

In The Time Of Trouble

He Shall Hide Me...

Freedom From Fear
In The Secret Hiding Place
of God

Marv Adamo

(Dedication)

To those who struggle with fear

(Cover Page)

"For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock." (Ps 27:5)

(Bible references are based on the King James Version. Archaic words have been modernized and in some cases the syntax has been rearranged to suit our modern vernacular. If you are using another translation, it may not read the same. Therefore, I suggest you follow along with the KJV, comparing it to your preferred translation. Please also note, italics are mine and are employed for emphasis.)

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Preface

I will admit from the beginning of this study that I have addressed the issue of fear as much for my own sake as for the sake of others. I was schooled in the art of fear from a very early age.

I was born into a middle-class Italian family. My father was an immigrant, coming to America from Sicily with his parents in 1920 at the age of five. He was a factory worker - a hard-working, loving, faithful husband and father. I couldn't say that he was fearless, but he had a saying about life and its finality, "When it is your time to go, you go." He lived by that philosophy and didn't seem to worry about much, if anything at all. He went to the Lord while soaking in a hot tub. I doubt there is an easier way to depart this life.

My dear, loving mother, on the other hand, was very fearful and worried about everything. In fact, she was plagued with fear. Of her three sons, I was most like her, in temperament and in philosophy. To both my mother and I, the glass was always half empty. Perhaps a more accurate description of her world view and mine would be to say that the glass was *nearly* empty, if you know what I mean.

To be honest, I had an idyllic childhood, growing up in the pre-smog days of the San Fernando Valley north of Los Angeles. But then came adolescence and with it the torments of living in a sinful world in a sinful body.

I don't remember when I first experienced real fear, but at some point in my early years I became fearful... of just about everything. Oh, I hid it well. As a successful athlete accustomed to the limelight, I could not let on to my inner fears. That would be humiliating. So I faked it like everyone else. And don't let anyone tell you they don't struggle with fear. *Everyone* struggles with fear. It's just expressed in different ways. Some may mask it better than others and some may be less fearful than others, but all of us, we shall see, are fearful by nature.

Beyond the innate propensity to fear, I assume the guilt of my sinfulness, my inadequacies, and my mother's fearful influences all contributed to my personal struggle with fear and have been a great hindrance in my life. If you can identify with this, what will follow, I trust, will be an encouragement to you.

As we shall see, inborn fear is the direct result of the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden. As we embark on this journey to overcome fear it is good to remember that God accepted the responsibility for that fall before Adam and Eve sinned, indeed, before they were created. The sacrifice of the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world was determined *before* the world began.¹

God fulfills that responsibility by his own sovereign decree and wisdom. We are wise when we accept his ways in hope of the future life he has promised us.

Let's approach the issue of fear with confidence in our Savior, the Lord Jesus, and with confidence in God's infallible provisions.

Yes, we can experience freedom from fear now in this present life despite what is going on around us. Let's let God teach us how.

M.A.

Chapter 1 - It's A Fearful World

That is a redundancy, to say the least. Why would I waste paper and ink to state the obvious? Because the Bible has a great deal to say about the condition of the world and where it is heading. So it must be worthy of our consideration. But before we address the world and its problems let's begin on the brighter side of things, things we know to be true based on the word of God. Let's approach the beginning from the end, otherwise we may become overwhelmed with the dismal state of things as they appear to us now.

God is eternal.² Those three words explain the existence of life. God always was, always is, and always will be. We accept that by faith. I'll have more to say about this later, but for now suffice it to say that his eternality allows him to know the end from the beginning. It is based on his foreknowledge.³ Prophecy is the revelation of that knowledge. Perhaps one of the greatest evidences of the credibility of the Bible is the infallibility of Bible prophecy - its ability to foretell the future before it happens.

That God is pleased to reveal the future to us is a tremendous blessing because I dare say life would be unbearable if we didn't have the hope of the gospel before us. It is that hope that motivates us to endure life's challenges. So let's go to the end of the story and remind ourselves of the incredible future we have as God's children.

First of all, we will have been completely conformed to the image of Christ, finding ourselves in a state of human perfection.⁴ We will experience eternal life - the very life of God - in its fullest capacity. We have it now in an incomplete state as far as our souls and bodies are concerned.

Among other things, eternal life entails everlasting joy and peace and rest from our labors.⁵ It includes the fulfillment of every pleasant promise God has made to us.⁶ It includes the partaking of God's divine nature⁷ - his

righteousness, holiness, purity, wisdom, knowledge, understanding... the list is long.⁸

The life to come for those of us who have put our faith in Christ includes being reunited with our loved ones who have gone to the Lord before us. It entails spending eternity with them as well as with the Lord Jesus and all the believers throughout history.⁹ It entails living in a recreated, perfect world where there is no evil and no sin.¹⁰ And get this, it involves being young again and forevermore.¹¹ According to the scriptures, there is even more than we can imagine to the life to come:

"But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man. the things which God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Cor 2:9)

The benefits of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ are as endless as the endless life of God himself. These all are Bible truths that we believe and embrace by faith.

As we consider the present day reality of the world around us, ever keep the end result in mind. That is how the Lord Jesus endured what he went through to save us from our sins.¹² We *will* arrive at God's expected end for us.¹³ He will see to it.¹⁴ That is our sure hope.

* * * *

So then, with the future glory in mind, what about this present world? The Apostle John in his first epistle said it succinctly:

"The whole world lies in wickedness." (1Jn 5:19)

It can't be said more strongly than that. However, the Apostle Paul expanded on the meaning:

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents,

unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away." (2 Tim 3:1-5)

Is not this a description of the world we live in today? But don't fret, our sovereign God has it all under control whether it looks like it or not. And whether we believe it or not, everything is going according to God's eternal plan. We are compelled to believe that based on the teachings of the word of God.

Both the Apostle Peter and the writer of the book of Hebrews referred to the time they lived in as *the last days*.¹⁵ I assume that the last days began with the resurrection of Christ since it initiated the New Covenant under which we now live. If that is the case, we have been in the last days for two thousand years, awaiting the Lord's return.

"The whole world lies in wickedness." And because of that, fear has been a common thread throughout the world's history. Since Cain killed his brother Abel, there has been violence in the earth. It reached an all-time high during the days of Noah when, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."¹⁶ You will not find a stronger indictment against humanity in the entire Bible - "*every imagination... only evil continually.*"

The history of mankind has been one of almost continual war, tyranny, and violence. The greater part of the earth's population has lived in fear throughout the centuries up to this present day. We in the America of the past century have been an anomaly, living in relative peace and safety due to the favor of God, the might of our military and our vast natural resources that keep us strong. Truly, we have God to thank for that, though sadly many Americans fail to acknowledge God's favor upon this country. This failure is a major factor in our present-day fear crisis.

Sadly also, the church is not exempt. It has been my observation that many of God's people here in America, "land

of the free and home of the brave," struggle with fear. The reasons for that will be a recurring theme in this study, as will the solution to the problem of fear. And, yes, there is a solution.

We live in a world where no one is exempt from fear. The writer of the book of Hebrews put it this way, speaking of Christ entering into humanity:

"Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same [flesh and blood]; that through [his] death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who *through fear of death* were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Heb 2:14-15)

During the days of the great Roman empire, a period in history that Hollywood likes to glamorize, six out of every ten people were slaves. You can imagine how it went for those under bondage.

How would you like to have lived in serfdom during the period of history called the *Dark Ages*, where tyranny and oppression ruled the day, or find yourself as one of the four million black slaves living in bondage and hard labor in our very own country? God forgive us!

Fear of death, fear of harm, fear of tyranny in any form has been the sad plight of humanity for six thousand years, a precious few being the exception. Along with deception, fear is one of the primary weapons of our adversary, the devil. It was the first response of Adam and Eve after they disobeyed God. After partaking of the forbidden tree, they were afraid of God and hid themselves.¹⁷ Prior to that dreadful mistake, the couple had experienced complete freedom from fear in a safe and secure love relationship with their Creator. Now that beautiful relationship was compromised and they found themselves for the first time in fear - fear of God and the consequences of their disobedience.

As a result, every soul of Adam's race since then has experienced fear. Even our precious Lord experienced fear so that he might identify with us and empathize and comfort us

in our struggles with fear.¹⁸ And yet the Lord has told us to not be afraid. By my count, he said that nine times in the Gospels alone. In fact, the expression, *fear not*, in its various forms is said to be found three hundred and sixty-five times throughout the Bible - that's once for every day of the year. I don't think that is a coincidence. I get the impression that God doesn't want us to be afraid.

Would you agree, if the Lord said, "Do not fear," it must be possible to not be afraid? He wouldn't tell us to do something that wasn't possible for us to do. We have to agree on this point if we are ever to learn to overcome fear. If we don't believe we can overcome it, it is quite certain we won't. That's just how the human mind works. And it's how faith works, which, of course, is one of the keys to overcoming fear.

But, thank God, freedom from fear is something he has promised us.¹⁹ We can be taught how to overcome it. In fact, we *must* be taught it, because it doesn't come to us naturally. On the contrary, fear is ingrained in the DNA of the natural man, ingrained in our natural instinct to survive.

Despite that fact, we can be taught not to fear even when we are *experiencing fear*. Does that sound like a contradiction, a paradox perhaps? As always, the Lord is our example. While he experienced fear, he was not afraid:

(Christ is speaking of himself through the mouth of the psalmist, as is the case with most of the psalms)

"For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side..."

(Ps 31:13)

"When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God I will praise his word, in God I will put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me..." (Ps 56:3-4)

"I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about." (Ps 3:6)

"Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear..." (Ps 27:3)

"The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (Ps 118:6, Heb 13:6)

Some of these verses present apparent contradictions, but in reality are paradoxical truths. It is possible to experience fear and yet not be afraid. We need to learn how it is done.

The Lord Jesus, while he experienced fear, did not let fear control him or deter him from doing the will of God. And that is the goal of this study: to learn to not be afraid even when we *experience* fear, to be able to stand in the evil day⁷ (that's today, folks), and to not let fear control us or deter us from honoring God and doing his will.

The Lord had learned the secret of dwelling in the secret hiding place of his heavenly Father. I am convinced that is how he overcame fear. We can do the same, if we are willing to receive instruction and *trust* him for the results. I emphasize trust, because it is virtually impossible to live free of fear, that is, its debilitating effects, without trust in the Lord.

The prophet Isaiah understood this:

"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, *because* he trusts in you." (Isa 26:3)

The key to this promise is *trust*. Perfect peace is the result of trusting God and can't be experienced any other way. I feel the need to repeat that. Peace (which includes freedom from fear) cannot be experienced apart from trust in God. Perfect peace eliminates fear.

Now, there is a positive kind of fear. It's called the fear of the LORD, which is clean and endures forever.²⁰ But we are concerned right now with the negative kind of fear, the kind that haunts us and can render us ineffective in God's service. That kind of fear can come to us in many different forms: fear of death, fear of harm, fear of privation, self-exposure,

loneliness, obscurity, rejection, failure, etc. Then there are lesser fears: fear of heights, water, crowds... We could very likely list pages of human fears and phobias.

A.W. Tozer, a twentieth century pastor and writer, expressed both the positive and negative meaning of fear in one sentence: "To fear [God] and not be afraid [of him] - that is the paradox of the faith."²¹

Indeed that statement is a paradox, as is the idea that we can experience the fear of danger generated by the world around us and yet not be afraid of it.

King Solomon, in the wonderful book of Proverbs, has said as much:

"Do not be afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it comes. For the LORD shall be your confidence, and shall keep your foot from being taken." (Prov 3:25-26)

"Do not be afraid of sudden fear." That's a paradox in itself, and what a wonderful promise follows it: "For the Lord shall be your confidence, and shall keep your foot from being taken." Notice he didn't say that fearful times would not come, but if and when they come, he will bring us through them. This is a key point to understand in dealing with the issue of fear.

If you struggle with thinking that you are not going to be able to keep the faith to the end of your life, consider this. It has been estimated that one hundred and eight billion people have lived on the earth since the beginning of time. That's right, *108,000,000,000*. We know there are approximately eight billion people alive on the earth today. That means that a hundred billion people have made their pilgrimage through this difficult world and passed on, some to everlasting life and some to eternal death (I shudder at that last thought). But if only ten percent of those people were believers, then *ten billion* people are with the Lord now, experiencing everlasting joy and peace, and forever free of fear. If they could speak to us they would tell us that God was faithful to bring them through even the worst of circumstances.

We have the assurance that nothing will separate us from God's love²² (and that includes fearfulness), and that no one can pluck us out of his hand.²³ So be at peace, knowing that you are secure in God's love for you even if you don't overcome your fears. The Lord will never cast you out.²⁴

Nevertheless, we must understand that Solomon's quote from Proverbs 3:25-26 is not claiming that we will never experience difficult times in our life here on this earth. That would be a very naive notion and would deny the history of the church from the beginning of civilization until now. Many have suffered great losses right up to the present day. We have to accept that and come to grips with it if we are going to be effective in this temporal life.

While it may be true that some may pass through this life relatively trouble-free, that is not the norm. Like it or not, some of us, if not most of us, will experience difficulty in this life. That was the conclusion of the Apostle Paul:

"For unto you [believers] it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake."
(Phil 1:29)

That may be a difficult statement to accept, but it is the inspired word of God. We are obligated to accept it based on God's great love and impeccable character, believing that he has a legitimate purpose for allowing suffering into our lives. I will have a more in depth explanation for suffering in a later chapter.

Keep in mind that God knows what each of us can handle and has promised to not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear.²⁵ But even that promise made to the Corinthian believers does not suggest that we will never experience *some* hardship at times. A closer look at that passage will reveal that if trouble does come our way, God will give us grace to *endure* it. He will "Make a way of escape, that we may be able to *bear* it." And we can surely count on that! I am inclined to believe that the way of escape is in fact the secret hiding place of God. Finding that hiding place is the goal of this study.

The point is that few get through this life completely unscathed. Trials touch all our lives at sometime or another and the very thought of that possibility often instills fear in our hearts. Nevertheless, we are going to have to come to grips with such Biblical statements as the Apostle Paul's and Solomon's and submit to God's training to prepare us for difficulty if it does come. And therein is one of the keys to victory over fear - *preparedness*. We will discuss that in the next chapter.

Chapter 1 Key Points:

1. The Lord has told us not to fear (365 times).
2. Therefore it must be possible to overcome fear.
3. We can be taught how to overcome fear.
4. Fearfulness will never separate us from God's love.
5. Preparedness is a key to overcoming fear.

Chapter 2 - Be Prepared

Step number one in the battle against fear is, be prepared! Don't wait for trials to come to prepare for them. Accept the fact that they very likely will come and prepare *ahead of time*. An athlete trains vigorously in preparation for an athletic event. If he is a distance runner, he knows the race will be strenuous, most likely even painful. He accepts that fact and trains for it. The late Steve Prefontaine, the University of Oregon's distinguished track star is quoted as saying, "Somebody may beat me, but they are going to have to bleed to do it." He didn't make that boasts without first preparing himself to make good on it. He understood what it would take to overcome adversity, and often that involved a lot of pain.

Of course, adversity comes in many different ways. My wife and I live in Western Oregon. This area of the country is known for its rain, relatively mild climate, and freedom from most natural disasters. However, being a highly wooded state, we are subject to forest fires. They happen almost every summer when the weather is hot and dry. They are usually started by lightning strikes, but it is not uncommon for a wildfire to be started by a careless camper or even an arsonist. Thousands of acres of our beautiful forestlands can be destroyed in a matter of days. If wind conditions are unfavorable, these blazes can spread very rapidly. If they threaten people or structures, warnings are issued to those affected in the event that evacuation is necessary. There are three stages of warning, three emergency evacuation zones:

Level 1 - Be Ready: You should be aware of the danger that exists in your area. Monitor emergency services websites and local media for information.

Level 2 - Be Set: You must be prepared to leave at a moments notice.

Level 3 - Go. Leave immediately. Don't wait to pack anything.

A few years ago when a wildfire looked like it might pose a threat to our neighborhood, I prepared an evacuation plan including basic food stuffs, important papers and personal items, and a rendezvous point should my wife and I get separated. We have three vehicles, two dogs, and a horse which is stabled elsewhere. Obviously, we would have to leave one of our vehicles behind (of course not my pickup truck - *smile*). We are still debating whether we would leave her car or mine behind. I think I know how that discussion will end. Oh well, at least I would still have my 4x4.

Fortunately, we did not have to evacuate during that threat. But I continue to add to our emergency preparedness as things come to mind. The point is, we feel prepared should an evacuation be necessary.

Are you following the wildfire analogy? In our fight against fear, Level 1 is the time to prepare, to accept the fact that we live in perilous times and that fearful events may come.²⁶ Given the present world situation, we are in Level 1 right now. It is all important that we accept this. We won't be able to stand in the evil day if we don't.

Level 2 is the time to settle it in our hearts that we are going to trust the Lord whatever tomorrow brings. We can do that because he is trustworthy. The Apostle Paul, speaking of his evangelistic team and the perils they faced, had this to say about trust:

"But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead."
(2 Cor 1:9)

Whatever else Paul meant by that, I am inclined to believe that he and his team had settled it in their hearts that they would be willing to die in the service of the King. But it could also be interpreted to mean that they were willing to die to their self-life, the selfish, self-centered life of the old man. They could embrace this attitude because they were convinced of the promised resurrection and the promise of joy and peace in this present life as well.

Some of us may not have arrived at Level 2 yet. We may not be convinced in our hearts that God will take care of us whatever the future holds and that he will bring us through. That's okay. It's a process. That is where training and preparation comes in.

Tacitus, a Roman historian, is quoted as saying, "He is not afraid to do what he has been trained to do well." The Roman army was so well trained and so disciplined that they were nearly invincible. So severe were their training exercises that it was not unusual for casualties to result.

Of course, there was an extra motivation for a Roman legionnaire to fight well. If he didn't, he stood the risk of being executed by his own countrymen. It was not unusual for a Roman commander to order a decimation of the ranks (the death of one man in ten) of those who proved cowardly or didn't fight well.

Now don't panic. Our God does not execute us for being fearful or cowardly, because his love and acceptance are *never* conditioned upon our performance. Having been in fear himself, the Lord knows how easily we can become dismayed. His antidote for fear is more preparation in the form of training, that is, more proving to us that he is trustworthy and can be trusted in whatever difficulty we may find ourselves.

The great statesman of the last century, Sir Winston Churchill, who had fought for England in the Boar War, once said that he believed that everything he experienced leading up to World War II was in preparation for him leading England through that terrible time of conflict. We need to be prepared and the good news is that God *is* preparing us for whatever lies ahead because he knows the more prepared we are, the less likely we will become casualties.

The Apostle Paul has warned that the Lord Jesus will not return before a great falling away occurs.²⁷ That term, *falling away*, comes from the Greek word, *apostasia*, from which we get our word, *apostasy*. He is talking about believers; unbelievers have nothing to fall away from. It may be uncomfortable to consider these things, but we cannot afford to be ignorant of what God has revealed about the future. And, folks, that future may well be upon us.

But before you become anxious over that thought, know that he is not talking about believers losing their salvation. Once regeneration has occurred, a reversal is not possible. You cannot be spiritually unborn, no more than you could be unborn from the natural birth that brought you into the world. Remember, salvation - eternal life - is a gift. It can't be won or lost based on our performance. It can only be received or rejected as a gift. If you have put your faith in Christ Jesus, you *have received* the gift of eternal life.²⁸ You are eternally secure in him, because your salvation is based on *his* faithfulness and obedience, not yours. I hope you understand that and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. If there ever was a question concerning the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus, we would indeed have something to worry about. But I trust you know there isn't.

The Apostle John makes it clear in his first letter:

"These things I have written to you that believe on the name of the Son of God; *that you may know* that you have eternal life, and that you may [continue to] believe on the name of the Son of God." (1Jn 5:13)

If you could lose eternal life once received, it would not have been eternal, would it? According to the KJV, eternal life is *everlasting* life. Both of those words are translated out of the same Greek word - *aionios*. This is not rocket science. Salvation, once secured, is not subject to rescission. The *gifts* and calling of God are irrevocable.²⁹ We are, however, subject to correction for wrongdoing and sometimes that can be severe, as some of us no doubt have experienced for ourselves.³⁰

But with proper training and preparation, we will be able to keep the faith in any situation, no matter how difficult it may be. The Boy Scout motto, *Be Prepared*, is ever so valid for the church in the days in which we live.

The final level of our illustration, Level 3, is when our faith is put to the test. It is when, in confidence and full assurance of faith, we believe that God will bring us through our trials one way or the other, whether by life or by death.³¹

It may be hard to consider these things, even fearful, but we cannot afford to be unprepared for trying times. I have a friend who has four young children. He will tell you that he is preparing them for martyrdom, should they be called upon to give their lives for Christ. We may all hope that it will never be necessary to do so, but we must be prepared should God ask that of us.

We see another example of preparedness in the building of the Temple of God in King Solomon's day. The great stones that went into the building of it were prepared *before* they were made part of the Temple. They had to be chiseled and shaped at the quarry, then transported to the Temple site prior to being placed into the Temple, which was no small task, to say the least.

This of course is a type, a picture of us believers, as living stones,³² being prepared prior to us being placed into God's heavenly temple, the church. And I might add that our being prepared prior to our conversion was no small task either, but one that God was willing to undertake, so great was his desire to make us his own and a part of his church.

Did you ever consider that the things you experienced prior to becoming a believer in Jesus Christ were in preparation for your purpose and calling once you were regenerated? God is very efficient and very purposeful. He doesn't do anything without a purpose. God gave us our temperament at birth with a particular purpose for our life and was molding and shaping us throughout the years prior to our conversion. Perhaps you haven't yet fully realized that purpose. But God has a purpose for each of our lives and has been preparing us for that purpose from the time we were born. Our parents, our siblings, our upbringing, our gender, our nationality, everything that pertains to us and has ever happened to us, all have played a role in making us into the person God intends for us to be in Christ.

Yes, he has had a purpose even in the sad and painful things that have happened to us. God is continually causing everything we experience to produce a good result in our lives, as only he can do.³³

As a former home builder, I can tell you that a lot goes into the preparation prior to beginning to build a house: land acquisition, design, plans, permits, etc. It was no different with God; he acquired - or rather created - the land, which he called earth, a perfect environment, a perfect setting on which to place his building, the church (that's you and me, folks). He had a perfect design in mind for the building and had plans for every one of us as "living stones." And permits... well, he didn't need permits, since he answers to no one, but I trust you get my point.

Concerning his plans for us, the Lord Jesus, speaking of himself in the book of Isaiah, had this to say:

"Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, you people, from far. The LORD has called me from the womb, from the belly of my mother has he made mention of my name. And he has made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand has he hid me, and made me a *polished shaft*; in his quiver has he hid me." (Isa 49:1-2)

I just love this passage. The verses that follow this quote make it clear that it is Christ who is speaking of himself through the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah. The polished shaft is a reference to him being a special arrow in his Father's quiver, kept hidden, prepared for a future special use. In addition to waiting four thousand years to come, the Lord Jesus spent the first thirty years of his life on earth preparing for what God sent him here to do.

In Christ, we all are polished shafts, prepared or being prepared for special use, for a special purpose that each of us can accomplish. Isn't that an exciting thought?

I like to think of God's plan for humanity as a great drama which God, as the playwright, has written from beginning to end. He has created the plot and cast the characters. Each of us as individual characters has a specific role, a specific part to play. If we willingly play our part as he has scripted it, we will receive a great reward, an eternal reward. But if we are not happy with the part he has written

for us and decide to rewrite it to our own liking, we will suffer great loss.

This thought is expressed in the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church:

"Every man's work shall be made apparent: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall test every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he has built upon [the foundation of Christ], he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." (1 Cor 3:13-15)

The King James wording is a little ambiguous without the rest of the context in which this passage is found. So here is my paraphrase of this passage:

"Everyone's deeds shall be made apparent, for the day of judgment shall reveal them for what they are, because his deeds shall be exposed to the fire of God's holiness; and that fire shall test everyone's deeds to determine of what sort they are. If anyone's deeds which he has done in Christ survive the testing fire, he shall receive a reward. If anyone's deeds burn up, that is, prove unworthy of Christ, he shall suffer a loss of reward: but he himself shall be saved by that same fire, which only serves to purify those who are in Christ, that is, those who are built upon the foundation of Christ." (Marv's paraphrase)

I trust you can see the link between these verses and the analogy I have termed God's drama. We are all here for a God-given purpose. Nothing in this life is by accident. Folks, this life matters. There is a lot at stake. Our reward will be commensurate with the degree to which we have played out our prescribed parts. One of the mottos of our day is, Black Lives Matter. Of course they do, more to God than we can ever imagine. All lives matter to him. But to bring it down to a personal level, *your life* matters. What you do with it has eternal consequences.

