

Jesus Calls Us To Maturity, Not Perfection

CHAPTER 6

"Praise Leads to Maturity"

Carl Sandburg tells the story about Abe Lincoln at the age of seven. One evening, Abe walked over to his cabin door and opened it. He looked up into the face of the full moon and said, "Mr. Moon, what do you see from way up there?"

Mr. Moon answered, "Abe, I see a calendar and it says 1816. I see eight million people in the United States of America. I see 16,000 covered wagons plodding slowly across the midwestern plains toward California. And, Abe, I see far to the west a wagon in the desert between two ridges of the Rocky Mountains. The wagon is broken, weeds are crawling in the spokes and there is an old dusty skeleton nearby with a pair of empty moccasins and some dry bones. I also see a sign that says, "The cowards never started!"

Troubles? Give God thanks! The very fact that you are facing troubles is a compliment to you--you had the courage to stick your neck out and try something. When you have this attitude toward troubles, they generally turn into blessings, compliments, or tributes. When trouble blocks the road and forces you to take a detour which, in turn, spares you from an accident, then trouble becomes a blessing.

When suffering forces you to unload excess baggage in your life

which you have not had the courage to get rid of before, then trouble is a blessing in disguise! Give God thanks when you face a problem, and you are maturing.

I do not always understand what is happening in my life, but I can thank God always that He is with me!

A recipe for victory is established in the following story.

A farmer owned a mule. The mule fell into a well, and the farmer wrung his hands and lamented his loss; but, concluded it was too expensive to hire a crane truck to pull it out. So, the farmer decided that mercy would best be shown by simply filling in the well with dirt known as "mercy killing". Shovel by shovel he buried the mule with dirt. The mule could have said--"**Oh, woe is me! I am doomed for destruction! Daddy mule never got any education and Mama Mule was a wild mare of the prairie. Brother Mule never amounted to anything, so I guess it is my lot to be buried alive!**". But, he had a thought of inspiration! Each time they threw in a shovel full of dirt, he just shook it off, stomped and stepped up. **Shake, stomp and step up....shake, stomp and step up....and in due time he walked out of the well in VICTORY!!!!**

BORN TO WIN is God's plan for us. "Born to Lose" is an expression advertised on the window of a Tattoo Parlor. I asked--"Does anyone ever have that tattooed on their body." He replied "Yes, but before they do it is tattooed on their 'mind'. Then I place it on their chest, arm or forehead." Just so, in learning to **PRAISE THE LORD** in our life, then the concept of "Born to win" must first be 'tattooed into our 'heart-mind'. We must willingly desire to be a **VICTOR**, then when positive or negative events come our way we are programmed to say, "Thank You Lord," which will be

our first response to life's vicissitudes.

" Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Romans 8:35

A "conqueror" wins the battle; but, a "more than conqueror" wins the battle-war **plus wins back everything the enemy has stolen providing we make a praise response to the vicissitudes which hound us daily. This is true of much in this life and ALL in the next life!**

WE not only WIN THE WAR, but also win back from the enemy what he has stolen which may include joy ... health ... hope .. time ... life ... things, etc.

BECOMING VICTORS requires a battle plan so-to-speak. It was so in 2 Chronicles 20---

"Now all Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children, stood before the LORD.

14 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly.

15 And he said, "Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the LORD to you: 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's.

16 'Tomorrow go down against them. They will surely come up by the Ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of

the brook before the Wilderness of Jeruel.

17 'You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD is with you."

18 And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem bowed before the LORD, worshiping the LORD.

19 Then the Levites of the children of the Kohathites and of the children of the Korahites stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with voices loud and high.

20 So they rose early in the morning and went out into the Wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper."

21 And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: "Praise the LORD, for His mercy endures forever."

22 Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated.

23 For the people of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to utterly kill and destroy them. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

24 So when Judah came to a place overlooking the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; and there were their dead bodies, fallen on the earth. No one had escaped.

25 When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away their spoil, they found among them an abundance of valuables on

the dead bodies, and precious jewelry, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away; and they were three days gathering the spoil because there was so much.

26 And on the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Berachah, for there they blessed the LORD; therefore the name of that place was called The Valley of Berachah until this day.

27 Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, with Jehoshaphat in front of them, to go back to Jerusalem with joy, for the LORD had made them rejoice over their enemies.

28 So they came to Jerusalem, with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets, to the house of the LORD.

29 And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel.

30 Then the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around." (NKJ) 2 Chronicles 20:13-30

Jesus said:

"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." John 10:10

I learned life's "battle plan" for praise in my growing up years as I was taught by word and example to be thankful since God is in charge in life

In 1944 or 45 the price of wheat was fluctuating because of the War. We were ready to sell in August and wheat was \$1.98 per bushel. Mother said--"Tomorrow will be a better day."

