



Paul Haigazian

Bitter
or
Better

Choosing the Bright Side
of Adversity Makes Life
Meaningful and Builds
Christlike Character

Paul Haigazian

Bitter or Better

Choosing the Bright Side
of Adversity Makes Life
Meaningful and Builds
Christlike Character

This is a work of non-fiction. Names, people, places, and incidents are not the product of the author's imagination or used fictitiously.

Any resemblance to other persons, living or dead, events, or localities is not intentional.

This eBook was published in October 2023 by Paul Haigazian.

The paperback was published in August 1999 by Paul Haigazian.
Copyright © ISBN 0-9674645-0-1

All rights reserved. No part of this eBook may be reproduced or used in any manner without written permission of the copyright owner except for the use of quotations in a book review.

To contact the author: paulhaigazian@yahoo.com

Contents

<u>Opening Remarks.....4</u>
<u>What God Has Promised.....6</u>
<u>Chapter 1: Adversities Are Inevitable, but Misery Is a Choice.....7</u>
<u>Chapter 2: I Wondered Why.....20</u>
<u>Chapter 3: Welcome to the Real World.....31</u>
<u>Chapter 4: Humility and Hard Lessons.....49</u>
<u>Chapter 5: Attitudes and Values.....62</u>
<u>Chapter 6: The Suffering Advantage.....79</u>
<u>Chapter 7: Life Is Not Fair, so Wisely Adjust.....92</u>
<u>Chapter 8: Life Is Too Precious to Cheapen.....102</u>
<u>Chapter 9: Dare to Dream! Dare to Act!.....121</u>
<u>Chapter 10: Gratitude Is Amazing.....131</u>
<u>Chapter 11: Look for the Silver Linings.....146</u>
<u>Chapter 12: Bring Out the Best in Others.....158</u>
<u>Chapter 13: Forgiveness and Kindness.....172</u>
<u>Chapter 14: Overcoming Bitterness.....185</u>
<u>Chapter 15: Resignation to God's Will and Prayer.....203</u>
<u>Chapter 16: Finish Well: A Meaningful Life.....222</u>
<u>Chapter 17: An Admission, an Update, and the Future.....236</u>

Opening Remarks

Life is hard, having many sharp edges, but encouragement is oxygen to the soul. This eBook contains valuable lessons and inspiring true stories from this author and others who persevered through difficulty and emerged with courage and wisdom. This writing is a source of motivation, resilience, and hope but not a magic solution to problems. It encourages us to develop a mindset of purposely looking for the positive in every situation, making our lives meaningful and forming Christlike character.

Readers are urged to explore new opportunities, perspectives, and relationships that can enrich their lives, benefit others, and grow closer to God instead of being bitter and self-centered. These lessons can enable us to look at life's bright side of adversity with confidence and optimism.

While the book has many Christian themes, non-Christians can benefit, too, since adversities play no favorites.

I share personal, social, and moral views, offering solutions to problems. A light dose of philosophy is included (free of charge since everyone enjoys freebies). This volume is not my life story alone. However, many of my physical, emotional, and social struggles and joys associated with my disability (cerebral palsy) are scattered among its pages, especially in Chapters 3, 4, 10, and 12.

Video and audio links provide greater insight into specific topics discussed.

Some readers might take offense to my restating specific truths, at times, in different ways regarding adversity. There's a method to my madness, though. We learn primarily through repetition. Unless some facts are repeated, we tend to forget them. Thus, when the storms of life come, we may react in hostility and panic instead of resting with calm assurance. Yes, resting with peaceful confidence that a good and loving God is working His perfect, sovereign plan in

us, for us, and through us amid adversity.

For whatever reason, many who read books tend not to finish them. I am guilty of this as well. Perhaps the unread content is the subject matter that could significantly benefit the reader. Thus, dear reader, *kindly read this eBook in its entirety*. Please don't feel you must power through its content at a fast pace while learning little. Maybe read and reread one chapter daily or weekly, attempting to fully understand the truths herein.

Upon finishing each chapter, ask the Holy Spirit, What are You speaking to me here? Write it down, and then prayerfully lean on the Lord to apply it.

Finally, if you disagree with something stated, that's okay; I will not be offended. Let it be food for thought.



What God Has Promised

God has not promised skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;
God has not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

God has not promised we shall not know,
Toil and temptation, trouble and woe;
He has not told us we shall not bear,
Many a burden, many a care.

God has not promised smooth roads and wide,
Swift, easy travel, needing no guide;
Never a mountain rocky and steep,
Never a river turbid and deep.

But God has promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labor, light for the way;
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.

— Annie Flint

"The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, suffering, struggle, loss, and found their way out of the depths. These people have an appreciation, sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and deep loving concern.

Beautiful people do not just happen."

DR. ELISABETH KUBLER-ROSS

Chapter 1

Adversities Are Inevitable, but Misery Is a Choice

“Much that we call evil is really good in disguises, and we should not quarrel rashly with adversities not yet understood nor overlook the mercies often bound up in them.”

— Horace Mann, Educator



Without rain, nothing grows. Similarly, we will benefit from life’s storms and difficulties if we learn from their helpful lessons. Choosing a positive attitude toward trials isn’t easy, but it is necessary to live a better life. I learned this valuable truth at a 12-day summer camp for older children.

It’s been 61 years since I last spoke with camper Jean Melzer. She still is one of my favorite teachers. Jean never used a chalkboard or taught from a book. *Her life was a book filled with fun, joy, forgiveness, and a loving personality.*

One thing setting Jean apart was that she needed others to wait on her hand and foot. Well, sort of. For Jean was born with no arms and no legs. Many were uneasy looking at her disfigured body. But Jean created such a positive attitude about her disability that misery – self-pity and bitterness – were absent.

Jean’s passion for life should jar us who complain about our hardships. Those taking time to know her often had to rethink what *a quality life* means.

There are at least seven lessons we can learn from Jean’s life:

- She doesn’t wallow in sadness over her deficiencies.
- She maximizes what she has.

- She quickly forgives others' cruel remarks.
- She is kind, even to those who are unkind to her.
- She has a delightful charm.
- She is grateful for life.
- Her life has meaning and purpose.

We become better people by applying these lessons and other encouragements mentioned throughout this book.

Renowned author Leo Tolstoy observed, “An arrogant person considers himself perfect. This is the chief harm of arrogance. It interferes with a person’s main

task in life – becoming a better person.” Jean was undoubtedly not arrogant, considering herself perfect or self-important. Her sunny and optimistic personality shone like a beacon light. She decided not to shy away from trials but to make the best of them. Jean is doing her part in making the world a better place. Let’s do our part as well, okay?

Everyone experiences adversities such as trials, challenges, afflictions, hardships, storms of life, difficult people, physical or emotional abuse, dire circumstances beyond your

control, and the like. Whatever the name or form, all have a common element: suffering (pain, discomfort, inconvenience) to some degree or another. So, where adversities are, suffering is also there.

We are all too familiar with physical pain, emotional pain, and making painful personal sacrifices to help others and ourselves. And no one is immune from



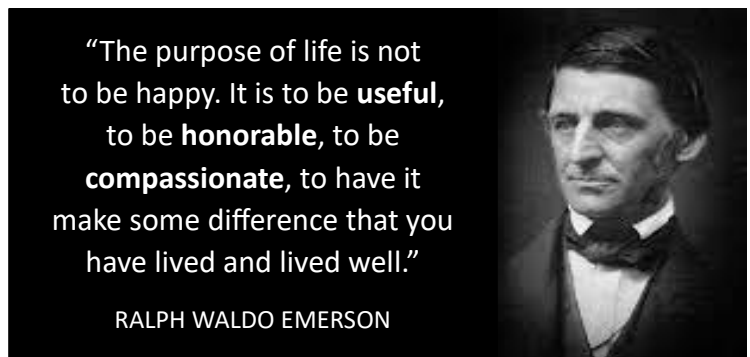
illness, loss, and disappointment. I tend to avoid suffering and have difficulty admitting it is often beneficial. Are you anything like me?

It is not a matter of *if* but *when* tough times come. If we are not careful, adversities often produce bitterness. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines bitterness as “feeling angry and unhappy because you feel that you have been treated unfairly” by people, circumstances, life events, God, etc. Although jealousy, rage, resentment, envy, and unforgiveness vary in intensity and expression, they all resemble bitterness. So, I lumped them under the term *bitterness*.

It makes no difference in genetic makeup, personality type, or how we have successfully dodged past trials; tough times are inevitable. Most consider this as dark, depressing news. **The bright and encouraging news is adversities can work in our favor if we participate in a two-step process:**

1. Allow difficulties to reveal our character and behavioral flaws.
2. Overcome these flaws by developing a hopeful, positive thought life, making us better, not bitter. As a result, our lives become meaningful, and a Christlike character is developed.

Many people are without a noble purpose for living, complacent, and unwilling to make a positive difference in others. By contrast, a meaningful life is filled with meaning and guided by moral values. “The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well,” urges Ralph Waldo Emerson. Happiness is terrific, but happiness must not be our entire reason for living.



Author and talk radio host Dennis Prager said, “Goodness is about character – integrity, honesty, kindness, generosity, moral courage, and the like. More than anything else, it is about how we treat other people.” Prager adds, “The biggest obstacle to people becoming better is that you have to really want to be a good person to be a better person, and most people would rather be other things.”

Becoming a better person is a never-ending process. Our best efforts are required to handle difficulties successfully. Developing character does not happen overnight. It takes work, consistent work.

“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.” This quote came from someone born healthy but developed an acute illness at 19 months of age, leaving her blind and deaf. Her name is the famed and inspiring Helen Keller.

Life is an ongoing struggle from the moment we are born until we take our last breath. To move about physically, we must fight gravity. Spending considerable energy and focus over a long time is required to do our best in school and work. And to become people of high moral character, we must live by God’s grace and laws, resisting the impulses of our base nature: binges, idolatry, sexual immorality, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, lying, selfishness, and things like these. **Worldly temptations lose their power when we are dependent and guided by the Holy Spirit moment-by-moment.**

Adversities are unavoidable. Try as we may, successfully sidestepping all difficulties can never be achieved. Regrettably, those who avoid difficulties at all costs, seeking temporal pleasures instead, frequently become self-centered, antisocial, and defensive. They live only to benefit themselves. According to the 2nd-century Christian writer Tertullian, “He who lives only to benefit himself confers on the world a benefit when he dies.” What a sobering statement!

Thus, moving from being self-centered to being selfless is essential. I find this

transition is more effective when *trusting God's plans, nature, and power*. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). God is good and does good, is loving, sovereign, and nothing is too hard for Him (Psalm 119:68, First John 4:8, Second Samuel 7:28, Jeremiah 32:17).

"He who lives only to benefit himself confers on the world a benefit when he dies."

TERTULLIAN

I don't fully understand why I have cerebral palsy and scoliosis, adversely affecting my entire body and speech. Though tempting, it is useless to read with certainty what God has in mind for me with these lifelong disabilities. And it is foolish to challenge His decisions and sovereignty. *Sovereignty means God's freedom from outward restraints, unlimited rule of humanity, and control over His creation and world history without overruling human free will.*

Instead of second-guessing God and dwelling on what I can't do, I find comfort that (1) God's plan for my life is far better than my own charted course, and (2)

If you choose not to find joy in the snow, you will have less joy in your life but still the same amount of snow.

@mindfulnessfitness

His loving nature can be trusted.

Keeping these two facts in mind often helps me persevere through hardships and not insist on being delivered from them.

Oh, sure, I still find myself complaining about my disability at times. After a while, this crazy guy realizes I'm only making matters worse: Staying joyless in my little world and having a big pity party. Yes, a party excluding

(unfortunately) the tasty treats, balloons, noisemakers, confetti, and those silly

pointed hats.

Many of life's happenings are out of our control. But we have control over our attitude. It's said that the only disability in life is a bad attitude. Since adversities are inevitable, but misery is a choice, I decided to do my best with the cards I am dealt and be a positive example.

Events can sometimes rock one's world to its core, such as losing a great-paying job, a disheartening medical report, or your house being flattened by a wildfire. How should we intervene, if at all, when someone we care about faces trials?

Lending understanding, kindness, prayer, a helping hand, and words of encouragement are helpful for someone experiencing loss. These loving acts propel the sufferer forward, giving him a vote of confidence to *grow through his pain*. However, to only satisfy or pamper him does him a disservice by stunting his ability to treasure life and make the best out of painful situations.

Adversity is neutral.

"Adversity causes some men to break; others to break records."

WILLIAM ARTHUR WARD

"Bad things happen. How I respond to them defines my character and the quality of my life. I can choose to sit in perpetual sadness, immobilized by the gravity of my loss, or I can decide to rise from the pain and treasure my most precious gift – life itself," declares Walter Anderson.

You and I may need the courage to face hard times head-on instead of seeking pleasure, often sensual like alcohol abuse, drugs, or bad behavior, in a feeble attempt to cope, escape, or self-medicate. Author Barbara De Angelis describes the courage I have in mind: "We don't develop courage by being happy every day. We develop it by surviving difficult times and challenging adversity."

So go ahead, dare to think, and pray about what some have difficulty accepting:

adversity reveals character. Hardship can make anyone a better person *if he responds admirably*. Jean Melzer's life testifies to this truth.

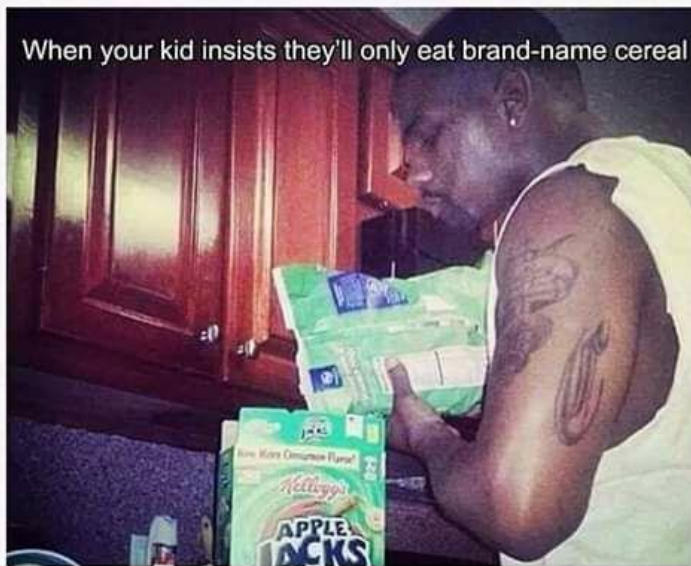
As long as our bodies have a pulse, adversities are always with us in some shape, manner, or form. We may wish it wasn't so, but struggles are by design. "If there is no struggle, there is no progress," notes orator Frederick Douglass.

"We don't develop courage by being happy every day. We develop it by surviving difficult times and challenging adversity."

BARBARA DE ANGELIS

We often choose to suffer, enduring pain to gain a beneficial outcome. We opt for surgery, coping with the painful recovery process to correct, minimize, or prevent a serious health problem. And we also suffer the pain of inconvenience by putting aside our time and planning to serve others to improve their lives.

No matter our age, adversity (suffering, pain, discomfort, self-sacrifice) teaches



us valuable life lessons. For instance, toddlers and kids are encouraged to finish their vegetables; otherwise, no dessert. In this scenario, parents and the young suffer. The parents experience difficulty teaching and often re-teaching their young, healthy eating habits. Such instruction

can test the parents' patience, effort, and innovation. The kiddos learn to honor their parents' dietary wisdom that their taste buds cannot always be

dazzled with hot dogs and fries. Wholesome meals ending with a small, sweet treat promote a healthier tomorrow.

Throughout life, each difficulty faced requires a series of moment-by-moment decisions. Like Jean Melzer, will we choose the path to make the best of our hardships? And, like Jean, let our lives shine, filled with meaning and purpose? Or will we take the harmful path by wallowing in misery and self-pity, negatively impacting others? Let's take courage and select the positive path.

But along the positive path, success is rarely a straight line. There are many twists and turns, ups and downs, triumphs and failures. Thus, keeping the end goal (target) in mind is necessary, or the present hardships will overwhelm us.

A word of caution: Seeking out or creating wild trials is unwise. We already face tough times without adding to our problems by making foolish, rash, or irresponsible decisions. A boy tries to impress a cute girl by jumping over a pile of bricks. But he stumbles and lands on the blocks, causing the loss of one eye.

