

## REFINED BY FIRE

The imagery of the refining fire is one that the scriptures touch on over and over again. God is the refiner, and He carefully oversees the refining fire. Through His fire, our impurities are being burned away. Our dullness is being burnished into a sheen that reflects His glory.

Different fires, different disappointments and trials, will come and go. The heat of the flames is intended to burn away impurities, making us more and more Christlike. Proper response to the fire produces steadfast faith resulting in Christ. Improper response to the fire results in being unproven and disqualified.

This study will look at what it means to respond to the Refiner's fire so that the dross is burned away. It will also consider the degenerative results of resisting the refining process.

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## INTRODUCTION

The imagery of the refiner's fire would have been one that people in Bible days could relate to very well. Today the refining process takes place in factories, where few ever see it. But in ancient days, it was different. Consider this story:

Come, let me take you back to a Judean village in ancient days. Inside a small, walled courtyard under a blue and blazing sky, there stands a refiner of metals. In his hands, gnarled with age, he is rolling and fingering a lump of ore. He watches the sun play on the streaks and veins of lead and other minerals running through this bit of rock chiseled from the bowels of the earth.

His experienced eye knows that, intermingled within this ore, there is silver. He lays the ore on his worktable then builds his fire with care and the wisdom of years. Soon the flames are rising in the pit situated against the courtyard's stone wall.

At the worktable he picks up his hammer and begins crushing the lump into smaller pieces. He pauses occasionally to stare at the fire, as if in study. From time to time he places more fuel upon the already-blazing coals and works his bellows until the flames are in a frenzy.

When the fire is right, he gathers the hammered bits of ore from the place of their crushing and lays them in a small, sturdy container of tempered pottery—his crucible. He places the crucible in the fire and sits down beside it. A long day is before him, and this is where he will stay for as long as the metal is subject to the flames. Silver is too precious to be forsaken in the furnace, too valuable to be ruined through inattention.

Carefully, he watches the fire. It must be maintained at exactly the right temperature for the right duration of time to accomplish its purpose. Slowly the ore softens. The silver, with its greater density and lower melting point, liquefies first, hissing and bubbling as oxygen is released. The still solid impurities rise to the top of the molten metal. This is the dross, and the refiner skims it off.

Now he adds bits of charcoal inside the crucible. He knows this will enhance the sheen of the silver. The carbon of the charcoal will keep the refined metal from reabsorbing oxygen from the air, which would only dull the finish.

He tends the fire, adds more fuel, and applies more air from the bellows. Amid the relentless heat surrounding the crucible, more dull impurities, newly revealed, rise to the surface of the mixture.

Again the refiner carefully skims away the murky, smudgy metal floating at the top of the crucible. Gazing down upon the molten surface, the refiner sees at best but a dim reflection of himself. The refiner works and watches and waits. The heat and its effect continue. More impurities rise to the surface, and again he skims them off.

He never leaves the crucible unattended, never steps away from the fire he has formed to do its work. The finished product he cherishes demands this process. Only his guided and guarded refinement will yield the promised and precious metal. And he is not yet satisfied. He lets the fire cool. Eventually he sets the crucible aside.

Then once again he builds up the fire, and the process begins all over. This time the skilled refiner makes the fire hotter. Within the crucible, new impurities are released, brought to the surface, exposed for what they are, then skimmed off.

Finally his leathery face breaks into a smile, for now as he gazes into the liquid silver his reflection is apparent—not yet sharp, but more distinct than before. More hours pass as he perseveres in his anxious and delicate work.

And then...once more he bends over the crucible, and this time he catches his breath. There it is! In the silver he sees what he has waited for so patiently: a clear image of himself, distinct and sharp. Delight banishes his frown. His task is done. The impurities are gone. The silver is refined. He has his treasure.

He has “choice” silver, the most lustrous of all metals, beautiful and highly valued. It’s as pale and shining as the wings of a dove, as brilliant and splendid as the moon, worthy to become coin or trumpet or ornament, worthy to grace the king’s table or to reflect sunlight in a crown upon his head.

The refiner has taken what was impure and made it pure. He has taken what was dull and made it beautiful. Potential value has become actual value.

And the fire—the guarded, guided, relentless fire—made the difference. The fire allowed ordinary ore from the earth to be transformed into treasure. All under the refiner’s watchful care, for all the while he never left it unattended.

Kay Arthur

During this study, we will see that the Refiner’s flames take the form of disappointments, rebukes, minor irritations, and major tragedies. We will see that the Refiner tests our faith to prove it—not so that we are discredited—but so that we can be qualified.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:27 and record what you learn about disqualifications.

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The word Paul uses here is adokimos, which means “not approved.” Adokimos is the negative of dokimos which is translated “testing” in James. Read James 1:2-3 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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A correct response to the Refiner’s fire produces endurance as we use self-control. Read 1 Corinthians 9:25 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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It is possible to resist the refining process. The fire can burn, but the impurities are not released and removed. Instead, they are stubbornly clung to, no matter how hot the fire.

Read Jeremiah 6:29-30 and describe what can happen if the refining process is short circuited.

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What does it mean to be disqualified or rejected? \_\_\_\_\_

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Read the following verses and reflect further on the refining process:

Proverbs 17:3 \_\_\_\_\_

Proverbs 27:21 \_\_\_\_\_

Proverbs 10:20 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalms 12:6 \_\_\_\_\_

Zechariah 13:9 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalms 66:10 \_\_\_\_\_

God is the refiner; however, He is also completely trustworthy during our times of trial. Read Psalm 50:15. What is our part? What is God's part? \_\_\_\_\_

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Life has been described as like having a thick curtain hung across the way. The curtain recedes before us as we advance, but only one step at a time. We cannot see beyond that curtain and cannot know what one day or hour may bring into our lives. Sometimes unexpected or undesired events are revealed. Our hearts can be filled with anxiety, frustration, grief, and heartache. Can we really believe that the Lord's unfailing love surrounds us as we trust Him? (Psalm 32:10)

The question is two fold:

1. Can you trust God's sovereignty? This means, is God really dependable when bad things happen?
2. Can you trust God's sovereignty? This means, do you have a relationship with God such that you can really believe He is with you in times of adversity? Can you believe He is with you even though you don't see any evidence of His presence and power?

Read the following passages. Particularly note their context, and then record what you learn:

Hebrews 12:11 \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 40:14 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Corinthians 12:7 \_\_\_\_\_

Often, it is more difficult to trust God than to obey Him. The law of God is readily recognized; His moral standards are clearly defined in the Bible and are rational and reasonable. Obeying God is accomplished by adhering to well-defined boundaries of God's revealed standards. Trusting God, however, is worked out in areas that seem to have no boundaries at all.

**WHEN WE DISOBEY GOD, WE DEFY HIS AUTHORITY AND DESPISE HIS HOLINESS.**

**WHEN WE FAIL TO TRUST GOD, WE DOUBT HIS SOVEREIGNTY AND QUESTION HIS GOODNESS.**

In either instance, we are defiling His character. Do you think God considers distrust as seriously as disobedience?

Read Psalm 78:19-22 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

Seeing circumstances through the eyes of faith helps us trust God. Just as the faith of salvation comes through hearing the message of the gospel (Romans 10:17), so faith to trust God in times of trouble comes from the Word of God. As the scripture is applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we experience the grace of trust.

During this study we will be looking at three truths about God:

1. God is sovereign. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Lamentations 3:37-38 \_\_\_\_\_

John 19:10-11 \_\_\_\_\_

2. God is infinitely wise. Read the following verse and record what you learn:

Romans 11:33 \_\_\_\_\_

3. God is perfectly loving. Record what you learn in the following verse:

Lamentations 3:32-33 \_\_\_\_\_

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"God's plan and His ways of working out His plan are frequently beyond our ability to fathom and understand. We must learn to trust when we don't understand." Jerry Bridges

## HOMEWORK

In order to trust God's sovereignty, we must know Him in an intimate way. Reflect on Psalm 9:20. Think of areas in your own life where trusting God is difficult. Write them down: \_\_\_\_\_

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Remember that the Refiner's fire burns for His glory and our good. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you move beyond knowing facts about God to knowing God. Then you will be able to trust Him more completely. He never leaves the crucible, and never steps away from the fire. He makes sure that the temperature of every flame that reaches us is such that it accomplishes its intended work as He tests and proves our faith. He perfects our perseverance. Pray that you will not resist the refining process and become as rejected silver.

## THE SOURCE OF TROUBLE

The Word tells us that whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (Romans 15:4). Today we are going to begin our study with a look into the Old Testament. We can be confident that these words were written for our instruction.

Carefully read through the first five chapters of Jeremiah. Note the historical condition of Judah, the southern kingdom. Then read the following verses and summarize what you learn of Judah during the time of Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 2:1-8 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Jeremiah 2:13-19 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Jeremiah 2:20-25 \_\_\_\_\_  
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How do you think conditions in your time parallel those of Jeremiah's time? The third chapter of Jeremiah tells how Israel has "played the harlot." Read the following verses and record Israel's behavior:

Jeremiah 3:1 \_\_\_\_\_

Jeremiah 3:6, 13 \_\_\_\_\_

Now read Jeremiah 4:19-22 and note how the people regard God's approaching judgment. \_\_\_\_\_  
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Jeremiah 5:7 sees God asking a question of Judah, "Why should I pardon you?" There are many reasons why He should not that are given in chapter 5. But we

see that, time and time again, God calls the people back. "Return faithless Israel." "I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious." "I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the Lord your God and have scattered your favors to the strangers under every green tree, and you have not obeyed my voice." (Jeremiah 3:12-13)

Read through Jeremiah 5 and note the reasons given for God's judgment:

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In what ways did Israel refuse to submit to the refining process of God? What did God require? \_\_\_\_\_

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Now list any parallels you see between the nation of Jeremiah 5 and our nation.

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Also list any parallels between Jeremiah 5 and your own life: \_\_\_\_\_

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Now think carefully about what constitutes disobedience to God. Read the following verses and record what you learn about sin:

James 4:17 \_\_\_\_\_



1 John 3:4 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 53:6 \_\_\_\_\_

Read Jeremiah 7:1-7. Was Judah given the opportunity to submit to the refining process? \_\_\_\_\_

Read Jeremiah's lament in 8:21-22. He knew there was a cure, but the people were not listening. They didn't have to live a defeated lifestyle, but they made no changes. They could have grown in maturity, but they did not repent.

Read James 1:2-4 and record what you learn. \_\_\_\_\_

Adversity itself is not grounds for joy! But the expectation of the result, the development of our character, causes us to rejoice in trials. We can rejoice because we believe God is in control of circumstances and is at work through them for our ultimate good.

Read the following passages and record what you learn:

Romans 5:3-4 \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 12:2 \_\_\_\_\_

We can rejoice because God is at work in us, regardless of our understanding. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Philippians 1:6 \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 13:21 \_\_\_\_\_

## HOMEWORK

As we face adversity, how can we submit to the Refiner's fire?

