with a serious medical challenge (disease), my friend (the husband) finally died. The funeral service that was carefully planned by his four adult children was Christ-centered and it was uplifting to everyone in attendance. In his/her special manner, each of the children offered their thanksgiving for the man who was, to them, a great father!

The oldest son, after he gave a 'glowing account' of his father's accomplishments and his father's godly character, revealed (almost as an 'aside') an interesting 'happening'. He said that, on one occasion, he invited his father to go with him

to the theater to view a certain movie (that the older son, apparently, liked).

The older son revealed something about himself, as well as he revealed something about his father. Whereas the son was (obviously) not very 'sensitive' to the content and the images of this particular movie, the father was 'very sensitive' to the content and to the images that were being 'flashed' on the large screen! The son said that, shortly after the movie began, his father decisively got up from his seat, and his father marched out of the theater!

The son (a professing 'Christian') who should never have watched that particular movie, and certainly should never have invited his beloved dad to go with him to view this particular movie - this very son (when he was sharing this 'incident' at the funeral service) demonstrated 'pride' in his father! He appreciated the fact that his father had stood by his moral convictions! "Be careful little eyes what you see, for the Father up above is looking down with tender love!" Not an exhortation only for children, but also for adults!

CAN YOU TAKE JESUS WITH YOU?

Many years before the above-described 'incident' took place; there was a young teenage girl, whose single mother was a dedicated Christian - a woman who was liked by many, in the nursing home where she had worked hard, and among her friends in her beloved local church. She was a loving and a kind person, a jolly woman, a woman who was committed to honesty and to mature responsibility. Her two daughters were disciplined and respectful and mature (for their young age). As a single mother, Ceola Betz (a close friend to Venita and to me, and a long-time member of the church where I was pastor) - this dear woman was 'saintly' in her character and very practical in her actions. Very pragmatic! A great mother (rather strict in her discipline, but, nevertheless, very loved by her two daughters).

This woman definitely was not 'legalistic', for she was most practical and flexible and gracious towards other persons. Nevertheless, without adhering to some of the legalistic 'ways' of her 'holiness background', she was deeply committed to the living of a godly and holy life, a life 'separated from worldly practices'.

She hated 'alcohol', and understandably so, for her husband was an alcoholic and his tragic 'problem' instigated her divorce. She strongly believed that a Christian should not compromise his/her standards.

However, this woman - Ceola Betz - was not a 'forbidding' or a 'judgmental' person. Instead, she was a loving and a kind and a hospitable person (she was a great cook and she loved to entertain her friends, in the confines of her rather small 'mobile home'). Even though she surely was not 'flush with money', Ceola often entertained her close friends in her home. Venita and I ate more 'company meals' in the mobile home of Ceola Betz than in any other home of all the members of our church.

Venita and I considered Ceola, in some ways, as a 'second mom', and (since our children's grandparents were many miles away from our city), Ceola was 'like a grandmother' to our daughters, as they were growing up.

Ceola was a 'popular' friend to a host of teenagers in our church, and these teens were often invited into the home of Ceola to enjoy good food (and, of course, Ceola's own teenagers thought this arrangement was 'wonderful').

Precious are the memories of my times with Ceola Betz, especially the time when we picked sweet corn in the corn field of a friend of Ceola's! On that particular memorable day we packed Ceola's old car with many dozens of ears of sweet corn (all free)!

On another memorable day, I remember when we picked lots of cherries (from the trees of one of Ceola's friend's orchard) Venita and I and Ceola had to 'pit the cherries'. Ceola (with her 'dry sense of humor') loved to blame me for the cherries that still (accidentally) had pits in them (when folks ate cherry pie)!

Too numerous are the occasions when Ceola introduced 'fun events' into the life of our parsonage family! Ceola (a very discerning Christian woman) was often aware that I (her pastor) tended to take my work too seriously, and that I (and my family) occasionally needed to have 'fun' (to laugh and to relax along life's way).

Unfortunately, I did take my pastoral work 'too seriously'. Unfortunately, I became weighed down with worries and with concerns that eventually took their devastating 'toll' on my mental and my emotional and my spiritual life. I failed to 'read' all the 'red lights' that warned me of impending troubles, troubles that finally would thrust me out of my position as a pastor!

Later in my tenure as a pastor, it was Ceola (and her close friend, Nellie Swartz) who came into my office, to kindly register concern that I was not 'looking well' and that I needed to see a doctor. This occasion (when these two longtime friends came into my office), this incident took place just a few months before I suffered a 'nervous breakdown' (depression) of which I write very openly in this book. I, unfortunately, brushed them off, and I told them that I was 'fine'!

This incident illustrates the kind of 'caring person' that Ceola Betz was! Her friendship endured for many years (decades). Approximately 10 years after I retired from pastoral leadership, this saint of God made her departure from this earthly life!

Ceola (a longtime nurse) was asked by someone what her job was! A curious question! Ceola did most of her nursing work

within the confines of one nursing home (where she worked for about 25 years). Ceola replied to the one who inquired: "I guess I would have to say that my job in the nursing home was to 'help people to die'!"

When I was around Ceola, I felt 'good about life', I felt that life (in spite of sorrows and financial hardships and physical illnesses) was 'blessed' by the overseeing Heavenly Father! She was a comforting friend, a joyous friend! In spite of her financial hardships, Ceola was determined to have a bright outlook on life, she was determined that her precious daughters would 'have fun', she was determined that her daughters would become responsible persons.

Indeed, Ceola's daughters did grow up to be responsible citizens. Both of these ladies married well, and both of these daughters have long invested their life in very productive labors.

Ceola Betz, both a hard worker and a 'fun-loving' person, brought considerable joy to me and to Venita and to our young (growing) daughters. Ceola, as I earlier mentioned, was like a 'grandmother' to our young children. One time, when our children were still in grade school, Ceola brought a kitten to our house! Since Ceola believed that every small child needed a kitty, this gift was for our young daughters (that cat, of course, became a part of our family for many years - during the years our daughters were growing up).

Ceola, on one hand, was a serious-minded person (no stranger to some suffering in her 'single life' economically, and no stranger to suffering physically, for she was certainly not in 'perfect health'). This very overweight 'saint of God' reminded me of a 'female Santa Clause'! She took her relationship with God very seriously, but she was not forlorn or forbidding or negative or 'distant' with people! Rather, she was approachable and kind and sincere and guileless (she 'hated' dishonesty and deceit in people)! Indeed, Ceola was one of our 'favorite'

persons! For dozens of years! When she died, Venita and I lost a very dear friend!

This is the 'context' for what I wish now to share. A few years ago, after the oldest daughter had (with her outstanding husband) established a 'great home', she shared with me an 'incident' that took place (many years ago) when she was a teenager. She said that she had her 'heart' set on seeing a certain movie.

She apparently knew 'in her heart' that this movie was not very edifying for her to view, but she, nevertheless, wanted very much to go to the theater to view this particular movie. She said that when her mother found out about her plans to view this movie, her mother simply asked her some questions: "Can you take Jesus with you to go see that movie? Would Jesus feel comfortable to sit beside you, to view that particular movie? "

The 'conscience' of this teenage girl was 'pricked'! She knew that she could not take Jesus with her, to view that particular movie! As an adult (established in the 'Faith') this now middle-aged adult recently told me that she was so thankful that she had a mother who was not afraid to confront her (a teenager at that time) concerning the distinction between 'right and wrong' (and that includes moral sensitivity regarding the kinds of movies that Christians should view)!

"Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters!" Thus saith the Lord God Almighty!

This mother wisely challenged her (struggling) teenage daughter: "Can you take Jesus with you to see that movie?" If we cannot take Jesus with us, we ought not to go to any event; we ought not to engage ourselves in any activity! Jesus loved to attend 'parties'! Jesus was even accused of being a 'winebibber'! But, in an attempt to 'win the sinners', Jesus

never 'compromised His principles', He never 'broke the Laws of His God'!

Questions to ask yourself: (1) Would Jesus 'feel welcome' and would Jesus be glad to 'sit beside me' at the activities where I am considering attending and participating in? (2) What would Jesus do during a certain activity that I am participating in? (3) Does the activity that I am participating in bring me closer to God, or does the activity cause my zeal for spiritual matters to 'flag' and to 'fade'? (4) When I participate in a certain activity, will my fellow participants be able to discern qualities of 'godliness' in me, or does my witness for Christ become 'tarnished' as a result of my participation in this particular activity?

WHAT YOU 'COURT' YOU WILL LIKELY 'MARRY'!

If you put your foot in a trap, don't be surprised if the trap 'snaps' on your foot! If you 'court with sin', don't be surprised if you will eventually be 'married to sin'! If you occasionally 'visit' the house of sin, don't be surprised if you become a 'member' of that house of sin! If you occasionally visit the 'forbidden' web site, don't be surprised if you are 'driven' to visit that forbidden web site every day (or secretly, at night)!

If you (gradually) develop a 'taste' for lustful 'pictures' on that 'secret web site', don't be surprised if you become 'addicted' to those lustful 'pictures'. ("When lust hath 'conceived', it brings forth death.") When 'lust' becomes your 'steady diet', then you will wake up some day to the dreadful reality that you have become a 'changed man', entangled in the 'web of lust'!

No longer will you have a 'taste' for 'normal sexual relations' with your beloved wife. Pornography has a deceptive-causing effect on a man! After a sex-driven man has a 'steady diet' of the so-called 'beautiful bodies' on the internet, a lust-filled man now perceives his own wife as very unattractive and sexually unexciting!

How tragic is the 'bondage' of sexual perversion! It is only a matter of time until his marriage partner will no longer sense that she is a 'partner' any longer. Soon, the perpetrator will serve his wife the divorce papers. Another divorce statistic, another devastated woman, another confused and disrupted child (the damaged product of divorce)!

It is no wonder that marriages everywhere are being destroyed - falling like a 'deck of cards'! Why don't Christians 'guard' what their eyes see, what their ears hear, where their feet walk, what their hands do, what their minds think, what their hearts respond to, where their money is spent, what their spirit worships?

IF THE MASTER WEEPS, WON'T HIS SERVANTS ALSO WEEP?

Does God weep? If persons (including believers) are everywhere 'weeping', I know that God (who loves humanity with an eternal love) is also weeping, alongside the weeping men and women and boys and girls and teenagers!

There is not a sorrow that God does not share! Why is there so much weeping? Simply because humans live in a 'tangled and twisted and broken world'. As a member of a 'fallen race', both sinners and saints will inevitably 'weep'. That is an integral part of this world!

No human being can escape the trials and the tests and the temptations that compose the 'stuff of this world'. The servant is not greater than his Master! Jesus wept. Jesus suffered persecution. Jesus wept because of the hardened hearts of unrepentant leaders (scribes and Pharisees). For many different reasons, Christians will weep, but, for certain, no Christian is excluded from experiencing (at times) a 'broken heart'.

As noted previously, that which makes God weep the most is the unrepentant hearts of sinners. It was the unrepentant condition of the Jewish people that caused Jesus to weep - as He looked over the city of Jerusalem!

DO YOUR TEARS FLOW FOR THE SUFFERING OF OTHER PERSONS?

This book ("Let My Tears Flow") will, obviously, center on several 'situations' that brought 'tears' to the eyes of suffering persons. 'Tears' to the eyes of persons who were actually 'attacked' by life's adversities, but also 'tears' to the eyes of persons who observed others who suffered from adversities.

The 'tears' from personal experience, and the 'tears' of empathy for others - either way, 'tears' are evidence that the heart is deeply 'hurt'! When one feels 'pain' for others (sympathy), that pain can be deeply felt, but, of course, one (as an onlooker) cannot feel the 'pain' at the same level as the person who is actually and personally 'feeling the blow of cruel fate'!

Only the one who is actually going through the 'ordeal' can fully understand the depth of the pain that he/she is enduring. One of my divorced daughters, who had confided numerous times with her caring mother, regarding the 'suffering' that she had experienced during the last 5 years, said to her mother, "Mom, you have never been through divorce, and, therefore, you don't understand how I feel!"

Only the person who has personally gone through the 'horrors of divorce' can be 'empathetic' (i.e., have in-depth feelings for a suffering one). The mother of my daughter definitely 'feels' deeply for her daughter, but she cannot express 'empathy' - she can only express 'sympathy'.

LOWER 'OCTANE' SUFFERING OR 'HIGH OCTANE' SUFFERING?

Sometimes the use of 'word pictures' facilitate in making proper distinctions and differentiations when one observes the wide range of experiences in life that entail 'suffering'. There are, obviously, different 'kinds' of suffering, and different 'degrees' of suffering, and different 'consequences' from

suffering. The following are simple 'word pictures' that possibly will help made some distinctions, as we observe several 'cases' (incidents) of suffering - namely, 'High Octane Suffering', and 'Lower Octane Suffering'.

The 'High Octane' stories of suffering are those situations in which there were 'grave elements' involved - and in these 'situations of sorrow' the consequences (outcomes) brought long-lasting or even permanent affects.

From ancient history, David's adulterous affair (although forgiven) was a 'high octane' suffering, because the consequences from his 'suffering' were long-lasting, and even permanent (because of the rape of his daughter and because of the death of two of his sons)! (Remember: the nails can be pulled out of the board of one's life - forgiveness can be granted - but the nail holes - consequences - remain!)

From contemporary times (1992): A man (one of my parishioners) is insanely-jealous because of his departing wife, and (on the parking lot of my church) he shoots and he kills his wife (in my presence and in the presence of 10 other parishioners), then immediately this murderous husband is shot by an off-duty policeman (and this husband later that day passes away at the hospital). This is a 'High Octane' suffering! Permanent Consequences!

Are you willing to 'pay the price' to live a life of love - real love? Lives that are 'given away' to lift up the fallen, to encourage the discouraged, to give hope to the hopeless, to give companionship to the lonely, to give direction to the confused, to pray for the sin-bound person, to give a loaf of bread to the hungry, to lead the lost ones to the 'foot of the Cross of Christ' to find forgiveness and new life?

As believers, we are called to 'weep with those who weep, in lift up the fallen ones. What is important to notice, when considering the various 'accounts' of adversity, is not the time when an episode of suffering happened, or the specific

'locale' where the episode of suffering happened (while those two things are interesting). What is 'essential', when making observation of 'cases' of suffering, is to 'see the hand of God' that rescues, that saves, that delivers, that heals, and that blesses those who have found themselves in the 'vice of pain and grief.

It is legitimate for one to ask himself, when he/she is going through the 'valley of suffering': "Does Jesus care when I've said goodbye to the dearest on earth to me?" Does Jesus really care when loneliness haunts me, day and night? Can Jesus wipe away my stream of tears?

DOES JESUS CARE WHEN I SUFFER?

Does Jesus care when I can't get to sleep at night, because of my 'searing pain'? Does Jesus care when I am engrossed in 'self-pity', when I can't stop crying after the funeral service for my wife? Because my 'eyes' are red with 'tear stains', I want to be alone. I don't want to see anyone, even my closest friends. I am embarrassed for even my family to see me in the pitiful condition that I find myself in! Why can't I quickly 'get over' my sadness and the heaviness in my 'chest'? Will I ever be 'normal' again? Why is it so difficult for me to 'receive' my healing from God whom I have earnestly sought? Is it because I simply lack the necessary 'faith' and 'trust' in God?

Does Jesus care when my wife suddenly loses her 'mental faculties', and, consequently, I must retire from my teaching position at my seminary where I have taught for the last 20 years! Because of her debilitating disease, I have to take care of her in my home, for the remainder of her life?

Does Jesus care when I am enduring the shame and the grief, as a result of my inability to find a 'job'? Does Jesus understand the 'pain' that I endure when I have to apply over and over for a job, with no success?

Does Jesus care when I feel that there are 'daggers' being thrust into my heart, because someone I have known for many years, has 'turned against me', a one-time friend who now is 'falsely accusing' me of 'sexual abuse'? Horror of horrors, this 'friend', who has falsely accused me, has actually taken me to 'court'!

Does Jesus care when I have tried 'over and over' to resist my 'cravings for alcohol' (my temptation not made any 'easier' when my friends often offer me 'social drinks')?

Does Jesus care when my anticipated retirement income has been suddenly and substantially reduced, and I have no idea what I am going to do during my 'senior years' to supplement my income?

Does Jesus care when my wife suddenly dies, and, as a result, I am left to raise 'small children', and when I am (admittedly) left alone and without the knowledge that her skills provided during our happy marriage (food, finances, friends, family, and fun)?

Does Jesus care when my one-time 'good health' suddenly turns to 'poor health', because of an unexpected and an incurable physical disease? Does Jesus care that, with this incurable disease, I am facing many 'astronomical medical bills', let alone, the mounting 'fears' that I feel as I face the 'unknown future' that ultimately will bring me to my impending, and perhaps 'painful' death?

DOES GOD REALLY 'BOTTLE UP OUR TEARS'?

There is a 'curious' verse in the Bible, a verse that declares that God will 'bottle up our tears'! What does this verse actually mean? Of course, I am not sure, but I love this 'word picture' that describes God's compassionate treatment of His children! Does this verse mean that there is never a 'tear' that we shed but what God knows and cares about that 'tear'? Does it mean that God preserves all of our tears? The Bible

says that God does not 'despise' a 'broken and a contrite heart'.

I believe that tears that come from a heart of deep repentance and genuine humility, God 'bottles up', i.e., God keeps 'account' of those tears! "Could my tears forever flow; thou must save and thou alone!"

The shedding of tears is the outward sign of inward repentance, and those tears are precious, for these tears are an indication that the repentant one (sinner) desires for God to 'save' him! Tears that are shed because I have carefully observed my 'sinful condition' (through the ministry of the Holy Spirit) are very precious tears in the sight of God!

My willingness to accept the 'awakening ministry' of the Spirit, results in my mind becoming opened to truth, and in my heart becoming broken with sorrow for my sins. The shedding of my tears, as a result of 'viewing' the horror of my sinful lifestyle (and 'viewing' the breaking of the heart of God as a result of my sinful lifestyle) - these 'tears of repentance' are most precious in the sight of Almighty God!

ARE THE 'TEARS OF REPENTANCE' IMPORTANT TO GOD?

Perhaps there are many different 'kinds' of 'tears' that God values so much that He desires to save those tears (as it were) in a 'bottle'! But surely the 'tears of repentance' are most important to God! Surely, God would definitely want to keep the 'tears of repentance' in a special 'bottle', a special place in his heavenly inventory of bottles, especially visible for all the angels to view! Remember what the Bible reveals about angels: There is great rejoicing by the angels in heaven, when one sinner comes to repentance!

The 'tears of repentance', contained in special bottles, demonstrate to the heavenly host (of angels) that a 'sinner has repented' and that the 'name of a new convert' has been entered in the 'Lamb's Book of Life'!

If you have truly repented of your sins, then God surely must have your 'tears of repentance' contained in a 'special bottle', labeled with your name (in His massive inventory). From the account of Scripture, we know that, if you are a 'true believer', your name is (wonderfully) 'recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life'!

God not only (apparently) has a large inventory of 'bottles with tears contained in them', but God also has a 'giant book' in which are recorded all of the names of those who are 'followers of the living God'!

The Bible speaks both of a 'bottle' where tears are contained, and of a Book in which is recorded the names of those who are 'true believers'. Often, of course, the Bible seeks to communicate 'eternal truths' through the use of 'word pictures' (metaphors) and of 'parables'. Jesus often taught eternal truths, by the use of parables.

HEALING FROM A 'BROKEN AND CONTRITE SPIRIT'!

The 'tears' of repentance from sin, and the 'tears' of surrender to Christ - these intermingled 'tears' usher the sinner into the 'family of God'! 'Godly sorrow' brings forth health and wholeness! 'Worldly sorrow' is simply the sorrow of 'regret' - perhaps 'regret' that the sinner has 'sown his wild oats', and that he must now reap his 'wild oats' - a life of barrenness and a life of great unhappiness!

The sinner had 'pleasures in sin' for a short time, but those temporary 'pleasures' turned to sadness and to despair and to 'bitter remorse'! Such a life of regrets (a wasted life in sin) causes the 'tears to flow', but those kind of 'tears' (worldly sorrow) eventually bring forth 'death'.

It is not a 'case' in which God is unable to 'save' the sinner, or a 'case' in which God is unwilling to 'save' the sinner, even in his 'old age' (after he has lived a long life of rebellion against

God and against God's laws). No, God is willing to save a man, even a very wicked man on his 'death bed'!

God is always willing to save anyone, at any time, even if it means (like it was in the 'case' of the dying thief, on his cross, near to Jesus' cross) at the 'last hour' of a man's life! Of course, it is true that a 'death bed' repentant will 'lose his life', because, throughout his long life, he lived in sin, with no 'spiritual fruit' developed in his life!

It is not a question of God's willingness to 'save' a person (for Jesus' death on the cross purchased salvation for every person). It is a question of the willingness of an 'old-timer in sin' meeting the conditions for 'salvation', namely, repentance and faith (trust) in Christ! Whosoever will may come to the 'fountain of Christ's cleansing blood' and experience the 'remission of sins'!

Every sinner - young or older - must come to God on the basis of the 'conditions' of repentance (godly sorrow for sin), and faith (trust in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins). 'Tears of repentance' leads a sinner to the 'foot of the cross' where the 'broken-hearted' (tear-filled) sinner hangs down his head, and where the guilt-filled sinner cries out: 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' He admits that he (a lost person, a hell-bound sinner) is 'not worthy of the least of God's favor'! He knows that, if God treated him with justice (righteousness), he would surely be condemned in time and in eternity.

THERE IS 'WONDER-WORKING POWER' IN THE 'BLOOD OF JESUS'!

This broken-hearted sinner asks, not for 'justice' (i.e., to be treated as he deserves to be treated - condemnation), but he asks for 'mercy' (i.e., to be treated in a way that he does not deserve to be treated)!

What the sinner most needs, this God of mercy is most ready to give - forgiveness! Reconciliation with the Father, all because

of the atoning and the justifying blood of the Son of God! "The blood, the blood, O hallelujah, it cleanses me!" Yes, there is, indeed, wonder-working power in the precious blood of the Lamb of God!

If there is true repentance and if there is genuine faith in Christ, God is able and He is 'glad' to take a very sinful man and to transform him into a very good man - a godly man, a man who will be impassioned to follow Jesus Christ the remainder of his days!

'Tears' are flowing - that is, 'tears of joy and exaltation' that the lost ones are now found, that the bound ones are now free, that the despairing ones are now the hopeful ones, that the selfish ones are now the self-giving ones, that the grasping ones are now the giving ones, that the filthy-minded ones are now the pure-minded ones, that the broken ones are now the healed ones!

The greatest evidence that Christianity is authentic and that Christianity is a 'powerful force' in the world is this: A wicked man can become a righteous man, a bad man can become a good man. "I once was lost, but now I am found; I once was blind, but now I see."

The total transformation of a 'wretched' man into a kind and loving and thoughtful and generous and tender-hearted and kind and longsuffering and patient and self-controlled and loving man! There is no power anywhere that can turn a wicked man into a godly man, a selfish man into a caring man - except the power of Jesus Christ! "Christ receives sinful men, even me with all my sin!"

WHEN I ACCEPTED CHRIST, MY LIFE DRASTICALLY CHANGED!

I have a long way to go in the 'Christian life' (in terms of becoming more 'Christlike' in my character), but I must (briefly)

state a fact: When I prayed (as a child) "God, save my soul!" my life was drastically changed.

I wanted (almost immediately) to start reading my Bible, and to start memorizing a lot of verses from the Bible, and to start praying consistently in a private place, and to start telling others about the love of Jesus at my school. Also, following my conversion to Christ, I found it 'easy' during my teen years to obey my parents.

A few months after my conversion, I became eager to learn about my 'Faith' from my loving pastor (in whose home I spent much time, being trained). During my high school years, I began to explore the possibility of becoming a pastor. I never 'dreamed' at the time I prayed that simple prayer (to be 'saved'), that my life would so greatly 'change'!

Great changes came to my life, as a result of my repentance and my faith in Christ. God genuinely 'saved my soul'. I was not then, and I have not been since that time, 'perfect', but the direction of my life decisively changed on that historic day, and I have been gradually changing ever since the day of my conversion. Admittedly, I have not always 'walked' as I should have walked, close to my blessed Savior.

I have never deliberately 'walked away from my Savior', but sometimes I have not kept in 'close step' with my Savior. Through my 'tears of repentance' (at times when I spiritually 'drifted'), God, in mercy, restored me.

I want to have a 'closer walk' with my Lord, for the remainder of my passing life! The famous song "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" appeals to me. That song expresses the 'desire of my heart'! But, I must acknowledge that I have shed many (internal and external) 'tears' - tears of repentance - during my long spiritual 'journey'!

Of course, since that initial commitment (to be 'saved'), I have had to shed a lot of 'tears' - including 'tears' of repentance.

But, nevertheless, I know that the power of Christ 'saved' me on March 12, 1956 (when I was 11 years old). It was a wonderful, divinely-wrought transformation of my entire life! There is no 'power' (for transformation) like the power of Christ!

TRUSTING GOD'S 'ULTIMATE COMPENSATION'!

'Suffering' (tears) is the 'common denominator' of mankind! Mysteriously, there seems to be an unequal distribution of suffering in this world! Only God understands why some persons suffer more than other people suffer.

The one concept that has brought great solace to me, as I look at the seeming unjust and unequal suffering that some persons experience, is the concept of 'compensation'. That is to say, that God (who is an absolutely 'just' God) will 'bring good in eternity' to those who unjustly suffered wrong here on earth!

This concept can be applied in 'numerous cases', but I think of this concept (of compensation) as it applies to the tragedy of 'abortion'! If there is ever a 'case' of injustice, it is the 'case' of an 'innocent', a 'helpless', a 'vulnerable' baby being 'murdered' in its mother's womb!

This 'developing human being' - so cruelly destroyed - will be vindicated by Almighty God in eternity! The millions of unborn babies, who cry out for justice, when they prematurely enter heaven, through the murderous act of abortion, will find justice, through the 'hand' of their Creator! The Creator of these little human beings will 'compensate' these 'little ones', for their loss in not being allowed to be born.

The all-just God will compensate these little ones, for the fact that they never were permitted to breathe the fresh air which God had provided for them on His 'green earth'! The Creator (in some way) will compensate these little ones for their loss in their not being given their right to live a normal, thriving life of seventy years! The Creator will compensate these little ones

for their loss in not being given the 'right' to hear the voice of God's 'call' to Christian service!

CHRIST'S DEFENSE OF THE MOST VULNERABLE PERSONS!

How very great is the loss when a 'cruel' consenting doctor pierces the beating heart of one of God's choice children (the unborn baby which is developing in a normal way in his mother's womb)! The punishment for such a 'crime' can only be determined by an all-just God - a God who Himself sheds many 'tears' each time another one of His little children dies through the brutal act of an abortionist doctor! I fear for the 'fate' of anyone who kills one of God's 'little ones'!