The good news is that in Christ everything that pertains to Christ pertains to us as well. We are the body of Christ. What is true of the head - Christ - is true of the body as well. As remarkable as that may sound, it is the gospel truth.³⁴ So, consider yourself a polished arrow in God's quiver prepared for a special purpose and know that everything that has happened to you thus far is in preparation for that purpose.

During the study of the Bible over my fifty years in the Lord I have accumulated reams and reams of notes, many of which were scribbled on scraps of paper or in some cases on napkins over a meal. In those days my mind was always going (and still is) and I was wise enough to write the insights down as they came. I even got into the habit of dating my notes, particularly for my son, should he some day want a chronological record of my progress and understanding in the knowledge of God.

I once tried to organize this collection of notes and scribbles into a functional inventory so I could access them if needed. Well, I quickly realized that it would take months if not years to do so and gave up the attempt. Now they sit in file folders and boxes in my office closet, the evidence of hours and hours of study. But what I have learned from them has been engraved upon my heart. All those hours of study have given me what understanding of the Bible I have been able to acquire up to this day and prepared me for whatever lies ahead.

I take great comfort in believing that there was purpose in all that effort. I embrace the thought with excitement that I also am a polished shaft, hidden in God's quiver, prepared for some special use.

If that sounds arrogant, just remember that God's plan is to conform *every one of us* into the image of Christ, the perfect human being.

Queen Esther of the Bible is yet another example of being prepared beforehand for a special purpose. In her case, preparedness came through circumstance. She was a Jewish child of the Babylonian captivity, and that certainly not by her choice, but by God's providence. She was beautiful and as a result was selected to replace King Ahasuerus's divorced wife,

Vashti. When evil was pronounced upon the Jews in Ahasuerus's kingdom, Queen Esther determined to make an appeal to the king to reverse the decree he had made ordering the destruction of her people. There was one minor problem. She could not appear before the king unless invited. To do so could mean her own death. But her uncle's word of encouragement, "Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" gave her strength to risk her life to save her people.³⁵

That statement, "For such a time as this," refers to her God-appointed circumstance. It can apply to us as well concerning all the preparation that we have undergone to arrive at where we are today, some of which may not have been pleasant.

Nothing that has happened to us was without purpose. God has used even the mistakes you and I have made to mold and shape us in preparation for being placed into the church, the true temple of God. What's more, God uses the mistakes we continue to make as he conforms us into the image of his Son.

There is a definite purpose for *you* in the plan of God. Realize it or not, your training for that purpose has been in process all along, line upon line, precept upon precept, so to speak.³⁶ Isn't that an encouraging thought?

Keep in mind that the preparation continues throughout our lives. In our present context, being prepared is crucial to overcoming fear, which is likewise crucial to becoming all that God created us to be. And, folks, you and I are destined to overcome fear. The fact is, Christ *has* made us overcomers by imparting to us his overcoming life.³⁷ His perfect life has been counted as ours, if we believe in him. We may not be experiencing that at the moment, but it is true nonetheless and will be experienced on the day of the resurrection, if not before. If we don't achieve freedom from fear in this life, it *will* be ours in the life to come. We can be sure of that.

Remember, God has brought millions, if not billions, of believers through the "fire" and they are now in everlasting joy and peace in the presence of the Lord. That will be you and me some day. Hallelujah! If that doesn't give you hope, what will?

Let's move on.

* * * *

I am a first-year Baby Boomer. I was born in 1946, the year after World War II ended. America emerged from that terrible conflict the most powerful nation on earth because we had "the bomb" and because we suffered least of all the nations involved. Eighteen million Germans died in that war, twenty million Russians. Europe was devastated as was Japan and the islands of the Pacific. American deaths numbered less than half a million.

Victory brought us into what has been called the Golden Age of America where even middle-class families like mine lived like kings on the earth compared to the rest of the world. And while there were other wars in the years to come, they were foreign wars, having little or no effect on American soil.

The point I am trying to make is that for most Americans living during that period of our history, there was little to fear in the way of danger. But since 911 that has all changed. America is no longer a safe haven as it was in times past.

I am speaking in generalities. I am aware that many Americans have suffered danger and harm during that time period, i.e., those that fought in subsequent wars, those that suffered racial violence, natural disasters, school shootings, and the like. But by and large, millions of Americans, including believers, have enjoyed peace and safety in the "glass bubble" of protection that now appears to be bursting. We have been an anomaly compared to the rest of the world throughout history. The time has come for American believers to learn how to stand in this present evil day.³⁸ And to do that, we are going to have to learn to overcome fear.

I feel that last statement bears repeating in bold print:

The time has come for American believers to learn how to stand in this present evil day. And to do that, we are going to have to learn to overcome our fears.

But take courage, we *can* learn to do that. The Apostle John makes a profound statement in that regard and perhaps alludes to the secret of how to do it:

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love." (1 Jn 4:18)

How's that for an incredible statement. There is no fear in love, because perfect love casts it out.

When we know and believe the love that God has for us, I mean are absolutely, positively convinced of his great love for us, fear will lose its hold on us. When we have absolutely no doubts of his love due to our failures or our sense of unworthiness, fear will be cast out. When we are absolutely convinced that God is in *complete* control of our lives and always and only has our very best interest at heart, *fear will have no place to dwell*, because it has no place in God's love. His love casts it out.

I think you will agree, only God has perfect love. Therefore, only God - who is love - can cast out fear.³⁹ We cannot live a fearless life without God's love; it isn't humanly possible.

Do you see then how the possibility of living free of fear and its debilitating effects finds its origin in the love of God?

Our best example of this is the Lord Jesus. He endured the horrendous agonies of the cross and the torments of hell because he was fully persuaded of the love his heavenly Father had for him and his Father's sovereign control over his life. He was also fully persuaded of the outcome, "You will not leave my soul in hell..."⁴⁰ He was convinced that his Father would raise him from the dead and make him co-ruler of heaven and earth. God's perfect love had cast out all fear.

He was also persuaded of the result of his sacrifice, umpteen million believers granted forgiveness and eternal life, who would become his corporate bride and live with him forever.

How then does the love of God relate to *our* fear of the world's evil and danger? My answer: If we are not convinced of

God's perfect love for *us*, not convinced that he will take care of us, whatever befalls us, not convinced of his all-sufficient grace, we most likely will fear the future.

The thing to remember about all this is that fear is an emotion, a feeling, something we experience *in our minds*. Fear has no other place in which to exist, but in our minds. As you might guess, the key to overcoming fear, then, has to do with the mind. That is where the battle is, because that is where fear exists. This is an important point to remember as we search out the ways to overcome our fears.

The late Bob George, a former Christian counselor and teacher has said that emotions are responders, they simply respond to what the mind is thinking. If we are thinking happy thoughts, we experience the emotion of joy or peace or some other pleasant emotion. But if we are thinking thoughts of danger or something equally unpleasant, we will undoubtedly experience fear. That's how the mind works.

Think of the mind as a movie screen. Whatever is projected on that screen is what we will respond to. How do you react to scary scenes in a Hollywood film? Do they not arouse fear in your heart, even though you know what you are viewing isn't real and can't touch you. Why? Because your emotions are simply responding to what your mind is seeing and therefore thinking at the moment. A good screenwriter and subsequently a good film maker will draw you into the plot as though you were experiencing it yourself. Is that not true? That's what makes a Hollywood movie successful.

Once again, this isn't rocket science (I love that term. I use it a lot). It is simply how the mind and emotions interact. Fear is an emotion. The mind is merely a movie screen, projecting whatever it is thinking. Is that over-simplistic? Well, I'm a simplistic guy and it makes sense to me. I hope it does to you as well (not to imply that you are simplistic also).

Hopefully I have convinced you that we need to be prepared for whatever lies ahead and that will require training. When I was in basic training in the army back in what seems a hundred years ago, our training involved a number of things: aptitude testing, marching, physical fitness, marching, gas chamber, crawling, weapons training, marching, grenade

tossing, rifle range, bayonet practice, more marching (come to think of it, we did a *lot* of marching. I'm not sure why). I have to believe it was all part of making us into soldiers.

Fortunately, God has excellent training methods if we will but avail ourselves of them. Some are in the form of provisions he has instructed us to apply in our battle against fear. We will be discussing them in succeeding chapters.

Chapter 2 Key Points:

1. Prepare your heart for adversity before it comes.
2. God's perfect love casts out fear.
3. We must be taught how to stand in this present evil day.
4. We can learn to overcome fear.
5. The battle against fear is in the mind.

Chapter 3 - Fight Or Flight

In the animal kingdom, just as in the human realm, there exists a basic instinct to survive. It is called *Fight or Flight*. This is never more true than in the world of horses. Horses, in my opinion, are one of God's finest creations. In fact in my mind there is nothing more glorious than a horse at a gallop, except God himself. You may think that to be an overstatement, but that is the affect that horses have on me. It is a good thing that I don't live near a Thoroughbred race track, or I might loose myself (and a lot of money), mesmerized in the grandstands.

Horses have only two desires in life: food and safety, unless of course they are stallions. Stallions have an even stronger desire than food and safety, but we won't get into that.

But by and large, food and safety are a horse's main concerns. I have often said that you can perform surgery on a horse if he has a crib of hay in front of him. Not true, of course, but it would seem that way when you consider how focused they are on food. Nevertheless, horses will run away from food if they sense they are in danger of a predator.

Their main predators are bears, cougars, and wolfs. Of the three, cougars are their worst enemy. They can obtain speeds up to fifty miles per hour. A horse can run nearly as fast, in some cases reaching speeds of forty to forty-five miles per hour. That is where the fight or flight instinct comes into play. Cougars will burn out after short sprints while horses, especially horses in the wild, can run for miles at a time. If a horse can get the jump on a cougar, he can outrun him because he can out-distance him.

The fear of predators is why horses are so alert and have lightning fast reflexes. It is God's provision for them and their survival often depends on it. God has indeed evened out the playing field, and if a cougar is going to feast on a horse, he is going to have to be very stealth.

If danger does present itself to a horse, his first instinct is to run, even away from food. He would rather run away from his predators and live to eat another day than to become

dinner himself. But if a horse gets cornered, he will turn and fight. And he has very powerful jaws and his kick can do a lot of damage if he strikes his attacker in the right place, possibly even delivering a death blow. The cougar may end up wishing he had stalked a smaller prey. That is why cougars will usually go after foals or weanlings rather than adult horses. Such is the way in the wild with horses and cougars.

But here's the rub when it comes to people. While we may share the fight or flight instinct with the animal kingdom, as believers in Jesus Christ, we do not have the option of running away from our enemy as a way to escape him.

You will notice that the armor of God listed in Ephesians, chapter six offers no protection for the back.⁴¹ We can infer from this that God intends for us to stand and face our enemies, in which case God's armor is invincible.

We dare not turn and run as the horse is inclined to do. For one thing, we cannot outrun our enemy. He is seemingly ubiquitous; his minions seem to be everywhere. Try to run from one and you will run into another. For example, if you try to run away from something God has told you to do, you will very likely have to face the enemy in the form of condemnation. There is no condemnation in Christ, but when we feel we have failed God we may *feel* condemned in our own minds. And, yes, that would be the enemy lying to us, but it will most likely have a negative effect on us nevertheless. My guess is that a great number of you can relate to what I am saying.

Did you know that if you encounter a cougar in the wild, the worst thing you can do is turn and run. To do that is to signal to the cougar that you are indeed a "prey animal" that he should attack.

In the same way, we cannot afford to turn and run from our spiritual foes, for that is an indication that we are an easy prey. Animals sense fear and so does the devil. People who work with and train wild animals have learned to mask their fear; their very lives depend on it. We must learn to do the same.

This brings to mind a statement the Apostle Peter made in one of his letters:

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about seeking whom he may devour. Whom *resist stedfast in the faith*, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brothers and sisters that are in the world." (1 Pet 5:8-9)

We are to resist the enemy. That implies standing firm in the faith, not running away from him. God has given us an incredible promise concerning this:

"Submit yourselves therefore to God, *resist the devil* and he will flee from you." (Jm 4:7)

This promise has a condition; *Submit* yourself to God. We cannot resist the devil in our own strength. But if we are submitted to God, he guarantees that the devil will flee from us, if we will but resist him.

We have an example of this in the gospel of Luke, when the Lord sent out seventy disciples to proclaim the good news of the gospel in the towns and villages:

"And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through your name'." (Lk 10:17)

Those who have submitted themselves to God *and* have resisted Satan will find that he has to flee from them.⁴² Incredible promise! But the thing to remember is that we have to resist the devil head on! For those of us who are in Christ, it is not flight, but *fight*.

I trust you can see how this relates to our topic of fear. Our enemy is strong and fierce. God himself described the devil - typified by leviathan, the sea monster in the book of Job - as being more fierce than anyone on earth.⁴³

It may be natural to fear our enemy, that is, to recognize he is powerful. But we are no longer "natural" but "spiritual."⁴⁴ We do not have to be afraid of him, because God *in us* is greater by far.⁴⁵

I realize I am talking like a "big shot," as though I am fearless, but that is not the case. I have, as I suppose you do, a great desire to overcome fear and be a good soldier of Jesus Christ. I am trusting him to bring that about.

* * * *

Now I would like to revisit the Apostle John's comments about fear:

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because *fear has torment*. He that fears is not made perfect in love. (1 Jn4:18)

We dare not pass up this important point: fear has torment. The Greek word translated *torment* in the King James Bible is found in only one other place in the Bible and there it is translated *punishment*. You will find that usage in Matthew 25:46. The context there is eternal judgment. The literal meaning of the Greek word for these two English words is *penal infliction* (penalty for sin). I hope you understand that the Lord Jesus bore *all* our punishment for *all* our sins on the cross. There is no more punishment for those who have put their faith in him, period! *He bore it all*.

That is why fear, kin-sister to torment, shouldn't have any place in the life of a believer. But we are all works in progress and as John wisely noted, "He that fears is not made perfect (complete or mature) in love." He recognized that not all of us have arrived at that level of faith and trust. But be assured, God will bring us there, if it takes the resurrection to do so. In the end, if not before, we will all be made perfect in love and free from fear.

There is no fear in love, because fear has torment and there is no torment in love. Isn't that a beautiful thought?

It ought to be obvious to us that the solution to fear is explicit faith and trust in God and his great love for us.

In chapter one I stated that fear is one of Satan's primary weapons. John's statement above explains why. I do not think it was unintentional that the translators of the KJV used

the word, torment, given its modern meaning: extreme pain or anguish of body or mind, agony, the infliction of torture. That is more in keeping with the thought behind the Apostle John's statement and the devil's motive in using fear against us. Modern translations use the word, punishment, in place of torment. My parents punished me (usually a time out in my bedroom) when I misbehaved as a child, but they didn't torment me as the devil's fear can do. Do you get my point? I know people that are tormented with fear. I hope you are not one of them. But if so, you need to be persuaded of God's love for *you*.

It is not hard to see why fear is so effective a weapon against the people of God, but that hasn't always been the case. Many believers throughout history have been convinced of God's love for them and appropriated God's grace to endure the devil's threats and abuses. They were trained and prepared by the Lord and able to stand in *their* evil day. God will do the same for us, if we will but trust him.

The great reformer, Martin Luther, must have had that confidence when he penned the words to his glorious hymn, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*:

"His [Satan's] rage we can endure, for, lo, his doom is sure. One little word will fell him."

I can't help but think that those who have stood their ground for Christ throughout history have been the ones who have discovered and taken refuge in the secret hiding place of God, where they were safe and where nothing, absolutely nothing, could dissuade them from trusting in the sovereign God of the universe.

If you consider the meaning of the word, torment, in our modern vernacular, fear can go so far as to produce torment in our hearts and minds even when we are *not* in any danger. Just as we are wired with the instinct to survive, we are also programmed to avoid pain of any kind. Let's face it, who likes pain but the masochist, and his is as abnormal a mental state as there is.

We will do just about anything to avoid pain, and that is why it is such an effective weapon in the hands of the enemy. But the good news is that God will teach us to overcome pain and the fear of it. Our part is to be willing to be trained.

To experience fear and yet not be afraid is indeed a paradox, but one the Bible most definitely teaches. I suppose it can also be said, you can experience pain and yet not be harmed by it, and that too would be a paradox. More on that later as well.

So then, we can be trained to live without fear, or perhaps a better way to say it, to not be afraid of fear.

Chapter 3 Key Points:

1. We don't have the option of running away as a way to escape our enemy.
2. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
3. The solution to fear is faith and trust in God and his love for us.
4. Our predecessors took refuge in the secret hiding place of God.
5. We can do he same.

Chapter 4 - Take No Thought

Until now we have been speaking in generalities. Let's begin to consider some practical solutions to the problem of fear, and, folks, there are solutions that we can experience now in this life. I am speaking this in faith based on what I know to be true in the holy scriptures. I am taking the Lord at his word. If he said, do not fear, then freedom from fear *must* be possible. Simple deductive reasoning requires us to believe that.

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, said as much when he prophesied at the birth of his son:

"...That he [the Lord God] would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him *without fear*, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life." (Lk 1:74)

This passage was part of an oath that God had made to Abraham nearly four thousand years from our present day. Yes, God has made it possible for us to live without fear. Let's let him teach us how.

The beginning of this learning process for me began with an earnest plea for deliverance. I mean, at this point in my life (I am 78) I can see the finish line and I was beginning to believe that I would have to take this struggle with fear to the grave.

But God heard my prayer and began to show me the way of deliverance. Why it took so long for me to catch on, I cannot say. I'm a slow learner, I suppose. But I have no excuse. I have been studying the Bible for fifty years and teaching it for over forty of those years. I know what the scriptures say, "Do not be afraid," but I had no clue as to how to make that a reality in my life.

Then the first revelation came, well, the first one to get through to me. It was a verse of scripture, of course:

"Therefore take no thought for tomorrow, for tomorrow shall take thought for itself..." (Matt 6:34)

To say that I have read that passage multiple dozens of times over the years would not be an exaggeration. But I never took it as a command until recently. Until now it sounded like a good suggestion, but one I obviously didn't take seriously.

But no, it is not a suggestion, it is a command, given to us by the Lord *for our benefit*, and we pay a tremendous price in fear and anxiety when we don't obey it. The Lord well knows that, for most of us, to project into the unknown and uncertain future in a world filled with tyrants and evil will very likely create fear in our hearts. Fifteen minutes of the evening news broadcast is often all it takes, which is a clue in itself.

I have dealt with hundreds of people in my service to the Lord and I have concluded that this has been true for most of them as well as myself. We live in a fearful world filled with evil, and it produces fearful people. This appears to be true despite the fact that we in America have lived in the best the world has to offer.

Fear may evidence itself in different ways. Some may demonstrate their fears in the form of paranoia, others by performing dangerous acts, like jumping out of an airplane in an attempt to convince themselves that they are not afraid. Most, like me, attempt to hide it.

Actually, I *did* jump out of an airplane... twice, when I was sixty years old. And, no, I didn't do it for the thrill, though it did prove to be thrilling. I don't do dangerous things for fun. For me it was an issue of trust.

You see, there was a skydiving club at an airport near where we lived and the sign said. "Skydive the Rockies." I had read a book about living courageously and felt the Lord saying to me, "Could you trust me to do something like that?" That I said yes to his challenge was a demonstration of the grace of God in my life at the time.

I remember waking up one morning and telling my wife that I was going to parachute out of an airplane. She thought it was a great idea. I assumed she wanted to get rid of me.

I have to believe that the Lord was working in my life back then to help me overcome my fears. The exercise did prove to build some confidence into my life. But it was not a cure-all for my problem with fear. How patient our Savior is in helping us through our phobias!

Getting back to the point, the complete verse reads like this:

"Take therefore no thought for tomorrow, for tomorrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the [present] day is the evil thereof." (Matt 6:34)

Here is my paraphrase of this passage. Remember, in the actual passage the Lord is speaking:

"Don't worry about tomorrow. When it gets here *my* grace will be more than sufficient to handle it. There is enough to deal with today, for which my grace is also sufficient. Just trust me. Trust me for today and for tomorrow and for all your tomorrows." (Marv 6:34)

Okay, it's my amplified version. But I am convinced that this is the point the Lord is making. As always, the question is, *can we trust him?*

Every believer in Christ has a track record with the Lord, whether it's a month long or years long. But we can all look back over our lives and see his faithfulness. For the brand new believer, it was the Lord's faithfulness to preserve him and bring him to salvation. For those of us who have known the Lord for some time, it is his faithfulness to keep us and bring us through the trials and tribulations that we have experienced thus far. He builds our faith and trust in him by the countless times he is faithful to us.

You can't put your trust in someone you don't know; we don't trust total strangers. In fact, trust is something that has to be earned, which in itself implies relationship.

The Lord is and has been proving *his* faithfulness and trustworthiness throughout our relationship with him. The more we get to know him, the more we will trust him. It is a

process. It doesn't happen over night. Of course, we have to open our hearts to him and give him the opportunity to prove his trustworthiness. And that often requires us getting out of our comfort zone (and maybe even jumping out of an airplane). That is our part in the equation.

When I began to see Matthew 6:34 not as a suggestion or even a command, but as a *provision* - a key element in overcoming fear - that is when things began to change for me. I began to connect this with other familiar passages of scripture that elaborate on the same theme. We will deal with some of those in the chapters to come.

For now, let's take a closer look at Matthew 6:34. We might consider this verse one of the first steps in overcoming fear. The key being, *living in the present*. If you are interested in learning how to live without fear, highlight or underscore this verse. In fact, paste it on your mirror or somewhere else where you will see it frequently and be reminded to heed its admonition. "Take no thought for tomorrow." It may well be the primary solution to overcoming fear.

* * * *

Have you ever considered that God lives in the present, an *ever-existing* present. As near as I can tell, that is what eternity is, a timeless state, an ever-existing present. The concept of foreknowledge more than suggests this. Foreknowledge simply means knowing something beforehand, knowing what is going to happen *before* it happens. Only God can do that and those to whom he chooses to reveal the future.

According to the scriptures, God has foreknowledge.⁴⁶ In fact, according to 1 Peter 1:2, we were elected, that is, chosen or selected to become God's children, according to his foreknowledge. In other words, the omniscient, ever-existing God knew beforehand who would *believe and receive* Christ. Those he foreknew he called his chosen *before* the foundation of the world.⁴⁷ He could do that because he is not in time. Everything that ever was or ever will be he sees in the ever-existing present that he eternally dwells in. In other words,

from God's perspective the future has already happened. He has already written the end of the story. He has already seen it happen in the ever-existing present in which he exists.

Does that make sense to you? Admittedly, when we talk about eternity we are doing so from a time-bound perspective. As time-creatures, we are limited in our ability to comprehend timelessness. Yet I don't believe this to be rocket science either. It is really quite reasonable to me, and I was just an average student in my school days. Maybe that's why it is reasonable to me; I'm not sharp enough to over think it.

Eternity has no past and it has no future. Those are time-terms that don't apply to eternity because there is *no time* in eternity. It is a *timeless* state of existence. So then, if eternity has no past or future, then neither does the eternal God. He simply ever-exists. He said as much when he appeared to Moses in the burning bush:

"And God said to Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, 'This shall you say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you'." (Ex 3:14)

God, the I AM, simply *is!* And, folks, we have to accept that by faith. We have no other explanation for the existence of God. We are dealing with the incomprehensible God and he has revealed himself in the holy scriptures as the self-existing, ever-existing, eternal God. One interpretation of the I AM statement is, (God speaking) "I am my own cause." We may not be able to understand that, but it is not difficult to believe it for those who know him personally, just as it is not difficult for a small child to believe that his dad exists, though he may not understand where he came from. The child has simple, childlike faith. We need that same kind of faith. The Lord Jesus did say that we must become *as little children* to enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴⁸

* * * *

Matthew 6:34 says to me that God wants us to learn to live in the present as *he* lives in the present, because the present is *our only reality*, as it is his.

We do not exist any longer in the past and we cannot exist in the future that hasn't happened yet and may never happen as we perceive it. The present is for us a kind of temporary eternity (there I go attaching a time-term to eternity). It is the realm in which everything we experience is happening *right now*. We may remember the past and speculate about the future, but our ever-existing state of existence is the "right now." In other words, we remember the past "right now." We speculate about the future "right now." We need only be concerned with the "right now." Is that too abstract?

And lest I be construed as being absurd, it is the gospel truth that, if you are a believer in Christ, you live in an ever-existing state right now. That is to say, you have been given everlasting life *right now*. If you believe in Jesus, you will *never* die. Do you believe that? That is the question the Lord Jesus posed to Martha concerning this very issue in the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of John⁴⁸ You can check it out for yourself.