1. Insofar as we are able to see what God is doing, we should do everything possible to make His purpose our purpose.
2. We should ask God to bring to our attention passages of scripture that are relevant.
3. We should pray, seeking God's will in the situation as well as God's purposes.
4. We should remember the lessons we have learned from past trials.
5. We can desire to grow in holiness. (Hebrews 12:10)
6. We can recognize our inability to do anything righteous apart from God. (John 15:5)

Think of the other ways that you might submit to the Refiner's fire in areas of adversity in our own life. List them here:

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## FAILURE: TRAINING IN DISGUISE

If you have walked in the Christian life very long, you must have realized that living for God means spiritual opposition. Read Luke 22:31 and record what you learn here: \_\_\_\_\_

Since we know that we will encounter warfare, it is important to understand some of the strategies that our enemy will use. Throughout the New Testament, we are reminded that we are in conflict with principalities, powers, and spiritual wickedness. It is essential that we understand the tactics of the enemy so that we won't be caught unaware.

During the time of Moses and Joshua, Israel prevailed in many battles. However, the book of Judges begins to describe years of dark defeat. The reason is given in Judges 2:10. Read this passage and record what you learn:

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How did God deal with this generation? Read Judges 3:1-2 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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Why do you think that we need to learn about war? Because we need to be able to identify the enemy so that we can defeat him. The enemy is not just Satan, but an entire world system that acts in opposition to God. How does our enemy wage war? Intelligence information is important in warfare. We must not go into battle unprepared.

Kay Arthur teaches about the Deadly D's: distraction, deception. These are quickly followed by disappointment, discouragement, dejection, despair, and demoralization.

Read the following verses and record what you learn about distraction:

Luke 10:40-42 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Timothy 2:3 \_\_\_\_\_

Now read the following and record what you learn about deception:

John 8:44 \_\_\_\_\_

In order to be a good soldier in warfare, we need to be able to resist the spiral of defeat. This means that we must not let one failure send us into an attitude that says we are perpetual losers. We must discover what we learned, and then use it in our training for future encounters with the enemy.

Today we are going to discuss some of the basic principles of military service.

**CONCENTRATION:** the ability to mass one's forces at a critical time and at a critical place.

The best way for the enemy to break through our defense is to amass his forces at a critical time and place. After discovering a weak spot in the defenses, the enemy lines up forces like a triangle entering point first—sending progressively more and more forces through the breach.

**OFFENSIVE ACTION:** going on the offensive allows the attacker to exercise initiative and impose his strategy on the enemy, to determine the course of the skirmish, to exploit weaknesses, and to adapt to changing situations.

Our enemy understands these principles well. He's a roaring lion seeking whom he might devour. When any of the Deadly D's come, our failure to respond biblically allows a weak spot that he can attack. He will create a breach and come in with more lying thoughts and feelings. He will move from deception to dejection and despair. If not stopped, he will completely demoralize.

**WHERE IS THIS BATTLE WAGED?** Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 and record what you learn:

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Satan attacks our minds with distractions and deceptions. He attacks with thoughts that run counter to what God has told us in the Bible. The thoughts

will be perversions of God's truths about His children. The thoughts will be distortion and misinformation. How we think is extremely important.

Read Philippians 4:8 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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If your thoughts are anything less than those that are in full obedience to the lordship of Christ, stop and ask yourself why you're thinking those thoughts. Jesus was continually reminding his followers to stop and think.

Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Matthew 18:12; Matthew 21:28; Matthew 22:42; Matthew 17:25

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Read Proverbs 23:7 and discuss why Satan would choose the mind as his battlefield. \_\_\_\_\_

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Now read Romans 12:2 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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We cannot stop the enemy from attacking, but we can refuse to allow him to get a foot in the door.

Read Ephesians 4:27 and 1 Peter 5:8-9 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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We have all of the armor that we need to be able to stand against the enemy.

Read Ephesians 6:12 and record who we are struggling against: \_\_\_\_\_

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Our trials and disappointments can really serve as a training ground for spiritual maturity. In fact, looking back we can often see that our times of deepest trial have produced the greatest times of growth.

How do we respond to trials, disappointments, and failures? Each encounter must be met biblically and quickly.

Read James 1:2-4. Record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Continue this line of thinking by reading Philippians 2:17. Consider the circumstances of Paul's letter, and record what you learn here: \_\_\_\_\_  
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No matter what the trial, disappointment, or failure, we must, by an act of willful obedience, begin to rejoice, pray, and give thanks in the situation. Continue your reading with these verses:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Ephesians 5:18-20 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Romans 5:3-5 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Return to our question of last week. Can **you** trust God? Do you rely on His sovereignty?

Read the following and record what you learn about God's trustworthiness and appropriate response:

Psalms 22:4-5 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Colossians 2:6 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Corinthians 5:7 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 50:10 \_\_\_\_\_

If you can't trust God's sovereignty in times of trial, begin to ask yourself what you really know about God. How can you begin to know him better?

Take the advise of Proverbs 23:23 to heart: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Take to heart some basic truths about God:

1 John 5:4 \_\_\_\_\_

Romans 8:28 \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 12:6-7 \_\_\_\_\_

God trains, educates, instructs, and teaches those whom He loves. Our trials and failures may just be His training in disguise. God can use these times to make us more like Jesus. In the final analysis, nothing else is important.

To end our study today, read 1 Peter 4:12 and record what you learn:

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## HOMEWORK

Read Romans 8:36-39. Think about the things which you are allowing to mar your relationship with God—trials, past disappointments and failures. If the world looks at you, will it see the sufficiency of His grace working through your life? Are you a living epistle? Consider where He may have placed you to help others see His sufficiency in your life so that they will know there is something different about you.

How is your training going? Are you trusting God's sovereignty in the midst of trouble?

## CHOOSE GOD!

To be able to choose to trust God in times of adversity is a hard thing to do. To trust God is a matter of faith. But we can know that God is trustworthy and can heal circumstances, as well as our attitudes toward them. Often, we do not realize that our bitter circumstances may be a test.

Read the following account, and record what you learn:

Exodus 15:22-26 \_\_\_\_\_  
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This account happens immediately after the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea. Moses and Miriam had just sung the famous victory song (15:1). And now the people had come to Marah where the bitter waters of Marah precluded quenching their thirst.

In the scripture, when we see "LORD" written in all capital letters, it is translating the Hebrew word, "Jehovah" or "Yahweh." In the verse we have just read, God calls Himself, "Jehovah Rapha," which means "The LORD your healer." Jehovah is the name of God that reveals Him as the self-existent one, the "I AM."

Did you notice the word "test" in this account? Like the children of Israel, we sometimes find ourselves drinking bitter water, not realizing that the bitter water is a test. God wanted Israel to learn an important lesson: When times are difficult—run to God—listen to God—trust God—CHOOSE GOD! He can take the bitterness and make it sweet because He is healer.

In Genesis 50:2, "rapha" is translated "physicians."

"And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel."

Sometimes we think of God's healing only in the realm of the physical. Is this the whole story? Look at the following verses and record what you learn about the realm of God's healing power.



Deuteronomy 32:39 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 19:22 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 57:17-18 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalms 147:3 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 30:26 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 53:5 and 1 Peter 2:24-25 \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 20:17 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 10:38 \_\_\_\_\_

If God calls Himself Jehovah-rapha, then that is what He is! And God never changes. Read Hebrews 13:8 \_\_\_\_\_

During hard times, during times of testing, where do you run? God, who created us, is not only our creator, but also our sustainer. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Jeremiah 17:5-6 \_\_\_\_\_

Jeremiah 17:7-8 \_\_\_\_\_

We need to always turn to God and His Word in times of trial and testing.

When we read Jeremiah 8, we saw that Jeremiah was greatly distressed over the condition of God's people in Judah. There was a balm in Gilead—a physician—Jehovah-rapha! But the people did not run to the physician. The condition was curable, but they were looking in the wrong place for the cure.

Read Jeremiah 46:11 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
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The children of God are not to run to Egypt (the word and what it has to offer.) They are to run to God. In Jeremiah's time, the Word of God had become a reproach to the people.

Read Jeremiah 8:10-11 and notice the result: \_\_\_\_\_  
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False prophets said what the people wanted to hear. Priests ruled on their own authority. (Jeremiah 5:31) And, the people chose this over God. Consequently, judgment came instead of healing. Read Jeremiah 2:14-19 and notice God's perspective of their plight: \_\_\_\_\_  
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What the people of Israel did, we still do today. We go to people of the world, people without a godly perspective, for help in times of testing. We run to people trained in the world's wisdom, but do not run in prayer to our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. And then we wonder why we feel unhelped, powerless, orphaned, and filled with strife.

This does not mean that we should never go to others for help. But it does mean that we SHOULD NEVER FAIL TO GO TO GOD.

As we begin to think about relying on human strength in times of need, King Asa of Judah immediately comes to mind.

Read 2 Chronicles 14 and answer the following questions:

1. Did Asa have a good relationship with the Lord? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. When the Ethiopians came, what did Asa do? What did God do? \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

Now skim 2 Chronicles 15 and consider these questions:

1. How did God warn Asa? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What was Asa's response? \_\_\_\_\_  
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Lastly, read 2 Chronicles 16, and answer these questions:

1. When the king of Israel confronted Asa, what did he do? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What was God's feeling about Asa's position? \_\_\_\_\_  
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What sort of person is God searching for? Notice that Asa had many physicians (2 Chronicles 16:12).

Many people live as victims of situations of the past. Many people live in failure in the present. Many have been taken advantage of by people. But you don't have to be an emotional cripple. You don't have to descend the spiral of the Deadly D's! Read the following verses and record the alternatives:

Jeremiah 33:3 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Jeremiah 32:27 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Isaiah 45:22 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Psalms 42:1 \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 13:5 \_\_\_\_\_

During times of trials, we can trust God because He is completely trustworthy. Finally, read the following verses, written by men who understand trials. Note the circumstances for each person:

Psalms 56:3-4 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Job 23:8-10 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Because God has promised never to leave us or forsake us, we can choose God in times of trial. Like Job, we may waver between trust and doubt. But we must agree with Job's conclusion!

We may sometimes have the same experiences—the seeming inability to find God anywhere. God may even seem to hide from us. Isaiah 24:15 says, "Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel." But because God does not lie (Titus 1:2), we can really believe that He will never forsake us.

As we complete our study for today, let's look at God's promises:

Hebrews 13:5 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Puritan preacher Thomas Lye emphasized that this passage in the Greek has five negatives which translate literally as "will not, not leave thee; neither will I not, not forsake thee." Five times God emphasizes that He will not forsake us! He will not leave us at the mercy of circumstances.

1 Peter 5:7 \_\_\_\_\_  
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But not leaving us is only one part of the proposition. God cares for us! His care is continual, not occasional. His care is sovereign. His care is infinitely wise and good. The verb translated "cast" seems to indicate that there is some considerable effort expended on our part. Jerry Bridges suggests the following:

We must by an act of will in dependence on the Holy Spirit say something such as "Lord I choose to cast off this anxiety onto You, but I cannot do this by myself. I will trust You by Your Spirit to enable me to, having cast my anxiety on You, not to take it back upon myself." Trust is not a passive state of mind. It is a vigorous act of the soul by which we choose to lay hold on the promises of God and cling to them despite the adversity that at times seeks to overwhelm us.

## HOMEWORK

Read Proverbs 18:10-11 and reflect on your life perspective. What contrasts are being drawn in this passage of scripture? \_\_\_\_\_  
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## PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

We live in a culture that is stressed out! If we could figure out how to buy more time, we would do it! Some tension is good in life, but it should not be allowed to become joy-sapping stress. Many times we react to situations instead of being proactive. Someone asks us to do something and we say yes, without remembering that our time was already taken doing something else. We are too busy and we become overstressed. I deal with this problem all of the time!