It was Jesus Himself who warned against mistreatment of children: "If anyone offends these little ones, it would be better for that person if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he be cast into the deepest sea!" Can 'language' be stronger than that! That statement makes 'chills go up and down my spine'! Jesus was a strong champion of all weak persons, and is there any one weaker (more vulnerable) than an unborn baby?

The weakest and the most vulnerable among us - unborn babies - are being slaughtered, as if they were 'birds' being hunted by marksmen in a Nebraska corn field! The eagerness with which pregnant women, who want the 'extra cells' extracted from their womb, is greater than the eagerness of 'professional fly fishermen' who are eager to 'take a catch' home after a day at the stream!

Those who offend the little ones should be cast into the deepest sea (with a weight around their neck)! In other words, those who murder innocent lives (namely, unborn babies), should be executed! According to Jesus, those who deliberately kill babies (and this is the meaning of 'abortion') should be put to death! Such a 'criminal act' deserves the 'death penalty'! How else can you interpret these 'damning words' of Jesus? (Of course, all sinners deserve the 'death penalty').

Jesus' message is the message of grace and forgiveness and restoration - and that message applies to women, and to consenting doctors, who have killed babies. God forgives any person - and rescues from death - if there is genuine repentance and sincere trust in Christ.

THOU SHALT NOT KILL - UNBORN BABIES!

Jesus' warning against 'baby killers' must be taken seriously! Everyone who is knowledgeable of the findings of science knows that 'human life begins at conception', and that all of our characteristics as humans are determined at the time of conception. Development of the human person is what takes place during the nine months in the womb, following conception. To abort at any time is to kill a developing human life!

To take life, at any stage, is to take the life that God has allowed to be conceived. No amount of rationalization (proposed 'reasons' and 'excuses') for the 'termination' of the baby will be acceptable to any 'reasonable' person, and the Creator of the baby claims total ownership of this 'little creation'! To take the life of an unborn baby is to take the life that God Himself created!

WHAT ABOUT THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE SUFFERING FOR NO REASON?

Some of the 'best Christians' in the world are suffering for no apparent reason! Some godly persons are experiencing suffering, as the result of accidents or as the result of unjust persecution. There seems to be so much unmerited suffering in our tear-stained world. Probably the most notable example of this is the unmerited suffering of countless unborn babies who are dismembered in their own mother's womb!

As a pastor of one local church in Fort Collins, Colorado, for over 25 years, I officiated at funeral services for many persons - including a few infants, young persons (including suicides), and middle-aged adults, as well as numerous elderly

folks. I have no problem in suggesting that it was God's 'perfect will' to call home to Heaven many of the 'saints' of God who had lived long and productive lives.

I do have difficulty in believing that the deaths of infants and children and young adults are an expression of God's 'perfect will'. Yes, it is true that all things which happen (including thousands of deaths which result because of earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes, wars, car accidents, etc.) are 'allowed' by the God of Heaven, and thus these tragedies are subject to God's so-called 'sovereign will'.

Some well-meaning Christians - Christians who believe they are honoring the 'sovereignty' of the living God - find themselves saying some very hurtful (and erroneous) things to broken-hearted parents of infants or young people who have tragically died by disease or by accident. Things like "Well, God wanted another 'angel' in heaven, so that is why God chose to take your baby." How horrible and how heretical!

I held a double funeral service for a young couple whose car was hit head-on by a drunk driver, and this young father and mother left behind several children to grieve the tragic loss of their loving Christian parents. Was it God's 'perfect will' for this couple (near Ft. Collins) to be suddenly killed as an on-coming vehicle (driven by a drunk driver) hit them head-on at the top of a hill on that country road?

What about the several children who died from one cause or another - from cancer or from some other 'defect'- whose parents I, as their pastor, tried hard to comfort in their bereavement? Would it have helped those sorrowing parents for me to have told them that they should not grieve too much, for the death of their children was a 'manifestation' of God's mysterious, sovereign, and perfect will? Was it God's 'perfect will' that my beloved, godly fifteen year-old niece died in 1981 from a seizure as she was happily riding on a roller coaster in an Amusement Park in Denver?

“GUARD AGAINST YIELDING TO YOUR ‘BESETTING SIN”!

If you have a 'tendency' to see all of 'life' only through your 'intellectual analysis', then you will have to guard yourself against having a proud attitude of condescension and 'intellectual snobbery' toward those who see life almost exclusively through the eyes of emotional response.

If you have a 'tendency' to easily become angry, then you will have to guard yourself against those 'contexts' (persons, situations, topics) that tend to provoke yourself to emotional reactions of anger and rage.

If you have a 'tendency' to quickly accept new ideas, without examination or scrutiny, then you will have to be on your guard against your becoming gullible to non-Christian religions and to false philosophies.

If you have a 'tendency' to be awestruck by the personality and by the accomplishments of another person, then you will have to guard against jealousy.

If you have a 'tendency' to be a 'perfectionist' in your actions and in your attitude, then you will have to guard yourself against judging and criticizing other persons who are 'messy' in their general lifestyle.

If you have a 'tendency' to spend much time 'planning for your future', then you will have to guard yourself against worrying and fretting and distrusting the God whose resources are adequate for your future. If you have a 'tendency' to be overly sensitive in your personality, then you will have to guard yourself against taking easy and frequent offense from the 'comments' and the actions of careless 'insensitive' persons.

If you, as a quick-paced and a quick-thinking person, have a 'tendency' to be contemptuous towards those persons who are slow-paced and who are slow-thinking, then you will have to guard yourself against being unkind and unthoughtful towards

those who are very different from you, in physical movements and in thought-processing.

If you have a 'tendency' to spend much time 'planning for your future', then you will have to guard yourself against worrying and fretting and distrusting the God whose resources are adequate for your future.

Most Christians, I believe, can 'identify' with one or more of the above-stated kinds of 'besetting sins'! God, of course, is able to help us Christians to experience 'victory over' our 'besetting sins'. God, however, expects us (who have certain 'tendencies' or 'weaknesses' towards certain sins) to cooperate with Him.

AN 'OUNCE OF PREVENTION' IS WORTH A 'POUND OF CURE'!

The above statements are intended to demonstrate how 'besetting sins' actually 'operate' in our life. When Jesus wept at the grave side of his beloved friend (Lazarus), don't you think that the (invisible) Heavenly Father was looking down from Heaven on that dreadful day, and that He, along with His Son (Jesus), was 'shedding tears' because of the heart-breaking sorrow that Mary and Marsha were experiencing?

And don't you think that, while Jesus was weeping over the impending doom of Jerusalem that the (invisible) Heavenly Father was also weeping? After all, Jesus (while on earth) was the 'perfect manifestation' of the character of the Heavenly Father! Jesus' weeping (while he was on earth) was simply the 'tears' that were coming from the 'depths of the heart of Almighty God'.

Far from being 'impassible' (i.e., incapable of having and of expressing 'human feelings'), Christ's actions - while He was on earth - demonstrates that there is no one like Almighty God who has the capacity for having and for expressing 'deep feel-

ings' (feelings of sorrow and of joy and of compassion, and so many more 'feelings').

If humans (ordinary persons) have the capacity for expressing many different feelings (such as sorrow, accompanied with many 'tears'), and if the perfect (sinless) Son of God had (while He was on earth) the ability and the desire to express many different 'feelings' (including sorrow, accompanied with 'tears'), then is it not likely (even logical) that the 'God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ', and the God who created 'tears' in His 'choice creation', I say, is it not likely and even logical that this 'Father God' (of Jesus), and this 'Creator of All Humans' should have the 'capacity' and the 'desire' to shed tears?

Few 'happenings' (i.e., moral failures) have affected me more than what happened to a highly - respected leader in my denomination. The 'downfall' of a man who, in my opinion, was a 'great leader' in our general church (denomination)!

This man - one of several elected bishops in our denomination - was the 'presiding bishop' over several states, including the state of Colorado. He presided over the annual conference meetings, and this bishop served on the 'ministerial appointments committee', responsible for the annual appointments of the ministers to the several churches.

He served as my own bishop, during the latter period of my long-term pastorate. He was the bishop (along with my superintendent) who justly 'required' me to retire (because of my illness). At the time of my 'forced retirement', under his jurisdiction, it was, likewise, this bishop (with the conference superintendent) who (understandably) terminated Venita's job (at the same time that my job was terminated).

I, of course, did not have any 'close' contact with this bishop (since I seldom even saw him), but, I must (gladly) acknowledge that, in spite of the fact that this bishop had a large number of ministers for whom he was responsible, in several states, this church leader on one occasion phoned me,

for the purpose of encouraging me (during the period when I was going through my 'depression')!

I did not closely 'observe' this man's 'church responsibilities', through the many years that he nobly served our denomination. But I do know that he was a talented communicator. In spite of his many virtues and accomplishments, this man 'fell from grace/ (sexual involvement)!

God's strength (grace) is unlimited and His strength is available to 'help' us, while we struggle to overcome certain 'besetting sins' in our lives. God, however, will not 'deliver the victory' to us, without our cooperation. God does not do it for us, but, instead, with us.

Almighty God, working with a humble and obedient Christian, accomplishes great victory over 'besetting sins'! (The AA program, with its 12 steps, depends greatly upon the 'higher power', but success in this amazing program also depends upon the cooperation of earnest persons (alcoholics), if the victory is to be won!). "If you can go around temptation, do not expect God to take you through temptation."

If you, as an alcoholic, expect God to deliver you from the addiction, then you must do your part! You must stay away from those who would tempt you to 'take a drink'! Avoid, as much as possible, those places and those persons and those images (T.V. and shows) that would cause you to be tempted to 'lust' or to 'steal' or to 'covet' or to 'curse' or to 'lie' or to 'deceive'! Paul told youthful Timothy: "Flee youthful lusts (passions)!"

Run away from anything that would lead you into the 'trap' of sin! Stay away from evil companions, for evil companions 'corrupt good behavior'! If you pick up a poisonous snake, it will likely bit you! "Come out from among them," says the Lord, "and be ye separate. And I will receive you. And ye shall be my sons and my daughters."

If you start 'courting the world', you probably will soon be 'married' to the world! Jesus said that His followers must be in the world of sinners (to show by their lifestyle that they are true believers), but He made it clear that His followers are not to be of the world (i.e., like the world in attitudes and in behavior)!

Christians are to be like their Master, that is, to love sinners, but not act like sinners, in the process of living with and near sinners! Christians are to separate themselves from sin (i.e., that is to hate sin, in all of its 'forms' and its 'formats') but, at the same time, truly love sinners who are 'broken' because of their sinful lifestyle.

*There is no 'place' for Christians to 'compromise' their standards, in an attempt to appear more contemporary (or 'modern') in the midst of their 'sinful' friends. Christians must be 'repulsed' by sin, and, at the same time, be strongly attracted (in love) to those whose life is 'coming apart' because of the 'ravishes of sin'! Christians are to be **IN** the world (of sinners), but not **OF** the world (of sinful practices). Hating sin, but never hating sinners!*

BE YE HOLY, FOR I THE LORD THY GOD AM HOLY!

God said, "Be ye holy, for I the Lord thy God am holy!" Holiness, first, means 'separation' from a life (practice) of outward sinning. Holiness, secondly, means an inner cleansing from inward pollution from self-centered (selfish) motives. Outward separation from sinning, and an inner cleansing from self-centered motivations!

Holiness is a lifestyle, a lifestyle that has a strong orientation towards God, with a supreme desire to please the One who made us and who redeemed us. Supreme consecration (self-surrender) to the One who supremely loved us and who gave Himself for us!

In light of the supreme sacrifice that Christ made for us, should we not make it our daily goal (indeed, our lifetime goal) to love our loving Redeemer, more and more and more?

It is a 'travesty' (a horror) for believers to 'flirt' with the world (and its sinful lifestyle), when one considers that it was the wicked world that nailed the 'most beautiful person in the universe' on a cruel cross! What communion has light with darkness? What fellowship does a God-lover have with a God-denier? Christians are to 'run away' from sin, not run 'toward' sin!

Martin Luther said: "You cannot help it if the birds fly above your head, but you can keep the birds from making a nest in your hair!" If we put our foot in the trap of temptation, we should not be surprised if the trap snaps and catches our foot in the trap! God will make a way of escape for us when we are tempted, but it is our responsibility to keep our eyes open so that God can show us where the 'escape hatch' is! "Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee, O God!"

What a comforting and reassuring promise from God, but what if we (as believers) seldom or never hide God's Word in our heart? God's armor to protect us (believers) against the onslaughts of the devil is available (shoes of peace, belt of truth, helmet of salvation, breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith, sword of the Word), but God expects His children to take the time to put on the armor!

None of us (believers) need be defenseless in our 'battles against temptation' (in our personal battle against our own 'besetting sin'). God is able, if we are willing and obedient, to deliver us from yielding to our 'besetting sin'! Our God will keep us from all evil, but we must be willing to be kept from all evil. The power of God and the willing cooperation of the obedient believer spell total victory!

**HAVE YOU YET DISCOVERED YOUR OWN
'BESETTING SIN'?**

What is your 'besetting sin'? What is my 'besetting sin'? As noted previously, there are many different 'besetting sins'! Is your 'besetting sin' Exaggeration, or Being Overly-Affectionate, or Being Unusually Curious, or Covetousness, or Manipulation, or Self-Confidence, or Being Undisciplined, or Lust?

What is your 'besetting sin'? Is it being Materialistic, or Being Perfectionist, or Worry, or Being Overly-Sensitive, or Being Contemptuous, or Intellectual Snobbery, or Pride, or Anger, or Gullibility?

Can you and I (and, for that matter, all believers) be kept from falling into our 'besetting sin'? God, in His Word, assures us that this is possible! "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." (Jude 24, 25, KJV)

**IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR ME IF I WRONGLY
CHOOSE TO SIN?**

But what happens if (through my own carelessness) I fail to 'keep myself within God's keeping power'? What if I should 'fall' into sin? Is there any hope for me, if I do not resist temptation, and if I, instead, yield to my 'besetting sin', or to some other sin? It is far better if I do not sin, but, if I do sin, God has (wonderfully) provided a 'remedy' for me!

Wrote the apostle John (so long ago): "My little children, I am telling you this so that you will stay away from sin. But if you sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father. His name is Jesus Christ, the one who is all that is good and who pleases God completely. He is the one who took God's wrath against our sins upon himself, and brought us into fellowship

with God; and he is the forgiveness for our sin, and not only ours but the entire world's." (John 2:1-2 Living Bible)

*Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed,
To resist some temptation strong;
When for my deep grief I find no relief,
Though my tears flow all the night long?*

*O yes, He cares, I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,
I know my Savior cares, He cares.
did not know Jesus!*

*When Jesus laid His eyes on Peter (Does Jesus care when
I yield to my 'besetting sin', or to any other sin?
Does Jesus care, really care, for you and for me,
when we fail to 'resist some temptation strong'? Did
Jesus care for Simon Peter when the latter denied
his loving Master, three different times? Peter
'swore' that he the man who was the leader of the
disciples), that is to say, when Jesus' eyes met Pe-
ter's eyes at the time of that betrayal, don't you
think that Jesus (in spite of His own trouble) was
'weeping and weeping' in His heart - for Peter?*

*Jesus could have, so easily and so understandably, been pre-
occupied with His own suffering (treatment by the Jewish
leaders), but, instead, Jesus was, at that very crisis, con-
cerned for His friend who had just 'fallen' deeply into the 'sin
of denial'!*

*Does Jesus care when we fall and falter and fail during our
life's pilgrimage? Jesus, as He was facing the agony of His
own crucifixion, was 'thinking' of Peter (and Peter's wallowing
in the shame and guilt because of Peter's dastardly denial).*

The time would come (after Jesus' resurrection) when Jesus would gently (though firmly) restore Peter to his former place among the ban of the disciples! As Peter had denied his Lord three different times, so Peter's lips would soon declare three times that he loved his Master.

Peter had deeply repented of his tragic moral failure (denial), and, therefore, the forgiving Lord was willing (gladly) to restore Peter to fellowship and to apostleship with his Master! Just think: Peter's actions caused Jesus to 'weep', just a few hours before Jesus' crucifixion. Peter's deep repentance and renewed surrender to the Lordship of Jesus, now brought great 'rejoicing' to Jesus! Jesus wept 'bitterly' (repentance), but Jesus forgave Peter, and Jesus took away his shame and guilt and fears! Peter's tears were wiped away!

When the greatest king of Israel, King David, gazed on the beautiful, naked body of a lady, while she was bathing, do you think that God was indifferent to David's lustful look? I think that, far from indifferent, God was fully present on that tragic day. I think that God saw and He understood everything that David did on that day!

I think that God 'read' the content of David's heart - his heart of passionate sexual desire. God created sexual passion to be used appropriately, but God did not create sexual passion to be satisfied in an illicit manner, that is, with another woman who is not your betrothed (the wife of your lifetime commitment). David, on that day, fell from the splendor of his kingly nobility, to the depth of his lustful shame and guilt.

David's sins are at least three in number - adultery, murder, deception! What were God's reactions to these terrible sins? God wept, God was 'shocked', God was angry! When David took this beautiful woman unto himself (by 'force', for King David had great authority and power) and when David committed the act of 'sex' with her (probably several times within a short period of time), God, of course, saw everything. Nothing is ever hidden from the 'all-seeing eye' of Almighty God!

God could have 'wiped out' David at this time - because of David's unfaithfulness to the divinely-established 'covenant' that God had with David. But, in mercy, God, instead of engaging in vindictive judgment against David, God 'wept' and 'wept'.

God yearned for David to repent of his serious violation against God's law, and David's serious violation against God's love for David! When David arranged for this woman's husband to die (in battle), God was 'shocked' that David could do such a cunning and wicked act.

When David became a 'murderer' (a 'cold-blooded' murderer) God's 'tears' streamed down His 'cheeks' (symbolically-speaking)! When David attempted further to 'hide' his adulterous affair (following his arranged murder of the woman's husband), God was distressed and horrified ('shocked') that David's sins could cause David to become so deceptive!

David's irresponsible actions (outright wicked actions) must have caused David's God to 'shed lots of tears', not momentarily, but ceaselessly, during the days and the following months of David's horrible 'downfall'.

David, the shepherd boy, who courageously 'took on' that 9 foot tall giant, and killed him, giving 'glory' and 'honor' to all of Israel! David, that courageous 'fugitive' who had to run 'for his life' away from jealous King Saul. David, that friend of friends to Jonathan, who mourned the death of Jonathan (son of Saul), and who showed kindness to Jonathan's crippled son, after Jonathan died in battle. David, the object of great admiration by the multitudes of Israelites. David, the most popular and beloved of all the kings of Israel.

David, known as the 'man after God's own heart'! How could this man 'fall from the pinnacle of glory' to the 'depth of shame and deception'? How could this remarkable man (greatest of all the kings) descend into the 'pit of wickedness'

(adultery, murder, deception, shame)? "How art the mighty fallen!"

What made David a 'man after God's own heart', since he sinned so grievously? David, who sinned greatly, also repented greatly (see Psalm 32 and Psalms 51). There is more written about David in the Old Testament than there is written about any other person.

The Book of Psalms (largely written by David) reveals that David, more than any other person who is recorded, poured out his heart in louder 'tones of repentance' than is known about anyone else.

Talk about tears of repentance! David shed 'buckets full' of tears - tears of overwhelming grief that he had 'broken his holy covenant' with his God, overwhelming grief that he had 'hurt' so many persons - the woman that he had 'forced' into an unholy relationship, the woman's husband that he had (through deception) killed in 'cold blood', his cherished nation that for months he had deceived through his careful 'cover-up'.

David's tears flowed day and night, because he had allowed his 'lust to rule his life' on that dreadful passion-filled day. David's 'glance' at that naked woman, became his 'gaze', and his 'gaze' became his passion-driven action (adultery).

That act on that day was like the first of many 'dominos' that fell, during the next fateful days following David's adulterous act. The consequences from that one act (consequences that unfolded for many years) were many and they were tragic.

The death of a beloved soldier (a soldier who had been long loyal to David), the death of the newborn child (the result of David's adulterous 'union'), Israel's shame as a result of David's 'cover-up' (deception) for many months, the rape of David's daughter by one of David's sons, the murder of David's son by another one of David's sons, the insurrection (plot against David) by one of David's sons, and the overwhelming

grief that David experienced when that rebellious son (who led an insurrection) was killed by one of David's generals. All tragic consequences of David's sins!

Sorrow upon sorrow, grief upon grief, tears and more tears! David experienced how 'harsh' the consequences of a lustful (adulterous) action can be! "Why, oh why did I allow my eyes to gaze upon that woman, on that sunny day, so long ago? Why did I not respect the Laws of God? Why did I not 'take charge' (with God's help) of my 'wild passions'?"

"Why didn't I go to battle with my soldiers on that particular day, instead of staying home with 'time on my hands'? Why didn't I keep my mind occupied with the reading of God's Word? Why was I such a 'fool' to allow myself to be 'dragged' into the 'snares of evil'? I have found out that, indeed, the 'way of the transgressor is hard'!"

David was no stranger to 'tears'! He felt at times that he was 'swimming in tears'. Wrote David: "I am worn out with pain; every night my pillow is wet with tears." (Psalms 6:6 Living Bible) It was not only an abundance of 'tears' that David shed, but it was also an abundance of entreaties that he presented to God!

David prayed to a God of mercy! "Hear my prayer, O Lord, listen to my cry! Don't sit back, unmindful of my tears. For I am your guest. I am a traveler passing through the earth, as all my fathers were. Spare me, Lord! Let me recover and be filled with happiness again before my death." (Psalms 39:12-13 Living Bible) "You have seen me tossing and turning through the night. You have collected all my tears and preserved them in your bottle! You have recorded everyone in your book." (Psalms 56:8 Living Bible) (How do you feel when you realize that your God has preserved all of your 'tears' in His bottle, and that He has complete 'record' of all your 'tears'?).

CAN I BE 'IN' THE WORLD AND YET NOT BE 'OF ' THE WORLD?

When my four grandchildren were quite young, I taught them the 'little chorus':

*O be careful little eyes what you see,
For the Father up above is looking down with tender love,
So be careful little eyes what you see!
Of course, I substituted various words for 'eyes'.
Be careful little ears what you hear,
Be careful little mouth what you speak,
Be careful little mind what you think,
Be careful little hands what you do,
Be careful little feet where you walk,
Be careful little heart what you feel.*

Jesus said, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." God is able and He is willing and He is eager to keep us (believers) from falling into sin, but God expects us to cooperate with Him during our spiritual battles, that is, we (as believers) must 'watch' (guard ourselves against evil situations) and we must 'pray'!

As mentioned previously, the apostle Paul (a veteran of the 'Faith') exhorted his young 'son in the Way', to 'flee youthful lusts', to flee those things that tend to stimulate the sexual passions within the bosom of a young man!'

He further exhorted (not only youth, but all believers): "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing. Then I will be unto you a Father, and you shall be unto me my sons and daughter," says the Lord God Almighty. This is a 'command' to every Christian, not a mere option or alternative.

If a person is to become 'clean', and to remain 'clean', then he/she must exercise the will by intentionally 'separating'

oneself from all that is 'unclean'! And this means that a Christian should not expose his/her mind to the pollution of worldly films, and some images on the internet, and worldly music, and some forms of 'slow dancing', and some other types of worldly entertainment.

**CONFUSED IN THE MIND, BUT TRUSTING
WITH THE HEART!**

Not well-known Bible scholar, William Barclay (who, himself, lost his only child at 'sea'): "Quite clearly, Jesus did NOT think sickness and illness and untimely death the will of God. Quite clearly, Jesus thought them the reverse of the will of God. They were the very things that he had come to help and to overcome. In the life to come God is seeing to it that the life cut off too soon is getting its chance to blossom and flourish, and the life involved in tragedy is finding its COMPENSATION. The eternal world is redressing the balance of the world of time."

Remember: the One, who suffered the most on this planet (Jesus Christ), understands you 'perfectly' when you are suffering! "Jesus, Thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love Thou art". Jesus sheds the sympathizing tear with you! Usually, there is some 'mystery' involved in all human suffering!

As a finite person, you will always be lacking in your understanding of 'Why' tragic things happen. After you suffer a great loss, you have the 'right' to try to understand the 'causes', but you must soon ask 'How'? Instead of 'Why'? How can I use this great loss to make me a better person (not a 'bitter' person)? How can this loss in my life be used (by God) to help me to become a person who is more tender, more loving, and more determined to reach out to other suffering 'pilgrims'!

Remember, even though your mind is confused and your heart is broken, God understands and He cares. He will apply the 'balm of healing' to your 'open wounds'! When life is 'turned

upside down', you still have your 'unmovable Rock' to stand on. "On Christ the solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand. You dare not trust the sweetest 'frame', but wholly lean on Jesus' name! When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay!"

When your mind 'plays tricks on you', and when you don't know which way is 'up' and which way is 'down', there is one solid foundation upon which you may stand, namely, the foundation of Divine Love! Amidst all the changes and the chances of your life, God will hold you steady! If you are an 'injured sheep' that needs to be carried by the loving Shepherd, then that loving Shepherd (who knows His sheep intimately) will 'carry you' until you are well enough to join the other healthy sheep!

SURVEYING LIFE'S VARIOUS SUFFERINGS

In our life's journey, we all experience various types of suffering, and, through God's grace, these sufferings can turn out to be 'stepping stones', rather than 'stumbling blocks' in our life.

First, there is the suffering of 'infirmities'. While it is true that both Christians and non-Christians experience this kind of suffering, the Christian is best prepared successfully to face this kind of suffering. There are believers - persons of great faith - whose tears have often flowed as they have earnestly prayed for healing, but to no avail!

Paul prayed that the 'thorn in his flesh' might be removed, but the thorn was not removed. God said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you!" If an obstacle (physical problem) is not removed, then God will 'use' the obstacle as a means of perfecting the character of the sufferer.

Many of the most mature persons (Christ-like persons) are the believers who have suffered the most! These godly persons have often been 'tried in the fire' of adversity, and they have come through the 'fire of adversity' and are like 'purified gold' (beautiful and lovely in their character - the kind of persons

that are magnetic, attracting others to the altogether lovely Christ)!

Second, there is the suffering of chastisement. The 'athlete of God' must undergo rigorous training, and he must experience some necessary 'correction' because of weaknesses in his life. The 'divine coach' has a right to expect submission from His trainees (believers). Training (i.e., laying aside unnecessary 'weights') may be rather painful at times, but there is great joy in growing in one's spiritual understanding, to prepare the disciplined 'athlete' to receive someday the 'crown' from God at the end of the race of life!

