

# THE HOLY SPIRIT COMFORTS

1. THE BEGINNING
2. HE CREATES
3. HE CONVINCES
4. HE CONVICTS
5. HE CONVERTS
6. HE CONSECRATES
7. HE COMFORTS
8. HE COMMITS
9. THE CHALLENGE

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the **Comforter** will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you." John 16:7 (ASV)

Of the some 34 translated titles the Holy Spirit is given in the Bible, the greek "Parakletos" is a special one; also translated "Helper," "Advocate," "Counselor," "Expert Aide." This Greek term was used in a court of justice to denote a legal assistant, counsel for the defense, an advocate; generally, one who pleads another's cause.

There is a dimension of our being which requires comfort, thus our benevolent Creator has provided "comfort" in various forms to fill in the gap between what might or should have been and what is. When life deals us what we perceive to be a "bad hand," comfort awaits us. This understanding is put forth in Genesis 5:27-29.

Our Lord has designed our journey so that no man needs to travel Life's Road *alone*. "When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. He named him Noah and said, "He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed." This was well illustrated as we traveled from Jerusalem to Egypt where there was much to see. After 200 miles we arrived at the border of Egypt with a long wait before us. After we cleared customs our new guides from Cairo greeted us. Minutes grew into hours and finally I went to our new Egyptian guides, Aynab and Adly Khattab, and asked why we could not begin the 700 mile trip to Cairo They made a statement which I shall remember all my earthly days--"*No one crosses the desert alone.*" And I asked, "Why?" They said, "*There are bandits in the desert, lions and cobras, which often attack individual travelers or single buses and cars, but, we'll be safe in a caravan.*" So, after this long wait six tourist buses and three tourist cars were assembled with a security car in front and back--lights flashing and sirens blaring, we swept across the Border and out onto the great Sahara Desert at 120 kilometers per hour (75 MPH). There would be only one stop at the Suez Canal, and after this our guide pointed to the north and said, "*Most Bible scholars believe that is Goshen where Israel lived and worked for Pharaoh.*" Keep in mind that Bible historians conclude this nation after 430 years in Goshen of Egypt had a population numbering in the tens of thousands, possibly a million. Now, all we saw was the shifting, whispering sands of the desert--dunes and hills now reigned supreme where once perhaps a million people lived.

When they left Goshen after eating the first Passover (Exodus 12) they would never see those houses again, but there was comfort in knowing they would not travel *alone* on their desert

journey which turned into a 40 year trek before they arrived at the Jordan River and went into the Promised Land (Palestine). They too were accompanied by other travelers and *tight security*. There was the Pillar of Cloud by Day and a Pillar of Fire by Night, manna and quail, sweet water out of bitter and cures for the serpent attack in the desert.

We too, do not journey *alone*. In the front of our *caravan* is Jesus and behind us is the Blessed Holy Spirit while Angels minister to us and the comfort of God's Presence is all around us.

**EXERCISE 57**

List some Bible examples where people needed and found comfort. These examples do not need to contain the word "comfort"; but, comfort was provided.

Example: *Adam and Eve (Genesis 4:1)* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

List some places on our journey where you already have or will need *comfort / help*.

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**God desires to help us in every way.**

Karl Barth, theologian and philosopher, was asked, "What was the greatest idea you ever contemplated? He answered, "The one I learned at my mother's knee that Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.

"Well, Mr. Barth what would you say is the *bottom line* of all your theological works? He said, "That God is for us. He is not out to get us but loves us and seeks that which is best for us."

Just so, the entire Bible is a book of helps for man, and is well expressed in the following scripture and poem.

"For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways." (Psalm 91:11)

## Working Angel

Last night I had a dream;  
It had a tale to tell.

I dreamed I saw an angel;  
he wasn't feeling well.

His body bruised and battered  
His wings were ripped and torn -

This angel could hardly walk,  
He looked so tired and worn.

I walked right up to him to ask;  
"Angel? How can this be?"

He turned around and paused a bit,  
Then spoke these words to me:

"I'm your Guardian Angel,  
A great task as you can see.

You've run amok most all your life:  
Look what it's done to me.

These bruises are from shielding you  
In times both dire and ill.

Those sins you've committed;  
I've often paid the bill

You see my wings are ripped and torn;  
A noble badge I wear;

How often they have lifted you  
From evils unaware.

Each mark is it's own story  
Of deadly wounds destroyed.

You made me wish - more than once -  
That I was unemployed.

Oh, don't you fret or worry -  
But remember - I'm getting old and frail."

I could hardly believe all I had heard,  
Let alone how much he cared.

I wept upon his shoulder,  
And praised God for my Guardian Angel!

May - 1999

"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"  
(Hebrews 1:14)

Our Blessed Holy Spirit ministers help and comfort to us in many ways.

- 1. He Comforts us with Assured Forgiveness**
2. He Comforts us with Answered Prayer
3. He Comforts us with Awesome Peace
4. He Comforts us with Alleluia Praise answers!

## **1. He Comforts Us with Assured Forgiveness**

Even though we conclude forgiveness of sin did not arrive until Jesus' death on the cross; yet, the Old Testament is replete with forward looking promises to that day.

## EXERCISE 58

Write down God's promise to forgive sin from the following verses:

Isaiah 1:18 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 43:25 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalms 103:12 \_\_\_\_\_

Jeremiah 31:34 \_\_\_\_\_

Was the above statement from Jeremiah 31:31-34 future for them? \_\_\_\_\_ When was it consummated? \_\_\_\_\_

**Isaiah 40:1,2 - "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God."**

What were the words of comfort in the above reference--Isaiah 40:1,2?

Now, read Ephesians 1:1-8 from your Bible.

While the Living Bible may not be a good translation, at times it is an excellent commentary providing rich spiritual insights. In that light, read Ephesians 1:1-8 below:

"Dear Christian Friends at Ephesus, ever loyal to the Lord: This is Paul writing to you, chosen by God to be Jesus Christ's messenger. 2 May his blessings and peace be yours, sent to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. ' How we praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every blessing in heaven because we belong to Christ.

Long ago, even before he made the world, God chose us to be his very own, through what Christ would do for us, he decided then to make us holy in his eyes, without a single fault who stand before him covered with his love.' His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by sending Jesus Christ to die for us. And He did this because he wanted to.

Now all praise to God for his wonderful kindness to us and his favor that he has poured out upon us, because we belong to his dearly loved Son. So overflowing is his kindness towards us that he took away all our sins through the blood of his Son,

by whom we are saved; and he has showered down upon us the richness of his grace for how well he understands us and knows what is best for us at all times."  
(Ephesians 1:1-8 LB)

### EXERCISE 59

From the above Living Bible text, Ephesians 1:1-8, please answer the following questions:

1. He has "blessed us with every blessing in heaven...."

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

2. When did "God chose us to be His very own?" \_\_\_\_\_

3. When did God decide to "make us holy in His eyes, without a single fault..."

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What has His "unchanging plan" always been?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. WHY did God do all of this? \_\_\_\_\_

6. "Now all praise to God for His wonderful kindness..."

WHY? See last paragraph of Ephesians 1:1-8 above.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### EXERCISE 60

Please give your honest heartfelt (not just religious) answers to these questions:

1. Are you certain God has chosen **you** to be His very own? \_\_\_\_\_

2. When did God choose **you**? \_\_\_\_\_

3. How many unforgiven sins / faults do **you** now have? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Have **you** been adopted into God's family? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Why did God do all of this for **you**? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How many of **your** sins has God taken away? \_\_\_\_\_

## EXERCISE 61

Privately in the prayer closet of your own heart thank God for the above six blessings!

## EXERCISE 62

When we will not believe our sins are forgiven and we are heaven bound, what does it diminish and/or delete in our lives? Put "D" for diminish by the ones so affected.