God knows what we are dealing with. He knows the pressures and conflicts that we face. He has made provision for us by giving His indwelling Holy Spirit to enable us to response in correct ways.

Read Deuteronomy 8:2-3 and see if you can understand what the Refiner might do in these sorts of situations: \_\_\_\_\_

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Do you see the word "humble?" It carries somewhat the same meaning as "meekness," the idea of humility and submission and bringing yourself low. Remember the circumstances of these verses.

Israel had been wandering in the wilderness. God had brought them out of Egypt. They had disobeyed and therefore had to wander for forty years. Since God had brought them out, He also supplied their needs. Besides being Jehovah-rapha as we saw last week, He is Jehovah-jireh—the God who provides. God provided manna for them to eat. Manna comes from a Hebrew expression for "what is it?" It wasn't familiar, and it turned wormy if you tried to hoard it up. Only on the day before the Sabbath did it last two days. The people literally had to depend on God **day by day**.

God fed them, but he also taught them a lesson in humility as our verses imply. The word humble is from a word meaning "afflict, oppress." The meekness that God was producing in their lives was the result of affliction, oppression, and humiliation.

Read Psalm 119:67-75 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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When it comes to learning meekness, we have the perfect teacher. Read Matthew 11:28-30 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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When we begin to learn meekness from the Lord, we stop trying to fix everything—we trust more in God’s sovereignty. We learn that the stress produced by this life cannot overpower us if we are living and acting in the practical knowledge that God is in control.

Read the following verses and note the example of Jesus:

John 8:28 \_\_\_\_\_

John 5:19 \_\_\_\_\_

John 12:49, 50 \_\_\_\_\_

John 14:10, 31 \_\_\_\_\_

Continually throughout the Bible, we see Jesus being meek before His father and also before men whom He had himself created!

Jesus was rejected, and accused of being the devil. But we never sense that He was driven or harried by difficulties and resistance. This doesn’t mean that He expressed no emotion. We see anger in the temple and grief at the death of Lazarus. We see suffering in the Garden as he prayed so fervently that His sweat became filled with blood. But we never see Him reacting instead of acting.

Read Hebrews 5:8 and see what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Read Colossians 3:12 and record your findings: \_\_\_\_\_

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Not only do we put on meekness, but we also are to pursue it. Read 1 Timothy 6:11 and record your findings: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

We are also commanded to walk in meekness. Ephesians 4:1-2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

And, we are to receive God’s Word with meekness. James 1:21 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Read the following verses and record the blessings of acting in meekness:

Psalms 25:8-9 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 29:19 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalms 37:11 \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 5:5 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalms 76:8-9 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalms 147:6 \_\_\_\_\_

It is difficult to act rather than react. But we can count on God to take care of those who afflict us.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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

The Greek for “meekness” is “prautes.” Many times it is translated “gentleness” but the meaning is really more than this. In the Old Testament the word comes from a root that means “emerging from affliction or humility.” In Bible days, the term was a reference to domesticating animals—taming them. They learned to come under the control of their masters, making them properly behaved.

This is what God is doing with us. Through affliction, He brings meekness—brings us under His control—transforms us under His power, so that we walk under His authority.

The opposite of meekness is not power, as we might think. The opposite of meekness is unbroken wildness. And real meekness is not being quiet, timid, pliable people who let everybody walk all over them. It isn’t a personality trait! It is a fruit of the Spirit. It is something that God does in us.

Read Galatians 5:16-17. Record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Remember that your flesh and the Spirit are in warfare, and if you fail to act in the Spirit, then you are being controlled by the flesh.

Read 2 Samuel 16:9-12. Record what you learn about David. Note especially the circumstances. \_\_\_\_\_

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Skip to 1 Kings 2:44 and read the eventual fate of Shimei: \_\_\_\_\_

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In Psalm 37, we begin to get a picture of a meek person. Look at the characteristics:

THEY DO NOT FRET BECAUSE OF EVILDOERS (1)

THEY TRUST GOD (3, 5)

THEY DO GOOD (3, 27)

THE MEEK "DWELL" (3)

See also Ecclesiastes 10:4

When we trust God, we do good instead of evil. We don't pay back evil for evil, but repay evil with good. When we believe that God is sovereign, when we respond in meekness, we don't run—don't abandon our position in the fact of opposition.

THEY DELIGHT IN THE LORD (4)

THEY COMMIT THEIR WAY TO THE LORD (5)

These verses tell us that the meek get their happiness from God, not from their circumstances. In our self-centered culture, it is very difficult to come to the position where you can truly say, "Lord, all I want is to know You." We miss His character and His attributes. We do not pray, "I want to know You in the power of Your resurrection and the fellowship of Your sufferings." But the meek give God ownership of their lives—they recognize His sovereignty and believe that He is trustworthy to be in charge.

THEY REST IN THE LORD

THEY WAIT PATIENTLY FOR HIM (7, 9, 34)

THEY TAKE REFUGE IN HIM

They trust Him to bring to pass their best interest in His timing.

THEY LOOK TO THE FUTURE



Those who trust God's sovereignty don't look at present circumstances, but trust the Lord's promise that the meek who wait for the Lord will inherit the land (verses 9, 11, 34) and live in it in eternal inheritance. (verses 18, 27).

# HOMework

Read through Psalm 37. Think through the ways you have responded in ways that did not express meekness or acknowledge God's sovereignty. List them here. Make them the subject of much prayer. \_\_\_\_\_

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## GOD IS IN CONTROL

When we accept the sacrifice of our Kinsman Redeemer, when we are freed from slavery to sin, our lives have purpose. Our value is not because of what we have done, or who we are, but because God has chosen us!

Read Romans 8:28-39. Look carefully at all words that refer to God, and the words that refer to us. Below, list what God has done for you: \_\_\_\_\_

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Now read Romans 10:3. What problem did the Jews have? How did they try to become righteous? \_\_\_\_\_

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Because the Jews lacked poverty of spirit, they could not understand the God does not save on the basis of works.

Read Titus 3:5-7 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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Look up the following verses and record what you learn about the way we are cleansed and changed. (Metamorphoo)

2 Corinthians 3:18 \_\_\_\_\_

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Romans 12:2 \_\_\_\_\_

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Ephesians 5:25-27 \_\_\_\_\_

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Suffering is one of God's methods of conforming us to the image of Christ. It is a comfort to know that we are not alone and that our suffering has a purpose. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Hebrews 5:8 \_\_\_\_\_

Romans 8:16-18 \_\_\_\_\_

God likens our suffering to the purifying of silver and gold. Naturally, neither metal is pure; they are mixed with all sorts of other things that make them impure. They must be refined before their beauty is revealed.

The refining process is not designed to destroy the metal, but to bring forth its beauty.

Just as silver and gold are put into the crucible, so God puts us into the crucible of suffering to make us beautiful—in His image.

Read 1 Peter 1:6-8 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

We must learn to see each trial as part of God's refining process.

Now read 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 and answer the following questions:

1. What is the treasure? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Why are we delivered over to difficult situations? \_\_\_\_\_

Write any insights you learned here: \_\_\_\_\_

Now read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. What do you have to do if you are going to walk victoriously? \_\_\_\_\_

Whether or not the refining process is successful depends upon our response. We will either be refined or embittered. It is our choice. The trials that come into our lives are designed to move us toward God.

Read the following verses and record what you learn:

1 John 4:8 \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel 4:34-35 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 45:5-7 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Psalms 103:19 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

According to Romans 8:29, why did God predestine us? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Everything in creation is indebted for its existence to the continuous sustaining action of God exercised through Christ. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Hebrews 1:3 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Colossians 1:17 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Nothing exists because of its own power of being. Nothing stands or acts independently of God's will. The laws of nature are just the expression of the will of God. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Isaiah 40:26 \_\_\_\_\_

Nehemiah 9:6 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalms 147:8-9 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 17:25-28 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalms 31:15 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Corinthians 9:10 \_\_\_\_\_

Every breath we breathe, the food we eat, everything that happens is under His control.

God's sovereignty is often questioned because we don't understand God's ways and God's thoughts. He just doesn't act the way we would act if we were God! But clearly the scriptures point to the fact that God created everything, and that He is actively sustaining and governing it.

Today we will conclude our study by reading the following verses. Record what you learn:

1 Chronicles 29:12 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Timothy 6:15 \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 10:29 \_\_\_\_\_

Lamentations 3:37 \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel 4:35 \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel 4:17 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 55:9 \_\_\_\_\_

Romans 11:33 \_\_\_\_\_

## HOMEWORK

Ask yourself today where you have substituted the doctrine of "chance" for the doctrine of God's sovereignty. Record these areas here:

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Now read Matthew 10:29-31. Record your findings here: \_\_\_\_\_

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## GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY RULES

Psalms 103:19 tells us that God's sovereignty rules over all. When we look at events in our world, it is hard to really believe this sometimes. When we know that our brothers and sisters in Christ are dying for their faith in other countries, the knowledge of their pain makes our momentary discomforts seem like child's play. The things that we consider trials might seem like a reprieve to them.

More people have been martyred for Christ during our century than in any other. Besides these, many other believers are persecuted daily and many more are not allowed to worship God openly. The cruelty of those who have no fear of God is almost unspeakable.

Read Ecclesiastes 4:1 and record King Solomon's reflection on the topic: \_\_\_\_\_

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Perhaps you have experienced sufficient emotional or physical pain at some point to be awakened and sympathetic to the hurts of others. Sometimes, you might feel alone with your pain, or your empathy with others.

Sometimes the pain may actually stem from loneliness, which is a very common counseling complaint in our times.

Read Proverbs 14:13 and record what you learn about pain: \_\_\_\_\_

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If we are going to learn to respond to the pain with meekness—if we are going to act rather than react—then we are going to have to trust God. Either we really believe that God's sovereignty rules, or we don't.

Either you have known enough about God's heart, character, and attributes to believe that he is sovereign, or you have not.

It is truly a blessing to be able to rest in the sovereignty of God. We can find joy not **in the heat of the flame**, but in the sure knowledge that the Refiner is **watching over the fire, controlling it**.

The fire isn't purposeless, and it isn't intended for destruction. It's intended for purification. Therefore, rather than focusing on the flames, or the new fuel that is being added, we can focus on the Refiner. We can endure because He will not leave the crucible unattended. We can trust Him.

When we inspect the word sovereign, we see that it contains the words “over” and “reign.”

Read Psalm 103:19-21 and record everything that you learn about God and those who serve Him: \_\_\_\_\_

What are the “hosts” mentioned here? \_\_\_\_\_

Are they both good angels and fallen angels? \_\_\_\_\_

Can anything at all keep God from doing what He wills? Read Isaiah 14:24-27 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

Only God is in charge. Only He is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent.

Read Daniel 4:24-35. It is an incredible story. Record all that you learn here: \_\_\_\_\_

God does what He wills with rulers, with His entire creation. This causes us some problems, doesn't it! Here is how our thinking goes: “This means that God knows about the bad things that are going to happen to us. This means that He could have moved in and stopped them. But since He didn't, then God can't be good.”

Let's follow this thinking to completion. If we say that God did not know, then we are removing the attribute of omniscience.