We waited and three days later wheat went to an unprecedented

\$5.03 per bushel at the Hardtner, Kansas elevator. That was the brighter day! We sold! Bought a new John Deere combine, and a farm in southeast Kansas.

So in life, if we will wait upon the Lord in trust and praise we gain! In the above incident we gained more than twice as much by doing as the donkey did--shake, stomp and step up.

In the last two verses of a memorial poem to my mother-Tempest Johnson 1901-1992 - Mother Taught Us What To Do. - I alluded to this teaching in,

"Mother taught me what do when life's skies are gray:

Dirty thirties brought clouds of dirt:

**Chickens Choked! Crops died, all from dirty
black skies.**

And this little boy cried when his kitten died.

**But, Mother said: *We will wait and pray, work and
hope, for there will be a better day
tomorrow.***

So, in later years when my son died.

I remembered what to do with gray skies.

**And, now on a day like today when my skies have turned
to gray because Mothers' gone away.**

I remember what to do.

That gray skies are turned to gold

**When I wait with hope and praise Him with
words bold.**

Then this turns my gray skies into a bright day!

by Wilbur S. Johnson 7-24-92

We begin our VICTORY walk by acknowledging that God is in

charge by praising Him in the midst of the trials of life. This we do by praising Him as Paul said:

"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;" Ephesians 5:20 (KJV)

So, we too may have VICTORY in all our days of living and serving if we will count our trials as JOY.

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be *mature* and complete, lacking nothing." James 1:2-4 (NKJ)

"Count it all joy when you fall into various trials,"

The NKJ translates the phrase "*whenever you face trials of many kinds*" as "*when you fall into various trials*," This falling into trials are most often *holes on the Road of Life* which we *dig* by our careless living, sins, etc. This is a trait of man which started with Adam and Eve who *dug the first big hole*, and ever since people, have been *digging holes and falling into them*.

The trials, tests, tribulations which we often encounter occur as the King James translation asserts-- when we "*fall*" into them. That is, we dig a *hole* so-to-speak while traveling *life's road*, then inadvertently fall into it.

Such was the case with my brother-Oren, sisters-Patsy and Janet, and myself when we borrowed without permission my Dad's good lariat rope, used in the Spring cattle roundup. Throwing the rope over a sturdy elm tree limb we fastened it to a long-wide board notched at the ends. All four of us started to swing to and fro until the rope broke.

I had an ingenious idea of weaving the rope threads back together and carefully, applying glue, then wrapping it with some fine copper colored wire. This I did, and let it dry overnight. It seemed strong and I again engaged the swing board swinging to and fro; but, on the second "fro" I flew and my arm cracked. I had *dug my own hole* and fell into it.

It is my observation of life that most people come upon trials-tribulations, which are *holes* we have *dug* or assisted in *digging*.

Such was the case with Old Testament Joseph, one of 12 sons of Jacob. True, God gave Joseph the gift of interpreting dreams, and must have supplied the two dreams about the Sheaves of wheat and the Sun, Moon and Stars bowing down. He interpreted these to his brothers and represented himself as the one they bowed down to. I suggest after he saw his brothers become jealous when his father gave him the "Coat of many Colors," (Genesis 37:3) and noted their outrage at the first dream interpretation, that certainly sharing the second dream was *digging a hole* which he would *fall into* later. Sure enough, true to form, his brothers cast him into a literal hole-cistern-cave, then retrieved him in order to make a *fast buck* by selling him to a band of Ishmaelites. One *hole* followed another. Next came the *hole* of being sold as a slave, then being cast into prison.

David also *dug a hole*, then *fell* into it in the matter of adultery with Bathsheba, then lying about the whole matter the *hole got bigger and deeper*. (2 Samuel 11:3)

While there is grave danger on the on hand of people striving for 100% perfection, and reaping all the bad fruits of such an impossible venture; there is another grave danger and that is of choosing to

remain where we are, as we are, with little or no progress.

My brethren, **count it all joy** when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be *mature* and complete, lacking nothing." James 1:2-4 (NKJ)

"Count it all joy"

So, James asserts that we are to **"Consider it pure joy when we face trials of many kinds."** He does not say trials are a joy but by faith as an act of our will we are to consider it all joy.

How do we learn to regard the trials of life as a matter of joy?

Praising God is a matter of Spirit and self-discipline. Jesus gives us the recipe:

"Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me'." Luke 9:23 (NIV)

Our greatest enemy to Praising God is "SELF". Self must be cast down, so Jesus says "I can of my own self do nothing," John 5:30 and again "deny self". Every act of disobedience and non obedience in the Bible has at its heart "SELF"-- Self-centeredness, SELF-assertion, SELF-glorification, and selfishness in a variety of forms. It was so with Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden and still reigns today.