Let's face it, except for what God has told us is going to happen, any thought of the future is only speculation. Even what God has told us will happen in the future may never happen *to us*. Did you get that? All the prophecies about the future will surely come to pass because God has spoken them, but they may never touch us personally. We may not even be around when they happen. This truth is part of the key to overcoming fear and should take the edge off our tendency to fear the future. And by future, I mean any time beyond today. Are you getting my point? Don't worry about something that may *never* happen to you. Instead, trust the Lord for the future as well as for the present. He has given us some incredible promises as reason to trust in him.

The popular Christian Country Western song *One Day At A Time*, written by Marijohn Wilkin and Kris Kristofferson says it so well:

*"One day at a time sweet Jesus
That's all I'm asking of You
Just give me the strength
To do every day what I have to do*

*Yesterday's gone sweet Jesus
And tomorrow may never be mine
Lord help me today, show me the way
One day at a time"*

"Yesterday's gone and tomorrow may never be mine."
How very true are those words.

God exists in the present. I believe he wants us to do the same. And if we are willing to learn how, it will eliminate a whole lot of the things that make us afraid.

Think about it. Don't most of your problems stem either from dwelling on the past or from speculating about the future? I know mine do.

Admittedly, some future events aren't speculation, they are prophecy. God has revealed a lot of things to us that are yet in the future and some of those things are unpleasant. But nothing in the future can affect us today *except in our minds*. Is that not true?

Future events can't in reality affect us today because they haven't happened yet. They are only in our minds. The truth is, they may *never* happen to you and I. We could be with the Lord before anything we worry about ever happens.

Of course, if we give them place in our minds, if we dwell on them, they can affect us greatly. They can affect us adversely and create a great deal of fearfulness.

It reminds me of a story I heard recently. A worrisome mother was justifying her worrying to her family. She said that she knows worrying works because ninety-eight percent of the things she worries about never come to pass. Sadly funny, isn't it?

I draw two conclusions from all of this: One, the battle is indeed in the mind and that is where we have to fight it, and two, we are not to speculate about the future; it may cause unnecessary anxiety.

But what about the bleak prophecies that will surely come to pass? After all, the Bible is clear that very difficult times will come as we approach the end of the age and the return of the Lord Jesus. For believers living in Ukraine as I write this, very difficult times are already here. Believers living in many other parts of the world would no doubt also agree. I think it is safe to say we are living in those times. At the very least, they are quickly approaching.

So how are we to not be afraid concerning the dismal events to come or for that matter the dismal events that are happening in the world at this very moment? I have answered that in part already. Though they will surely come to pass and may even be happening at this moment, we may not experience them personally. God knows our limitations and is faithful to not allow more than we can handle.⁵⁰ Let's not be like the mother who worries over ninety-eight percent of things that never happen to her. What a waste of worry.

I must interject here, it is *our* responsibility, those of us who have been spared horrific tragedies up to this point, to diligently pray for those who are suffering in the world today, both believers and unbelievers alike.⁵¹ May we be faithful to do so, because our prayers make a difference and the day may come when we will need their prayers.

Fear is debilitating. It robs us of joy and peace, which are blessings for the present, and can even rob us of hope, which involves the future. Fear can keep us from reaching our God-given potential and fulfilling the purpose for which we were created. Let's not let that happen to us. Let's learn from God how to overcome fear.

To do that, we have to learn to view life from a Biblical perspective as the Apostle Paul admonished us:

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."
(2 Cor 4:18)

We have to develop an eternal perspective and wean ourselves from a temporal mentality. Friends, take no thought for tomorrow.

* * * *

So much for the future. What about the past? How does our past factor into our present-day fears? I will offer two answers, though there may be more.

Past sin, mistakes, failure, whatever you want to call them, can instill fear in our hearts when we doubt God's forgiveness,.

Forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel - forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ. If we are not convinced that the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus, has taken away our sins and forgiven us because we have put our faith in him, we are very likely going to fear the consequences of our wrongdoing. Our inner being understands and agrees that sin must be punished.⁵²

But, folks, the good news of the gospel is forgiveness of sins - *past, present, and future*.⁵³ There probably isn't an easier doctrine to substantiate Biblically. I have known people who have been believers for years who still struggle over their past sinfulness. Put it behind you! It is over and done, paid in full by the blood of Christ. The last thing the Lord Jesus said on the cross just before he died was, "It is finished."⁵⁴ We dishonor the Lord when we doubt the efficacy of his sacrifice on our behalf. Cast out any fear of punishment for your sins. The debt has been paid in full. Great God of mercy, thank you!

God does correct us when we do wrong. He is a faithful Father and he corrects those he loves.⁵⁵ But correction is totally different from punishment. Punishment is an eternal consequence for rejecting Christ. Correction is a temporary measure to turn us back onto the right path, the path of righteousness and holiness.⁵⁶

Another common fear is the idea of not measuring up as a believer, of not *doing* enough. I have struggled with this one myself. Having at least an academic understanding of the

price that was paid for my salvation, I conclude that I owe the Lord everything. I owe him total surrender, total commitment, total obedience. But I confess to you that I haven't as yet been able to give him that, though I want to with all my heart. There is still too much of "self" left in Marv and lack of faith to think that I have given my all to God. Can you relate to that? If you can, let's both trust God to finish the work he began in us as he has promised to do.⁵⁷

God has given all believers the righteousness of Christ which we received as a gift when we put our faith in him and were born again by the Spirit of God.⁵⁸ You can't get more righteous than that, so there should be no thought of not measuring up. He measured up for us.

Of course we want to please him and honor him by a holy life, but we can't improve on the righteousness of Christ that has been laid to our account by faith in him alone. You will never be more righteous than the day you received Christ because on that day you received his perfect righteousness. Remember this when you think you are not measuring up (I'm speaking to myself here as well). If you have believed in Jesus, you measure up by God's reckoning, because faith brings you into Christ's righteousness. There, I've said it three times for emphasis. Do you get the point?

Now, this is not to say that we can't live, that is, conduct ourselves, more righteously. No doubt we all can improve our behavior, which at times falls short of Christ's perfect life. We believers are in the process of being conformed into the image of Christ, which process will progressively reflect more and more the life of Christ in our mortal bodies. That is the intermediate goal. The ultimate goal is to be completely conformed into his image. In the end, God will have produced a perfect race, a perfect humanity that reflects his divine nature.⁵⁹ Incredible, isn't it? What a destiny the people of God have in store for them!⁶⁰

So then, let's take no thought for tomorrow. It doesn't exist yet. Also, let's take no thought for the past. It no longer exists and has been paid for in full. Existence can only be experienced in the present. That is where we live, right now,

this very moment. And right now and forever we are forgiven and secure in the love of God.⁶¹

Exception To The Rule

At the risk of sounding contradictory, let me say that there are legitimate exceptions to this rule of not taking thought for the future or the past. It is not only okay, but very beneficial to remind ourselves regularly of the future promises that God has made concerning the life to come. As with the Lord Jesus, to do so becomes the hope and joy set before us, knowing that this temporal life of difficulty and suffering will surely have an end and a glorious future awaits us.⁶²

Likewise, to reflect on the faithfulness of God in our past and on the wonderful things we have enjoyed up to the present will engender gratitude and hope for the future. These are good things to do and remember.

In the Old Testament, God continually instructed Israel to erect monuments to remind them of what he has done for them, and to tell their children about them, that they might be thankful and that God might be glorified.

Yes, it is a good thing to "count our blessings" both from the past and for the future and to keep them ever before us.

One more thought about taking no thought. Of course we have to give thought to tomorrow's responsibilities that we have toward God and to others. We must be mindful of what God has put before us to accomplish and where to direct our energies. These things often need forethought and planning. Just don't concern yourself with worries about them. Instead, give your worries to God.⁶³ He is far better equipped to deal with them than you or I are.

* * * *

Before we move on to the next chapter, I want to leave you with a few more verses that are very encouraging to me with regard to the mind and its role in the fear issue. First of all, we must believe that God has given us the mind of Christ.⁶⁴ He is the head of the body and his mind is the

operating system of the body (that's us, folks - the church). The Apostle Paul put it this way:

"For God has not given us [believers] the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (2 Tim 1:7)

We have to take that as a statement of fact, whether we are experiencing it right now or not. If God hasn't given us the spirit of fear, then where does it come from? You guessed it, from our adversary, the devil. Remember, he is a liar and the father of lies and fear is one of his primary weapons.⁶⁵

God has given us the spirit of power to combat the spirit of fear that the devil attempts to foist upon us. The word for power in the above verse, in the Greek, is *dunamis*, meaning *miraculous* force or power. Those of us who struggle with the idea of supernatural power need to take God at his word and believe that is exactly what he has given us.

God has also given us a sound mind. The word, sound, in the Greek, means disciplined, self-controlled. While we have to take that as a statement of fact as well, we have a part to play in it. You see, we have to deal with *two* minds. We have a spiritual mind as the verse implies - God has given us the *spirit* of a sound or disciplined mind. That is in reference to the new, regenerated person we have become in Christ and you can't get more spiritual than that.⁶⁶

But we also have to deal with a carnal mind which pertains to the flesh. The Apostle Paul addressed the struggle between the mind of the spirit and the mind of the flesh in his letter to the Galatian believers:

"This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against [desires to overpower] the Spirit, and the Spirit against [desires to overpower] the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that you would [desire to do]." (Gal 5:16-17)

You see, the flesh has a mind of its own, just as it has a will of its own.⁶⁷ When we fear, we are not in the mind of the

spirit, but in the mind of the flesh. Fear certainly is not generated in the mind of Christ which we have been given. Remember, it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us.⁶⁸ He is *now* our life.⁶⁹

And, by the way, a great promise is given to us in those verses; walk - that is, conduct yourself - according to the dictates of the Spirit, and you *will not* fulfill the lust of the flesh. It behooves us, therefore, to learn how to walk in the Spirit. That would be a study in its own right.

Paul expanded on this principle in his letter to the church in Rome:

"For they that are after the flesh do mind [are mindful of] the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally [fleshly] minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against [in opposition to and hostile toward] God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Rom 8:5-7)

Don't you just love all these remarkable truths that God has given us in his word. It remains for us to believe them and appropriate them by faith.

Fear, like evil thoughts, is also generated in the fleshly mind. In fact you could say that fear *is* an evil thought because it doesn't come from God. Certainly the risen Christ, who is now our life, has no fear. This is the very reason it is possible to live without fear. It is accomplished by learning to let the fearless Christ live his life *in* and *through* us.

Bob George summed up the good news of the gospel very well:

"Christ gave his life *for us*, that he might give his life *to us*, so that he might live his life *through us*."

That is another saying that would be good to post on your mirror as a reminder.

Listen, God is not asking us to do what he asked Jesus to do. He is not asking us to die for the sins of the world. He

is asking us to merely die to *ourselves* that the life of Christ may be revealed in our earthly, mortal body. We are warned that if we seek to save our life, we will lose it:

"For whosoever will [desires to] save his life [the self-life] shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life for my sake [Jesus'], the same shall find it." (Lk 9:24)

Here is another verse that will help to defeat fear:

"Finally, brothers [and sisters], whatever things are true, whatever things are honest [honorable], whatever things are just [innocent], whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, *think on these things*. Those things which you have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me [the Apostle Paul], do: and the God of peace shall be with you. (Phil 4:8-9)

I think you can see the reasoning behind these words of the Apostle Paul. Fill your mind with good thoughts and there will be no room for fear, for good thoughts will fill your heart with peace. Fear cannot exist where there is true peace. The two are incompatible.

Phil 4:8-9 serves as an excellent example of positive thinking, "*Think on these things*."

You have heard the common expression, mind over matter. This is not mind over matter, it is the spiritual mind over the carnal mind. It might be better said, *truth over lies*.

One more verse as it applies to the discussion in this chapter:

"And do not be conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Rom 12:2)

While this verse has several admonishments, I want to focus on just one, the renewing of the mind. According to this

verse, we can be transformed, that is changed, by *the renewing* of the mind. I don't know about you, but I want desperately to be changed in so many ways. I want desperately to gain the mastery over fear and I have to believe that it is possible based on the word of God.

Thank God that we believers are in the process of being changed, The Bible term is being *conformed* into the image of Christ. Oh blessed hope! To be made like Christ, the perfect expression of humanity.

When God is finished with that process, he will have an entire race of regenerated people - millions, maybe billions of us.

Think of it, completely new creatures free from sin in the flesh, without even the capacity to sin. That is what God began to do in the original creation when he created man in his own image to be partakers of his sinless divine nature.⁷⁰ Then we will experience eternal life - the very life of God himself - in all its fullness. Do we really understand what God has done for us through the sacrifice of his Son?

God deemed freedom of choice and the capacity to sin a necessary part in his marvelous plan of salvation. Without them, we could never understand and appreciate certain aspects of the character of God. What meaning would there be to mercy, forgiveness, longsuffering, patience, grace, and his sacrificial heart without a fallen humanity?

I have said many times over the years that God is the only being in the universe whose determined end truly justifies the means. In other words, the sufferings that he allows us to go through in this present life are justified by the end result that God has in store for those who have trusted him. I feel compelled to quote a scripture by the Apostle Paul once again:

"But as it is written, 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him'." (1 Cor 2:9)

That sounds unspeakably good to me. I hope it does to you as well. Paul expressed it further in another passage:

"For I count that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom 8:18)

Do you get the gist of this? The end result will be so unspeakably glorious that it will justify a hundred times over the sufferings we have gone through to arrive there. Keep that future hope ever before your eyes.

This thought is expressed supremely by the writer of the book of Hebrews when speaking of Christ's sufferings:

"[Jesus] for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb 12:2)

No one has suffered like our Lord suffered. But the rapturous delight of the joy that was to be his as a reward for his suffering motivated him to endure the agony of the cross, indeed, the sorrows of his entire earthly life.⁷¹ That his joy will be commensurate to the magnitude of his suffering is an indication of just how rapturous it will be.

It follows that to be conformed into the image of Christ is to be made into the image of God, for Christ is the very image of the invisible God.⁷²

The writer of the book of Hebrews put it this way:

"God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the *express image of his person*, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." (Heb 1:1-3)

The *express image* of God. In the Greek, that phrase means the *exact copy*. Christ is the exact image of God. That is why he could tell his disciples that if they have seen him

(Jesus), they have seen the Father.⁷³ He is exactly what the Father, the invisible God, is like in character in a human body.

Mark Lowry, the writer of the lyrics to the song, *Mary, Did You Know?* understood this full well. Two of the verses read:

"[Mary] When you kiss your little baby, you kiss the face of God."

"[Mary] That sleeping child you're holding is the great I Am."

It gives me goose-bumps to think about that. Oh, Lord Christ, Lord Sovereign, how we worship you! Do we really understand who Jesus is? I certainly hope so.

The Prophet Jeremiah also understood the deity of Christ:

"Who would not fear you, O King of nations? For unto you does fear belong." (Jer 10:7 paraphrased)

The King of nations - that would be Christ Jesus. Lord, we apologize if we have failed to reverence you for who you are.

With a reverent attitude toward the sovereign Lord and his desires for us, let's take no thought, no negative thought, for tomorrow. Instead, let the wonderful truths of God's word continually refresh and renew our minds.

In the next chapter we will look at another passage that is also essential to the conquest of fear.

Chapter 4 Key Points:

1. Take no thought, no negative thought, for the future or the past.
2. That is not only a command, but a provision for overcoming fear.
3. Live only in the present as God does - the ever-existing present.
4. Fill your mind with good thoughts and there will be no room for fear.
5. The life to come will be worth whatever it takes to get there.

Chapter 5 - Casting Down Imaginations

Another significant passage of scripture that is a help in overcoming fear is found in the Apostle Paul's second letter to the Corinthian believers:

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds); casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled." (2 Cor 10:3-6)

This is an amazing promise, to be grasped by faith. We understand that we are in a spiritual battle and must recognize that God has given us invincible armor with which we are to engage our enemy, the devil.⁷⁴ Our responsibility is to don the armor of God and to learn how to use it effectively.

When the Roman army trained, they used wooden swords, spears, and shields that were as much as twice the weight of their combat counterparts. The reason is obvious. In combat their actual weapons were easier to wield. This is much like a track runner today who will train with ankle weights on. When actually competing without the added weight, his stride will be a lot easier to maintain.

We have to train to learn how to use the armor of God well. That comes with practice. Sometimes that can be spiritually taxing. But the alternative - being untrained and ill prepared - is not an option if we are to be successful as soldiers of the Lord. Being ill prepared is never a good condition in which to find ourselves.

Much of our training in the Lord can be considered "boot camp" to learn how to fight this spiritual battle.

In the context of our current study, the stronghold is fear. According to the verse above, the weapons God has equipped us with are capable of pulling down that stronghold. Let's believe that.

But how is it done? The answer, according to this passage, is by casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. Imaginations, high things - this of course refers to the battle in the mind.

Let's examine 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 closely, for these verses, like Matthew 6:34, hold an important key in overcoming fear.

The weapons of our warfare are not fleshly

The first thing to consider - and believe - is that we cannot overcome our fears by natural, fleshly methods. because the natural man is naturally fearful. We cannot defeat the enemy on his battlefield. He prefers to set the battle in array in our natural minds. He knows he has a chance of prevailing if he can get us to engage him through fleshly means - by getting us to think like the old man we *used to be*. I italicizes the phrase *used to be* because we are no longer in the old man. According to the Bible, the old man was put to death with Christ on the cross.⁷⁵

Fear, doubt, unbelief are all generated out of the natural mind - the mind of the old man. It is another apparent paradox; the old man *was* put to death with Christ and yet seems very much alive. That has been my experience. I am guessing it has been yours as well. But we can only experience the death of our old man *by faith* in what God has said to be true.

Faith, according to Hebrews 11:1, is the evidence of things *not seen*. The old man may not seem to be dead, but God's word says that he is. And the only way we can realize that in our experience is to believe it. In other words, the claims of the Bible become an experiential reality in our lives when we actually, truly believe them to be true. That old saying, seeing is believing, is a falsehood in the spiritual realm. The truth is, believing must precede seeing; the experience of it will never come about until we believe it.

Additionally, there is the paradoxical truism that while we have indeed been put to death with Christ, we continue to

experience that death daily, as is expressed by the Apostle Paul:

"I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, *I die daily.*" (1 Cor 15:31)

"*Always* bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifested [made apparent] in our body." (2 Cor 4:10)

This latter verse can be taken to apply to the corporate body - the church - not bodies individually. Individually we may not always be demonstrating the death of Christ. By God's grace we are granted respites from time to time during our pilgrimage through this difficult life. Newlyweds, on their honeymoon, are very likely not experiencing or expressing Christ's death, but his blessing.

But corporately Paul's statement is certainly true. How many of God's people are suffering even now as you and I consider these things? God grant grace, mercy, and peace to those who are suffering at this very moment. And grant the same to us also, if and when our time comes to suffer for Christ's sake.

Paul's thought of him personally dying daily is further expressed in the letter to the Galatian churches:

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me... (Gal 2:20a)

In the King James Version, the wording is in the present perfect tense, indicating an action that has happened in the past and *continues* into the present. I *am* crucified, not I *have been* or *was*. I *continue* to be crucified with Christ, i.e., I die daily. Passages like this are why I prefer the KJV over modern translations. These nuances can make a great deal of difference in the true meaning of the holy scriptures.

As I mentioned in the last chapter, the spiritual mind - *the mind of Christ* - never generates fear. It is fearless,

undoubting, and believing. It pertains to the new man, Christ in us.

You may be thinking, gee, that sounds great, but it isn't me. Well, it *is you* and it *is me*, according to God, but we may not have matured enough to experience it in our present-day life. Let's give God a chance to bring it about in our own personal experience. That happens by trusting him day by day. Remember, he will finish the work he began in us.⁷⁶ I am inclined to believe that many of us become anxious over things that we feel presently unable to handle. If that is the case, we simply must believe that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear.⁷⁷ And as we elaborated on in chapter three, don't be projecting into the future. God has given you grace to deal with today's issues. When tomorrow comes, his grace will be sufficient for whatever you have to deal with then.⁷⁸ (Oh, I am so repetitious).

Don't you wish you were like courageous David who slew Goliath, that formidable giant?⁷⁹ I do. Well, if you remember that story, David spent hours in the hills tending his father's sheep. His job was to protect them from predators and lead them to water and good pasture. Except for the predators, it no doubt was a boring job. My guess is that he spent a great deal of his time hurling rocks at tree trunks with his sling, in fact, so much time that he got good at it - *really good* - so good that it built a confidence in him.

Remember, "He is not afraid to do what he has been trained to do well." In David's case, he was self-trained, though God's grace was undoubtedly with him and helping him. God knew he would one day face Goliath and was preparing him for that day. God is also preparing us for those times when we have to meet our Goliaths. And if we have been trained well and are prepared, our Goliaths will fall before us as well. Exciting thought, isn't it?

But David had obviously applied himself to his training. It wasn't just the sheep he had to defend. He would have made a good meal for the predators as well. Yet he killed a lion and a bear, and he didn't do it with a .30-06 rifle. Ours is a spiritual war. Oh how we, like David, need to be trained to fight it well.

Let's choose the battlefield when engaging with our adversary, the devil. Let's not meet him on the battlefield of a fearful, fleshly, unbelieving mind, but on the battlefield of a believing, disciplined mind. A disciplined mind knows the word of God and how to wield the armor of God successfully.

Knowing who we are in Christ, let's learn to be good soldiers of the Lord.⁸⁰ But of course, that requires a willingness to be trained and to step out of our comfort zone at times.

I volunteered for the draft in 1966 during the build-up of the Viet Nam war. It wasn't all that patriotic of me. I had lost my college deferment and was very likely going to be drafted anyway. It just made sense to go in and get it over with. Perhaps you could call that a willingness.

I was nineteen years old and about as undisciplined as anyone could be. But two months of boot camp and another four months in advanced training changed all that. By the end of the training I had learned discipline and felt like a soldier ready for anything. Talk about a makeover. What brought that about? Training, disciplined training.

Having been drafted into the Lord's army, we have a great need to be trained in spiritual warfare. Let's be willing. Let's be volunteers. We cannot expect to overcome fear if we haven't been trained to do so. It is imperative that we submit to the Lord's training methods.

Satan wants to engage us in an untrained condition. Let's submit to God's "boot camp" so that we can successfully defeat the devil and his lies, the chief of which is fear. Yes, fear is a lie.

Remember Tacitus' quote in reference to the arduous training Roman legionnaires underwent to prepare them for actual combat. Did they experience fear when they went into battle? No doubt. For one thing, most of them most likely were unbelievers who did not have the promises of God or the hope of the resurrection to strengthen and sustain them. But, being trained well gave them confidence and courage they otherwise would not have had.

Many of us are trying to fight the spiritual battle we find ourselves in without ever being properly trained.

I suppose I wasn't the only guy who was apprehensive about going through boot camp, especially with Viet Nam looming over our heads. But it did bring about a result, sometimes even despite ourselves. Let's trust God to bring us through his training, even if it is a rigorous process.

As it was, the army didn't send me to Viet Nam, but to Korea where I didn't see any action. I assume God knew what I could handle and what I couldn't. I am forever grateful to him for sparing me that ordeal, which is a prime example of his faithfulness and trustworthiness.

But mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds

The next portion of this promise-filled passage confirms the truth that we can't fight this battle on our own. The weapons we have been given are powerful *through God*. Is there anyone more powerful than the omnipotent God? Even the Lord Jesus himself said that he could do nothing on his own, but only what he learned from the Father.⁸¹ If that was true of him, how much more is it true of us.

The same promises God gave to Israel of old are to us as well. We New Testament believers, though we be Gentiles, are the children of Abraham as well as they.⁸² I don't think anyone would argue that the promises God gave to Abraham are to Israel also.

In reality, it is God who fights our battles for us, as he fought theirs. This has always been the case throughout history, for the battle is the Lord's.⁸³ This in itself should ease our fears.

These mighty weapons that God has given us and wields through us are capable of pulling down strongholds. We all have strongholds, areas of our lives where the enemy of our souls holds us captive. At the very least, strongholds hinder us - fears, addictions, weaknesses and bondages of all sorts. Fear perhaps is the strongest of them all.

With respect to fear, do you see how this passage of scripture relates to Matthew 6:34? Do you want to pull down the stronghold of fear? Simply do not give any place for it in

your mind. One way to do this is by not projecting into the future. You won't fear what you do not think about.

These are very practical solutions to the problem of fear. We can benefit greatly by taking them to heart.