If we say that God couldn't stop it, then we are saying that something or somebody is more powerful than God—we are removing the attribute of omnipotence.

Are we just abandoned in an orderless world? Does Satan make bad things happen and God can't stop him? If God can't overpower Satan, then whose hands are we really in? We can get in real trouble with this thinking.

Read Deuteronomy 32:39 and record what you learn here: \_\_\_\_\_

Now pair these words with 1 Thessalonians 5:18. Record what you learn:

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What reason is there to give thanks in everything if God isn't in control? If He isn't in control, we are in big trouble. We'd better panic right away! If God isn't sovereign, then Satan can do anything he wants to us at any time that he wants to do it. But, since God is sovereign, we can be sure that whatever happens has been filtered through His hands and will result in our good and will be for His glory.

Early in the life of the church, Jesus' followers began to understand. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Acts 2:23; Acts 4:28 \_\_\_\_\_

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However, God also understands our grief. Read Psalm 56:8-11 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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More than one hundred years before Cyrus' birth, Isaiah gave a prophecy concerning Israel. Read Isaiah 45:1-7 and record what you learn, especially in view of the circumstances of its writing: \_\_\_\_\_

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Compare with Ecclesiastes 7:13-14 \_\_\_\_\_

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Because God can see the future, because He knows everything because He is all-powerful, because He is here—because of these things, we can respond in meekness. We don't need to try to manipulate things in our own strength.

Does this mean that in our adversity, we just sit back and say, "I have no part—I will just lay low and be a victim?" No! We keep looking to God, we learn, we move forward. We are not victims! We are more than conquerors!



# HOMework

Next week, we are going to look at the book of Habakkuk and at excerpts from the life of Paul concerning renewal by the transformation of our minds. Read ahead, and note any areas where you think your thoughts could use some transformation! Record the areas here so that you can look back and see how you've grown through trials! \_\_\_\_\_

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## PEACE IN PAIN

Today, we will begin our study with a look into the book of Romans. 1 Peter 2:9 tells us something of our position. Before we begin today, read this verse and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Now begin by reading Romans 12:1-2. Record every truth that you are able to see in these verses here: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Now, we are going to look at this process in action. Read the book of Habakkuk and answer these questions:

1. What did God tell Habakkuk that He was about to do? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How did Habakkuk initially respond? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Reread 1:12. What do you think Habakkuk understood about God's character? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Now, particularly look at 2:1. Think through what you see of Habakkuk's action, and then look at the next three verses and look at God's response: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If the righteous live by faith, as Habakkuk is told, where does this faith come from?

Read Romans 10:17 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Now, read Hebrews 11:1 and define faith here: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

God wants us to live by faith. This is the way to get through trials and pain. Living by faith keeps us trusting God, and we learn about God so that we know

He is trustworthy, by reading the Word. The answers for our trials are always in the Book!!!!!!!

How we respond is crucial. Sometimes when the fire gets hot, people say, "God, you didn't do what I asked. You didn't respond appropriately. I'm through with You and Your Word." And they walk away from the source of answers. But, this wasn't Habakkuk's response.

Reread 3:17-19 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Whose high places are you going to walk on? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Many times, the high places of others look better than our own! We see people, and think they have it made. They just seem so together. But, we may not know their trials. God helps us each to walk in our own high places, the ones that He has prepared for us.

Read Romans 9:20-21 and note what you learn about this concept here: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

To end our study today, read 2 Corinthians 10:1-6. Record what you learn about our responsibility in the process of renewing our minds. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Does this sound like a passive victim of events to you? What is our responsibility in light of God's sovereignty? Record your thoughts about these ideas here. This is where we will begin next week. \_\_\_\_\_  
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## RENEWING YOUR MIND

Last week, we began looking at the concept of being transformed by the renewing of our minds. This clearly involves some responsibility on our part. We will be considering this responsibility for next two weeks.

Read Philippians 4:6-8. Notice the order of events that are expressed in these verses, and record them here: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When trials come, we aren't to be anxious, but we are to be doing something! This is not victim thinking. In fact, this is mind-renewing thinking.

Now, look at Acts 4:24-29. In this chapter, Peter and John had been threatened by the Jewish leaders and told not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. When the other believers heard this, they immediately prayed. Record what you learn about their attitude of prayer here: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

These believers knew that God was sovereign, but they saw this as a reason to pray. In fact, prayer assumes the sovereignty of God. If God is not sovereign, if He isn't in control, why pray to Him?

As prayer without faith is but a beating of the air, so trust without prayer is but a presumptuous bravado. He that promises to give, and bids us trust his promises, commands us to pray, and expects obedience to his commands. He will give, but not without our asking. Thomas Lye

So, we can see that really trusting God's sovereignty will actually require us to adopt new ways of thinking and believing. And, we act on our new way of thinking.

Read Philippians 3:13-14 and record what you learn here: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Whereas Satan wants you to focus on what you were, or on what the trouble is, or on thoughts that he plants, our responsibility is to refocus our thinking (Philippians 4:8) and to press on.

Now, move to 2 Corinthians 10:3-7 and record what you learn there. Specifically record what you learn about the nature of our warfare and the weaponry.

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Notice (v. 7) what the Corinthians were doing wrong. They were focusing on the circumstances. Compare with 2 Corinthians 5:16: \_\_\_\_\_

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As we look at 2 Corinthians 10, there are some things that we need to know. Notice especially verse 10. Apparently Paul had his fair share of critics in addition to his various trials. It seems apparent that the Corinthian culture (Greek) that especially worshiped beautiful bodies, worldly wisdom, and eloquent speech, didn't see much desirable about Paul!

Traditionally he is described as short, small boned, and bow-legged. Besides this, he is believed to have had some sort of eye ailment that was repulsive because of yellow, crusty secretion. Through people's words, the enemy was trying to tear Paul down. If he could get Paul to think about his physical appearance, he might destroy his ministry.

But, Paul had done his intelligence gathering on the enemy. Therefore, Paul reminded the Corinthians that although we walk in fleshly bodies, we don't war with fleshly weapons. Satan's goal is to establish strongholds in our minds, and our responsibility is to stop him. In times of war, opposing sides try to establish strongholds in the enemy's territory. It is the same in spiritual warfare. When we think about things that are not godly, or think negatively about God, or fantasize evil, we give the enemy ground on which he can build a stronghold.

This is why we must destroy speculations (things we imagine) and everything and anything else that might be raised up against what is actually true about God. If Paul had not done this, the enemy might have used the circumstances to destroy his ministry.

Be assured that Satan doesn't just waltz into your mind and announce that it's him. He's clever and subtle. He can come as an angel of light—meaning, he can put out propaganda that looks pretty good. He drops suggestions and hints around. He casts doubt on the good things of God, and the truth of the Word.

Just as God's sovereignty doesn't invalidate our responsibility to pray and think in a renewed fashion, it also doesn't invalidate our responsibility to act according to our renewed mindset! This means we can use all legitimate, biblical means at our disposal to avoid harm to ourselves or others and to bring about what we believe to be the right course of events.

Although we may not know God's sovereign purpose in every circumstance, this is certainly no excuse to shirk the responsibilities that God has clearly commanded in the scripture. It is also no excuse to fail to carry out specific things that God has already shown us or told us.

Read Nehemiah 4:7-20. Record what you learn here: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Did Nehemiah believe God? Yes, but he also used all available means, believing that God in His sovereignty would bless those means.

In Joshua 9, we find the men of Israel in a confrontation with the Gibeonites. In this meeting, Israel entered into a treaty because they did not pray. Read this section of scripture and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

In this section, we can see that prudence requires willingness to pray or seek counsel so that we can correctly see the situation for what it is. We can seek counsel not only from God but from godly people.

Read Proverbs 15:22. Combine it with Proverbs 16:9, and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

It is clear that God uses the wise counsel of others to bring our plans into line with His sovereign will. So, in the process of renewing our minds, we must remember that prayer acknowledges God's sovereignty and our dependence on Him to act on our behalf. Prudence acknowledges our responsibility to use all means that God has provided for us. We must not separate these two ideas.

## HOMEWORK

Read 1 Chronicles 5:18-20. Reflect on how much these well trained warriors trusted in their ability and training. Compare to Psalm 127:1 and record what you learn here: \_\_\_\_\_

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We will continue this thought process next week.

## OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Last week, we began our look at God's sovereignty contrasted against our responsibility. Let's begin today by reading Psalm 127:1 and recording what we learn:

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There is a sense in which this verse sums up all of the responsibilities that we have as believers. Whether it is mental, spiritual, or physical, we should always be building and watching. Notice that the psalmist speaks of God actually doing the work. This in no way negates the position of the human builders or watchers, but clearly shows us that in every respect we are dependent on God to enable us.

Continue reading in Deuteronomy 8:17-18 and write your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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It is important to realize that God doesn't allow our dependence on Him to be used as an excuse for indolence. Read Ecclesiastes 10:18 and Proverbs 20:4 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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We could summarize our thoughts as follows:

**OUR DUTY IS FOUND IN THE REVEALED WILL OF GOD.**

**OUR TRUST MUST BE IN THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF GOD.**

There is absolutely no conflict between trusting God and accepting our responsibility. We can clearly see that God's sovereignty does not do away with our duty to act responsibly.

The flip side of that thought is this:

Does failure on our part to act responsibly frustrate the sovereign plan of God? Read Esther 4:10-14 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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Once we understand that we are truly God's child, that we are not our own, that we've been purchased with a price, we can reorder our priorities—think differently—live with renewed thoughts. We are here in this time and in this place to do what God wants.

Read Ephesians 5:15-16 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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This is why Satan works so hard to keep our minds from being renewed. If we are saved, he can't take us back out of God's hand, but he can and does try to wreck the sort of life that we live.

Continue with Paul's thought in Ephesians 5:17-18 and record your thoughts:

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The Holy Spirit helps us determine what God's will is. Our time is redeemed (bought back) when we walk under the control of the Spirit. This is very important. If we are unwilling to walk under the control of the Spirit, we will not be able to tap into God's wisdom for us.

Read Romans 11:33 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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Wisdom is commonly defined as good judgment. We think someone is wise if they can develop the best course of action, or respond the most appropriately to given circumstances. But, human wisdom is fallible. The wisest people never have all of the facts that God can have. From time to time, we all agonize over important decisions, trying to determine the best thing to do.

**GOD NEVER HAS TO AGONIZE OVER A DECISION! HE DOESN'T HAVE TO EMPLOY CONSULTANTS! HIS WISDOM IS INTUITIVE, INFINITE, INFALLIBLE.**

Read Psalm 147:5 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

God's actions result in His glory. (See the following: Romans 1:21, Romans 11:36, Ephesians 1:12, John 15:8)

The good that God does in our lives is to refine us—to bring us into conformity with the likeness of His Son. It isn't necessarily for comfort or happiness.

Read Hebrews 12:10 and record what you learn about God's wisdom:

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

Read also Psalm 119:71 and record your further thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Here we begin to see experiential learning discussed. We begin to see that our responsibility also includes learning from our circumstances. We begin by reading and studying the Word. But we also learn through the ways God works in our lives.

For example, we might admire the trait of patience, but we learn patience when we have to "suffer long." (The definition of patience). This usually involves trials.

In fact, if we think carefully of the fruit of the Spirit, we will see that most of them have a "natural" counterpart. But the fruit become spiritual when they have been learned at a deeper level as a result of walking with the Spirit.