To change the analogy, the 'soldier of God' must be disciplined, and some of that discipline involves suffering. "Take your part in suffering as a loyal soldier of Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 2:3)

Here is another analogy: The branches on the Vine must be pruned, if there is to be a fruitful harvest (John 15). The pruning process in the life of the believer is often 'painful', but there is joy because of anticipation of a fruitful harvest!

Another analogy: The potter must mold the clay if beautiful pottery is to be the finished product. Believers must be made moldable and soft in the hands of the Great Divine Potter, but there is often some 'pain' involved when the divine potter molds us to become a 'beautiful vessel', worthy for the Potter's glory!

Third, there is the suffering of persecution. Jesus said that anyone who lives a godly life will suffer persecution. Jesus greatly suffered persecution, and His followers are bound to suffer persecution also – in one form or another. Many believers, throughout the ages, have suffered the ultimate for Christ - they have laid down their lives for the sake of Christ! One famous German pastor, who confronted Hitler because of the persecution against the Church, was finally hanged (at the very end of the War). His name is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who (after

all these passing years since 1945) is still remembered as one of the great Christians of the 20th century)!

He exercised a profound influence for Christ, but he gave his life because he boldly confronted a mass murderer (evil dictator). The suffering of persecution is intense and it is hurtful! The surrender of one's life on the altar of obedience, in the face of murderous persecutors, is the height of bravery and loyalty to Christ! Jesus said that the reward for those who are persecuted for 'righteousness sake' will be 'great' - very 'great' in heaven!

Christians are not to 'court' persecution, but if (when) it comes, Christians are to 'suffer' boldly and faithfully. While Christians do not needlessly 'embrace' suffering, if it comes, Christians are to 'commit their case unto the Lord', for the Lord alone has the authority to 'render justice' unto the persecutor. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay", saith the Lord (Romans 12).

Just punishment will be certainly and eventually given to lawbreakers - to those who defy the laws of God. God has appointed government officials who will act as God's 'agents of justice' to bring lawbreakers to the 'bar of accountability'. Wrong will be punished, and righteousness will be rewarded. God's righteousness will be honored. God's integrity will be recognized. God's justice will be vindicated. God's holiness will be respected. God's peace shall be restored. God's love will be celebrated.

If not on this planet, then hereafter, all persecutors will be punished. If not on this planet, then hereafter, all (persecuted) believers will be rewarded.

Christians do not 'court' the suffering of persecution, but, on the other hand, Christians are not to run from the 'suffering of persecution', simply because of the 'fear' of consequences! Through the enabling presence of the Spirit, Christians are to 'stand tall' and to witness for Christ, regardless of the possi-

bility that they will be persecuted physically, or shunned socially! Followers of Christ cannot expect that all persons (sinners) will be receptive to their message.

The Bible reminds us: "Woe unto you, if all men think well of you!" Christians can expect that they will be persecuted! Persecution - in one form or another, at one time or another, from one person or another, to one degree or another - will come to every follower of Christ! Jesus said, "If they persecuted me (the Master), they (the world of sinful men) will also persecute you (the servants)."

Fourth, there is the suffering of temptation. It is said that Jesus suffered 'being tempted'. Temptation is Satan's attempt to get us (believers) to 'fall into sin'. Temptation is Satan's attempt to 'lure us into a forbidden thought or into a hurtful action.' Satan fell from 'favor' with his Master (pre-history), and now Satan seeks to get humans to follow his rebellious path! Satan is 'taking out his bitterness against God' by attempting to 'capture humans' as his victims.

As Satan desired to destroy Simon Peter, so Satan today desires to destroy us - he desires to 'sift us like wheat'! Satan can 'misquote' Holy Scriptures, in his scheme to deceive mankind. He tries to imitate the work of God, by pretending to be an 'angel of light'. He comes as an 'angel of light'; he disguises himself, with the goal of causing believers to 'taste the ingredients of the world's pleasure'!

Temptation, looked at from God's viewpoint, is not meant to be the 'downward pull to evil', but rather temptation is to be seen as a 'stepping stone' to further spiritual growth! The believer, by saying 'No' to the temptation to lie, is given opportunity to demonstrate his integrity! This same 'logic' (of converting 'temptation' into a 'test' for the purpose of character-building) can be applied to any specific type of temptation (cheating, lust, gossip, jealousy, gluttony, etc.).

Someone said that 'temptation' is not the punishment of being a human, but rather 'temptation' is the 'glory' in being a man! Temptation, meant by Satan as his opportunity to destroy a man, is, from God's perspective, the opportunity for a man to become a stronger follower of Christ.

Said one rugged and discerning believer, "I used to say the devil is tempting me; now I say the Lord is testing me." It is possible for the believer to experience joy amidst the suffering of temptations and trials. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance." (James 1:2 NIV)

It is true that the ultimate purpose of experiencing temptations is to look at the temptations as 'tests' by which the believer is given opportunity to prove his faithfulness to God, and opportunity for the believer to grow in his 'faith'! This should be the 'goal' and the intention of the sincere believer every time he faces personal temptation!

When a believer struggles with the approach of temptation, is he simply 'left to himself' to face the vicious presence of the tempter (devil)? Thankfully, the answer to this question is a resounding 'No'! Says Hebrews 2:18, "Because he (Jesus) himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (NIV) You are not left alone when Satan suddenly approaches you, when he approaches you with a blatant temptation or with a subtle temptation!

God is with you, to sustain you, to protect you, to give you courage and wisdom. If you trust Him, he will 'carry you through' temptation! "No temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it, for he has promised this and you can bear up patiently against it." (1 Corinthians 10:13 Living Bible)

God understands the 'pain' (suffering) that you experience when you confront temptation! Temptation (by its nature) seeks to 'exploit' the weak areas of your life! Jesus has promised to 'aid' you during your times of temptation (Hebrews 2:18). The 'pain' that you feel when Satan is tempting you may be 'sharp' and it may be difficult. But the 'pain' that a believer feels when he actually 'yields' to temptation is likely to be the greatest pain!

The shame one feels because he took the 'road of least resistance' (yielding to sin), the pangs of guilt or loneliness he feels because he senses that his fellowship with God has been injured, the 'sense' of personal disappointment that he feels because he has taken the 'low road of transgression', instead of taking the 'high road of righteousness'! Shame, fear, social isolation, guilt, condemnation, personal disappointment, disillusionment - a terrible litany of consequences, as a result of his yielding to temptation! Can any 'suffering' be as great as this type of suffering?

*Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed
To resist some temptation strong;
When for my deep grief I find no relief,
Though my tears flow all the night long?*

*O yes, He cares, I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,
I know my Savior cares.
(By Frank E. Graeff)*

The Bible explicitly states that the 'norm' for the Christian life is 'sinless' - that is, the living of life with no deliberate breaking of God's clearly revealed and known laws! Jesus came into this world to deliver His people 'from' their sins, not 'in' their sins (Matthew, chapter 1). The Christian life is not meant (by God) to be a 'sinning religion', that is, a religion that practices sinning. In fact, the Bible (1 John 3) indicates that anyone who 'practices sinning' is of the 'devil'.

The call to live a 'righteous' life (a life free from 'sinning') is a call that is reiterated time and time again in the New Testament! It was 'sin' that nailed the Son of God to a cruel cross, so Christians should never tolerate any sin in their lives! The Son of man came to this earth to destroy all sin, objectively, through the sacrifice of the Cross, and subjectively, through the application of the atoning blood of the Cross to each individual heart.

With all of these statements of truth being declared, it has to be admitted, however, that many Christians (probably most Christians) morally fail - actually do sin - at one time or another time, in their sincere attempt to live the Christian life!

Sadly, but truly, many Christians do break the known laws of God, at some time in their life. One need never sin, and no Christian should ever break God's holy laws, but, realistically, Christians sometimes do, indeed, sin in one way or another. Sadly, it is far too easy for a Christian to be 'off his guard', to 'slip into an act of sin or into an attitude of sin'.

There are countless sins into which believers can easily 'fall'! The entertainment of a jealous thought, the opening of the mind briefly to a lustful thought, the allowance of a feeling of resentment toward an 'offender', the 'surprise' envious or greedy thought, the enjoyment of a proud feeling because of an honest compliment from a friend, the resistance of the Spirit who is definitely directing you to give some money to a poor person, the nurturing of bitterness towards your cruel 'enemy' who enjoys ridiculing you because of your Christian 'faith'!

There are, indeed, many sins into which believers can 'fall'! The 'doubting' of your trust in God as you face a troublesome future, the return of your 'self-consciousness' which hinders you in your 'ease' in social settings, jealous feelings that crop up because you feel that God has gifted another believer more than God has gifted you, neglect in paying your bills which could lead to a form of stealing, feelings of anger towards a

person who undercuts your work on a Christian project, a new craving for money because of the comfortable lifestyle you think money will make possible.

Our God is able and He is willing to guard us against attacks of evil, and against the 'evil one' (devil). As we seek to follow our Master, our Master will protect us from the snares and traps of Satan! If we 'watch and pray', the Lord will respond by shielding us from the 'forces of evil'! "The Lord is faithful; he will make you strong and guard you from satanic attacks of every kind." (2 Thessalonians 3:3 Living Bible)

Weak though we might be, if our heart is sincere and our mind is open, we can be assured that our mighty Savior will give us strength to overcome all threatening 'evil' in our life. God's power is limitless, and His power is far greater than the power of Satan! "God is able to keep you from slipping and falling away, and to bring you, sinless and perfect, into his glorious presence with mighty shouts of everlasting joy." (Jude 25 Living Bible)

God speaks to His followers: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life!" A most glorious promise, but a demanding condition! Only those who are faithful, not temporarily, but constantly (till the threshold from earthly life to eternity) - these persons will be crowned with eternal life! If I fall away from following the Lord (backslide from the Christian Faith and from personal relationship with the Lord), the promise of receiving a 'crown' will not be fulfilled in my life - after I die!

'Faithfulness' is at the 'heart' of all the Christian virtues. Someone said that if you placed 'faithfulness' on one side of the scale and if you placed all the other Christian virtues on the other side of the scale, 'faithfulness' would outweigh all the other virtues!

Being 'true' (faithful) to our Lord (as a branch, abiding in the Vine) is what determines if we are finally granted a place in

the eternal kingdom! Only as the branch abides in the Vine can the branch enjoy continuing life and vitality. When the branch is severed, the branch dies (and it is cast into the fire). (Read John 15)

This sobering portion of scripture should not be interpreted to mean that, if a Christian commits one sin (or even a few sins), he is automatically 'severed' from the Vine' (and, thus, in danger of being 'thrown into the fire'). If I sin, I should be concerned, and I should 'run to the arms of Jesus' for forgiveness and for restoration. So that I might once again enjoy a wonderful and a close fellowship with my Savior. I should never minimize the seriousness of even 'one sin'.

One sin can lead to another sin, and to another sin, and so on! An example of this is seen in the life of the Christian who decides to abandon the position of 'total abstinence', and he decides to start enjoying a 'social drink' (and enjoy a 'social drink' quite often). One 'social drink' becomes two 'social drinks', and (for many Christians) these occasional 'drinks' become a lot of 'drinks'. This unsuspecting Christian 'wakes up one day' and he finds that he is 'hooked' on alcohol and the next thing he knows, he is an alcoholic (attending AA)!

Here is another example: A little sinning (such as an occasional 'glance' at pornography on the internet), becomes a lot of sinning, and this 'Christian' finds (sadly) that he is on a very 'slippery sloop'. His 'lustful thoughts' have opened the door to eventual 'sexual bondage' (a very hard bondage to 'break').

There are countless examples (from 'real life') that demonstrate the problems that develop, all because the heart and the hand and the mind of a believer allows the entry of the first sin into his life, followed soon with the second sin and on and on and on, until a habit has been formed, and spiritual wreckage has resulted.

Here is a third example: There are too many believers who yield to their 'craving' for a material object (car, boat, house,

vacation, etc.), and, instead of resisting that craving, they decide to borrow money (on a credit card). It is 'enjoy now and pay later' - the attitude that brings so many Christians to the 'brink of bankruptcy'!

The Bible makes it clear (to every believer, 1 Timothy 6) that if we have food and clothing and shelter, with these we ought to be 'content'! However, so many of us (believers) are not satisfied with the 'basic necessities' of life. Instead, we fall prey to the advertising world, and we think that we must have more and more and more 'things' - more and more 'stuff! We think that we can't get along without the 'toys and trinkets' of our world.

There is some kind of 'hole' in our life that we think 'just one more thing' will fill! Daily life is 'boring', so a new car will 'make life more interesting'. Never mind the 'cost'; I will put it on my credit card. I simply must give a new 'sparkle' to my life of drudgery! The temptation, in this materialistic society, is to purchase anything that 'appeals to our imagination'.

Christians get themselves into 'tons of trouble' when they get their eyes off of the 'Lord of Sufficiency' and begin to 'glance' and then to 'gaze' at the glitter and the trinkets and the entertainment of this world! The Bible encourages us (believers) to resist the temptation to purchase everything upon which 'we lay our eyes'! Wise believers embrace what the Bible says: "Life does not consist in the abundance of the things that a man possesses!"

There is assurance for every yielded believer! God, in mercy and in love, has given to us humans certain 'deterrents' against sinning. First, the greatest deterrent against sinning is the Holy Spirit, who helps us to guard against temptation. Temptation, of course, is inevitable, but the Spirit gives us strength to resist the allurements of the evil one (devil). The Spirit helps us to discern the nature and the consequence of our particular temptation.

The Spirit actually 'intercedes' in our behalf, and the Spirit 'translates' our 'inner groans' of agony, and the Spirit presents our inarticulate cries to the Heavenly Father. Short of being coercive, the Spirit does everything in His power to guard us against 'falling into sin'.

If we are rebellious in our attitudes, and if we are intent in committing a 'wrong' (sin), then the Spirit must allow us to go foolishly and carelessly into our 'ditch of sin'! But, the Spirit, who has access to our inner conscience, will appeal to our reason and He will seek to guide us away from a course of action that is fraught with disaster!

The Bible warns believers never to grieve or to quench or to resist the blessed Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the believer's greatest Helper, so believers must learn to be sensitive to the Spirit, to listen to the 'still, small voice' of the Spirit. The voice of the 'evil one' is boisterous (loud and clamorous), and that (deceptive) voice demands immediate and thoughtless action!

On the other hand, the Spirit's voice is soft and kind and without coercion, and the Spirit appeals to the better reason of the person with whom He is dealing. To listen to the Spirit's voice is to find peace and joy and greater understanding of reality. To listen to the voice of the evil one (devil) is to be led into paths of wickedness and sorrow and bondage!

Second, another deterrent against sinning is the Holy Scriptures. When Jesus was tempted by the devil (Matthew 4), Jesus quoted scriptures to the devil. "It stands written" Jesus said to Satan. Satan had to retreat, because God's Word is powerful and authoritative and final, and Satan's falsehoods (lies and deceptions) cannot stand up against the eternal truths that are recorded in the Bible. "Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee, O God!" Ephesians 6 (listing of the spiritual armor) says that the 'sword of the Spirit is the Word of God'. Of the six pieces of armor (for spiritual warfare), the 'sword of the Spirit' (Word of God) is the only 'offensive piece of armor'!

Third, another deterrent against sinning is Prayer. "Pray without ceasing", that is, have an inner attitude of trust in God, at all times. When temptation assails you (at unexpected moments during the day), simply 'breathe a quick prayer' to your 'Divine Defender'. In the wilderness, when Jesus was tempted by the devil, for 40 days, Jesus was in constant communion with His Heavenly Father. Unbelievably, God is more interested in you enjoying spiritual victory (over sinning) than you are for yourself.

The Spirit (as noted above) is always present with you, and He is (through your obedient cooperation and through your attitude of prayerful submission) committed to applying Jesus' victory over Satan (won at the Cross) to your own personal life.

The historic victory of Jesus is meant to be your own (constant) victory in your own personal life! Christ has already (finally) won the victory over sin and over Satan, and you (as a believer) now have the 'right' and the 'privilege' of 'tapping into Jesus' historic victory'!

Because Christ won the victory for the entire human race, the victory over sin and Satan and death is assured for every yielded believer! You now (as a child of God, in fellowship with the victorious Christ), can daily appropriate Christ's victory over sin and the devil. Of course, you can have no victory, independent of your 'conquering Christ', but when you are 'vitally connected' (through obedience and surrender) to Christ, then Christ's strength becomes your strength, Christ's victory becomes your victory!

Living a life of 'constant victory over sinning' should be the 'norm' for believers. Christians need never to 'break God's known laws'. But, unfortunately, Christians sometimes do not 'guard themselves' against a certain sin, particularly a certain 'besetting sin', and they find themselves realizing that they said something they should not have said. Rather than being

contemplative they have been impulsive (thoughtless), and they have offended someone by the words they spoke or by the actions they performed. Afterwards they feel 'bad' (guilty), for being so insensitive in words or careless in actions.

Christians who fail to be equipped (daily) with all the 'armor of faith' can too easily stumble into an act or into an attitude of sin! What should a believer do if he finds himself with a conscience that is not 'clear', if he finds himself with a spirit that is 'troubled', if he finds himself with a heart that is 'guilty', if he realizes that his 'tongue' was too loose, if he realizes that he has offended a 'brother' or a 'sister'? He feels 'miserable' because of the thoughtless word he spoke and because of the selfish actions that he performed!

My sinning is unnecessary! My sinful actions are hurtful to someone, somewhere! What can I do? Thankfully my loving Heavenly Father is not going to allow me to be 'suspended in guilt' and alienated from my fellow men. It is a 'bitter pill' to swallow (spiritually-speaking), but the 'bitter pill' of 'humble restitution' is the answer to reconciliation with the brother (or sister) that I have offended. Going to the one that I 'wronged' is not easy, but it is an act of humility.

Simply asking for their forgiveness is essential if the relationship is to be restored. After honestly confessing your specific 'wrong', you then say something like this: "Can you find it in your heart to forgive me?" It is likely that the offended person will, indeed, forgive you. If not, at least you are 'clear' in your own relationship with God (for you have obeyed the 'voice' of the Spirit.).

Your conscience is clear, and you hope the 'heart' of the offended person will also eventually become 'right'! You continue to pray for that offended one, and, if the 'occasion arises', you will be kind in his presence (but definitely you will not 'force' yourself upon that one-time friend whom you offended).

To ask the offended one to forgive you is vitally important, but, the all-important 'step' for a believer to take, is to come to God to ask for forgiveness. David said (in the midst of his 'heavy sins'), "Against thee, and thee only, have I sinned, O God!" All sin is primarily against God, and only secondarily against our fellow men. The Bible says, "If anyone should sin, we have an Advocate before the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous One"! Jesus is ready to 'plead our case' before the Father. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and He will forgive our sins, and He will cleanse our hearts from all unrighteousness." The 'pain' of guilt will be resolved, the broken relationship will be restored, the departed joy will return, the heart-break will be healed, the humiliated shame will be gone!

Fifth, there is the suffering because of life's losses and tragedies. Perhaps the hardest experience in the life of a Christian comes when he is called to experience a sorrow, a disappointment, or a loss, the explanation for which defies human reason. Each of us (believers) - if we have lived long enough - knows, by personal experience what it is like to lose a loved one, prematurely. When my brother's daughter (my niece) - 15 years old - suddenly died, as a result of her having a very rare seizure while she was riding on a roller coaster, her parents and her siblings, obviously, were devastated.

The sorrow from this premature death was very great! Why did this dedicated young lady (a sincere Christian) have to die when she was so young? I suppose some 'positive benefits' came from this tragedy, but, nevertheless, this tragedy defies human reason. My niece was so talented and so dedicated to Christ, and she had great potential in countless ways!

When I was a pastor for a long time, I witnessed the death of several younger persons. For me to minister to surviving loved ones was not the easiest job I ever had! How difficult it was for me to stand beside a young couple, as they buried their 'infant' child (a crib death). And there were the surviving four children and teens, which had to attend the double casket funeral for their parents, who were the victims of a head-on col-

lision (killed by the collision of an oncoming car, driven by a drunken college student)!

I previously had led this couple to a saving knowledge of Christ, and this couple was making 'great strides' in their spiritual growth! Of course, they suddenly appeared in heaven, when they were suddenly killed, but what about the four children who were left behind?

On a dreadful (tragic) day in August 1992, there was the 'tragedy of tragedies' when a jealous-ridden husband shot and killed his wife! On the church parking lot where about 10 of us witnessed the entire horrible scene! A police officer and the murderer exchanged 'fire', and both were seriously injured. The man who shot his wife died a few hours later, in the hospital, and the police officer verily survived. He finally recovered several weeks later. Both parents dead, their three precious children were taken into the home of their grandparents. Those children received great training for many years, by their grandparents, and they are now adjusted adults (in spite of the unbelievable tragedy)!

There are some others who chose to leave this earthly life, by their own will! Each of these had an outstanding mind, and they were lavishly endowed by their Creator. The hardest of all hard funerals for me to conduct were the funerals for those precious folks who decided that life was not worth living for them any longer. The inner tears and the heartbreak that I experienced when I learned that these persons took their own life! Of course, various death-dealing instruments were used, but all of these instruments of destruction accomplished the same intended purpose!

Tragically, the purpose of these 'instruments' was to enable the despairing person to escape this earthly life! Each of these persons had one thing in 'common' - each felt that they could no longer deal with all the burdens and the sorrows and the heartbreaks that were 'heaped' upon them! It is 'chilling' to one's inner soul to think about those 'death-delivering in-

struments' - ropes, gas, pills, guns, railroad tracks - all used to end the precious life that God gave to each person!

All of these precious lives left this earth prematurely! Only our merciful God understands the depth of their respective and unique 'pains'! None of us has a 'right' to 'stand back and judge' these persons who, obviously, came to a point of 'no return' in their respective lives.

Sadly, none of them saw a 'way out' of their 'valley of despair and depression and unbearable pain'. The Bible says, "Thou shalt not kill", and that is a prohibition against killing one's own body. No, suicide is not a legitimate option for any believer, but God knows the person and God understands the 'factors' that are involved in the life of the person that caused him to take this desperate action, this final exit. We are not the 'judge', only God is the altogether Righteous Judge! God will judge according to love and mercy! God alone has the full knowledge of all the facts, surrounding every person!

SURRENDERING THE 'MYSTERIOUS EVENTS' OF OUR LIFE!

Some persons make it a 'habit' to check the 'obituary page' of their city newspaper, every day. I personally do not look for that section of the paper, unless and until I have a reason to, and that reason, obviously, is to read the obituary of a person whom I have known. On a certain day, now several years ago, I 'happened' to glance at that particular page. Almost immediately I noticed an obituary of a man - a minister - whom I had casually known for many years.

He was a well-known minister who had served his church and his school (both of which he founded) for about 25 years. He was an exuberant and outgoing and friendly and committed leader in our community, and he was highly respected in both the Baptist Church that he founded, and the Christian Day School that he founded (one of the few Christian Schools in Ft. Collins). I did not know him well, but occasionally I would see him "cheering" for his teens (basketball players, etc.) that

would be competing against the teens in our own Christian School (the School that Venita founded in 1987).

He was a 'fierce competitor' athletically, but he was also 'fair' and 'hospitable' to competitor schools. He had a beautiful wife and several children, and his children were very musical. He was committed to excellence academically, and (from my limited observations) he was a sincere follower of Christ. One could probably say, without exaggeration, that he carried too many 'loads' administratively, for he chose to be not only the pastor of his growing local (Baptist) church, but he chose also to be the 'head master' (principal) of his Christian School.

How he was able to 'juggle all these balls', I do not know! I think that it was apparent that he was a 'type A' temperament (i.e., fast moving, quick thinking, goal-oriented, deeply committed to 'kingdom building!'). The few times I had contact with him, and brief conversations with him, he appeared to me to be deeply sincere and totally 'focused' in his God-given mission!

Obviously, because I was only an acquaintance of this fellow minister, my knowledge of him was very limited, and my perception of him was very incomplete, but my general impression of him was positive. I respected him, and when I saw him, I perceived him to be a 'seasoned' (experienced) minister - a minister who held strong convictions regarding the importance of young person's receiving a Christian education!

Every time I saw him, he appeared to me to be a 'strong soldier' of the cross, a friendly and loving person. Because he was a member of a very conservative denomination (Independent Baptist Church), I, obviously, knew that he definitely embraced very conservative 'ideas' and 'doctrines'. I knew that I likely would not 'agree' with every one of his 'convictions' (theologically), but, nevertheless, I deeply respected him for his personal faith in Christ, and for the success that was his, in that he founded both a growing church and a highly respected Christian Day School (with all grades)!

When I read that particular obituary (by 'chance'), the above-stated thoughts regarding this fine gentleman, came to my mind. Of course, I began to ponder to myself 'why' he had died. I knew that he was not elderly (I think he was in his 50's). Did he die from 'cancer' or from a 'car accident'?

Why did he die at a relatively young age? Then I had a strange 'intuitive feeling' that came to me – a 'feeling' I wanted quickly to 'push out of my mind'! My wife had the same thought, almost simultaneous to my thought - 'it was suicide'! How could that be? No way! He was such a fine person! Such a successful man - the pastor of a well-known church, and the administrator of a well-established Christian School! Surely not! Horror of all horrors! A man of God surely would not take his own life!

Our suspicions (intuitions) were soon confirmed! I decided (somewhat reluctantly) to attend his funeral. The sanctuary of the church, that he had built a few decades ago, was packed to overflowing, for the lengthy memorial service. On one of the front walls of the sanctuary was placed a huge picture of the pastor.

The seasoned minister (a leader in the denomination's district, an older minister who knew the deceased pastor very well) gave the funeral message - a message that was full of love and compassion, but, nevertheless, a message that communicated so much grief and so many unanswered questions.

The retired minister, who lovingly addressed the congregation of broken-hearted listeners (friends and family) shared that Bob Jones University (a well-known conservative university) had recently granted the 'honorary doctor's degree' to this deceased pastor. A great honor, given to a minister who was considered worthy of recognition for unusual service in God's kingdom!

This unusual honor was given a few weeks before the minister ended his own life so tragically! Some of the deceased minister's own children (young adults) offered music (brass instru-

ments) in the service! As I sat in the midst of this packed sanctuary, I felt like shedding a thousand tears! A heart-rending occasion!

I was not 'close' to this particular man (a fellow minister in my community), and, therefore, my evaluation of the 'contributing causes' would have to be partial and perhaps inaccurate. There, obviously, are reasons that people have (in their own mind and according to their own perspective) for committing suicide.