Does this sound simplistic? Perhaps it is. But I am finding out that it is as simple as that. But to be perfectly honest, in principle it is that simple. In practice it takes a lot of mental effort and discipline. It takes training or rather *retraining* our minds in the way we think. In chapter seven we'll discuss mind renewing and how it relates to self-talk, another key to victory over fear.

For now let's pull everything we can out of the present passage under consideration.

Casting down imaginations

Here is where the effort on our part comes in. Casting down, that is a strong phrase. In the Greek it means to lower, destroy, or demolish with violence. We will not be able to overcome fear with kid gloves. We have to want this victory badly enough to fight for it. God has given us the weaponry and the promise that he will fight the battle for us. But he intends to do it *through us*. Note that, for it is imperative that we understand he accomplishes his will through us. In other words, he wants our cooperation and our willingness to trust him and believe him for the things he has said to be true.

For example, God's word says that if we are in Christ, we are a new creature - a whole new kind of humanity - right here, right now. This new creature has Christ himself as its life.⁸⁴ (I know I am repeating myself. I can't help it, it is such an important truth). It is Christ himself who lives in us, right here, right now. I am not making this up. As the Apostle Peter has said, "We have not followed cunning devised fables."⁸⁵ This is the word of the true and living God! We may not feel like a new creature, we may not act like one at times, but that does not negate the fact. If God said it, it has to be true.

As I have said previously, Christ gave his life to us so that he could live his life *through us*. Christ desires that. But we have an active role to play in this drama. Our part is to

yield ourselves to God and trust him to do what he has said he will do. And, folks, it won't happen without faith and trust, for they also are keys to overcoming fear.

* * * *

A word about imaginations. Imaginations are thoughts about the present or about the future, usually involving what we would like to see happen or what we are afraid will happen. They can be subconscious or conscious. The former take the form of dreams or nightmares, depending on the content. The latter can be thought of as conscious dreams or just wishful thinking, but they can be conscious nightmares as well, again depending on the content. That's my non-professional opinion of imaginations, but I think it will suffice for our purposes in this study.

Whether conscious or sub-conscious, frightful imaginations can create a lot of fear in our hearts and minds if we are not quick to cast them down. And by that I mean reject them outright when they present themselves to us. This is where the discipline comes in. It will take effort and training, very likely re-training, to build the habit of casting down imaginations that are contrary to the truth of God.

Dreams, that is, wholesome dreams, are a good thing. We all have them, consciously and sub-consciously. They give us hope of a better future. I have a plaque on the wall of my office that a friend gave me years ago which reads: *Believe in your dreams*. It gives me pleasure to look at it and reflect on my dreams for the future. I expect to see all of them fulfilled in the resurrection and the coming kingdom of God, if not before.

If a dream doesn't come to pass in this life, we are most likely none the worse for it. But fear-arousing speculations can do a lot of damage right now, in the moment. This is why we must learn to cast fearful thoughts down. I don't know about you, but I have an overactive imagination and it can run wild, causing me much grief. But the thing about imaginations is that they are usually nothing more than

dreams or speculations about the future. As the worrisome mother in the last chapter discovered, they may never happen.

I suppose imaginations can involve the past as well, - imagining how things might have been if you had made different choices or done things differently. What would life have been like if... (*fill in the blank*). This is extremely unwise as it can generate regret, which most often produces a different kind of fear. We may fear that we made a wrong decision and missed out on something. We may feel that a wrong decision resulted in missing the will of God for our life.

Listen, if you still have breath in your nostrils, you can yet fulfill God's will for your life. So don't waste time fretting over the past. True, the past can't be relived. but the present is ours and whatever future God grants us. They are all we need to be concerned about.

Can we not believe that God can and does work all things for our good, even our bad choices and mistakes? If we don't believe that, what hope do we have, since we have all made bad choices? Thank God for his mercy and his ability to bring good out of our mistakes. Only the God of the Bible can do that.

If you have made a bad mistake in your life, don't compound it by making further mistakes as a result. God will forgive you and lead you and guide you from that point on, if you are willing to admit your wrong to him. That's called repentance and involves submitting to his will going forward.

Whenever we come to a fork in the road and make the wrong choice, instantly, God has a new set of choices for us: accept his forgiveness and whatever consequence results from our wrong choice, or go on in our error. The right choice, of course, would be to determine, by the grace of God, to do what he deems is necessary under the new set of circumstances.

I said God will forgive you. In reality, if you are in Christ, God has *already* forgiven you, once and for all time. He did so because while his Son, our Savior, hung on the cross in incalculable agony (I shudder at the thought), he asked his Father to forgive us.⁸⁶ And God never said no to Jesus, because Jesus never said no to him. This is an incredible truth. If we will acknowledge our wrongdoing, we can go

forward with a clean slate, knowing that his mercy is new every morning and it never ends.⁸⁷

If you are in Christ, forgiveness is no longer an issue. Christ settled that on Calvary. When we do wrong, of course we must confess it to God, not to receive forgiveness, but to *acknowledge* it. I consider this a key point. I may receive some flack for that statement, but I am convinced it is the gospel truth.

When I sin, I confess it to God and thank him for the forgiveness I have in the Lord Jesus Christ and go on from there with a renewed determination to make right choices in the future. If I mess up again a week later or a day later or - heaven forbid - a minute later, all I can do is confess it again and thank God for his forgiveness purchased for me by my precious Savior. What else can I do? What else can *you* do? Of course, God's discipline - his correction - is a strong motivation to make right choices in the future. He is a faithful Father; he will correct us. I trust you have discovered that as well. But, folks, all those who are in Christ Jesus have been forgiven their sins - past, present, *and* future - once and for all time. I do hope you believe that, because believing that will dispel a lot of fear.

Do you need proof that God has forgiven you once and for all time? Consider this inspired statement from the Bible, the word of the living God:

"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, has he [God] made alive together with him [Christ], *having forgiven you all trespasses...*" (Col 2:13)

How many sins has God forgiven us? *All*. I love that little word, all. It leaves nothing to interpretation. The Greek word, *pas*, translated *all* in this verse is defined as, *all, any, every, the whole*. Do you get the picture? God has forgiven us *all* our sins and trespasses. I hope I am not wearying you with my italics and repetition. It's just that some things warrant being emphasized. This is one of them. I know so many believers that struggle with this issue of forgiveness and in

many cases live in continual condemnation over the weaknesses of their flesh because they do not understand and believe that they are forgiven once and for all time. In other words, we believers live in a *continual state* of forgiveness. I think that would make a great placard to post somewhere conspicuous as a constant reminder:

I live in a continual state of forgiveness because of what my Savior accomplished for me at Calvary.

We may ask God to forgive us when we do wrong, as an expression of apology. But the truth is, he already did so when he raised Christ from the dead. According to the scriptures, when God raised Christ from the dead, he raised us from the dead with him to newness of life.⁸⁸

Yes, we are still capable of sinning, but when we do, it is the flesh - the remaining sinful nature in us all - that does it, not the new man we have become in Christ. The following passage of inspired scripture will confirm that:

"For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal [fleshly], sold under sin. For that which I do, I don't allow: but what I hate, that I do. If then I do that which I don't want to do, I consent to the law that it [the law of Moses] is good. Now then *it is no more I that does it, but sin that dwells in me.* For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwells no good thing: for to will [desire] is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I don't find. For the good that I desire to do, I don't do: but the evil which I don't want to do, that I do. Now if I do that which I don't want to do, *it is no more I that does it, but sin that dwells in me.*" (Rom 7:14-20)

"It is no more I that does it," Paul says, "but sin that dwells in me." That is either the greatest copout in the history of the world, or it is the gospel truth. Which do you think it is? Remember, this scripture came to Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Discussing this passage may seem to be a diversion from our topic of fearfulness, but it is such an important truth and

very definitely factors into the problem of fear. If we don't understand this principle of sin in the flesh, it will inevitably lead to condemnation which, by its nature, will result in fearfulness. If you believe that God condemns you for your failures, how can you but be afraid of the presumed consequences?

Paul is speaking in the first person, present tense, "...but *I am* carnal [fleshly]." The context is clear that he is speaking of himself as a born again believer, the new man he now is in Christ. The verses that immediately follow the above passage confirm that fact:

"I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the *inward man*: But I see another law in my members [the flesh], warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." (Rom 7:21-23)

The *inward man* is another expression for the *new man*, the *hidden man*, the *new creature* in Christ, in other words, the born again believer. Paul was anything but a new creature in Christ before he was regenerated by the Spirit of God. Unregenerate people do not delight in the law of God after the inward man because there is no inward man in an unregenerate person, only the sinful flesh. With regard to the religious, the flesh is usually expressed in the form of self-righteousness, as was the case with Saul of Tarsus, the Apostle Paul before he was converted.

Self-righteousness is an affront to the cross of Christ. There is no question that Paul is speaking of himself as a born again believer. We must be deliberate and accurate when interpreting the word of God. We must faithfully put the pieces together making sure our interpretation is consistent with the immediate context and with the entire Bible as a whole. Paul called it rightly dividing the word of truth.⁸⁹

In the above passage, Paul is making an extremely important distinction between the new man and the flesh, between the sinless spirit and the sinful flesh. The sinless

spirit pertains to the new man, Christ in him. The sinful flesh pertains to the old man with the old nature. Yet, here is another rub: While the old man is dead, having been put to death with Christ, the sinful flesh lives on in the old body which as yet has not been regenerated. That won't happen until the resurrection of the believers, when - Great God Almighty! - we will receive a new immortal, incorruptible body.

That the fleshly nature lives on in our mortal bodies is the reason for the struggle Paul is describing in the above passages. It is the battle - the flesh warring against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh - described in Galatians, chapter five.

If we don't make this distinction, we will forever be battling condemnation over the evil tendencies of our fleshly nature, which, though we are regenerated, linger on in our fleshly body, creating a constant struggle with the new, spiritual person we have become in Christ. It would be good to underscore this important point.

Paul goes on to explain the battle with the flesh as doing things that he knows are wrong and not doing the things that he knows he ought to be doing. Can you relate to this? I certainly can.

But, folks, the answer to this struggle is right here in the text. Paul's conclusion is that when he sins, it *is not him*, that is, not the new man he has become in Christ, but the old sinful nature that still resides in his mortal body.

Unfortunately, he had to carry that sinful nature that was in his flesh to his grave, as you and I will have to do. The good news is that when we breathe our last breath we will finally be free of it forever.⁹⁰ What a promise and a hope!

To reiterate a very important point, when we believers sin, it is no longer us who does it but sin that dwells in us. Let that sink down into your soul and spirit. It will liberate you from condemnation over moral lapses and from the fear that results. This may well be one of the most important teachings the Bible has for us. Can you see how liberating it is to know you are free of condemnation right now and forever? Want more proof?

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who do not conduct themselves according to the dictates of the flesh, but according to the dictates of the Spirit." (Rom 8:1 - my paraphrase)

Please take note: this passage immediately follows Paul's explanation of the struggle with the sinful nature of the flesh.

As I have said, God, as a faithful Father, will correct us when we do wrong.⁹¹ But correction (the King James word is chastisement) is *not* punishment. Underline this next statement: Christ bore *all* our punishment on the cross when he was made sin on our behalf.⁹² That's right, *all*. If it were not so, you and I would still be held accountable for our sin. I call it the "Great Exchange". The Lord Jesus took all our sins upon himself, suffering the full weight of the wrath of God that we deserved. In exchange, he gave to those of us who have put our faith in him, *his* righteousness - his innocence before God.

Innocence, that is the meaning of the word, righteousness. It is a form of and a synonym for the word, justification. To be justified is to be made innocent in the eyes of God. That is precisely what God has done for us in Christ - declared us innocent by faith in the Lord Jesus. How marvelous, how wonderful, how unspeakable is the salvation of God that was purchased for us by the Lord Jesus when he willingly went to the cross on our behalf!

Folks, forgiveness is in Christ. Forgiveness belongs to the new man. The flesh with its sinful nature is incapable of forgiveness because it is incorrigible and incapable of repentance.⁹³ We have to accept the fact that the past is the past and can't be relived. What we can do when we make mistakes is submit to God's prescribed will from that time forward.

We all make mistakes. I have made many, some of them life-changing. But in every instance God has given me the opportunity to rectify the error to the degree that it was possible. Of course it always involves confessing my wrong to him and to those I have wronged, and turning back to God in

faith. No wrong choice is totally irredeemable for a child of God.⁹⁴ Is this not one of the reasons we love him so?

But imaginations, present or past, are not the only things we must learn to cast down.

And every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God

Every high thing... That encompasses a whole lot more than imaginations. It includes every untruth - spoken, thought, or written - every false prophecy or false teaching that promulgates untruth. It includes the devil and his demons and all workers of inequity. All of these are perpetrators of fear along with their lies.

Again, God would not tell us to do something that is beyond our capability. Given the regenerated persons we are as believers, given the Spirit of God and the armor of God, it is reasonable to conclude that we have everything we need to overcome fear.

Why then is it that we still fear? The first answer that comes to my mind is unbelief; failure to believe what God has said to be true about us as new creatures in Christ. As believers, we are loved unconditionally and have been given everything we need to be successful in this life.⁹⁵ We have already been made victorious in Christ and are destined to triumph over all our enemies.⁹⁶ These and other innumerable and immutable truths of God's word are our assurance that we have nothing to fear.

When you get down to the core of the matter it is the process of being conformed into the image of Christ that we fear, not the final result. Overcoming through the process is the real challenge.

This is why the Apostle Paul called the spiritual battle we are in the "good fight of faith."⁹⁷ It is the fight to believe what God has said to be true when it seems otherwise. Simply put, we fear when we don't believe God.

However, failure on our part to believe doesn't necessarily mean deliberate rebellion against God. It can very well mean that we haven't the faith to believe and obey, that we haven't

matured enough nor been persuaded of God's love for us. We can be so quick to condemn ourselves and others because we fall short of God's word and will. Not submitting to the will of God out of rebellion is one thing, but not knowing how or feeling inadequate or ill prepared is quite another.

I am ever mindful of the desperate plea of the father in the Gospel of Mark who brought his possessed son to the Lord for healing:

"Jesus said to him, 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes.' And immediately the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, 'I believe, help my unbelief'." (Mk 9:23-24)

God will not fault us for lack of faith if we truly lack it. How many times did the Lord say to his disciples, "Oh you of little faith?" He may have marveled that they still didn't believe, given all the miracles he had done, but he didn't condemn them for it. Instead, he continued to give them more reason to believe until they were persuaded. He will do the same for us.

Another reason for our fearfulness is failure to take seriously God's provisions for overcoming fear. To this point in our discussion that would be refusing to stop projecting into the future and not disciplining our minds to reject anything contrary to the knowledge of God.

A good example of this is found in the Old Testament, when the children of Israel were delivered from the bondage of Egypt. They were afraid to enter the promised land because giants possessed it.⁹⁸

They had witnessed all the plagues upon Egypt. They had seen the pillar of smoke by day and the pillar of fire by night that signified God's presence with them. They had seen the parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army in it. The children of Israel had no excuse for not trusting God to deliver the giants into their hands. Yet fear seized upon them and made them impotent. They had failed to cast down their fearful imaginations. You can read the full account in the book of Numbers, chapter thirteen.

It ought to be obvious that God wants us to be free of fear or he wouldn't have told us three hundred and sixty-five times to not be afraid. But here is another rub. We have a part to play in this process. There are things *we must learn to do* to be free of fear. If we haven't already submitted to God's training, it's time we do so. Becoming fearless just may be the result.

When I first became a believer in Christ, I was so grateful for all that God had delivered me from that I wanted to obey his every word. But as was so often the case in those days, I lacked the wherewithal to perform his word consistently. I hadn't grown enough spiritually to realize that God had given me *everything* I needed to fulfill his word and that he, working within me, would conform me to his will.⁹⁹ Growth, of course, is a process. It's called growing in grace and the knowledge of the Lord, and it takes time.¹⁰⁰ If we are teachable, we will never stop growing, at least not in this temporal life.

It took me years of laboring under legalism - the demand to perform - to finally realize that my relationship with the Lord was not base on *my* performance, but on *his* performance. It is called the New Covenant, a faith-based relationship with God that is based on Christ's perfect life, his perfect obedience, and his perfect sacrifice. In other words, a relationship with God based on Christ's performance *on our behalf*.

When I came to understand this, it was like being born again, *again*. It involved the realization that I was genuinely a new person in the Lord with a standing before God based on Christ's righteousness alone. I had been given his righteousness as a gift, received by faith in him. Oh glorious gospel of grace!

There are other reasons why we still fear: our upbringing, our temperament, tragedies of the past, to name a few. But God in Christ has given us provisions to overcome all of those things and *everything* that might cause us to fear. And just in case you are not convinced and still believe you will never overcome your fears, know this. In the end it won't matter. We are children of God by faith in Jesus Christ,¹⁰¹ whether we overcome fear or not. We can rest in the assurance that

nothing will ever separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus,¹⁰² certainly not our fears. What godly parent would fault or reject a child because they are afraid?

And bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ

The general consensus of the six translations that I use to study the Bible is to interpret this phrase to mean that we are to make every thought we think obedient *to Christ*, and I would not take issue with that. But whose obedience is the Apostle Paul talking about in this verse? Because grammatically speaking, the obedience of Christ is *Christ's obedience*. That is what I believe the Apostle Paul is getting at in this verse.

In other words, the whole focus of this passage - and the key to it - is not our obedience but Christ's obedience. *He* was the obedient One.¹⁰³ *He* was the faithful One¹⁰⁴ in whose steps we are to walk as we allow him to live his life in and through us. Does that make sense to you?

Such an interpretation takes the focus off of us and puts it on Christ, where it belongs. *He* is the fearless one. *His* is the life we now live in the flesh.¹⁰⁵ I believe this to be a major key in overcoming fear and the only sure way to actually do it. We can do nothing of ourselves. We must learn to let him live his fearless life in and through us.

The scenario goes like this: I am fearful, he is fearless. The more I let him live his life through me, the more will I become fearless like him and will express his fearlessness in my own life. The less I let him have his way in my life, the more fearful will I be. Does that also make sense to you?

The decisive element in all this is trust. The only way it will ever come about is by trusting him to bring it about. The more we learn to trust him, the less fearful we will be.

Here is my paraphrase of this section of scripture. I will break it down into smaller paragraphs for easier reading. You can consider it my commentary. I will leave it to you to determine its validity:

"Though we live in a natural, fleshly body, we do not conduct our warfare according to our fleshly, natural abilities. (For the weapons that we conduct our warfare with are not natural or fleshly weapons dependent on our own strength and ability, but are powerful, spiritual weapons we have received from God which are capable of pulling down the strongholds in our lives);

Casting down imaginations, which are nothing more than speculations about the future that may never come to pass, or worries about our past mistakes for which we have been forgiven, and casting down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God - whose knowledge is the only real truth - and taking captive every thought, and *redirecting* it to *Christ's' obedience*, which is laid to our account as though we had lived his perfect life, and which is the basis of our standing before God.

Therefore dwell on *Christ's obedience*, which is a finished work and can *never* be undone and wherein lies our victory. For faith is the victory! We will be vindicated in the end and will judge the unbelieving world for their disobedience, when we have patterned our own obedience after Christ's." (2 Cor 10:3-6, Marv's paraphrase)

Christ's obedience is a perfect obedience. His righteousness is a perfect righteousness. His life is a perfect life. He never violated the will of God. He always did the things that pleased his heavenly Father.¹⁰⁶ None of us can say that. The great Apostle Paul could not say that.¹⁰⁷

The only way Christ's life is going to be reflected in our lives, the only way he is going to be able to live his life in and through us, is for us to focus on him and his life, to believe that he is now *our very life*. If we let him live his life in and through us, it will be reflected in our humanity as it was in his. What a profound thought that is to me! I hope it is to you as well.

Which would you rather stand before God in: Christ's righteousness based on his performance or your own self-

righteousness based on your performance? If you took more than a few seconds to answer that question, you have misunderstood the gospel message as I had. We are so prone to think that it all depends on *our* performance. Wrong!

My own personal experience under legalism and the experience of many others in the body of Christ is evidence that there is a great need for the New Covenant - the gospel of grace - to be emphasized in the churches. The focus of the New Covenant is on Christ's performance, not our own. And what a wonderful truth that is, because it takes the focus off our puny self-effort and puts it on the One who is the embodiment of the divine perfection. It is *his* life that saves us. Oh, wonderful truth!

In the Lord's exhortation in Matthew, chapter six, we are told what *not to do*: don't take thought for tomorrow. In this current passage in Second Corinthians, chapter ten, we are told what *to do*: cast down imaginations and every high things that exalts itself against the knowledge of God and focus only on Christ's obedience. It is *our* responsibility in each case. I wonder how many times we all have violated these injunctions without giving it a second thought. If we are obedient in these two matters, if we are willing to be taught how to do what the Lord has commanded us to do, I believe we will make great progress in the battle against fear.

Chapter 5 Key Points:

1. Fear is a stronghold and must be pulled down.
2. We cannot expect to overcome fear if we haven't been trained to do so.
3. Therefore, submit yourselves to God's training process.
4. Cast down every thought that is contrary to the truth of God.
5. The more we learn to trust God, the less fearful we will be.
6. Focus on Christ and his obedience, not on your own.

Chapter 6 - One Square Yard

Mr. Dickenson (fictitious name) was my high school history teacher. He had been a U.S. Marine in World War II. I can only imagine the horror he experienced in the Pacific theater.

He was a stern man who ran his class like a drill sergeant. No one acted up in Mr. Dickenson's class.

I have no memory of what he taught or what we learned of the subject of history in his class, but one thing he once said has stayed with me all these years. He said, "War is only a yard long and a yard wide." I don't remember the context of that statement or why he said it, but I surmised the meaning to be: "If someone is shooting at you in *your* square yard, you are at war, even if the rest of the world is at peace." In other words, what is happening to you in your immediate set of circumstances is your reality, not what is happening elsewhere.

Conversely - and this is the point I want to make - you can be at peace in your square yard of existence though the entire world be at war. This is not just wishful thinking. According to the Bible, you and I can be at peace *regardless* of what is going on around us. Our Lord said as much just before he went to the cross:

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: *not as the world gives*, do I give to you. Don't let your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (Jn 14:27)

The world's peace is conditioned upon circumstance. Christ's peace transcends circumstance and is not subject to what is going on around us. We can be at peace amidst the worst of circumstance, as has been the testimony of believers throughout history.

Our Savior knew we would have trials and difficulties in this temporal life. It is as much a promise as any other:

"These things I [Jesus] have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world *you shall have* tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (Jn 16:33).

I wonder if perhaps that saying of Mr. Dickenson's has stayed with me these many years that it might serve me in the spiritual warfare I find myself in as a believer in Jesus Christ. I didn't know the Lord then, but I wonder now if he was a believer and understood these promises. I certainly hope so. Perhaps the Lord's promises carried him through his war.

War is only a yard long and a yard wide. That's one square yard. When considered in the Biblical context, it correlates with the Lord Jesus' words in the Gospel of Matthew as we discussed in chapter three, "Take no thought for tomorrow."

We need only be concerned with what is happening to us in our "square yard" of existence *today*. Can you see how focusing on the present leaves no room for worry and fear about the future? It will take continuous effort on our part to train our minds to dwell only on the present, but with practice it can be done. I am finding that out for myself.

So consider everything outside of your square yard as outside of the realm of your existence. That's another world as far as you are concerned. That world can hate, lie, cheat, steal, war - whatever - but you don't exist out there. Your square yard is your *only living reality* despite what is going on around you.

But let's be realistic. There are times when trials and difficulties do enter our square yard. There are believers throughout the world that are exposed to very difficult circumstances at this very moment. You may be one of them. I trust that God's grace is proving sufficient for whatever you or they are going through. God will always be faithful to his own, whatever circumstances befall them. We will discuss how to deal with those times of difficulty in the final chapter.

But some of us are dealing with fear where no real danger is imminent. In such cases, it is most likely that our mind is not staying in our present square yard of reality. Instead, we are projecting our thoughts into someone's else's

reality. The thing to do when that happens is to rein in our thoughts and earnestly pray for those who are truly suffering in *their* square yard. Our freedom from the same difficulty at the present moment puts us in an opportune position to intercede for them. And who knows, the day may come when we need their prayers. That's how the body of Christ is to function, caring for one another.

If we train ourselves to react to thoughts outside of our reality in that way, two positive things will result. One, we will be a tremendous help to those who presently and desperately need our prayers. Two, it will redirect our focus back to *our* present reality, for which we can be thankful.

If it should be that we find ourselves also in imminent danger, this principle doubly applies; we need each other's prayer.