* Be willing to crucify self. Visualize this by drawing a parallel line (----)through the "I" of your ego which produces a

cross(+). Now you can declare--"It is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me." Galatians 2:20

* Add up all your rights, then throw them away--

* Calculate your earthly desires, then forget them--

(Philippians 3:7,8)

* Consider the importance of your earthly knowledge. Be sure it equals "0". (Proverbs 3:5; I Corinthians 1:25-27)

* Begin to think of yourself as a slave--(Romans 6:22)

* See yourself as crucified-- (Galatians 2:20)

This experience must be a daily attitude as Paul says

"I die daily" I Corinthians 15:31.

"My heart is steadfast, O God, I will sing and give praise. Awake, my glory! Awake, lute and harp! I will awaken the dawn." -Psalm 57:7,8

The attitude of gratitude releases the dynamic power that helps you survive. Gratitude also releases reviving power. You can find the power to start again when you feel like quitting. You can pick up the pieces and bounce back to make a comeback.

I fill my mind with thoughts of gratitude concerning God, the people I know and the circumstances that surround me!

Linda Dellenbach of Abbyville, Kansas shares an incident out of her life which illustrates facing life with the joy of trust and praise.

"February 22

"Some trust in chariots (*chemotherapy*) and some in horses (*radiation*), but we will trust in the Lord our God."

Psalm 20:7 (*Italics, my application*)

"In September when I was diagnosed with cancer I was just ready to start reading Job (I'm reading through the

Bible). I was reluctant to start reading there as it seemed like a downer to me, but Josh, our son, said he would read through Job with me which gave me a boost and I started.

"As usual, God knew what He was doing! The main blessings I received were:

1. God is all wise and powerful. But sometimes we don't have a clue why He's doing what He's doing.

2. We need to be careful not to jump to conclusions why some one is suffering. Instead we need to listen to God for sensitivity on how to comfort that person.

3. God is really all we have. Keep focused on Him!

"Now I am reading through Psalms and its also been exactly what I need. It is a great book of praise to God, encouragement that God is with us, and the battle and victory are His. At first cancer thoughts invaded ny thoughts continuously. That was good, though as it forced me to pump God thoughts and scriptures in my mind in order to survive without major fear.

I have had a relatively easy time and I praise God for one little blessing that was big to me. Charity, God and I found a wig in which I feel comfortable.

I know-'vanity, vanity'. Smile! It is even equipped with a cowlick which I choose to see as an extra authentic touch.

"I will close with this thought and Scripture. *'May God arise and his enemies be scattered—'* Psalm 68:17 and *'The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of*

thousands.' Psalm 68:17. Because you belong to Him, your enemies are His enemies. So whatever manifested or sneaky enemies you are up against right now may they be scattered and soundly defeated in your life.

"I deeply appreciate the medical advances. One of those, the Zofran they have given me before each 'chemo'. I have had no nausea. Dr. Jennings, our oncologist, is very up on the latest and best treatment for breast cancer and has been in charge from the lumpectomy through the 'chemo and radiation. We have appreciated and felt good about his very personable and knowledgeable staff of nurses from the beginning. However our ultimate trust is and has to be in God who is really choreographing the life dance which I am in.

"I'm done with my treatment now and the nurse just told me how well I have done with Chemotherapy. She said Dr. Jennings remarked that I've done better with 'chemo' than anyone he's ever had as a patient. That's your prayers and the faithfulness of God!!!!

*Thanks again" - *Linda Dellenbach - Abbyville, Kansas*

*Linda her husband, Keith, have been special friends of ours since 1974 when they ministered at Greensburg, Kansas and we ministered down the road at Minneola. We have been blessed in getting to share Faith Alive Revivals where they ministered and Keith and Linda have given us high encouragement through application of the faith alive Bible principles, and counseled us in many ways. (See my second book Build My People, pp. 24,25, for a true story testimony of their Christian home.)

**What I want instead is your true thanks to God" Psalm 50:14
NLB Give thanks instead of what," you may be thinking? Well,**

to be honest, there are a lot of things that we do that **if we took the time to give thanks to God instead of just going ahead and doing them, we would be a lot better off.** One thing I have been trying to practice is catching myself when I am about to say something to my wife or my children in a wrong frame of mind, and thanking God for them and how much they mean to me before I continue. It truly changes what comes out of my mouth. No telling how long it will take me to perfect it, but a start is better than nothing.

Scripture tells us to "get a grip on every thought that does not bring glory to God." (2 Corinthians 10:5) My version of casting down every imagination that exalts itself against the glory of God. **Well, I believe that giving thanks to God is one of the greatest weapons we have to help us to accomplish this.** In this Psalm, God says that He does not need much of anything that we have to offer Him. He has all the wealth, food, and possessions in the World. What He really desires is our true thanks. He desires that we pay our vows to Him. When we say we want Him to be Lord of our lives, He wants us to present ourselves to Him and allow Him to transform us.