- \_\_\_ Our faith      \_\_\_ Our witness      \_\_\_ Our giving      \_\_\_ Our hope      \_\_\_ Our love
- \_\_\_ Our fervency      \_\_\_ Our joy      \_\_\_ Our peace      \_\_\_ Our mercy
- \_\_\_ Our goodness      \_\_\_ Our praise      \_\_\_ Our prayers      \_\_\_ Our worship
- \_\_\_ Our winning of souls      \_\_\_ Our happiness
- \_\_\_ Our effectiveness as a counselor

## ASSURED FORGIVENESS

The hope which filled the heart of Paul concerning the Corinthian brethren was full of comfort to those who trembled as to their future. But why was it that he believed that the brethren would be confirmed unto the end?

I want you to notice that he gives his reasons. Here they are: "**God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ**" (I Corinthians 1:9).

The apostle does not say, "You are faithful." Alas! The faithfulness of man is a very unreliable affair; it is mere vanity. He does not say, "You have faithful ministers to lead and guide you, and therefore I trust you will be safe." Oh, no! If we are kept by men we shall be but ill kept. He puts it, "**God is faithful.**" If we are found faithful, it will be because God is faithful. On the faithfulness of our covenant God the whole burden of our salvation must rest. On this glorious attribute of God the matter hinges.

We are variable as the wind, frail as a spider's web, weak as water. No dependence can be placed upon our natural qualities or our spiritual attainments; but **God abides faithful. He** is faithful in His love; **He** knows no variableness, neither shadow of turning. **He** is faithful to His

purpose; **He** does not begin a work and then leave it undone. **He** is faithful to His relationships; as a Father **He** will not renounce His children, as a friend **He** will not deny His people, as a Creator **He** will not forsake the work of His own hands. **He** is faithful to His promises and will never allow one of them to fail to a single believer. **He** is faithful to His covenant, which He has made with us in Christ Jesus and ratified with the blood of His sacrifice. **He** is faithful to His Son and will not allow His precious blood to be spilt in vain. **He** is faithful to His people to whom **He** has promised eternal life and from whom He will not turn away.

**This faithfulness of God** is the foundation and cornerstone of our hope of final perseverance. The saints shall persevere in holiness, because God perseveres in grace. He perseveres to bless, and therefore believers persevere in being blessed. He continues to keep His people, and therefore they continue to keep His commandments. Seed thoughts from Charles Spurgeon.

**NOTE: In the previous "delete-diminish" Exercise 62, it is my studied and experienced conclusion that all should be checked.**

Some may suppose that my accepting God's forgiveness of sin is subjective. Knowing that I am forgiven of all my sin and on my way to heaven is based on two factors:  
1. Objectively, I must believe the Word of God which in multiplied places including the above Scriptures, declares I am saved; and, 2. Subjectively by faith I receive this truth into my own heart / life.

### **EXERCISE 63**

**Now write down at least three New Testament verses which promise forgiveness of our sin and/or declares that we are saved:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## **Ask What Great Thing I Know?**

**You ask what great thing I know  
That delights and stirs me so?  
What high reward I will win?  
Whose Name I glory in?  
'Tis Jesus Christ, the Crucified!**

**What is faith's foundation strong?  
What awakes my lips to song?  
Who bore my sinful load?  
Purchased for me peace with God?  
'Tis Jesus Christ, the Crucified!**

**Who is He that makes me wise  
To discern where duty lies?  
Who is He that makes me true,  
When I am tempted not to do?  
'Tis Jesus Christ, the Crucified!**

**Who defeats my fiercest foes?  
Who consoles my saddest woes?  
Who revives my fainting heart,  
Healing all its hidden smart?  
'Tis Jesus Christ, the Crucified!**

**Who is Life in life to me?  
Who my hope in death will be?  
Who will place me on His right,  
With the countless hosts of light?  
'Tis Jesus Christ, the Crucified!**

**This is that great thing I know!  
The One who delights and stirs me so!  
Faith in Him who died to save,  
The One who triumphs o'er the grave,  
'Tis Jesus Christ, the Crucified!**

**--Benjamin Hall Kennedy--(edit by wsj)**

1. He Comforts us with Assured Forgiveness
- 2. He Comforts us with Answered Prayer**
3. He Comforts us with Awesome Peace
4. He Comforts us with Alleluia Praise answers!

## **2. The Holy Spirit Comforts Us with Answered Prayer!**

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

(Romans 8:26,27)

### **Ask - Seek - Knock**

The winsome voice of a father speaks to his child saying:

"Do you need comfort? then ASK!"

"Are you sick? then ASK!"

"Are you weary? then ASK!"

"Is your faith weak? then ASK!"

"What does God promise? then ASK!"

Too, simplistic? Read what Jesus said:

"Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.'

I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. "So I say to you: **Ask** and it will be given to you; **seek** and you will find; **knock** and the door will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Luke 11:5-10)

Here God hands His children a "blank check" so to speak, and simply says "*ask*"; but in the above Luke passage that is what He does. Above all else our Lord is teaching us persistence in praying; also, He offers us three levels of praying in this passage-- "**ask--seek--knock.**" Do not mistake these words as being repetitious. They are not, but each designates an increased level of seeking the comfort and help of God in the midst of our problems.

**1. ASK** -- In the Greek language "ASK" signifies "a simple use of the voice in making a petition."

There are mysteries about praying and God's answering; but, one thing is sure---God answers many-most of my instant prayers when I simply **ask**. I do not keep a record of all the simple "asking prayers" which I pray; but, at five prayers per day across 60 years the total is 109,500. God has answered all of them with either "Yes-No-or-Wait," and the vast majority have been "Yes!"

Following are a few examples--\*

\* When I was 10 years old I lost my Mother's hammer. A simple prayer--"God please help me find that hammer!" Instantly I found it on the other side of the creek lying in the middle of an animal path. As recorded in my first book Faith Alive In Heart Home and Church, pg 102,103

\* I fell on a blue Milk of Magnesia bottle, which slashed my throat. With blood gushing out of my throat, this frightened eight year old boy prayed, "God, please don't let me die." He answered instantly. We were 17 miles from any doctor or ER, so bandages and tape was the first aid applied. Today I have only a hair line scar and a stronger faith!

\* Our dog named "Puppy" chased a rabbit in front of our Binder. The sickle mower severed his left back leg leaving it attached by one strand of nerve and muscle. First suggestion was, "End his misery, put the dog down." Then, I prayed, "God, please save my dog." A rush trip to the Veterinarian in town saved Puppy and my three-legged dog lived another 30 years.

\* At 8 on a Sunday morning traveling to my student preaching point at Ripley. I stopped at Guthrie praying I could get a doughnut for ten cents. I asked the waitress if they had doughnuts and the price? She said, "Yes, and they are 10 each plus tax." I explained that I only had one dime. She said, "Well, they are a dime plus tax, but I can sell you 1/2 doughnut for a

nickel, and later the other half for a nickel. We did business and I drove on filled with gratitude to God and one whole doughnut.

\* "Lord, we need a pianist here at Ripley Christian Church. Please send us one." God sent me a pianist, a lifelong friend, a wife! Her name was / is Imalee.

\* "Jesus be in charge!" Imalee prayed out loud. That simple prayer brought the Suburban and trailer which was sliding on ice to an instant halt and prevented a collision. Page 197, *ibid*

\* I pray about everything, and Jesus helps me repair machinery, raise cattle and catch coyotes," said the Circleville, Kansas, farmer to me.