No one really knows (for sure) why this man committed such a horrible thing. Irony of all ironies - on the day that his congregation celebrated the resurrection (Easter Sunday) was the very day that this minister experienced 'self-inflicted death'. On the Sunday evening of Easter, this precious man of God used his garage for his own self-destruction. The day to celebrate 'Life in Christ' became the day he chose to experience his own Death (needlessly and tragically). Eventually, I learned that he left a rather detailed note which partially explained (justified) his reason for killing himself!

Why, why, why? When he had so much to live for (a fine family, growing church, dynamic school), why did he 'end it all', using the fumes of his car as the 'instrument' of his death?

Only God, who mercifully welcomed His 'troubled servant' Home, can tell us the 'answers' to these urgent questions - but it is not likely that God (on this 'plane of existence') will reveal those answers. God alone knows the kind of 'pain' and the degree of 'pain' that any human being is feeling. God alone knows the unbearable burdens that people carry!

There are doubtless several 'contributing causes' for this 'tragedy of tragedies', but I am possibly privy to possibly two or three 'contributing causes' for this self-inflicted death. Apparently, this dear man went through considerable grief and difficult 'adjustment', following the death of his dear wife, about three years before this 'happening'.

During the funeral service, one of the minister's close friends (a lady choir member) mentioned that sometimes she had to 'get after him' for not taking his medication. She did not expand on her comment, but I sensed that this minister was probably taking some kind of anti-depression medicine. (Obviously, in this funeral setting, no one would have said it, but I wondered if the minister was 'bi-polar').

I wondered if he had been struggling, for a while, with some kind of emotional or mental 'challenge'. I have no 'data' to support these possibilities, but I do not believe that a man takes his life unless there are some serious emotional or mental factors 'on board'. Of course, I will never know what the full 'facts' are.

Besides the fact that his wife died (a few years previously), and besides the fact that this minister was apparently not consistently taking his prescribed medication (maybe for depression), there is another rather 'strange fact' which brought even greater intensity to the sadness to that unusual funeral service. Present at that tear-jerking service was the woman whom, apparently, the deceased minister was considering marrying! I got the 'impression' (although I did not discern all the facts) that plans were being made for the uniting of these two persons in holy matrimony!

When I heard about this 'dream' that was destroyed, my heart 'sank' even more. This minister had the possibility of a 'new future' with a 'new bride'! Why would he deny life and choose death? He possibly could have been very happy with this lovely woman!

Why didn't he 'release the past' (the good times with his now deceased wife), and 'move on into a glorious future' - loving a new wife, deepening his love for his dear children and grandchildren, embracing anew the wonderful folks in his church where he had labored for 25 years, continue to lead his school

or perhaps wisely hire another administrator (to lighten his own 'load' of responsibility)?

This precious man (with all the unanswered questions that went to the grave with him) is in the hands of a God who knows all, who cares for all, who judges righteously and justly, whose mercy is from 'everlasting to everlasting'!

TRUSTING WHEN WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND!

It is true that there are many tragic events that happen in one's life, that are beyond our ability to comprehend or to understand! Christ did not come to earth to give us an 'easy' life. There are many trials and there are many tests and there are many temptations that come to every believer - to even the most devout believers. No, God did not come to make life 'easy', but He did come to make life 'great'!

Greatness in life sometimes is found through climbing the mountains of difficulty. Greatness usually comes as a result of believers experiencing suffering - sometimes great and terrible suffering! But, during our struggles, we must remember that our God loves us, and that our God will 'make a way through the wilderness of suffering!' Because of God's grace, Christians can ultimately 'come out on top' - Christians can be victorious, Christians can be like 'gold tried in fire'!

The well-known Bible scholar (William Barclay) has an important insight: "There are times when a Christian has to learn the hardest lesson of all, the very lesson which Jesus Himself had to learn in Gethsemane; he has to learn how to accept what he cannot understand. There are times when things happen that he cannot understand, but he can still say, 'God, Thou art love; I build my faith on that.'"

"The universe is not 'a vale of tears'; rather, it is a 'vale of character-making' and character cannot be made except in the strain and stress and struggle." (E. Stanley Jones)

SURVIVING A 'NEAR-DEATH' EXPERIENCE!

Since the historic 'fall' of mankind, history has been 'interlaced' with suffering! Every person comes into this world as a result of another person's suffering - the suffering of childbirth. Some women, including the mother of my great grandmother, paid the ultimate price to bring another human being into this world, that is, some women die during childbirth!

My own eldest daughter had serious 'complications' when she was giving birth to her firstborn child (a son). Her 'regular doctor' was not adequately trained to deal with the serious complications of this difficult birth.

God amazingly protected my daughter by providing a highly 'specialized' doctor, who just 'happened' to be in the hospital in the middle of the night. This doctor's unusual training enabled him to know just what to do! If it had not been for his 'skilled intervention', my daughter (like her ancient ancestor) may have been another casualty (death during childbirth)!

My daughter's 'ordeal' during the middle of that night, more than 17 years ago, was most frightening, but God had just the 'right' doctor, who happened to be in the hospital at an unusual (irregular) time of the night! That near-death experience happened on the night of Lucas' birth – April 30, 1997!

I believe that our God is a God of 'providence' - a God whose mercy is demonstrated in beautiful and special ways. For some reason, God chose not to intervene on the night of my niece's death, but God did choose to intervene to save my daughter's life, while she was giving birth to a son (who is now over 6 feet tall)!

ACCEPTING UNFORESEEN DAILY EVENTS!

Life is 'fragile'! Life is 'uncertain'! Life is 'vulnerable' to the unexpected 'storms of life'. You can be here today, and you

can be gone tomorrow! Life soon passes away - it fades like the beautiful flower that wilts and dies, it fades like the 'tea kettle's steam' that is seen and then it vanishes into the atmosphere! My mother used to say, "Ronnie, you do not know what a day will bring forth." Unpredictable, a day can bring forth an unforeseen (tragic) event!

For the last 15 years, I have enjoyed weekly fellowship with several men - all older men! Except for one man, I was during these many years the youngest man in the group! For more than a dozen years, I did lots of talking, lots of listening, lots of laughing, lots of empathizing, lots of Bible reading and praying and praising - and, of course, lots of eating! One by one, most of these godly men (each with such an interesting 'history') have died!

One of my friends, with whom I had spent a lot of time visiting and sharing and laughing, unexpectedly 'dropped dead' in his house. Just a few weeks ago! I found out about his death at a time that took me by surprise.

He had been a leader in the church where I have attended, ever since I retired from my pastorate (July 1994). I had known this man for nearly a dozen years, and I enjoyed his friendship. He brought so much 'zest' to our weekly group. Everyone loved this widower! His death was announced during the Sunday Morning announcements!

I was so shocked when I learned of his unexpected death, that I could hardly give my attention to the hour's service! He had just returned from an honorary trip for veterans, to the Nation's Capital! His next door neighbor (a member of the same church) was concerned when my friend did not respond to her call. The neighbor walked over to his house, and she looked through one of his windows. The neighbor saw him lying on his floor, obviously dead! Here today, and gone tomorrow! The uncertainty of life!

Strangely, my last conversation with my friend (about two weeks before he died) was rather 'strange'! My friend wanted to talk at some length about 'cremation'! He said that he derived considerable 'comfort' when he looked at the box on his fireplace mantle which contained his wife's ashes! When the time would come for his own death he said he wanted his ashes to be mixed with the ashes of his wife! Just think: Only a few days, from the time he talked to me about this 'morbid subject', he got his request!

Dust we are, and unto dust we shall return! It is only a matter of time until every person, now alive, will be dead! When I participated in the 'mile relay' in high school, I had to run my lap, and then the next relay runner had to take his turn to run a quarter mile (one lap around the track). Because of my age (soon I will be 69 years old), I know that I am getting closer to the end of my lap. Soon I will let another take over where I left off. I could have done a better job, but I can say, humbly, that I have given much energy and serious focus as I have run my life's lap!

When I have come to the end of my lap, I am confident that there will be someone else who will run the next lap, and I believe that that person will run his/her lap well! The Bible notes that three score and ten years (70) is the time allotted by God for the duration of a man's life on this earth. The Bible does indicate that God sometimes allots an extra ten years, or a total of 80 years for the length of a person's life.

Someone noted that any years that you live, beyond 70 years, is 'borrowed time'! It may be (and probably is) wonderful if a person lives to be old, 80 years old, or 90 years old, but the Bible indicates that, with the extension of time, there is often additional heartache and troubles!

Death may overcome our closest friends, unexpectedly, or death may come knocking on our door, unexpectedly! No one knows the day or the hour when he will leave his 'temporary dwelling place'. Death is no 'respector of persons'. It can

come to anyone at any time. Death is the 'common denominator' of the human race! No one is excepted!

The old must die, and the young may die. The only prediction that we can make with absolute certainty is that every human being, sooner or later, will die! The human body (however beautiful or however handsome) will turn to dust (quickly or gradually). A certain 'aid' to a certain king was told (by the king) to come into the presence of the king, each day, and to announce to the king: "King, remember that someday thou must die!"

Death can rob us of our family members in the 'twinkling of an eye'! We must be ready, for in a day that we think not, the 'death angel' could come to knock on our door! Let us face reality: You and I are only one 'heart beat' away from eternity.

I have an older friend who told me about a minister who, following his sermon, announced to the congregation how well he felt and how healthy he was. In a matter of seconds, after that self-congratulatory announcement to the congregation, the minister fell down dead with a massive heart attack! Each of us is just 'one heart beat' away from eternity.

Just recently, I heard about a mother who was planning to attend her daughter's wedding. But two weeks before the wedding date, the daughter and her soon-to-be-husband went to the home of her mother. The mother lay prostrate in death! The mother had apparently been dead for about 24 hours! It is believed that this mother had choked on a piece of watermelon! Death, many times, is sudden and it is shocking! The uncertainty of life, and the surety of death! Death is certain, so we must prepare to meet our God! "It is appointed unto all men, once to die, but after death is the judgment!"

ACCEPTING THE INEVITABILITY OF DEATH!

During the nearly 20 years that my wife and I have cared for elderly ones in our home (as a business), we have, of course,

witnessed the deaths of several of our residents. These persons have all (as far as I know) been believers (two became believers after they came to our home).

I was privileged to be alone with my mother-in-law in our home, when she had her 'home going'! As she was dying, I said to my mother-in-law: "Soon you will be with your husband in heaven!" What a godly woman she was, and now she dwells with her husband!

It is not the 'expected' deaths of the older ones that bring us sorrow and grief. In fact, in the 'case' of some of these older ones, we actually rejoice that God has finally 'taken them home' where they no longer have to suffer pain and loneliness and so much more!

It is time for them to 'go', and we are relieved that they no longer have to live in their decrepit body. We rejoice that God has released them from their earthly frame. Their bedfast existence is replaced by a celestial life of zest and health. Their worn-out body that has limited vision is replaced with new eyes that can behold the beauty of heaven - the beauty that defies all human language to describe!

When we come to celebrate their lives, we focus on their life of faithfulness, their labors of love, their contributions to their family and friends and church! 'To be absent from the body, is to be present with the Lord!'

We may shed a tear or two, because we will miss their lovely and encouraging presence! But if we shed tears, most of those tears will be shed for ourselves (tears of self-pity), not for the saint who had departed to take his/her place among all the 'saints of the ages' (in heaven)!

We could not wish these saints to return to this earth, to leave their new heavenly home. "Eye hath not seen, nor has the mind conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him!" Even though the 'departed ones' enjoyed their

'earthly home', they have no desire to return to this earth, to repeat their 'long journey'.

These saintly persons have 'cross the finish line', and they are thankful that their 'Divine Coach' enabled them to 'run a good race'! They have finished their 'course'; they have 'kept the faith'! Jesus said, "Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee a crown of life!"

They were faithful, so now they are going to be crowned by the King of kings. The most wonderful words that any human can hear are these: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter the joys of thy Lord!"

Those who have won their crown of life are given assignments in heaven. And, one of those 'assignments' (as far as we can perceive from the Bible) is to 'cheer' the 'earthly runners', as they continue to 'run the race of faith'! From the 'grandstands' of heaven, these heavenly citizens act as 'cheerleaders' for earth's weary runners! (See Hebrews 12:1)

PINPOINTING THE SOURCES OF SUFFERING!

To the careful 'observer' of life, as it is lived in the daily activities and in 'grind' of life's routine responsibilities, it is quite easy to recognize that people, far and wide, experience suffering from many different sources and for different 'reasons'.

Of course, after 'all is said and done', there is a certain 'mystery' that surrounds suffering in general, and suffering in particular (in some individual 'cases'). Without attempting to amplify (detail) the 'reasons' for suffering, the following is a simple list of the 'sources of suffering':

- 1. Suffering comes as the consequences of one's own wrong moral choices.*

2. *Suffering comes because of bearing the consequences of someone else's wrong moral choice (divorce is a vivid example of this kind of suffering).*
3. *Suffering comes as a result of 'natural disasters' (like tornados, etc.).*
4. *Suffering comes as a result of the devastation of a disease (like cancer).*
5. *Suffering comes as a result of the attacks of Satan (like the incredible suffering of Job).*
6. *Suffering comes as a result of believers enduring hurtful persecution, inflicted by evil persons.*
7. *Suffering comes (to all believers) as a result of enduring the 'chastening rod' (of discipline) from the hand of the loving Heavenly Father (Hebrews 12).*
8. *Suffering comes as a result of experiencing ill health (physical and mental illness).*
9. *Suffering often comes as a result of the 'natural aging process' (the natural deterioration of the aging physical body).*
10. *Suffering comes as a result of the loss of many things in one's life (loss of job, loss of loved ones through death, loss of income, loss of friends, loss through multiple trials and temptations).*
11. *Suffering comes (in a 'necessary' and 'God-honoring' way) when a person experiences 'godly sorrow' through the repentance of their sins.*

12. *Suffering comes when war ravishes a nation, resulting in the loss of life, and resulting in the pain and sorrow in the lives of loved ones.*
13. *Suffering comes when believers experience losses, the purpose for which defies human reason, suffering for which there does not seem to be any apparent reason. God makes 'no mistakes' when He allows His children to 'suffer' for mysterious purposes. During these most bewildering times of their lives, believers must remember that God has full understanding of our situation, even though we don't.*

Our prayer, during these 'bewildering experiences' of our life, must be: "God, I don't understand, but thou art perfect love, and I trust you, even when I cannot understand the mysteries of life. Perhaps someday the 'mystery' to my suffering will be unfolded. I will then know that nothing can happen to your child that is contradictory to your love!"

DISCERNING SOME BENEFITS FROM 'SUFFERING'!

When 'problems' (sufferings) come, it is very important for believers to look for the lessons which God desires to teach during (and because of) the 'problems'. Christians must learn to discern the 'benefits' of having problems and suffering.

1. *Suffering can cause one to see God more clearly. Great spiritual vision of God is oftentimes the product of great sorrow. Someone said, "The vision of God can be seen more clearly through a tear."*
2. *Suffering can cause one to depend more on God's power instead of on human strength. God's strength is made perfect through human weakness. God's power is only available to the person who knows that he is weak and powerless and helpless and hopeless*

without the enabling presence of the indwelling Spirit.

3. *Suffering can perfect ones character and bring about greater spiritual growth and maturity. The Greek word that is translated 'Character' is the word that is "used of metal which has been passed through the fire so that everything base has been purged out of it. It is used of coinage as we use the word 'sterling'. When affliction is met with fortitude, out of the battle a man emerges stronger, and purer, and better, and nearer God." (Daily Study Bible; Romans by William Barclay; pg. 74)*

Problems and suffering, successfully met, can perfect ones character. In the world of nature, pearls are the product of pain. A pearl "is a symbol of stress; it is a healed wound; it is the enduring token of a tiny creature's struggle to preserve its life. If there had been no wound there could have been no pearl." (Daily Readings, William Sangster; pg. 94).

Beautiful character may be the product of suffering! A trial successfully met produces stronger character, and inspires greater hope for further progress towards the realization of final maturity in Christ.

*When through fiery trials thy pathway lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply
The flame shall not hurt thee;
I only design Thy dross to consume
and thy gold to refine."
(How Firm a Foundation - song)*

Wrote James: "Dear brothers, is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy, for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So let it grow, and don't try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in

full bloom, then you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete." (James 1:2-4 Living Bible)

God can use all things in life - the 'good', the 'bad', and the 'indifferent' - and God can produce something 'excellent' out of them. He can take the 'raw materials' of life and do something good with them. Would you eat a cake if the heat of the oven was not first applied intensively to the cold liquid ingredients which were poured into the cake pan? Heat is important to produce a tasteful cake. Is it not important for 'heat' (suffering, discipline, and trials) to be applied to the life of a believer if he is to become a mature, 'tasteful', and 'attractive' Christian?

4. Suffering can enable a believer to develop a heart-felt ministry to other suffering persons. Many times, those who are most effective in ministry are those who minister in an area where they have themselves suffered most.

Notes William Sangster, "We see how rich a service the sufferers render to our poor tormented race. Sympathy is a shallow stream in the souls of those who have not suffered. There is something unheeding and harsh in a man who has known nothing of pain. And sympathy is far too precious in this needy world to begrudge the price at which it must be purchased. When Richard Baxter lost his wife, he declared, in his grief. 'I will not be judged by any that never felt the like.' It was only another way of saying that he could not be comforted except by those who had suffered. Suffering, in a disciple, can often be wrested to service. It is Christ - like work to soothe and sympathize, and only those who have drunk the cup of sorrow are fully equipped to do it." (Daily Readings; pg. 48)

5. *Suffering can help develop a tender heart and a sympathetic nature. Wrote Paul, "What a wonderful God we have - he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of every mercy, and the one who so wonderfully comforts and strengthens us in our hardships and trials. And why does he do this? So that when these are troubled, needing our sympathy and encouragement, we can pass on to them this same help and comfort God has given us." "You can be sure that the more we undergo sufferings for Christ, the more He will shower us with his comfort and encouragement. We are in deep trouble for bringing you God's comfort and salvation. But in our trouble God has comforted us - and this, too, to help you: to show you from our personal experience how God will tenderly comfort you when you undergo these same sufferings. He will give you the strength to endure." (2 Corinthians 1:3-7 Living Bible)*

Think of the most beautiful and lovely and tender-hearted people you have known. Have they not usually been persons who have gone through difficult trials and tests and sorrow, and who have emerged victoriously? Have they not been the persons who, as a result of life's trials, have become understanding, gentle, stable, caring?

Someone said that when certain sorrowing people needed a comforter, they would turn to a certain woman who was known for her gentle eyes. Those gentle eyes came from a gentle heart, made tender through much sorrow.

6. *Suffering can result in making you strongest where you have long been the weakest. It is said that where a tape is spliced, it is stronger at the point of the splice than anywhere else. It is said that the place where the broken bone heals is much stronger than any other part of the bone.*

Someone might say that an eagle with a broken wing which has been healed can never fly as high again. Or, the 'fallen Christian' who has been restored to fellowship with God through repentance can never be really strong again (or 'effective' in Christian ministry).

Who can limit the power and the possibilities of grace which heals the broken and the wandering Christian who had succumbed to temptation, but who had learned his 'lessons' (in humility) well from his 'spiritual reversal'?

The story is told of a man who told the passenger in the back seat of his car to 'kick him forward' for 'greater comfort and better position in the car'. Will life's problems (and sufferings) 'kick' you forward during your journey of life?

7. *Suffering can help turn your 'focus' away from the transitory and temporary concerns of earthly life, to more clearly 'focus' on the permanent and eternal verities of life. Susanna Wesley (mother of John Wesley), whose soul was many times covered with the 'sea billows of sorrow' (many of her 19 children died early in life), she sought to make her sorrows 'serve' a redemptive and a beneficial purpose. She sought to turn her eyes toward God and toward heaven when she was immersed in earth's sorrows and grief's.*

The mother of John Wesley wrote, "Since I must expect to meet with many difficulties, much opposition, many disappointments and daily trials of faith and patience in my passage through this world, may it be my highest wisdom to disengage my affections as much as I lawfully may from all transitory, temporal enjoyments, and to fix them on those more rational and spiritual pleasures which we are to enjoy when we enter upon our state of immortality."

EXPERIENCING THE 'PAIN' OF LONELINESS!

Allow me to share some of my experiences with loneliness. Even though I was only 11 years old when I became a believer in Christ, my conversion was 'deep' and it was very meaningful to me. As I shared previously (in this book), immediately following my conversion experience, I began to memorize lots of verses (even several chapters from the New Testament). When I was alone (sitting on the big rock, near Fountain Creek) memorizing verses and spending time in communion with God (prayer), I did not feel a sense of loneliness.

I cherished these regular (frequent) times when I could be alone! However, because of the 'change' that had taken place in my life, some of my fellow students (who had little understanding of spiritual matters) tended to stay away from me. I tried to 'witness' to some of them, but they looked at me as a person who was 'a little different and too religious'.

I soon realized that, as a new believer, I could have few friends in a secular junior high school or senior high school. I tried to be friendly to all fellow students (and to secular-minded teachers), but I soon realized that I was not 'one of them'. The obvious 'worldliness' in their behavior (from both students and teachers) brought 'distress' to my inner spirit. I sometimes read my Bible during my 'study hall' at school.

At times, I definitely felt ostracized from the 'in group' - and I definitely felt lonely, most of my time that I was a student in a public school. For different reasons, I also felt lonely when I left my home (when I was 17) to attend Central College at McPherson, Kansas. This college was a small Christian College, and the faculty at this fine college sought, from the first day of classes, to make all the students 'feel at home'. I tried to adjust to my new environment, living in a dorm and seeing the strange faces of many new students (most of whom were probably also feeling 'uneasy' in a new environment).

In spite of all the noble efforts by the dedicated faculty to make me feel comfortable, I must be honest to acknowledge that the first ten weeks away from my beloved parents, I found myself, when I was alone, actually weeping and weeping! I was terribly 'homesick', and that feeling is an overwhelming feeling.

I had one teen friend who, years later, came to Central College to be a freshman student; she was so homesick that, within a few days, she left the college and returned home. She never returned, and she never graduated from any college, but she became unusually successful, generally in her life, and specifically in her multiple Christian ministries. She is usually talented, and she has a charming personality. (College is not for everyone).

Plagued with feelings of homesickness, I would listen to a 'then-popular' secular song, entitled '500 miles'! I don't remember all the words, but it was a tear-jerking song! One line of the song was as follows: "Five hundred miles, five hundred miles, and five hundred miles away from home!" It didn't help in the 'control of my emotions' to realize that my home in Colorado was about 500 miles away from McPherson, Kansas!

I would listen to that song (full of emotion and sentiment), and I would break out into a 'full blown cry' (almost uncontrollably)! This song which focused on 'loneliness' (being away from one's home), made its way into the emotions of my own quivering heart! Lonely? Very Lonely!

I felt so lonely for the parents whom I dearly loved! I was a 'home body', seldom being away from my mother and my father, during my 'growing up' years! Five hundred miles seemed like a long ways from my home, where I felt so comfortable and so welcome. I loved my mother's good cooking. I loved to see my dear father, and I enjoyed his kind and thoughtful and providing ways. He was not 'professing Christian', but he, nevertheless, was a warm and caring and supporting father!

Humanly-speaking, my parents were my strong pillars upon which I could 'lean' for emotional support! I was the object of their 'considerable attention' in my humble home, but (even though the college was small) now at college, I was just 'one in a group of students', and none of the faculty, obviously, knew me in any personal way!

After a few months, I began to feel that I had something to 'contribute' to the college, and I began to relate (conversationally) with several other fellows (in my dorm). I became a friend to a young lady (who, a few years later would become my wife). That friendship meant so much to me. She was bright and talented and spiritually-minded, and she provided engaging and enjoyable conversation. My friendship gradually blossomed into a dating relationship.

When we both transferred to Greenville College (Greenville, Illinois), after our sophomore year at Central College, we were together as often as possible. It was apparent, soon after we transferred to Greenville College, that God was going to bring us together in a permanent marriage relationship. Each of us was lonely for the other person, if we were not able to see each other for a few hours (because of college studies, etc.).

As is probably 'true' of most persons (including believers), I have experienced the feelings of 'loneliness' from time to time, throughout most of my life. I know that God, and God alone, is my source of 'true contentment' and 'genuine fellowship'! The Bible teaches that Christians have the constant presence of the Holy Spirit. Based on this wonderful 'reality', if Christians are never 'alone', then Christians should never feel 'lonely'.

If a Christian is placed in solitary confinement, because of his 'faith', he need not feel 'lonely'. God is there (in his imprisonment), and God will be His Friend even when he is all alone! Many persecuted believers (throughout the ages of the Church) have testified that they, during their isolation from people,

have experienced the joy of the Lord and the sweet friendship of their Lord!

It is true that no human companion (not even the companionship of a devoted spouse) can take the place of the companionship of the dear Lord and Savior! God's grace is 'sufficient' for all 'situations' - even the situation when a believer is placed in solitary confinement (as a result of his 'faith') But, even with the glorious unseen presence of God, who ministers to believers who are in extreme conditions, God desires (most times) to provide a 'human comforter and friend' to human beings.

Because God created humans to be 'social creatures' (creatures who need and who desire to be connected in meaningful conversation), God knows that, without this connectedness, there is a sense of 'loneliness'!

After God created Adam, God said that it was not good that Adam should be alone. So God made Eve as a companion and friend - one that Adam could converse with and one whom Adam could relate to in meaningful ways. God created, in Adam, the need for and the capacity for personal relationship. And, every one of Adam's descendants has the same need and the same desire - to relate to other human beings in loving communion!

IT IS NOT GOOD THAT MAN SHOULD BE ALONE!

As God said regarding Adam ('it is not good that man should be alone'), so God says today, 'if it is not good if this kind of reaction (loneliness) is sometimes felt by people who have no 'significant other' (friend) in their life, how much greater is the 'pain' in the heart of the person who does not enjoy the 'friendship' of the living Lord?

***AS YOUR EYES ARE MADE FOR SIGHT, SO YOUR SOUL IS
MADE FOR GOD!***

Each of us (humans) is made first and foremost for fellowship with the One who made us. As the stomach is made for the food, as the lungs are made for air, as the brain is made for knowledge, as the fish are made for water, as the eye is made for vision, as the ear is made for sound, so your soul is made for the Spirit! The Spirit (on the Day of Pentecost) was sent into the world, to dwell in the heart and mind and spirit of every human being.

We are made for fellowship - fellowship with God. Just as Adam and Eve (when they were first created) 'walked with God in the cool of the evening' (in the Garden of Eden), so you and I are made to commune with our Lord, 'in the cool of the day' (evening), and also 'in the fresh air of the early morning hours'! "Constantly abiding, Jesus is mine, O what a foretaste of glory divine!"