He wants us to trust Him in times of trouble and promises to rescue us if we will. And when He does, He says that we will give Him glory for the great things He has done.

You see He wants to do great things for us so that we will give Him glory.

There are many other areas in our lives where thanks to God will change everything. Just imagine how it would change things if when our thoughts were nothing but negative we began to give thanks to God for what is good and wonderful and even for the good

plans we have not yet seen. It would renew our minds and refocus our attention. "Yes but that only lasts for so long," you may say. Well then start over when it wears off.

God never said that everything in our lives would be perfect. He said that He is perfect and He is perfectly willing to hear our prayers and answer us when we call. It takes an effort to keep our focus on His promises when we have the things of this world staring us in the face. That is why He says to think on things above. Think on the things that are above and beyond your circumstances. Think about the victory that God has promised. And of course, give thanks.

Don't ignore what God promises as though they do not apply to what is happening right now. He says that giving thanks is a sacrifice that truly honors Him and if we will keep His path He will reveal the salvation of God. (Psalm 50:23) Now there is something to give thanks for. **It has been my experience that this works every time. God never fails.** thoughts by Roger Day of Highmore, SD and edited by Wilbur Johnson

"Count it all joy"

'My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be *mature* and complete, lacking nothing.'

James 1:2-4 (NKJ)

The subject of "PRAISE" is often treated with two extremes:

1. Ultra extreme of supposing that the phrase-- "***Praise the Lord***"(PTL)-- is p-r-a-i-s-e, and
2. substituting "P.T.L." for adoration of God. The phrase is simply an admonition to do it,

(Almost every reference in the Psalms-- 68:32; 86:12; 57:9; is not praise in and of itself, but an admonition to praise God. Both are inherently lacking in the church.

Many have grown adept at using the expression "**Praise the Lord**" in reference to the positive blessings which come their way, but have a total lacking on the other side of acknowledging Jesus is Lord by praising Him for the vicissitudes as well.

Too much praise is self centered rather than God centered. Most of our hymns are self/man/need centered. Examples of pure praise hymns are "How Great Thou Art," "Crown Him With Many Crowns." "Holy, Holy, Holy," "Great Is Thy Faithfulness."

We are to take Up Our Cross with **PRAISE/JOY**-- Matthew 9:23 ; James 1:2

I have found it so in the midst of life's crises---*

* On the way to share a Faith Alive Revival in Ashland, Kansas as I was leaving Arkansas City, Kansas the brakes on my car locked up producing black smoke and causing the tires to skid. I pulled into a K-Mart parking lot and PRAISED THE LORD for these locked brakes. This unlocked the brakes, I drove on, and after that they never locked again..

* In a ice storm, ground blizzard on the way to Holly, Colorado. PRAISING the Lord for and while driving on a "closed highway" through raging wind and snow the Lord brought me through the storm and safely to Holly.

* When our Suburban and Trailer slid on black ice turning over

on the way to a Revival at Mooreland, Oklahoma-- PRAISE was our first response.

* When our daughter was raped by a good friend, PRAISING GOD that He was in charge, was our first response.

Refusing to acknowledge that Jesus is Lord by praising Him results not only in no victory, but induces other negative factors as we discovered when our first born son, Lynn, died in a one car accident at age 18. Praising the Lord was at the bottom of my "Do List," so as six months passed I was filled with worry, bitterness, and regret. But, VICTORY won the day when I PRAISED THE LORD acknowledging that God was-is in charge of all incidents including accidents. (Romans 8:28)

I know a person whose life's events read much like Job of the Old Testament. He lost his wife to cancer but refused to PRAISE THE LORD, that is to assert "THY WILL BE DONE." In a critical skiing accident he injured his body resulting in loss of his profession. Yet, he would not say "THY WILL BE DONE." Next his house burned but still NO PRAISE to accept God's Will. Finally, he was involved in a car wreck, but still was unwilling to assert "GOD IS IN CHARGE--blessed be his name!" All the time his bitterness and rebellion towards self, others and life increased.

Maurine Moore of Ashland, Kansas came to visit and shared the following story of God's *fingerprints* in the life of her family over the years.

Maurine's brother, Dean, caught Polio at age 15. Totally paralyzed he could do nothing for himself except talk as his mind remained exceeding sharp. Don Rock, local minister at that time, came daily and assisted with Dean.

Through all his 33 years and vicissitudes his parents cared for him at home. Looking back, Maurine remarked, "**We were so thankful for it all! God's grace was more than sufficient!**"

The testing of your faith produces patience.