The Apostle Paul, speaking in the first person, makes an interesting point that seems to fit our context here:

"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." (1 Cor 13:11)

The point here is not to chide ourselves over our fearfulness, but to realize it is time for us to mature in our attitude toward suffering and difficulty. Difficult times are upon us - the prophetic signs are all around us - and we are going to have to grow in our faith if we are going to overcome fear and be a light in this dark world.

Perhaps we can't make our square yard in this natural life totally impregnable, but what if we could make it nearly so. I think it's possible. But whether we attain to that degree of impregnability in the natural realm or not, here is the real crux of the matter: "In the spiritual realm of God's reality, the square yard of God's secret hiding place *is* impregnable." How is that for a bold claim?

We will be discussing God's secret hiding place in a later chapter, but for now let's consider a wonderful promise from

the book of Psalms that alludes to the possibility of impregnability:

"Because you have made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, your habitation, *there shall no evil befall you*, neither shall any plague come near your dwelling." (Ps 91:9-10)

What a wonderful promise, which according to the New Testament, is in reference to Christ.¹⁰⁸ But what pertains to Christ pertains to us believers as well, as his body and as coheirs together with him.¹⁰⁹ This passage goes on to explain why it will be that no evil will befall us, but there is a condition attached to it: "*Because you have made the LORD God your dwelling place.*" Keep this precious promise in mind for it is a key element with respect to the secret hiding place of God.

But this brings us to a conundrum. There are many passage in the Bible that speak of God's promise to protect us from harm, but there are just as many that speak of tribulation and difficulty in the life of a believer. How do we reconcile these two seemingly contradictory eventualities?

How do we reconcile, "There shall no evil befall you..." with this passage:

"Then they shall deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and you shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." (Mat 24:9)

This is but one of the seeming contradictions found in the Bible. Yet the word of God is consistent throughout - there are no contradictions! The Holy Spirit, the author of the holy scriptures, *does not* contradict himself.

This may be one of the most challenging conundrums we have to consider, but one that demands an answer. The following is my explanation.

That believers have suffered and continue to suffer at times is undeniable. Church history is replete with evidence of that fact as well the testimony of the word of God itself. America is an anomaly. We believers in America experience

very little suffering on account of our faith in Christ. That may change and is the reason we must come to grips with the possibility and learn to overcome our fears beforehand. It is imperative, if we are to withstand in our evil day, should it come upon us.¹¹⁰

The simple answer to the apparent contradiction above is that tribulation, that is, suffering for the faith in whatever form it takes, is *not* evil from God's point of view. Those who perpetrate suffering are evil and the form that suffering may take may be evil. The scriptures declare that, "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel."¹¹¹ Our adversary is heartless and ruthless, and God allows him, at times, to do harm to his children.

But nevertheless, God is sovereign over everything that happens to us. He remains in complete control over every circumstance. The great sufferer, Job, serves as a good example. Satan could do nothing to Job that God did not allow, and yet he did allow Satan to bring tremendous harm to Job.

Here is another paradox for you to consider: "Satan may do harm *to* us, but he *cannot* harm us." This is to say, by God's sovereign permission Satan may be allowed to bring suffering into our lives, but that suffering can only produce a good and beneficial result. Keep in mind that God's plan is to make us like Christ in every way. That involves some suffering. This may be a difficult truth to understand and accept, but it is the truth nonetheless. It may take the resurrection for us to truly understand it, but in the end it will prove to be so, and that because God is working everything that happens to us for our eternal good, *everything!*¹¹²

Yes, Job's loss was great: ten children, all his wealth, his friends, even his health for a time. But today Job is in heaven with his ten, rather twenty children (after Job's ordeal, the Lord gave him ten more children in addition to the ones he temporarily lost). He is enjoying health and wealth and friends infinitely beyond what he had during his pilgrimage on earth. Are you getting the point? We have to get our focus off this temporal life and onto the life to come. We have to learn to be eternally minded.¹¹³

Apparently, our definition of evil is different from God's. God looks at the sufferings that we go through in this temporal life as necessary steps in the process of conforming us into the image of Christ. He is willing to allow suffering in the life of a believer in order to bring him or her into the divine perfection he has promised to all those who have put their faith in him.¹¹⁴

Perfection - that is what it means to be conformed into the image of Christ. Let your imagination dwell on that, for perfection is your destiny if you are a believer in Christ. In our present imperfect state it may be all but inconceivable that we will one day and forevermore be perfect as Jesus our Lord is perfect. The very thought is humbling and should give rise to ceaseless gratitude, praise, and adoration. It should also help us to more readily accept the difficulties that come our way.

As I have said before, the end result God has determined for us justifies the means it takes to bring us to that result. Whether we believe that now or not, the day will come when we will thank him for all that it took to make us like Christ, the perfect expression of humanity. And, friends, you can count on that. God will not be thwarted in his plans for those who believe in him.¹¹⁵

If we define evil as the horrendous things the devil perpetrates on us, then, yes, there is a contradiction of statements. How can it be that no evil will happen to us? But if we look at Satan's evil deeds as God does, as a tool that he uses to perfect us, it begins to make sense. Understanding this may not make the suffering we are called to endure any less difficult, but it will put it in a whole different light, lending purpose and hope to tragedy. We simply must learn to see and evaluate things the way God does. Of course, that takes faith and trust and steadfast hope, which is the assurance of the final outcome. And folks, the final outcome will come shortly. This temporal life is very short - it is but a handbreadth, according to King David.¹¹⁶ And that is a very short span. If the Lord doesn't come for us soon, we will go to him soon enough, as millions have already done.

Since God's ways are perfect, I have to believe that if there was another way to accomplish God's plan to create a

perfect humanity, he would have done it another way. While I don't like suffering any more than the next person, I am content to trust him in this, based on his integrity and his trustworthy character alone, though at times my heart may falter. At those times of faltering I thank God that my relationship to him and my security in Christ are not dependent upon my performance or my puny faith. I am convinced that I am saved by Christ's performance and his faith alone. I have such assurance - and so do you - as this:

"If we do not believe [if we falter in our faith], yet he abides faithful; he cannot deny himself." (2 Tim 2:13)

Our Savior cannot deny himself because we are flesh of *his* flesh and bone of *his* bones - his body, the body of Christ.¹¹⁷ Oh glorious wonder!

Here is yet another wonderful assurance from the inspired word of God:

"Knowing that a man is not justified [made innocent] by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed *in* Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by *the faith of Christ*, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Gal 2:16 KJV)

If this seems like another diversion from our topic, it is also not. If we want to overcome fear, we must understand the New Covenant gospel. Much of our fear stems from a misunderstanding of our position in Christ and what God has done for us in him. If we are afraid of what the world or the devil might do to us, it is because we are not secure in the love of God - that marvelous love that casts out fear. I hope you can see the connection.

The verse above from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatian believers is key to understanding the basis of our salvation. You will not get the distinction Paul is making in that statement from many of the modern translations. Of the five other translations that I use in studying the scriptures

(ESV, NKJV, NASB, NIV, AMPC), none of them translate this verse properly.

We are made innocent by *the faith of Christ*, Paul says. Whose faith is that, his or ours? He goes on to say that we have believed *in* Jesus Christ, that we might be declared innocent by the faith *of* Christ.

Forgive my repetition, but this is such an important distinction, it bears repeating. The verse under consideration entails two kinds of faith, Christ's and ours. *Our* faith *in* Jesus is the faith *we* exercise when we believe in him. It is *our* faith that appropriates what *he* has done for us in order to purchase our salvation. It is *his* faith - his faithfulness to do the will of God as our sin-bearer - that renders us innocent. Sadly, most modern translations also fail to make this distinction. It is *his* faith that we now live by.¹¹⁸

To understand that and believe it is salvation indeed. I sincerely hope that your confidence is in what the Lord Jesus has done *for you* and not what you think you need to do for him in order to be saved or stay saved.

My faith, little though it may be, brings me into and secures the salvation that Christ has purchased for me through *his* obedience. That is because God has made it so very easy to be saved: "Simply believe the gospel." The Lord said, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved."¹¹⁹ I believe and have been baptized. I hope you have also. What Christ has done, he has done. Nothing in heaven, on earth, or in hell can undo his finished work on the cross. "For by one offering he [Christ Jesus] has perfected *forever* those who are sanctified."¹²⁰ That's you and me, folks, sanctified, cleansed by the blood of Christ. For how long? *Forever!* It is our choice to believe it or not believe it. That choice determines our eternal destiny. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Are we called to obedience? Of course we are. Are we called to a holy life? Of course we are. Are we called to serve, to deny ourselves? Of course we are. And to the degree we fulfill those callings we will be rewarded, both in this life and in the life to come. But salvation is based on faith *in him alone*, that is, in what he has accomplished through his atoning death and resurrection. Anything else is to add to

God's requirement for salvation, to devalue the grace of God, and to deny the efficacy of our Lord's sacrifice. We cannot add one iota to Christ's perfect sacrifice on our behalf. This is why we are told in Ephesians, chapter two that we can't take credit for anything that pertains to our salvation.¹²¹ It is all of God.

Any reward we might receive is indeed based on our service and in that regard I suppose you could say that service is a performance. However, it in no way has anything to do with the procuring of our salvation. We serve the Lord out of gratitude for the unspeakable gift he has given us. That he rewards us for doing so is yet another expression of his incredible grace and goodness and generosity toward us. The gospel truth is that even our service is the result of God's work in us for which we can take no credit.¹²²

What you and I need to do is believe what God has said he accomplished in sending Christ to the cross, period! Self-effort, a performance-based gospel (and there are dozens of them out there, folks) will produce one of two things. It will either produce condemnation over our failure to perform the way we think we need to in order to be saved or stay saved, or else it will produce self-righteousness because we think our performance has merited salvation. Wrong in both instances! Salvation, which is to say, eternal life, is a gift.¹²³ It cannot be earned. It can only be received or rejected. That is the indisputable nature of a gift.

A brief anecdote will, I hope, drive this point home. Many years ago my wife and I were involved in a church Christmas play. We played the part of the innkeeper and his wife. Three kids from the church played the shepherds. As you will recall, the night Jesus was born an angel appeared to the shepherds to announce the birth of the long-awaited Messiah. At the appearance of the angel, the shepherds were terrified, but the angel said to them, "Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."¹²⁴

The man who played the angel had without doubt the deepest voice in the congregation. He bellowed his lines from backstage. Now imagine his booming voice saying, "Fear not!" In response, the shepherd kids quaked melodramatically. Their antics were quite funny and drew laughter from the

audience. But the angel's retort to their quaking response brought down the house. He said to them in that same thundering voice, "Just what part of 'fear not' is it that you don't understand?" It was hilarious!

I recount this anecdote to make a point that I don't want you to forget. *Eternal life is a gift!* But there are dozens of teachings out there that want to make it a work, that is, something we have to earn. If an angel were to appear to us today, I suspect he would thunder, "Just what part of *gift* is it that you don't understand?" Have I made my point?

Can you see how misunderstanding the "good news" of the gospel relates to the issue of fear. Remaining in our square yard of present reality for deliverance from fear involves believing what God has said to be true about salvation in Christ. There is no freedom from fear without the truth of the gospel.

Fear of harm from others and an unhealthy fear of God stem from insecurity in our relationship to God. To fear evil is to doubt God's perfect love for us, that love which alone can cast out fear.

Overcoming fear is a challenging endeavor and all this is easy enough to expound, but bringing it into experiential reality is quite another thing. It will take the grace of God working in our lives. It will take earnest faith on our part. It will take an unfeigned trust in God, and alas, who has such faith and trust? I don't, not completely, not yet anyway. But my hope is that God, in his infinite love and grace, as he works day by day in my life will bring me to that point of faith and trust before I finish my course. That is my expectation. I hope it is yours as well.

* * * *

I am not writing to the fearless in Christ Jesus, if indeed there are any, but to those of us who struggle with fear. I don't know about you, but I am not ashamed to admit that I struggle with fear. I can admit that because I understand who I am in Christ and that God has not finished perfecting me. But I expect him to do so based on the promises in his word.

So I will wait as patiently and cooperatively as I can until he finishes his marvelous work in me, as he will in every member of the body of Christ. That includes you, my friend, if you are a believer in Christ. You can bet eternity on that.

Well, that is my answer to the question of reconciling the evil that befalls believers with God's promise to protect us from harm. I will have more to say about suffering in the life of a believe in a later chapter. For now suffice it to say that, concerning evil, it comes down to believing that everything that happens to us in this life is by God's permission and works for our eternal good and therefore is not really evil after all. The sovereign God has assured us of that. Does that make sense to you? How can something really be evil if it results in our eternal benefit?

I am fully aware that some of you may have already suffered greatly, loss of a spouse or a child or other loved one. Or perhaps loss of health or mobility due to illness or accident. We all suffer loss of some kind in this life, some more devastating than others. No one gets through unscathed. But can you imagine the inexpressible joy you will feel when you are reunited with your loved ones in the resurrection, or when you are made completely whole? When relationships are completely restored? When young children deprived of life in this temporal age are allowed to grow up in a perfect world, free of sin and suffering? Oh my, what a day that will be! Great God of glory, come quickly!

* * * *

In this and the previous chapters I have offered some practical ways to overcome fear based on the word of God. I hope you will consider the cited verses as admonishments and not mere suggestions. It behooves us to heed them. Failing to take the Lord's admonishments seriously can result in such maladies as depression, anger, physical ailments, and the like, all of which contribute to our fears.

One square yard, it is the realm of our existence. God intends for it to be a safe haven for us *in the Spirit* as we move through this life trusting in him.

Chapter 6 Key Points:

1. Be concerned only with what is happening in your square yard today.
2. Because your personal square yard is your present and only reality.
3. God is in complete control over everything that happens to you.
4. Focus less on this temporal life and more on the life to come.
5. Perfection - the end result - justifies the means to get us there.
6. We incur negative results if we fail to heed the Lord's admonitions.

Chapter 7 - Self-Talk And Negative Thinking

This brings us to another important topic in our struggle with fear called self-talk. There is a definite correlation between the two. When self-talk is negative it affects the way we think and this in turn contributes to our fears. A number of books have been written on this subject. I have found *Telling Yourself The Truth*, by William Backus and Marie Chapien very helpful in explaining how to overcome negative self-talk and negative thinking. The following are my brief thoughts on the matter.

As the term implies, self-talk refers to what we say to ourselves or think about ourselves. In addition to what we say or think about ourselves, our self-image is greatly influenced by what others say or have said about us. These can be statements that we have come to believe are true whether they are true or not, and that is where the stumbling block occurs. We often lack the discernment to distinguish lies from truth. We are prone to believe lies merely because someone we assume has credibility has spoken them to us or because we have unwittingly spoken them to ourselves. In fact, the power of the spoken word is such that even when we don't attribute credibility to those who have spoken unkind things to us, the words they speak can nevertheless hurt us deeply. These can leave wounds that may take years to heal, and some only God can heal. I am certain that some of you can identify with this.

Of course, the Bible is the indispensable standard by which we distinguish lies from truth, so a good knowledge of the scriptures is essential in our battle against fear. Ignorance of the truth will almost always produce fear because ignorance opens the way for untruth to penetrate our minds. In this way Satan, the father of lies, attempts to instill fear in us by his lies. It is the truth that makes us free, and one of the things it frees us from is fear.¹²⁵ If daily Bible reading and study are not a part of your routine, I suggest you make it a habit. Knowing God's word is one of the chief remedies for fear because the Bible teaches us how to overcome it.

Discerning lies from truth has been a major issue since the beginning of time. Satan, symbolically represented as a serpent, lied to Eve in the Garden of Eden, basically telling her that she could be like God without God. Eve must have considered the serpent a credible source; she believed him. And you know the rest of that tragic story. Her lack of discernment brought sin into the world and with it fear, wrecking havoc on the human race. But lest we condemn her for her error, remember that she is a type of us believers, the church, just as Adam is a type of Christ.¹²⁶ Were any one of us in her place, we would no doubt have made the same mistake.

I have admitted to you that prior to understanding the harmful practice of negative self-talk, most of my thought life was negative. I was shocked to discover this seven decades into my life, but I simply wasn't consciously aware of how extreme it was and what a devastating effect it had on my life. I blamed my negativity on my melancholy temperament and accepted it as normal. Well, it is normal for the melancholy temperament in its raw, unregenerate state, but it is not normal for the Spirit-controlled child of God. Nevertheless, negativity had become a habit, the pre-programmed thinking pattern of my life. Maybe you can relate to this as well.

With very little effort, I can recall most every negative and hurtful thing anyone has ever said to me or that I have said to myself, dating back to my grade school days. Several come to mind even as I write this - painful memories that have left deep scars. I am convinced that every thought, every impression we have ever had, is stored in our brain and capable of being brought back to conscious memory. Given the appropriate stimulus - a word or picture or an associated thought- it is amazing how we can recollect disturbing thoughts. Sometimes memories seemingly return without stimulus, unexpectedly out of no where. At those times we ask ourselves, where did that come from? Is this no so with you?

The mind is a vast "hard drive," a vast storage bank and it is believed that we are making use of only a small part of its capability. It's all there, folks, every thought, every impression

we've ever had. And many of those thoughts and impressions are negative and have had a negative impact on the way we have lived our lives.

All that said, how does negative self-talk and negative thinking relate to our problem with fear? My answer: "Fear is a negative thought." For one thing, it is not trusting God. It is not trusting him for safety when in danger. It is not trusting that he has a purpose when he seemingly doesn't keep us safe from danger. And it is not trusting him for deliverance yet to come when he allows us to go through difficult times.¹²⁷

Learning to trust God is a process and is acquired through repeated experiences of his faithfulness in our lives. Our faith and trust grow as God demonstrates *his* faithfulness to us time and time again. The Apostle John said that we love God because he first loved us.¹²⁸ I think it can also be said, we trust God because *he first* proved his trustworthiness to us. And the more he proves his trustworthiness to us, the more we will trust him. And here is the ultimate benefit: The more we learn to trust him, the less fearful we will be.

Again, that is a process, a life-long process. So don't condemn yourself for lacking trust in God. You and I are works in progress. Our part is to be willing to be taught to trust him, as he proves his trustworthiness to us through the challenges of this earthly life. Just as the father in the Gospel of Mark cried out, "I believe, help my unbelief," we can cry out, "I trust you, Lord, help my lack of trust in you." In other words, help me to trust you more completely.

Negative thoughts produce negative results. Likewise, fear also produces negative results. Is there not a direct connection between the two?

Remember high school algebra? If "A" equals "B" and "B" equals "C" then "A" equals "C" as well. If negative thoughts produce negative results and fear produces negative results, then negative thoughts and fear are essentially one and the same thing. In this context they are inextricably connected.

Do not be quick to dismiss this as insignificant. Eliminating negative thinking will go a long way toward eliminating fear. This may not be easy, but it is not as difficult as you might think. We may not be able to stop evil things

from happening, but we can train ourselves to stop thinking negative thoughts about them and projecting negativity into the future.

The late J. Vernon MaGee, that wonderful radio Bible teacher of years past, used to say: "You can't stop the birds from flying over your head, but you don't have to let them build a nest in your hair." We may not be able to stop negative thoughts from presenting themselves, but we don't have to entertain them or give energy to them. With practice, we can repudiate them. That's the good news. We can reprogram our minds to reject negative thinking and replace it with truth, thereby repudiating fear as well.

Yes, it will take effort on our part, but it can be done and will be worth it. As I understand the scriptures, with the proper training it will be possible to look fear in the face and reject it outright. That is a bold statement, I know, and I am admitting to you that I am not there yet. But I simply can't deny what the Bible has to say about all this. It is the conclusion I have come to based on the word of God, and I know his word is true. You will have to come to your own conclusion. But when considering, keep in mind the history of the church throughout the centuries, how believers have faced danger with courage and faith. They weren't necessarily super-saints. Many were ordinary, everyday people like you and me. But by the grace of God, they were able to stand for God in their evil day.

I am not suggesting that believers who have suffered throughout history never experienced fear, but that they learned to overcome their fears. We can do the same, if we will but trust the Lord to teach us how.

Now, if you are like me, you may be thinking this all sounds feasible, even believable, but it isn't something *I* can attain to. Well, if you have thought that way, then we both have succumbed to negative thinking, which makes this an excellent case in point.

Do you see how the way we think and what we think can negate the word of God. He has said over and over again, "Do not be afraid." We must believe that it is possible to do so, after all, it is the word of God. And we can learn how through

the experiences God brings us through, if we are teachable. Being teachable is a prerequisite to overcoming fear. If we are unwilling to be taught by God, there is little hope of overcoming fear or making any progress in the faith, for that matter. Perhaps we need to do some serious soul-searching on this point.

As I have alluded to before, it is all but impossible to be free of fear without faith and trust in God. And faith and trust in God is all but impossible where negative thinking and negative self-talk exist. These two culprits are among the primary causes of fear. I doubt it is possible to eliminate fear without eliminating negativity in whatever form it takes. The two seem to go hand in hand in hindering our lives, negative thinking usually being the cause and fear being the result, though it can at times be the other way around.

Doubts do arise. I am inclined to think they are part of the process. But let's not reinforce them by negative self-talk and negative thinking. We will have the opportunity to work on any tendency toward these two faith-challenging, insidious, and often transparent habits in the next chapter for we will be discussing the unpleasant topic of suffering. I hope you will approach it with faith and trust.

Chapter 7 Key Points:

1. Negative self-talk and negative thinking contribute to our fears.
2. Knowing God's word is one of the chief remedies for fear.
3. Fear is a negative thought and is the result of not trusting God.
4. Learning to trust God comes through experiencing his faithfulness.
5. Eliminating negative thinking and self-talk will help eliminate fear.
6. Being teachable is a prerequisite to overcoming fear.

Chapter 8 - Suffering In The Life Of A Believer

Since fear is linked to suffering, I feel it appropriate to address the issue of suffering in the life of a believer in this discussion. We simply must come to grips with this unpleasant issue. It goes without saying that no one but the masochist enjoys suffering. Yet God has deemed it a necessary part of his plan for us and has a definite, positive purpose for it.

Just as negative thinking is likely to generate fear, challenging our faith and trust in God, suffering, whether real or imaginary, will very likely also create fear in our hearts. As I stated at the beginning of this study, ingrained in the DNA of the natural man is the instinct to survive. Suffering runs contrary to that instinct posing a real or imaginary threat to our survival. Yet God, in his divine wisdom, allows it in the lives of believers, raising in our minds the recurrent question, why? In this chapter I hope to offer legitimate answers to that question, but let's lay some ground work before we consider the reasons.

Let's face it, most of us believe the buck stops with God. That is to say, we are prone to believe that God is the ultimate cause of the difficulties that come our way. Why? Because we believe that God is sovereign and that he can do anything, and that is true, "With God *all* things are possible."¹²⁹ Since that is true, we reason that he can also *stop* anything from happening, if he chooses to do so. Well, can he? Of course he can, but he doesn't always. So then, *he* must be ultimately responsible for the difficulties and tragedies and the evil things that happen to us. *He* is to blame. It's a logical conclusion. Now most of us know better than to voice such an affront to God, but in our heart of hearts we may at times think it.

Maybe you have never thought this way, but I confess to you that I have. The sovereignty of God, which I fully believe in, seems to demand such a conclusion. Of course, to blame God is blasphemy. God does not, *cannot*, do evil.¹³⁰ To do so would be a violation of his divine nature, which is unthinkable. He is perfect in all his ways. Yet people are constantly blaming him for the evil works of the devil: wars,

starvation, disease, etc. Sadly, even we believers do the same at times when tragedy strikes. It seems a natural response. We just don't understand the cause and effect of things, how God has predetermined the consequences for every choice that is made.

But the fact that he has predetermined the consequences does not negate his sovereignty over them. On the contrary, it is proof of his sovereignty. And a good thing too. He has left nothing to chance. Being sovereign, he can intervene any time he chooses and he has done so time and again throughout history. That he doesn't always intervene may be a mystery to us, but it is never without purpose. We will discuss the principle of cause and effect in the next chapter, which I hope will explain to some degree why God doesn't always intervene in human affairs.

Yes, we believe that God is sovereign. But here is the contradiction in our thinking: "While we may believe he is sovereign over everything else, we often don't believe he is sovereign over *our own* life, especially when tragedy strikes." If we really believed in his sovereignty, there would be no room to question him about anything that happens to us. Once again, to get to that point of confidence and trust is a process. We are so quick to forget what he started with: fearful, insecure, unbelieving lost souls who didn't know our right hand from our left. I can't say it enough, we are in process of becoming who God created us to be. Let's be patient and let him do his perfect work in us and with us.¹³¹ We will be forever grateful in the end.