Every day is filled with choices. Author Roy T. Bennett offers his thoughts about choices and a serious two-word appeal: "Attitude is a choice. Happiness is a choice. Optimism is a choice. Kindness is a choice. Giving is a choice. Respect is a choice. Whatever choice you make makes you. Choose wisely."

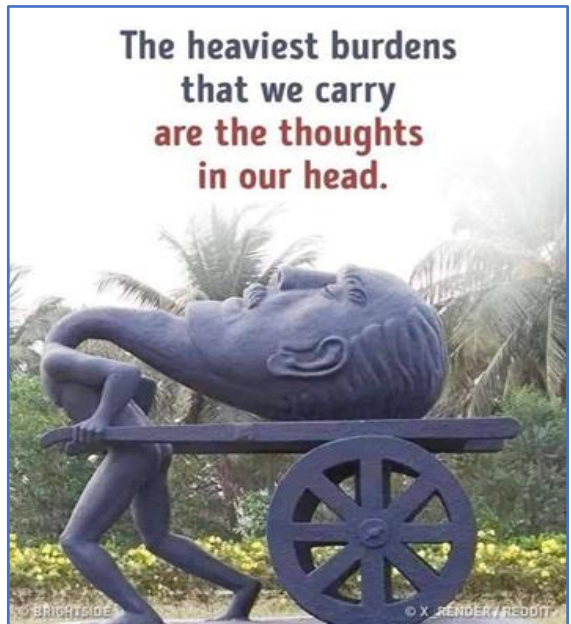


Our lives are the sum of our choices.
And our choices reflect the content
and quality of our thoughts. So, what
in the heck are you and I thinking?

We choose what to think. As followers of Christ Jesus, God will not *force* us to think a certain way. Oh, sure, He tells us what the content of our thoughts must be, as outlined in Scripture. But we have the final say-so what to think.

Is a battlefield within us? Yes. It's between our ears. No matter who we are, constant warfare is waged 'upstairs.' Our thoughts can run wild, especially when stressed by trials. We imagine and voice the worst outcomes, often devoid of reality: "I will never recover from this illness." "I can't think straight because worries are bombarding my mind." "My pet died, and now there's no reason to live." "I tried and failed. I'll always be a failure."

Thoughts enter intentionally and unintentionally. We do intentional thoughts when we actively decide to think about a topic, situation, or whatever seems pressing. Unintentional thoughts just 'pop' into our minds, uninvited. Happily, unsolicited evil thoughts make no statement of who we are.



However, acting upon our thoughts or meditating (rolling a thought over and over in our minds) will eventually define our character and destiny, no matter how our thoughts enter. Educator Stephen R. Covey said, "Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny."

A negative mind will never give us a positive life. It makes a person a "Debbie Downer," regardless of their birth name. Since a battle is raging between our ears, choosing thoughts that align with God's

Word is critical. Words impact our thinking and behavior. Let's encourage ourselves by *proclaiming aloud* what God's Word says about ourselves or a specific concern on our mind and heart. [You Say](#)

Philippians 4:6-8 outlines a healthy thought life: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things."

You and I can control our "mental airport." Below is an excerpt by Max Lucado from his book, *Anxious for Nothing: Finding Calm in a Chaotic World*.

You didn't select your birthplace or birth date. You didn't choose your parents or siblings. You don't decide the weather or the amount of salt in the ocean. There are many things in life in which you have no choice.

But the greatest activity of life is well within your dominion. You can choose what you think about. You can be the air traffic controller of your mental airport. You occupy the control tower and can direct the mental traffic of your world. Thoughts circle above, coming and going. If one of them lands, it is because you gave it permission. If it leaves, it is because you directed it to do so. You can select your thought pattern.



For that reason, the wise man urges, "Be careful what you think,

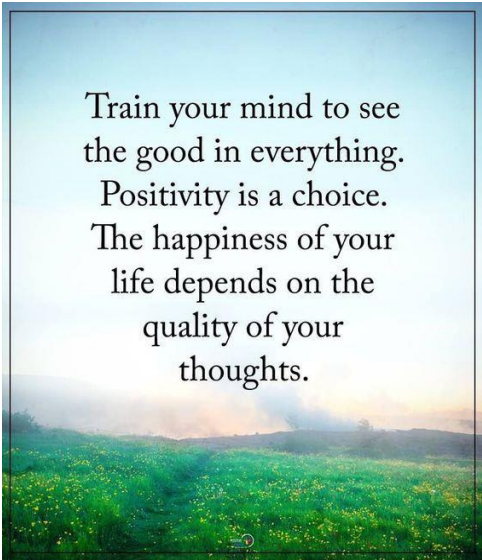
because your thoughts run your life” (Proverbs. 4:23 NCV). Do you want to be happy tomorrow? Then, sow seeds of happiness today. (Count blessings. Memorize Bible verses. Pray. Sing hymns. Spend time encouraging people.) Do you want to guarantee tomorrow’s misery? Then, today, wallow in a mental mud pit of self-pity, guilt, or anxiety. (Assume the worst. Beat yourself up. Rehearse your regrets. Complain to complainers.) Thoughts have consequences.

Healing from anxiety requires healthy thinking. Your challenge is not your challenge. Your challenge is the way you think about your challenge. Your problem is not your problem but how you look at it.

Our most valuable weapon against anxiety weighs less than three pounds and sits between our ears. Think about what you think about!

I don’t know about you, but I was tired of the negative effects of stinkin’ thinkin’. For too long, my thoughts were in the gutter – immoral thoughts, assuming the worst of people, easily offended, unhappy, judgemental, and pessimistic. As a result, I became depressed and aloof from Jesus,

So. I consciously and consistently worked on improving my mindset. It was initially challenging, and I was tempted to give up on the small wins. But, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the inspiration of others who faced difficulties with optimism, I learned to appreciate the benefits of having a positive mental outlook. It’s true: Find the good in everything. Positivity is a choice. The quality of your thoughts determines the happiness of your life.



Train your mind to see
the good in everything.
Positivity is a choice.
The happiness of your
life depends on the
quality of your
thoughts.

In light of Roy T. Bennett's prior appeal to "Choose wisely," someone in Minneapolis makes wise choices every day. Who is this, and why? Business speaker Ryan Estis remarked, "I will never forget that cup of coffee." It wasn't the coffee but the young lady named Lilly behind the coffee counter. So what happened? Maybe a love story? No.

It's a story of being helpful and happy when circumstances and feelings say otherwise to brighten lives. Ryan Estis said, "When you decide to show up consistently as the best version of who you are, it gives you your best opportunity to meet people where they are. And you never know when someone needs you to be your best." [The Simple Secret to Happiness](#)



Like Lilly, the joyous barista, our actions and life stories have a ripple effect that touches many people, even those we don't know personally. The average person influences about 10,000 people in their lifetime, researchers say. We can't avoid challenges and difficulties, but we can choose how to respond to them and affect others with our attitude and behavior. The question is, what kind of impact do you want to have? Do you want to be a positive or a negative influence? A leader or a follower? The choice is yours. You can be a leader who motivates others and helps them grow, or you can be a follower who discourages others and holds them back. Think about it, and choose wisely.

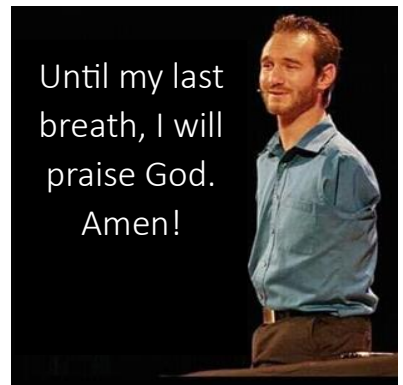
I'm amazed how people can overcome the worst through inner strength. Even more impressive is when they let the Lord be the utmost part of life's journey. He can do things that we can't even imagine. Only God can change a willing heart, not through temporary behavior modification, but by permanent transformation. He can heal our brokenness, forgive our past, give us purpose today, and hope for the future through Jesus' love and grace. That's a miracle!

Well, the story of Joseph's life is nothing short of miraculous. A captivating and relevant narrative in the Bible. It shows how Joseph dealt with issues such as forgiving and being forgiven. It also illustrates the importance of having a clear conscience and trusting God's timing. Joseph's life was full of surprises, challenges, and opportunities. God used his dreams and disappointments to mold his destiny, just as He can do with us.

Like Joseph. "The hardships that come into our life may seem random, unexpected, undeserved, and unbearable. But, in fact, they are not random acts. They are part of God's sovereign plan for your life. A plan for your ultimate good and a plan for God's ultimate glory," says Dr. Robert Jeffress.

"I want you to know that the fear of being alone and having no purpose in your life is one of the most disabling things you will ever experience. You need to know the answer to two questions: Who are you? And what do you want?" maintains Nick Vujicic.

Who is this extraordinary man, and what is his heartfelt message to you and me? [Broken Pieces and Hope](#)



"God never ends anything on a negative; God always ends on a positive," assures Edwin Louis Cole. Echoing Cole's comforting words is the promise in Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not evil, to give you a future and a hope."

If you disagree with something stated, that's okay; I will not be offended. Let it be food for thought.

Want to know more? If so, Chapter 2 is awaiting your arrival and curiosity.

Chapter 2

I Wondered Why

“If God conceded me His omnipotence for 24 hours, you would see how many changes I would make in the world. But if He gave me His wisdom, I would leave things as they are.”

— J.M.L. Monsabre



Below are five aspects of adversity I wondered about, and maybe you do too. These aspects somewhat overlap.

Why do adversities exist? I wonder what it would be like to be a co-creator of the world. Maybe I could have improved some things that God overlooked. For instance, I would have ensured everyone was always healthy and happy. No more suffering from diseases or depression. No more fighting or hurting each other. No more hunger or homelessness. No more earthquakes or hurricanes.

And if I ultimately had my way, life would be forever blissful. Not a hint of disappointment, hardship, or suffering.

It's tempting to second-guess God why He allows evil, hardships, and suffering, let alone their widespread incidence. Adversities can boggle the mind and deeply sadden the heart. For instance, when they affect the innocent or undeserving, like babies born mentally disabled or addicted to illegal drugs.

Some see evil, hardships, and suffering run rampant and decide that God does not exist. Or that adversities are too powerful for God to keep them in check. Others contend these adversities reflect God's nature: stern and punishing, unlike a good God. Others view Him as uninterested in the affairs of man, only giving us an indifferent, casual glance from far, far away.

Still, others have a different understanding of where man is to blame, not God. In other words, many trials result from man's foolishness and arrogance, as seen in the life of an alcoholic, a predator, a thief, or a bitter and unforgiving person. He leaves a trail of destruction traced to his poor choices.

I concede evil doesn't stand alone, for we live in a world of goodness. But such is a small comfort among pandemics, widespread hunger, genetic accidents, terrorist attacks, and crops ruined by insects.

So, why do adversities exist? Author and motivational speaker Stephen R. Covey offers a sensible answer: "Just as we develop our physical muscles by overcoming opposition – such as lifting weights – we develop our character muscles by overcoming challenges and adversity."

What is the purpose of adversities? Many times, life appears so complicated, confusing, and haphazard. Despite this, some contend God allows difficulties because they are saving and logical, though their value may not always be apparent at the moment.

Strange as it may sound, adversity can be a lifesaver. A newly forming butterfly exemplifies this truth.

A butterfly conjures up thoughts of beauty and freedom. Through *metamorphosis*, a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly. But if a 'well-meaning



person' were to help free the butterfly by pricking its cocoon, he would cripple or hasten its death. Why? Because the strength for the butterfly to fly, search for food, and function well is only achieved through

adversity, forcefully breaking the cocoon itself.

This truth sounds good, but I'm not sure I want to govern my life based on some principle with butterfly wings. I will admit, somewhat reluctantly, that there are strong indications that adversities can work for the good of us humans, too. For instance, when the ravages of a natural disaster bring a community together, neighbors reach out with loving concern and a helping hand. And when an enormous drop in the stock market causes a prominent investor to lose his wealth, he realizes his family, and God are his true riches.

Businessman Joseph Wirthlin observes, "As with the butterfly, adversity is necessary to build character in people." As defined in *dictionary.com*, "Character refers especially to moral qualities, ethical standards, principles, and the like: a man of sterling character."



Pastor John MacArthur identifies eight traits of Christian character: genuine faith, obedience, humility, selfless love, forgiveness, self-discipline, gratitude, and worship. To some degree, each trait, on its own, marks a person as one of God's own and reveals an active, living faith. Each is an essential element of mature Christianity. [Developing Godly Character - Pt 6](#)

Yet, I cannot buy the notion that the purpose of adversity always produces good. Take the untimely death of a loving mate. Such can cast the survivor into a tizzy, cause bitterness, and test his desire to live. What's so grand about that?

What are some different attitudes toward God when facing adversities? Many find their faith so severely challenged when trials come that they become bewildered and bitter. They may even ask, Does God now hate me? Others see

trials as proof that God is neither kind nor loving. And some conclude there is no God, or He would have prevented hardships and tragedies altogether.

Yet, many come closer to God in difficult times. Though they may not enjoy the method, they often view trials and afflictions as *tools*. Yes, tools God skillfully uses for their best interest and in concert with His sovereign and loving plan.

These people of faith admit discomfort and pain have a way of getting one's attention now. Possibly, it's a bad habit we refuse to let go of. Or it may be a roadblock redirecting our lives to a safer, more beneficial path.

Marcel Proust expounds, "Illness is the doctor to whom we pay most heed; to



kindness, to knowledge, we make promise only; pain we obey."

Moreover, C.S. Lewis remarks, "Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Who among us can relate to this truth?: When things are going well, we tend to forget God or put Him on the back burner of our lives and lose

our spiritual bearings. (Yup, sadly, that's me.) Our loving Father in Heaven uses painful events to drive us back to Him to fulfill His marvelous plans.

Are there positive benefits to adversities? Growing up in Los Angeles in the 1950s, I didn't think twice about where milk came from, for it seemed so effortless. There was no thought of operating processing plants' hard work, risks, and costs. And no idea of reliably delivering fresh milk to the market or

my front porch in those days. I was only interested in the finished product, not the effort and risk of getting milk to my kitchen table. As with milk, so with a diamond. Both show that the finished product does not magically appear. A diamond withstands much to bring out its beauty and worth.

Diamond is the hardest known natural material. Its formation requires tremendous heat and pressure from carbon atoms to give its crystallization form. Once mined, to bring out its beauty (fire and brilliance), it must undergo cleaving, sawing, cutting, and polishing. Crucial is cutting the diamond according to plan, eliminating cracks, flaws, and cloudiness. The result produces a gem of the greatest size, best appearance, and maximum value.



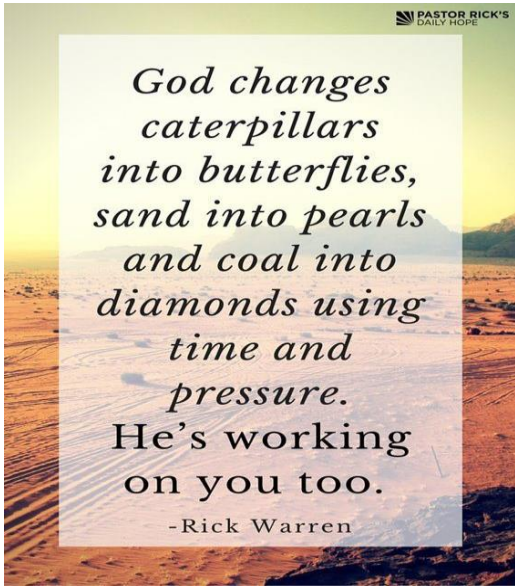
We may remark that a particular person is a “diamond in the rough.” The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines this phrase as “One having exceptional qualities or potential but lacking refinement or polish.” And at times, we are far less flattering in describing a person as a “piece of work,” demeaning him.

Unlike the refined diamond, having no emotions and feeling no pain, we tend to squirm and squeal at the slightest adversity. We don’t take the initiative and deal with something painful or detrimental at its onset by correcting the problem as quickly as possible.

Such procrastination or avoidance behavior often prolongs the inevitable. This delay frequently necessitates drastic action at a more significant expense or consequence. Ignoring a nagging toothache needs dental surgery now costs big bucks. Or worse, a person who refused help for his anger is now in prison for murder because a heated discussion went too far.