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be *mature* and complete, lacking nothing." James 1:2-4 (NKJ)

Allowing praise to mature us is not complicated like the story of the horse and its owner below. A man moved to a house and barn at the edge of town. He purchased a horse to live in the barn, but experienced grave difficulty in getting the horse into the barn for its ears were too long. He gets a saw and plans to saw out the top of the door so the horse can enter.

A neighbor seeing his plight comes over, sizes up the problem and suggests it be solved by digging a ditch under the door so the horse can walk in.

"Nope, it will never work" says the horse owner.

"Why not?" says the neighbor.

"Because it's the horse's ears that are too long, not its legs," asserts the owner.

Allowing *praise* to mature us is not a matter of changing life's events but adapting ourselves.

To do this we must receive more of God's grace.

"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." James 4:6 KJV

How can we receive more grace? Above James says God is the giver of "more grace" which makes possible our maturing.

"Charis," the Greek word for **grace**, means "*Divine favor, power freely given to undeserving people*" There are four senses of "grace" from the Greek word "*charis*." The one used here is

"Enabling power"--

"But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble'." James 4:6

"And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all." Acts 4:33

We are given the grace of *enabling power* in order to praise God for all events to mature us in Christ's likeness.

How do we allow this patience to develop us?

"In everything give thanks," then what? I Thessalonians 5:18

There is no doubt about it, we are to ***GIVE THANKS FOR ALL THINGS***. (Ephesians 5:20; I Thessalonians 5:18; I Peter 2:9; Hebrews 13:15; Philippians 4:4; I Thessalonians 5:16; Ephesians 1:15,16; Colossians 3:17).

But, having followed the Divine instruction, **t-h-e-n what?** Do we lie down like a rug and let life run us over? Do we resign our future to fate and no change? Wisdom decrees that we **TAKE INVENTORY**, then **ACT!**

"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Psalm 90:12

In direct relation to "trials" James says in chapter one:

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing

of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." NIV

Examples of the above ---*

* When our first-born son, Lynn, at age 18 left for glory out of a auto accident, it took one year for the Lord to make me willing to give thanks. I did, **t-h-e-n, wisdom prompted me to made a note** to never purchase another small car like an Opel Kadet which tips over easily having a very high center of gravity.

* When our vehicle license plates were ordered revoked by the State of Kansas in 1977 due to a fluke computer entry by our insurance company, I thanked the Lord, **t-h-e-n wisdom taught me to make a note to change insurance companies.**

* When a local video company promised me a master tape of the "Dealing With Devil" study seminar for \$600. but upon delivery charged me \$1,000. more. I informed the Preacher of the Bible Christian Church (BCC) where we were members as he was a member of our non-profit corporation. The elders of the church did nothing, so I thanked the Lord, **t-h-e-n, wisdom bid me never to do business again with this**

firm.

* One of the elders of the BCC roofed our house and installed guttering. The roof leaked and the guttering was hung with roof straps lowering our property value several thousand dollars, and now the guttering and straps must be removed to install a new set of shingles. I thanked the Lord, **t-h-e-n**, **wisdom required me** to find another firm.

* When an expert heart doctor "killed" my brother because his expertise gave him "tunnel vision" causing him to be unable to see my brother's problem was pneumonia and an aneurysm in the lung, not heart, I praised the Lord, **t-h-e-n** the **Lord bid me** to lessen my confidence in men and the fleshly mind.

*An elder of BCC through careless driving allowed his vehicle to cross the center line of highway 15 on a trip to Wichita. He killed his own wife plus a best friend of mine and elder of BCC; also, maimed a young man in the other car and killed his soon bride to be. After the funerals, two years went by. I became able to **place the Lord in charge** by **praising Him**, **t-h-e-n**, **my wisdom took note** that this elder went out and bought a new car and married another wife. I checked with the young man who had been crippled for life and learned this elder had never written or called on this young Christian man to offer his understanding or assistance. The elder's insurance company insisted that a small pittance must be split three ways among the survivors, so I sought the counsel of the County Attorney and after study, he advised me the elder had

slipped through a loop hole in the law and no prosecution could take place. He could be held libel in a civil court. So, **wisdom decreed** that **I withdraw fellowship** from this man, which I did.

* When our Suburban and trailer slid on "black ice" and turned over, by God's grace I was able to praise Him immediately. **T-h-e-n, wisdom decreed** that at much expense I have new brakes installed on the trailer.