Let's be careful not to blame God for things we don't understand. I remember a time when in extreme sorrow I shook my fist at God and said, "How could you let this happen to me?" When I consider what an insult that was to my heavenly Father, I am ashamed that I would think to find fault with his impeccable character and divine perfection. Thank you, Lord, for your mercy upon me and your forgiveness. I didn't realize how foolish I was in blaming you.

Blaming God can be thought of as a form of self-talk in which we mentally entertain erroneous thoughts about God and draw erroneous conclusions about him. In other words,

blaming God is another form of negative thinking and will inevitably contribute to our fears due to wrong concepts about the personhood of God. We simply must learn to control our thought life, demanding that it line up with the truth of God. We must reprogram our minds. That is going to take deliberate effort on our part.

We also mustn't forget that our gracious God knows us through and through and feels our pain when tragedy and loss enter our lives. The truth is, no one experiences pain and suffering apart from God. This is a fact of existence: "In him [God] we live and move and have our being."¹³² We exist in God. There is no suffering outside of God or apart from him because there is no "outside" to him. The entire universe exists *in him*. That will challenge your mental capacity if anything will, but it is true. When the incomprehensible God created the universe, he created it within himself. Remember, God is a Spirit, an infinite, omnipresent Spirit.¹³³ He is everywhere at once. No place exists where the ever-present God isn't present. Everything exists *in him*.¹³⁴

If you and I could travel beyond the farthest star, if indeed there is a farthest star (there is no reason to think there is an end to the universe, as it typifies the infinitude of God), we would still be *in God*, because there is nothing outside of him. He is infinite, boundless. The infinitude of God, though next to impossible to grasp, is an essential and inescapable aspect of his divine nature.

If there were something or someone outside of God, it would present the possibility that *that* something or someone could be more powerful than our God. If so, he might have a different agenda, in which case God's revealed attributes and his eternal purpose would be found to be a lie and God himself a liar. If that were the case, our hope would vanish into vapor. But we are told that God, *our* God, cannot lie.¹³⁵ Furthermore, we have the testimony of God himself who spoke through the prophet Isaiah saying:

"Thus says the LORD the King of Israel, and his [Israel's] redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; beside me there is no God." (Isa 44:6)

"You are my witnesses, says the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me." (Isa 43:10)

Listen, when anyone suffers, the one true and infinite God, the *only* God, suffers along with them. Meditate on that, if you will. It will or ought to humble you as it does me. To understand that and believe it will result in a whole new perspective on suffering and on the character of God. He is not aloof, looking down on us poor suffering humans from an untouched vantage point in the heavens. He is intimately joined to us in all things we experience. Any parent who has had to watch their child suffer will understand this. Do you not suffer along with your child?

And of course, what is true of God the Father is true also of Christ:

"For we do not have a high priest [the Lord Jesus] who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was *in all points* tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Heb 4:15)

"For in that *he himself* [Christ] has suffered, being tempted, he is able to comfort them that are tempted." (Heb 2:18)

"Lo, I am with you *always*, even unto the end of the world."

(Mat 28:20)

The Lord Jesus is with us in our suffering as well. He suffered like no other human, and God the Father suffered with him.¹³⁶ (I tremble at the thought.) And we have to include the Holy Spirit in this equation. What happens to one member of the Godhead happens to them all, because they are inseparable.¹³⁷

Some of you may have undergone serious tragedy and loss, far more than I have. I hope you can be comforted by the

knowledge that God himself has suffered with you. In the end, he will replace all sorrow with everlasting joy. Have you lost a child, a loved one? You shall be reunited with him or her on that glorious day when the King returns and the church is raised in the divine perfection of its bridegroom. The difficult part for us is waiting for that day. Oh come quickly, Lord Jesus!

"In his favor is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." (Ps 30:5b)

The ultimate "morning" begins with the resurrection of the church, when we shall physically enter into everlasting joy with all our loved ones who have gone before us.¹³⁸ In the mean time, God is faithful to grant us joy in the Lord now, even in times of suffering. Let's trust him to do so.

* * * *

The explanation for evil in the world is actually quite simple: "God has given mankind what is termed free will - the freedom to make our *own* choices." He gave the same to Lucifer and the angelic host. You know how that went. Like the fallen angels, some people make evil choices. Of course, they will receive their due, if they do not call upon God for forgiveness. The wonder is that God can turn evil into good in the lives of believers who have been victimized by the devil.

But it remains that freedom of choice is integral to the gospel message. Without it man would be nothing but a programmed, robotic creature at the mercy of a higher power who predetermines man's eternal destiny - who he would save and who he would damn.

To believe such a notion is a reproach upon the character of God and an insult to the cross of Christ who atoned for the sins of *the whole world*.¹³⁹ In so doing, the Lord gave every soul of Adam's race the freedom to choose life or death. But that is another issue, one that we can't elaborate on in our current study. I make mention of it only to substantiate the point that if we feel we have no control over what happens to

us, or worse yet, if we believe that God has no control over what happens to us, we are going to experience fear. Peace and freedom from fear can only come from confidence in God's sovereign control over everything that happens to us.

I am compelled to repeat this again in bold print:

Peace and freedom from fear can only come from confidence in God's sovereign control over everything that happens to us.

Perfect peace can only come by trusting God.¹⁴⁰ When we succumb to distrust and negative thoughts, we are doubting God's love for us and his sovereign control over our lives. We are doubting that he will take care of us regardless of what happens to us, no matter what he *allows* to happen to us. When we entertain negative thoughts we are doubting God's word. We are doubting that he is seeing to it that everything that happens to us will produce a positive result in our lives.¹⁴¹ This is true even of the tragedies that befall us in whatever form they may take. Being conformed into the image of Christ involves suffering. That was true of the Lord Jesus when he walked the earth two thousand years ago:

"For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation [Jesus] perfect through sufferings." (Heb 2:10)

It is true of us as well. Let's accept that in faith and trust. It is God's all-wise way of bringing us into perfection. We won't have to fear the process if we learn to trust our God. We may lack the faith to see that now because we don't fully understand God's ways and have not matured enough in the faith. But we will surely see it after the resurrection, when we shall understand all things.¹⁴²

I want to interject here that not all suffering is physical. Much of our suffering is on the emotional level, which may be even more difficult to endure. My guess is that many of you can identify with this also. I have experienced some physical

pain in my life as no doubt you have also. But I would rather go through some of that pain again than some of the emotional anguish I have experienced.

Yes, we may experience suffering, but it isn't necessarily physical suffering that we are called upon to endure. Keep that in mind when you contemplate fearful thoughts. Better yet, don't contemplate them at all. You may be enduring or have already endured your appointed allotment of suffering, so don't waste time or emotional energy worrying about the future.

Once while I was going through a devastating set of circumstances, a friend sent me a card with this inscription: "Nothing touches me that has not passed through the hands of my heavenly Father, *nothing!*" I can't overstate how comforting the knowledge of that was at the time. To this day it continues to be a comfort. I hope that thought will be a comfort to you as well.

* * * *

With trust and confidence in God, let's consider a few more verses on the subject of suffering. After all, the Bible is or ought to be the indisputable authority in the life of a believer. Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul:

"For unto you [believers] it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake."
(Phil 1:29)

As difficult as it may be to accept, this is as much a promise as any other. God has given us many wonderful promises for this life and the future and we receive and anticipate these gladly and with gratitude. But suffering is a whole other matter for most of us.

Of course, God understands this and is very gracious and pitiful toward us. Nevertheless, he deems suffering a necessary part of the conforming process as he molds and shapes us into the image of Christ. We might think of it in the same way that we do a necessary medical procedure. There

may be some pain involved that we are naturally averse to, but the result will be for our good and grateful will we be that we subjected ourselves to the process.

Faith teaches us to trust God, though we may not understand his ways now. I believe the day will come, be it not until the resurrection, that we will thank God for all that he allowed us to endure in being made like Christ, the perfect One, so wonderful will be the final result.

King David understood this full well:

"As for me, I will behold your face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with your likeness." (Ps 17:15)

Awaking with the likeness of Christ is of course a reference to the resurrection, in which King David fully expected to take part. From a literary standpoint, this verse is understatement, to say the least. He along with you and I will be more than merely satisfied when we awake with the likeness of Christ. We will be *ecstatic!*

Here is another promise concerning suffering, spoken by the Lord himself:

"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world *you shall have tribulation*: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (Jn 16:33)

We would just as soon edit out these kinds of promises, if we could. Well, I'll speak for myself anyway. But in the end we would regret doing so, because God's ways are perfect. His plan for us is perfect, and were we to alter it, we would end up with something less than the best for ourselves. Of course, it takes faith to believe that. If we don't have that kind of faith presently, let's look to God for it. And here is a clue:

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom 10:17)

If we believe God's word, we are compelled to come to the conclusion that God's way is perfect, however difficult the process is. Rather than make every effort to avoid suffering, let's learn to accept it as a necessary step in the conforming process. God knows what he is doing and he is in complete control of everything that happens to us. Do you believe that?

In this world *we will have* tribulation. In the next, *we will have* everlasting joy and peace. The Apostle Paul more than confirms this:

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom 8:18)

And again:

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor 4:17)

If you are familiar with the Biblical account of the Apostle Paul's life, you no doubt will find it amazing, as I have, that he would call his afflictions light. He could only make that statement in view of the result - the surpassing glory that is yet to be revealed in all of our lives.

The Apostle Peter echoed these thoughts:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, *if need be*, you are in heaviness through many temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried

with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet 1:3-7)

I have italicized the phrase, *if need be*, because it is a key point. Apparently Peter also understood that there is a need for suffering in the life of the believer. Of course, it is God who determines the need. We have to trust him in that.

King David also understood the need for suffering:

"Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now I have kept your word." (Ps 119:67)

"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn your statutes." (Ps 119:71)

"I know, O LORD, that your judgments are right, and that you in faithfulness have afflicted me." (Ps 119;75)

This last verse is a conformation of the sovereignty of God in the life of a believer. David's afflictions occurred at the hands of evil men, but he understood it was God who allowed it. In reality, it was God who afflicted him.

There just isn't any way to get around this. It has been given unto us to experience some form of suffering and it can take many different forms and many different degrees. My guess is that the greater majority of believers throughout history - and there have been millions - have not suffered as severely as Paul did. But the hard truth is, we all get a taste of it.

The Apostle Peter, in a desire to encourage the suffering believers he was writing to, had this to say:

"Whom [the devil] resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." (1Pet 5:9)

Others experience the same afflictions, though often through different circumstances. We don't all go through the

same things. God knows our frame and what we can handle. He knows our limits and has given us assurance:

"There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above that which you are able [to bear]; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it." (1 Cor 10:13)

While some affliction may be our lot, do not make the mistake of projecting into the future as we talked about in chapter three. You may have already experienced your share of affliction. The point is, don't entertain any fearful thoughts for the future.¹⁴³ God has the future covered. God has it under control. We can trust him, no matter what the future brings.

I doubt there is anyone reading these words who hasn't already gone through difficult circumstances. Well, God has brought you through thus far, hasn't he? As was mentioned previously, we all have a track record with God. We all have experienced his faithfulness, praise his name! Let that track record be your assurance that he will bring you through to the end.

* * * *

You might think it strange that a message about overcoming fear would include a section on suffering. Wouldn't it be more comforting to avoid such a discussion? But the Lord Jesus did say that the truth would make us free.¹⁴⁴ Let's be brave enough to face the truth. Doing so will pave the way to dealing with it properly and while it may be a little uncomfortable to talk about, I believe it is the pathway to victory over fear.

If a medical examination exposed a serious medical problem, wouldn't you want your doctor to tell you about it so you could prepare yourself and deal with it in the proper way? I certainly would. I would not want to go on in ignorance

without treatment. Treatment offers hope. The Bible says we are saved by hope.¹⁴⁵

The word of God has a number of hard things to say to us and being ignorant of them or ignoring them will not change the facts. When it comes to the word of God, ignorance is *not* bliss.

With that in mind, let us consider a few more perhaps uncomfortable Biblical truths:

"Whosoever will come after me [Jesus], let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Mk 8:34)

Here is my hypothetical response to that statement: "Okay, Lord, I've picked up my cross and am ready to follow you. Where are we going?" His answer: "To Golgotha. Where did you think we were going?" My response to his answer: "*Gulp!*"

How is that for a comforting scenario? Just reading those words can arouse fear in our hearts. But we are to remember that the Lord has told us not to be afraid (365 times). We are back to that paradox. Do you see what I am getting at? There *must* be a way to acknowledge and accept these hard truths and yet not be afraid of them. We are moving toward discovering that way as we continue in this study. We cannot afford to ignore the Lord's words. There is too much at stake.

Fear is a form of suffering, is it not? Many of us suffer at the hands of our fears, whether those fears are based on reality or not. A sad plight indeed. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews recognized this when he said that Christ delivered us "who through fear of death were all [our] lifetime subject to bondage."¹⁴⁶ Is there not suffering in the fear of death?

William Shakespeare, in his play, *Julius Caesar*, wrote: "Cowards die many times before their deaths. The valiant never taste of death but once."

How true that is. Let's learn to be valiant men and women of God, trusting God both for our remaining time on the earth and for the time of our passing into glory. And, folks, in the

end, it will be glorious and quite possibly a whole lot easier than we expected. Remember, the Lord won't subject us to anything beyond what we can bear.¹⁴⁷

Have I depressed you by this discussion? If I didn't think there was a solution and a happy ending to all this, I would not have included it in this study.

Certainly suffering and fear go hand and hand. Without the one there is very little reason for the other. Once again the book of Job serves as a good example. Satan wished to destroy Job because of his impeccable testimony. No doubt many had come to faith in God through Job's godly life. But Satan could do *absolutely nothing* to Job that God did not allow him to do. We should be very much comforted by that fact.

The question arises, why would God allow Satan to harm his consummate servant, Job, in such a devastating way? We might ask and probably often have, why would God allow Satan to harm *any* of us? Those are excellent questions to ask ourselves and they deserve an answer. The latter may well be the question of the ages: "Why human suffering?" Remarkably, I found my answer to those questions in the book of Job.

Years ago I was asked to teach an overview study of this book. I had read it many times prior, but I had never studied it. I identified with Job, for I had gone through my own set of difficult circumstances, though nothing compared to his. But, alas, no trial seems small when you are going through it. Preparation for the study proved most beneficial for me.

There are forty-two chapters to the book of Job and he suffered through forty-one of them. But then came chapter forty-two when, "The Lord turned the captivity of Job."¹⁴⁸

I scoured the text looking for what it was that caused God to end Job's trial. I thought, if I could only discover the turning point, I could do whatever brought it about and be delivered from my own trial as well.

As it was, my chapter forty-two didn't come for a number of years, but it came at last, though it didn't come from me figuring out this deep and complex book. In the end, I concluded among other things that dying to "self" was the

principle goal of Job's ordeal and mine. After all, there is just no way to be conformed into the image of Christ apart from death to the self-life. If you agree with that, you have discovered perhaps the main cause of fear - death to self.

In Job's case, what had to be put to death in his life was self-righteousness, the all but inevitable result of his nearly impeccable life.

John the Baptist understood the necessity of dying to self full well:

"He [Christ] must increase, but I [my self-life] must decrease."

(Jn 3:30)

I assume that God accomplished his purpose for my ordeal at the time of my Job experience, for it involved much dying to self. If you are in your own Job experience, be patient. There is a Job, chapter forty-two, for every child of God - a time when God delivers us out of our distress as he did Job. So never give up hope. The ultimate chapter forty-two will come for us all when we breathe our last breath and go to be with the Lord. I wait with anticipation for that day to come.

In preparing for that overview study of the book of Job, I discovered no less than twelve reasons for suffering as a believer - *twelve!* I will list them with a brief explanation for each one. You will have to decide for yourself whether they are valid reasons for suffering or not. For this list to make sense, it would be good to follow along in the King James Version of the Bible or at the very least the New King James version. Other translations will not always render the meaning the same.

Reasons for suffering in the life of a believer (From the book of Job)

1. To expose our hearts - God allowed Satan to put Job to the test to show Satan and Job where Job's heart was with respect to faith in God.¹⁴⁹

2. To vindicate God's honor - Satan challenged God to put Job to the test and God accepted the challenge. In the end, Job came through with flying colors.¹⁵⁰ And so will you and I. God will see to it, because salvation is of the Lord.

3. To conform us into the image of Christ - To take us from a selfish, self-centered state of being to the selfless state of Christ's divine perfection. In Job's case, his self-centeredness was displayed in the form of self-righteousness. He claimed to be more just than God who put him through all his misery for what Job thought was no legitimate reason.¹⁵¹ (In my opinion, that was the purpose of Job's trial, to purge him of his self-righteousness. We were created to reflect the divine character and nature of God.¹⁵² Anything contrary to his righteous nature must be purged if we are to be made like Christ. Perhaps more than anything else that purging includes self-righteousness).¹⁵³

4. To learn empathy - Suffering makes it possible for us to identify and empathize with others who go through similar trials. Job could be a comfort to others as a result of his own suffering and deliverance.¹⁵⁴

5. To teach us to trust the Lord - Our trust in God grows as he delivers us from our trials time and time again. His deliverances are the evidence of his faithfulness, and so we learn to trust him more and more.¹⁵⁵

6. To confirm us in the faith - Suffering gives us opportunity to prove our faith and trust in God - to him, to ourselves, and to others. Suffering patiently and in faith is a witness to the world of the truth of the gospel.¹⁵⁶

7. To reveal God's sovereignty - Job's deliverance from his trial and suffering proved to him that God was indeed sovereign and could deliver even when things looked hopeless.¹⁵⁷

8. To experience the fellowship of Christ's suffering and identify with him - Job may not have known in his day what the Messiah would suffer on his behalf. That was a mystery then. But surely he understands now that he is with the Lord and appreciates Christ's suffering on his behalf all the more.¹⁵⁸

9. To redirect our hope from the temporal to the eternal - Before his trial, Job was enjoying the "good life." But in his misery, Job had given up all hope for this temporal life, yet he had a sure hope for the life to come.¹⁵⁹

10. To purify our motives - Job's motives appeared to be pure at the start of his trial, but as it progressed, his attitude changed from acceptance¹⁶⁰ to confusion¹⁶¹ to complaining¹⁶² to arrogance.¹⁶³ He concluded he was more righteous than God. Nothing could be more arrogant than that. In the end, his sufferings purified his motives, when he saw God in the true light of his righteousness and omnipotent power.¹⁶⁴

11. Chastisement for wrongdoing - Though the Lord considered Job a perfect and upright man, he found it necessary to discipline him for his self-righteous attitude, which is totally unacceptable to God.¹⁶⁵ Self-righteousness is a serious affront to the cross of Christ and to God who is the *only* righteous one.

12. Identification with God - When we suffer, we are not only identifying with Christ, but with God the Father also, the Great Sufferer, who was in Christ when he suffered on the cross and is in *everyone's* suffering.¹⁶⁶

Yes, there are many valid reasons why God allows his people to suffer, perhaps more than those that I have listed. As we mature in the Lord, we will come to accept suffering as a necessary part of God's plan for our lives. Like the Apostle Paul, we may even learn to glory in our suffering.¹⁶⁷ But of course, that will take a great deal of maturity.

Having said all that about suffering as a believer in Jesus Christ, let me remind you once again to stay in your *present*

square yard of existence and not attempt to project into the future. The truth is, none of us is guaranteed tomorrow. What we are guaranteed is that if we were to leave the earth tomorrow, we would in an instant of time be ushered into the presence of the Lord.¹⁶⁸ There we will experience everlasting joy and peace along with all those who have also put their faith in Christ and finished their pilgrimage on earth. Don't forget the Lord's words in the Gospel of John:

"He that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (Jn 11:25-26)

That's a good question for us. Do *we* believe this? If we don't believe in the resurrection, what hope do we have? This life is very short and will surely come to an end. The graveyards of the world are a testimony to that. Without the resurrection we would be as the Apostle Paul said, "most miserable."¹⁶⁹

God could call us home at any moment. And I am not referring to the catching away, commonly called the rapture. Yes, the day of the rapture will come and as the Lord Jesus has said, it will be at the last day of this age - the day of his second coming.¹⁷⁰ But mortal life is very fragile. One hundred and fifty thousand people in the world die every day, one hundred and twenty every minute (the time it might take you to read a page of this book). Yes, life is very short. We could go at any time, through illness or accident or heart attack or stroke or any other form of demise. Wouldn't it be better to simply trust the Lord for the future? He is trustworthy and is constantly proving that to us day by day.

As you can see, I have taken up a considerable portion of space in the discussion of suffering in the life of the believer. I consider it extremely important that we come to grips with this unpleasant issue. We owe it to our Lord to trust him to bring us across the Jordan River, so to speak, and into the promised land. We can be assured that we all will make it across. Our Savior has promised it.

In the next chapter I want to discuss a governing principle of the faith and of the entire world system.

Chapter 8 Key Points:

1. God, in his divine wisdom, allows suffering in the lives of believers.
2. God suffers with us. There is no suffering apart from him.
3. In the end, God will replace all sorrow with everlasting joy.
4. Freedom from fear can only come from confidence in God's sovereignty.
5. We won't have to fear the conforming process if we learn to trust God.
6. Nothing and no one can touch us without God's permission.

Chapter 9 - The Principle Of Cause And Effect

For every cause there is a predetermined effect. This is an inviolable principle of life. To understand this and live by it is wisdom of the highest order. We could save ourselves a lot of grief and sorrow if we would but let this rule govern our lives.

God has ordered the universe in cause and effect relationships. An example of this is found in the science of physics. Newton's Third Law of Physics states that every action results in an equal and opposite reaction. This is cause and effect in its simplicity, if you can call physics simple (I think I slept through that class). It means if object A exerts a force on object B, object B in turn exerts an equal and opposite force on object A. In other words, the force exerted by object A is the *cause*, the equal and opposite force exerted by object B is the *effect*.

Perhaps a more obvious example is this: "If you plant a weed seed in your garden it will produce a weed plant. However, if you plant a vegetable seed it will produce a vegetable plant." Brilliant, huh? We don't need a science class to figure that one out. The Bible confirms this rule:

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. (Gal 6:7)

This inviolable principle extends to every facet of life. Most of us no doubt have had to learn this lesson the hard way.

Cause and effect. If you jump out of an airplane without a parachute... well, you get my point. A very unpleasant effect indeed.

We might consider this principle of cause and effect the operating system of the universe, for it truly governs our existence as a computer's operating system governs how it works.

So, what does the principle of cause and effect have to do with overcoming fear? Well, in some cases fear can be *the cause* of something else, such as make us cower in the face of

a challenge, or run from a perceived danger where no danger exists. In other instances fear can be the effect, such as when we hear a frightening report on the evening news. In that case, the frightening report is the cause and fear is the effect. Fear, then, can be the cause of a negative action or a negative reaction, depending on the circumstance. In either case, it produces a negative result.

I suppose there are circumstances where fear can produce a positive result such as keeping us from doing something harmful or avoiding a truly dangerous situation. In such cases fear may even save our life. But in our context we are discussing negative kinds of fear, so let's stay on that track.

Okay, so how can we make this principle of cause and effect work for us in a positive way in our battle against fear? First of all, understand the principle *before* we act. It often appears that people don't take it seriously, their actions bearing witness either to their ignorance or their rebellion. For example, if you don't believe God exists and that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation, the principle of cause and effect demands that you will die in your sins. A horrifying thought, to say the least. In that example, unbelief is the cause and eternal death is the effect.

Applied to the doctrine of freedom of choice, we can think of our choices as the *cause* of any given result. We choose to do or not do something. Unless restricted by an outside force, we are free to do as we please, we are free to make our own choices. That is a gift from God. We were created that way. To be created in the image of God necessitated that we have the freedom of choice. Why? Because God has the freedom of choice. He is free to do whatever he pleases. We could not have been made in his image without the freedom of choice. It's a matter of simple deductive reasoning: If God has the freedom of choice, then in order to be made like him we must also have the freedom of choice. How can it be otherwise?

Being sovereign, God has the complete freedom to do as he pleases. I don't think anyone who believes in God would argue with that. Of course he will never violate his righteous and holy nature. For example, he will not lie. To lie would be

a violation of his divine nature, and that is something he *will never do*.¹⁷¹

God is free to make his own choices. Is it error, then, to say that in his determination to create us in his own image it has pleased him to give *us* a limited sovereignty of *our own*? That is a contradiction of terms, of course. To be truly sovereign in the strictest sense of the word, one cannot be limited. But I am using the expression to define and explain the free will of mankind. We are sovereign over *our own* will, and that is all. We have no real control over anything else. It is a limited autonomy, to be sure, but it is ours alone and by God's decree no one can violate it - not other people, not angels, not demons, not Satan himself. In fact, God himself will not violate our will, our freedom to make our own choices. If that were not true, no one would perish in their sins, because God is not willing that *anyone* perish.¹⁷² To die in one's sins one must violate the will of God. This is rebellion of the highest order. I feel the need to repeat that. To die in one's sins one *must violate* the will of God. If anyone rejects God's salvation, they will perish by *their own* choice. This is serious business, folks. The ultimate act of rebellion is to reject God's offer to redeem us. God has made us responsible for our choices. We are accountable to God for everything we think, say, and do.