**OPEN-HEARTED TO GOD IN ORDER TO BE OPEN-HANDED
TO PEOPLE!**

The person (believer) who most enjoys the friendship of Jesus is the same person who has the greatest capacity to enjoy the friendship of others. He who is most centered on the beautiful person of Jesus, and who is regularly cultivating that love relationship with Jesus, is the one who is released from self-preoccupation, to enable him to center on the beautiful presence of a fellow human being.

Centering on Christ, he is released from undue attention on one's own self, and, therefore, he can focus on the beautiful personality of another (friend or stranger)! He is available (through the Spirit's enabling power) to minister to the loneliness of another fellow human being.

When a believer thoroughly enjoys the friendship of the Spirit (through prayer and meditation and the reading of the Word), such a believer has his own 'needs' daily met, and he, in turn, is ready daily to 'reach out in love' to help meet the 'needs' of other lonely souls!

Deliverance from the 'bondage of self-preoccupation' (self-centeredness) is perhaps the greatest 'deliverance' that there is! When we get our self 'off our hands' (through full surrender to Christ, and through 'death' to our 'carnal self'), we are free to be ourselves without constant sensitivity to other's scrutiny of us. Those who are resurrected to their new self (in Christ), are those who are delivered from self-preoccupation and from self-consciousness!

Freedom from 'self-centeredness', these humble souls are now 'persons for others'. Their greatest delight in life is to love and to cherish other (hurting) persons, and to fill the 'void of their loneliness'. A supreme love for Christ gives these love-filled souls a worthy love for themselves. There is an important difference between a 'wholesome self-love', and an unwholesome 'self-centered' love!

The God-filled person has the motivation and the power to love others - to love them with a joyful and uplifting spirit! Like a 'filing' is drawn to a magnet, a lonely person and a love-starved person are drawn to a joy-filled Christian!

Everyone (believers and non-believers) wants to be a friend to an unselfish, outgoing, loving, caring, love-filled Christian - to a Christian who is in 'loving relationship' with his Lord, and who is, in turn, overflowing with God's love for fellow human beings. "What this world needs most of all is love - God's sweet love!"

WHAT CAN I DO DURING MY MOMENTS OF LONELINESS?

When one, like myself, is a pastor of a local church (particularly of a small church), he/she observes a considerable number of persons (male and female) who are lonely, to one degree or another. Most, if not all persons, experience 'mild forms of loneliness'.

Such feelings are generally not 'devastating', even though these feelings are probably never 'pleasant' to experience! For instance, I felt a certain degree of loneliness when some

of my parishioners moved away from our city, and, of course, away from the 'flock' that I shepherded.

As a member of my 'flock', of course I missed them when they left the 'flock'! Other sheep, too, expressed how much they missed these 'sheep' that moved to another city and to another 'flock' (another local church). I learned, quite easily, to 'deal' with the result of the rather frequent mobility of our members. I learned to 'live with this inevitable set of circumstances'.

The loneliness that a surviving spouse feels is probably a loneliness that would be hard to describe. But, my wife and I have noted that, even though the surviving spouse is lonely, this spouse (usually) has the assurance that he/she was greatly loved by the spouse who died. There is great comfort in dwelling on the memories of good times from a lifetime of loving relationship, as the result of living together for 50 years.

Without minimizing the loneliness, due to losing a spouse, my wife and I concluded that the loneliness (and grief) that a divorced person feels is greatest of all. When a perpetrator leaves the innocent spouse behind, how can we measure the loneliness and devastation and grief that he/she feels?

Unfortunately, there were many couples (far too many couples) in 'my' church who decided (because of unresolved conflicts) to 'call it quits' (divorce). I experienced grief for these 'broken persons', for I knew that God 'hates divorce' (Malachi 2). What soul-piercing loneliness these persons experienced, following their divorce (especially when some of them had been together in companionship for many years, before 'tragic circumstances' hit them)!

Is there any greater loneliness than when a 'divorced person' has to spend many hours alone - in a newly rented apartment, and when such a person is often 'criticized' by former friends (who can't empathize, for they have never experienced the

agony of divorce)? Many former 'friends' leave the now divorced person! That spells 'hurt' and great 'loneliness'!

A FLOOD OF DIVORCES BRING A FLOOD OF TEARS!

The perpetrator of a divorce brings unusual pain to the 'innocent' partner in the marriage (whether or not the 'innocent' spouse anticipated the 'announcement' from the 'perpetrator' that the 'marriage is over!'). When the 'innocent' partner in the marriage 'discerns the yellow lights' coming on, perhaps some steps can be taken to prevent the 'break up' of the marriage, but if there is 'determination' by one spouse that he/she wants nothing more to do with the marriage, divorce is inevitable! It takes commitment on the part of both partners if the marriage is to be maintained!

Each 'situation' (regarding divorce), is different and unique, but it is likely that the 'perpetrator' in most divorces is involved in a 'triple dimensional sin'. Simply explained, there is a 'breadth', there is a 'depth', and there is a 'length' in the sin of the perpetrator (the initiator for the divorce).

The 'perpetrator' usually (not always) has committed a 'host' of sins, all of which have in some way contributed to his divorce. Most of these sins (if not all of these sins) have been committed with little knowledge or with no knowledge by the 'innocent spouse'. The kinds and the numbers of sins differ, of course, with each perpetrator.

It could be that the sin of the 'perpetrator' is only adultery (which sin against a lot of innocent spouses is very common). In the life of most perpetrators, this may be the predominate sin, but often the 'breadth' of sin covers many other sins, beside the sin of adultery.

The following list describes the 'breadth' of sins that many perpetrators have been involved in, sometimes long before the innocent spouse knows that she is to be 'dumped' by

her husband. Some perpetrators are guilty of all of these 'sins', and other perpetrators are guilty of only a few of these 'sins'. Some perpetrators have tasted more of the 'fruits of sin' than have other perpetrators. Each situation, of course, is unique.

This following list describes the sins of the 'flesh' and the sins of the 'attitude', both of which have the power to demolish any marriage! (1) Lust, (2) Adultery, (3) Stealing, (4) Greed, (5) Deception, (6) Lying, (7) Blasphemy, (8) Hypocrisy, (9) Plotting, (10) Jealousy (10) Envy, (12) Profanity, and (13) Slander.

All of these sins are the 'frontal forces' that the 'evil one' uses to demolish the 'fortresses' of a marriage. There are many different sins (a 'breadth of sins'), but any one of these sins has the power to land a 'telling blow' on what was once a 'strong relationship'! Sin, in any form, is a strong and a devastating force.

A leading characteristic of 'sin' is that it likes to 'hide' in the 'darkness'! Sin, by its very nature, is deceptive, cunning, secretive, plotting! The God-rejecting 'perpetrator' 'salves' his own conscience! He has 'rationalized' his immoral behavior. Everyone else is 'having an affair', so why shouldn't he? Life is hectic and difficult, so why shouldn't he have a 'little fun', a 'little diversion'? The perpetrator can easily resort to lying and to secret plotting.

The 'perpetrator' rationalizes that, since his wife is so 'critical' of him, since she is so 'cold in the bed', he has a 'right' (as a 'red-blooded American male') to 'enjoy' the relationship of an affirming and warm-hearted woman, a woman other than his wife.

His own secretary is that kind of woman, so why not? If this man has any 'religious inclinations', he can easily say, to himself, that God wants him to be 'happy and to be sexually satisfied', and, after all, if there is any 'wrong' in his actions,

God will always forgive him! Isn't it God's 'business' to forgive?

The second dimension of a 'perpetrator's sin' is 'depth'. This simply means that many 'perpetrators' skillfully live a 'double life'. Their 'hidden life' is not known to their spouse, and certainly it is not known to his children! Perpetrators know how to 'get around'! They know where to go - with their wife not even 'having a clue' as to who they are with, or where they get their 'kicks' (i.e., where they meet the 'other' woman)!

They are skilled in 'deception', and, if their suspicious spouse makes any 'searching inquiries', they have a 'ready' answer (a handy reply, a handy alibi, all based on lies)! These perpetrators are intent on 'living life to the full' - 'wine, women, and song' - and lots of each, but especially lots of 'women'! Multiple 'affairs', or if it is only one 'affair', then many 'experiences' of intense sexual indulgence with the one woman!

Some of these perpetrators in our promiscuous society have rightfully earned some 'shameful titles'. The intensity (depth) of their sinning is mind-boggling! They are worse than 'animals which are in 'heat'! Their passions find no gratification! The more 'lusting' they do, the more 'lusting' they desire!

They are in 'bondage' to their lower appetites! Their lives are out of 'kilter'! The Bible says that they are like an animal that is being led away to be slaughtered! These passion-driven persons are running 'headstrong' to destruction!

Not all of the following 'labels' apply to every perpetrator, but some of the following 'labels' apply to some of the perpetrators, some of the time. All perpetrators are 'guilty' of being the kind of person that at least one of these 'labels' describes. The sin of each perpetrator is different, of course, but any one of these labels describes a despicable person!

Here are the labels that describe perpetrators (destroyers of marriages):

- 1. Perpetual liars.*
- 2. Serial adulterers*
- 3. Clever deceivers*
- 4. Greedy users*
- 5. Conniving thieves*
- 6. Irreverent blasphemers*
- 7. Destructive plotters*
- 8. Self-righteous hypocrites*
- 9. Dirty-mouthed slanderers*
- 10. Secret planners*
- 11. Jealous competitors*

Obviously, it would be unjust and unfair to assign these titles to all of the perpetrators in a divorce. There must be clear evidence that a certain characteristic has been clearly evident, before a label is attached to a particular perpetrator. It is important that we do not engage in premature judging of another man's behavior.

On the other hand, it is important to realize that Jesus Himself noted that 'by their fruits ye shall know them'! An 'apple' is called an 'apple', because (in reality) it is an apple! One cannot deny 'the facts' (the reality of the situation). When a perpetrator involves himself in multiple 'affairs', then he (rightly) should be called what he is - a 'serial adulterer'! And, of course, this same reasoning should be applied in evaluating all the other sins that a perpetrator commits! Some sincere Christians warn us against judging anyone, and the warning (to a large extent) should be heeded. "Judge not that ye be not judged", said Jesus. It is important that we understand the meaning of 'judging'.

'Judging' is the exercise of 'condemning a man's soul to hell'. Only God is qualified (equipped) to judge a man's spiritual condition. Only God can look into a man's inner soul, and only God can discern the hidden motives and desires and intents of

a man's soul. Only God has the sufficient knowledge to evaluate the true condition of a man's inner spirit.

God alone can determine the ultimate destiny of a human being. God alone can take everything 'into consideration'. God alone 'sees the big picture' in every individual life! No, we believers are not wise enough, we are not spiritual enough, and we are not loving enough - to 'judge' another person! We should, indeed, refrain from all 'judging' of our fellow men!

But, while we are not to 'judge' others, we (believers) are, as Jesus said, to evaluate the 'fruit' in the lives of other persons. Granted, we must be careful not to 'cross the line' from 'fruit inspection' to 'judging' others.

We believers dare not 'judge' another, but we can (and should) 'evaluate' the lifestyle of another person. We are told by Jesus that we are permitted to 'test the fruit' of another person's life! We believers must call an 'apple' an 'apple', because we know it is an 'apple'!

We must call sin (of many kinds) by its proper name. If a man practices lying, then he has earned the 'title' as a 'perpetual liar'! (It must be said at this point: Many Christians have occasionally made a 'slip' and have not been totally truthful with some 'fact'. That is to say, some believers have failed, in rare situations, to tell the 'whole truth', but such believers do not practice lying. When this happens, believers immediately confess their 'sin' and they accept Christ's immediate forgiveness).

The third dimension of 'sin' in the life of a perpetrator is 'length'. It is alarming how long some perpetrators practice their 'sinning', and practice their sinning 'behind the back' of their innocent spouse. 'Sinning' (of various sorts and kinds) can go on for a very long time, before the truth finally comes to 'light'.

One perpetrator said to his wife (to a wife who had always been 'true' to her marriage vows), 'I have not been married to you for nine years!' This was a 'shock of all shocks' to this innocent spouse!

She had been faithful to him during those last nine years, but during that long period of time, he, instead, had lived a 'double life'! 'Concealment, deception, plots, conniving' - the 'name of the soul-killing game of sin'! The Bible says (repeatedly) that what is done in darkness (secret), will eventually be exposed by the 'light' of God's truth!

The Bible says that the time will come when the 'hidden sins' will be revealed! What a man really is (behind the facade of self-righteousness and respectability) will be known! What is 'hidden in the closet of deception', will someday be 'announced from the housetop!'

A man may be clever enough to enjoy his 'hidden life' for a very long time, but the time will come when he will have to confess with his lips, to his wife, that he has, indeed, lived a 'double life' - a life that deserves to be known by everyone and despised by everyone! Even 'moral' persons, who have no profession of 'faith', will rise up and will condemn such shameful behavior!

Think of the 'pain' - the 'tears' - which the woman experiences when she learns that her husband has been deceiving her for a long period of time, when she learns about his 'secret life' of gross sinning! Shaking with 'shock', the tears stream down her cheeks, her mind is befuddled, her emotions are stirred to intense anger, and then she looks her husband in his eyes, and she simply asks him, 'How could you do this to me?'

With her lips quivering, she asks, 'How could you betray me for so very long?' And then after she settles herself down a little, she asks herself the penetrating and the troublesome question: 'How could I be so blind to all of his mischief, and how

could I be so unaware of all his deceptive movements and maneuvers?’

There are ‘tears of remorse’, there are ‘tears of deep grief’, and there are ‘tears of intense anger’! And the tears will ‘flow and flow’ - because of the initial shock, because of the heart-breaking details that are involved in settling the disagreements regarding the court battles!

Her tears will continue to flow when she learns that her husband (of many years) is now planning a wedding to another woman. She battles the ‘tears of anger’, combined with the ‘tears of self-pity’, as she faces a future of a single life (alone and with no ‘partner’)!

Day after day, as the months stretch into years, she has had to learn to fight back the ever-ready ‘stream of tears’. She never ‘dreamed’ that life could be so ‘cruel’ and so ‘unjust’! If it weren’t for her ‘daily quiet time’ with her dear Lord, she thinks she would ‘crack up’ - give up on daily living! She never realized that the ‘pain of divorce’ could be so deep, and that it could be so hard to ‘get over’!

It was one thing for me to talk about the ‘tragedy of divorce’ (in my preaching and in my teaching), but it was quite another thing for me to ‘face divorce’ up close - in my own family!

One of the most ‘tragic months’ of my life was the seventh month of the year 2008! During that month (July 2008), my wife and I experienced the heartbreaking news that both of our daughters were being told that their respective husbands no longer wished to maintain their marriage commitments!

The strangest thing! How could both of our daughters (who were Christian by ‘profession’ of faith, and also who were Christian by their last ‘name’) receive the same dreadful communication from their respective husbands, the very same month?

The events that transpired in the lives of our daughters had some similarities, but, obviously, there were significant differences. No reconciliation in either 'situation', or eventually divorce papers were delivered in both 'situations'.

As is usual in most environments where the long divorce proceedings take place, the emotions of the victims were many and they differed in intensity, from time to time. The victims (my daughters), obviously, could not predict what 'feelings' and 'emotions' would be manifested, as the 'settings' changed from 'event' to 'event' during the tedious process of 'completing the divorce process'.

There might be tears, there might be anger, there might be anxiety, there might be fear, and there might be a scramble of several of these emotions on certain occasions. There is probably no experience so intense to 'live through' than the tangled experience of attaining a divorce settlement (since there is usually an 'adversarial' attitude, rather than a 'conciliatory' attitude by one or both of the contenders in the divorce process).

My oldest daughter (and the same could be said of my youngest daughter) has grown spiritually (and otherwise), as a result of her 'going through the flames of great adversity'. In spite of her residual hurt, as a result of 'going through' her terrible experience (of divorce), my oldest daughter has shared with me and with her mother that she has sensed the calming presence of the Spirit of God, that she has grown spiritually (and otherwise) as a result of her 'war wounds' that she bears because of the conflicts that she has endured!

From a greater distance (geographically-speaking), I have observed the same reality in the life of my younger daughter (who, also, has known what 'real suffering' is all about)! My youngest daughter (who bears a number of 'battle scars' from her divorce fiasco), has demonstrated remarkable maturity and unusual insight into the dynamics of her failed relationship with her former husband!

For the last few years, my older daughter (a gifted preschool teacher and an amazing artist), has enjoyed teaching a sizeable number of preschool children. She works hard, but she loves her job. Not everything now is 'ideal' for her, but she continues to make remarkable progress in her total life. Most importantly, she loves her Lord, and she seeks to live at peace with all persons.

My youngest daughter, who also suffered greatly as a result of her divorce, during these last five years, has also become like 'gold tried in fire', in terms of her character development! She has learned to 'cope' with her countless difficult situations, and she has maintained a positive outlook on life. It is her strong faith in God (and the support of her many friends) that has brought her through this dark tunnel of divorce.

Divorce is probably the most 'rocky road' that a human being can 'travel'. There are so many 'dips', 'valleys', 'side roads', and unexpected 'storms' along the path towards recovery. The progress is usually rather slow, and there are sometimes 'reverses' and strange and unknown 'side roads'. There are days, fraught with 'deep pits' and with detours and with dark tunnels of terror and deception. Some perpetrators intentionally lay land mines, in the hopes that the 'innocent victim' will be harmed or even destroyed.

Both of my daughters have been tempted, from time to time, to take the 'low road' of resentment and vindictiveness, but (by God's enabling grace), they both have taken the 'high road' of faith and trust in their Savior. They both have chosen (by God's enabling grace) to forgive the one who has brought great pain into their life. They know that the tragedy of a 'broken marriage vow' is a tragedy that would be hard to surpass. But they have learned that, not to forgive is to defy God's command! Not to forgive would land them on the 'low road' of life!

I must admit that the two divorces have brought many 'inward tears' to my soul, and an eruption of my emotional system!

Some emotions which I have expressed have not totally pleased my dear Lord. More than once, during the troubling times of these last five years, I have had to cry out to the Lord for His forgiveness for my emotional outbreaks!

My wife has been my 'chief calming influence'. She, too, has been heartbroken, but she has 'kept her head' and she has spoken words of peace and reassurance to me. She is a great 'prayer warrior', and she has cast her burdens at the feet of Jesus, day after day, during these uncertain and confusing days! I thank God that He gave me a wonderful 'helpmate', to help me to keep my eyes on the Eternal One - the mighty Comforter - who is a 'very present Help in every time of need'! Don't misinterpret me! Venita too has experienced great anguish and anger! Heartbreak, too!

Admittedly, I have been frustrated beyond description, and I have often expressed the emotion of 'anger'. After the passing of five years (since I became knowledgeable of the divorces, July 2008), I am finally learning to be more decisive in my commitments of these tragedies to my God. Up until the present time, for the last 5 years, I spent many hours in prayer (for my daughters and for their children, and also for my former sons-in-law).

God's grace is 'sufficient' for all sets of conditions, even for the horrible condition of divorce. Admittedly, when my emotions become 'stirred' I have to recommit my 'feelings of anger' to Almighty God. I have to remind myself that God is able to take the 'broken pieces' of one's life, and He is able to reconstruct a beautiful life, using the broken pieces in His work of creating an amazing 'reconstructed life'!

**MY GOD KNOWS THE WAY THROUGH THE WILDERNESS, SO
I WILL FOLLOW!**

God, in the midst of chaos and destruction, is the 'miracle-producing God'! What is 'impossible' with men is not impossible with God! "He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above

all that we can ask or think!" What comfort this Biblical promise has given to me, during these last difficult five years! I don't know what the future holds, but I do know who holds the future! "My Lord knows the way through the wilderness, and all I have to do is follow!" (A chorus I sang numerous times when I was young).

The wilderness (of divorce) has been wrought with countless dangers, and with heartbreaking trials! The way through the wilderness is rough, and it is dangerous, but my daughters have been patient travelers through this barren desert. They are not completely through this wilderness (at this time), but they have kept their hope in the Loving Guide who knows the 'topography' of this barren wilderness!

It is important to remember that the Guide Himself went through this rough and barren wilderness. He knows, by personal experience, the way through the 'wilderness'! Though it has not been easy, and though it has taken considerable time, my daughters are learning to 'turn lemons into lemonade'! To turn 'tragedies' into 'triumphs'!

Our Savior has decisively won the 'victory' for mankind, at the Cross! Now, through the Holy Spirit, we can appropriate Christ's victory for our own victory. 'To God be the glory, great things He hath done' - even amidst the 'mess' of divorce!

In spite of the 'river of tears' which divorce evokes, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is a God who is 'rich in mercy'! God is ready to forgive anyone of any sin when there is wholehearted repentance and genuine faith in Christ's atoning grace! This offer of forgiveness extends to those who are the perpetrators of a divorce! "There is no sin stain that has gone so deep, but what the blood of Jesus goes deeper yet."

John Newton (many years ago) was a 'slave trader' (very wicked man), and God found this 'lost soul' and thoroughly converted him! A miracle of miracles! This man, once on the slave ships, became a love-filled preacher of the gospel! He

wrote the song that is still sung by millions of folks: “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now I’m found, was blind, but now I see.”

‘LOWER OCTANE’ AND ‘HIGH OCTANE’ SUFFERING!

Previously (in this book) it was suggested that the various ‘episodes’ of suffering that will be explored in this particular book (on ‘Tears’) could be ‘labeled’ as either a ‘lower octane’ suffering or a ‘high octane suffering’. These are simply ‘word pictures’ to differentiate two ‘levels’ (kinds) of suffering. Both of these kinds of suffering express some type of ‘loss’ in one’s life.

It is true that the one who is going through a particular experience of ‘suffering’, thinks (at the time of the experience) that the suffering is ‘intense’. But, an objective view of each particular experience of suffering would make the observer conclude that there are, indeed, different degrees of suffering. There are some ‘lower octane’ and some ‘high octane’ experiences of suffering!

‘Lower Octane’ suffering is suffering that lasts a relatively short time (probably a few days, or, at the most, a few months). The ‘consequences’ of this type of suffering are not long-lasting, and many times the consequences of this type of suffering dissipate (end) altogether. This is not to say that this kind of suffering is insignificant. But it is to say that there are few, and oftentimes no long range consequences from the episode that introduced the ‘suffering’. Perhaps a simple illustration will bring some clarity. I broke my wrist when, as a young teen, I was trying to ‘high jump’ (using the wrong procedure). It really ‘hurt’ when my wrist hit the edge of the ‘high jump pit’. But, after I wore a ‘cast’ for 9 weeks, and after I rebuilt the strength in that weak wrist, I continued to participate in high school track (and I was excited with my running events, from which I should never have departed, to try ‘high jumping’). This broken wrist episode is a simple illustration to clarify what a ‘low

octane' suffering really means. (1) Suffering that did not last for very long, (2) no long-term consequences from the episode (my bone healed in a few weeks).

On the other hand, there are many episodes of suffering that could be labeled as 'high octane' suffering. In this 'case', the suffering is intense, the consequences from the 'event' are long lasting, and sometimes there are permanent consequences as a result of the 'episode'!

It is easy to understand why abortion would be called a 'high octane' suffering! The initial suffering from aborting a baby is intense. There is no abortion procedure that is easy or painless! Besides the physical suffering, there is untold emotional suffering, on the part of the woman who visits an abortion clinic.

Regardless of the words from the lips of those who wish to 'downplay' this horrible experience, it is still true that having an abortion is a 'nightmare'! The abuse to a woman who undergoes this 'procedure' is horrendous! There are many women who are forced (by a boyfriend or by a parent) to have an abortion - and the suffering that such a woman undergoes under these circumstances is considerable!

Even if a woman deliberately (defiantly) chooses abortion (thinking that such a 'procedure' is harmless), this headstrong 'modern woman' is in the 'vortex of suffering'! The consequences are 'irreversible' - a baby is dead, a one-time pregnant woman is no longer able to be the mother of a beautiful child. Sometimes women who abort a baby, thereafter lose the ability to have any future child!

The consequences (as we have noted) from 'high octane' suffering are sometimes permanent. Even if that woman, who has aborted her baby, finds forgiveness for her dastardly act, she, nevertheless, has to bear the burden of regrets for the rest of her life.

Illustration: You can pull out the nails from the 'board of your life' - that is, by God's grace, you can experience the removal of your nails (i.e., your sins), but the nail holes (scars and consequences) remain forever in the 'board of your life.' God forgives all sins, but not even God can remove the 'nail holes' (the consequences and scars) from your life!

It is better never to sin, than to have sinned and then (after the forgiveness for your sins), still have to live with the consequences (scars) of your past sins! God will, of course, for Jesus's sake, forgive a woman for her 'crime of abortion' (killing her baby), but, even after she is forgiven, she still will have to live with the consequences of her horrendous sin!

She will have to live with the memory of the day she entered an abortion clinic, and when she lay flat on her back to allow a doctor (and nurses) to find her baby and to rip that baby apart! It is no wonder that she is plagued with many nightmares regarding that darkest of all dark days of her life!

Now she is deeply repentant, and she is learning to accept God's forgiveness and she is learning the importance of her forgiving herself for this horrendous crime (murder of her child). How can she 'live with herself'? How can she look at herself in the 'mirror'? How can she keep her friends from knowing about her most horrible deed? Regret after regret after regret! The only way that she, a new believer, can 'go on living' (with her God, with herself, with others around her), is to reassure herself that 'where sin abounds, grace super abounds' - 'the blood of Jesus cleanses her from all unrighteousness'!

TRAGEDY IN A 'WINDOW WELL'!

Another 'high octane' suffering that I witnessed was personified in the life of a very 'nice' lady who, for a short time, was a regular attender of the services of the Free Methodist Church, where I was pastor. She was a fast-talking, fast-

moving, a highly-motivated woman, a woman who had a great compassion for the disadvantaged and poor persons.

I was a young pastor at the time. At the rather small church where I was pastor, I received a rather small weekly salary, but the members, nevertheless, treated me well, in so many ways. Because my wife was excellent in budgeting, we 'got along financially'. My wife and I (and small children) enjoyed fresh vegetables out of my wife's productive gardens.

This woman, whose income allowed her to have a 'few nice things' in her beautiful home, was looked at by many in our congregation, as a 'woman of means'. She invited a few of our members into her home, 'to eat and to have a good time, laughing and sharing'. She once asked my wife why the folks in our small church did not invite her, in turn, to their homes. It is doubtful that my wife gave a very 'direct' answer to her 'fair' question. Secretly, my wife was quite sure that it was because the members in our church felt 'intimidated' by this lady, whom they knew was on a 'considerably higher economic level'.

One early morning, with tears streaming down her cheeks, she appeared at the front door of our house. With hardly any introductory communication, this dignified lady handed me some money. As I recall, it was \$50 in cash (an impressive amount of money, during the 60's)! She said that the Lord told her to give this money to us! I was awestruck with her generosity.