Focusing on the finished product provides the incentive and strength to endure the painful, embarrassing, or difficult refining process. Since no life is perfect,

there's no reason to keep the messy parts of our lives a secret for fear of other



people's thoughts. "Being honest is the only way to fix it. There's no failure, no fall; there's no sin You don't already know, so let the [Truth Be Told](#)," says singer/songwriter Matthew West.

When facing adversities, why aren't self-help methods more effective?

Do you enjoy self-help books and videos to improve yourself? I certainly do. But why do many self-help methods miss the mark and are not helpful? This intriguing question

is answered in an article titled "What does the Bible say about self-help methods?" at [GotQuestions.com](#):

The self-help genre of books and videos is incredibly popular and broad-reaching. There are self-help methods for everything from de-cluttering to being more productive at work to learning the confidence to improve one's health, and the list goes on. The desire to improve oneself is laudable since it recognizes that we are imperfect creatures living in a world that is less than we intended.

However, self-help aids miss the point. Humans do not need self-improvement. We need a Savior. This is not to say that all self-help methods are inherently bad, but anything that emphasizes self to the exclusion of God is off the mark.

When we come to faith in Jesus, we are made completely new (First Corinthians 5:17). We are counted righteous before God, yet we are still

in the process of becoming righteous. This is called *sanctification*, a work of the Holy Spirit in us. God doesn't just improve us; He transforms us and gives us new hearts. Even though sanctification is a work of God, it is a process in which we participate. We pray, study the Bible, learn from sound teachers, and engage in Christian fellowship to help us know God more. Some self-help methods, such as time management, improved memory, or healthy relationships, may be useful here. There is nothing wrong with seeking to improve one's organizational skills.

The key is discernment. Does the self-help method involve New Age meditation, mantras, or other mystical practices? If so, that method is not helpful. Are you looking at the self-help method through the lens of biblical truth? Or has the method become a religion of its own?

For example, methods to improve your confidence have no weight apart from knowing why you can be confident in Christ. Methods to help you be more organized are helpful only insofar as you need to use that skill. Being organized does not make you suddenly acceptable, lovable, or better than others. It is God who gives you worth. Learning skills of any kind is simply stewardship of gifts He has bestowed. Using secular self-help methods to aid your spiritual growth or improve skills needed for daily living may be valuable, but they are not necessary, and spiritual discernment is vital.

The self-help mentality can be dangerous, and many of the mantras and basic concepts in self-help methods are humanistic. However, with

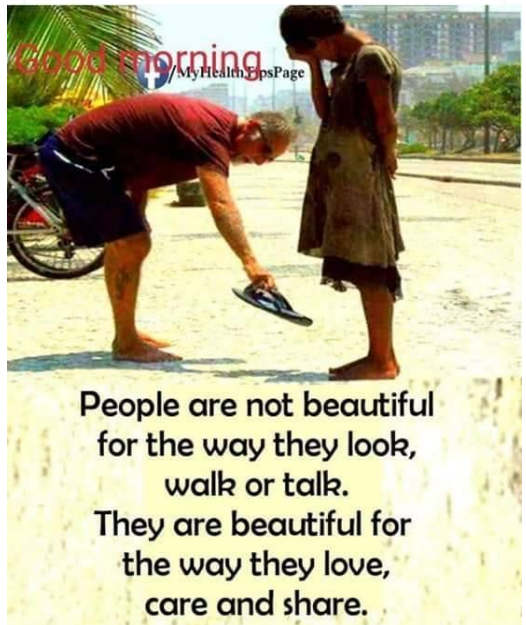
This is not to say that all self-help methods are inherently bad, but anything that emphasizes self to the exclusion of God is off the mark.

a firm foundation in biblical truth and reliance on the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts, some self-help methods may be helpful tools for Christians looking to improve a specific area of their lives.

The above discussion provides *glimpses* regarding the value of adversities. Briefly examining the reasons for their existence, purpose, response, benefit, and why self-help methods miss the mark has satisfied my wonderment in no small measure. These glimpses often encourage my heart and mind when I am overwhelmed, in despair, or feel like giving up on life. [I Will Not Quit | Trust God and Never Give Up](#)

Big problems rarely come with simple, readymade solutions, and we can quickly tire of finding answers. Our world needs solutions to its environmental, moral, medical, economic, psychological, and societal ills, to name a few areas. Given this, ask God and/or seek wise counsel about what you should do about it. Such an appropriate question requires a decisive response instead of just sitting around, angry, and forever griping about the problem(s).

Our best intention to be part of the solution can be derailed by only thinking about the enormity of the problem. We often do nothing, convinced, 'What benefit can my little part play anyway, for I can't make a difference.' Let's focus on the solution, not the huge problem, such as poverty (see above photo).



Often, doing what we can can wonderfully affect people and our surroundings.

I am mindful of a life lesson helping me not to give up when a problem is large, but I am so limited. The story takes place on a beach where thousands of starfish washed ashore due to a storm.



A man saw a boy return a starfish gently back to the water. “Hey, you’ll never make a difference; there’s too many starfish,” the man mocked. “You’re right,” the boy proudly

smiled back, “but it made a difference to *that one*.” The lesson or moral of the story is clear: We should do what we can, nothing more and nothing less.

Consider Paige Hunter. She struggled for years with PTSD, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Now Paige takes the huge suicidal problem into her own hands, doing her part and saving lives. [The 18-Year-Old Who Saved Six Lives](#)



No person is an island. How we handle adversity causes a ripple effect. Think about the man giving his sandals to a poor, barefoot woman who was deeply moved by his compassion, bringing her comfort. Reflect upon the scorned boy’s glad, instructional response. The lad did his part, saving one starfish amid the thousands he couldn’t rescue. And ponder Paige Hunter, who turned her life’s mess into a message – literally and positively.

Will we allow adversities and the storms of life, as *refining tools* in God’s loving hands, to create meaning and purpose in our lives, resulting in praiseworthy action? And will we allow these tools to build Christian character? If not, we will probably live a dreary existence, self-absorbed, bitter, adversely affecting

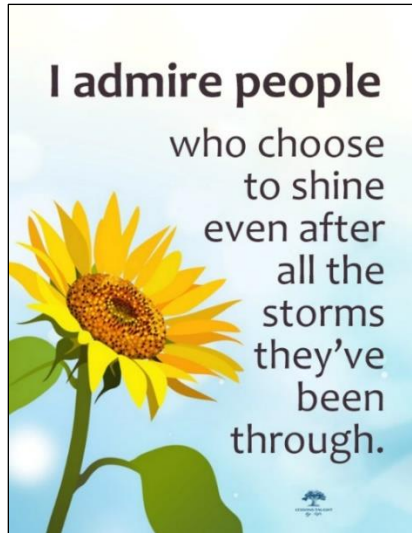
others, and have only ourselves to blame. The choice is ours and ours alone.

When adversity and the storms of life come, Dr. Robert Jeffress asks, “What are you building your life on? Is it on the sand, or is it on the truth of God’s Word? The mark of a true disciple of Jesus Christ is not somebody who hears God’s Word and [intellectually] believes, but a true disciple is someone who believes God’s Word and obeys it.” [How Firm Is Your Foundation?](#)



This tree is still standing after the sand beneath was washed out.....Why? Because its roots are so deep. It reminds me of what our relationship with Jesus should be like. When the storms wash up against us, we will still stand because we are firmly planted. Lord, help us to keep growing our roots deep in Your Word, Your Truth, and Your Love.

When facing difficulties, I believe favorable outcomes often happen when we, in faith, gratefully acknowledge the big picture is at work in our lives. This big picture constantly works behind the scenes, not immediately visible or fully understood. This is why trusting the Lord is vital, for He never ceases working for our best interest according to His magnificent will and timing. I, and countless others, find comfort in this encouraging outlook.



The next chapter introduces my 'birth twin.' Not a brother or sister, but a birth twin of a different nature. It's a birth twin that everyone experiences daily. Sound crazy or confusing? Maybe. But reading on will explain what I mean and the value of doing our best.

Welcome to the Real World

“Keep your face to the sunshine, and you cannot see the shadow.”

— Helen Keller



Many things don't go our way, and we feel disappointed. But don't fret; there's a reason for everything. Maybe a lot better outcome is waiting for us down the road. Trust that God has a plan for us; we'll see it in time.

Like most couples soon to become parents, mom and dad probably dreamed about something big or famous their baby would become. Perhaps a doctor, a lawyer, or an international leader.

On the entrance door of the hospital's delivery room were the words, *Push! Push! Push!* A good chuckle was needed as Mom gave birth in 1951. Indeed, a good giggle and a whole lot more were needed.



The skillful hands of the doctor welcomed me into the world. It should have been one of the happiest days for my parents. It was not. There was cause for great alarm in the delivery room, for I wasn't breathing.

Over six minutes later, I began to breathe. The doctor's examination found no obstruction around the throat or the

breathing passages. He concluded, "He's okay. Everything is normal now," cautiously assuring words for Mom and Dad's troubled hearts.

As it turned out, everything was not okay, and I was not normal. I suffered *anoxia*, an absence of oxygen to the brain. Later, I became acutely aware of my

‘birth twin,’ having no gender or birth name. My twin is adversity, and your twin is adversity, too. Why? Because adversity, whatever its manner or form, characterizes the real world. This contrasts with the fantasy world: everything should go well with little or no trouble, pain, loss, or disappointment.

No matter how young we are, hardship can rock one’s world. I had difficulty nursing and constantly cried, puzzling Mom and Dad. They tried to quiet the crying, promote sleep, and keep me comfortable, but with little success.

The regular visits to the pediatrician did not reveal any reason for the nursing and crying problems. Instead, questions from my mom were met with, “The baby is normal and healthy. It is you. You have a perception problem.”

During one pediatric examination, the doctor tapped both knees using a rubber mallet, expecting the typical knee-jerk response. After repeated attempts but finding no reflexive movement, he ended the exam and told Mom that a battery of tests would be ordered to better assess my health.

Soon after, at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, my parents’ anguish and fear were confirmed – their son was not normal. The doctor’s diagnosis and prognosis were devastating: “Paul has cerebral palsy. It is a permanent lifelong condition but generally doesn’t worsen over time. This disorder of motor dysfunction was due to a lack of oxygen to the brain during birth. In your son’s case, the brain damage is so severe he will remain severely handicapped (or *disabled* in today’s language). He won’t be able to walk, talk, feed, bathe, or clothe himself. Someone will have to do everything for him. Paul is probably mentally retarded (mentally disabled). I’m sorry.” In other words, I would be a ‘vegetable,’ incapable of doing anything.

Then the doctor added, “My advice is to place him in a residential care facility. Go on with your lives, have other children, and lead a normal life without Paul.” An admission form for Camarillo State Hospital lay on his desk. “We can

arrange to place Paul in the facility very soon.”

A heart-wrenching decision about the future of their firstborn was before them. My parents reached deep inside themselves to find a glimmer of hope as they discussed the medical recommendation.

Then, Mom and Dad left the medical building. I was returning home as well, but how long would I stay? Judging by natural circumstances, they didn't find much hope but decided to do their best. The difficult decision to keep me at home was based on conscience and a small amount of hope.



My folks concluded, “We couldn't live with ourselves if we don't make a concerted effort to give Paul a chance. An opportunity to respond to love and hard work in getting him to do something. Maybe, just maybe, he'll make some progress. If not, we might institutionalize him after a couple of years. He's so far down that he

can only go up.”

Such became the kind of pep talk my parents frequently gave themselves without encouraging signs.

Everyone faces adversities. They are one of life's few constants. We have two choices: (1) Allow trials to drive us to the breaking point, distressed and bitter. Or (2) face adversities head-on, persevering through the fiery furnace of affliction, emerging transformed for the better. This perseverance, moment-by-moment, day-by-day, creates a meaningful life and builds one's character.

Vice Admiral Reginald B. Mansell observes, “A pessimist makes difficulties of his

opportunities. An optimist makes opportunities of his difficulties.” By deciding not to place me in the state residential hospital, my parents were somewhat optimistic, albeit an unpopular decision by the typical wisdom of the day.

In the early 1950s, it was more socially acceptable to institutionalize or isolate the severely disabled than today. The belief that *Paul will only be as good as we make him* gave

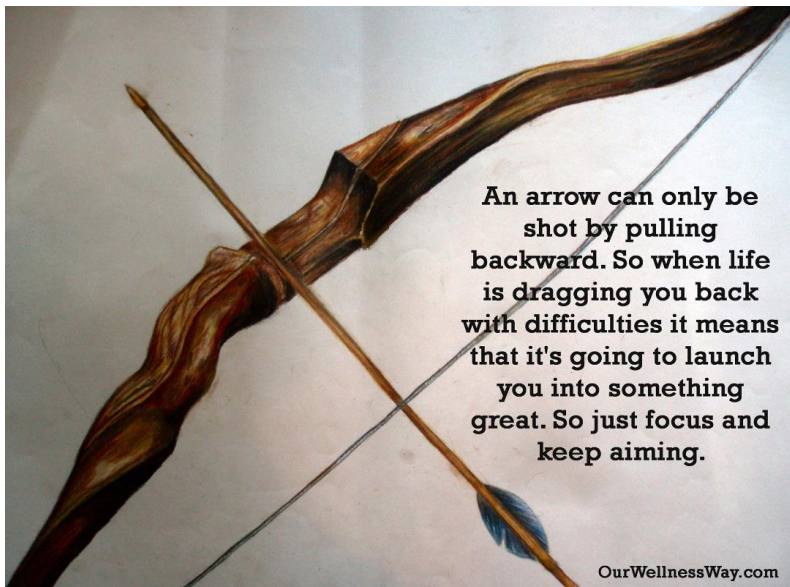
Mom and Dad the incentive to keep hope alive by me staying home and pressing forward.

Even in the best of circumstances, proper parenting requires many

sacrifices. Mom and Dad held fast to their commitment, no matter how dear the cost: financially, energy spent, demonstrating patience, enduring times of heartbreak, and providing constant encouragement. Thus, raising their special needs son would not be easy.

We were a middle-class family. Dad was the breadwinner, so making the most of my life fell on Mom. She found Dr. Margaret Jones, leading a pilot program for the young having cerebral palsy. The specialized nursery lasted two hours a day, four days a week.

On one visit, Mom commented, “Doctor, it’s hard for me to get Paul to do anything. He sits or lies without showing any desire to move.” “Well, Mrs.



Haigazian, think of what Paul does, which deserves your praise,” replied the doctor. “He has an excellent appetite,” Mom answered sheepishly. “Good! Make a big deal about that.” Making a big deal of my eating made a difference – the grocery bills skyrocketed!

Mom and Dad gave me opportunities to interact with others in everyday settings. We moved to a neighborhood with young families at age three. My parents encouraged the neighborhood kids to play with me by buying the latest and best toys.

I was amazed at how other children moved so quickly while I could only watch from a chair at age six. I looked no further than my home to see this sharp contrast. It was unfair, or so I thought, that my sister could walk, talk up a storm, and feed herself at four.

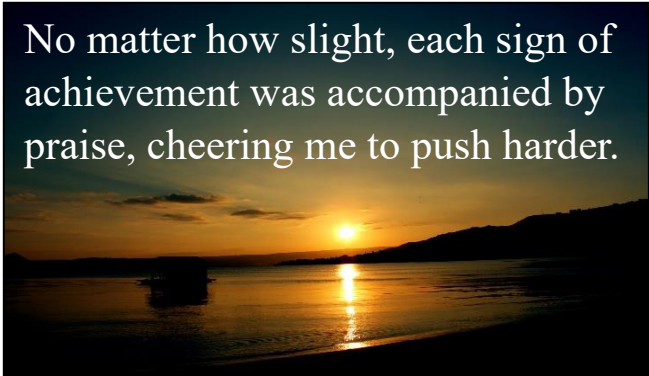
Attending a school for the disabled reinforced my belief that I’m different. Keeping my head from hanging down, grasping objects skillfully, and controlling my flailing arms, stiff legs, and feet turned inward was exhausting.

My parents looked for any hint of physical progress.

No matter how slight, each sign of achievement was accompanied by praise, cheering me to push harder. And when there was no visible progress, words of encouragement

rang out. “Come on, Paul, you can do it. Don’t give up now. Keep trying!”

I knew they meant well, but their enthusiastic support sometimes angered me. I was angry because my best efforts yielded little results after spending much

A photograph of a sunset over a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange glow and a reflection on the water. A small boat is visible in the foreground on the left. The sky is dark with some clouds.