Once again, this is cause and effect. Rejecting salvation becomes the cause, perishing in a Christ-less eternity is the effect - the awful, horrifying result, make no mistake about it.

We are sovereign over our choices. This is a God-given privilege and responsibility received when we were created. However, here is rub number three and where understanding the principle of cause and effect comes into play. *We do not* have a choice over the outcome, the *effect* of our choices. God has predetermined the outcome of *every* choice we make. He does so because *he* is sovereign - the One and Only true sovereign - in absolute and complete control of the universe. His predetermined consequences are based on the integrity of his character and his justice. It is just and right for God to judge evil and reward good, because his divine nature requires it of him.

God is the "divine perfection" and as such every action he performs, every decree he utters, every decision he makes reflects his perfection. This is the God of the Bible. This is the One we worship. God is love *and* he is also just, and those two divine attributes are not inconsistent with each other. His divine love demands that evil be done away with. Conversely, his justice is an expression of and the evidence of his divine love. He will not allow evil to continue indefinitely. There is a determined end to it, a day on his calendar in which he will judge the world by his exalted Son, Jesus Christ.¹⁷³

We cannot alter the effect of any of God's predetermined consequences except it be by repentance, and that on a case-by-case basis as determined by the infraction. God is just, but he is also merciful, and thank God he is.

So, once again, how does all this factor into the fear issue? Answer: Bad choices will produce fear in our lives, though it be but subconsciously, especially if we disregard the Lord's provisions for overcoming our fears.

Furthermore, bad choices will always produce bad results. Sooner or later the predetermined consequence will come to pass. This is indirectly implied in an often overlooked passage of scripture:

"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." (Ecc 8:11)

Judgment isn't always executed immediately, but it *will* come eventually, as sure as God lives. Make no mistake about that. Remember, God will not be mocked.

Bad choices will indeed produce fear. Why? Because we have a conscience, which was the result of partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We instinctively know right from wrong. When we do wrong, we instinctively experience fear, because we know that sooner or later there will be an unpleasant consequence. The Apostle Paul made this abundantly clear in his letter to the Roman believers:

"Who [the ungodly] *knowing the judgment of God*, that they which commit such things [evil deeds] are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." (Rom 1:32)

How do they know they are worthy of death? Because they have a conscience, however seared it might be.¹⁷⁴ God's moral law is written in everyone's heart.¹⁷⁵ That is why everyone is accountable to God, even the savage in the deepest jungle who has never seen a Bible or heard the name of Jesus. And when that savage kills a neighboring tribesman for whatever he hopes to gain by it, he instinctively knows he is doing evil. He may not care. He may love to do evil.¹⁷⁶ But he knows it is not right.¹⁷⁷ We all know what is good and what is evil, what is right and what is wrong. That is called conscience. God has made himself known to every soul that has reached moral consciousness and therefore holds them accountable.¹⁷⁸

Let's connect the dots in all this. Let's put the pieces of the puzzle together. There is a solution to our fearfulness and making the right choices will go a long way toward reaching that solution. Let's continue to examine yet another piece of the puzzle on how to live without fear in a fearful world.

Chapter 9 Key Points:

1. God has ordered the universe in cause and effect relationships.
2. For every cause there is a predetermined effect.
3. We are sovereign over our own will, free to make our own choices.
4. However, God has predetermined the consequences of our choices.
5. We are accountable to God for the choices we make.
6. Making the right choices will go a long way toward overcoming fear.

Chapter 10 - Strength In Numbers

The Bible is an integrated whole. Every part is connected to the rest in some way or another, each truth contributing to a more perfect understanding of the word of God. I have used the phrase, *connect the dots*, to express the necessity of considering everything God has said to us to be essential to our spiritual growth. There are no trivial or unnecessary statements or exhortations. The Lord has made that clear to us through the pen of the Apostle Paul:

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is *profitable* for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim 3:16)

"All scripture..." Even the seemingly insignificant passages are necessary to our success in this spiritual battle of faith. We do not want to be found negligent when it comes to our response to the word of God.

With that in mind, here is another practical, though seemingly insignificant provision for overcoming fear. It is included in the category, *all scripture*, and therefore is just as inspired as any other passage of the Bible:

"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised). And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as you see the day approaching." (Heb 10:23-25)

Unfortunately, this exhortation is often disregarded as a mere suggestion and not considered a necessity.

Don't forsake assembling with other believers. This may be an obvious enough exhortation, but I have known too many believers who don't take it seriously. While obedience to this command - and yes, it is to be received as a command - may

not be a mandatory requirement for salvation, it is nevertheless essential. God has deemed it so, therefore it behooves us to take it seriously.

"And so much the more as you see the day approaching." Friends, as incredible as it may seem, the day - the day of the Lord's return - is approaching very rapidly. Let's be prepared for it, and one way we can do that is to stay connected with other believers.

The above command is for *our* good, and we deprive ourselves of much of God's provision for our success when we don't heed it. For one thing, the gathering together of believers is where God bestows many of his blessings.¹⁷⁹ God has designed the church - the various members of the body of Christ - to be interdependent upon each other; not co-dependent, that is unhealthy; not dependent in the strictest sense - our salvation is dependent on God alone, not on others; but interdependent - in need of relationship with other believers as we traverse this pilgrim journey. We are in need of the various gifts God has given to other members of the church that we will not benefit from if we isolate ourselves.

And don't forget, each of us has been given a gift or gifts for the benefit of *the rest of the members* of the body of Christ, which we deprive them of by our isolation.¹⁸⁰ That's right, and it is selfish of us to do so. Think about that, but don't guilt over it. If it brings conviction, do something about it. Gathering together is not to be considered a legal requirement, but an act of love toward the other members of the body of Christ. Legal requirements result in bondage, a legal obligation to fulfill God's will. The gospel of grace liberates us to voluntarily do his will out of a willing, loving, and grateful heart.¹⁸¹ Gathering together with other believers is an expression of our love for them and for the Lord.

Unfortunately, isolation is often one of the ways, albeit an ineffective way, of dealing with fear. We can be misled into thinking that if we hide ourselves away somewhere, we will be free of danger and therefore free from fear. King David at one time thought as much when he was facing danger:

"My heart is extremely pained within me: and the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me. And I said, 'Oh that I had wings like a dove! For then I would fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest'." (Ps 55:4-8)

There are several myths in King David's supposed solution to his fears. First, the notion that if he could fly away, he would be at rest. We may obtain a false sense of security by running away from our fears, but what we would experience by running away would not be the "rest" of God. Instead, we would have an empty, self-fabricated substitute, conditioned upon circumstances which are always subject to change and over which we have little control.

The second myth is the notion that remaining in the wilderness would be better than living in the promised land. For believers, the promised land, the land of peace and safety, is found in being in the will of God. Admittedly, we have to fight our way into the promised land to enjoy its benefits. It's called the good fight of faith, not a physical fight, but a spiritual one.¹⁸²

Folks, God doesn't want us remaining in the wilderness. We forget that the wilderness, representative of this world system, is not a pleasant place. It in no way can be compared to Canaan, the land of milk and honey, which represents living in the peace and protection found only in the will of God.

The wilderness that King David was referring to, the wilderness that the Israelites wandered in for forty years, was not the Willamette National Forest in beautiful Oregon. It was waste howling desert, hardly fit for lizards let alone mankind. No, we don't want to remain in the wilderness.

And thirdly, it is a myth to think that by running away or isolating ourselves we can escape our fears. We dealt with this issue in a previous chapter. At best we will replace one fear with another. There *is* an escape from fear, as we are going to discover, but it is not found in running away or isolating

ourselves from the world or other believers. It involves sheltering ourselves in the secret hiding place of God.

Believing that isolating ourselves from the body of Christ will somehow spare us from danger and alleviate our fears couldn't be farther from the truth. Instead, it is a deception of the enemy of our souls. He knows that if he can isolate us from the body of believers we will be an easy prey.

We find an example of this in the wilderness journey of the Old Testament. Keep in mind again it is believed that the host of Israel that departed Egypt numbered around two million. For the sake of discussion, if they traveled forty-abreast, that would be a column almost fifty miles long. That's right, *fifty miles!* You can do the math, if you like. I did. Use your own geography to grasp a mental picture of just how long a column that would be. Yeah! That's a huge host strung out over a very great distance.

Now as they traveled, the weak and the weary fell behind and were overcome by the Amalekites.¹⁸³ Being separated from the host, they were easily picked off. The lesson in this? We cannot afford to be separated from the host - the rest of the body of Christ. We must not forsake gathering with other believers. It is too dangerous and not at all a solution to our fears. You may think that if you isolate yourself, you will be safe, but that simply isn't true. In actuality, you will find yourself defenseless if and when the enemy does attack. As the saying goes, there is strength in numbers. Stay connected.

Another good example of there being strength in numbers is found in nature. African water buffalo are fiercely protective and not afraid to face off their predators. When threatened, they will form a protective circle around the young, the old, and the weak members of the herd, bravely fighting off the foe.

What a lesson for us there is in their example. In the body of Christ there are young and old and weak. But there are also the brave and the strong - the more mature - who will help us fight off our enemies if we consider ourselves too weak to do so. But we must stay connected. Yes, there is strength in numbers. Don't forget that.

* * * *

In previous chapters I made some comments about distinctions and how important it is that we recognize them. Here is another distinction. It is imperative that we distinguish between the *natural realm* in which we live our natural lives, and the *spiritual realm* in which we exist in our spiritual lives. It is also important to realize that these two realms co-exist simultaneously.

My wife's intrigue with sci-fi and my exposure to it as a result (not my favorite genre) has given me some insightful analogies. One of those analogies is the concept of a parallel universe - two universes co-existing at the same time. I think that was in a Star Trek episode years ago. Of course, the concept is contradictory. The universe (uni-verse) is, by definition, *one* verse - *one* cosmos. There can't be two, that is, if the Bible is correct. Instead, there are two distinct and uniquely different *realms* existing in the *one* universe that God has created.

Perhaps the spiritual realm can be thought of as being superimposed over and permeating the natural realm and in that way they coexist. One is a visible realm, the other an invisible realm. The Lord has said that the kingdom of God (the spiritual realm) is within you.¹⁸⁴ Another way to think of these two realms is that they exist in two different dimensions. I am very satisfied to think of the kingdom of God as a different dimension. It makes sense to me. What do you think?

We might also think of the natural realm as a type of the spiritual realm, a type being a representation or *picture* of something else. I could cite numerous examples of this. In fact, the Bible is replete with natural types and pictures which give us an understanding of the spiritual realm in which God exists. The parables the Lord Jesus taught are prime examples, "The kingdom of God is like..."¹⁸⁵

Typology - the study of types - is a fascinating study and one that will open up the true meaning of the scriptures like

nothing else can. But we cannot get into that in our present discussion.

As for sci-fi, I learned a long time ago that if you are married and want a happy life, you must have a happy wife. So "Live long and prosper, Captain Kirk."

It ought to be obvious that to prepare for and deal with trials and difficulties without fear, we must learn to live *in* the spiritual realm. The Bible uses the term, *walk* in the Spirit, referring to our conduct and behavior.¹⁸⁶ The word, Spirit, when capitalized, refers of course to the Holy Spirit. When not capitalized, it usually refers to the human spirit, that part of us that animates our bodies and through which we can know God and have a relationship with him. On occasion it can also refer to angels and demons. The context will determine which it is referring to.

The term, *in the Spirit*, occurs twenty-nine times in the King James Bible. It is quite important that we understand what it means to be in the Spirit, because there are only two options. We are either in the Spirit or in the flesh. To walk in the Spirit is to live according to the dictates and influence of the Holy Spirit.

The flesh is another term used often in the Bible and most of the time refers to the sinful, unregenerate old nature, the nature we were born with and needed to be delivered from. To walk in the flesh is to live according to the dictates and influence of the sinful, fleshly nature. Deliverance from that nature can only happen through regeneration - by being born again by the Spirit of God. Apart from regeneration there is no way to have a relationship with God. And, sadly, fear is the natural result of not having a relationship with God.

So, it ought to be obvious that there is no way to be free of fear apart from being born again. It would not be inaccurate to say that receiving the Lord Jesus through faith in him is the very first step in overcoming fear, particularly the fear of judgment. Believing in Christ is how we become a child of God.¹⁸⁷ When we become a child of God, we become spiritually connected to other believers. Our responsibility then becomes *staying connected*, mentally, emotionally, and physically through our gathering together with them. Am I

overstating the point? I don't think so. There is strength in numbers and that strength is essential in overcoming fear.

The unbelieving world is plagued with fear and resorts to innumerable methods in dealing with it: buying firearms, storing up ammunition, learning martial arts, installing security devices in their homes, withdrawing from society all together, etc. None of these deal with the real problem and can never truly eliminate fear. The real problem is alienation from the Creator. So sad for people who don't know the Lord.

Okay then, we have looked at several of God's provisions for overcoming fear. In the next and final chapter we will consider *the solution* which will make all these admonitions attainable and will assure us of victory over fear. But know that there is no "snap-your-fingers" solution to the problem of fear. It will take deliberate effort and practice on our part to retrain our minds to believe the promises of God concerning the things we have been discussing. In the end, faith is the victory. Faith brought the millions who have gone before us through the fire and on into glory. We are destined to be among them.¹⁸⁸

Chapter 10 Key Points:

1. Don't neglect to assemble with other believers. Stay connected!
2. We cannot escape our fears by running away from them.
3. Instead, run to God. He is the place of safety.
4. There is strength in numbers.

Chapter 11 - The Secret Hiding Place Of God

The secret hiding place of God: what is it, where is it, and how do we get there? I have alluded to the answer to those questions throughout this study. In fact it is embedded in the psalm from which the title of this book originates, a psalm of King David. Once again:

"For in the time of trouble he [the LORD] shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me: he shall set me up upon a rock." (Ps 27:5)

First note that this is a promise. "He *shall* hide me." As with all promises, we have to believe them to get the full benefit of them. A promise not believed offers little comfort or deliverance in the time of trouble. It should encourage us to know that Jehovah, the sovereign God of the universe, has promised to hide us in his pavilion. The Hebrew word translated pavilion here refers to a lair, which is a resting place, a refuge or place for hiding. The word of God speaks much about hiding, as we shall see in the remainder of this chapter.

The psalm under consideration goes on to say:

"...in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me..." (Ps 27:5b)

This is a repetition of the promise. Take note of repetition when it occurs. The Bible employs repetition for emphasis. The Hebrew word translated secret means *a cover* and derives from another Hebrew word meaning to *hide by covering*. Are you getting the essence of this wonderful promise? In time of trouble God will hide us in and by his covering.

The tabernacle during the wilderness journey of the children of Israel represented the dwelling place of God. It was later replaced by King Solomon's glorious temple in Jerusalem, both of which are types of God's dwelling place in heaven.

Perhaps even more significantly, they typified the church, the body of Christ, the spiritual dwelling place of God.

The church, then, is in itself a hiding place, a place of refuge from the storms of life, because it is where God dwells. This thought correlates with the last chapter about staying connected with the body of Christ. Keep it in mind as we draw ever nearer to the secret hiding place of God.

The solution to fear is not found in the natural realm of things. It has nothing to do with geography or psychology or any human provision. It is not solved by moving to a new location. The seemingly ubiquitous devil is still, for a short time more, the god of this world.¹⁸⁹ Unless you can escape the earth's atmosphere, you are going to have to reckon with him. And if you could escape into outer space, you would probably find him there as well, in the form of fear of death. I doubt there is an astronaut that has been to space who would say there wasn't an element of fear involved in the experience.

The solution to fear is not found in connecting with your "inner self." There is much emphasis on such practices. Listen, *self* is the problem. The inner self, in the way that the world defines it, is synonymous with the old, sinful nature, a nature that is attempting to be like God without God. That thought was embedded in the serpent's lie to Eve in the Garden of Eden.¹⁹⁰

The inner self is to be distinguished from the *inner man* - the new person you have become in Christ through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. That new person, Christ in you, is *selfless*.

Furthermore, fear is not abated by building an arsenal or a fortress. Those only serve as placebos to placate our fears. Satan is not thwarted by these methods. The only real solution to fear is found in God alone.

The last part of Psalm 27 is a prophecy spoken at the time in the future tense, and now fulfilled in Christ:

"He shall set me up upon a rock." (Ps 27:5c)

King David, like all of the Old Testament believers, was looking ahead to the promised Messiah in whom he had put

his faith. The word, rock, in this verse refers to *the Rock*, our Savior - the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus is the Rock upon which we are securely founded, a strong, immovable Rock, to which we can run for refuge. That great old hymn says it so well:

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee."

The Lord Jesus, then, is also our hiding place, as he shares the title of Lord with the Father and the Holy Spirit.¹⁹¹ They are co-equal, co-rulers together. Remember, there is but *one* Lord.¹⁹² It is a title that they three share together. While the triune nature of God - three persons, one God - is an incomprehensible mystery, it is nevertheless a Biblical truth. The Apostle John makes this abundantly clear in his first epistle:

" For there are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit: and these three are *one*. (1 Jn 5:7)

You will remember that the Word was in the beginning with God *and* was God.¹⁹³ And if he was God, he still is God. God can't stop being who he is. God is a mystery, to say the least. You will also remember that the Word was made flesh (Jesus) and dwelt among us.¹⁹⁴

I believe the fundamental meaning of 1 John 5:7 to be that they three (plurality) are in perfect *unity* with one another, which is characteristic of the essential nature of God. Unity, by definition, means oneness.

It would not be inaccurate to say these three are *one* Lord and *one* God. I don't pretend to understand the doctrine of the trinity, I just believe it based on the inerrant teachings of the word of God. I don't trouble myself with things that are beyond my comprehension. Call it childlike faith, if you want. I wouldn't mind that a bit.

* * * *

That God himself, in the three persons of the Godhead, is our hiding place is a recurring theme throughout the holy scriptures. Let's examine some of those passages, building our trust in God from his immutable word.

Psalm 31 reiterates the promise of a hiding place, expanding on the scope of the Lord's provision:

"Oh how great is your goodness, which you have laid up for them that fear you; which you have wrought for them that trust in you before the sons of men! *You shall hide them* in the secret of your presence from the pride of man: you shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." (Ps 31:19-20)

We talked about a good kind of fear in chapter one, the fear of the Lord, which is reverence for who God is. Here in this passage reverence for God is the first condition for receiving his goodness. The second and equally vital condition is trust. We have elaborated on trust also previously and what a fundamental condition it is. Without trust and its twin sister, faith, there is little we can expect in comfort and solution for the problem of fear.

The passage goes on to say, "You shall hide them in the secret (or covering) of *your presence...*" The presence of God is the end of all arguments, the end of all threats. This reminds me of the 1988 film, *The Bear*, in which an orphaned bear cub is subsequently adopted by an adult male Grizzly. There is a scene in which the cub, being chased by a mountain lion eventually tires and turns to face his pursuer. The poor, frightened cub strikes out at the threatening cat and growls his tiny growl. Amazingly, the cougar cowers and backs off. Only then does the camera pan back to the adult Grizzly standing eight-foot tall behind the cub, teeth bared, thundering a ferocious growl. What a beautiful picture of the protective covering of our God over his own.

The last part of this verse speaks of being kept, that is, protected, from the strife of tongues. While the strife of tongues can refer to accusations, it can also refer to threats. And do not threats gender fear? In almost every newscast

these days there is someone or something threatening evil. Cast down such thoughts! They are intended by the adversary of our souls to make us afraid, thereby crippling us, rendering us ineffective in the battle against evil. Apparently those who perpetrate such threats don't know what a "Grizzly bear" our God can be. Pity them, pray for them that they might repent before they breathe their last breath, but don't give in to their threats. Resort to God's hiding place instead. You will find it a place of refuge, as this next proverb clearly states:

"In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge." (Prov 14:26)

Flee to God

King David, who wrote the previous two psalms, took his own advice in this next psalm which he also wrote, a plea for deliverance:

"Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies: *I flee unto you to hide me.*" (Ps 143:9)

This verse suggests that we have a part to play in this hiding process; we are to flee to God for safety. If we don't flee to God, how can we experience his protection? To flee implies *running*, which would seem in contradiction to what I have said in chapter three about not running away from our enemy. In reality, running *to* God is the very way we stand up to our enemy and prevail over him, for we cannot prevail in our own strength. Like that bear cub, we can turn and face our enemy knowing that our God is standing over us to protect us. Turning to anything or anyone other than God when in distress is equivalent to running away from our enemy. Does that make sense?

Fleeing to God for safety does not involve a change in geographical location. It involves a change in disposition. Rather than being fearful or unbelieving when under attack by the enemy, we can retreat to the hiding place of God in our heart. After all, the kingdom of God *is within you*, the Spirit of

God *dwells in you*, and Christ, the conquering King *is in you* and is now *your very life*.¹⁹⁵ Is there a safer place on earth to hide?

King Solomon, David's son, also understood this principle of running to God for safety:

"The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous [the believer in Christ] run into it, and is safe." (Prov 18:10)

The thought here is taking refuge in all that the name of the Lord represents - this powerful name that is above all names.¹⁹⁶ It is itself a secret and secure hiding place of God, an indomitable shelter. Yet another contemporary song, *What A Beautiful Name*, by Hillsong Worship, expresses this very well:

"What a beautiful... what a wonderful... what a powerful name, the name of Jesus."

The name of the Lord deserves its own study, but suffice it to say that it is a place of safety - *the* place of safety - a place to hide from fear of evil.

Another of King David's psalms has the same theme:

"Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of your wings. From the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who surround me." (Ps 17:8-9)

Despite what this implies, nowhere in scripture does it say or even suggest that God has wings - he is not a bird. In a few verses of the Bible he is said to walk or fly upon *the wings of the wind*, but in those cases it is the wind that has wings, not God.¹⁹⁷

I believe the wings in this psalm to be a symbolic reference to the cherubims that cover the mercy seat, the solid gold lid which covered the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies. It is described in the book of Exodus, chapter 25, in the Lord's instructions to Moses for the building of the tabernacle. He was to make two cherubims of gold -

representing angelic beings - one on each end of the mercy seat, and *the wings of the cherubims* were to stretch forth and cover the mercy seat.

Eleven verses in the King James Bible declare that the LORD, the God of Israel, dwells between the cherubims. The implication is that God *sits upon* the mercy seat overshadowed by these angelic beings. My thinking is that the mercy seat is the throne of grace spoken of in the book of Hebrews. After all, why would it be called a *mercy seat*, if it wasn't a throne upon which the LORD of mercy, the King of Heaven could sit?

In that regard, I believe to be hidden under the shadow of the wings of these cherubims is to find ourselves at the mercy seat of God where, "We may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."¹⁹⁸ Isn't that a beautiful thought? To me, this is what it means to put the pieces of the Bible puzzle together. Keep in mind that many of the scriptures have a symbolic meaning as well as a literal one. The parables are a clear example of this as are much of the prophetic books and the book of Revelation.

Folks, the wicked may oppress us, and if the Lord permits, may even do physical or emotional harm to us and bring grief into our lives as he did in Job's life. But as was stated previously, he cannot in reality truly harm us, because everything God allows is for our ultimate good. We must accept this and learn to trust the Lord in those situations, knowing that nothing can touch us without God's permission. In such cases, God has a deliberate purpose for allowing mistreatment. Let's learn to run to the mercy seat of him who dwells between the cherubims to find comfort and safety in times of trouble and distress.

When my son was a young child, he fell off his bicycle and broke a baby tooth which eventually had to be pulled. I knew there was going to be some pain involved, but it had to be done so the permanent tooth could come in. The process did hurt him and I had to stand by watching helplessly. But it was for his own good. He survived the ordeal as you and I will survive whatever ordeal we may experience. God will not subject us to anything that in the end is not for our own good.

It takes faith to believe that and to trust him with our lives, but is he not worthy to be trusted?

Another of King David's psalms expresses the same thought:

"I will abide in your tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of your wings." (Ps 61:4)

And here is yet another:

"My soul, wait only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defense; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God." (Ps 62:5-7)

If you think I'm repetitious, read through the Psalms. They are replete with repetition. The Holy Spirit, the author of the holy scriptures, knows that repetition will drive home a point.