* Following a sexual assault incident on me in a local park, anonymous phone calls began to plague us between midnight and five in the morning. Sometimes the callers would harass us by hanging up when we answered; yet other times they would try to disguise voice and curse us. A careful study and investigation revealed that these were being made by at least two members of BCC. The Elders did nothing. **We thanked God.** **T-h-e-n, wisdom spoke,** telling us to obtain an unlisted number and isolate our old number to the office. **This we did and pressed on.**

* Out of the park attack upon me hundreds responded with understanding and counsel. All of the counsel was good and well meant, but it became impossible to follow it all. When I chose to NOT follow the counsel of one brother and friend, he withdrew his support of Faith Alive Ministry plus our friendship and fellowship for some 30 years. We released the matter into God's hands by praising Him, **t-h-e-n, wisdom reminded us** that even Jesus had to learn obedience, rejection of friends and not to commit Himself to men. (John 2:24,25; Philippians 2:8)

* We were "starving" for Bible preaching as we had been for 18 years. When I consulted the elders of BCC that the "wood, hay and stubble" preaching did not satisfy and pointed out to them that many other families, 72 individuals in all, had already left the church one by one over a dozen years saying the same thing, **they did nothing.** I thanked God since nothing happens by chance, and the Lord spoke through His Word to us-- "**Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.**" 2 Corinthians 6:17. **T-h-e-n** wisdom demanded we seek another church. **This we did**, finding a New Testament people in a Mount Zion Country church.

PATIENCE is the bottom line of GIVING THANKS FOR ALL THINGS, **t-h-e-n**, do **NOT** lie down like a rug for people to walk on, walk over and kick you about; but, listen closely for the VOICE OF WISDOM as God speaks out of His Word by His Spirit counseling you.

Paul states that PATIENCE is the fruit of trials/tribulations:

"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;" Romans 5:3

So over many years and as the result of facing many vicissitudes, I have learned *patience* to thank the Lord when I developed hiccups as we were preparing to attend Sunday services with our daughter, Rebecca, and grand daughter, Katie. As usual I tried all the self prescribed remedies--hold my breath, breathe into a sack, drink fluid slowly, drink some buttermilk, etc. Nothing worked. We started to drive the 32 miles to services, then suddenly it occurred to

me--"**Praise the Lord in all things!**" And, just as suddenly SELF reared its head to say "Why?" Spirit self answered, "Because in everything give thanks" (I Thessalonians 5:18). So with Rebecca driving, I leaned my head back and prayed-praised--"Thank You Lord for these pesky hiccups. I'm thanking You for them because You told me to." In a matter of moments the hiccups were gone and I thanked Him for that, too. Terribly simple? YES! But, the principle is the same in all of life--things LARGE and small.

LET GO OF SELF and Praise The Lord!

And, what will patience do when when there is no rain!

Just this week a lady walking down our street here in Ashland greeted me saying, "**Are you the person who praised God for the drought and now its snowing.**" My response, "**Well, yes for it is no secret what God can do.**" **Fifty or more people joined me in praising the Lord for the drought, and now we have moisture. Blessed be His Name!**"

My sermon subject on Sunday, January 27th. was "**Practicing the Presence of God in the Present Tense**" at the Protection, Kansas Christian Church. At the conclusion I challenged the people by asking **if they would be willing to practice the presence of the Lord in the present tense by thanking Him (I Thess. 5:18) for the drought which has been on going for months.** 90% raised their hands. So, we PRAISED THE LORD for the drought, then thanked Him for the moisture which He would send. Now, three days later (January 30, 2002) we are in the midst of a Winter moisture storm --ice-sleet/snow--- 6 to 10 inches of snow on the level!

We did what Job did--Job 1:19-21; Habakkuk did--3:17-19; Paul did--2 Cor. 12:7-10, and Jesus did!

"But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have **My joy** fulfilled in themselves." John 17:13

"These things I have spoken to you, that **My joy** may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." John 15:11

"looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."
Hebrews 12:2

God always honors His WORD and NAME!

Some PRAISE Suggestions

1. Do **NOT** praise the Lord expecting something in return--health, finances, rain, snow, etc. Praise God for Who He is and His salvation.

2. Learn to praise the Lord for all things in life--both the big and small / positive and negative--Ephesians 5:20,
I Thessalonians 5:18.

3. See my book Faith Alive in Hear and Home (red cover) pages 132-170. 7 Specific suggestions, pg. 167

"that you may be *mature and complete, lacking nothing.*"

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, **that you may be *mature and complete, lacking nothing.*"** James 1:2-4 (NKJ)

I heard a testimony by Ken Duncan, a world renowned

photographer from Australia, also, a devoted Christian Brother who said: "Nothing happens by chance. God has a divine destiny in all things!" It's a reality that the many adverse and good events in our family and this ministry and others have been allowed, not caused by the Lord, and He is using them for His glory and our good as prescribe by Paul--

**"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.
"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." Romans 8:28, 37**

While writing my manuscripts for this book and the previous five the Lord has often interrupted my progress by requiring me to live out the theme under consideration one more time. So it has been with this chapter.