No matter how slight, each sign of achievement was accompanied by praise, cheering me to push harder.

time and energy. At the time, I didn't realize my folks had their down days, too. Outwardly, they remained upbeat, careful not to transmit their negative emotions, fighting frustration and sorrow and questioning the fairness of life.

"Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there," said actor Will Rogers. Mom and Dad did their best for me, especially during the *formative years*, as my body grew. They learned that cerebral palsy adversely affects muscle control, coordination, tone, reflexes, posture, and balance.

Mom and Dad were on a mission to accomplish as much as I could through a daily routine of physical exercises. It was physically and emotionally taxing on them. Nevertheless, it was as if my parents took the prayer of Michelangelo to heart, "Lord, grant that I may always desire more than I can accomplish."

The emphasis of each exercise wasn't on how fast but on how effectively I reached each incremental goal. Specific muscle groups were stretched using

In times of great stress or adversity, it's always best to keep busy, to plow your anger and your energy into something positive.

Lee Iacocca

patterning – repetitive physical motions to improve motor coordination and balance through brain and muscle memory.

As years passed, Mom's eyes were often filled

with tears, seeing my struggles in learning to walk. "If I could give my arms and legs to make you normal, I would do it," Mom empathetically said. Dad felt the same way, though his emotions were less obvious and more businesslike. Barring a miracle, becoming "normal" was not to be.

Physical exercise was essential, but I was not a happy camper sometimes, yelling at my parents, "Go take a hike!" Attending special public schools for the

disabled provided formal education and physical, occupational, and speech therapy. I knew these therapies were helpful, but the slow progress frustrated me.

To help keep things in a positive perspective, my parents sometimes reminded me of the famous quote: “I cried because I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet.” I understood its meaning, but not entirely. Then, one day, I realized its meaning while shopping with Mom. I saw *a smiling man without legs*. He was selling pencils from a tin cup outside a department store. The man had a makeshift skateboard to propel himself with his hands, traveling along the sidewalk.

I cried because I had
no shoes until I met
a man who had no
feet.

Although the man never knew it, he deeply touched my heart by cheerfully handling his adversity. Such started the lifelong process of getting out of myself. Getting out of myself primarily meant (1) giving more attention to the interests and needs of others instead of being so self-absorbed and (2) gaining a sense of gratitude for what I *already* had. No matter the day or season, let's be grateful for all the gifts we possess! Yes, let's make gratitude a lifestyle.

The brain damage affected all four extremities. It caused me to walk on the toes and balls of my feet and cross my feet in a scissor gait, frequently tripping myself. I wore orthopedic high-top shoes for maximum walking support.

I wore steel braces running from my waist to my shoes. Due to the many leather straps and the steel, I always needed help putting them on and off. Also required assistance after falling to get back on my feet.

In theory, the braces were to help me learn the correct way to walk: the heels touching the floor first, then the toes, with feet pointed straight ahead.

“Mom, why did God make me this way?”

I was seven, and Mom held me close and answered the best she could. “I don’t know. In time, we may know why. I wish I could fix you, son, but I can’t. Let’s trust God that He has a good plan.”

Unfortunately, only a few of my fellow students had success using them. After five months of use, I found the braces intolerable, and with Mom and Dad’s approval, the expensive braces and shoes were put aside.

My first step, unaided by braces or holding an adult’s hand, was at age eight. Getting me to walk without the aid of others was a giant step toward independence. I

fell frequently but, within a year, learned how to get back on my feet by myself. By age 12, I mastered walking the stairs, although using a handrail was a must.

Still, I didn’t have much control over my physical body. Every waking moment, my head and body were in a constant involuntary motion. My head shook like a bobblehead doll. I jokingly told curious people why I was wiggling: “I ate too much Jell-O.”

The involuntary motion was particularly pronounced in nervous situations or when experiencing pain. The neurological damage had heightened my startle reflex, making me appear jumpy. Also, I had slurred speech and often drooled.

Feeling self-conscious in public was a struggle, knowing I stood out like a sore thumb. I heard kids shout from afar, “Look, he’s drunk,” and “He’s a retard” as they giggled. I reminded myself of Mom and Dad’s words: *Such words were not out of hate, for the kids didn’t know better.* My folks emphasized not to entertain self-pity feelings. Instead, to be kind and forgiving regardless of hurtful remarks and mocking gestures. I knew Mom and Dad were right, but putting it into practice wasn’t easy, and neither did they say otherwise.

My folks took me to public places unashamed. This positive mindset became ingrained in me. Attending ballgames, sitting in restaurants, and playing at parks prompted stares from adults and kids. And upon hearing my deep and muffled voice, heads immediately turned curiously in my direction as if on a swivel. (Thankfully, no one sued for any neck injuries.)

To thrive in life you
need three bones.
A wishbone.
A backbone.
And a funny bone.

Reba McEntire

Unlike some people who go out of their way to become an attention magnet, I was an attention magnet by default. As a result, it was hard to accept my disability completely. Oddly enough, this lack of acceptance worked in my favor *when I allowed it*. It ignited a more concerted effort to become as “normal” as possible, blending into new surroundings. My parents suggested I

take the initiative by being friendly instead of waiting for neighborhood kids to approach me. The results were astonishing.

Kids usually responded in kind after introducing myself with a smile and extending my shaky hand in friendship. Rather than making fun of me, they thought I was smart and enjoyed being around this awkward-looking and weird-speaking kid. Also, they came to my defense when others made ridiculing remarks and rude gestures.

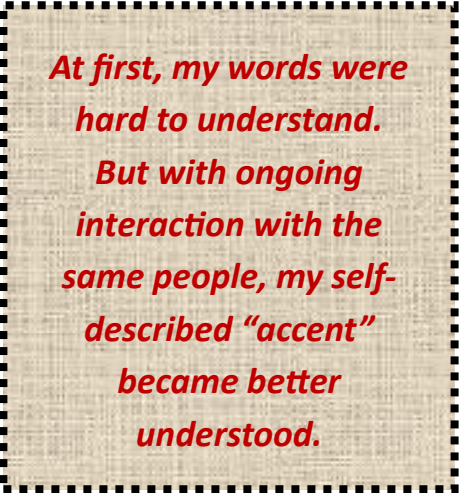
At first, my words were hard to understand. But with ongoing interaction with the same people, my self-described “accent” became better understood.

Besides getting me to do more physically, a concentrated effort was made to maximize my mental abilities. The doctor’s statement, “Paul is probably mentally retarded” only added greater resolve for Mom and Dad to provide as

much mental stimulation as possible.

My folks talked and sang to me throughout the day as a baby. Then, growing a bit older, I was encouraged to say words, sing nursery rhymes, and understand the reading of nursery books. As my speech developed, they emphasized that I speak in complete sentences. This helped foster logical thought and intelligent expression.

Mom and Dad loved learning and instilled the same passion in me. They always appreciated questions as they taught me how things worked in terms I could understand. Hands-on learning was encouraged.



***At first, my words were
hard to understand.
But with ongoing
interaction with the
same people, my self-
described “accent”
became better
understood.***

Playing board games provided a fun way to advance reasoning and socialization skills. My favorite games were Monopoly, Scrabble, Yatzy, Stock Market Game, and Bingo. Television viewing was not a mind-numbing activity. Along with life lesson comedy shows ([Hermon Munster's advice](#)) and Westerns, news broadcasts and educational programming were primarily important. Years later, listening to talk radio stirred my political curiosity.

The advancements in physical abilities, mental development, and social settings were far from the doctor's grim prognosis over a decade earlier. Growing in confidence, I felt good about my life. However, mixed with this new outlook came sad, tumultuous times.

Tensions mounted between Mom and Dad, and within a year, they divorced. Mom had custody of my sister and me and worked full-time. Living close by, Dad picked up my sister and me every Saturday, and we had an enjoyable time.

But bad feelings began to creep in. I felt shafted by life, uptight, and disgruntled. The divorce only reinforced my frustration. At the same time came puberty's onset; physiological changes left me with more questions than answers.

Like many teenagers, any degree of rational thinking and my pleasant manner were now in shambles. Instead, emotions and hormones dictated my unreasonable, thoughtless, sarcastic attitude and rebellion.

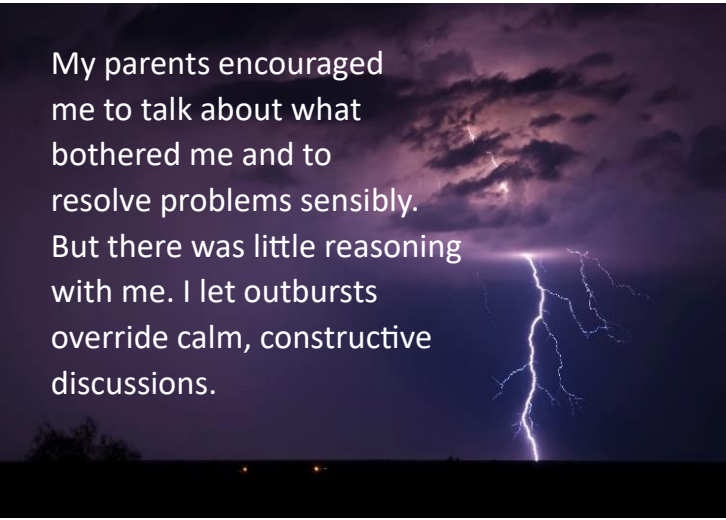
I clutched to a laundry list of 'good' reasons to justify my bad attitude and misbehavior:

- I wasn't normal.
- I no longer had a girlfriend.
- I wasn't smart.
- I had a face full of pimples.
- I thought life was unfair.
- I was not too fond of school.

My parents encouraged me to talk about what bothered me and to resolve problems sensibly. But there was little reasoning with me. I let outbursts override calm, constructive discussions. I threw temper tantrums and ran away from home when I didn't get my way.

But the difficulty in walking made wandering beyond three blocks from home short of impossible. I enjoyed tormenting Mom by ducking behind parked cars with demented glee. Her white Ford drove slowly through the neighborhood as she called my name loudly.

Cold, hunger, or fatigue eventually ended my deviant 'fun.' After returning home each time, I hardly considered my reappearance as an admission of misbehaving. Instead, I saw it as a power play. In retrospect, I realized nothing done out of spite is ever right.



My parents encouraged me to talk about what bothered me and to resolve problems sensibly. But there was little reasoning with me. I let outbursts override calm, constructive discussions.

One of my tantrums became so intense that my mom threatened to call the police. "Go ahead; I dare you!" screamed back at her. Finally, shaken and with a trembling voice, she called. Fear gripped me as I tried to maintain a

cocky, defiant posture.

"Look, lady," the officer advised sternly, "spank him with a wooden coat hanger or do whatever it takes to control him. Being locked in the juvenile hall is definitely not pleasant. Getting us involved would mean he'll have a police record." I shaped up quickly thanks to the officer's words, at least for the next two months.

I knew better than to blame Mom for my disability when saying, "You made me be born this way!" But, knowing that some tragedies occur beyond our control, my angry accusation acted as a means to vent and gain sympathy.

My emotions were as unstable as water. One day, I was angry and hard-headed, while the next day, I was relatively calm, accepting life on its terms and open to constructive criticism.

To the unsuspecting, many interpreted the angry outbursts as understandable, resulting from frustration with my disability. These outbursts were mainly a manipulative scheme that worked like a charm by making unwarranted favors flow my way.

Once Mom and Dad caught on to my devious acts, they explained how such behavior was wrong and reflected poorly on me. Also stressed was the importance of taking responsibility for my actions by consistently obeying stated rules. Discussions of moral values emphasizing the difference between right and wrong happened almost daily, shaping my morals, behavior, and character.




Carefully choosing friends was also discussed. Mom said, "Some people take advantage of others because they are selfish. You don't need to add problems to your life by making buddies too quickly. Get to know them over time, and then decide if they are right for you." [The importance of choosing friends wisely.](#)

One day, Dad shattered my world with a frightening statement. "Son, you're 13, and in many cultures, this is when a boy soon becomes a man. It's time you begin thinking seriously about a career. What kind of work do you want to do in life."

I softly grumbled a few words in protest. But my inward, visceral reaction was entirely different. Looking at Dad, I was appalled, silently saying, How dare you do this to me! Can't you see my limitations? Dad's words contradicted everything I had assumed, telling the neighborhood kids, "My folks know I can't

work, so they'll take care of me." Now, what was I going to tell them?

Facing the world was an enormous undertaking. But the thought that Mom and Dad expected me to become a viable, productive member of society stunned



Life doesn't allow
for us to go back and fix
what we have done wrong
in the past, but it does
allow for us to live each day
better than our last.

POSITIVE
PSYCHOLOGY
TEACHER

me. My physical, educational, and speech difficulties made earning a living so unfair. Why do they expect so much of me?

After a few months and the excuse-making put aside, I started pondering my parents' expectations. Conversations with them provided encouraging feelings of becoming self-supportive. I realized

this was merely the latest in a series of parental efforts lovingly coaxing me to reach my maximum potential. This understanding lifted the weight of concentrating on my inabilities and inadequacies. Courage began to well up, and, I looked soberly to the future with purpose and enthusiasm.

I soon entertained pleasant thoughts of being a wage earner. Also, I imagined that I could one day live independently and have my own family.

High school had to be taken seriously if this were to eventually happen. Mom and Dad hounded me to study harder, but laziness won. My grades were average, but with concerted effort, they would improve. My physical abilities

had advanced to the point where academics could now be the primary focus. And they did, beginning in the 10th grade.

But I still felt awkward. My sister is intellectually gifted and got excellent grades with a little study. So naturally, I fell headlong into the intimidation trap.

Comparing myself to her made me ashamed of my grades. Envy had put a damper on my ability to learn. The quicker I dealt with jealousy, the easier it was to succeed in school, and that's what happened.



Daily, I sifted through my mind, searching for the proper vocation and needing a realistic occupation that matched my abilities. I enjoyed making up and telling jokes and puns. So, my first career choice was to make a living by writing jokes for comedians. After subjecting friends and family to my "humor," thankfully, they said, "Keep your day job." I got the point, though I didn't want to hear it. They did me a favor by not appeasing me or giving me false hope.

With each passing month, something became more apparent as I desired to mature as a person. Mom and Dad had said something for years, but my *woe-is-me* attitude didn't want to accept it. They said, "Every person has a disability. Some disabilities are more obvious than others; that's all." I no longer felt so singled out by taking this truth to heart.

However, this understanding did not motivate me to develop the spiritual side of life. Before my folks divorced, I attended a nearby Sunday school for a month or two, and then we moved 30 miles away. Prior to the move, I had mixed feelings about the church experience.

I enjoyed interacting with kids who readily accepted me and found the Bible lessons valuable. But Sunday school had minimal relevance to my life, probably

due to the unintended example, Mom and Dad set. They dropped my sister and me off at church and returned home. Such absence said church attendance was not a vital part of life, at least for them. Besides, Mom said (incorrectly) that my disability was my ticket to Heaven anyway.

My grandparents on my mother's side knew the Lord. They attended church regularly. Grandma had many admirable qualities, but it appeared she had resentment. Her slightly abrasive manner may have stemmed from the Armenian genocide between 1915 and 1923. The Turkish Nationals invaded her homeland of Armenia and massacred an estimated 1,500,000 fellow Armenians. Her first husband and their four children were slaughtered.

Grandma's somewhat controlling personality was evident, using religion as a tool to voice her displeasure. If something I did that she didn't like, from time to time, she said, "God's going to get you for that!" This approach didn't draw me closer to Grandma or God.

Grandpa was Grandma's opposite in some ways. Understanding and mild-mannered, he exuded warmth and acceptance without forcing religion on anyone. I should have weighed both behaviors equally with this stark contrast before concluding that Christianity wasn't for me.

By age 16 or so, the pendulum swung dramatically in my favor. For one thing, Mom remarried a man with a heart of gold. His deep love and continuous support for Mom, my sister, and me were undeniable. His two grown children also showed immense affection and support toward us, knitting our blended family even tighter.

For another thing, as new challenges came, my body and mind responded positively. Although I continued to cross my feet, walking became less tiring. My stability improved, so falling occurred about every fifth day. What a relief that was. My scraped hands, forearms, elbows, and knees had more time to

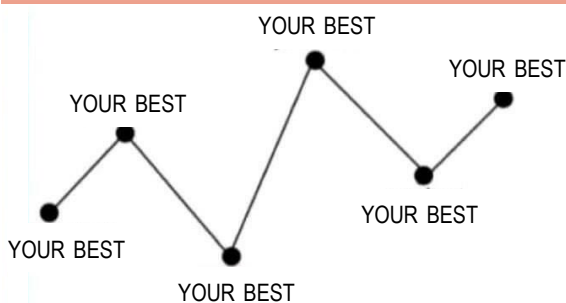
heal, not to mention, at times, my injured ribs.