\* Russ Johnson of Newkirk, Oklahoma, checked into Snyder Clinic in Winfield, Kansas, for a set of tests. The tests went well except his CAT scan showed a spot on the left kidney. The doctors suspected the spot was malignant. He came by our house on his way to St. Francis Hospital in Wichita, Kansas, on January 22. We prayed as did scores of others. They did a biopsy. On Wednesday Bro. Russ called from home. The biopsy and another CAT scan was done and the Wichita doctors could find nothing to biopsy. He said, "whatever was there is gone!" He ran a Sonogram just to be sure. Nothing there. **WOW!** He attributes this happening **TO THE LORD through ANSWERED PRAYER!** It's now one-and-one-half years later and all is well! *It still is no secret what God can do!*

\* "Jesus, in Your Name chase away the devil in these weird happenings," I prayed. He did and high school senior, Kurt, of Galva, Illinois became a Christian. Page 198, *ibid*

#### **EXERCISE 64**

**List a few simple "asking" prayers which God has answered for you.**

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But, sometimes we "ASK" and no answer comes, thus Jesus suggests we step up to level two in our praying--"SEEK".

## 2. SEEK

"So I say to you: **Ask** and it will be given to you; **seek** and you will find; **knock** and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; **he who seeks finds**; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Luke 11:9,10)

The Greek word "ζητεο" declares this word in relation to praying means--"**to seek by thinking, to seek how to do something or what to obtain.**" Vine's

Sometimes we need to pray about what we're going to pray about to establish in our own mind the "what" and "how" of our prayers.

Many years ago Marge Hoskins of West Lebanon, Indiana, came to my Study saying, "Wilbur, God is mocking me. I have been praying for patience and He sends me trouble." Having just read Romans 5:3, I said, "Marge, God is answering your prayers for "Tribulation worketh patience." We have laughed about that many times since, but Marge learned an important lesson about what to pray for and the answer to expect.

Consider these examples of God answering prayers in unexpected ways:

1. I asked God to take away my pride.

God said "No!

It is not for me to take away, but for you to give it up."

2. I asked God to make my handicapped child whole.

God said "No!

Her spirit was whole, her body was only temporary."

3. I asked God to grant me patience.

God said "No!

Patience is a by-product of tribulations; it isn't granted, it is earned."

4. I asked God to give me happiness.

God said "No!

I give you blessings, happiness is up to you."

5. I asked God to spare me pain.

God said "No.

Suffering draws you apart from worldly cares and brings you closer to me."

6. I asked God to make my spirit grow.

God said "No!

You must grow on your own, but I will prune you to make you fruitful."

7. I asked for all things that I might enjoy life.

God said "No!

I will give you life so that you may enjoy all things."

I Thessalonians 5:16-19

16 Rejoice always,

17 pray without ceasing,

18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

19 Do not quench the Spirit." (NKJ)

### **EXERCISE 65**

**List a few of your unanswered prayers which may have been due to not understanding how God answers when we seek Him.**

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## GOD'S SPECIAL CHANNELS OF BLESSING

Our purpose in living is not to find ways to get blessings from God, but to give ourselves back to God. Yet, God has established channels through which He wants to bless and guide us. It is some of those channels/tools which we now explore.

### EXERCISE 66

Name the following *tools-channels* with which God comforts us.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_ ... Mark 11:24; James 5:15; Matthew 6:6; Mark 9:19-23

2. \_\_\_\_\_ ... Ephesians 5:20; I Thessalonians 5:16-18

3. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ ... Matthew 6:16; Luke 5:32-35; Mark 9:29

4. SPEAK TO THE " \_\_\_\_\_ " ... Matthew 17:20; Mark 11;12-14, 20-24

5. BIBLE PROMISES CONFESSED TOWARDS PROBLEM ...

Wait upon the Lord...renew strength -- (Isaiah 40:31 NKJ)

Shall supply all your needs -- (Philippians 4:19)

Trust in the Lord...He will direct our path -- (Proverbs 3:5,6)

Cast your burdens.....He gives rest -- (Matthew 11:28)

6. COME AGAINST \_\_\_\_\_ IN JESUS' NAME ... James 4:7; I Peter 2:21;  
Matthew 17:14-20; Matthew 16:18;

7. ASK OTHERS TO \_\_\_\_\_ ... I Thessalonians 5:25; I Timothy 2:1;  
II Corinthians 1:8-11; Philemon 1:4; Revelation 8:3,4

8. BE \_\_\_\_\_ (Visualize what you desire) --

"For as a man thinks in his heart, so is he." Proverbs 23:7a(NKJ)

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; For out of it are the issues of life."

(Proverbs 4:23 ASV)

"Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mark 11:24 NIV)

9. \_\_\_\_\_ be \_\_\_\_\_ ... Matthew 6:10; 26:42; Luke 11:2

This "top line" is also the "bottom line" as Hudson Taylor said, "GOD ALWAYS GIVES THE BEST TO THOSE WHO LEAVE THE CHOICE WITH HIM.

10. Call \_\_\_\_\_ to ANOINT WITH \_\_\_\_\_ AND \_\_\_\_\_.. James 5:14-16

### EXERCISE 67

Out of considerable Bible study, and 60+ years of observing life, sickness, injury and chastisement within and without, I have reached some conclusions which I want you to consider in the following exercise.

1. What is Jesus/God's primary purpose in this world? (Luke 9:10) \_\_\_\_\_

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2. The word "sickness" first appears in the Bible in Genesis 28:1. About how long after the creation of Adam and Eve was this? \_\_\_\_\_

Adam & Eve Created 4000 B.C. / Flood 2500 B.C. / Abraham 2000 B.C. / Moses 1500 B.C. / Solomon 1,000 B.C.

3. When does death of an individual first occur in the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_

Who? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Has God ever visited anyone with disease? See Leviticus 26:24,25; Deuteronomy 28:27,35; II Chronicles 21:13-19; Psalm 106:13-15; Isaiah 10:16) If so, name the affliction / disease \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Is illness/injury ever used by God to teach certain lessons of life?

II Corinthians 12:2-10 \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 12:5-13 \_\_\_\_\_



James 1:2-4 \_\_\_\_\_

I Thessalonians 3:2,3 \_\_\_\_\_

6. What is the one thing the Lord has taught us people who are sick to do? (James 5:14-16) \_\_\_\_\_

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7. Why do people often not want to practice James 5:14-16? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Does Matthew 6:10; 26:42 or Luke 11:2 (NKJ) have anything to do with sickness and healing? \_\_\_\_\_

9. What does I Thessalonians 5:16-18 NKJ-- "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." have to do with our experience of affliction, chastisement, sickness, injury, etc?

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### 3. KNOCK

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who **knocks, the door will be opened.**" (Luke 11:9,10)

Vine in his Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words says the Greek indicates the word for "knock" means "to strike, knock," is used in the New Testament of importunity (persistent, urgent) in dealing with God.

When I studied Greek we learned what was called the "linear tense," (present imperative), and in this passage is a present participle meaning that which continues on and on. The Amplified New Testament is precisely correct with its translation--

"So I say to you, Ask and keep on asking, and it shall be given you; seek and keep on seeking, and you shall find; knock and keep on knocking, and the door shall be opened to you. For every one who asks and keeps on asking receives, and he who seeks and keeps on seeking finds, and to him who knocks and keeps on knocking the door shall be opened." (Luke 11:9,10)

### **Matthew Henry comments on Luke 11:1-13.**

"We ought to continue instant in prayer, and watch in the same with all perseverance to encourage us in prayer. If importunity (persistent and urgent) could prevail thus with a man who was angry at it, much more with a God who is infinitely more kind and ready to do good to us than we are to one another, and is not angry at our importunity, but accepts it, especially when it is for spiritual mercies that we are importunate. If he do not answer our prayers presently, yet he will in due time, if we continue to pray.