Venita and I had learned to be 'frugal' with the little money we had, so this gift of money was a 'big and unexpected bonus' for us. This gift would help us immensely! This lady (who considered herself a 'friend' of Venita's) bought some 'nice' clothes for Venita, on a couple occasions. One of those occasions was when Venita entered the hospital to deliver one of her babies (a beautiful pajama outfit).

This outgoing, passionate, intelligent lady - a trained nurse by profession - from all indications enjoyed our friendship, and

she respected the fact that I was a pastor of a 'small flock' of beautiful folks. She was the kind of person - warm and personable - that Venita and I found it easy to like.

It was not long until this dear woman found herself worshipping in a larger church. I suppose she felt more 'comfortable' in a larger church, where she likely found parishioners more 'like herself' (socially and professionally and economically). This woman was, by personality, an aggressive person, and, within a few years, she was given greater responsibility - in fact the responsibility as 'head nurse' at the hospital!

When I, as pastor, made my hospital visits, I would occasionally greet this 'fast-moving' nurse, as I met her in the hospital halls. She was, in her own way, friendly to me, but I knew that she was so 'duty-minded' that I could not contain her for even a brief 'chat'.

Then, the consequence of her 'social life' came to her with a 'terrible crash' - a 'crash' that brought unrecoverable tragedy! From the 'height of honor' to the 'depth of shame' - that is what I 'dread' to describe in this next and final scene of this woman's life!

I so wish that I could record that this 'fine' lady enjoyed her position as 'head nurse' at the hospital, for many years to come! It is wonderful to focus on 'happiness' in a person's life, instead of having to report a tragedy. Every person wants to 'finish well' in this earthly life, but, because of wrong decisions that some persons make, some of these persons end their lives in tragedy.

I, of course, was not an 'eye witness' to the horrifying scene, but I learned about the tragedy! This tragedy can only be described as 'unthinkable', as 'beyond imagination', as 'heart-crushing', as 'soul - shattering', as 'horrifying'!

The body of this skilled, mission-minded nurse was found in the 'window well' of her own house! The story that was report-

ed was that she was so drunk (with alcohol) that, unaware as to where she was walking in her yard, she stumbled into the 'window well' and there she died!

When I heard about this tragedy, I was shocked! I could hardly 'believe my own ears'! If my own 'tear ducts' could have been fully opened, I think I could have poured out a gallon of tears! (This was definitely a 'high octane' suffering! The suffering that everyone endured, as a result of this 'accident', was 'intense', and the consequences from this tragedy will be with her family and friends for many years)!

I attended her funeral service, not as her pastor, but as a 'distant friend'. During the service, I found my mind wandering, as I reflected upon the several times in the past that I had conversed with her. I recalled the few months that I was her pastor (many years ago), and I recalled that morning when she had tears streaming down her cheeks, and when she put several bills into my hand, as she expressed her love to us! That distant morning, tinged with a few heavenly rays of sunshine, I could not forget! Why did I have to find myself in a funeral chapel now?

Even though she was respectful towards me (after she quit attending our church), I got the 'feeling' that she thought 'my' church was basically 'below' her own 'standards' in one way or another. The years 'came and went', and I seldom saw her, although I think she maintained her 'high position' at the hospital.

I could hardly listen to the funeral message! I was preoccupied with my various thoughts, regarding this precious woman. Even though I had only a 'distant relationship' with her (because our 'paths no longer crossed' for the last several years), I, nevertheless, had a 'high regard' for her spirituality and for her excellence in her nursing profession.

At the closing of the service, as I walked out of the chapel, I passed by the front row, where her elderly parents were sit-

ting. As I walked by these godly parents, my heart broke for them! They were committed (long-time) members of the Free Methodist Church in New York. Their deceased daughter went to a historic Christian (Free Methodist) College where she received her degree in nursing.

This one-time 'head nurse', now dead, was likely taught (amidst all of her other Christian teachings) that 'total abstinence' (from all alcoholic drinks) was the 'safe way to live'! ('Total abstinence' is a basic standard within the Free Methodist Denomination).

Perhaps it was the 'peer pressure'; perhaps it was the 'tight social circles' - who actually knows what influences came to 'bear' on the life of this one-time 'conservative lady'! Obviously, this precious lady reasoned to herself that 'social drinking' was an acceptable practice for her. It is a simple logic (often ridiculed as a statement of legalism), but it is, nevertheless, true: 'If a person never takes the first drink, he/she will never become an alcoholic!'

Those who casually and self-confidently declare that they can drink a little, without ever becoming a 'habitual drinker', may become to their surprise (someday) an alcoholic! (I just briefly talked today to a friend who has been 'dry' for about 12 years, and she gladly has a ministry of daily encouraging several younger ladies who are alcoholics).

It sounds like a 'scare tactic', but it is, nevertheless, true, that the self-confident 'social drinker' might eventually become an alcoholic. God forbid, but, as an alcoholic, you too might become so disoriented in your mental faculties, that you will die from some 'accident' - maybe by falling into a 'window well'! What kind of death will be your death? Death from an overdose of alcohol? Why do so many Christians have a lenient view towards 'social drinking'?

Why should you take a chance? Don't you value your own life? Why not be one of those 'fanatical Christians' who have cho-

sen to refrain from the drinking of all alcoholic beverages? Why intentionally 'kill' your own brain cells? Why endanger yourself (physically), and endanger other lives around you? Why risk killing yourself (or someone else) in a car wreck?

Why not drink some juice (V-8 juice) instead - something that is good for your valued body? Don't trust yourself with even one beer or even one glass of wine. Be different! Don't go along with the 'stupid crowd'! Go against the 'current' of popular practice (drinking alcohol)! Don't be afraid to be different. Don't be critical of the decisions (regarding 'social drinking') that other believers make, but 'be your own man' - be independent without being judgmental of others.

“Do not let the world 'squeeze you into its own mold', but be a new and different person in all you think and in all you do.” Romans 12. (Don't go along with the 'crowd of worldly persons'. Love these persons, and witness to them about the new life in Christ, and about a 'clean way of living' (including healthy habits, with no alcohol).

Remember, the worldly person (who thinks it is 'cool' to get drunk) is a part of the 'mass of persons' who are sliding down the slippery slope to perdition. They need to experience a 'moral U-turn' (repentance) in their life. Do not be conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the Spirit of God (daily).

Don't be afraid to be 'different'. When offered a 'drink' (of alcohol), simply say to your (sincere) friend: "No thank you. I don't drink. It was thoughtful of you to offer!" (Don't argue, don't judge, and keep the doors of friendship open; remember Jesus was a 'friend of sinners'). Jesus said that we (believers) are to be 'in' the world, but we are not to be 'of' the world. Both humility and confidence is (simultaneously) to be evident in the life of the committed Christian.

With no spirit of superiority or pride, the Christian is to 'stand head and shoulders above the crowd' of purposeless persons.

People are looking for individuals who have purpose and direction in their life - so a Christian has the opportunity to be the example and the model for others to 'look up to'!

Someone said, "Any dead fish can float downstream, but it takes a live fish to swim upstream!" As believers, we must swim upstream (against the current of wrong thinking and wrong practices). The Christlike person (nurtured by the 'fruits of the Spirit' - Galatians 5:22, 23) - this type of person is like a 'giant magnet' - drawing persons to the altogether lovely Christ!

DENTAL 'IMPLANTS' AND MORE DENTAL 'IMPLANTS'!

In contrast to this 'high octane suffering' (the tragic death of an outstanding nurse), the following account (a personal account) can be considered a 'lower octane suffering'. I refer to my dental implant 'fiasco'. After numerous visits to my dental implant center (near Denver), during the last nearly 6 years, and after numerous surgeries and dental procedures, I am still waiting for my 'final product'! I hope to have my final teeth in a few months (from the time of this writing).

Originally, I was scheduled to receive 4 implants for the bottom level, and 4 implants for the upper level of my mouth. Because of repeated failures (lack of integration of the implants with the bone structures), I have, instead, received at least 30 implants!

Not long ago, one of my dentists (who has performed many procedures on numerous other patients) outrightly told me that I have a 'history of failures'! He didn't need to verbalize that fact, for I have been well aware of the many corrective (somewhat painful) surgeries that I have endured during the last many years!

Thankfully, he was only referring to my 'dental failures', and not to my personal or moral failures! I know the 'route' from

Ft. Collins to Denver very well and there are many farm fields along the route that I have enjoyed!

The multiple 'bone structure' problems have tested the 'resolve' and the 'creativity' of these experienced 'professionals'. It has also tested my own patience with the long process, and it has tested my ability to endure the various levels of 'pain' that is part of all the many procedures and surgeries.

There was one surgery in particular which was a 'test' to a very accomplished surgeon. Amazingly, this highly-acclaimed surgeon expressed a desire to me that he pray (out loud) just before he proceeded with his surgery on me!

It has only been during the last few months that I have begun to chew (softer) food! For nearly six years I was not able (or permitted) to chew. I was on a 'liquid diet' for these many years. Of course, I would 'miss the mark of truth' if I insisted that my inability to chew was a type of 'suffering'!

Some folks, of course, would consider themselves a 'suffering person' if they were not allowed to chew regular food for five years! I must admit that it has not always been 'easy' to watch my family and my friends eating a plateful of food, while I (in their presence) simply looked at my glass of juice!

The contrast, during hundreds of 'table times', has been pronounced, between my family's full meals and my glass of milk! During these six years I have (admittedly) looked upon the well-wishers (who stacked their plates with 'a mountain of food'), with a little 'envy'! In the presence of my friends, who tended to 'feel sorry' for me, I tried to minimize my 'lot in life' as a failed dental patient, but (inwardly) I sometimes wondered if I would ever see the 'light at the end of the tunnel'. My hope sometimes grew rather dim! Dental implant after dental implant! Like hundreds of other patients, I was supposed to have received 8 implants, and now I have received about 30 implants! Why do the implants keep failing? I probably have the 'record' for the number of implants that have 'failed'. I

never dreamed that I would travel to that dental implant center so many times (perhaps 30 times)! Will I ever have well-fitted teeth? As of this date, the process continues!

Some procedures were difficult, and the recovery from some surgeries took considerable time to complete. On one occasion, while my wife was driving me back to Ft. Collins, I fainted twice, and I lost everything that was 'not welcome' in my stomach! I drove numerous miles, and I had numerous procedures (surgeries), for numerous years. I hope that someday I will enjoy singular success - new and lasting teeth!

Even though, at the time of these many procedures, the pain seemed rather severe (even with drugs), objectively-speaking, the pain was rather short-lived. At worst, in a matter of a few hours, I recovered from the pain of the surgeries.

The 'pain' from these numerous procedures is now only a memory in my mind, with little conscious 'recall' of these many 'appointments'. I believe (eventually) that, instead of lasting 'negative consequences', there will be lasting 'positive results', from my 'dental implant' (long-lasting) 'episode'!

WHAT ABOUT THAT SMALL 'BLACK SPOT' ON MY ARM?

There is an old saying: "When it rains, it pours!" The month of April 2013 brought 'double drama', 'double trauma', and 'double thanksgiving'! When one least expects 'troubling events', it is then that sometimes troubling events 'arrive'! Not one troubling event, but two such events! Not one 'near death' event, but two 'near death' events! Both within the 'compass' of one month - April 2013!

These were 'hair raising' events, but, thankfully, in the end, neither of these 'scary events' turned out to be 'high octane suffering' – although they so easily could have turned out to be events that spelled 'death' to several persons. Ironically, the two events happened on the same day - October 17, 2013.

The first event focuses on the 'large black spot' that appeared on the underside of my right arm. It was in a place where I could not easily see it. It probably was on my arm for 2 or 3 years. I gave no notice to the spot, but when I (with great effort) looked at the spot, I passed it off as being a simple mole. I have to admit that it was rather large, but I simply figured that some moles were small and some moles were large, and I just happened to have a large mole.

My assumption was confirmed by my doctor, who, at the end of my complete examination, simply told me that I had nothing to be concerned about! For about ten months after I got a 'clearance' from my doctor, the mole changed in size, and the mole began profusely to bleed! I noticed blotches of blood on my bed sheets, one morning, but I still did not feel much concern. My wife, of course, insisted that I return to my doctor.

When I saw the doctor, he did not express any alarm, but he did comment that the sore was 'ugly', and that it would be 'wise' to get it removed. A couple days later, my doctor performed a simple surgery to remove the growth. After the surgery, my doctor said that he was quite certain that there was no cancer (melanoma) in this growth. Of course, he wanted a professional (laboratory) examination of the growth.

When my doctor phoned my house, a few days later, with the pathology report, I could sense in his voice certain somberness. He told me that his worse fears were confirmed. He was saddened and he was shaken to tell me that, indeed, the pathology finding revealed that I did, indeed, have a cancerous growth - a melanoma!

My wife and my oldest daughter were present when I got the phone call. During the phone conversation, the doctor began to lay out possible plans for cancer treatment. He even shared with me the whereabouts of doctors who specialized in melanoma cancer!

The message of the brief phone call was very sobering! When I finished my talk with the doctor, I immediately began to sense my own mortality. I had heard of many other persons who had cancer, and I was at the bedside of a few persons who were dying as a result of cancer. Now, cancer was starring me in the 'face'. I knew that 'cancer' (including melanoma) was a 'killer disease'!

Will I be another 'cancer statistic', soon? Even though many melanoma patients fight hard to recover, many die from the disease, and some die within a few months! In spite of all the persons whom I knew that had cancer (of one form or another), I never believed that I would contract 'cancer'! After all, I have attempted to keep myself 'in shape' physically, by running consistently since I was a youth! Why would cancer attack me - on my arm?

God gave me 'certain calm', but slowly it was dawning on me that I had a serious type of cancer in my own body! I found this hard to believe! I was starting to re-orient my thinking, as I slowly began to realize that I might have only a short time to live! A sense of my mortality replaced my long-held confidence that I would probably live to be an old man (maybe even 90 years old).

This sense of my mortality was accentuated, following my brief visit with the surgeon, a few days later! This surgeon (specialist) read the pathology report to me, and he said (frankly) that he was 'troubled' by the report. He said that (statistically-speaking), because of the considerable 'depth' of the melanoma, it was likely that the cancer had spread a considerable width on my arm. He said that he would remove as much of the skin as he possibly could (to get all the spreading cancer if he possibly could).

He said that he could only go a certain width (from the original melanoma), but he could not go 'too far', lest he would not be able to sew up the wound. He was gracious, but he was also very sober and very 'business-like' in his approach to me. I felt

a certain atmosphere of 'somberness' in that small room! He said, "I don't know what there is about pastors. I have done surgery on several of them."

I probably was 'reading too much' into that comment, but I felt like he was telling me (subtly) that he had seen several ministers die, in spite of his attempts to help them! He was 'to the point' in his conversation with me - rather 'frank' - but, as he left the room, he simply said "I will do everything that I possibly can for you!" That last comment reflected a genuine care and compassion, and I deeply appreciated those few words!

The doctor did the surgery, and, from a medical viewpoint, the surgery was successful. A side comment: While I was being prepared for the surgery (which preparation took a few hours), I had the privilege of meeting several persons - mostly Christians. I conversed with several persons, and I believe I left behind a 'witness' for Christ.

Thankfully, God gave me a 'focus', not on myself or on my upcoming surgery, but, instead, upon the Lord and upon the Lord's people. Meaningful contacts before surgery- God answered my prayer that I might witness for Christ, and might keep my mind off of the upcoming 'cancer surgery'!

From the time that I first learned that I had cancer, until the day that I learned that I had no cancer whatever in my body - a period of about two weeks - I must say that I had thoughts that I never had before. I reflected on the many years that I had tried (with many failures) to serve God, and to obey God (since I was an 11 year old child). I reflected on my many years of ministry! I was thankful for those years in which I served God and the Church! Of course, I thanked God for my dear wife and daughters and their families.

I felt disappointment that I would not be able to launch a certain 'new project' that I had been working on for several months. I was sad that, in spite of my efforts to keep 'physically fit' (through daily running), I apparently was going

to die of cancer, and that I was going to die at too young of an age! Some of my 'dreams' would not be fulfilled! I did not 'panic' during this time. I felt a 'certain peace' from my loving Lord!

My wife and I began to resign ourselves to 'face the worse'! I did not want to leave my dear wife as a widow, but I had fullest confidence that she, who is a multi-talented woman, would continue to live a fruitful and contented life as a widow. During these two weeks (suspenseful weeks), there were many folks - some whom I had never met - who prayed earnestly for my 'healing'!

Among the many 'prayer warriors' who interceded for me, were members of my younger daughter's church in Denver ! Also, there was a Catholic priest in Seattle (a friend of my sister-in-law) who conducted a special prayer service for me!

I was not desperate in my praying, but I did pray specifically regarding this cancer in my body! I, myself, pictured the cancer cells as God's enemies, and, just as God destroyed the enemies of God's holy people (in the Old Testament), so I asked God to kill the cancer cells that were attempting to destroy the healthy cells in my body!

I told the Lord that these enemy cells had no right to be in my healthy body - a body that I had attempted to keep healthy (through active exercising - namely, consistent running). I had run literally thousands of miles, during my lifetime, and I had anticipated a long life of health (perhaps into my middle 90's like my mother who died at age 94)!

God was so merciful to answer the prayers of earnest prayer warriors! I was frankly amazed that there were so many people who cared for me (and some of them I had never met). I was so thankful that these fellow Christians took the time to pray for me. I knew then, and I still know, that I am not worthy of the least of God's favor.

I am only a sinner, saved by grace, with faults and failings and sins. I have, however, been an earnest follower of Christ, but, nevertheless, a fallible servant of my Lord. Again, I exclaim that God is merciful to the least of His servants - even to me! God does not give us what we deserve - justice - but, rather, God gives us what we desperately need - mercy and forgiveness and restoration!

I sent a copy of the following 'witness report' (a summary of the 'event') to over 80 addresses. I was so happy with the 'healing outcome', that I was compelled to share this 'healing outcome' with several other persons, many of whom prayed for me.

I entitled the 'witness report "Do You Believe In 'Physical Healing'?" I have, throughout my long life, sought to eat right and to exercise right (I have consistently involved myself in running a few miles almost every day, since my teen years). But an event took place when I was 68 years old - an event that caused me to 'face my mortality'. Simply stated, I discovered a dime shaped mole on the outer, upper right arm (a 'spot' that I could not even see with my own 'bare eyes'). My wife told me about it, but I could only see it when I viewed it in my mirror. I dismissed this 'spot' as insignificant, but I thought I probably should mention it to my family doctor, at the end of my complete physical examination (April 2012). My doctor quickly viewed the dime-shaped black spot, but he said it was nothing to be concerned about.

I thought nothing about it - until, about 10 months after seeing my doctor, the little spot began to bleed, and finally that spot became a large erupting, bloody 'mess'! My wife, of course, insisted that I go to the doctor, but I told her that there was nothing to be concerned about, since the doctor told me the same message, a few months before. But finally, after she continued to insist, I went to the doctor (who had serviced me medically, for the last 30 years).

When he took the covering off of the bleeding sore, he said that it 'looked angry', and he said that he must soon operate on it - to remove this 'angry sore'. Two days later, after he removed the 'angry sore' (a simple surgery performed in his own office), he said he was 'baffled' as to what was the nature of the sore! But he assured me that he was quite sure that it was not a melanoma (skin cancer).

After the doctor received the pathology report (two days later), he called me and sadly informed me that, indeed, it was a melanoma! He was troubled, and he began to tell me that the seriousness of this diagnosis could result in surgeries (removing lymph nodes) and chemo treatments, etc. Of course, my wife and my daughter (who were present when I receive the call) and I were all 'shaken' by the 'bad news'.

I soon began to think of the 'worst' - eventual termination of my life (death). It was a few days later that I visited a specialist (surgeon) who told me that the diagnosis (pathologist report) was 'troubling'. He said that the fact that the melanoma was quite 'deep' into the skin (which has five layers), and the fact that the 'sore' bled rather profusely - these two facts meant that this situation could be serious. Before I left his office, this specialist said that frankly he was 'troubled'. Of course, my sense of the 'brevity' and the 'uncertainty' of life - my own 'mortality' - filled my mind.

But I must say, to the 'glory of God', that, in spite of my understandable 'fears', I sensed a certain wonderful (God-given) peace. I said to myself, "Even though I have tried hard to live a healthy life (trying to keep my heart and lungs and circulatory system in 'good shape' through my consistent running), maybe God does not desire for me to live a long life (into my late 80's or 90's like my ancestors). I began to remember the scores of persons whom I loved on earth, who are now in heaven.

I had written quite a lot about heaven (and had recorded hundreds of quotations about heaven). Maybe now it was time for

me to leave the family I loved, and to meet my blessed Savior. The surgeon (specialist) said he would have to take a lot of my arm skin (where cancer probably resided), as well as one of my lymph nodes.

Three days after the extensive surgery, the pathology report came into the hands of my primary physician, and (even though I was not home at the time), he called my wife and told her that NO cancer was found anywhere - that I had a 'clean bill of health'. He said, "Praise the Lord!" My wife called me while I was traveling in a car with my brother, a few miles from home. Needless to say, my brother and I could hardly believe the 'good report'!

The burden that was released from me was more than I can put in words! Scores of persons spent time in prayer for my healing! Do you believe in the power of prayer? Healing from God? Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

There was a sizeable number of persons who communicated to me (after they received my 'witness report' regarding my healing.). They rejoiced, along with me, that God's goodness and mercy had been demonstrated.

A few days after the confirmation (from the pathology report) that I, indeed, had no cancer in my body, my primary physician (who performed the first minor surgery) called me and he openly and simply said, "Ron, I fully expected that there would be cancer, both in the arm and in the lymph node. There is no explanation, other than that you were healed as a result of an answer to prayer!"

I told him that he and God were responsible for my healing, and he said it was God! I knew that he was a kind and gentle man of 'faith', but, through the many years (30 years) that I had enjoyed him as my physician, I had never heard him to be so 'explicit' regarding the power of prayer (the intervention of God)!

This event could have been a 'high octane suffering' (intense pain, eventual death, permanent consequences), but God allowed it to be a 'lower octane suffering' (minimum pain, deliverance from a disease that often leads to death, short term consequences with continuing gratitude to God for a miracle)!

LEARNING TO LIVE MORE GRATEFULLY!

As I reflect on this 'incident', that could have resulted in my death, what lessons can I learn? Probably more lessons than I can now consciously list, but here are some lessons that I hope I will never forget:

May I live with a greater sense of God's mercy and love and power!

May I have a renewed appreciation for the loving and caring 'people of God' (including those persons whom I have never met).

May I learn to better 'number my days that I may get a heart of wisdom'! May I learn to value each day, to use each day for God-honoring work, never to take 'life for granted'!

May I have a 'keener sense' of the fragile nature of life, and may I sense my need to trust my life more and more to the God who has total control of life's events (happy and sad events, alike).

May I learn to value the power of prayer, which in my 'case' resulted in my healing from a deadly form of cancer!

May I learn to be more appreciative for the 'healing skills' of competent doctors, who apply the 'knife' in surgery to prevent the spread of cancer! May I more greatly appreciate the fact that a compassionate doctor and a loving God work 'hand in hand' to accomplish the outcome of healing!

May I learn to live with a 'childlike faith', humbly submitting myself to the 'directives' of an all-wise, and all-powerful, all-loving God!

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow!" "Teach me, dear Father, to be 'lost in wonder, love, and praise.' In Jesus' name!"

IS THAT THE 'SMOKE ALARM' I HEAR?

The second event - the event that took place the same day as my 'melanoma surgery' (April 17, 2013) - had the potential of also being an 'event' that could have destroyed precious lives! I was not made aware of this 'hair-raising event' until I returned to my home, after my recovery from surgery, on that same evening (April 17). It happened about 3 hours after I had left my home in the early morning, to go to the hospital to prepare for surgery.

Apparently, my wife (who cares for elderly ones in our home), was upstairs performing her regular elderly care duties. She heard a very loud noise, and, at first, she did not recognize that it was the sound of the 'smoke alarm'. Because she had long ago developed a 'hearing loss' (during childhood), it is not always easy for her to discern or to distinguish various kinds of 'sounds'.

Fortunately (providentially) she decided to 'check out' the loud noise, so she descended the long flight of stairs to find out if there was anything to be concerned about! When she got to the bottom of the flight of stairs, she could hardly believe what she was observing! The flames from an open (large) pan of boiling oil, were shooting very high (almost reaching the kitchen ceiling)! The microwave stove, attached to the regular stove, was already melting!

Venita, who is quite 'calm' in emergency situations, took 'control' of the 'dangerous problem'! She did not 'panic' in the presence of this 'terrifying sight'! She had the 'presence of mind' to do what she should do, during this emergency. She

knew that she could not call the emergency number (911), for, by the time the fire department would be at our house, it would be too late!

In a few seconds, the house would be on fire, and Venita certainly would not have time to rescue the two elderly ladies who lived in our house. She may not have given much thought (at that particular time) to the likelihood of terrible calamity, but, if the fire would have spread beyond the stove, the entire house probably would have ‘gone up in flames’ (with the loss of precious lives)!

Venita responds well in ‘crisis situations’. Venita knew that her gracious God enabled her to think clearly, to remain calm, and to act quickly and wisely! Instead of dousing the flames with water (a foolish thing to do when there is an ‘oil fire’), Venita did the wise and effective thing - she used nearby towels and a rug to put out the flames!

After the fire was out, and after Venita ‘gathered together her thoughts’, she noticed the bottle of oil, next to the stove, was melted down, close to the remaining oil in the bottle. Of course, if the fire had reached that half bottle of oil, disaster would have ensued (the bottle would probably have acted like a ‘bomb’)!

Venita had planned to prepare a ‘stew’, but she forgot to turn off the heat under the pan of oil, before she went upstairs to take care of an elderly lady! The ‘best of cooks’ can make mistakes, but this mistake nearly turned into a disaster!

It is because God gave ‘positive results’, rather than ‘negative consequences’, that these ‘twin events’ of April 17, 2013, can be identified as ‘lower octane sufferings’!

Two potential tragedies on the same day! The Bible says that God sends His holy angels, to ‘minister to those who are the heirs of salvation’! Did unseen ministers of God - the holy angels - hover over me (at the hospital), and hover over Venita (in her kitchen)? Protection and deliverance!

DOUBLE MURDER ON THE CHURCH PARKING LOT!

It probably was the 'darkest day' in the life of our local church, namely, the cold-blooded murder of one of our dearest members of our church, committed by the crazed husband (who was a black belt instructor, a military man, a marksman, a so-called patriot, a studious and a well-like person.) Without going into long details regarding his personhood and his personality, he was domineering as a husband, extremely possessive, highly opinionated, an inflexible conservative when it came to political and militaristic viewpoints.