Breakthroughs of expressing myself took place as well. I wrote articles for the high school newspaper and spoke before unfamiliar groups. I found it exciting to communicate with others in ways once thought impossible and began forming long-term friendships. Thanks to speech therapy taken years prior, my speaking became less slurred. The drooling ceased after acting on repeated reminders to swallow frequently. Scholastically, my grades improved so that I took advanced classes and graduated three months after my 17th birthday.

All this made my self-esteem shoot through the roof, reaching new but hazardous heights. The physical difficulties I overcame heightened my sense of self-importance, as evidenced by an arrogant attitude. And the ability to drive a car infused me with increased pride. Pride had set me up, and I learned a valuable ancient truth: “He who stands at the top of high places better be

careful because if you fall, it’s a long way down.” And that’s what happened.

You Are Not A Machine



**Your Best Will Look Different
Each Day (and that’s totally
okay!)**

one purpose: To encourage care providers and disabled people to make the best of their unique situation, whatever their “best” is each day.

Before I conclude, a word to parents, guardians, and carers helping those with special needs: Every case or situation is different. What worked for my parents and me may not work for you and your infant, child, or adult. So, don’t entertain feelings of shame, guilt, or endlessly second-guessing. Sharing my success story has

CEREBRAL PALSY: ATTITUDE AND ACTION

Growing up, Mom and Dad taught me to develop a proper self-identity and have kind interactions with others. Truths I keep reminding myself today, even as an 'old man.' In essence, my folks said:

Don't allow cerebral palsy to define you. You are much more than your body. Yes, severe physical limitations and speech difficulties exist. So does the emotional pain from unkind remarks and the long stares from others. However, do not have a pity party. Enjoy your life!!

You cannot always control others and circumstances, but your attitude is entirely under your control. Extend kindness instead of being cruel. Be patient instead of impatient. Be understanding instead of being critical. Forgive instead of holding a grudge. And share instead of always taking.

Have a pleasant demeanor and an upbeat, caring personality. On balance, this will attract like-minded people. These admirable qualities also encourage those holding superficial, negative judgments about disabled people to begin valuing inner beauty instead.

Do your best, whatever your "best" is. For some who are severely disabled, a simple smile is possibly all they can give to somebody. This loving gesture must not be discounted or ignored as unimportant by the recipient, but express sincere appreciation to the smiling, happy person.

Chapter 4

Humility and Hard Lessons

“As long as you are proud, you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people. Of course, as long as you look down, you cannot see something above you.”

— C.S. Lewis

“For the Christian, humility is absolutely indispensable. Without it, there can be no self-knowledge, repentance, faith, or salvation.”

— Aiden Wilson Tozer



The prideful are selfish, unteachable, and arrogant. By contrast, the humble depend upon God by being (1) teachable and giving to the needy, (2) attempting to trust God in their daily settings, (3) grateful for God’s matchless grace, love, goodness, and forgiveness through Christ, and (4) experience divine guidance and comfort in adversity.

“Never let hard lessons harden your heart; the hard lessons of life are meant to make you better, not bitter.”

ROY T. BENNETT

When I thought my world was coming together, my eyesight fell apart. Within a year, I was legally blind. The uncorrectable low vision was my fate. Months of self-pity made me bitter. Blurry vision meant no more car driving, a crushing blow to my huge

ego. Personal successes had gone to my head, and pride was oozing from my ears. I needed a large slice of humble pie; please hold the whipped cream. Instead of pridefully sulking over the loss of good vision, I gradually learned the

value of being grateful for what I could still see.

Before my vision problem, I regarded dependence on others as a weakness. (Maybe you feel or felt the same way, too.) Oddly, my poor eyesight helped me realize dependency reflects life itself. We are interconnected. Ideally, we use our unique gifts and abilities to assist and enrich others. We must fight the temptation to hold back, not be involved, and remain selfish. As Ralph Waldo Emerson urged, “Make yourself necessary to somebody.” [Redwoods](#)

A wise person echoed Emerson’s advice, “If you see someone falling behind, walk beside them. If you see someone being ignored, find a way to include them. If someone has been knocked down, lift them up. Remind people of their worth. One small act could mean the world to them.”

As I turned 18, the Vietnam War escalated, and the military draft was in high gear. Guess who Uncle Sam’s finger was pointing to? Yup, in my mailbox was a 1-A classification, meaning I was eligible for military service.

I couldn’t have been more flattered to serve my country, although I thought they were in bad shape if the United States Army needed me! The classification was revised to 4-F, meaning unfit for military service. (Probably, the Army didn’t want to explain a new twist on *friendly fire*.)

I found other ways to serve in the following decades: Donating “care packages” to military troops overseas and being pen-pals with several



soldiers. Also, I prayed for the safety and success of military operations. Voting for candidates who believed in a robust and wise military was also important.

My parents were high achievers, and, within reason, nothing less was expected of me. Dad spent four years in the Army during WWII. He earned a B.S. degree and an M.B.A. from the University of Southern California, attending evening classes while supporting a family. Starting as a timekeeper, he worked his way up the corporate ladder to become the Chief Financial Officer of Hughes Aircraft Company, having 84,000 employees. Mom was a professional opera singer with the Metropolitan Opera in New York City before marrying Dad.

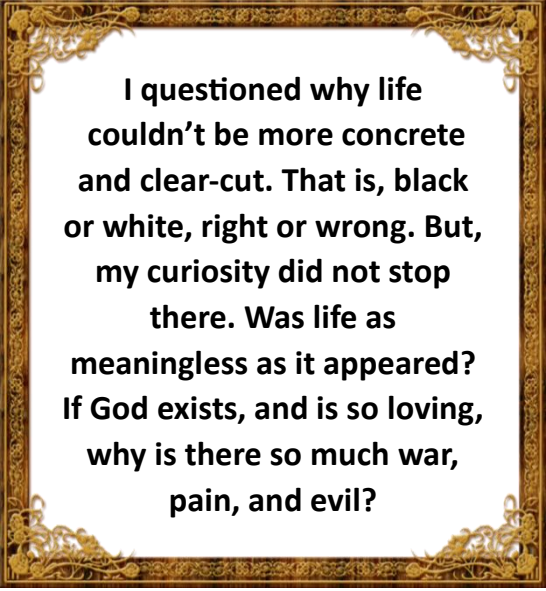
Dad could be counted on to teach practical lessons. One day, he said, “If you are going to do a task, son, try to do it right. Spending time and energy without giving it your best effort would be a shame.” This may have sounded harsh to some outsiders, given my limited abilities. But Dad gave me a vote of confidence, and I took it as such, grateful for his practical wisdom.

As my horizons in life broadened, it was somewhat scary to see just how complicated the world is. I questioned why life couldn’t be more concrete and clear-cut. That is, black or white, right or wrong. But, my curiosity did not stop there. Was life as meaningless as it appeared? If God exists and is so loving, why is there so much war, pain, and evil? I was sure of one thing: Give me a couple of years, and I’ll have all the answers, solving every woe. (Yeah, right.)

After graduating from a special needs high school with its slower educational pace to attend a nearby two-year city college, the academic challenge of competing was exciting yet intimidating. Why scary? Because with a high school diploma in hand, I had the equivalent of a 9th or 10th-grade education under my belt.

Six units were all I could handle during the first semester. My nose was virtually in the books – nine inches away due to low vision. Deciding to be outgoing, I fought off thoughts that I didn’t belong in such a setting. In 1969, relatively few

physically disabled students with significant impairments were on college campuses. And, still, fewer of them graduated.



**I questioned why life
couldn't be more concrete
and clear-cut. That is, black
or white, right or wrong. But,
my curiosity did not stop
there. Was life as
meaningless as it appeared?
If God exists, and is so loving,
why is there so much war,
pain, and evil?**

Most students and professors showed me great kindness, and meaningful friendships developed. What we had in common as people far outweighed our differing physical capabilities.

Joking about my disability frequently caught students off-guard and cut through their initial uneasy feelings. At first, they had a hard time believing what they were hearing. Some of our serious conversations were sprinkled with

poking fun at myself. Yes, they saw the obvious – my balance problem, falling often, and whose body is in constant, shaky motion. Yet, they heard, “Go ahead and blame me. I’m familiar with being the fall guy.” And “McDonald’s would love to hire me, for I make the best shakes in town.”

The professors were empathetic to my difficulty in note-taking. So, they waived the “no tape-recording lectures” policy. Using one trusty finger, I wrote the classroom lectures in an outline form on an old electric typewriter at home.

With an enrollment of 22,000, the sprawling campus made it difficult to get from class to class, given my lack of supersonic speed. When possible, courses were taken close by, arriving on time, prepared, and sitting in the front row.

Despite my speech impediment, I took a non-required course, *Introduction to Public Speaking*. Each student gave five five-minute speeches before classmates and the professor. Although intimidated by not being verbally well-understood

in class, the desire to be an effective communicator offset the fear.

One assignment was to make a motivational speech. One of the ten topics the professor gave us to choose from reflected an inner conviction. I spoke on *A Man's Reach Should Exceed His Grasp*. This outlook helped me earn an Associate's degree in Anthropology, with an intense interest in archaeology.



Seeing myself uncovering the material remains of past human life intrigued me. Intriguing? Yes. Practical? Not exactly. Can't you see me, with a balance problem and my entire body moving wildly within an excavation pit, where the slightest movement demands extreme caution? Instead of uncovering history, I would be history!

I was accepted at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), living on-campus in my junior and senior years. I changed to a psychology major, though I never forgot my last anthropology professor at CSULB.

As I viewed it from the front row, he always wore a small gold cross on his coat's lapel. The symbol seemed odd to me, given what many in anthropology held dear – the theory of evolution. I wondered how he could justify his Christian faith in a Creator. I didn't ask the professor, but the cross captivated my attention and prompted soul-searching.

The cross captivated my attention and prompted soul-searching.

Some Christians in the dorm seemed to go out of their way to talk about Jesus' love for me. I heard them out for courtesy's sake, but I was skeptical. Christianity, to me, was a crutch for those with no psychological support system for dealing with life's difficulties. (In time, I learned that everyone needs

help, a 'crutch,' to live his best life in a broken world. Broken people cannot fix broken people. Only our Creator can fix us by healing and satisfying our most profound needs if we allow Him.)

Seasonal hymns I had mindlessly sung umpteen times during Christmas break suddenly became significant. I *listened* to the lyrics for the first time, pondering their meaning. They spoke of the Lord Jesus as Emmanuel (God with us), redeeming humankind from sin, disobeying God's laws/missing His standards.

My understanding was enlightened as if blinders were taken from my eyes. My heart was deeply stirred. Past attempts to disregard the sin question and the need for a Savior could no longer be ignored or reasoned away. Instead, I weakened my stance as a skeptic and whispered a feeble prayer for forgiveness. In the next few months, I neither attended church nor considered myself a Christian, but became increasingly open to spiritual realities.

In my senior year, I became depressed over a required course, *Psychological Statistics*. Formulas, theorems, and numbers were never my strength, and I

struggled to pass tests. The thought of coming so far but not graduating due to one failed required course became unbearable.

For three days, my emotions ran wild. The perspective of how valuable life is was lost. Suicidal thoughts crept in. I forgot that *Life always has its share of bumps in the road. Such doesn't mean we drive off*



a cliff, but hang on and ride it out.

Distraught and frantic in my dorm room, I looked up and humbly uttered, “God, if you’re up there, help me.” To my amazement, He did, putting the idea in my mind of a tutor. That day, I hired a man who helped me get through the class with a passing grade.

Months later, I participated in graduation exercises on a sunny May morning. I could hardly believe it, standing among the thousands of fellow graduates. Then, a question came to mind: How does a person eat an elephant? One bite at a time, and so it was with me – to persevere daily, year after year, and not get overwhelmed by the enormous academic task and quit.

Although the bachelor’s degree bolstered my ego, it didn’t relieve the continual



I thought there must be something on a grander scale, a purpose stretching beyond our brief, mortal existence.

gnawing inside for something more. Life felt empty, having little purpose and hope. The normal progression of life – being born, attending school, working a job, getting married, having children, trying to live well, growing old, and dying – seemed shallow. I thought there must be something on a grander scale, a purpose stretching beyond our brief, mortal existence. I had to go past what

secular education and my five physical senses told me.

Months later, the gnawing and the emptiness ceased. Like theater curtains opening to reveal center stage, my heart was opening to the One who wanted

to take center stage in my life, Jesus Christ. I received God's free gift of salvation by grace and began attending church regularly. I was thankful that no matter our age, [God forgave](#) sin, including mine! [A Potter's Story](#)

Discovering the uniqueness of the Bible, I learned no other book provided solid answers to life's most pressing questions:

- Who am I?
- Why am I here?
- What is life all about?
- How can I find meaning and purpose?
- How should I live?
- Why is there evil and suffering in the world?
- What happens after physical death?

But what about the atheist who does not believe what the Bible says? An atheist must know everything, and that's his big problem. Scientists say the most knowledgeable person has less than 1 percent of the world's knowledge. Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" [How Do I Know?](#)



Lee Strobel 
@LeeStrobel

To continue in atheism, I would need to believe that nothing produces everything, non-life produces life, randomness produces fine-tuning, chaos produces information, unconsciousness produces consciousness, and non-reason produces reason. I simply didn't have that much faith.

Someone aptly noted that an atheist couldn't find God for the same reason a thief can't find a police officer.

I think back to one of my boyhood experiences. In 1961, three large buses filled with excited, disabled kids traveled up the twisting roads to our mountain campsite, Camp Paivika. Camp counselors were friendly and always helpful to

those needing physical assistance, and lent a listening ear. We had plenty of fun daytime activities and enjoyed delicious meals. At sundown, gathered around the campfire, we sang and learned from cheerful storytelling while eating smores to our heart's contentment.

Gazing into the night sky, I was amazed by the countless stars. I had no idea of



their vast expanse and beauty, for the big city lights of Los Angeles, its smog and cloud cover hid my vision.

Science is the Bible's best friend, verifying the existence of a Creator. I

Googled, "How many stars

and planets are there?" Answer: "Robert Frost, Instructor and Flight Controller at NASA, stated, 'There are up to 19,000,000,000,000,000,000 stars similar to ours with at least one planet similar to Earth'" (*Forbes*, November 15, 2017).

[There Is a God](#)

Dr. John Lennox is a Professor of Mathematics at Oxford University. He makes an astounding assertion: "The more we know about our Universe, the more the hypotheses about a Creator gain credibility as the best explanation of why we are here." Lennox is one of a growing number of scientists concluding a Creator exists.

After graduating college, I took a position at the Spastic Children's Foundation in Los Angeles as a social worker trainee. The 135-bed residential facility catered to adults and children with moderate to severe cerebral palsy needs. Also, many residents had some degree of mental deficiency.

After work hours, I taught Bible study to adults desiring to attend. I left the trainee position a year later but continued volunteering at the Foundation, leading Bible study three times a week for the next 17 years.

It took 90 minutes from home to the Foundation using city buses. Nightfall came early during the fall and winter, so I traveled in the dark. I used caution and was prayerful to and from the bus stop, walking two blocks to the facility in a high-crime area of Los Angeles.



Two well-built young men came behind one summer day and pushed me to the ground. Then they tried wrestling my wallet away. After screaming “Help! Jesus! Police!” several times, they ran off. I dusted myself off and entered the facility with the wallet, never leaving my front pocket.

On another occasion, I exited a city bus when it pulled away from the curb, dragging me alongside it. The driver closed the rear double doors too quickly, trapping one bell-bottom (flare) pant leg inside the bus. Shouting passengers got the driver’s attention, and the bus stopped, leaving me with only a few scrapes.

Two years later, a gun-toting passenger made a bus ride scary as we were held hostage for about 35 minutes until the police disarmed and arrested the unlawful man.

Though the travel was inconvenient and often dangerous, spending time with the residents was an honor. To have a friend who regularly visited, loved, shared, and prayed for them meant a great deal. Many new visitors couldn’t stomach the sights, sounds, and smells having physical disabilities. And those visitors who could stomach the differences, some felt awkward interacting with the residents.

Sadly, relatively few family members came to visit. Perhaps it was too emotionally painful and upsetting. Or they took the same medical advice told my parents – institutionalize me and have a normal life without him.