God's wisdom is fathomless, his decisions are unsearchable. Read Romans 11:33, 34 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## HOMEWORK

Skim the book of Job. Think through what you learn of God's revealed wisdom in this book. Especially concentrate on Job 42:3.

Contrast this with Psalm 131:1.

Next week we will begin a look at some of the ways that the enemy attacks the battlefield of our minds. It is good to have the knowledge of God's sovereignty and our responsibility clearly in mind as we proceed.

## THE BATTLEFIELD

Romans 12 tells us that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Our minds are the battlefield. For this reason, we have armor to protect our heads! Read Ephesians 6 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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One of Satan's tactics in our minds is to make us feel rejected. Rejection makes us feel isolated. It is a very destructive emotion. It can be a deadly strategy on the part of our enemy.

Rejection in some form or another comes to every child of God. Is all of the rejection we feel imagined? Only in our head? No, some comes from this source. But some is real and is a part of the life of those who belong to Christ. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

John 1:11 \_\_\_\_\_

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Isaiah 53:3 \_\_\_\_\_

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Do you think that Jesus understands our real rejection and our feelings of rejection?

We are in the process of being conformed to God's image. Many times we do not do the right things. We make mistakes, we repent, we mourn. But during these times, we make choices regarding a continuing life of service to God, or a life lived in defeat. We must bring our thoughts captive in obedience to Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:10 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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We must remember that we are in the process of being conformed into the image of Christ. We must learn from our mistakes and allow the fire to burn that which is not Christlike in our behavior and character away like dross.

Read Philippians 3:13-14, and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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We must remember:

1. Jesus was perfect and still rejected by many.
2. Even Jesus' brothers didn't believe in Him, and essentially rejected Him. (John 7:5)
3. Some of the people who Paul led to the Lord later said bad things about him and rejected him.
4. Many of the prophets were rejected by the people and even the priests and kings.

We must also remember that we are God's servant and we serve no other.

Read Galatians 1:10 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When we are rejected, or when we feel rejected, we must cling to God's Word.  
Write out the main idea from each of these scriptures:

Matthew 10:34-37 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

John 15:18-21 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Psalms 27:7-10 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 13:5-6 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

People may leave us or forsake us, but God will never leave us. Read Ephesians 1:5-6 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

God never promises that others won't reject us. They may even reject us because we are Christians. But God will never forsake us.

Read Isaiah 49:14-16 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Now, read Romans 8:1 and Romans 8:35-39. Record what you learn here:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Thoughts not under control lead to depression. Depression means to be “pressed down.” If the cause of your depression is not physical or biochemical, it could be that dwelling on the past is causing your depression. Sometimes depression is caused by anger with God or with people. Depression can come when we allow circumstances to overwhelm us, sending us into a state of mental or physical inertia. Depression can be a symptom of unbelief.

Remember, our past was part of the old man. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The old person died with Christ (Romans 6:6).

## HOMEWORK

Read Psalms 42 and 43. Mark all references to God, you, rejection, despair, and hope. Record your findings here: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Take some time to pray these psalms back to God. The psalms wonderfully turn into prayers, because they started as the outpourings of a heart toward God. The psalmist knows that times of despair will pass and there will again be times to praise God. If help is going to come, it will be from God!

## THE WAR

What happens when we have thoughts that just won't leave us? What happens when we have behaviors that we know aren't right, but we can't seem to overcome them? Remember, we are in a war!

Satan's strategy is to besiege our minds until he wears down our resistance and captures our thoughts. We call this barrage that hammers away at our defenses "spiritual warfare." It is fine to talk about the mechanics of this battle. But we also need to know how to practically resist the devil. We can find some real ammunition in the way Jesus handled Satan when He was tempted.

Read Matthew 4:1-11 and do the following:

1. Name Satan's tactics in this passage: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Name the areas of Jesus' temptation: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Can you see any parallels between the devil's temptation of Jesus and temptation of you? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How did Jesus handle Satan's temptation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Satan worked very hard to lure Jesus into sin. Why was it so important to the enemy? Can you see that Satan was trying to wear Jesus down? Do you see that, even though Jesus was physically spent, He continued to resist?

Everything that Satan tells us must be compared with the plumb line that is the truth of God's Word. We must never allow the enemy to twist or pervert the Word, or to quote it out of context.

Read John 4:4 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

There is absolutely no reason for us to doubt the reality of such spiritual warfare.

Read Ephesians 6:10-20. Answer these questions:

1. Who do we struggle against? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What does God tell us to do? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Write out the name of each part of the armor, and describe how you might put it on: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How does the armor relate to the warfare in the mind of a Christian?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The enemy wants you to focus on your wounds. He wants you to be consumed with pain. He never wants you to understand that the sovereign God may be burning away those things that don't belong to Him.

Now, read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The Word of God is all that you need to be adequate for every work of life. Record the ways in which the armor of God has something to do with the Word of God: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



The devil's tactics not only cause us to doubt and disobey God's Word. They also cause us to ignore the Word altogether; to doubt God's love. Doubting God's love causes us to doubt His character. Once this has happened, the enemy has cut us off from the only true and sure place of refuge and healing—Jehovah Rapha and the Word.

To stand in this war, we must know God and we must know His Word, and live accordingly.

## HOMework

Read Psalm 119:1-88. Mark every reference to the Word of God. Include other words that mean the same thing.

Mark every reference to affliction, salvation, and hope.

Make a list of every way that the Psalm spoke to some area of your life where you are struggling with spiritual warfare. Record them here: \_\_\_\_\_

[illegible]

## GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY OVER PEOPLE, NATIONS, NATURE

Sometimes we mistakenly believe that God's sovereignty is only over Christians, those who believe in Him. But, scripture teaches otherwise!

Read Proverbs 21:1 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Now read 2 Chronicles 20:6 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Finally, read Jeremiah 14:22 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

From these verses, it is clear that God is sovereign over many areas that we traditionally try to wrest from His control!

Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Exodus 3:21-22: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Now read the actual events. Exodus 12:35-36: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The Egyptians did something that was not normal for those who enslaved others! They freely gave slaves so much that it is almost unbelievable. Sometimes we think that we, our families, or our future is controlled by other people. What does this account teach us? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Continue your thinking by reading Ezra 1:1. Record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Read Isaiah 45:4-5 and get some insight. Is it required for a person to know and love God in order to have God use the person?

Finally, read Ezra 6:22, 2 Corinthians 8:16-17 and record what you learn of God's sovereignty: \_\_\_\_\_

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The fact that God is sovereign over our rulers is usually not evident to us as we view their decisions and actions on a human plane. Consider what happened to facilitate the birth of Christ.

Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census that required Mary and Joseph to go to Bethlehem—at the right moment for Messiah to fulfill Micah's prophecy (Micah 5:2). Several instances in the New Testament mention times in Jesus' life where governmental action played a role in fulfilling prophecy.

Read Matthew 2:14-23 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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Confirm your findings by reading Acts 4:27-28: \_\_\_\_\_

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If this was true in bible times, can we believe that our daily newspaper is revealing the sovereign hand of God? We must remember that for those experiencing in the midst of events described in the Bible, God's hand may not have been apparent to them any more than His hand is to us today.

Besides being sovereign over nations, God controls those who rule in governments. Read Romans 13:1-4 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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Confirm your findings by reading 1 Timothy 2:1-2: \_\_\_\_\_

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Much of this truth can only be understood from God's eternal perspective. We struggle with some of the evil dictators and immoral men who have held public office, but we must consider what the Word says:

Daniel 4:17, 32 \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to sovereignty over who rules, God also determines when they rule. Read Isaiah 40:23-24 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

In addition, scripture is clear that God determines who wins in warfare. Read Proverbs 21:31: \_\_\_\_\_

Also read Judges 7:2-22, which records the victory of Gideon, and 1 Samuel 14:6, 15, 20 which records Jonathon's faith. Record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Psalm 20:7 says, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God." Does this mean that a Christian must trust God and not military strength of any sort? Does this mean that we should dismiss our military forces and disarm our weapons? We see again and again that in the Word that people do not put their trust in their weapons, but neither do they discard them. It is recognized that an army fights but God gives the victory to whomever He wills.

In addition to being sovereign over people and nation, God is also ruler over nature. Read Jeremiah 14:22 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Has God walked away from the day-to-day control of creation? God set up the laws of nature, and they operate because He has told them to do so. Read the following verses and record what you learn about God's sovereignty over nature:

Job 37:3-13 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalm 147:8-18 \_\_\_\_\_

Jeremiah 10:13 \_\_\_\_\_

Amos 4:7 \_\_\_\_\_

Sometimes we struggle with disaster coming from the hand of God. Read Isaiah 45:7 and discuss what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## HOMEWORK

Thousands of years ago, the prophet Habakkuk struggled with the question of God's sovereignty. He finally concluded that although he didn't understand God, he would nevertheless trust Him. As you conclude your reflections this week, read the following verses and record that you learn:

Habakkuk 3:17-18 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## FORGIVENESS

When we begin to acknowledge that God is sovereign over people, nations, and nature, we sometimes begin to struggle with the reasons that God did not “fix” events in our lives for us. “Why me, God,” we ask. Keeping a proper attitude is difficult, especially when we realize that God’s sovereignty did not work events as we would have liked.

As we begin our study today, read John 5:1-9 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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For thirty-eight years, this man had been ill. He spent his days with those who were sick and crippled. He did not work because he had a physical ailment. The world gave him a living because fate had dealt him a torturous blow. When Jesus came along, He asked the man if he wanted to get well. Was this a valid question?

Sometimes in the midst of our problems, we begin to embrace an attitude of victimhood. We take our identity from our problems. We begin to love our hurts, sicknesses, and wounds.

**Why?** Because our pain brings attention and pity. We somehow receive comfort by seeing others reject those who have hurt us.

**Why?** Because our wounds are an excuse for our shortcomings and failure. We reason that we “are the way we are because of what has happened to us.” Healing would remove the excuse to be what we are and make us responsible for becoming what we should be.

**Why?** Because we are angry with God. If God healed us, we would have some obligation to become what God wants us to be. To relinquish self would mean to lose control to God.

**Why?** Because we fear change. There is a “comfortableness” in our victimhood. Some don’t believe the change could really happen anyway.

And, so, Jesus asked the man if he wanted to be healed. To be healed, in light of God’s sovereignty, almost inevitably means that some forgiveness must occur. In the physical world, we know that our wounds never heal unless they are

cleaned. The same principle applies to the spiritual and emotional levels of mankind. Healing won't come by ignoring the debris or putting a bandage over the wound.

You can never cover the infection of hurt and expect to get well. The wound must be opened and thoroughly cleaned. Then healing can be done. This doesn't mean that we uncover things that we have already confessed or that we rummage around using unbiblical methods. Read Philippians 3:13 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

However, things that have been denied, or buried, need to be exposed. God can call this to our minds as we pray according to Psalm 139:23-34.

If there is anyone in the Bible who demonstrates forgiveness, it is Joseph. Read Genesis 37:1-36 and summarize what you learn about Joseph's rejection by his brothers: \_\_\_\_\_

Read on in Genesis 39:1-23 and record the temptation Joseph suffered, and his unjust imprisonment: \_\_\_\_\_

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 and record what you learn in this regard: \_\_\_\_\_

Read Genesis 50:20 and record Joseph's eventual position: \_\_\_\_\_

Now, read Matthew 6:14-15 and record what you learn about forgiveness: \_\_\_\_\_

Finally, we will conclude our study today by reading Matthew 18:21-35. Read Jesus' response very carefully. What was the teaching of the story?