John Miller was a likeable person. John loved to laugh and he loved to joke with his friends. John could even be the 'life of the party'. John had a 'black belt', and he was a disciplined instructor in his sport! He was very strong physically, and he was committed to a military way of life (for, of course, he had been in the military at one time). He was strongly patriotic and he held certain patriotic convictions tenaciously.

John was domineering in his 'style' of male leadership. At times John could be 'warm' and personable in his relationships with friends in our local church. However, John was very 'sensitive' in his feelings and, therefore, he could be rather reactionary towards certain persons (who chose to disagree with his conservative viewpoints)!

John was very possessive of his wife and of his children. He was intelligent and he enjoyed being very philosophical in his discussions with his friends about a variety of subjects (usually political topics)! However, he easily took offense when 'liberal political views' were presented to him.

John Miller had great knowledge of guns, and he himself was a 'sharp shooter'. He had been hired, at least on one occasion, as a 'body guard' for some 'important person' in another state!

John had two lovely teenage daughters and one young grade school son, and they all were intelligent and good-looking, like their Mexican-born father and their Anglo mother. John's wife, Valerie, was one of the most beautiful women (physically) that you could imagine! And also she was very intelligent and very creative (she was a portrait artist and a seamstress and a fabulous soloist).

Valerie (John's wife) had a most delightful, loving, extroverted personality, and she was multi-talented. A most beautiful voice, as evidenced time and time again when she sang solos in our worship services. ('She brought heaven down to earth' when she sang, and she never sang for self-enhancement, but only for the glory of God).

Everyone in our church really loved and admired this precious and loveable lady. She was a lady of dignity and yet a most approachable lady. Like a magnet, many persons were drawn to her. She was joyous in demeanor. Her laughter was so enjoyable to hear!

She made an income, out of necessity, for her family, as a seamstress. She could do almost anything with clothes, from making something new to doing difficult jobs of altering clothes. In addition to these impressive talents, Valerie was a portrait artist whose paintings could easily win first prize in any contest!

If a person would ask John (Valerie's husband) if he loved his wife, he would without any hesitation declare, "Of course, I do!" But, while I was the pastor of this couple, for several years, I recognized that there was some serious 'breakdown' in their communication. I am quite sure that Valerie felt that, during their 17 years of marriage, John failed to get serious about his responsibility as husband, and specifically as a financial provider for the family.

Of course, I was not aware of all the reasons, but finally (after several years of waiting for John to change his ways) Valerie

'could take it no longer'. She had tried for many years to be a cooperative and a submissive wife. She had even given up some of her own goals, in an attempt to 'please' her husband! She left him a few days before the horrible incident on our church parking lot.

For a few days, John was staying at the home of one of our church members. On that fateful Sunday morning (August 23, 1992), John (a marksman) came to the sanctuary of our church, just before the second worship service began, and he motioned to Valerie that he wanted to see her.

She submitted to his demand, and she and John had a brief 'tempestuous dialogue' in the foyer, which I witnessed. Several persons, about 10 persons, including a police officer who would not normally be at that particular worship service, soon found their way to the parking lot, where John and Valerie were carrying on a heated argument! One or two couples (friends), who followed John and Valerie to the parking lot, tried to calm John (tried to 'reason' with John), but to no avail.

When Valerie discontinued to talk (argue) with John, and as she stepped a few feet away from John, John pulled his concealed weapon, and (marksman that we was), he shot Valerie in her heart! I saw her die, and, as she was dying, I think I heard her say, "I didn't think he would do it!" As I, and a few others, saw her die at our feet, we, obviously, were horrified! In the most horrendous tragedies, however, God is present!

One of the men who witnessed the murder (a man who was a new Christian, and, sadly enough, a man who was also a friend of John and Valerie) said he saw two angels attend to Valerie, as she was dying. He said he saw one angel at Valerie's head, and another angel at Valerie's feet!

As soon as John opened 'fire' on his wife to murder her, the police officer (a godly man and, ironically, a good friend of

John's) immediately opened 'fire' on John, and John in turn simultaneously opened 'fire' on Mike (the police officer).

I stood a few feet away from this 'murderous scene'. I watched as the bullets were being exchanged between these two men (these two men who, up until this moment, had been 'good friends')! I could hardly believe what I was seeing!

Both men were seriously hurt. It took Mike (the police officer) several weeks in the hospital to recover. John's injury was fatal. He died in the hospital, a few hours after he was shot by Mike Swihart (John's previous 'friend')!

The drama of this 'bloody scene' (on the church parking lot on that fateful August Sunday morning - August 1992) could not be invented by a movie producer (exchange of 'fire' aimed simultaneously at two marksmen, each of whom before that murderous morning enjoyed mutual 'friendship', (as 'Christian brothers'), and all of this happening because of an 'insane jealousy' of a man for his wife! That night of the shooting, believe it or not, the daughter of the police officer and the daughter of John (good friends) were together and slept together, at the home of the police officer! If that is not 'ironic', I don't know what irony is!

If one of the bullets would have hit in a slightly different position, Mike would have been killed. While John lay on the parking lot, he was still conscious enough to try to reach for his gun (near him), to continue to shoot (even though he was prostrate on the blacktop).

Toxie (who saw the angels a few seconds before) went over to where John was lying, and, as he saw John trying to pick up his gun on the parking lot, Toxie kicked away the gun. John then said to Toxie, "What have I done?" Toxie answered, "You just killed your wife!" John replied, "Oh no, I am going to hell. Pray for me!" Toxie replied, "You pray for yourself"!

By afternoon, while he was being treated in the hospital, John died! All of this happened on John and Valerie's 17th wedding anniversary! A most tragic happening, to be sure, but we must leave the eternal destiny of every person (including John) in the hands of Almighty God!

GRIEVING THE NEEDLESS DEATH OF ONE SO YOUNG!

My godly mother used to say, "The old must die, and the young may die!" But when the young persons (children or young adults) die, it is almost always the result of either disease or of fatal accidents. But when the young person (in his 20's) dies of suicide, it is 'hard to take' - 'hard to process' in our minds! Russ Brandon was such a 'case'. I did not know him well, or for a long period of time. For a few months he attended the local church where I was pastor at the time.

I remember him as a physically endowed (muscular) person, handsome, forthright and direct and unapologetic in his demeanor. A young man who was full of intellectual inquiries which he strongly and respectfully directed to me. He asked me penetrating (philosophically-oriented) questions after questions! Within the confines of my small office, he seemed to enjoy asking questions, the answers to which I could not quickly or easily give.

He seemed to delight in delving into the 'mysterious' and 'profound' areas of life. I greatly enjoyed dialoguing with him, for I believed that he was sincerely seeking better to understand the meaning of life. I sensed that, at times, he was struggling to find personal peace in his own life, but his personal quest for meaning was oftentimes hidden behind the facade of philosophical discussion.

I really liked this vivacious young man, even though he often took on the 'stance of a controversial philosopher'! I recognized that he was intelligent, as shown by the kind of questions that he posed to me. Frankly, I thought that, although he was basically sincere in his motives, he some-

times wanted to pose questions (and philosophical problems) to me that would leave me 'speechless' (i.e., that would leave me in a position without any adequate responses).

In spite of all his 'intellectual wrangling', I saw 'below the surface' that Russ was a young man, desperately desiring to find meaning and purpose for his life! I was kind and caring towards him, and I gave him time (without interruption of him) for him to express his views (some of which were not totally in agreement with the Biblical viewpoint).

I respected him (and his questions and his dogmatic assertions), without always agreeing with him. He listened to my counter-arguments, and he showed great respect for me, even when he choose not to agree with me. We had a mutually respectful discussion, the few times we were together.

Even though he seemed to enjoy being 'controversial' in his conversation with me, his was a 'pleasing personality'. I really liked Russ, and I greatly enjoyed being with a young man who knew how to use his brain to think and to contemplate and to 'search for truth'! I liked him as a person! Even with some apparent weaknesses in his personality, he, nevertheless, had an attractive personality!

He, at this time, was dating a beautiful Christian lady who was a member of our church. But, in spite of all the 'good' in the person of Russ, it seemed to me that this fine young adult was probably quite 'skilled' at covering a lot of 'hurts' in his personal life. Apparently, the hurts were so great, and his despair was so deep that he believed - tragically - that ending his own life was the only 'good option'!

His instrument for his death was his own car, parked by a beautiful lake, a few miles away from Loveland, Colorado. I had known this handsome young man for a relatively short period of time. During this time we had our rather 'intense dialogues'. I found myself growing in greater love for him!

How shocked I was to receive the terrible news of his untimely death! As I fixed my eyes on the young, muscular body of this man, who now rested in a beautiful casket, my inner soul cried out, Why? Why? Why? - Such a needless and senseless death! The young man had amazing potential.

He could have blessed countless lives, by the use of his mind, by the kind words of his lips, by the exercise of his talents, through the influence of his personality! Why couldn't someone have gotten to him with the message of hope, to give him reason to continue to live! Such a choice young man! Why did he choose such a senseless way to die?

I wish I could have said something, or have done more to give him hope for living. Why didn't I do a better job answering his questions? Did I clearly point him to the blessed Savior? (These are the sentiments that I had that day, as I fixed my eyes on Russ's body, in the casket, the day before the funeral service, where I, as his pastor, shared some funeral meditations).

A GREAT WOMAN SUFFERS GREATLY!

I was both sad and glad as I entered the hospital room of a 'saintly' woman by the name of Beulah Pilcher. I was glad to be in the presence of one of the godliest persons I had ever known. As an older member of the church where I was pastor, I had long admired her godly wisdom and her sweet temperament and her wise words and her special skills and her lifetime of service with her minister husband.

She had been a widow for several years; her husband died before I became this woman's pastor. Yes, as I entered that hospital room, I was glad when I thought of the many times that she and I had worshiped together, and when I thought of the joyous fellowship I had enjoyed being with her and with the several other widows in the weekly 'cottage prayer meeting'. When I went to her mobile home, I greatly enjoyed listening to her stories from the past, times when she and her dedicated

husband (minister) saw God work miracles in the lives of persons that she reached out to. Yes, lots of reasons for my spirit of gladness, when I entered her hospital room.

But, I also had reason for sadness! I had ambivalent feelings, before entering that hospital room! I had a certain 'dread' come over me. I knew that (again) when I entered that room, and when I stood beside her bed, that I would be looking into the face of a woman who would (in spite of the administered drugs) be in the agony of pain! She was slowly dying of that dreadful disease - the disease that everyone 'runs' from, namely, cancer!

How many are there right now who are slowly and painfully dying of cancer - the monster that is traversing the land to find someone to render a painful death! As I recall, it took several weeks (maybe months) before her agony (suffering) finally and mercifully ceased!

Death was such a 'welcome friend' for this saintly widow! Of course, during her bout with cancer, she had been ready to die for an extended period of time. She had walked with her Lord for a lifetime, and, amidst her constant pain, she could hardly wait until she breathed her last breath!

Why did she have to suffer for so long, and with such intense pain? Why did it take so long for her to die? If God was not the 'source' (cause) of this suffering, then was God trying to teach this faithful saint some important lessons? How was this terrible suffering, being endured by a beautiful human being, consistent with God's love? There must be some purpose in this 'long chapter of suffering'!

The 'mystery of human suffering' will probably never be 'solved', as long as we humans travel the many pathways on this terrestrial planet. We explore this 'mystery', but we will find only partial answers to our probing questions. Above everything else, it is important that we never conclude that God is

the 'source' of human suffering! God is the 'Author' of all things 'good', not all things 'bad'.

It is His perfect will, of course, that every human (sinner) experience the sorrow that always accompanies true repentance. 'Godly sorrow' (as a result of one's awakening to the reality of sin in his life) - that kind of grief and sorrow is meant to lead the sinner to the 'foot of the cross'! That sorrow, initiated by God, is a healthy sorrow. The sorrow that accompanies the chastening rod of correction - that, too, is initiated by God, and the result of that sorrow is healing and discipline and growth in the Lord! (Hebrews 12)

One highly-respected writer, William Sangster, has some helpful insights regarding suffering. He notes, "People talk at times of sickness and disease as being 'the will of God', but it does not prevent them waiting on the doctor for a cure. It is only 'the will of God' in the sense that God created the world order in which sin and disease were possible. But man has misused his freedom. So sin has come into the world, and sickness and disease with it. But God is not more opposed to sin than He is opposed to sickness. His will for men and women is perfect health of body and of soul. 'Why then', people ask, 'doesn't he banish sickness with one stroke of his almighty power?' If this question troubles you, ask yourself another one. 'Why doesn't he banish sin in the same way?' The answer is, 'because our freedom is involved.' The moment God forced us to goodness; we should be robots and not men.

"At some level, our freedom is involved in sickness as well - not in precisely the same way, not in a fashion easily recognizable, but in the fact that we sometimes break God's laws of health through folly or ignorance and the penalties follow (even where we are in no way to blame, as with little children and many adults too). God is fighting disease as he is fighting sin. All who really heal are his colleagues. Medical research students receive his aid - whether they are aware of it or not. He does not write the answers on the heavens for us, because

he treats us as persons and works with us in fellowship. But he is against disease.”

Because of the above comments on the phenomenon and mystery of human suffering, I was helped in my long-time and persistent struggle with the question as to why people in general suffer and why, in particular, godly persons suffer. Of course, we finite, frail, 'creatures of clay' are not equipped to understand many of the divinely-concealed mysteries of life.

When we cannot understand with our minds, we must trust with our hearts! God does all things well and rightly, and we must put our trust in God's wisdom. He is all-wise (He knows what is best), He is all-loving (He wants to do the best for each person), He is all-powerful (He is able to do what is best for each person).

Even though we will always, of course, come 'very short' in our understanding of the 'mysterious ways' of Almighty God, we must, nevertheless, be diligent in our search for truth. God gave us a good brain, and, therefore, we should earnestly search for the truth about all of life, and specifically about the mysteries of human suffering. The basic premise is this: God is not the 'author' of human suffering. God hates human suffering. God, through various means and various methods, is seeking to eliminate human suffering.

Because God created human beings with a free will, human suffering is inevitable as a 'happening' in this type of world. God does not force His will upon the human race. Much of human suffering is the result of an individual's own wrong moral choice. In many cases, persons suffer because of the wrong moral choice of other persons (near to them) - such as the suffering of unborn babies because of the wrong choice of the mother, and such as the suffering of troubled children because of the choice of their parents to divorce.

BEWILDERED MIND BUT A TRUSTING HEART!

Even though the mystery of human suffering remains, we can be assured that God loves the human race. However, to the broken-hearted person who is seeking for answers, we must not give quick or easy or simplistic or dogmatic or heretical answers, in an attempt to explain the premature (tragic) death of his loved ones!

Because we (believers) are called to comfort our sorrowing 'brothers and sister' (in the 'faith), we will (carefully) want, at times, to offer some rational explanation for another's misfortune. But, most of the time, sorrowing persons do not want rational explanations for their grief, but, rather, most sorrowing ones want a sympathetic heart and a listening ear.

There is probably no Christian alive (including an intellectually-oriented Christian) who can give an intellectually honest answer to many of the mysterious deaths that they encounter firsthand, or that they read about!

How do you give an answer to a person who is asking why their loved one died, as a result of a tornado or of a hurricane or of a flood or of an earthquake? It is reported that more Christians died for their faith (persecution) during the 20th century, than in all the other centuries combined! Some skeptics ask, "Where was God when each of these loyal followers of Christ were being cruelly tortured and put to death so unjustly?"

Without being irreverent in attitude, the question can be asked, "Why have so many Christians been killed in car accidents, caused by drunk drivers?" And another piercing question (not meant to be irreverent): "Why has God allowed the slaughter of many, many millions of unborn babies, through the cruel intervention of pain-giving, heartless doctors (who, in spite of their denials, played the role of monsters)?" And, focusing again on a 'saintly woman': "Why did Beulah Pilcher have to suffer so much, and for so long?"

**ARE SO-CALLED 'NATURAL DISASTERS' CAUSED BY
'DEMONIC FORCES'?**

In his expansive and thought-provoking volume, entitled 'God At War', respected evangelical scholar, Gregory Boyd, advances the argument that, behind the devastation of all so-called 'natural disasters' (hurricanes, tornados, etc.) is the 'activity of demonic forces'! He notes, "In the apocalyptic world view, the entire world is understood to be under a demonic curse, which affects even the 'natural' order of the world. The angels-turned-demons in care of various natural functions are now bent on wreaking havoc with the creation.

"Everything from plagues to earthquakes to famines to rain storms could therefore be attributed to demonic activity. When God is finally victorious over all his enemies, (the New Testament authors) believed, there would be no more famines, floods, plagues, war, tears, sin or death. The demonic curse on the cosmos would itself be cursed, and the rule of God, with the viceroyalty of humanity, would be reestablished."
(pgs. 208-209)

Does it not 'make sense' that, if God is not the author of suffering, and if thousands are killed by hurricanes and tornados, therefore, there is some other 'force' (other than God) that is (who is) responsible for the killing of so many precious human beings? If the world (and all of its functions in 'nature') has been 'cursed' at the time of the historic 'Fall' of man, then this must mean that Satan (called the 'prince of the power of the air') has the ability to wreak havoc upon mankind, through his control of the 'natural forces'.

Never should we blame God when thousands die, as a result of the 'forces of nature'. Apparently, Satan (even though he is a 'defeated foe') can still exercise demonic force over the wind and the waves and the underground movement of the earth, and the volcanic fire below the surface of the earth! Satan certainly is not all-powerful (as God is), but, nevertheless, until he is finally confined to the 'lake of fire', he is still 'on

the loose' seeking to do damage to God's choice creation (mankind).

Because our world is still the battleground of the 'evil one' (the enemy of God and the enemy of mankind), we should not be too surprised when Satan demonstrates his bitterness toward God, and his hatred towards mankind!

Even though God is our Protector and Defense (a very great Help in our times of need), and even though Christ is the Conqueror over Satan (as a result of the cross and the resurrection), and even though the 'final victory' in heaven is guaranteed to those who follow Christ on this earth - even though, even though we can affirm these 'positive truths', reality declares that Satan (still on the loose) is using various tactics (methods) to bring defeat and destruction to the race of creatures whom he intensely hates.

IS SATAN ADEPT AT DECEIVING UNSUSPECTING HUMAN BEINGS?

Satan is called a 'thief and a robber'. He wants to steal happiness and to steal life itself from every believer - by storms, by hurricanes, by tornadoes, and by so much more! If he wanted to crush the apostle Peter, and 'sift him like wheat', don't you think he wants to do the same to you and to me?

Through killing believers by the millions (martyrdom), through the devastation of countless diseases (cancer, etc.), through fatal accidents (mountain climbers, and by Satan using drunk drivers to kill believers), through inciting obesity that leads to heart attacks, through urging believers to live in danger zones where hurricanes often occur.

Satan is called a 'murderer', and he is adept in urging humans to make foolish choices that could lead to death. Choices like living a sedentary life (no exercise). Choices like eating unhealthy (useless) food. Choices like living at the 'edge' of disaster (sports that are full of risks to one's life). Choices like

living at the edge of the ocean (in the 'name of beauty') which likely will be the center of wind and waves and certain death.

Choices like 'flirting with alcohol' (in the 'name of freedom' which, at best, is an unhealthy choice, and at worst leads to alcoholism and usually premature (painful) death). Choices like pursuing the glamour of money and the excitement of sexual indulgence, the end of which a lifestyle often leads to strife and envy and bitterness and ultimate despair and (oftentimes) suicide.

Satan does not care how he 'kills' human beings, if not through so-called natural disasters of various kinds, then through some other methods. Because of his 'subtle' ways - his mastery in deception - Satan is quite able to lead many souls down the pathway that leads to death (physical death and spiritual death).

He is a liar, deceiver, and murderer. He is the archenemy of Jesus Christ. He tried desperately to defeat Jesus Christ, while Jesus traveled along the shores of Galilee, and while Jesus (for 40 days) was tempted by Satan in the desert.

Jesus never yielded to the allurement of Satan, and when Satan thought he had his conclusive victory over Jesus, when Jesus died on a cross, Jesus again won the victory over Satan. The day that Satan thought was his greatest victory, was the day, instead, of Satan's greatest defeat. Jesus won the victory, once and for all, for the entire human race.

The victory that Jesus won is the victory over Satan that we too can experience! When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, then Jesus allows us to share His victory over Satan.

Satan tragically still 'gets his way' at times on this earth, in spite of the fact that Jesus conquered him on the cross and through the resurrection. Christians, at times, die on this earth (at the hand of Satan) - like the believers who died in the Nazi prison camps! Why? Because, even though Satan is a

'defeated foe', and even though his final destiny will be the 'lake of fire', God (for His own good reasons) has allowed Satan (for a short time) to 'be on the loose'!

While he is 'on the loose', Satan is taking out his 'bitterness' against God, by attempting to 'hurt' the people of God. Satan knows his 'days are numbered', and, therefore, he is waging his 'last assault against humanity'.

Satan can't defeat the living Christ, for Christ won the victory conclusively (historically) when He was on the earth in 'bodily form'. However, while Satan cannot 'touch' Christ, and, obviously, he cannot tempt Christ to sin, Satan can try to defeat human 'flesh and blood' creatures - humans who are in a 'state of probation' (testing), living on earth.

If Satan can't outrightly 'kill' humans (through a variety of strategies), then he will attempt to allure humans into doing 'wrong' - thereby 'breaking' their relationship with God. Satan seeks to allure a man into Satan's 'evil purpose', for Satan knows that the 'wages of sin is death'! To get persons to take the way of evil is to get people on the path that leads ever downward and downward, and the end of that path is death (what Satan's goal is for every person)!

GOD'S WAYS ARE HIGHER THAN OUR WAYS, AS HEAVEN IS ABOVE OUR EARTH!

There are many mysteries in life that will never be fully solved by us frail 'creatures of clay'. To understand all the mysteries of life (which God has not chosen to reveal) is about like an ant trying to understand the mysteries of Einstein's brain! God's ways are higher than our ways, as high as the heavens are above the earth, and so are His thoughts compared to our thoughts!

The one 'mystery' that God has revealed - the most important mystery - is the fact that what Jesus (the Incarnate One) was here on earth - Perfect Love - God the Creator has always

been! What kind of God is at the center of the Universe? Jesus revealed that He is a God of Perfect Love! The most important fact of reality! Jesus revealed (once and for all) that God is for the human race, not against the human race.

Even though there are many injustices and inequities that are apparent in the 'happenings' of human life, and there are so many 'things' that occur on the earth (wars and crimes and so-called 'natural disasters', etc.) that defy human reasoning, we humans can be assured that God loves the human race, that God understands the hurts and sufferings which humans undergo, that God is the 'Great Compensator' who will redress every loss and who will repay every wrong.

Not one person will go 'unpaid' who has died prematurely (like aborted babies) or who has died unjustly (like martyred persons, or like war victims) or who has died accidentally (like those who died in tornadoes, and like those who died in car crashes).

GOD WILL 'BALANCE THE BOOKS' AT THE 'END OF HUMAN LIFE'!

God (in eternity) will 'make it up to those who suffered loss' here on earth. God, who is perfectly 'just' in all His dealings with humanity, will be a 'debtor to no man'! To those who have done evil (with no repentance), God will repay with just punishment. To those who have done great evil (hard-heartedly), God will apply 'many stripes'. To those who have done little evil (with little understanding of the nature of evil), God will apply 'few stripes'.

To whom much is given, much will be required. To whom little is given (pagan persons with no light of Christianity), little is required. God is the just judge, and His justice is always 'tempered with mercy'! The same is true of God's evaluation of the believer. The believer who has suffered the greatest for God (the believer who has shed his blood for Christ) will receive the greatest reward from Christ. Great will be the re-

ward for those who have been greatly persecuted for Christ's sake (Matthew 5).

Why do some Christians, when they are going through the dying process, experience much more intense and extensive pain than do other Christians who die painlessly and quickly? No one but God knows the answer to that question!

One sure thing: Every Christian, as he is dying, and regardless of how much or how little pain he is enduring during the process of dying, experiences God's presence and God's enabling power! "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me." (Psalms 23)

It is my understanding that the last words that John Wesley said, before he died, were: "The best of all, God is with us!" As many martyrs for Christ were dying, throughout the last twenty centuries of Christian history, it is known that words of triumph were on their lips - even while they were greatly suffering! If God gives His followers 'living grace' (i.e., power to live the Christian life), so God will also give Christians 'dying grace' (i.e., the strength to go through the dying process).

The 'mystery' of why some Christians suffer and why some other Christians apparently suffer much less - this mystery probably will never be 'solved' on this side of eternity. For instance, Hebrews 11 (the 'faith chapter') records the fact that many believers, because of their faith in God, escaped the 'edge of the sword' in persecution, while other believers, who possessed equally great faith in God, died by the 'edge of the sword' during bitter persecution!

Both are equally blessed by God, but some Christians at that time experienced great physical suffering for Christ, while other Christians escaped great physical suffering! Why did God deliver some from suffering, while He allowed other Christians to suffer greatly - in life and during death? Does God have favorites?

God 'favors' all persons who have a 'close walk' with God, but, for some unknown (strange) reason, God allows some of His 'choicest servants' to suffer greatly! Does anyone understand the 'mysterious ways' of God's love! Because someone (believer) suffers greatly, this fact does not mean that God loves him less!

Who can discern the mysterious ways of God? One's mind is 'baffled' when he tries to figure out the strange ways of God. All we can say is that God loves everyone, and that God has a specific 'purpose' for the life of every soul - including the soul who suffers unbelievable pain as a result of life's circumstances! We can never fully understand the mysteries of life (the many injustices and inequities of life), and why 'things' happen the way they do.

We must affirm, anew, that, in spite of the confusion of our mind and in spite of the doubts of our spirit, God, indeed, is who He said He is - namely, a God of perfect and unconditional love. During our times when our suffering seems to defy reason, we must say, "God, thou art love, and, even though I am deeply hurting because of the bruises and the beatings of life, I will put my trust in you. I know that you will use all the difficult experiences in my life, for my own good and for your own honor and praise!"

GOD IS THE 'GREAT COMPENSATOR' IN ETERNITY!

Why have some persons experienced a rather 'easy or comfortable exit' from this earthly life, while other persons (like Beulah Pilcher) had a painful time during their dying process? Only God can answer that difficult question! God is the 'Great Compensator', and in eternity all things will be made 'right'. No more injustice and no more inequities - in eternity!

All who were unrewarded and unrecognized on earth will be rewarded and will be recognized in heaven, and God will exalt those who were humiliated or persecuted on earth. The followers of Christ who, on earth, were bitterly persecuted on earth,

will be crowned with the 'crown of life' in heaven! No more sorrow and no more suffering!