Many names and faces changed over the 17 years at the Foundation, but one thing did not change. I found myself being a student rather than a teacher. And what was the most valuable but hard lesson the residents taught me? Simply this: *Adversities are inevitable, but misery is a choice.*



Sometimes, I felt ashamed, bemoaning my difficulties on the bus home. Here I was, a picture

of health, mobility, and intelligence compared to most residents, but inwardly complaining about my suffering and my lot in life. Any number of them would trade places with me in a split second if they could.

Little did the residents know that they were better off in the grand scheme than me in one sense. They mostly accepted their hardships, whereas I let mine fester. I think of Cheryl. There was a glow about her, with loving eyes and a seemingly perpetual smile. Severely disabled and nonverbal, Cheryl's joyful countenance warmly spoke to me as if to say, '*Life is beautiful. Enjoy it, Paul.*'

With God's help, the festering (mentioned above) was gradually replaced by increased acceptance of my adversities. Each day created a deeper appreciation of life's value and beauty. It is said, "True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less." [Less Like Me](#)

I observed a life lesson that transformed my attitude over time. Most people have about 90 percent good and 10 percent not-so-good lives. Sadly, many focus on the 10 percent not-so-good, distorting reality. Thus, they make themselves feel lousy and alienate others with a sour, negative attitude. By contrast, *making a conscious effort to be grateful for the 90 percent good keeps life in perspective. It promotes good mental and physical health.* A positive

person brightens the outlook of others as well. Here's the bottom line: Gratitude turns whatever we already have into enough. [Pursuing Joy](#)

Do you know what God uses as His “chisel” to sculpt our lives? Here's the encouraging answer. Theologian J.I. Packer asserts, “God uses chronic pain and weakness, along with other afflictions, as His chisel for sculpting our lives. Felt weakness deepens dependence on Christ for strength each day. The weaker we feel, the harder we lean. And the harder we lean, the stronger we grow spiritually, even while our bodies waste away. To live with your ‘thorn’ uncomplainingly – that is, sweet, patient, and free in heart to love and help others, even though every day you feel weak – is true sanctification. It is true healing for the spirit. It is a supreme victory of grace.”

Dr. Robert Jeffress tells this story: “A sculptor was going to fashion a beautiful angel out of a slab of marble. A passer-by said, How will you make an angel from that marble slab? The sculptor said, ‘Oh, that’s easy. All I will do is chisel away everything that doesn’t look like an angel.’ You know, it’s the same with you and me. The moment we trust in Christ as our Savior, God begins a sculpting process. He molds, conforms, and shapes you into the image of His Son, His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. God loved Jesus so much He said, ‘You know what? I really don’t need to have one child. I would like to have a lot of children who are just like my favorite Son, Jesus Christ.’

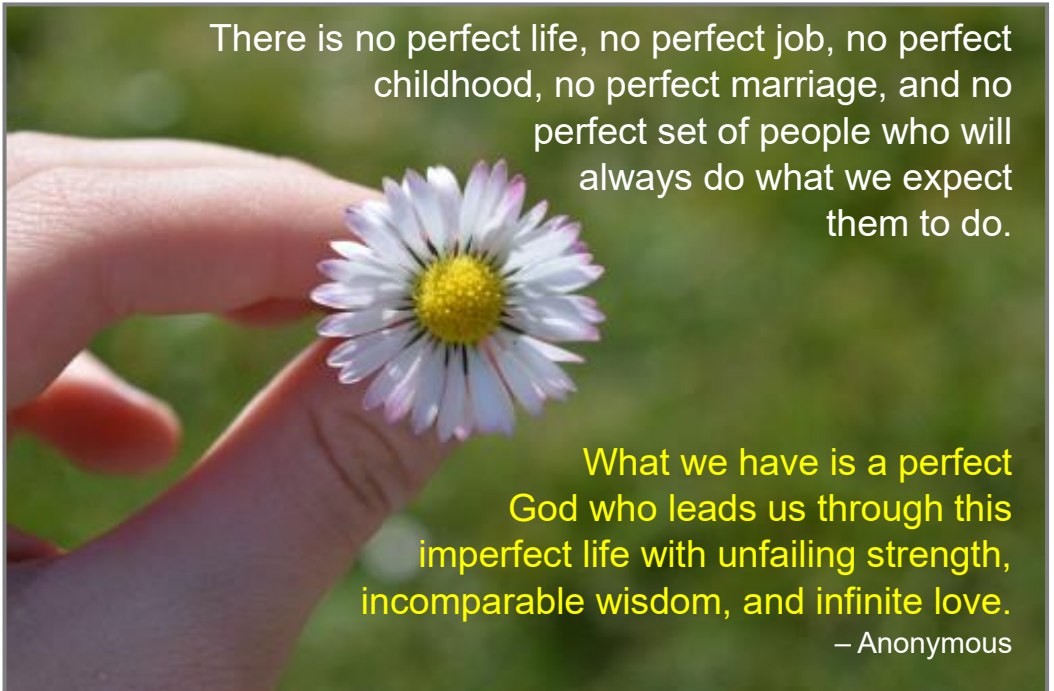


**“The moment we trust
in Christ as our
Savior, God begins a
sculpting process.”**

DR. ROBERT JEFFRESS

“God is working right now to make you just like Jesus. How does He do that? By chipping away everything in your life that doesn’t look like Jesus. Every habit, affection, attitude, trial, and difficulty are the hammer and chisel he uses to do

that, chipping away at anything displeasing Him. Paul said in Romans 8:29, 'For whom God knew and foreknew, He predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son'. God was doing that in Joseph's life, as told in the Book of Genesis. And it's what he is doing in your life as well.'"



There is no perfect life, no perfect job, no perfect childhood, no perfect marriage, and no perfect set of people who will always do what we expect them to do.

What we have is a perfect God who leads us through this imperfect life with unfailing strength, incomparable wisdom, and infinite love.

– Anonymous

How important are good attitudes and good values? What impact do they have on the individual and on society? The answers might surprise you.

Attitudes and Values

“Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character.”

— Albert Einstein

“All life demands struggle. Those who have everything given to them become lazy, selfish, and insensitive to life’s real values. The striving and hard work we constantly try to avoid is the major building block of the person we are today.”

— Pope Paul VI



An ancient Greek legend tells of an athlete who ran well at the races but didn’t win first prize. The crowd applauded the winner noisily, and a



statue was erected in his honor. But the man who had placed second was full of envy. His mind was full of resentment against the winner. Finally, he destroyed the statue, reminding him of his loss.

Night after night, while the town was sleeping, he chiseled at the statue’s base. As he cut away one evening, the massive marble broke from its weak base and crashed on the disgruntled athlete, crushing him. Resentment killed the man.

This ancient legend provides us a valuable lesson: unchecked bitterness can kill the innocent, too. A woman became enraged

by a fellow motorist, impairing her judgment to drive safely. Minutes later, she entered a highway but in the wrong direction. Her car slammed head-on into another vehicle. The woman, her son, and the other vehicle's occupants were killed due to road rage.

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines bitterness as “feeling angry and unhappy because you feel that you have been treated unfairly” by people, life events, circumstances, God, etc. Although jealousy, rage, resentment, envy, and unforgiveness vary in intensity and expression, they all resemble bitterness. So, I lumped them under the term *bitterness*.

Our outlook and our standards chiefly determine how we handle adversities. Daily, attitudes and values are formed, changed, and modified to help us navigate life with a sense of purpose and security. But if we aren't careful, holding onto harmful attitudes and values prevents us from becoming our best. Thus, our character and hard work will often adversely affect society itself. Even a few loud but persistent members can negatively change the social fabric of their culture. That's why maintaining healthy and constructive attitudes and values is essential.

Attitude is a way of thinking or feeling about someone or something: a negative or optimistic attitude typically displayed in a person's behavior.

In society, perhaps the job setting is one of the best indicators of our attitude. Many workers are happy and productive, often putting in long hours and working under challenging circumstances. A sense of gratitude flows from them, even when their job is far less than ideal.

By contrast, some disdain their jobs. They claim their jobs are the source of bitterness and discontent, especially when holding menial jobs. I suggest that there are inherently no *menial jobs* but having an apathetic, disgruntled attitude toward one's job.

It would be grand if we loved our work, but we shouldn't feel guilty or surprised when we don't love or like it every day. Even when our work is considered a "calling," we experience down days. This doesn't necessarily mean our job is unsuitable for us or we are burned out. All work has tedious, repetitive, and mundane aspects to it. That's why it's called "work." If it were not so, we call it "play" or "sport."

A responsible worker is often characterized by his capacity to invest in his work. However, for those who fall short, here's a one-week exercise that can transform your work when consistently applied: Release all your negative feelings about work. Then, go to work, not just with the attitude of "putting in your time," but treating your job as if you owned the business. In other words, take a genuine interest in what you are hired to do. Also, bring in good cheer, show hard work, and display a positive attitude every day.

You'll find your work will go faster, be more productive, you will make more friends, and maybe even get a raise. And best of all, you'll enjoy your work!

A great attitude about work is admirable, especially when Mondays roll around. But, sadly, many workers over the past 75 years often consider Mondays dreadful, a pain, or nothing good.

A person helping people deal with their anxiety and depression online said to a lady, "Yeah, I know Mondays are never fun for you," but gave no encouragement. I thought a positive comment about Mondays might have provided better support. So I wrote her the following:

Is there something inherently wrong with Mondays? What about the saying, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." Hmm? Are we to believe this to be true by placing high importance on Tuesdays through Sundays but leaving Mondays out in the cold? Okay, I'm a little sarcastic here, knowing Mondays are usually the first day of the workweek.

However, maybe it's time to regard Mondays in a more constructive light – a day of enthusiasm and productivity. And why not? Usually,



haven't we returned from two days of fun and relaxation where we can (and should) recharge our batteries? Sundays traditionally are a *day of rest*. Since we live in a country with so many blessings, why perpetuate a

sour attitude about Mondays, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy? Embrace Mondays, not dread them.

Let's enjoy seven days of the week, not six, by doing our best for the remaining one-seventh of our lives. It's something money can't buy, but welcome each Monday, will.

(By the way, the helpful person mentioned above did not reply to my inquiry.)

Dr. Charles Swindoll tells us the one thing we can control is our attitude:

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, education, money, circumstances, failures, successes, and other people's thoughts, say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company, a church, or a home.

The remarkable thing is that we choose which attitude we will embrace every day. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have – our attitude.

I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% of how I

react to it. And so it is with you; we are in charge of our attitude.



We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have – our attitude.

The online publication *Power of Positivity* discusses “The Secret Power of a Positive Perspective.” Here are some highlights:

To change ourselves effectively, we first had to change our perceptions.

— Stephen R. Covey

Most of us have a deep desire to understand and be understood. Without the correct perspective, this world can be a very confusing place. But it doesn’t have to be. ...

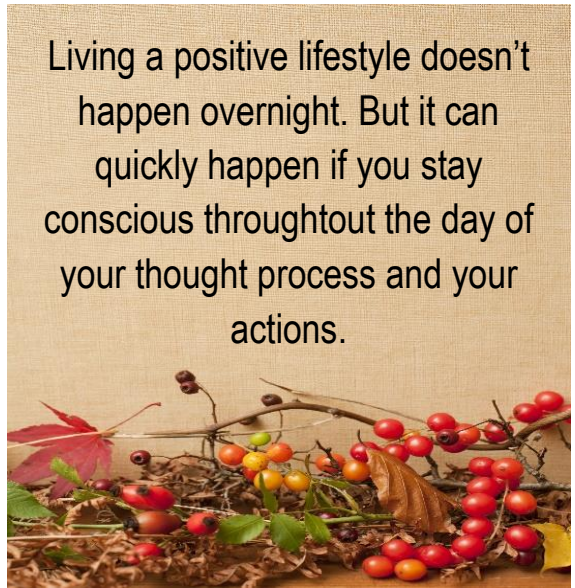
Do you know you have the power today to make positive changes that bring about the kind of difference you want in your life? Yes, you have that power within you right now. When you are ready to make real positive changes, you won’t let excuses set you back.

Let go of blaming others, specific circumstances, health, family history, age, and environment. It comes down to your thoughts, words, attitude, and actions that only you can control. If you genuinely want to reach your goal, you will go after it with your whole heart and overcome any obstacle.

You can change everything right now by choosing a positive perspective on any situation as often as possible. Living a positive

lifestyle doesn't happen overnight. But it can quickly happen if you stay conscious throughout the day of your thought process and your actions.

To start harnessing the power of a positive perspective, you need to maintain a positive mindset. This will allow you to begin drawing more abundance into your life and the life of your dreams in time. How we live now comes down to how we think about things and our mental attitude toward life.



We can make major positive changes by choosing a positive perspective in everything at every moment. It doesn't matter how much money you have, what your health is like, how many friends and family members you have, what you weigh, how you look, or what size home you have. Look at your life with a grateful heart and find something good to think and say about it. That is choosing a positive perspective.

For example, there could be a co-worker you don't really get along with or even strongly dislike the person, but when you open up your heart and mind and look at this person, you will find at least one good quality. In time, more reasons to like that person will surface by focusing on that one good quality about that person. It's just how it works! You can apply this same theory to anything.

Be grateful for where you are right now, and continue to anticipate the

positive changes and growth by choosing a positive perspective at any moment. A positive attitude is the only way to live your best life because you consistently feel joy. Feeling joyful brings more abundance.

Developing a positive perspective is essential to overcoming challenges and becoming well-adjusted. Lizzie Velasquez's life testifies to the power of a positive mindset. Her story is remarkable. She is thriving, not crushed.

Millions have watched her shocking *YouTube* video. Lizzie maintains, "We are not victims in any sense unless we allow ourselves to be." Many find Lizzie's



"We are not victims in any sense
unless we allow ourselves to be."

Many find Lizzie's statement
startling, even incomprehensible,
given her incurable medical
condition.

statement startling, even incomprehensible, given her incurable medical condition.

Lizzie is a favorite hero of mine. Maybe she will be a hero of yours. Many think she is "The Ugliest Woman in the World." So, what makes her feel beautiful?

Carefully listen as Lizzie explains which qualities define her, always looking at the bright side of her unchangeable condition: [Lizzie's Positive Perspective](#)

In 1939, one of professional baseball's most celebrated players, Lou Gehrig, expressed an inspiring positive perspective on life after his career abruptly ended. He played a historic 2,130 consecutive professional baseball games before leaving the lineup due to a debilitating and terminal neurological disorder. Two weeks later, he addressed fans at Yankee Stadium, declaring, "Life has dealt me a big blow, but I still have a lot to live for."

President Abraham Lincoln's accomplishments, intellect, and communication

skills are well-known. What is lesser known was his struggles with depression most of his life, even being suicidal. However, Lincoln said most people were like him: they were as happy as they wanted to be.

Apart from a chemical imbalance or a physiological disorder, many who are depressed have not *decided* to be otherwise. *By refusing help*, I believe those chronically sad are choosing to be self-absorbed, sometimes pulling others' heartstrings to garner sympathy, money, and favors.

What is success? Joshua Becker answers, "Rather than defining 'success' by the type of car we drive, may we define it by the number of people we picked up in life and set down on a better road." Dr. Myles Monroe shares, "Success is the fulfillment of the purpose and assignment for which you were created."

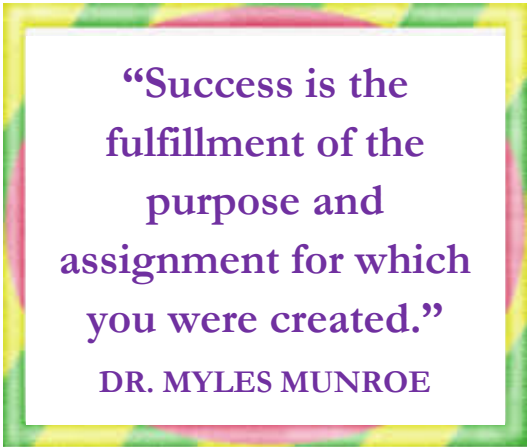
Consider Helen Keller's success story.

At 19 months, she was stricken with an acute illness, leaving her deaf and blind.

But she didn't allow her significant disabilities to ruin her life. Nor did unsuccessful educational efforts dampen her drive to press on.

Keller met Anne Mansfield Sullivan, who helped Helen learn to read and write quickly. At age 10, she began to speak after only one month of study. In 1904, at age 20, Keller entered Radcliffe College and graduated with honors four years later. Her life and her books have inspired countless worldwide.