When reviewing stories such as this, we must always remember that God assures us of forgiveness. Read Hebrews 10:10 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

A guilty conscience can destroy relationships, emotions, and even cause physical illness. There is no guilt that cannot be cared for at the mercy seat of God. Read Hebrews 10:19-22 and reflect on what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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Whether sin is blatant or disguised, the only way to receive God's forgiveness is through the blood of Jesus Christ. God's forgiveness is an act of grace that is appropriated by acknowledging sin and accepting pardon.

Read 1 Timothy 1:15 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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God wants His children to walk in the reality of forgiveness—from Him to us, and from us toward others. How can we do this? Here are some practical steps:

1. 1 John 1:9. Agree with God that you have sinned. "Confess" is from the Greek homologeō which means "to say the same thing."
2. James 4:17. Accept responsibility for the sin.
3. Matthew 5:23-24. Tell God that you are willing to make restitution if necessary.
4. Romans 5:20. Thank God for the blood of Jesus which cleanses sin.
5. Romans 8:1. Take God at his word.
6. Galatians 5:16. Thank God for the Holy Spirit that helps us with struggle with lust of the flesh.

Having so appropriated God's forgiveness, how should we respond toward those who sin against us? Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Ephesians 4:31-32 \_\_\_\_\_

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Colossians 3:12-15 \_\_\_\_\_

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Matthew 6:8-15 \_\_\_\_\_

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When we have suffered unjustly at the hands of others, it is hard to forgive, especially if the other person isn't sorry for what they have done. What can we do when we have no desire to forgive?

1. Realize that forgiveness is a matter of the will, not of the emotions. To forgive is a matter of choice.
2. Realize that forgiving another person does not let that person "off the hook" with God. Verify by reading Hebrews 10:26-27.

## HOMEWORK

Read Luke 7:36-50. Discuss the point of the story that Jesus told Simon the Pharisee. Contrast the love of the Pharisee and the love of the woman. Were they both sinners? What made the difference in their responses to Jesus?

To refuse to forgive is sin. To obey and forgive is to love God and keep His word. Take some time to review what you have learned this week about forgiveness. Record any areas where you need to exercise forgiveness toward those who have wronged you. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Conclude your homework this week by reading the following verses and recording what you learn:

Ephesians 5:1-2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1 John 4:20-21 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## VICTORY OVER DISCOURAGEMENT

As we have begun looking at various issues of God's sovereignty and our responsibility, it is easy to become somewhat discouraged. We do not sense God's sovereign love. Rather, we see calamities coming in, and see ourselves as victims. At times like this, we must stand on the assurance that we "live by faith, not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7)

Isaiah 49:14-15 speaks of the attitude of God's people, and God's response to them. Read these verses and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

In Lamentations 3:1-20, Jeremiah feels the alienation from God. Read 3:19-20 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Jeremiah is obviously emotionally and spiritually spent; but in the next verses, his attitude changes. Now read Lamentations 3:22-23 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What caused Jeremiah's change of heart? He turned from the circumstances as his focus to a focus on God. Jeremiah reflected on God's great love and faithfulness.

Does the faithfulness of God mean that we should never expect to be disciplined? Read the following passages and record what you learn:

Hebrews 12:5-6 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 13:21 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Conclude this study by reading Romans 8:28. We see nothing inherently good about many adversities. Record your reflections on this verse: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The scriptures tell us that God's love is "unfailing." Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Psalms 32:10 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 54:10 \_\_\_\_\_

Lamentations 3:32 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Corinthians 12:9 \_\_\_\_\_

Further, scriptures tell us that God is “with us” in our troubles. Read the following verses and reflect on them:

Isaiah 41:14 \_\_\_\_\_

Isaiah 63:9 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 9:4-5 \_\_\_\_\_

God’s unfailing love and presence is affirmed again and again in the Word. It is true, whether we believe it or not. Our unbelief does not change God’s love. Our faith does not create God’s love. God’s love begins him—who is love—and flows to us because of Christ.

However, the experience of that love and the comfort it brings is dependent on our belief of the truth of God’s love as revealed to us. Read Mark 9:24 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

We will always struggle with doubts about God’s love during our time of adversity. If we never had to struggle, our faith would not grow. As we struggle with our doubts, we must not let them overwhelm us.

Read Psalm 13:1 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Now record the words of David that follow in Psalm 13:5-6: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Like David, we must wrestle with our thoughts. With God’s help, we also can come to trust in God’s unfailing love even in adversity.

## HOMEWORK

Read the following passages and record what you learn about God's help in discouragement:

Psalm 31:19 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalm 119:11 \_\_\_\_\_

Lamentations 3:32 \_\_\_\_\_

Notice that the assurance here is that God will show compassion. Even fires of affliction are tempered by His compassion.

## RUN THE RACE

One of the most difficult things to comprehend in life is that God has created us each uniquely. Psalm 139:13-16 tells us that God Himself created our “inmost being.” The Hebrew word to express the center of desire and longing—the center of emotions and moral sensitivity. Essentially David is saying that God created his personality as well as his physical body. The same thought comes out in Job’s thoughts. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Job 10:8-11 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalm 119:73 \_\_\_\_\_

Jeremiah 1:5 \_\_\_\_\_

Knowing that God is intimately involved with creating us in our mother’s womb helps us to understand that a God so much a part of the creative process must also have a plan for our lives. Each of us is designed uniquely to fulfill the plan that He has for us. Our disabilities and our abilities all fit into that plan. God’s plan embraces more than the circumstances of our lives. It also includes what He wants us to be and do. God’s sovereignty determines our function with the Body of Christ and the corresponding spiritual gifts that we receive to carry out our function. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Romans 12:4-6 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Corinthians 12:7-11 \_\_\_\_\_

It is usually true that our spiritual giftings are consistent with the physical, mental, and personality aspects of our being. God knows all of these in advance. Read Jeremiah 1:5 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

To say this does not deny that the curse of sin on our world exists. And, becoming a Christian does not take us out from under the curse on our earth. But, it does give us a new perspective about our jobs. Read Colossians 3:23 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

The fact that God has set apart our days should give meaning to each day—each seen as important because it is ordained by God. Does this mean that we take a fatalistic approach? Never! Read 1 Corinthians 7:19-21 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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There must be a godly balance between our efforts to improve our situation and acceptance of those situations that cannot be changed. It is comforting to read Psalm 23 and notice that God leads, guides, etc. As the shepherd, God commits Himself to sovereignly guide our lives.

This naturally brings us to the consideration of discovering God's will for our lives. We struggle with right choices when we have two that seem good or appropriate. Do we sometimes choose the wrong road? Will God in His sovereignty guide us faithfully through right and wrong decisions?

God's guidance usually comes step-by-step. Our life plans are not revealed to us as one completed book. J. I. Packer described the process this way:

"God made us thinking beings, and He guides our minds as we think things out in His presence."

One of the often repeated stories from nature involves the emergence of the Cecropia moth from its cocoon. A small boy, in his attempt to help the moth, snipped part of the cocoon away to allow it to emerge more easily. However, the struggle to come out of the cocoon was essential in building the muscles of the moth's body and getting the required fluids into the wings to expand them. The moth, emerging too rapidly, was doomed to never fly and to an early death.

Like the cocoon, God uses the trials of our lives as a testing ground that builds up our spiritual muscle (the fruit of the Spirit). Can peace and patience be developed without adversity? Can you understand why both Paul and James speak of joy in the midst of sufferings? Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Romans 5:3-4 \_\_\_\_\_

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

Remember that the adversity itself is not the cause for joy. But, the expectation of the results cause us to rejoice in adversity. We rejoice because we believe that God is in control and at work through them for our ultimate good.

Read Hebrews 12:2 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Compare with Psalm 94:12 \_\_\_\_\_

God is at work in us and will not fail to carry to completion all that He has begun to do in us. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Philippians 1:6 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 13:21 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Each adversity that crosses our path, large or small, is allowed by God. God does not have pleasure in our suffering; but he allows what will help us grow. Read Lamentations 3:33 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

In the wonderful study Experiencing God, Blackaby and King advise believers to find out what God is doing and discover how you can join Him. This is good advice! God's sovereign work never negates our responsibility. Just as God teaches through adversity, we must try to learn from it.

1. **SUBMIT TO WHAT GOD IS DOING** Insofar as you can see what God is doing, make His purpose your purpose. This doesn't mean that we cannot use every possible means at our disposal to minimize the affects of adversity. But it does mean that we should accept the success or failure of those means as He wills and try at all times to learn whatever He may be teaching. Sometimes we see God's will quite clearly; other times we do not. When we cannot see, our attitude should be one of faith, trusting God to work out what we need to learn.

## 2. APPLY PERTINENT PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE TO THE SITUATION

We should ask God to bring pertinent passages of scripture to our attention. In this way we can profit from the circumstances and learn new truths about the scripture. In fact, adversity can even help us understand that scriptures as they become "heart" knowledge instead of only "head" knowledge.

## 3. REMEMBER THE LESSONS WE LEARN FROM

**ADVERSITY** We should not merely endure trials, but we should also use them as a means for growth in godliness. Read Deuteronomy 8:2-3 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

There are some additional things to be learned from adversity. In the natural world, an unpruned vine produces a lot of growth but not much fruit. Pruning contributes to increased fruit production. Read John 15:2 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

Because we tend to rely on human wisdom and natural talents, seeking success and reputation. God uses adversity to prune away things that are not really important.

In addition to fruit production to show us that we must rely on Him and not on ourselves. Read Hebrews 12:10 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

God also allows adversity to show us that we must rely on Him and not on ourselves. Read John 15:5 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

## HOMEWORK

Read the following verses and record what you learn about God's presence in adversity:

Hebrews 10:32-36 \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 12:1 \_\_\_\_\_

James 1:3, Romans 5:3 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Corinthians 1:4 \_\_\_\_\_

Job 42:5 \_\_\_\_\_

Philippians 3:10 \_\_\_\_\_



## THE JOY OF THE LORD

Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. Nehemiah 8:10

It is difficult to remember the perspective of joy in running the race that we discussed last week. It is easier to move from difficult circumstances into a cycle of bitterness. Bitterness can cause us to hate God's blessings; it can also cause us to be angry and hostile toward others, emotions that are expressed as resentment and angry outbursts.

If not released, bitterness can take root and defile both us and others. Today, we will look at our response to adversity. We will learn that bitterness has much to do with discipline. Begin by reading Hebrews 12:5-15. Especially note each time "discipline" is used, then record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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There can be no long-lasting joy without understanding the truths of these verses. The cure for anger and bitterness and "victimhood" is recorded here! Healing depends on acceptance. This is not the same thing as acquiescence. Acquiescence is resigning yourself to some circumstance. Acceptance is to believe through the circumstance. What do we need to accept to fully experience God's joy?