When suffering forces you to unload excess baggage in your life which you have not had the courage to get rid of before, then trouble is a blessing in disguise! Give God thanks when you face a problem!

I do not always understand what is happening in my life, but I can thank God always for He is with me! Leaving home here in Ashland, Kansas early Wednesday morning, (September 2, 2002) we planned to return the following day; but that one day venture turned into a near one week trial..

My MRI test at Dodge City was completed, and we were lunch guests of Mike Weece, then stayed over in a inexpensive motel, rested and prepared for a appointment with my neurologist the next day. We closed the day with our usual Family Altar and retired.

At 2 A.M. the *trial* began when I made a rush trip to the bathroom and discovered I was hemorrhaging. Imalee awakened, we prayed for

guidance and determined we must head for an ER, perhaps at Pratt--75 miles east. Calling our doctor--Wes Young in Ashland we apprised him of our dilemma and he advised us to go to Pratt where I had undergone a Scope test one week prior. Motor running we sat parked on the motel lot waiting for Dr. Wes to call. Imalee led in a prayer for guidance, angelic attendance and clear highways. The call came and with Imalee at the wheel we roared onto the highway. It seemed like a long journey and I felt the blood flowing onto the motel towel on the car seat. I began to Praise the Lord and asked only that His Will be done. At 4:30 A.M. we checked into the Pratt, Kansas ER.

It was at this time that I was aware of a covering of Strong Peace surrounding me as as Jesus promised:

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." John 14:27

Lying in the ER at Pratt as the 'bottom' dropped out of my blood pressure my body began to heave and sob. The ER doctor said--"We are losing him." A nurse said--"He's afraid." I responded-- "I am not afraid for 'God is my refuge and strength and underneath are the everlasting arms'. True my body was shaking inside which I suppose was a malfunction of something, or my flesh did not want to let go of my spirit. "They called the Hospital Chaplain and he ministered to Imalee. Imalee called our daughter, Rebecca, in Wichita and she came and they ministered to each other all that day. The head nurse asked if I had a "Living Will?" I said-- "My will is to live; but, we do have a Living Will paper out in our car." At this they began to stabilize me. Silently I continued to praise Jesus for being in charge.

Transferred to the ICU unit I was plugged into a double IV and hooked up to one of the heart/pressure/oxygen machines. Having determined I had lost much blood they began talk of procedures for a transfusion. I balked unless they would guarantee me no Aides or Syphilis in the plasma. They couldn't and Imalee signed the forms. However, suddenly the verticular hemorrhage stopped, my hemoglobin leveled out-- I was stabilizing. How was this possible? The Doctors and Nurses acknowledged they had done nothing to this point except make me comfortable. What can Angels do? God's mighty power was at work--WOW! I spent two days in ICU and two days in a regular room.

An hour went by-- Leona Messer of Ashland called members of her family engaging them in prayer; Imalee called Mike Ellington and Bob Davis of Ashland who engaged the Ashland Church prayer line and the E-Line Prayer Line for SOS prayer assistance.

The importance of Christian Brothers/Sisters visiting in the Hospital was emphasized to me as twenty ministers came to call-- Mike Ellington and Bob Davis were the first to come and pray.

On Saturday evening Bro. Tom Walters of Medicine Lodge came to call, encourage and pray followed by young Todd Walters of Medicine Lodge, a High School senior who came during a intermission of practice for a musical titled the "Titanic." He chose to come see me rather than eat supper."

Of all the 10 "professional preachers" who came to call on me in the Pratt Hospital....a top, "blue ribbon", "gold star" Brother was TODD WALTERS. Wow! Wish I had a video of his call---what he said, questions he asked, encouraging words and prayer prayed--made my corpuscles dance with glee!! Todd sure has the "touch of God's gift of ministering" on his life/heart! I still draw strength from

Todd and his call! All brought high encouragement. My Sisters Patsy Smith and Jan Prough kept touch as did our children Galen, Teresa and Rebecca. Keith Dellenbach of Abbyville, Kansas came and stayed all day Friday "feeding" my spirit with the Water and Bread of Life. He offered a "Word of Knowledge-Wisdom" saying the devil made a direct attack on my life seeking to write--"THE END" as the last words in this book--but the Lord grabbed the *devil's pin* away and stopped him from writing with the 'ink of my blood.' WOW! and PTL!

There is an expression--"It's not over until the fat lady sings"--and *she* has not yet sung for me.

Challenge yourself to mature in PRAISE by doing what Habakkuk did:

Israel was about to be sieged by the Nation of Assyria, and as Habakkuk looked at the situation he cried out:

"When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.