Dr. Mahlon Johnson also made the most of what he had. He wrote a book named *Working on a Miracle*. The miracle referred to his medical research in seeking a cure for AIDS. This endeavor soon became his life's passion just by



**“Success is the
fulfillment of the
purpose and
assignment for which
you were created.”**

DR. MYLES MUNROE

one slip of the hand. Dr. Johnson accidentally cut his thumb while performing an autopsy on an AIDS patient. He immediately washed his open wound with chlorine, but it was too late.

Now, having AIDS, one might wonder about his bitterness. Remarkably, he had none, as he told an audience on national television. He contends helping others cope and live with the disease far overshadows his suffering and the social stigma he encounters.

What do Lizzy Velasquez, Lou Gehrig, Abraham Lincoln, Helen Keller, and Dr.

“Bad things do happen; how I respond to them defines my character and the quality of my life. I can choose to sit in perpetual sadness, immobilized by the gravity of my loss, or I can decide to rise from the pain and treasure my most precious gift – life itself.”

WALTER ANDERSON

Mahlon Johnson share? See if the following quote characterizes each of them: “Bad things do happen; how I respond to them defines my character and the quality of my life. I can choose to sit in perpetual sadness, immobilized by the gravity of my loss, or I can decide to rise from the pain and

treasure my most precious gift – life itself,” declares Walter Anderson.

Having moral attitudes is vital for traveling through life successfully. Equally crucial is possessing good and honorable values. An online definition of value: “A measure of the worth or importance a person attaches to something; our values are often reflected in how we live our lives. For example, I value freedom of speech or my family.” The same sentiment is frequently said about valuing a college degree.

Earning a college degree is essential because of the benefits it affords the

graduate; that's the prevailing thought in our modern society. But is there another side to credibly challenge this perception? Another side that often prevents disappointment, frustration, student loan debt, and bitter feelings? Does this side sound too good to be true?

Being a new college graduate with no student loan debt would be grand. And land an enjoyable, high-paying job leading to a financially secure future that lasts decades. You'd be sittin' pretty if that happened. But such a scenario is rare.

Let me be upfront: a college degree is overrated. I am not saying a college degree shouldn't be pursued if the person has the desire, ability, and means, has set a career goal, and has a sober view of the broader picture. That said, we should be educated, and being educated is to be well-informed of the more comprehensive picture of facts:

- “Nearly 40 percent of working-age Americans now hold a college degree.” Report from the *Lumina Foundation*” (PBS, 2014).
- Nearly half of all college students stop short of a degree, according to Harvard University, 2011. “Reasons for dropping out included: unprepared for the rigors of academic work; inability to cope with the competing demands of study, family, jobs, and cost.”
- “Just 27 percent of college grads had a closely related job to their major” (*Washington Post*, 2013).

Did you find any of these facts a bit surprising? I'm not the sharpest knife in the drawer, but researching these points reaffirms what I have long believed: There should be no shame in the person who makes wise life decisions and works hard but has no college degree. This person becomes a vital part of a company or is self-employed through diligence. He earns relatively as much as his college degree counterparts without student loan debt. And let's not forget those who learn a valuable, employable skill or trade through apprenticeships but possess



no college degree. There is no shame in those, either.

Which educational level does society place a higher value on? Hint: the *mandatory* one. Society realizes that not every person is interested in college or is college material. Besides, most jobs require a high school diploma. So, if your heart is set on earning a college degree, you won't find me

holding you back. Just do your homework first, if you get my drift.

Or consider the value of merging work and college. In the "old days," many students worked through college, mostly part-time. The benefits of working outweighed the longer time it took to graduate.

Jeffrey J. Selingo explains why more teenagers and college students need to work while in school. "The more students can work in jobs alongside various generations that help them better understand specific career paths and the nuances of the workplace, the better off they will be in launching into the

Which educational level does society place a higher value on? Hint: the *mandatory* one. Society realizes that not every person is interested in college or is college material. Besides, most jobs require a high school diploma.

world of work after college.” Looks like those ‘old fogies’ had it right all along.

A person having admirable or moral values is honest, fair, and worthy of respect. As I see it, such a person earns his keep and takes personal responsibility. He views himself soberly, has a zeal for life, and endeavors to make a positive difference within his sphere of influence. Abandoning such values or being unwilling to develop them is unwise. There are at least four harmful values that we should steer away from:

Harmful value #1: Minimize the positives of gainful employment by expecting handouts instead. While growing up, my mom told me a story that helped shape my view of life, especially valuing work ethics. A father told his son that a portion of his daily earnings was required by nightfall. But instead of working,



he asked his mother for money. The mother gave him a coin. By evening, the father asked for one coin from his son. After handing the coin, the father threw it into a lake as the boy watched. The next evening, the father asked again. The son dug out his mother’s coin he got hours

earlier. Then, the coin was instantly tossed into the water as the boy looked on.

The mother had no more money on the third day, so the son had to find a job. Sure enough, the father came calling for another coin. As the father had his arm cocked, anticipating another splash landing, the son screamed, “Wait, I *earned* that one!” Clearly, money earned is valued more than money unearned.

Humans are meant to work. *Fittowork.org* answers the question, Why work? Being at work:

- keeps us busy, challenges us, and gives us the means to develop ourselves

- gives us a sense of pride, identity, and personal achievement
- enables us to socialize, build contacts, and find support
- provides us with money to support ourselves and explore our interests
- people at work tend to enjoy happier and healthier lives than those who are not working

Let me be clear: There's a place for public assistance for the disabled who cannot work. However, think with me about society's love affair with economic handouts.

In recent decades, government handouts have been portrayed as having the best of intentions and motivated by "compassion," "understanding," and "fairness" to help those financially hurting. Who could argue against something so reasonable and generous? Well, let's look at the *results* of such reasonableness and generosity.

I suggest these handouts are mainly counter-productive by creating multi-generational families on welfare. Non-disabled people are choosing not to work, abusing the welfare system. They live off the backs of hard-working taxpayers rather than being gainfully employed. Why so little desire to become self-reliant? Because of a time-tested principle: When a behavior is rewarded, it is repeated – it's that simple. That's right, lazy behavior is being incentivized!

When people refuse to work, they are more likely to cause trouble – "Idle hands are the devil's workshop" (Proverbs 16:27). Multiple studies show higher crime rates where one finds poverty. Additionally, when people refuse to work, the poverty rate rises.

In 2015, the poverty rate was 14.3 percent, nearly the same percentage as when the War on Poverty began in 1964, despite spending at least \$22 trillion of taxpayer money (*heritage.org*).

There is a bright spot, though. Staying out of poverty is almost guaranteed if three rules are followed. The *Brookings Institution* studied the poverty problem and released its findings in 2013.

According to *jacksonville.com*, Brookings whittled down a lot of analysis into three simple rules to avoid poverty:

1. At least finishing high school.
2. Waiting to get married until 21 or later and not having children until after marriage.
3. Having a full-time job.



If you do all those three things, your chance of falling into poverty is just 2 percent. Meanwhile, you'll have a 74 percent chance of being in the middle class.

These rules apply to all races and ethnic groups. Sadly, breaking these rules is becoming more commonplace for all racial groups.

Virtually every college in the United States praises the virtues of socialism, meeting the needs of the masses via the welfare state. The facts will either confirm or refute classroom instruction. You be the judge by viewing two videos: [Socialism Makes People Selfish](#) and [What's Wrong With Socialism?](#)

Harmful value #2: possessing a victim mentality. In all caps, political commentator Ben Shapiro wrote, "LEFTIST IDEOLOGY: WHERE FEELINGS RULE OVER FACTS AND VICTIMS ARE HEROES."

Tattooed on the forearm of a Seattle teen are the shameful words, *I'm A Victim*. Some might identify with and even celebrate the tattoo's underlying message. Why shameful? Because a victim mentality shifts the blame to

someone or something else to excuse one's faults, insecurities, or circumstances. In other words, they feel that bad things keep happening to them no matter what, and none of these circumstances or situations are their fault. Such an attitude impedes a person from reaching his full potential by not behaving responsibly.

Lorena Bobbitt was criminally acquitted of cutting off her husband's penis

I don't want my pain and
struggle to make me a
victim. I want my battle to
make me someone else's

hero!

while he slept, alleging she suffered spousal abuse. Her action typifies what is seen today – failing to take personal responsibility and absolve oneself based on feelings. Sure, life is hard, but to make an excuse to justify harmful and potentially deadly behavior is, in my humble opinion, indefensible.

President Lyndon Johnson remarked, "There are plenty of recommendations for getting out of trouble cheaply and fast. Most of them come down to this: Deny your responsibility."

We cannot be responsible for our birthplace, gender, race, height, and age. No matter the rationalization or excuse, considering oneself a victim is a *choice*. A choice that hinders personal and spiritual growth through adversity, robbing himself and others of seeing a real-life principled hero.


Harmful value #3: Viewing high self-esteem as the ideal. Another subject we hear a lot today is high self-esteem. Possessing this attribute is often touted as the answer to one's poor image. *Webster's Dictionary* defines self-esteem as "holding a good opinion of oneself; self-competency."

How important is high self-esteem? Many educators consider high self-esteem the most critical attribute a child could possess to become a psychologically

healthy and responsible adult. But is this always true? No, given the following fact: Some of the world's kindest, most giving people have low self-esteem. They are often humble, seeking little or no fanfare. Conversely, some cruelest people, such as murderers, gang members, and hate groups, hold a "good" opinion of themselves. They delight in grabbing the attention of others with their evil behavior.

High self-esteem is not nearly as crucial as applying moral values and self-control. Therefore, it is nonsense when delinquent kids and adults say they did something wrong because their self-esteem is low. People do bad things because they *lack self-control and a moral compass*.

Again, high self-esteem is admirable when virtuous behavior accompanies it. Such is principally true when practicing biblical values. To live governed by biblical values is remarkably rewarding. For God did not give His teachings to make us unhappy. As children of God



To live governed by biblical values is remarkably rewarding.

through Christ, He gave guidelines to save us from needless heartache, pain, and loneliness. This is so we may live joyful, admirable, fulfilled lives in right relationship with our loving Father in Heaven and with others.

Harmful value #4: Not helping others in this life while believing firmly in Heaven. Rabbi and author Harold Kushner reminds us if we are truly spiritual, our values will evidence themselves by tackling the severe issues of this life:

The danger in believing too strongly in Heaven is that you will forget to take this world seriously. It's easy to shrug off the death of 10 million people in Africa when you believe in a future reality where the first shall be last, and the last shall be first. With this attitude, why not ignore the

rich as they ravenously prey upon the poor?

As a follower of Christ, I submit that involving others' pain and injustices validates our expectation of Heaven, not diminishes it. You might wonder why there is pain and injustice in the first place? And since God is good, why is there so much suffering? Are there any favorable outcomes to the suffering God allows? As discussed next, certain truths attempt to answer these questions.

The Suffering Advantage

“God will test you because He wants you to mature. He wants you to develop a walk with Him that is not based on your fluctuating emotions but on your commitment to Him as you learn to walk by faith.”

— Pastor Greg Laurie



A university professor received his doctorate in chemistry 30 years ago. His scientific expertise has earned him the respect of the most prominent men and women in his field. You’ll find him giving test questions to his senior college class every other week.

Why seek answers from those who know relatively little about the subject from someone so knowledgeable? The answer is obvious: the professor allows his students to locate themselves to see how well they have mastered the subject.

.....
When you are going
through difficulty &
wonder where GOD
is, REMEMBER that
the teacher is always
quiet during the test.
.....



WWW.LIVELIFEHAPPY.COM

We also have lessons to learn, followed by exams. These lessons and exams go beyond academics to weightier life issues, long-ranging in scope. Life is not a resting place but a testing place. (Though this is exciting news, please, reader, try to contain your excitement!)

When we experience adversity, we face suffering in some form and degree. You may think this chapter title, *The Suffering Advantage*, is weird. And you

might scratch your head, wondering, How can suffering be an advantage? Heck, I don't know!! All kidding aside, suffering can be advantageous if we heed or follow the valuable lessons they teach. But will we take heed?

Much of the following text is taken directly from Pastor Martin R. DeHaan's booklet, *Why Would a Good God Allow Suffering?* I hope his insights will clarify this critical question, positively impacting your life. It definitely has mine.

Life can be tough to understand; making much sense of our existence can be frustrating regarding the immense problem of suffering and trials. Seeing bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people makes us wonder if we will ever find convincing answers to such a mystery.

It makes sense when an arsonist perishes by the fire he sets. It makes sense when a murderer on the loose is fatally wounded in a police shoot-out. And it makes sense when a reckless driver dies in an accident.

But what about the arsonist's fire killing innocent men, women, and children as he runs loose? Or when a bystander is caught in a police crossfire with a criminal, and the bystander is permanently paralyzed? Or when a family of six is eating in their parked car, and a reckless driver slams into them, and the reckless driver alone survives the crash?

Humans are highly curious. Most parents can attest that the never-ending cries of "Why?" come early in life. It is foolish to presume we completely understand why a good God allows suffering. The reasons are many and complex, so it is wrong for us to expect to understand every time.

Being a benevolent God, He has given us some answers. Though it may be a mystery, for example, why one person gets singled out for a disease, we can know, in part, the reason why medical conditions exist. We may not fully understand why we face a particular problem, but we usually know how to deal with the situation and respond in a way that pleases the Lord.

Precious reader, it is ridiculous to assume I fully understand all you are personally suffering right now.

While some aspects of suffering are shared, the particular reasons may differ.

In your suffering, you may need a hug, a listening ear, or someone to sit with you in silence. But, in time, you will want and need God's Word to comfort you and help you see your plight from God's perspective.

It may not be enjoyable at the moment, but our emotional and physical pain and hardships have a definite purpose for our ultimate good with this outlook.



There is a four-point outline I take comfort in when adversity or pain comes my way concerning suffering. Such has helped me to cope and proceed forward. Also, it provides assurance the grand scheme is ultimately at play, yielding favorable outcomes.

The first reason why a good God allows suffering is to alert us. To live in a world without pain is hugely desirable. No more backaches, headaches, or pulled muscles. But neither could we feel angina to avert a potential heart attack or sense any pain to signal the seriousness of a ruptured appendix.

“As much as we despise pain, we must admit that it often serves a good purpose. It warns us when something goes wrong. The cause of the misery, rather than the agony itself, is the real problem. Pain is merely a symptom, a siren or bell that sounds when a part of the body is endangered or under attack,” declares DeHaan.

The universality of suffering indicates something is wrong with our world.

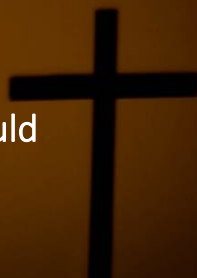
Examples include an accident, an abusive spouse, a natural disaster, a congenital disability, a terrorist attack, and a random disease. These events know no boundaries to race, religion, social status, or morality. It often strikes at the very heart of fairness. In other words, bad things happen to people trying to be good, and good things happen to people who enjoy being bad.

As a teen, thoughts about my struggles with cerebral palsy and scoliosis came to mind: God either ordained such misery and grief or wasn't powerful enough to stop it. Neither scenario was correct, as I, in time, learned that something was wrong with our world.

From a biblical perspective, God could have prevented misery from happening. But this would be at the expense of granting man's most prized possession: *his ability to choose*. Inherent in this ability is to make the wrong choices as well. As a result, the unthinkable happened: man decided against his Creator.

"Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata – creatures that worked like machines – would hardly be worth creating."

C.S. LEWIS, *THE CASE FOR CHRISTIANITY*



The Garden of Eden's tranquility was severely jolted when our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God. Satan tested man's love for God, and man failed. In biblical terms, that failure is called *sin*. And just as some horrific viruses break

down the body's immune system and lead to death, sin spreads like a deadly infection passing from generation to generation. Each new generation inherits the effects of sin and the desire to sin.

Sin affected the nature of man and adversely affected his planet. Paradise gave way to ground cursed with weeds, making man's work difficult.

Disease, disaster, and corruption are symptoms of a deeper problem – *the human race has rebelled against the Creator*. Every sorrow, grief, and agony vividly reminds us of our human predicament. Through no direct fault, such suffering acts like a giant, flashing neon sign announcing that we live in a fallen world.