Confidence In God's Protection

In another of David's psalms confidence and faith are stressed:

"You are my hiding place; you shall preserve me from trouble; you shall surround me with songs of deliverance." (Ps 32:7)

"You *are*," and, "you *shall*." I certainly hope we can say the same thing with the same faith and confidence. It is that very faith and confidence that will bring deliverance into our experiential reality and enable us to rise above our fears.

It might be good here to remember that David, before he became king of Israel, was a fugitive, running from King Saul his predecessor, who out of jealousy was trying to kill him. I suspect that most of these psalms were written in reference to this difficult time of David's life, though he continued to face dangers throughout his life.

This next psalm of David's is also a plea for deliverance:

"Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer: preserve my life from fear of the enemy. Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity: who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words." (Ps 64:1-3)

What makes this psalm unique is that David's plea is not for deliverance from his enemy, though he no doubt desired that as well, but deliverance from *fear of* the enemy. That strikes me as being very significant with regard to the focus of this study. It is only natural to want deliverance from our enemies and that will come in due time. In the meantime, the Lord wants us to be free from fear of the enemy, and as I hope you are seeing from this study, he has made that possible through faith and trust in him.

We must never forget that we are in a very real spiritual war in which there are real dangers and sometimes casualties. Of course, for those of us who have put our faith in the Lord Jesus, we win either way because we can never really lose this war. Christ has already won it for us. The challenge is to be victorious in this temporal life until that glorious day when he returns to make everything right forevermore.

And should we lose our life in the conflict, to depart and be with the Lord is far better than anything we could experience on this earth.¹⁹⁹ Do you and I believe that? If that should happen, we would in reality lose nothing at all. Of course the ones we would leave behind would experience grief. We all have an allotted portion of grief to experience. But God has a purpose for that as well. Everything he allows in our lives works toward accomplishing his purposes.

There are two other requests in David's plea for help in this psalm. He desires to be hidden from the evil deliberations of the wicked and from their disparaging words and accusations - the hurtful schemes and plans that evil people desire to perpetrate against the people of God. In our Lord's case, his enemies were always looking for ways to trap him, to trip him up, poor misguided souls. Their goal was to find

reason to destroy him. Is it any wonder that they will attempt the same with us, attempting in vain to do the impossible to the destruction of their own souls.²⁰⁰

Thank God, there is a hiding place where we are safe from these evil intents. Running to that place in time of trouble is how we escape the fear of the enemy. Do you see this? Do you want to be free from fear? Let God hide you in his secret dwelling place where nothing - absolutely nothing - can harm you or make you afraid.

I hope it is obvious to you that in considering these promises I am making a distinction between the physical body and the spirit and soul. It is the human spirit and soul that can always find refuge in God's secret hiding place, regardless of what is happening to us in the body. This is so important to understand and accept.

Now that isn't to say that God can't and won't protect our physical bodies from harm, and he very often does. We are no doubt unaware of many of the times he protects us from harm, as only he can do. But history, including Biblical history, gives evidence of both protection from harm and allowing physical calamities to happen to us. In other words, sometimes he does protect from physical harm and sometimes he doesn't.

The inclination is to ask the perpetual question, why? We discussed that question in chapter eight. I have no other explanation for suffering in the lives of believers than has already been said except to say that it requires us to look at things in a different light. We need to look at things through the light of God's truth and eternal plan. This temporal life with all of its struggles is the path by which we reach the eternal bliss God has prepared for those who love and trust him.

Things that we consider bad or evil - disappointment, loss, infirmity, suffering of any kind - are the very things God uses for our eternal good. All of these things work toward conforming us into the image of Christ, which is God's ultimate goal. In his sovereignty, he has a temporary, permissive will that allows evil to happen, but woe to those who are the cause. He will judge them if they do not repent.

His justice demands it. But he is able to use their evil deeds for our good. Again, this is a hard truth to accept, but what other conclusion can we arrive at that is adequate to explain why the sovereign God allows evil?

* * * *

Throughout this discussion I have stressed the necessity of faith and trust as essential requirements for overcoming fear. This next verse connects trust to safety. If one is truly safe, there will be no place for fear. That is what this verse implies:

"The fear of man brings a snare: but whoso puts his trust in the LORD shall be safe." (Prov29:25)

Safe from what? In this psalm it is safe from the fear of man. This is another wonderful promise from the word of God, stated as a matter of fact - *shall* be safe.

Yet another proverb of King Solomon's emphasizes the need for spiritual discernment:

"A prudent man foresees the evil, and hides himself: but the simple pass on and are punished." (Prov 22:3)

Foreseeing implies both earnest effort and vigilance, looking ahead to potential danger. This speaks of preparedness, which we discussed in chapter two. A simple way to put it is, don't wait until trouble comes to make your abode in the hiding place of God. If you continually resort there, you will be prepared to deal with adversity if and when it comes.

A companion passage is found in the book of Isaiah:

"Come my people, enter into your chambers, and shut your doors about you: hide yourself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be over past. For, behold, the LORD comes out of his place [heaven] to punish the inhabitants of the earth [unbelievers] for their iniquity..." (Isa 26:20-21)

I am inclined to believe the indignation is a prophetic reference to the final judgment when the Lord will judge the world in righteousness.²⁰¹ The verses that follow Isaiah 26:20-21 more than suggest that. However, the exhortation to hide ourselves for the moment would apply to any distress at any time in history.

Three encouragements are found in these two verses. First, this period of judgment will be brief - "a little moment." Relative to eternity, it will be but a speck of time. Secondly, evil will indeed be judged and eradicated from the earth. Hallelujah, what a promise!

Thirdly, and the main point as far as our topic is concerned, God has provided a place for believers to hide themselves during this difficult time in human history, during *every* period of history, for that matter - our chambers. The Hebrew word for chambers here is defined as an *innermost chamber*. Is that not symbolic of the secret hiding place of God, the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of the living God? Hide yourself there.

Similar to the Isaiah passage above as well as Psalm 17:8-9 several pages back is yet another psalm:

"Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusts in you: yes, in the shadow of your wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities pass over." (Ps 57:1)

Calamities speak of the disastrous events and great distress and misery resulting from God's indignation upon this wicked and idolatrous world both historically and at the end of the age. World War I and World War II are prime examples of this, as well as all the wars of human history, all of which will pale in comparison to the Great Tribulation which is yet to come.

My guess is that this last paragraph has raised your heart rate. Just thinking about such things can do that. But don't you see that God's hiding place is the way to escape it all? That is the point of this whole discussion. There is such

a place to hide during any distressful situation and we have the infallible, inerrant word of God to confirm it.

A Continual Refuge

This next verse adds a time-perspective to the promises and provisions we have been looking at:

"In you, O LORD, do I put my trust: let me *never* be put to confusion. Deliver me in your righteousness, and cause me to escape: incline your ear unto me, and save me. Be my strong habitation, whereunto I may *continually* resort..." (Ps 71:1-3)

Don't you just love words like *never* and *continually*? In an ever-changing world such promises give us stability and assurance. In an ever-changing world it is so comforting to know that the Lord never changes.²⁰²

These verses are replete with meaningful words and phrases. The entire verse could be put into italics and not be an overemphasis. But it is the last phrase that I want to emphasize the most - *continually resort*. The hiding place of God is a place we can continually take refuge in. That is what God wants us to do and is his provision by which we can overcome our fears. Regardless of what is happening in the world around us, we have a continual hiding place where we will be safe. It will take faith and trust and a little bit of effort on our part to learn how to get there and remain there, but it will prove to be well worth the effort. Let's not wait until difficult times come our way to learn how to hide ourselves in God. Let's make him our continual dwelling place now and forever more.

Keep in mind that faith is a gift.²⁰³ It is not something we can conjure up. God is the giver of the gift of faith and the channel through which he gives it to us is the Bible, the word of God.²⁰⁴ Make the Bible your constant diet. Feast on it. Learn from it. Believe it. God has already given you the faith to do that. All you have to do is exercise that faith in order to gain more faith, as the Bible says, "from faith, to faith."²⁰⁵ We can grow from a little faith to a little more faith, to even more

faith. Our faith increases as we take in God's word and learn to obey it.

If believers are caught unprepared when trials come, it will most likely be because they have not made the word of God a high priority in their lives. I can't stress that enough. According to the Bible, God has given us everything we need to be successful in this life.²⁰⁶ Those provisions are found in his word, our instruction manual on how to wage spiritual warfare and be victorious. It is our responsibility to take it into our heart and mind by reading it, studying it, memorizing it, and meditating on it. The footnote referenced above deserves quoting:

"... his divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, *through the knowledge of him* that has called us to glory and virtue." (2 Pet 1:3)

What a wonderful provision - *all things*. Nothing is lacking for our success. But according to this verse, they are conditioned upon and received through the knowledge of God. That knowledge comes from the Bible, God's word (I know I am being redundant, but I want to stress a point).

Of course we can learn of God through nature, concluding that there is a divine Creator:

"The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork." (Ps 19:1)

But that knowledge alone does not equip us for spiritual battle. Folks, make the Bible a top priority. A solid grasp of the scripture is going to be ever so necessary in the days ahead.

Without giving place to condemnation or legalism, it is not a bad idea to reexamine our priorities from time to time to make sure they are in line with God's will for us. For many of us who have grown up in America, it is easy to forget that we are indeed in a spiritual battle; we have enjoyed so much comfort and safety. Let's not let our enemy dupe us into thinking that we are not at war.²⁰⁷

* * * *

I want to reference another verse out of the Old Testament before we move on, because it may seem to be a contradiction of what has been said thus far. However, it is not:

"Why do you stand afar off, O LORD? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Ps 10:1)

I am quite certain that we have all had times when the Lord seemed to be distant - afar off. Well, we may have *felt* that way, but it simply isn't true because it simply isn't possible. Consider these promises from the word of God, and remember that God cannot lie:²⁰⁸

"Let your conversation [manner of life] be without covetousness; and be content with such things as you have: for he has said, '*I will never leave you, nor forsake you*.'" (Heb 13:5)

Also:

"Lo, I [Jesus] am with you *always*, even unto the end of the world." (Matt 28:20b)

And:

"I [Jesus] will pray to the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you *forever*. Even the Spirit of truth [the Holy Spirit]..." (Jn 14:16-17)

Three promises: the Father will never leave you, the Lord Jesus will never leave you, and the Holy Spirit will never leave you. The entire Godhead, what more assurance do we need?

The Amplified Bible renders the Hebrews passage above this way:

"[God] himself has said, I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. I will not, I will not, I will not in any degree leave you helpless, nor forsake nor let you down, or relax My hold on you. Assuredly not!" (Heb 13:5 AMP)

The repetition of the three phrases, "I will not," is not a typo. There is a triple negative in the Greek, apparently for emphasis. Do we get the point?

To use a previous analogy once again, if I could say it with the booming voice of the angel in the Christmas play in chapter six, I would bellow, "**Just what part of *never leave you is it that you don't understand!***"

We may ask, "Where are you, Lord?" when we feel he is distant from us, but that would be the language of unbelief. Nevertheless, his answer to that misguided question would be, "I am right here with you, now and forever, through thick and thin, through trials and adversity.²⁰⁹ I will never leave you!"

When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were cast into the fiery furnace for refusing to bow down to the king's golden image, where was the Lord then? You will find the answer to that question in the book of Daniel, chapter three. You can read it for yourself, but take special note of verse twenty-five. Apparently, those three believers trusted in the Lord's faithfulness.²¹⁰

So how do we reconcile Psalm 10 with these promises that the Lord will *never* leave us? My answer: there is nothing to reconcile. The problem lies in our unbelief, our lack of faith in what God has said to be true despite what we are experiencing at the moment. The problem is with our tendency to rely on what we are *feeling* rather than *the truth* of God's word. And let's face it, God does allow us to wonder where he is at times, though he is right there all the while.

I may not have a satisfactory answer to why he does that, but I am beyond thinking that his word is untrue. I hope you are as well. Sometimes we have to accept the "mystery" until such time as God gives us revelation of what it is all about. As I have said before, we can do that based on our certainty of

God's integrity and his continued faithfulness to us in the past.

Okay, I will hazard a guess as to why he lets us feel abandoned. One, it is to grow our faith and trust for future challenges. In the future, should we feel the Lord has left us when in difficult circumstances, we can look back on similar experiences and remember that he never really did abandon us. His repeated faithfulness is proof of that.

I suspect the second reason is in order to give us a sense of what our Lord experienced when he was forsaken on the cross. To know Christ, in some measure, involves experiencing what he experienced. The Apostle Paul called it the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.²¹¹ Our Savior experienced total abandonment, something we will never experience:

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" (Ps 22:1)

His was real. Ours is imaginary. When the sins of the world - *our* sins - were laid upon him, his Father did indeed forsake him. He forsook Christ so he wouldn't have to forsake us. I shudder at the thought of what the Lord Jesus endured to purchase my salvation and am humbled to the depths of my soul. To say, thank you, Lord, seems so inadequate. I will attempt to express my gratitude by a surrendered life. In any case, we can be assured that the Lord will never leave us or forsake us under any circumstance. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Roman believers substantiates this as well.

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor an other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8:38-39)

How is that for assurance? Let us be persuaded as well. Let's consider just a few more wonderful assurances before we bring this study to a close:

"The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know your name will put their trust in you: for you, LORD, have not forsaken them that seek you." (Ps 9:9-10)

"The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." (Ps46:11)

"But I will sing of your power; yes, I will sing aloud of your mercy in the morning: for you have been my defense and refuge in the day of my trouble. Unto you, O my strength, will I sing: for God is my defense, and the God of my mercy." (Ps 59:16-17)

Lastly, here is the same theme carried into the New Testament:

"...God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, *who have fled for refuge* to lay hold upon the hope set before us." (Heb 6:17-18)

As you can see, the hiding place theme is evident throughout the Bible. And there are other passages still that we haven't looked at. I get the impression that God wants us to be assured that he will take care of us. Don't you?

At the beginning of this chapter I asked three questions: "What is the secret hiding place of God, where is it, and how do we get there?" I have done my best to answer them, but no doubt there is much more that can be said. It is time, though, to wrap up this study. In the epilogue that follows I will attempt to summarize this discussion.

Chapter 11 Key Points:

1. In the time of trouble, God shall hide us in his secret place.

2. The dwelling place of God, *is* the hiding place, the place of refuge.
3. Flee to God in time of trouble. In fact, dwell in him at all times.
4. God is not distant. He will never leave us, under any circumstance.
5. These earthly struggles will soon be over.

Epilogue - The Conclusion Of The Whole Matter

You may recognize the heading of this epilogue as a quote from King Solomon's book of Ecclesiastes. He used this phrase in summing up his view of the purpose of mankind.²¹² While we have not attempted to exhaust that lofty topic, the phrase seems a fitting way to conclude this study by means of a brief summary, if indeed I haven't wearied you with my repetition thus far. Here is my recap:

- Yes, it is a fearful world - for a little while longer, anyway. We need to be trained and prepared to finish our time on this earth in faith, trusting God to bring us through to victory.
- Don't project into the future, which is anything beyond today. Live only in the present, the immediate set of circumstances you find yourself in at this very moment.
- You won't fear what you don't think about.
- Train your mind to reject negative thoughts and replace them with the truth.
- Your personal reality is the "square yard" in which you exist. You need not be concerned with anything outside of that. God has it all under his control.
- You are covered and protected at his mercy seat, under the wings of the covering cherubims.
- Understand the principle of cause and effect, because that principle governs the universe and cannot be violated without serious consequences. Every choice we make has a predetermined result.
- There is strength in numbers, therefore stay connected to the body of Christ.

- Above all, make your abode the secret hiding place of God, which is God himself, the only truly safe place in the entire universe.

- The Lord will teach us to overcome our fears, if we are teachable, but we must be responsive to his methods.

- The battle is in the mind. To the victor will go the spoils of war, which for believers in Christ are everlasting joy and peace and eternal, unending life... the list is too long to enumerate here.

- The good fight of faith is the battle to believe what God has said to be true despite the appearance of things to the contrary.

- Faith and grace are gifts and necessarily exclude self-effort.

- Faith comes through hearing and learning the word of God. By his word we will know the truth and the truth will make us free from fear.

- This temporal, natural life is only a means to an end, not the sole purpose of our existence. Keep things in prospective.

- It's imperative that we learn to think the way God thinks and see things the way he sees them. We need to focus on eternity, not on this temporal life.

* * **

And now, one final verse of scripture. It is among the last recorded words Moses spoke to the children of Israel before his passing into glory. I think it is a fitting verse to conclude with:

"The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy [your

fears] from before you; and shall say [to the heavenly host], 'Destroy them'." (Deut 33:27)

In the time of trouble he will hide us. That is the conclusion of the whole matter concerning fear. May we all find refuge in the secret hiding place of God.

Amen and Amen!

Footnotes (KJV)

Note: I have attempted to document Biblically the comments made in this study. The following list of references is by no means exhaustive. The Bible, being an integrated whole, provides many cross references. It is our job as students of the Bible to make the connections.

1. 2 Tim 1:9, Rev 13:8
2. Deut 33:27
3. 1 Pet 1:2
4. Rom 8:29
5. Isa 51:11, Ps 37:11,
Isa 9:7
6. Lk 21:32-33
7. 2 Pet 1:4
8. Ps 145:3
9. Jn 6: 39, 40, 44, 54,
Mat 8:11
10. 2 Pet 3:13, Prov 2:22
11. Job 33:25
(the resurrection)
12. Heb 12:2
13. Jer 29:11
14. Phil 1:6
15. Acts 2:16-17, Heb 1:2
16. Gen 6:5
17. Gen 3:10
18. Heb 2:18, Heb 4:15
19. Prov 1:33
20. Ps 19:9
21. *The Knowledge of the Holy*, Harper
One,
1978, page 84
22. Rom 8:38-39
23. Jn 10:28-30
24. Jn 6:37
25. 1 Cor 10:13
26. 2 Tim 3: 1-5
27. 2 Thes 2:3
28. 1 Jn 5:13
29. Rom 11:29
30. Heb 12:5-6
31. 2 Tim 4:18, Phil 1:20
32. 1 Pet 2:5
33. Rom 8:28
34. 2 Cor 1:20, Rom 8:17
35. Esther 4:14
36. Isa 28:10
37. Col 3:4, Jn 16:33,
- 1 Jn 5:4-5
38. 2 Tim 3:1, Eph 6:11-13
39. 1 Jn 4:16&18
40. Ps 16:10
41. Eph 6:10-18
42. Jm 4:10
43. Job 41:1, 10, and 33
44. Rom 8:9
45. 1 Jn 4:4
46. Acts 2:23, 1 Pet 1:2
47. Eph 1:4
48. Mat 18:3
49. Jn 11:26
50. 1 Cor 10:13
51. Heb 13:3
52. Rom 6:23 and Rom 1:32
53. Col 2:13, Heb 10:14
54. Jn 19:30
55. Heb 12:6
56. Heb 12:9-10
57. Phil 1:6
58. Rom 5:17
59. Gen 1:26
60. 1 Cor 2:9-10
61. Rom 8:38-39
62. Heb 12:2, Rom 8:18
63. 1 Pet 5:7
64. 1 Cor 2:16
65. Jn 8:44
66. 2 Cor 5:17
67. Jn 1:13
68. Gal 2:20
69. Col 3:4
70. 2 Pet 1:3-4
71. Isa 53:3
72. Heb 1:3 and Col 1:15
73. Jn 14:9
74. Eph 6:10-18
75. Rom 6:6
76. Phil 1:6
77. 1 Cor 10:13
78. 2 Cor 12:9

79. 1 Sam 17:1-54
80. 2 Tim 2:3
81. Jn 5:19 and 30
82. Gal 3:29
83. 1 Sam 17:47
84. Col 3:4
85. 2 Pet 1:16
86. Lk 23:34
87. Lam 3:22-23 and Ps 136
88. Eph 2:4-6
89. 2 Tim 2:15
90. 1 Cor 15:50-55
91. Heb 12:5-10
92. 1 Pet 2:24, 2 Cor 5:21
93. Rom 8:7
94. 1 Jn 1:9-10
95. 2 Pet 1:3
96. 2 Cor 2:14, 1 Cor 15:57
97. 1 Tim 6:12
98. Num 13:25-33
99. 2 Pet 1:3, Phil 2:13
100. 2 Pet 3:18
101. Gal 3:26
102. Rom 8:38-39
103. Phil 2:5-8
104. Rev 3:14, 19:11
105. Gal 2:20, Col 3:4
106. Jn 8:29
107. Rom 7:18-19
108. Mat 4:6
109. Rom 8:17
110. Eph 6:13
111. Prov 12:10
112. Rom 8:28
113. 2 Cor 4:18
114. Rom 8:18, 2 Cor 4:17
115. Phil 1:6, Isa 14:27
116. Ps 39:5
117. Eph 5:29-30
118. Gal 2:20
119. Mk 16:16
120. Heb 10:14
121. Eph 2:9
122. Eph 2:10
123. Rom 6:23
124. Lk 2:10
125. Jn 8:32
126. Rom 5:14
127. Jn 16:33
128. 1 Jn 4:19
129. Mat 19:26
130. Job 34:10, Jm 1:13
131. Jm 1:2-4
132. Acts 17:24-28
133. Jn 4:24
134. Acts 17:28
135. Titus 1:2
136. Cor 5:19
137. 1 Jn 5:7
138. Jn 6: 39, 40, 44, 54,
Isa 51:11
139. 1 Jn 2:1-2
140. Isa 26:3-4
141. Rom 8:28
142. 1 Cor 13:12
143. Mat 6:34
144. Jn 8:31-32
145. Rom 8:24-25
146. Heb 2:15
147. 1 Cor 10:13
148. Job 42:10
149. Job 1:11-12
150. Job 1:20-22, 2:3, 42:7
151. Job 34:5
152. Gen 1:26
153. Jn 15:1-2
154. 2 Cor 1:3-4
155. Prov 3:5-6, Ps 22:4-5
156. Job 2:3,13:15,
Gen 22:11-12
157. Job 42:1-2, Jer 32:17
158. Phil 3:10
159. Job 19:25-27,
2 Cor 4:16-18
160. Job 1:21
161. Job 3:11, 7:20
162. Job 6:1-4
163. Job 34:5
164. Job 42:5-6
165. Job 36:8-12, Heb 12:6
166. 2 Cor 5:19
167. 2 Cor 12:9
168. 2 Cor 5:8, Phil 1:23
169. 1 Cor 15:17-19
170. 1 Thes 4:15- 17,
2 Pet 3:10
171. Mal 3:6, Titus 1:2
172. 2 Pet 3:9
173. Acts 17:31
174. 1 Tim 4:2
175. Rom 2:14-15
176. Prov 21:10
177. Rom 1:19-20, Rom 7:9
178. Rom 7:7-9, Eze 18:20a
179. Ps 133:1
180. Eph 4:8, 1 Cor 12:4-10
181. Ps 110:3
182. 1 Tim 6:12
183. Deut 25:17-18
184. Lk 17:21

185. Mat 13: 24,31,33, etc.
186. Gal 5:16
187. Gal 3:26
188. Heb 12:22-23
189. 2 Cor 4:4, Rev 12:12
190. Gen 3:4-5
191. Acts 2:36, Matt 11:25,
2 Cor 3:17
192. Eph 4:4-6
193. Jn 1:1
194. Jn 1:14
195. Col 3:4
196. Phil 2:9
197. Ps 18:10, 104:3
198. Heb 4:16
199. Phil 1:23
200. Jn 15:20
201. Act 17:31, Ps 9:8,
Ps 96:13
202. Mal 3:6
203. Eph 2:8
204. Rom 10:17
205. Rom 1:17
206. 2 Pet 1:3
207. 2 Cor 10:4, 1 Tim 1:18
208. Titus 1:2
209. Isa 43:1-3
(insert your name)
210. Dan 3:12-30
211. Phil 3:10
212. Eccl 12:13

(BACK COVER)

"For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock." (Ps 27:5)

Embedded in this passage is the clue to overcoming fear. Fear is a living reality. Everyone has to deal with it. Navy Seals experience fear. My nephew, a retired Green Beret, admitted to experiencing fear in the line of duty. No one is exempt. But the question is, can this great nemesis of our souls be overcome? The Bible's answer is an unequivocal yes. God has made a way for those who put their faith in him to overcome fear.

In this study we will consider just how that can be done. Join me in my personal quest to overcome this tyrant. Yes, it is a fearful world, but there is indeed a place of refuge, a place where we can experience peace and safety now in this life. God has seen to it. Let's take this journey together with faith and confidence in Him and in the Great Champion of our souls, the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

(Photo)

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