We have it from Christ's own mouth, who knows his Father's mind, and in whom all promises are yea and amen. We must not only ask, but we must seek, in the use of means, must second our prayers with our endeavors; and, in asking and seeking, we must continue pressing, still knocking at the same door, and we shall at length prevail, not only by our prayers in concert, but by our particular prayers. Every one that asketh receiveth, even the meanest saint that asks in faith. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, (Psalm 34:6). When we ask of God those things which Christ has here directed us to ask, that his name may be sanctified, that his kingdom may come, and his will be done, in these requests we must be importunate." (persistent and urgent) (from Matthew Henry's Commentary, Luke 11:1-13 PP 27,29)

Sometimes God leads us in ways we would not choose, therefore we must pray as "knocking on God's door," knowing always that through life's hills and valleys--GOD IS IN CHARGE!

### **"KNOCK" persistently and urgently**

George Muller (1805-1898) of Bristol, fed some 10,000 orphans, 2,000 at a time, during his lifetime. He used faith and persistent prayer to bring in the food and clothing. He also had a large interest in the lost which the following testimony tells us.

In his intercession for others Muller had tremendous tenacity. In 1844 he began praying for the conversion of five persons.

"I prayed every day for them without one single intermission, whether sick or well, on land or sea, whatever the pressure of my engagements might be. Eighteen months passed before the first of the five was converted. I thanked God and prayed on for the others. Five years elapsed, and then the second converted. I thanked God for the second and prayed on for the other three. Six more months passed before the third was converted. I thanked God for three and went on praying for the other two. These two remain unconverted alter nearly thirty six years. But I hope in God, I pray on, and look yet for the answer."

Actually the fourth became a Christian just before Muller's death in 1898, and the fifth accepted the Lord a few years afterward. from *Guideposts*, March, 1987

"Rejoice always, **pray without ceasing**," ( I Thessalonians 5:16,17 NKJ)

In our trials and challenges of over 60 years, **persistent praying** has brought God's answers except when He gave us no time to pray. I have marveled that of the tens of thousands of prayers I have prayed and God answered, there have been two times when God gave us no opportunity to pray. The first was when our first born son at the age of eighteen was involved in a car accident on a lonely country road. By the time I arrived at the scene the doctor had pronounced him dead, and I had only the opportunity to kneel in the wheat stubble, kiss him and say "God loves you and so do I." Then, 26 years later at 6:30 on a Saturday morning the phone rang and the hospital said, "Come quickly! Your daughter, Lisa, has had a heart attack." We went and just as quickly she flew away to God's eternal day. I have postulated that perhaps He knew our "track record" of persistent prayer from many people and that if home going was to be effected, it must be quickly before Heaven would be bombarded with a multitude of prayers.

There have been at least three times when persistent urgent prayers have brought large dividends. First, when Imalee sustained a stroke. Various "prayer tools" were used but the long lasting persistent prayers of several thousand people praying produced a glory healing! Secondly, when I was diagnosed with Viral Hepatitis, and again people came and prayed and anointed me and hundreds of others prayed. I conclude it was the persistent *without ceasing* prayers which raised us up! Thirdly, in 1997 I was poked with a stroke on my right side. While I used all the "10 Prayer Tools," there was no instantaneous healing but again the prayers of many multitudes of Christians have produced amazing results. Typical of those prayers is one from Brother Rodger Thompson of Wichita, Kansas, sent to me via e-mail:

**From:** rodgerthompson@juno.com  
**To:** wsjfaith@hit.net  
**Date:** Wed, 8 Apr 1998 15:59:57 -0500  
**Subject:** MY PRAYER FOR YOU

"Thanks for the update. In the flesh, Wilbur and Imalee, my heart breaks for you. You have been called upon to bear much grief. I rejoice in the knowledge of the promise that you will also bear much joy in the morning.

I shall agree with you in both the giving of thanks and the asking for a wake up call to those parts of your body that have been stricken with numbness. If I look at circumstances they confuse me. The knowledge of the love and the goodness of God are my focus. He is able and He loves you. I shall rejoice in the Lord and make my petitions known to him with thanksgiving according to Philippians 4:6,7, and receive His peace on your behalf.

Heavenly Father I send you this e-mail prayer on behalf of my dear brother Wilbur and sister Imalee. You know their hearts and their sorrow. You know their love for you and their needs. I know you take no pleasure in their suffering. I dig up the roof of your house and lower Wilbur to you in the midst of whatever you are doing. I interrupt you like those men of old who brought their friend to Jesus. Jesus touch Him with your healing touch. Awaken those parts of his body that are numb. Restore his health by the power of Your resurrection. I give you thanks and I rejoice in you and the precious promises. Jesus overcame the gates of hell at calvary and the empty tomb stands in testimony to that fact. In the name of Jesus and by the power of the shed blood and the resurrection, the Lord rebuke you demons of infirmity. Jesus lives and by His stripes we are healed!"

In Jesus Name! God be praised! Amen!"

Rodger

**"KNOCK" with an attitude of "Thy Will Be Done".**

"I am thinking "OUT LOUD" as I respond to the question about God's Will. First of all, is everything that happens on earth, "God's will?" I perceive not. One passage that would support this is the one that says, "God does not will that any should perish, but that all should come to eternal life." Yet we know that people perish without God, by their own choice. The reason that this simple question is so complicated is because of the big doctrinal issue, "FREE WILL", and the affect of sin in/on the world. What of the school killings? Was that God's will? I think not. Many bad things happen to good people, are they God's will? Whole books have been written on this one subject. Where is God When It Hurts, and When

God Doesn't Make Sense are two more recent releases. I say that to point out how shallow anything that I might say will be when compared to the big picture of the question. God's particular "will" for each person must be answered by each individual. The person going through a struggle must search their heart and the mind of God, and out of this comes their answer. In looking at Job, we would have to say that God understands even our doubts. As we consider Job, when Job finally cries out to God, God doesn't condemn him, but just reminds him of who He (God) is and how small Job is in comparison and that God knows all things and has the power to do all things. Yet He (God) allows certain things to happen so that:

1. We can be tested, (Job);

2. Our faith can grow, (James 1);

3. We can rely more totally on God's Grace, (Paul asking for the thorn to be removed was told by God, "My grace is sufficient, for my power is made strong in weakness," II Corinthians 12;

4. We can receive our heavenly reward, (Sickness unto death)

It is easy for others not going through struggles to have opinions. Again consider Job's friends. They all had an opinion on how well Job was doing in his relationship with God, and they were all wrong!!!!

As you and I have discussed in relationship to your daughter, Lisa, and our minister friend, Gary Spencer, and others, God always answers, it is just that sometimes His answer is "NO". At other times He says "YES", but yes in a way that we do not anticipate. Healing, for example, some times healing takes place in Heaven. Who could say that Britta Thompson or Hugoton, Kansas, or Lisa, or Gary or my mom and dad, Lee and Mildred Wright, were not healed, (James 5:15,16) and yet they died, or did they? Jesus said, "He who liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." We understand that is "Spiritual Life." That a person's "spiritual self", who we truly are, never dies. So why can't God provide "Spiritual" answers to prayers for healing?

Again, does He not answer? Could it be He says "NO", or perhaps He heals in ways that we do not expect, (Spiritually in Heaven)? Remember, the great apostle Paul did not receive physical healing on earth. If God answered with physical healing each and every time a Christian asks/prays for healing, would we ever see Heaven? Does God answer in ways beyond our understanding? These are difficult questions and I don't know that any of us has all the answers. However, we know from Jonah's experience that human action/response does move the heart of God and change (at least for a short time) the outcome of history. Nineveh was spared, (for a time, Jonah 3). I believe that prayer does touch the heart of God, and that He does intervene, but not always. I do not know why He provides physical healing on earth on some occasions, and spiritual healing in heaven on others, but we must yield to God's will, which is

where this discussion started. Can you imagine what a mess we would be in if God had said yes to His own Son's request to "Let this cup pass from me" and Jesus would not have physically died for our sins? I am grateful that on occasion, God says "NO", even to His own son.