1. We must accept God's character and His sovereignty. If God is not in charge, then someone or something is stronger than He is. If He is unaware of what is happening to us, then He is not in charge. Because God is sovereign, we need to know what He is like. Read Jeremiah 31:3 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. We must accept God's grace. This happens on more than one front. First, we are saved by grace, which is never the result of anything that we do. Second, grace keeps us from bitterness. Look again at Hebrews 12:15-16. God's grace is sufficient to allow us to handle anything that comes along. Think for a moment on the analogy of Esau. In a moment of extreme physical discomfort, Esau despised his birthright for temporary satisfaction. What is your birthright? How might you give it up for a moment's satisfaction? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. We must accept who and what we are. Read 1 Corinthians 15:10 and record Paul's perspective: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Read also John 15:16 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Who and what we are is a product of God's work. Read Ephesians 2:10 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If we fall short of living by these truths, we come short of the grace of God. We must not allow the sinfulness of our past keep us from going forward for Christ. In Paul's case, his past was extremely sinful, he had an unattractive appearance and he was not perfect—other people even got mad at him from time to time! But, because of his acceptance of God's grace, he could write 1 Corinthians 15:10. Read this verse and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

We must also accept the fact that God loves us with an everlasting, unconditional love. Therefore, we can move out to love others. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Romans 5:5 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 4:19 \_\_\_\_\_

Popular psychology tells us that we can never love God or anybody else if we don't love ourselves first! God says that we can love ourselves and others because He loved us first!

The way to love others is not through love of ourselves. To really love God and others, we must die to self! Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Mark 8:35-36 \_\_\_\_\_

Galatians 2:20 \_\_\_\_\_

As we move forward in our Christian life, we will continually move toward death of self rather than love of self. But, what about the verse that commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves? Read the following verses and record your

findings: Read Romans 13:8-10 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Mark 12:28-33 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Do these verses tell us to love ourselves? Continue your study with these  
verses: Philippians 2:3-8 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2 Timothy 3:1-5 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The sacrifice that Jesus made does not show our worth to God; it demonstrates  
God's unconditional love toward us. John 3:16 tells us that God loved the world.  
It doesn't tell us that he esteemed man. A careful study of Romans 9 shows us  
that God is not obligated to mankind. Rather, God reached out in mercy toward  
us. Read Romans 9:18 and reflect on what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Continue your thinking by reading 1 Timothy 1:15-16: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What do sinners deserve? What has God offered instead? Will we still suffer  
rejection? Yes, but we choose to remember that God is in control and will not  
allow anything that is not for our good and His glory. Read Romans 15:17-18  
and record Paul's perspective: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

There is a lesson in Paul's testimony: we must continually cast our cares on God.  
We all deal with various hurts and pains. Sometimes a memory is triggered that  
is especially harmful. Do not try to handle it in your own strength. We are  
yoked to Christ. Cast the anxiety on Him! Read 1 Peter 5:6-7 and record what  
you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## HOMEWORK

In this study, we have dealt with rejection, or lack of acceptance by others. We  
can also be hurt when we do not accept others. This means that we can be hurt  
because someone else did not live up to our expectations, ideals or desires.

We feel wronged because someone owed us something that they didn't give (respect, honor, time, love). We feel wronged because that don't live up to what we expected from the relationship. We are hurt because someone treats us in ways that remind us of how someone else mistreated us. In all of these situations, we can be hurt because we cannot accept others for who and what they are.

Perhaps you didn't have a father's love or affection. Then people tell you that you will have problems all of your life because you didn't have these things. You are hurt, and then your hurt is intensified. How defeating this can be until you learn to accept your circumstances. There will be things that we cannot change. Another person's rejection or lovelessness may be part of what cannot be changed.

In these circumstances, we must remember that the relationship has been permitted by God, who promises that all things work together for your good.

For your homework this week, take a few minutes to think about people who trouble you in some manner—who irritate you—who you would really like to avoid—those you want to forget about altogether! List their names, then ask yourself these questions about them:

1. What do you think \_\_\_\_\_ owes you?
2. What do you deserve in your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_ that you are receiving (or did not receive)?
3. Is the mod that you expect \_\_\_\_\_ to fit into one that you know God expects?
4. Do you resent \_\_\_\_\_ because he/she reminds you of someone else? Who? How?
5. Do you project feeling (attitudes, thoughts) on that person that you are not absolutely sure he/she has? Why?

Now, read Romans 15:7. What was your state when Jesus accepted you?

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If you were to extend God's love to \_\_\_\_\_, how would you respond to him/her?

How can forgiveness help you experience the joy of the Lord?

## THE WISDOM OF GOD

In times of adversity, have you ever found yourself wondering if God really knows what He is doing?

Jerry Bridges tells the story of a tragedy in Aberfan, South Wales on October 21, 1966. The black waste from a mine slithered down a man-made hill and oozed into the junior school classrooms. With no escape route, 109 children and 5 teachers died. A pastor, interviewed by the B.B.C. said, "Well...I suppose we have to admit that this is one of those occasions when the Almighty made a mistake."

Anyone who has dealt with adversity of a deep level can probably understand the doubts that this pastor struggled to make right in his mind. Does God make mistakes in South Wales? Does He make mistakes anywhere?

Read Romans 11:33 and record what you learn about God: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

We all know that human wisdom is fallible, even at its best. The wisest men and women can never have all of the facts, or predict with absolute certainty all results over all time. Consequently, in our human wisdom, we agonize over decisions. God doesn't have this problem!

God always knows all of the facts! He always knows exactly what He is doing! He always knows what is best for us. He doesn't agonize over decisions. He doesn't need outside consultants.

Read Psalm 147:5 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

In his classic book Desiring God, John Piper says this:

"The chief end of God is to glorify and enjoy himself forever."

Do you agree with this statement? The following verses will give some perspective. Record what you learn through each:

John 15:8 \_\_\_\_\_

Romans 1:21 \_\_\_\_\_

Romans 11:36 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Corinthians 10:31 \_\_\_\_\_

Ephesians 1:12-14 \_\_\_\_\_

Revelation 4:11 \_\_\_\_\_

Revelation 5:13 \_\_\_\_\_

Revelation 15:4 \_\_\_\_\_

There is no doubt that Christians live in a world that is hostile to us. We ask God “why?” We often cannot see any possible good to us or glory for God from particular circumstances that come our way. We have an enemy who “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” He wants to “sift us like wheat,” as he did Peter. He wants us to curse God just as he tried to get Job to do.

Read Romans 8:28-29. Record your initial findings: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Verse 29 begins with “for” which indicates that it is a continuation of the thought from verse 28. The good that God works for in our lives is conformity to Christ.

Now read Hebrews 12:10 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

To share God’s holiness is the same thing as being conformed to the image of Christ. Notice the author’s use of “as they thought best” in the Hebrews 12:20 passage. There is a clear contrast being drawn between human parents and God. God doesn’t make mistakes. He knows what, and when, and how. His discipline is always exactly suited for our needs.

Sometimes we reach a point where we are unwilling to live without rational reasons for what is happening to us or to our loved ones. Our quest to have the “why” answered becomes all consuming. But we often are never told why.

Read Isaiah 55:8-9 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

This verse does not tell us that God will not explain to us, but says that, even if God gave full explanation, we would not be able to understand. Continue this thought by reading the following:

Romans 11:33-34 \_\_\_\_\_

Human beings simply cannot search out the reasons behind God's decisions. To experience peace in times of trial, we must come to a point of believing that God's ways are simply beyond our understanding. This is not the same thing as intellectually "giving up" or refusing to deal with hard issues. It is, in fact, the opposite. It is acceptance of the truth that God knows things that we do not know.

Read Job 42:3 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

Compare with Psalm 131:1 \_\_\_\_\_

God's wisdom is infinite and His ways are beyond our understanding. Consequently, we must be careful when interpreting God's actions. We also must be cautious when other people offer themselves as interpreters. Although it is important to learn from circumstances, we must be careful that we are learning from God and not putting our own "spin" on the events.

There is one particularly comforting thought when considering God's wisdom. It is this:

**GOD'S WISDOM IS NOT ONLY ABOVE OURS, IT IS ALSO  
HIGHER THAN THE WISDOM AND DECEIT OF OUR  
ADVERSARIES!**

Somehow it is easier to accept adversity from adverse circumstances than from the hands of other people (especially Christians). Read 2 Samuel 24:14 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

Continue your thinking with these verses:

Proverbs 21:30 \_\_\_\_\_

Romans 8:31 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Corinthians 12:9 \_\_\_\_\_

If we accept that God is sovereign, we must conclude that God is in control of both sad and glad circumstances and is guiding them with His infinite wisdom.

# HOMework

Consider the words of John Flavel:

"Believe firmly that the management of all the affairs of this world, whether public or personal, is in the hands of your all-wise God...Resign up yourselves to the wisdom of God, and lean not to your own understanding...When Melancthon was oppressed with cares and doubts about distracting affairs of the church in his time, Luther thus chides him out of his despondency...do not thou presume to be the governor of the world, but leave the reins of government in his hands that made it, and best knows how to rule it."

Does this mean that we should be indifferent to suffering that goes around the world? What then, is the correct response of the Christian? Record your thoughts here: \_\_\_\_\_

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper appears to be a standard notebook page or a sheet of stationery.



## VICTORY OVER DESPAIR AND ANGER

If we continue in a cycle of disbelieving truth, we will descend from dejection right into despair. What is despair? The abandonment of all hope. Despair causes your mind to become numb. It can also lead to almost frantic activity. In a state of despair, people sometimes act recklessly without considering the consequences.

Christianity offers something that no other religion claims: assurance of salvation. This assurance is the birthright of every child of God. The greatest victory of the enemy is to cause the believer to lose hope. Satan doesn't begin by proposing some overt sin—but he lures by the sin of unbelief.

Go back for a moment to Satan's first words to Eve in the garden: "Indeed, had God said..." Did he ever tell her to eat the fruit? No, he just cast doubt on God's Word. Then, he continued by implying that God had known that she could be like Him all along and was holding out on her!

The root of sin is unbelief...the basis for sin is lies. If Satan can lure us into unbelief, he can take away our hope. Satan is the father of lies—a murderer and destroyer. He wants you to believe that God doesn't care—that He is unwilling (or unable) to answer your prayers. If Satan can't take you to the lake of fire with him, he wants to at least destroy any daily relationship you might have with God.

We lose hope when we act according to our own emotions or human reasoning rather than trusting God's Word. We lose hope when we focus on circumstances. We lose hope when we leave God out of the picture.

Romans 5 tells us where hope comes from and what it does. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Romans 5:1-10 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Psalms 42:1-5 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

To begin to understand hope, today we will look at Jeremiah's writings in Lamentations 3. Read verses 15-20 and write down everything that you know about the circumstances of Israel with regard to Babylon: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Think about the despair of the people of Israel. They knew that God had caused their destruction. They knew that they could have stopped the tragedy by listening to God, but they hadn't listened. It is one thing to be ruined when you have done everything you could possibly do to prevent it. It is quite another thing to realize that your destruction is of your own making. Our despair is greater when we realize that "I could have stopped it...I did it...I caused it...It's my fault...If only I had listened...if only...if only...if only."

For Israel, with man it was too late, but not with God. Continue reading in Lamentations and record Jeremiah's hope.

Lamentations 3:21-24: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Notice that the hope involves a choice (it begins with "therefore"). What had Jeremiah called to mind? That there is no end to the Lord's lovingkindness and compassion.

Read now in Lamentations 3:55 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What did Jeremiah do? He called on the name of the Lord.