The former (evil) things of earth will all be passed away, and, behold, all things in heaven will be new! The remaining questions (regarding the mystery of human suffering) may or may not be answered by God, in heaven.

But, whether or not those 'thorny questions' are answered, the important thing is that the justice of God will be vindicated, and the righteousness of God will be honored, and the peace of God will prevail among all of heaven's inhabitants. As previously mentioned, those who suffered most for Christ, while they lived on this earth, are the ones (such as martyrs) who will receive the 'greatest rewards'! Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for great will be their reward!"

It is conceivable (based on this scripture) that there will be 'levels of rewards' in heaven. Because the love of God is in the heart of every heavenly citizen, there will be, of course, no carnal (jealous) competition between the inhabitants of heaven.

All heavenly inhabitants will be content with the place that God gives to them in heaven, and all will rejoice in the place that God has given to every other fellow 'saint' in heaven. However, based on Jesus' words (just quoted), it seems 'right' and it seems 'fair' that those who suffered most for Christ, during their earthly journey, should receive the 'greatest rewards' from Christ, in heaven!

WILL GOD DISTRIBUTE 'REWARDS' IN HEAVEN?

There is a scriptural teaching regarding the 'judgment of rewards'. From a study of this scriptural passage, it is certain that God will reward each person in eternity, according to the quality of his/her life that he or she has lived (that is, the quality of godlike living). Also, the quality and the quantity of 'good

works', done with a loving heart, and for the glory of God - these 'good works' will also be evaluated, and appropriate rewards will be given to the 'worthy recipients'.

The 'judgment of evaluation' is only for believers in heaven. The 'judgment of condemnation' will be only for unbelievers who failed to make heaven their home. There will be differing 'degrees of rewards', given by God to persons in heaven! It appears from studying scripture that there will be a great deal of difference in the kind of rewards, and in the degree of rewards, that God will give to the heavenly citizens.

For the sake of emphasis, it needs to be stated again that the greater that believers suffer for the sake of righteousness (that is, the greater they suffer for the person of Christ) here on earth, the greater will be their reward in heaven!

Christ, the 'Great Sympathizer', and Christ the 'Great Compensator' understands the wide variety of suffering that humans endure, and He will 'comfort' and He will 'compensate' all persons who experience various kinds of suffering - whether that suffering is the suffering of economic deprivation, or the suffering of grief and loss of loved ones, or the suffering from an incurable disease, or the suffering of a premature death, or the suffering of an extended death process, or the suffering as a result of abortion, or the suffering from persecution that resulted in death, or the suffering from manifold disasters, or the suffering caused by war, or the suffering as a result of other 'unjust or unexplained' happenings!

The loss that Beulah Pilcher suffered on this earth, cannot be compared with the gain that she now enjoys in heaven. The mind cannot conceive of the rewards that God has prepared for his children!

A PAINFUL FALL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT!

It was a night punctuated with tragedy! It was very frightening, and it resulted in considerable pain for the one whose ac-

cident it was! The event could have been more 'terrible' than what it turned out to be. The tragedy could have resulted in lifetime paralysis, but I strongly believe that, because of divine intervention (perhaps angelic protection), my wife escaped from further injuries.

During a time when Venita and I were caring for a few elderly ones in our home, I was awakened in the middle of the night, by some sounds of pain and desperation! When I awakened from a 'deep sleep', as a result my hearing a 'pleading voice', I thought that a patient (resident) who lived in the room, across the hall from my bedroom, was 'crying out' for help. I soon realized, however, that the 'cry of desperation and pain' was coming from the lips of my wife! It was obvious, by now, that the voice was from downstairs.

I quickly found myself down the long flight of stairs, and there, prostrate on the hardwood kitchen floor, was Venita, and she was in anguish and pain. She told me quickly to get her emergency help! She had missed four or five steps, as a result of her being in the dark, and as a result of her thinking she was at the bottom of the staircase! Because she missed so many steps, she took a terrible fall, onto the hardwood floor! Her sharp pains, caused by her two cracked bones, were almost more than she could bear!

I called Venita's sister (who lived one block away), and I asked her to come as soon as possible. She, and a couple of her visiting friends, came quickly to our house, and they got Venita to the hospital emergency room (across the city). After the initial care was administered to Venita at the emergency room, Venita came back to our home, and she spent the next several months being treated by a well-trained and sympathetic physical therapist!

The good-humored and kind-hearted young therapist brought both sympathy and cheer to Venita, during the next several months of treatments. The treatments brought considerable

pain to Venita, and there were times when Venita wondered if she would ever be 'well' again!

Healing from two cracked bones takes much time, and the process is accompanied with much distress and pain. Amazingly, during these difficult months of recovery, Venita maintained her leadership of her job (caring for the elderly ones in our home). Of course, there were family members who aided Venita considerably during the long and slow months of recovery.

What basic lessons can one learn, as a result of contemplating Venita's hurtful fall? Spiritually speaking, we must all 'watch our steps' in life! If we don't, disaster can ensue! The Bible says, "When you think (confidently) that you stand (in the Christian Faith), take heed, lest ye fall!" "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

I wonder how many 'falls' could be recorded every year - broken hips, broken arms, broken backs, broken necks? I heard recently that 3 out of 5 older folks (65 years old or older) will, at some time, experience a serious fall! When I was a teenager, I carelessly and confidently, tried to show my prowess (athletic strength) when, with no training in 'high jumping', I did a 'frontal jump' over a rather highly set 'bar'. Surprisingly, I made it over the bar, but I came down at the edge of the 'sandpit', and my wrist hit the hard edge of the pit.

My wrist was hurt, and I knew immediately that my wrist was sprained. My friends who were so amazed that I made it over the bar, shouted to me, "Do it again, Christian! Do it again!" I succumbed to 'peer pressure', and I did it again. I actually made it over the bar, the second time (and I had never practiced). Instead of listening to my own inner 'voice' of reason, I jumped again! I used the improper technique (the 'frontal jump') instead of the proper technique (the 'scissor jump'). I landed in the same place in the sandpit, near the edge! My wrist again hit the hard edge of the pit! This time my 'fall' resulted in a broken wrist!

During the next 9 weeks (with a cast on my arm), I had plenty of time to learn that it is important not to be 'head-strong', not to be 'thoughtless' regarding imminent danger. Not to be overly-confident in one's endeavors, not to 'give in' to 'peer pressure', not to be dismissive of one's own inner 'voice' of sound judgment that warns one's own self against doing activities that one is not prepared to do (i.e., not trained to do).

One must realize that the above considerations could easily be applied to the 'spiritual life'. Just as it is too easy for one to 'fall' and to do one's self a lot of harm physically, so it is too easy for a believer to stumble and to 'fall' (spiritually-speaking) and to do one's self a lot of damage. How many Christians, like King David, have found themselves to be careless, during an idle moment, and have allowed their 'eyes to roam', and have allowed their 'heart to become inflamed with lust', and then have eventually found themselves in bed with that 'other woman'?

Anyone can 'fall' and get hurt, physically; anyone can 'fall' and get hurt, spiritually! Resisting temptation results in greater strength spiritually, 'Falling' into temptation brings great pain, spiritually!

Venita was not expecting a 'fall' (in the darkness of the night), but, nevertheless, she did fall and, consequently, she experienced severe pain. When a believer least expects to 'fall', he/she can 'fall'! The devil is like a 'roaring lion'! 'Lions' roam around, and lions seek to devour some unguarded prey (believers)! It is true that the Bible declares that God guards us (believers), to prevent us from 'falling'!

What a glorious promise this is from God! If we cooperate with God, God will cooperate with us - to prevent us from stumbling and from falling! (I once had a pastor who told me that if I 'fall' into sin, to be sure to 'fall forward toward the cross', confess my sins, then get up and continue to walk with God in humility and faith). Falling into sin is painful (just like falling down

some steps is painful), but the 'fallen believer' can repent and can turn anew in faith to the Savior.

Just as a person (Venita), must 'watch the steps', so a believer must take proper precautions to avoid a 'terrible fall'. There are several precautions, to avoid a 'fall': (1) Bible - 'thy Word has I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee'. (2) Prayer - 'watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.' (3) Fellowship with fellow Christians - 'do not neglect the assembling of yourselves together', but instead 'stir up each other' and 'guard each other against falling' (4) Mutual accountability - 'confess your faults (sins) one to another, that ye might be healed'.

We are to 'keep our eyes on all the steps'! Every 'step' is important, in order that we might live a successful Christian life, free from stumbling into sin. We must be careful to avoid a terrible 'fall' during our spiritual journey. We must be careful (through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit) to keep all of the Commandments of God (Exodus 20). We are exhorted in the Bible to obey all of God's commandments. We are to keep our 'eyes' open to discern all the truths of God's Word.

When we are 'off guard', we make ourselves vulnerable to Satan's attacks! Ephesians 6 gives us instructions (commands) to 'put on all the armor', to assure ourselves of spiritual victory! God will do much for us, to keep us from 'falling' into sin, but God also expects us (believers) to equip ourselves for 'spiritual battle'. As noted above, we (believers) are to submit ourselves to studying the Bible, to earnest praying, to fellowship with fellow believers, to humble acknowledgment of our faults (sins) to fellow believers.

God will help us to do these 'things' (means of grace), but God expects us (believers) to 'guard ourselves against falling into sin' by exercising our own effort. God supplies the 'armor' for spiritual battling (Ephesians 6), but God cannot put on the armor for us. We must do our part, and God will do His part! God initiates, in terms of supplying the resources (for victory over a

sinning lifestyle), but believers must respond to God's initiatives (of grace).

God and man must work together, to achieve victory in living! Jesus said that without Him, humans could do nothing! But, as resourceful (grace-filled) as God is, God waits for us (believers) to appropriate God's rich gifts (of strength, of wisdom, of love, etc.)! Paul wrote, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!"

When, through faith in Christ and by surrender to Christ's purposes, we enter into 'partnership' with Christ, the 'sky is the limit' as to what this divine-human partnership can accomplish! It is Christ within a believer that makes a weak man strong, an aimless man a man with purpose! It is not the ability of a man that wins the spiritual battle of life; rather, it is the man's surrender to Christ's strength that makes a man a true victor in life!

It is not the mere strength of a man that accomplishes the 'high attainments' for God, but it is, rather, the infused strength of God in a surrendered man that makes the 'impossible' in life wonderfully 'possible'! "I can do all things through Christ" - not through my own strength, but, instead, through Christ's mighty (imparted) strength! Christ in me is the hope of glory, and it is Christ's indwelling glory that is the means of my spiritual victory over sinning. Focusing my attention on Christ's glory (rather than allowing my mind to be idle) assures me the I will not fall into sin.

We need not to 'fall' into sin, but if we (believers) do sin, we have an Advocate - Jesus Christ the righteous One - and He will plead our 'case' before the 'Judge of the Universe' (God Almighty). If we confess our sins, Christ is faithful and just, and He will forgive us our sins (because of the sacrificial offering on the Cross)! Jesus will cleanse our hearts from all unrighteousness, and He will restore us to fellowship with the Heavenly Father.

A 'fall', physical or spiritual, is 'painful', and there is usually a time of therapy (treatment) for a considerable time, following the tragic 'fall'. If one 'falls' spiritually, there is a 'Spiritual Therapist' available to the hurting person! The 'Spiritual Therapist' is the blessed Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit is patient in His treatment of the person who is 'wallowing' in shame and pain and remorse!

The 'fallen one' must cooperate with the 'Spiritual Therapist'! As it was in the 'case' of Venita's painful therapy (that lasted several months), so it is the 'case' of every 'fallen' Christian's therapy. The spiritual treatments 'likely will be painful' and the 'regime' of treatments probably will be rather lengthy. But the Spirit ('therapist') always knows what each patient needs!

Some of the customized treatments will be quite painful! Just as it is the 'goal' of the physical therapist to bring ultimate healing to his/her patients, so (of course) it is the 'goal' of the 'Spiritual Therapist' (Holy Spirit) to bring ultimate (restored) health and wholeness to the 'fallen' believer!

Obviously, it is 'better' if a believer had not fallen (had not lost his 'bearings' and had not missed his 'steps'), but when a tragedy happens, the 'Lord of mercy' does not simply look at the hurt believer and then disregard the fallen one with an attitude of indifference!

The Holy Spirit ('Spiritual Therapist') is intent in His efforts to restore the 'fallen' believer! The Comforter (Holy Spirit) is a Helper and He is a Healer - One who is called alongside of the person who needs aid and companionship. Of course, there is the 'painful side' in the 'healing process', but there is also the 'comforting side' of the 'healing process' (and Venita experienced both pain and comfort while she underwent the many treatments by her physical therapist).

One who 'falls' can expect to receive the 'chastening rod' from God (leading to greater repentance and to greater humili-

ty and dependence upon God). But the one who falls can also expect to receive the 'comforting hugs' and the words of encouragement from the 'Spiritual Therapist' (leading to greater love for God and greater gratitude for the ways of righteousness).

God always expresses both His justice and His mercy, in the healing process of a 'fallen' believer! The 'Spiritual Therapist' knows how and when to apply both justice and mercy (both correction and encouragement) to each 'fallen believer'! For instance, God knew exactly how best to 'deal' with King David, after this great King 'fell' terribly into sin. Of course, God hated the fact that His beloved servant would be so 'stupid' as to 'fix his eyes' on the body of a beautiful woman, and then to end up having sex with her!

As grieved as God was with King David's folly, God was merciful and He was compassionate towards David! The 'spiritual therapy' that God administered to King David, was 'painful', and the therapy lasted a long time! David's sin brought him great grief, but God's therapy was thorough and it was restorative (see Psalms 32, Psalms 51)! God's grace is sufficient for every 'fall'!

THE MOST SHOCKING NIGHT OF OUR MARRIAGE!

This following 'episode' happened several years after the above 'episode' took place. The following 'episode' happened in the evening of July 4, 2011 (Independence Day). I think I can say that, second only to the day in August 1992, when I saw a man shoot to death, his wife, on the parking lot of our church, this day (July 4, 2011) was the most frightening day of my life! I thought, momentarily, that my wife was dying, right at my feet!

It was a 99 degree day on that July 4th day! My wife spent several hours on that afternoon, with my daughter. My daughter and Venita did a lot of 'clean-up work' in my daughter's backyard. My daughter and my wife worked very hard, and they

drank very little water during those afternoon hours. Even though they both were very tired, they enjoyed being out-of-doors, and they felt satisfaction that they had accomplished their 'goal' of making the back yard look so beautiful!

Venita came back to our home in the late afternoon, and she told me that she was exhausted - so very tired from working so intensely, underneath a very hot sun! The temperature was extreme, but mother and daughter were 'caught up with the excitement of their work'.

After Venita returned to our home, she told me, while we were casually visiting in our kitchen, that she was exhausted as a result of her hard work and the expenditure of her energy, under a bright sun and with very high temperatures. She was standing at our center kitchen counter, and she was carrying on a conversation with me, while she was dabbling with some paint which she was using to do a 'finger painting' children's project. Venita and I have, throughout our long life together, talked about every subject 'under the sun'!

We find it so easy to visit together about a variety of subjects, and we have a hard time refraining ourselves from talking while the other partner talks. On this particular evening (in light of the divorce of both our daughters), we were involved in the discussion regarding the 'elements of a good marriage relationship'. Even though Venita admitted that she was 'extremely tired' from her afternoon work in the out-of-doors, Venita seemed to be 'relaxed' while she 'casually chatted' with me. She and I were engrossed in a very relevant conversation, relating to the complex subject of the dynamics of a good and lasting marriage!

What happened next 'frightened me out of my wits'! As if she had turned into a 'long stiff board', Venita suddenly fell backwards, and her head hit the hardwood kitchen floor with a 'sickening thud'. The back of her head (skull) hit the floor so hard that her head 'bounced' after her head hid the floor! It

was a most 'frightening' and a most 'pathetic' sight for me to behold!

I believe that God, mercifully, allowed her head to miss the edge of the table (on one side), and to miss the window ledge (on the other side). If her head would have hit either of these objects, it is likely that her neck would have been broken (and she could have been paralyzed the remainder of her life!). She fell right between these two objects!

The moment, of course, that she 'passed out' (i.e., became unconscious as a result of the 'fall'), I have to admit that I became 'panic-stricken'. I thought, at first, that she had had a heart attack, and that, perhaps, she was in the process of dying. I bent over her, and, even though I knew that she was unconscious, I tried to waken her. I called her name, over and over.

Her breathing was 'heavy' and very 'unnatural', and I thought that I might soon witness her last breath! I thought that soon I would be a widower, and I wondered how I would get along without my wife for the remainder of my life!

These above thoughts came quickly to my mind, and, amidst these terrifying thoughts, I knew that I must call the emergency number (911). I told the operator (who, as usual, was calm and deliberate in her communication) - I told her that I thought my wife was dying, so please get someone to my home very quickly.

Unfortunately or fortunately, I don't know which - my oldest daughter came through our front door, while I was in the middle of this confusion. Needless to say, my daughter (who is very close to her mother) was 'panic stricken'! Seeing her mother, prostrate and unconscious on the kitchen floor, was almost more than she could bear!

I could hardly bear the thought that I might soon be a 'widower' for the rest of my life! Married to Venita for 45 years

(at the time of this accident), I had enjoyed my partnership with her so very much. Of course, our marriage was not 'perfect'.

We both had our shortcomings and our failures (our challenges and differences) in our marriage, but I knew in my heart that I loved her deeply, that I respected her many and various skills, that I liked her personality, that most of all I deeply admired and appreciated her strong faith in God and her consistent love for God and for her fellow men.

She had worked so hard all of her life, and she had always been a supportive wife and a loving parent! Admittedly, (perhaps selfishly) I had been Too dependent upon her administrative and business skills! How could I get along without her presence in my life!

As a multi-talented woman, she had contributed so much to the smooth operation of our marriage, on a day-to-day basis. I depended upon her for the countless 'solutions' to multiple 'problems' in our married life! I also, of course, tried to contribute various 'things' to our marriage relationship, but there is no doubt that Venita is the 'better half of our marriage'.

I had benefitted countless times (sometimes daily) from her 'storehouse of wisdom'! As I shared previously at various times, I believe that Venita has several 'talents', but at least two distinctive 'spiritual gifts', namely, the gift of administration and the gift of wisdom. Her exercise of those two gifts has brought immense 'benefits' to our marriage relationship, in so many ways and at so many different contexts! Among her countless contributions to our marriage and our home, is her contribution of cooking and her contribution to practical business affairs!

Obviously, when I considered the possibility that I might soon be a 'widower', I did not mentally make a 'list' of all the above-mentioned reasons why Venita would be 'missed' by me, if she were to die from that terrible fall. In my subconscious

mind, those thoughts were in my 'confused brain' on this 'heart-stopping' evening!

The six firefighters (who arrived within a few minutes) were trained, of course, to remain 'cool and collected' during emergencies. When they relocated Venita's body to a more specious area (a few feet from where she fell), they immediately took her 'vitals', and, thankfully, the person in charge (a competent and confident-speaking woman) assured me that Venita's heart was 'fine'! Definitely no heart-attack! I was very relieved when I heard her words of assurance! Her words were like 'music in my ears'!

The ambulance arrived, and soon Venita was in the emergency room at the hospital. Soon after she was taken to the small room at the hospital, as I carefully observed her, Venita regained consciousness. Obviously, she was confused, and she wondered what had happened to her, and she wondered where she was.

After the appropriate tests were taken (which took about one hour), a young (lady) doctor told Venita that one of two things caused the 'blood on her brain'. It was possibly caused as a result of the hard blow to her skull, when she fainted.

The other possibility (and more serious than the first possibility) is that an aneurism may have happened in her brain, and that this, in turn, caused her to fall. Was the blood the result of falling, or did the blood (from an aneurism) cause her to fall?

This doctor could not diagnose what caused the blood on the brain! She told Venita (and her family) that, because the Fort Collins hospital did not have the equipment and expertise to deal with an aneurism, Venita would have to be flown to a 'sister hospital' in Denver. A large hospital in Denver (that works in cooperation with the Ft. Collins hospital) was equipped to treat this condition.

Venita, by helicopter, was flown to Denver, late that night, to a well-known (large) hospital, where a highly trained staff of

doctors, gave immediate attention to Venita when she was placed in a beautiful room that night. Several family members and friends were at her side, late that night. Venita spent three days in that Denver hospital. She underwent several tests. The conclusion to the whole matter was simple and gratifying: Venita's tests all came back as 'clean'!

Because of severe dehydration, Venita's body had to faint! When Venita reflected on that long afternoon, she realized that, while she was working hard, she did not take time to drink a lot of water! Perhaps, no water, but she did drink 'iced tea' during those hours when the heat was intense. Tea tends to take fluids away from the body, whereas water replenishes the body fluids. Venita (after this episode) realized that there is no substitute for water, as a fluid that keeps the 'body in tone' while working hard!

DEATH AT AN AMUSEMENT PARK!

My wife and I had retired for the night. We were sound asleep when I roused myself to answer the phone. On the other end of the line was the broken (but distinct) voice of my older brother. With obvious sadness in his voice, he said, "Ronnie, God has taken home tonight, one of His children. Sharla died tonight, while riding on a roller coaster at the amusement park in Denver!" Needless to say, I was shaken, and I did not know how to answer my brother. How could this be?

Sharla, only 15 years old! A remarkable child! A committed Christian girl! So sweet, so talented, so mature, and loved by so many! So athletic (she could walk across the room, standing on her hands). So fun-loving and so outgoing and so aggressive in action (she just got her driver's permit). A perfectionist (kept a perfectly ordered room). Loved nature (she had taken nature trips with her dad, and she loved to write poetry about nature). She loved her family (including her extended family), loved her church, and she respected the commandments of God. Sharla, the remarkable young lady who was in love with life - how could she be dead!

Often the saints of the ages talked about the 'dark night of the soul'! Of course, one of the darkest nights in my brother's life was on August 14, 1981. Sharla died suddenly while she was riding on a roller coaster at an amusement park in Denver, Colorado! When Sharla was about 3 years old, she fell out of the back end of a pick-up truck and, because of the hard hit on her head, she became occasionally subject to seizures (for which, of course, she took medication).

Whether she forgot to take her medication on that dreadful night in August, or whether her medication simply was 'not working', I do not know. But, regardless of the reason for the tragic accident, Sharla went Home to Heaven very quickly, without notice.

Just thirteen days following her death, Sharla's father had a most unusual 'visitation' from his daughter (who had been a heavenly citizen by that time, for almost two weeks)! Jerry shared that phenomenal experience (in writing) with some of his family members, including me.

Even though I have not included all the specific details regarding the context of the evening when this happened, I have included the 'essence' of the amazing 'heavenly visit' that Sharla made to her beloved father. May God minister to all who, by chance, read the account of this 'encounter' that my brother had with his beloved daughter.

The following is the written account of that amazing 'heavenly encounter', which my brother (Jerry) experienced, thirteen days after Sharla's 'entrance into heaven'.

That which follows is so unusual; I realize it may be a mistake to reduce it to writing. I will make no attempt to interpret or explain; I simply want to record this so that I will never lose from my memory that which happened. It was so beautiful, yet so 'shaking'!

My mind was thinking through many things related to all the events that had taken place after Sharla died. I didn't go to sleep - but rather was lost in a million thoughts and dreams. Then, at about 11:00 p.m., I remembered that I had not left the lamp on down in the living room. I was afraid that Marsha might get up to go to the bathroom and not see the steps. I then got up, went downstairs, turned on the light, came back upstairs, looked out the windows at the beautiful view to the northwest, and then went back to bed. I still wasn't sleepy, so again I just lay there.

At 11:30 p.m., with no prior warning at all, Marsha got out of bed and with no hesitation what-so ever went right out the bedroom door and turned right - to the other bedroom. I thought that perhaps she was mostly still asleep and was trying to get to the bathroom to the left. I waited about 30 seconds, and then decided that I should check on her.

I went into the other bedroom, and found Marsha curled up on top of my foam mattress and sleeping bag - where she and Sharla had slept several times before. I assumed Marsha had gotten tired of the waterbed, and wanted to sleep on the foam mattress. I helped her open the bag and get all curled up inside it. Almost immediately, Marsha went to sleep; she looked so comfortable. I then went back to bed, and after a while, I too fell asleep.

I don't know at what time the following happened, but I have never in my life had an experience like this one. (It will be humanly impossible to accurately relate this, but I want to try.) I have never experienced such intensity. First, I heard Sharla's voice. Her voice was clear, but seemed to be coming from far away. She was saying in her beautiful, distinct voice, 'Hello, daddy. Hello, daddy. It's me - Sharla.'

Then, I saw Sharla. Sharla was absolutely beautiful and striking. She was healthy, and so totally alive. And most striking of all was something I can only describe as an 'essence' - a halo of luminous light - a 'glow' - surrounding her entire body.

She seemed to be 'floating'- so gracefully, without any rush; just totally there, yet so distinctly different and beautiful.

Sharla said, 'Hi, dad. I can only stay for a while; then I have to leave again. I have come back to say how very much I love you. I want to lie between you and Marsha.' Sharla then kissed, hugged, caressed, and expressed her love to Marsha and to me. She said, 'Daddy, don't be sad; I love you so much, daddy, I have gone to a better place - to Heaven. I love you, daddy. I must go now. I love you, daddy'. And then Sharla, in all her perfect beauty 'floated' off to Heaven.

At that point I awoke screaming and screaming, 'Sharla! Oh, Sharla! I love you, Sharla! Oh, Sharla! I love you. Sharla, I want to go with you Sharla! Sharla! 'And then she was gone! I was screaming out loud over and over again - for Sharla. I was totally shaken! Even now, Sunday afternoon at my school (4:15 p.m. on August 30th) I am reliving it over and over again.

I don't understand what happened; it seemed so totally real. I do know that our loving God can even control dreams; but I also know that He can 'lift us beyond' the ordinary. I'm sure this account will seem strange (even weird), especially to non-believers.

Whatever it was, I am totally grateful to God. I shall never forget how alive, how totally healthy and beautiful Sharla was. How gracefully happy she was with eternity - yet how thoughtful and kind and beautiful she was to express her love and affection to Marsha and to me.

We serve a perfect and loving God! How I love you, Jesus. 'THANK YOU' for the assurance that I will see Sharla in all her glory again someday in eternity. Thank you, Sharla. I love you - and I am homesick for Heaven.

Books in This Series.

WHO CARES FOR THE UNBORN BABY!

*Part I - "Biblical Foundation For The Sanctity Of
Human Life!"*

Part II - "Exposing Our Nation's Silent Holocaust!"

LET MY PRAISES BE HEARD!

LET MY TEARS FLOW!

LET MY LAUGHTER RESOUND!

DOES GOD LOVE ALL OR ONLY SOME?

BATTLE AGAINST HUMANISM!