Sincerely in Christ,  
Larry Wright

Brother Joe Ragsdale prayed this simple "Thy will be done" prayer for me five days after I was poked by a stroke.

from: Ragsmopp@aol.com  
To: willjohnson / wsjfaith@hit.net  
Date: Wed, 8 Apr 1998 22:48:35 EDT  
Subject: OUR PRAYER for HIS WILL

Hello young man and young lady.  
I will continue to pray for your healing.  
This is always the hardest part as my mind says, Lord heal Wilbur completely, but my heart says Lord I pray for Your will to be done in this illness so that through this you may be glorified.  
We love you both and God loves you both.

Joe & Joy Ragsdale, Fort Smith, Arkansas

## **HERE AND NOW**

Here in the heart of this world,  
Here in the noise and the din,  
Here where our spirits are hurled  
To battle with sorrow and sin,  
This is the place and the spot,  
For knowledge of infinite things;  
This is the kingdom where prayer  
Can conquer the minds of kings.  
Wait for no heavenly life,  
Seek for no temple alone;  
Here in the midst of strife  
Know what the sages have known.  
See what the Perfect One saw,  
God in the depths of each soul;  
God as the Light and the Law,  
God as the beginning and goal.

Stand not aloof or apart,  
Pray in the thick of the fight;  
There in the street and the mart,  
That is the place to do right.  
Not in some cloister or cave,  
Not in some kingdom above;  
Here on this side of the grave,  
Here should we pray and love.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

1. He Comforts us with Assured Forgiveness
2. He Comforts us with Answered Prayer
3. **He Comforts us with Awesome Peace**  
Peace in the Valleys of Life  
Peace in our Sorrow and Grief  
Peace in our Trials and Troubles

### 3. He comforts us with Awesome Peace

"But the Comforter, (even) the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you. **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you:** not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful."  
(John 14:26-27 - ASV)

When the Communist movement was in vogue, they touted this definition of *peace*--peace is the absence of all class conflict. That is, they believed to have *peace*, all people who disagreed with them must be removed. Even today, many Christians believe that *Christian peace* is the removal of all conflict, tribulations, etc. Not so! The Greek word picture of *peace* is that of a little bird in a nest built upon a limb of a giant tree with a storm raging all about while the bird, its nest and tree are held safely in the palm of a giant hand.

#### EXERCISE 67

Give some examples from the Bible of individuals at *peace* in the midst of a storm, either literal from without or internal from within.

## Consider the list in Hebrews, chapter 11

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### Peace in the Valleys of Life

"The man of God came up and told the king of Israel, This is what the LORD says: 'Because the Arameans think the LORD is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands, and you will know that I am the LORD.'" (I Kings 20:28 NIV)

People like to read the glory stories in *Guidepost*, *Reader's Digest* and our own books which record many answered prayers, healings, God's deliverance by faith, and results of praise; but, do not want to be a prayer partner when the "pain and strain of suffering" which brings forth those stories is taking place. It's okay when the pastures are green and the waters are still; but, some want to be removed from the presence of the "winds of adversity" and "raging waters" which lap at the top of our "dikes" in life. It is important to note that God has not promised to *keep us out* of the "valleys of life" but He has promised to *go with us through the "valleys."*

The Lord's awesome peace is available to all of God's children and dependent upon our response to the trials which come our way. The 23rd Psalm is the world's most loved psalm; yet the "still waters and green pastures" are preceded by the agony of Psalm 22.

Surely Psalm 22 is both a foretelling of Christ's suffering, but also David writes in the present tense of his own life. Bible scholar, Matthew Henry suggests, "Psalm 22 is a sad complaint of God's withdrawing. (v. 1, 2.)

1. It may be applied to David, or any other child of God, in the want of the tokens of his favor, pressed with the burden of his displeasure, roaring under it, as one overwhelmed with grief and terror, crying earnestly for relief, and, in this case, apprehending himself forsaken of God, unhelped, unheard, yet calling him, again and again, "My God," and continuing to cry day and night to him and earnestly desiring his gracious returns.



2. Spiritual desertions are the saints' sorest afflictions; when their evidences are clouded, divine consolations suspended, their communion with God interrupted, and the terrors of God set in array against them, how sad are their spirits, and how sapless all their comforts!

3. Even their complaint of these burdens is a good sign of spiritual life and spiritual senses exercised. To cry out, "My God, why am I sick? Why am I poor?" would give cause to suspect discontent and worldliness. But, Why has Thou forsaken me? is the language of a heart binding up its happiness in God's favor" Psalms 22:1-10 PP 2 from Matthew Henry's Commentary

### EXERCISE 68

**Under line the words/phrases in the following psalm which reveal discouragement.**

- 1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?
- 2 O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.
- 3 Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.
- 4 In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.
- 5 They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.
- 6 But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people.
- 7 All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:
- 8 "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."
- 9 Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast.
- 10 From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.
- 11 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.
- 12 Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.
- 13 Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me.
- 14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me.
- 15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.
- 16 Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.
- 17 I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.
- 18 They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

- 19 But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me.  
20 Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs.  
21 Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

(Psalm 22:1-22)

Jesus said, "the peace I give is of such a nature that the smiles of the world cannot give it, nor the frowns of the world take it away." The peace which Christ gives is infinitely more valuable than that which the world gives. The world's peace begins in ignorance, full of sin, and ends in endless troubles; Christ's peace begins in grace, consists with sin conquered, such is the difference between Christ's peace and the world's.

What use do we make of Jesus promise of peace? -- *Let not your heart be troubled*, for any evils past or present, *neither let it be afraid* of any evil to come. Those that are interested in the covenant of grace, and entitled to the peace which Christ gives, ought not to yield to overwhelming griefs and fears. The conclusion of the whole matter; He had said (v. 1), *Let not your heart be troubled*, and here he repeats it as that for which he had now given sufficient reason.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

During a siege of many trials including our daughter, Lisa's death; and Imalee's concussion from her fall on the ice; my stroke(s); our daughter, Teresa's accident in the Grand Canyon; our two-month-old granddaughter, Hannah Johnson's infantile botulism; our daughter, Rebecca's divorce; Imalee's mother's strokes; and my brother-in-law breaking his hip, the Holy Spirit moved in my spirit prompting me to write a meditation of acceptance based on Psalm 23.

After passing through the above trials, someone said to me, "How do you stand it?" I said, "I don't and I can't, but HE can and HE does!" So, out of that and after a night of wrestling with God about many of the inequities of life which others must endure, He awakened me in the very early morning with this heartfelt response to the vicissitudes of life.

(Psalm 23 by David in bold. My words of response are in non bold)

**1 The LORD is my shepherd** also my Savior, Lord, Guide, Keeper, Hope, Cornerstone, and Sustainer; **I shall not want--** I may question, but will not doubt His ways all of my days. **2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures** even brown pastures, and I do not always lie still, but after squirming around, I rest in His beautiful peace; **he leads me**

**beside the still waters--** sometimes troubled waters, but He is there, **3 He restores my soul--** after I have created a little havoc when passing over raging waterfalls and stormy seas, always there comes the harbor where the waters grow still and my soul is restored; **he leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake--**after He washes my eyes with tears and cradles my wounded heart in His arms of love, then I begin to see that He has led me down His path of rightness. **4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,** and when that day comes as I pass over, I'll see death, hell and the grave in the valley below and shout with victory! **I will fear no evil for You are with me--**because You have been through the same Valley and made it out safe, and are waiting on the Other Side; **your rod and Your staff, they comfort me--**"Lord, sometimes Your rod and staff hurts before they help me, but always after the mourning comes the morning!" **5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies--** "It bothers me, Lord, that I don't have more enemies like David, but whatever the situation, You have always spread a banquet table for me in the wilderness of every negative situation"; **you anoint my head with oil--** "and Your oil runs all over the crooked stick of my life, and Your Spirit renews my whole being"; **my cup runs over--** "pardon my tears, Lord, but my cup is full beyond any proper desserts, so that I cannot contain all Your blessings, and my full heart bursts with love and joy!" **6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life--**it's happening already, and I accept happy days the rest of the way, too; **and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. WOW!** "My Great Shepherd, You have let me stand on the threshold of the door of Your House, and I long to see beyond into every room, but most of all when I've finished this race, just to see Your Face, will have made it all worthwhile! -- Hallelujah!