"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

"Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

"The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments."
Habakkuk 3:16-19

Let us challenge our maturity to press onward by **thanking/ praising the Lord at the beginning of each day for all that is going to happen in that day.**

I conclude our thinking by calling attention to Praise in alphabet form:

A although things are not perfect
B ecause of trials or pain
C ontinue in thanksgiving
D o not begin to blame
E ven when the times are hard
F ierce winds are bound to blow
G od is forever able
H old on to what you know
I magine life without His love
J oy would cease to be
K eep thanking Him for all the things
L ove imparts to thee
M ove out of "Camp Complaining"
N o weapon that is known
O n earth can yield the power
P raise can do alone
Q uit looking at the future
R edeem the time at hand

S tart every day with worship
T o "thank" is a command
U ntil we see Him coming
V ictorious in the sky
W e'll run the race with gratitude
X alting God most high
Y es, there will be good times and yes,
some will be bad, but..
Z ion waits in glory...where none
are ever sad!

The attitude of PRAISE releases the dynamic power that helps you survive. Praise also releases reviving power. You can find the power to start again when you feel like quitting. You can pick up the pieces and bounce back to make a come back.

**"My heart is steadfast, O God, I will sing and give praise.
Awake, My glory! Awake, lute and harp! I will awaken the
dawn." -Psalm 57:7,8**

Since I discussed at length this vital subject of "Praise" in my first book, Faith Alive in Heart, Home and Church" pages 132-169. I want us to move up to a more mature level of praising - thanking God for the circumstances of our life. To consider shortening the time line which Francis Schaffer names in his book.

"The shorter the time of our struggle to choose to give God praise in a particular circumstance, the greater our spiritual maturity."

Francis Schaeffer, a prolific thinker-writer of the last century in his fine book--True Spirituality-1971.

The areas we run away from as we mature in life, we must eventually come back to deal with. before God will promote us to a new level of maturity. Allowing praise to mature us is not complicated like the story of the horse and its owner below.

A man moved to a house and barn at the edge of town. He purchased a horse to live in the barn, but experienced grave difficulty in getting the horse into the barn for its ears were too long. He gets a saw and plans to saw out the top of the door so the horse can enter. A neighbor seeing his plight comes over, sizes up the problem and suggests it be solved by digging a ditch under the door so the horse can walk in.

"Nope, it will never work" says the horse owner.

"Why not?" says the neighbor.

"Because it's the horse's ears that are too long, not its legs," asserts the owner.

Allowing *praise* to mature us is not a matter of changing life's events but adapting ourselves. To do this we must receive more of God's grace.

"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." James 4:6 (KJV)

How can we receive more grace? Above James says God is the giver of "more grace" which makes possible our maturing.

"Charis," the Greek word for **grace**, means ***"Divine favor, power freely given to undeserving people"*** There are four senses of "grace" from the Greek word "*charis*." The one used here is

Enabling power"

"But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble'." James

4:6

"And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all." Acts 4:33

We are given the grace of *enabling power* in order to mature in Christ's likeness. **Praising the Lord** is a 'high water mark' of maturing.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

by Chuck Thomas - Tulsa, Oklahoma

Chapter 6 - "PRAISE TESTS OUR MATURITY"

- 1. The very fact that you are facing troubles is what?**
- 2. What is God's plan for us?**
- 3. We may have VICTORY in all our days of living and serving if we do what?**
- 4. According to James 1:2-5, why should we "Count it all joy?"**
- 5. What does the attitude of gratitude release?**
- 6. According to Psalm 50:14, what does God want?**

- 7. What does 2 Corinthians 10:5 tell us?**
- 8. According to James 1:2-4, how do we become mature and complete?**
- 9. What did Wilbur Johnson do when the brakes on his car locked up while driving Arkansas City, Kansas to a Faith Alive Revival in Ashland, Kansas?**
- 10. What does the testing of your faith produce?**
- 11. The Greek word for grace is "Charis," which means what?**
- 12. What is the bottom line of giving thanks for all things?**
- 13. How did Wilbur Johnson apply 1 Thessalonians 5:18, when he developed hiccups while preparing to attend Sunday service with his daughter, Rebecca and grand daughter, Katie?**
- 14. How did the Protection Christian Church "Practice the Presence of God in the Present Tense?"**

15. According to Romans 8:28, 37, how does God use adverse and good events to happen to us make us "more than conquerors"?

16. When Wilbur Johnson suffered hemorrhaging, what resulted in his ventricular hemorrhage stopping?

17. Of all the "professional preachers" who called on Wilbur in the Pratt Hospital, who was the top, "blue ribbon, "gold star" Brother?

18. How can we challenge our maturity?

19. What releases the dynamic power that helps you survive?

20. What does Francis Schaffer suggest shortens the time line in our spiritual maturity?