This is a very interesting response. What if he had chosen instead to be angry? Is angry always sin? The words anger (angered, angry) are used 364 times in the Bible. Most of the references concern God's anger!

God is angered by injustice. (Exodus 22:22-24)

God is angered by idolatry. (Deuteronomy 29:18-21; Jeremiah 25:6)

God is angered by spiritual adultery. (Psalm 106:34-40)

God is angered when He is betrayed. (Deuteronomy 4:23-26)

God is angered when people don't listen to Him. (Jeremiah 25:6-11)

God is angered by disobedience to Him. (Joshua 7:1)

God is angered when people complain and murmur against Him or His servants. (Numbers 11:1, 33; 12:1-9)

God is angered by unbelief. (Psalm 78:21-22; Hebrews 3:7-12; John 3:36)

God is angered by ungodliness and unrighteousness from men who suppress truth in unrighteousness. (Romans 1:18)

God is angered when we refuse to pay homage to His Son. (Psalm 2:10-12)

In general, God's anger is His response to sin—so when God expresses anger, it is always within the realm of His character. Read Psalm 30:5 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

Read also Exodus 34:6-7: \_\_\_\_\_

Why, then, are people angry?

People are angry because God doesn't operate the way they want. (Genesis 4:1-8)

People get angry because of God's judgment. (1 Chronicles 13:11)

People get angry because we don't like the words of God's servants. (2 Chronicles 16:7-10)

People get angry because God doesn't judge others when we want Him to. (Jonah 4:1-11)

Read Isaiah 45:20-24 and look at how we can deal with anger toward God:

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

From these verses, we can see some appropriate actions. If you are angry at God:

1. Set forth your case. Tell God why you are angry.
2. Turn to God. Recognize who He is and that He has no obligation to answer you.
3. Confess your sin. Recognize that anger with God is rebellion against his sovereignty.
4. Humble yourself before God.
5. Pledge allegiance to God as your Lord. (Isaiah 45:25)

In addition to being angry with God, we get angry with other people. Read Psalm 37:1-15 and record what you learn about your responses to others:

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Anger can be very destructive and dangerous. It can even go undetected until it explodes. Your homework today will reveal to you how to determine if you are harboring anger.

Finally, today we will consider how to deal with anger that has led to despair or hopelessness. A very interesting study is to read through the book of Acts and note all of the times the phrase "In the name of the Lord" (or Jesus Christ, or Jesus the Nazarene) is used. There is power in His name when someone is indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God!

Read Acts 3:6 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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Peter and John could not give what they did not possess. But they could give what they had—the power of doing things in the name of Jesus.

What was the man begging for? \_\_\_\_\_

What if Peter and John could have given him what he was begging for? He would have been crippled for life—in total despair—without hope! But there is hope—power, salvation, healing—in the name of Jesus. It's never too late to call on Him and open the door of hope! **IT'S OUR CALL!**

## HOMEWORK

Today's homework will consider any stored-up anger that we might be harboring. How do we know it is there?

1. Anger seeks revenge (Genesis 49:6-7; 1 Samuel 25:28-31)

2. Anger is laid up (collected in the heart) Job 36:13...smolders and burns (Hosea 7:6; Proverbs 30:33)
3. ...then anger stirs up strife (Proverbs 29:22)
4. Anger becomes a flood (gushing out, overwhelming. Proverbs 27:4)
5. Anger bears grudges (Psalm 55:3)
6. Anger accuses (1 Samuel 17:28)
7. Anger brings sinful actions (Proverbs 29:22)
8. Anger can cut us off from friends (Proverbs 22:24-25)
9. Anger causes us to despise people (Matthew 5:22)

Now read Ephesians 4:26 and Psalm 4. What do you learn about your response to anger and despair in these verses?

## ALWAYS TRUST GOD

Because God is sovereign and wise, we can always trust. If we are going to honor Him in times of adversity, we must trust Him. There is more at stake than experiencing peace in our difficulties (or deliverance from our difficulties). The honor of God should be our primary concern!

There are responses that show that we are trusting God. Today we will look at some of them.

## THANKSGIVING

1 Thessalonians 5:18 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Obviously, giving thanks in adversity is not a natural virtue. It is a fruit of the Spirit which the unbeliever does not understand. One of the most forthright rebukes against mankind is offered by Paul in Romans 1:21. Read this verse and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Giving thanks admits dependence. Read the story of the ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19. Record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Often our problem is deeper than just forgetfulness. We have a spirit of ingratitude because of our sin nature. Of course, we don't have so much trouble with the need to give thanks when the circumstances are good (someone has been healed). But, we have much more difficulty when the circumstances are bad.

Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Romans 8:28 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

1 Thessalonians 5:18 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Thanksgiving is a response to the trustworthiness of God.

## WORSHIP

Worshipping God in times of adversity also shows our response to God's trustworthiness. Read Job 1:20-21 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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Worship involves a two-directional view. Looking upward, we see God in majesty, power, glory and sovereignty. Looking inward, we see our dependence on God and our sinfulness in His sight. We see God as sovereign Creator and ourselves as the creature. We deserve nothing from God but eternal judgment.

Read Matthew 20:15 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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God has absolute power to do what pleases Him and absolute control over His actions. Read Exodus 33:19 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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Worship in times of adversity implies an attitude of acceptance on our part of God's right to do what He pleases. It is an acknowledgement that anything we have is a gift of sovereign grace and may be taken away at His pleasure.

God does not wield his sovereign power tyrannically. God acts toward us in love, mercy, and grace. As we worship before Him, we can bow in confidence that His power is used for us and not against us.

## HUMILITY

Humility is a response to adversity as well as its fruit. Read 1 Peter 5:6-7 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

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Compare 2 Corinthians 12:7 \_\_\_\_\_

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James 4:6 \_\_\_\_\_

## FORGIVENESS

Adversity often comes because of the deliberate hurtful actions of others. The natural tendency is to harbor resentment and seek revenge. Forgiving shows that we have learned two important truths:

1. We are all sinners—believers are forgiven by the grace of God. We have all acted selfishly or uncaringly at some time.

Read Ecclesiastes 7:21-22 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Also read Ephesians 4:32 \_\_\_\_\_

2. The hurtful person is just the instrument of the hurt. Read the following verse and record what you learn:

Lamentations 3:37 \_\_\_\_\_

## PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE

Humility, worship, thanksgiving, and forgiveness does not mean that we should not pray for deliverance from the adversities that come to us. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Matthew 26:39 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Job 1:12; 2:6 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 22:31 \_\_\_\_\_

James 4:7 \_\_\_\_\_

## SEEKING GOD'S GLORY

Above all, our response to adversity should be to seek God's glory in the circumstances. Read the following verses and record what you learn:

Philippians 1:14-17 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Philippians 1:18 \_\_\_\_\_



## HOMEWORK

Reword the question for today. We started out considering:

Can you trust God?

Now make the question this:

Can you trust God? Is your relationship with God such that you know you can count on Him in times of adversity? Have you isolated yourself from problem areas? Do you have an intimate daily personal relationship with God?

This week, think through areas where you do not trust God. Record them here:

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Now think through each of the appropriate responses that we have considered in this lesson. How might each apply to your circumstances? Record your thoughts here:

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## GIVE THANKS ALWAYS

Even after all we have studied regarding God's sovereignty, you may still say, "If He's truly a God of love, how can He even allow adversity? If He's a merciful and long-suffering God, how can He permit people to suffer? If God authorizes tragedy, what sort of God is He really? Why does He allow tragedy? Is He cruel and uncaring? Is He a destroyer? Is He vindictive and merciless?" Because of these sorts of questions, people are afraid to give their lives to God.

But, to those sorts of people, you can answer, "If you are afraid to trust God, then you don't know God!"

In this study we have learned that God is Love (1 John 4:8) He is a God of righteousness; He is totally and absolutely right in all that He does; He's a God of justice, mercy, and long-suffering. He is a faithful God, true to His promises. His thoughts toward me are for my future and my good.

In His love and faithfulness He weaves the events and circumstances of our lives like a tapestry. We see the tangle of threads from the back side. But God sees the beautiful design He's making on the front side.

Today, we are going to take our final look at scripture from John 21. We are going to see Peter's life from two perspectives.

First, Jesus will take Peter back to the place of his commitment.

Second, Jesus takes Peter back to the place of his denial. This time, the fire is a fire of reminder. Peter had stood before a charcoal fire before, gathered with the crowd in the courtyard of Caiphas' house. He must have been remembering his denial before that fire.

Read John 21:1-8. Record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Surely Jesus must have known that the setting would evoke memories in Peter. Was Jesus' purpose to condemn? No, it was a fire that helped him remember his commitment and commission from the Lord. Essentially, Jesus was telling Peter the same thing that He told the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2.

Read Revelation 2:1-7 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

Peter had to remember "from where he had fallen." He had to remember his denial. When breakfast was over, we have the scene detailed for us in John 21:15-18. Read these verses and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

When Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, he used "agape," the highest form of love. The love that desires another's good. It's the love God has for us—unconditional love, the love that lays down its life for another.

Do you love Me? This is the question that the Lord asks of us today. In view of what Christ has done, taught, sacrificed, and loved, do we love Him? Do we love unconditionally, sacrificially, so that we meet His highest needs?

Peter answered that he loved the Lord. But he did not use the word "agape." He said, I "phileo" You. "Phileo" is the word for brotherly love, a love between two who share common interests.

Peter knew that he had failed miserably at the other fire—he had not loved unconditionally—he had not put Jesus first!

Jesus asked a second time, "Do you 'agape' me?" Again Peter answered, "Yes Lord, You know that I 'phileo' You."

Then Jesus asked a third time. This time Jesus asked, "Simon, son of John, do you 'phileo' me?" John records that Peter was grieved because Jesus asked him the third time, "do you 'phileo' Me?" Jesus was asking Peter to come face to face with his relationship with Him. Again, Peter answered using "phileo."

Peter's commission was to tend the Shepherd's sheep. Truly God is a God of second chances. He is the Redeemer of our failures. If we can't say "agape" and we can only say "phileo," He will still commission us to His service.

We are not to compare our own commitment and commissioning for the Lord with that of any other.

Read John 21:20-22 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus showed Peter—as He shows us—that we have a twofold purpose in life:

1. To love God
2. To follow God

So God is asking you, “Do you love Me?” Jesus showed Peter what He shows us. We can do nothing in our own strength. Jesus didn’t choose us because we’re talented, or loyal, or pretty, or smart. He chose us out of pure love.

If the enemy invades, reminding you of your failure, do what Peter did (John 21:7). Get out of the boat! When we make a commitment and fail, when we commit and deny, we can go to God and He will respond as He did to Israel.

Read Lamentations 3:22-23 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

And so, we can love Him. We can follow Him. In all of our disappointments and afflictions, whenever the Refiner’s fire is hottest, we can remember the words of Peter:

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:6-9

So, in our times of trial, we can always give thanks because God is sovereign and His fires are for our refining. We are not subject to the fire reserved for evildoers. Read Malachi 4:1-3 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

We are not subject to the lake of fire reserved for unbelievers. Read Revelation 20:11-15 and record what you learn: \_\_\_\_\_

We can give thanks because we are subject to the Reiner's fire. The heat of the flames is intended to burn away impurities, making us more and more Christlike. We can give thanks that our dullness is being burnished into a sheen that reflects His glory!