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

### **EXERCISE 69**

**Write a paragraph of your acceptance of an adverse trial (situation) out of your life.**

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Mentioned above is our daughter, Teresa, who spent nine years in medical schools becoming a general surgeon. Our doctor daughter took up practice in Winfield, Kansas, at Snyder Clinic and ministered to hundreds of patients over a period of 10 years. Then, in 1998, while on a rafting trip in the Grand Canyon, she and others were taking a short hike up the side of the canyon. Although I have hiked with her many miles in the Rocky Mountain National Park and she has hiked and climbed mountain trails extensively, yet on the way down she stumbled and fell. She fell 40 feet, striking rocks and breaking her back in three places. It took a helicopter and medical crew some six hours to get her out of the canyon to Flagstaff, Arizona, for emergency medical treatment. From there she was taken to Phoenix for surgery. Now a year later she can not walk because she is paralyzed from the waist down. Now she drives her own vehicle, has a stand up wheel chair, stair lift chair and manages amazingly well in living by herself. In reply to my question "Has this incident changed your life?" she said "I am a totally different person."

Several months later I wrote a poem for her, which speaks to all our hurts and hopes.

*Dedicated to my daughter - Teresa Johnson - as she struggles to recapture life after falling and breaking her back in the Grand Canyon in June of 1998.*

## *On Goes His Song*

His song goes on!  
When my life is a piece of cake  
Or when my heart aches,  
On goes His song!

His song goes on!  
When my life seems shattered  
And hopes are scattered  
On goes His song!

His song goes on!  
Through days of wrong  
When my nights have no song,  
Still, on goes His song!

His song goes on!  
When my life is bright and sunny  
And at times, a bit funny;  
On goes His song!

His song goes on!  
When my heart wounds are deep  
Made by loved ones leaving we cannot keep;  
On goes that song!

His song goes on!  
When my health pales  
And strength fails,  
Then, so clearly, on goes His song!

Through times of wrong:  
My ears strain to hear His voice,  
Then, I make His will my choice!  
He sings the "I am with you always" song!

On goes His song!  
Even when my way is bleak  
And faith is weak,  
I hear His assurance song!

So, on goes His Song!  
Until we hear the trumpet sound!  
Then, we'll be Glory bound!  
And see the One who sings the song!

*by Wilbur S. Johnson*

*Aug. 9, 1998 - c.4 a.m. when my sleep was wide awake*

"I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired:" (Psalm 77:5,6)

But, if we will wait in patience, then in the morning we shall see His glory!  
"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

(II Corinthians 4:17-18 - NKJ)

## Peace for our Sorrow and Grief

Death cannot be denied, grief is normal; thus comfort is needful.

C.S. Lewis in the Chronicles of Narnia has Aslan, the Lion saying:

"There was a real railway accident," said Aslan softly. "Your father and mother and all of you are-- as you used to call it in the Shadow-Lands-- dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning!"

And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after But for them it was only the beginning of the real story."

from The Chronicles of Narnia, The Last Battle, by C.S. Lewis, chap. 16, pp. 183-184.

Sorrow produced by the departure of our loved ones is partly due to our misunderstanding. This is well probed by C.S. Lewis when he speaks of the death of Lazarus:

"We are not high-minded, and we follow One who stood and wept at the grave of Lazarus not surely, because He was grieved that Mary and Martha wept, and sorrowed for their lack of faith (though some thus, interpret) but because death, the punishment of sin, is even more horrible in His eyes than in ours. The nature which He had created as God, the nature which He had assumed as Man, lay there before Him in its ignominy; a foul smell, food for worms. Though He was to revive it a moment later, He wept at the shame; if I may here quote a writer of my own communion, "I am not so much afraid of death as ashamed of it." And that brings us again to the paradox. Of all men, we hope most of death; yet nothing will reconcile us to— well, its unnaturalness. We know that we were not made for it; we know how it crept into our destiny as an intruder, and we know Who has defeated it. Because Our Lord is risen we know that on one level it is an enemy already disarmed; but because we know on the natural level that it is

God's creation, we cannot cease to fight against the death which mars it."

God in the Dock by C.S. Lewis, "Some Thoughts" (1948), page 7, pp. 149-150.

### EXERCISE 70

**C.S. Lewis says Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus because of "the shame of death."**

1. Is this a new thought to you? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Lewis uses the phrase "shame of death." What other words or phrases come to your mind which describe death? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Name some other reasons people grieve? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My nephew, Scott, and his wife, Christy, bid their baby daughter, Abby, farewell. With Scott's permission, here are some of his special thoughts.

"People are very uncomfortable discussing death. Moreover, we in the Christian community have developed the twisted notion that grief, after more than a month or so, somehow indicates a weakness of faith on our part. I certainly don't see it that way. No matter how much we know (believe) that we will see our loved ones in the resurrection, there is the real and very present sense of loss in the here and now. Acknowledging that pain is not a sign of spiritual weakness, but rather an acknowledgment of the reality we face. Faith comes in helping us to understand that the pain will someday turn to joy. Faith keeps us from sinking into despair.

There is such a need in the Christian community for education about helping people deal with grief. One woman in our church (a very well-meaning Christian lady I might add) sent us the most offensive card right after Abby died. The card included some ridiculous story about having seen a "vision" of heaven with lots of children parading around. All of the children had candles and were singing and enjoying themselves except for one little girl who sat down and was crying. When asked why she wasn't joining in the parade, she answered that she couldn't, that her mommy's tears kept putting her candle out. Can you believe it? The message of the card was that our tears (only weeks after Abby's death) were causing her pain in heaven!

I did a seminar for a local clergy group last year, the topic of which was dealing with grief. I was trying to get them to understand that there are "good" and "bad" things to say to people. Would you believe that one of these clergy told me that that was all fine and good, but that grieving people just need to "get over it" and have thicker skins and not be offended by all the little slights?!" Scott Prough, attorney and professor of law at OCU, Oklahoma City.

## **Expressing Comfort to the Grieving**

### **EXERCISE 71**

**Mark the following either "T" for true or "F" for false.**

\_\_\_ I Thessalonians 4:13 says Christians should not grieve.

\_\_\_ Paul was a super Christian and had no sorrow. See Philippians 2:27.

\_\_\_ Laughter is far better than sorrow. See Ecclesiastes 7:3.

\_\_\_ Sorrow has no place in our life. See Psalm 90:10

\_\_\_ Crying and sorrow will go on forever. See Revelation 21:4; Isaiah 51:11

\_\_\_ The expression "God needed another flower" is appropriate upon the death of a child.

\_\_\_ Ignoring the name and life of a loved one is a good expression of sympathy.

\_\_\_ God keeps no record of our tears. See Psalm 56:8

\_\_\_ "Get over it" spoken by a clergyman to sorrowing parents is appropriate.

Having bid my father, son, mother, father-in-law, son-in-law, brother and daughter farewell, I am convinced that it is the Holy Spirit who is in charge of ministering true comfort. I have learned out of a thousand sweet experiences and too many sad ones, that it is futile to place total confidence in humans.

Brother Scott Prough continues with his heart thoughts:



"This discussion is bringing back a lot of old memories. I remember that after Abby died, Christy and I went camping. Neither of us wanted to return to our house and all of its painful memories. Finally we had to return home, and I remember that for the 12-hour drive home I was praying that God would find a way to make it easier for Christy. Imagine my surprise when we pulled into the driveway and saw a strange car out front. It turned out that an old high school friend of Christy's, a girl she hadn't spoken to in years, had heard of Abby's death and dropped by "unexpectedly". The amazing thing was that she knew just what to do. She sat down with Christy and asked to see Abby's baby book and pictures. She spent hours looking at the pictures, commenting on them, and asking the typical "motherly" questions. This was just what the doctor ordered!! Another mother was acknowledging Christy's motherhood, and remembering Abby!! That will forever be one of my strongest proofs of God's ability to answer prayer.

The sad thing is that is it just that type of comfort people need. There's no magical thing they can say to take away the pain. But simply acknowledging the grief does wonders. And they need to acknowledge that the deceased lived on this earth and touched people. For us the saddest thing of people's silence is their implicit (and certainly unintentional) denial of our daughter's existence. Abby lived--albeit if only for a few months. She didn't have a big impact on this earth, but she touched us and taught us a few things about life (as I'm sure Lisa did for you and others who knew her). Acknowledging her existence, going to the cemetery is such a small thing to do, yet it ministers to people so deeply."

Well, I'm out of time and crying--not a thing to do at work--so I'll let you go for now. Have a blessed day in the Lord." *ibid* Scott Prough

## EXERCISE 72

Write down a meaningful experience in which you received/extended comfort in a time of grief.

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## Good Grief Release

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Matthew 5:4

"I sometimes hold it half a sin  
To put in words the grief I feel;  
For words, like nature, half reveal  
And half conceal my soul within."

Arthur Henry Hallam, 1833

Shortly after the death of our daughter, Lisa Kaye Johnson, a well meaning person said; "What's wrong with your faith? Don't you know where Lisa is?" I responded, "Yes, we know where Lisa is, and we also know where she isn't." She is with Jesus, but, she is not with us. There is an empty place at mealtime, an empty bed where she used to sleep, an empty chair where she sat as I explained to her the weather and "The Waltons" on TV and dozens of other subjects I talked with her about from day to day. And of course an empty place in our hearts reserved for our love for her and getting to wait upon her.

The above question and my answer brings into focus the all important spirit/flesh tug-of-war that exists at the time of grief. Grief is a natural human response when we sustain a loss which is beyond our control. The Bible makes clear from Genesis to Revelation that man is a triune human being-- body, soul, spirit. (I Thessalonians 5:23) We are not of the Christian Science religion, which teaches mind over matter; therefore the flesh has its day as we labor beneath the sun on the trail of reality. Please know, our present problem is not one of weak faith or lack of hope. In fact our FAITH is made stronger and our HOPE more alert by Lisa's going home. We experienced the same spirit/flesh battle when our son Lynn was taken. The depth of one's grief seems to depend on how involved we are with an individual on a daily basis.

The longer I live the more convinced I am of the need for what we called "common horse sense" out on the farm. So, we have been comforted on the occasions of our loved ones graduating to glory by hundreds of praying people, those who shared Scripture, scores of cards, memorial gifts, flowers, food and hugs of hope.

However, on both occasions we have also been devastated by a minority who came after the funeral was over and lacked common horse sense/wisdom. A minority who came violated every common sense written or unwritten rule of sensitivity. In hopes of helping all of us express empathy, I suggest the following positive 'tools':

## EXERCISE 73

Check the ones you have used in expressing sympathy.

- \_\_\_ 1. DO talk about the departed person. DON'T give the departed person the silent treatment as though they had died of leprosy or never existed. Find at least one positive thing you can say about the departed and say it.
- \_\_\_ 2. DO express understanding but do NOT say, "I understand" unless you have bid farewell to a person of like relationship, a son, daughter, husband, wife, etc. One can say, "I don't understand completely, not having lost a \_\_\_\_\_, but I came to share your sorrow by just being here.
- \_\_\_ 3. DO remind the remaining family member(s) that---"God loves you and so do I."
- \_\_\_ 4. DO NOT brag about a family member of yours who may have the same health problem/disease, etc. and is still living. This cuts to the quick and is in very poor taste.
- \_\_\_ 5. DO ask about the funeral memorial service. If you were there find one positive note about the service and say it.
- \_\_\_ 6. DO ask to go to the cemetery if the place of burial is nearby.
- \_\_\_ 7. DO share some Scripture--either read some or have it written down and hand to the family.
- \_\_\_ 8. DO ask to pray or if we might join together in a prayer circle.
- \_\_\_ 9. DON'T stay away just because you don't know what to say. GO and shake the bereaved hand, hug their neck, and perhaps just set in silence. If words are needed, God will direct, but your love and concern, seen in your presence, speaks louder than words at times.
- \_\_\_ 10. DO read excellent articles like "An Etiquette for Grief" in the March, 1998 Reader's Digest, which came out just after I wrote my treatise.

A 'bottom line' for our hurts and hopes is expressed in this Scripture.

**"When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, 'If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.' So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle. (Exodus 13:17-18 NIV)**

The concept that the *Promised Land* is always near, yet on the other hand, God leads us around by the desert road, has surfaced often across the years when my life seemed to proffer so much of the dry desert, and long winding roads along with a few dead end ones. Yet, as Israel journeyed, and I have found it so, the Way is *paved* with many an *oasis--a crossing place through the Red Seas of life, quail and manna* when needed, *water from the rocks*, seen and unseen angels assisting, His guiding presence in a *pillar of fire by night* and a *cloud by day* to point the Way, and always knowing that just over the next *sand hill, deep valley* or *high mountain* there will be the sight of the 'ole *Jordan River*, and when I get there, Joshua (Jesus) will lead the procession *down to the waters and we will cross over on dry land* to that beautiful land of milk and honey. Then, the trumpets will sound and we will shout with all the saints of the ages that the walls have all fallen down forever and forever.

A 'bottom line' for the inequities of life is we can learn from them, and try to help others be a bit more helpful towards our fellow man. So, in spite of the many vicissitudes on our trail, God's goodness is far greater than the gore of men, His Grace is sufficient for all our days and ways, and always we are overshadowed by His everlasting love which lifts us up and takes us on.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." (II Corinthians 1:3,4)

### **Peace in our Trials and Troubles**

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we

also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Romans 5:1-5 NKJ)

### EXERCISE 74

List some of your trials/tribulations. If you have/are experiencing victory in them, write the word "VICTORY!" after those.

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In a TV series called "The Waltons," the mother in the family, Olivia, has polio. Neighbors referred to as "the Baldwin sisters" come to visit. They leave this message with Olivia--"God's ways seem dark, but sooner or later they touch the shining hills of day and we see the sunrise." So, it is with each of us! Robert Schuller of the Hour of Power phrases it this way--"We can turn our hurts into halos, our scars into stars."

"I cry to you, O LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me." (Psalm 142:5-7)

## EXERCISE 75

Make a guess: what will set David "free from prison"? \_\_\_\_\_

**Praising God in an adverse situation is a matter of faith in the providence of God.**

"At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing." (Job 1:20-22)

As the 25th anniversary year of our Faith Alive Days ministry approached we began laying plans for a proper celebration? The Board of Directors of Larry Wright, Rose Foster, Rodger Thompson, Gary Spencer, and Tammy Vanderpool coupled with Imalee and myself appointed a special "Anniversary Committee" to lay plans. The proffered plans included--rallies, printed Bible markers, a video, speaking engagements, perhaps a camp out and if possible publish book #5. As the weeks passed by it became evident that JESUS WOULD CELEBRATE THIS ANNIVERSARY HIS WAY! Tribulations paved our path including--

Faith Alive Ministry Director, Gary Spencer was diagnosed with leukemia  
Our Holy Land Trip with the Spencers was canceled  
Our daughter, Lisa's death in November  
Imalee's concussion from a fall on the ice  
Close preacher friend, Gary Spencer died  
Imalee's mother, Ina Barrick, sustains strokes  
My stroke in April  
Our daughter, Rebecca's divorce  
CCDS-SRS litigation  
Our doctor daughter, Teresa, breaks her back in Grand Canyon on June 13th  
My brother-in-law, Red Smith, breaks leg/hip  
Our two-month-old granddaughter, Hannah Johnson's bout with botulism.  
My brother-in-law, Hap Prough, involved in a car wreck while delivering mail

Our plans were laid aside and we bowed low. It wasn't strange, for after 25 years of the Lord being in charge doing things in His own unique way, i.e., no pledged support, no contrived revival invitations, needs supplied day to day, guidance in amazing ways and always His

Presence along the way---I should have known He would commemorate the anniversary in HIS WAY! HE did that very thing by using the events of the year like *tinsel and bells* hung on a Christmas tree with His star at the top. The *tree* so-to-speak were the great Bible truths we had preached and sought to practice for 25 years 'hung' with the 'tinsel and bells' of the events of the last year. So, we made an intentional choice to rejoice/accept with joy the Lord's plans for us and Faith Alive Days by practicing those Truths of His Word listed as follows:

## EXERCISE 76

**Write down a phrase which depicts the meaning of each verse, and check the ones which you have been blessed in using.**

- \* Colossians 1:27 -
- \* Proverbs 3:5,6 -
- \* Zechariah 4:6 -
- \* Isaiah 30:18 - *"God works for those who wait for Him" (ASV-1901).*
- \* Philippians 4:19 -
- \* I Corinthians 15:31 -
- \* Psalm 44:4 - *"command deliverance...O God my King (KJ or NKJ)*
- \* Isaiah 40:31 -
- \* Isaiah 65:24 - *"before you call - I will*
- \* Matthew 7:7 -
- \* Matthew 21:21 - *"Speak to the*
- \* Luke 18:1 --
- \* Philippians 4:6 -
- \* James 5:14 - *sick: call for elders; prayer + oil = healing!*
- \* Romans 8:28 -
- \* II Thessalonians 5:18 -
- \* Hebrews 12:2 -
- \* James 1:2 - .
- \* Proverbs 15:22 -
- \* Job 33:31; James 1:19 -
- \* Romans 8:35-39 -
- \* I Corinthians 10:13 -
- \* Ephesians 3:7 - *My gift of ministry is through His grace (ASV)*
- \* Exodus 14:14 -
- \* Philippians 1:21 -

\* II Tim. 1:7 - "*no fear..but power, love, sound mind*"

\* Hebrews 1:14 -

\* James 4:7 -

\* I Peter 5:7 -

James encourages us with these words: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials," (James 1:2 - NKJ)

### **Thanking God in an adverse situation brings Peace to Life's Pieces**

While visiting in Bay City, Texas, I went for a bicycle ride on Saturday, May 13, 1995 in a special park west of town. Many shade trees lined the paved drives. I paused to use the open air (no roof) rest room. A young black man was using the urinal so I used the stool. He came up behind and shoved me causing me to lose my balance. In the same instant he grabbed my billfold and fled towards his car. I collected myself and ran after him noting his license tag number.

The Spirit prompted me to--"*In everything give thanks,*" I Thessalonians 5:17, which I did! There were many matters to be thankful for--he took my billfold not my life, stole my credit cards, but not my credit, took my driver's license but not my car, absconded with my social security card but touched not my heavenly security, ran away with my family pictures but not my family, removed old momentos from my billfold but not from my memory. WOW! PRAISE THE LORD? YES!

I reported the matter to the police and they promised to begin an investigation on Monday. On Monday I declined to pursue the matter as it would require me to drive 600 miles back to Bay City for a hearing and return again for a trial.

In the afternoon of the day I was robbed the Lord inspired me to write this poem.

#### **WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU GET A TIGER BY THE TAIL**

While cycling down a park road.  
Just movin' along with no big load.  
A robber man crossed my path.  
He shoved me when I was in the bath.



Now, this man was the robber of my treasure,  
He took my billfold for his pleasure.  
I thought: "Must I love him without measure?  
He has taken away my money for his leisure."

I thought: "I'm bound for a dead man's jail.  
They'll send my pieces home by mail."  
I got up slowly as that robber began to sail.  
And for me this robbery became a 'tiger tail.'

Now, my 'tiger tail' seemed as big as a whale.  
Yet I couldn't turn back, though I was a bit pale.  
I kept on movin,' not too hearty, not too hale.  
Really, my movin' was like a snail.

I kept on believin' thru the thunder and the hail.  
Lifted my bucket up high. HE filled my pail,  
And I praised the Lord for HE never fails!  
Soon, I was wamping that 'tiger' with its tail.

So, next time you get a 'tiger by the tail',  
Don't give up and don't turn pale.  
You can win the tiger tug, and be happy and hale!  
Just \*PRAISE THE LORD without fail.

Wilbur S. Johnson 5/13/95

\* (I Thessalonians 5:18; Ephesians 5:20)

This aptly illustrates that we need to PRAISE THE LORD FIRST, not ask "WHY." The devil always has a bag full of "reasons" as to why we should not praise the Lord in a negative situation---doesn't make sense, not logical, most people don't, etc. We need to do just what the Word says--"In everything give thanks," then leave it up to God to work all things together for his glory and our good out of the situation. (Romans 8:28)

**EXERCISE 77**

**List some of your life's negative experiences for which you have praised-thanked the Lord and the results.**

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**EXERCISE 78**

**Write down the name of these Bible persons who thanked God in the midst of adversity; also, a phrase which describes the adversity.**

1. II Chronicles 20:15-22\_\_\_\_\_

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2. Job 1:20-22\_\_\_\_\_

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3. Daniel 6:10\_\_\_\_\_

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4. Hebrews 12:2\_\_\_\_\_

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5. II Corinthians 12:9,10\_\_\_\_\_

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6. James 1:1,2\_\_\_\_\_

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7. I Peter 4:16\_\_\_\_\_

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8. I Thessalonians 5:18\_\_\_\_\_

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9. Romans 5:3\_\_\_\_\_

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We have found a "bottom line" for all our trials in these Scriptures and poem:

For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock." (Psalm 27:5)

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place."  
(II Corinthians 2:14 NKJ)

### **DREAM ON**

I've dreamed many a dream that never came true  
And I've seen them vanish at dawn,  
Oh! but enough of my dreams have come true  
To make me keep dreaming on.

I've prayed many a prayer and no answer ever came,  
Though I've waited patient and long,  
But enough answers have come through  
To make me keep praying on.

I've sown many a seed that fell by the wayside  
For the birds to feed upon,  
But I've held enough golden sheaves in my hand,  
To keep me sowing on.

Now I've tasted the cup of sorrow and pain,  
And sometimes gone without a song,  
But I've sipped enough nectar from the roses of life,  
To make me want to live on.

I don't regret a mile I've traveled for the Lord,  
I don't regret the time I've trusted in His Word,  
I've seen the years go by and sometimes the days were long,  
But I'll keep on serving Him until I finish the race.

Words by Howard Goodman

as adapted by Wilbur Johnson and shared with me by Bob & Marge Hoskins