Not only does suffering alert us that something is wrong with our world, but something is also wrong with God's creatures. [Unshakable Trust: Choices and Consequences](#)

LIFE IS ALL ABOUT
MAKING CHOICES.

ALWAYS DO YOUR BEST
TO MAKE THE RIGHT
ONES, AND ALWAYS DO
YOUR BEST TO LEARN
FROM THE WRONG ONES.

@pierianspringlv.com

People can cause suffering. As sin-infected creatures, people make decisions that damage themselves and others. Adam's son, Cain, was jealous of his brother Abel, and he killed Abel. We see two of man's original character flaws – selfishness and jealousy – evidenced through generations of injustice, war, crime, hatred, suicide, abortion, and the like.

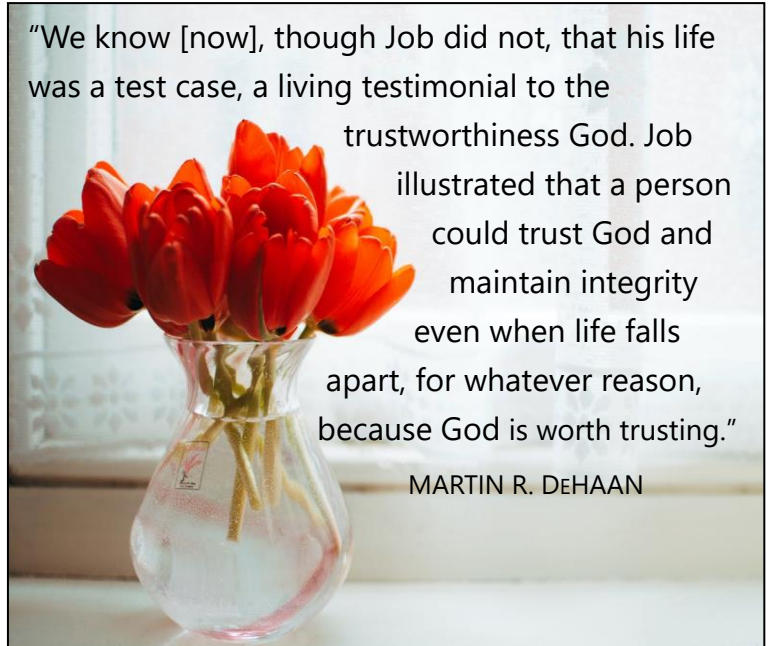
Satan and his fallen angels are agents of suffering. As an all-wise and loving God, He has Satan on a short chain. God is using him as our sparring partner, as it were, for our ultimate betterment.

Apostle Paul experienced a physical problem he attributed to Satan. God did not grant Paul's request to have the problem removed. Instead, the Lord helped Paul see how this difficulty could serve a far higher purpose, making

him humbly dependent on the Lord by experiencing His grace (First Corinthians 12:7-10).

Centuries before, God permitted Satan to afflict Job most devastatingly. His family, possessions, and health were all taken away (Job 1-2).

I often find it difficult to reconcile God's loving, merciful, and trusting nature considering Job's trials, let alone my own. But, then, I am comforted and reassured by DeHaan's comment, "We know [now], though Job did not, that his life was a



"We know [now], though Job did not, that his life was a test case, a living testimonial to the trustworthiness God. Job illustrated that a person could trust God and maintain integrity even when life falls apart, for whatever reason, because God is worth trusting."

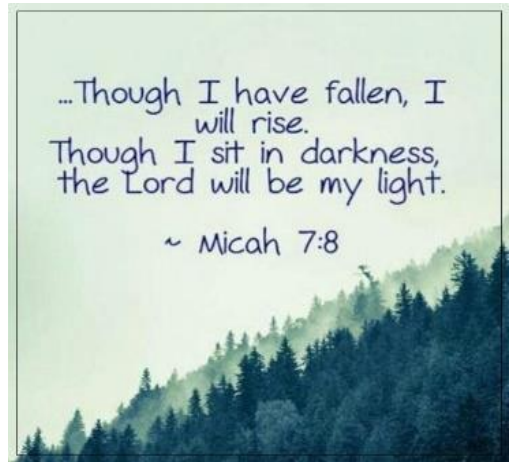
MARTIN R. DEHAAN

test case, a living testimonial to the trustworthiness of God. Job illustrated that a person could trust God and maintain integrity even when life falls apart, for whatever reason, because God is worth trusting."

There are a few biblical examples of suffering attributed to Satan. They include a blind and mute man (Matthew 12:22) and a boy who suffered seizures (Matthew 17:14-18). However, there are no direct ties to Satan in most cases of sickness.

Not only are the world and God's creatures out of sync, but now God gets personal: *something is wrong with me*. As noted earlier, some suffering is not

necessarily because of our sin. However, God will *use* suffering as a form of correction for those who trust Jesus Christ, receiving Him as their Lord and Savior. Just as a loving parent trains and corrects his children, so does the Lord. His discipline is not out of some twisted pleasure but a compassionate attempt to profit us (Hebrews 12:5-9). He uses troubles to encourage us to find solutions by relying on Him.



We may struggle with the reality that many seem to get away with all kinds of evil without swift punishment. Scripture explains in Second Peter 3:9 why God waits: The Lord is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (a change of mind that results in the forsaking of sin).

The Lord uses hardships as a loving wake-up call for the unbeliever. A wake-up call, alerting the unbeliever that he will experience God's wrath on the coming day of judgment for refusing God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. God will deal perfect justice to all who reject His love and rule.

The second reason why a good God allows suffering is to direct us. Our wrong actions, breaking God's physical and spiritual laws, can be troublesome.

We live in a physical world. Much suffering is traced to the wrong choices we make. A new house is burned because its builder incorrectly installed the electrical system. Smokers are more likely to get lung cancer than nonsmokers. When children are left unsupervised around pool areas, the drowning incidence increases.

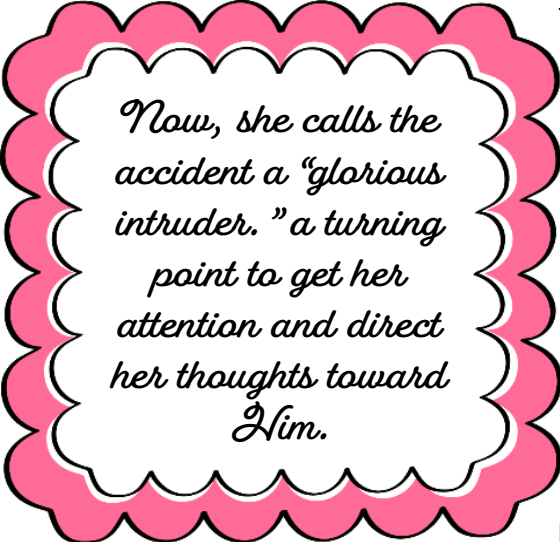
We also live in a spiritual world. Suffering is often blamed for a person turning

away from God. Other times, suffering gets credit when people's lives are redirected. It helps them see life more clearly and causes their relationship with God to grow closer. How can similar circumstances have different effects on people? The reasons lie with the people, not the events.

My friend Vince turned away from Christianity shortly after his neurological system began to torment him. The best doctors could not help him. No talking could convince Vince that God wasn't at fault, and years of him taking illegal drugs had finally taken their toll.

Contrast Vince with Joni Eareckson Tada. As a fit teenager in 1967, Joni became a quadriplegic, suddenly paralyzed from the neck down due to diving in shallow water. She found reconciling her condition with her belief in a loving God impossible. It took two years of tears and intense questioning for her attitude

to change from bitterness to trust. Through a caring friend, Joni finally realized she was not alone. Jesus was paralyzed when nailed to the cross.



Now, she calls the accident a "glorious intruder." a turning point to get her attention and direct her thoughts toward Him.

Now, she calls the accident a "glorious intruder," a turning point to get her attention and direct her thoughts toward Him. She claims it was the greatest thing that ever happened to her. Instead of complaining or accusing

God of evil, Joni now looks at life from a long-range perspective. To see that God was compassionately forcing her to depend more heavily on Him.

DeHaan observes, "Suffering has a way of showing how weak our own resources really are. It forces us to rethink priorities, values, goals, pleasures,

the source of real strength, and our relationships with people and God. It has a way of directing our attention to spiritual realities if we don't turn from God instead."

Paul, the apostle, suffered greatly. He wrote, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). Paul is not making light of our troubles but challenges us to see them through the prism of eternity.

Martin R. DeHaan observes, "Our problems can indeed be significant, even crushing. In His loving sovereignty, God is still standing over all of human history and weaving it all together into a beautiful tapestry, ultimately glorifying Him. When troubles strike, remember this: God uses such situations to direct us to Him and the long-range view of life. He calls for us to trust, to hope, to wait."

The third reason why a good God allows suffering is to shape us. Physical exercise can be painful, but because of its benefits, we endure. But what about the pain we don't choose? What gain can come from illness, emotional distress, accidents, or trials? Is the gain worth the pain?

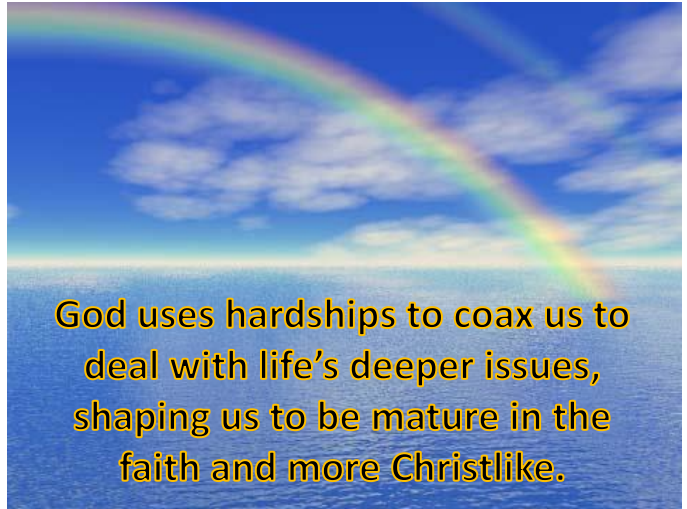
Consider the words of apostle Paul in Romans 5:3-4, "... we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, character; and character, hope." Paul isn't telling us to celebrate our troubles but to rejoice about what God can and will do through our trials. We are to have '*through vision*.' Our attention should focus on the end product, not the painful process.

God uses hardships to coax us to deal with life's deeper issues, shaping us to be mature in the faith and more Christlike. Pastor DeHaan writes about this shaping, describing it this way:

The greatest sermons I have ever heard were not preached from pulpits but from sickbeds. The greatest, deepest truths of God's Word have

often been revealed not by those who preached nor by their seminary preparation and education. But by those humble souls gone through the seminary of affliction. They learned the deep things, the ways of God, through experience.

The most cheerful people, with few exceptions, have been those who have had the least sunshine and the most pain and suffering in their lives. The most grateful people I have met were not those who traveled a rose pathway all their lives. They were confined by



circumstances, their homes, and often to their beds. They have learned to depend upon God, as only Christians know how to do.

The grippers are usually those who enjoy excellent health. The complainers are those who have the least to complain about. Those dear saints of God have refreshed my heart again and again as they preach from sickbed pulpits. They are the men and women who have been the most cheerful and the most grateful for the blessings of Almighty God.

Perhaps the most quoted Scripture during times of distress and suffering is Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." We mistakenly think this means God will turn every bad thing into good.

What is God's endgame, then? We find the answer to that question in the following verse: "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."

Rick Warren maintains, "A disciple thinks, feels, and acts like Jesus Christ. It is being conformed to the image of Christ as Romans 8:28-29 states – that God's No.1 purpose in our lives is to make us like Jesus."

In *Becoming a Whole Person in a Broken World*, Ron Lee Davis writes, "The good news is not that God will make our circumstances come out the way we like, but that God can weave even our disappointments and disasters into His eternal plan. The evil that happens to us can be transformed into God's good."

How can God be in control when it seems so out of control? In his book *Why Us?* Warren Wiersbe notes, "God proves His sovereignty, not by constantly intervening and preventing these events, but by ruling and overruling them so that even tragedies end up accomplishing His ultimate purposes."

The sovereign Lord of the universe uses all of life to develop our maturity and Christlikeness to further His eternal plan. However, to accomplish those purposes, God wants to use us to help others, and He wants others to help us. That's what this last reason is all about.

The fourth reason why a good God allows suffering is to unite us. Pain and suffering seem to have a unique ability to show us how we need each other. Our struggles remind us how fragile we are. Even the weakness of others can bolster us when our strength is sapped.

Suffering helps us to meet the needs of others as we allow Christ to live through us. Since we all [bleed the same, let's stand united](#), loving, and caring for one another.

Dr. Paul Brand, an expert on the disease of leprosy, notes:

When suffering strikes, those standing close by are flattened by the shock. We fight back the lumps in our throats, march resolutely to the hospital for visits, mumble a few cheerful words, and perhaps look up articles on what to say to the grieving.

But when I ask patients and their families, who helped you in your suffering? I hear a strange, imprecise answer. The person described rarely has smooth answers and a winsome, effervescent personality.

[Rather, he] is someone quiet and understanding who listens more than talks. He does not judge or offer much advice ... [but has] a hand to hold, an understanding ear, a bewildered hug, and a shared lump in the throat.

God made us dependent on one another, where love must reign. Philip Yancey writes, “There is no magic cure for a person in pain. Mainly, such a person needs love, for love instinctually detects what is needed.”



The above discussion boils down to this: God allows suffering for us to realize our dire situation and then make the necessary changes to live a God-honoring life. As a result, we will experience what He

has marvelously in store for us in this life and throughout eternity.

Those sufferers unwilling to accept God's free gift of eternal life through Christ's sacrificial payment doom themselves. Their baseless accusations include that God is unloving, vengeful, and unmercifully hurling firebrands of affliction and despair upon His defenseless creatures.

Many think God shielded Himself from suffering. On the surface, this notion

appears credible until we dig deeper in our quest for truth.

God is the supreme sufferer of the universe. Was it not the Lord Jesus – God in the flesh – who experienced insults, torture, and Hell? Was He not touched with the feeling of our infirmities and tempted like we are in all points, yet He did not sin? Was it not He who hung on a cross between two thieves, though He was innocent? And was it not He who went to Hell on our behalf, saving us from sin's penalty? The answer to these questions is Yes!

As followers of Christ, we will also suffer. With man's ability to choose, God is specific in the direction suffering should come: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange was happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the Spirit of glory and God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, thief, evildoer, or meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but glorify God in that name" (First Peter 4:12-16).

Let's turn from some answers to why God allows suffering to the fairness of life. In times of tragedy, difficulty, or loss, we may ask, Why me? Why now? But when experiencing good times, do we dare ask, Why me? Why now?

Chapter 7

Life Is Not Fair, so Wisely Adjust

“Why is this happening to me? Why am I having such a difficult time? One answer is that life is supposed to be difficult! It’s what enables us to grow.

Remember, Earth is not Heaven!”

— Pastor Rick Warren

“The sooner you learn that life is not fair, the better off you’ll be.”

— Katie Couric

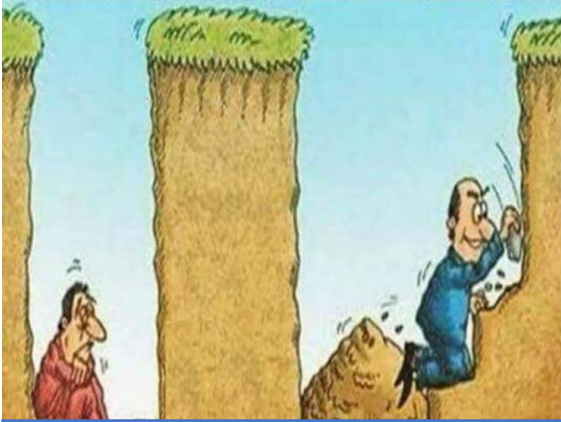


Have you tried escaping from the inescapable? In their ‘infinite knowledge and strength,’ kids often think they can do just about anything. Such was I at age seven. I already knew life wasn’t fair because I had done nothing wrong to bring about my disability. My infirmity couldn’t change, but I thought something could change – growing older.

I noticed adulthood’s hardships: significant responsibilities, long work hours, marital problems, and paying taxes. So, my emotional reaction was to stick out my chest in defiance and decide to stay at age seven. Such was the solution to avoid all adulthood difficulties, so I concluded. But like Humpty Dumpty, I came crashing to earth when my eighth birthday rolled around. Boy, was I disappointed!

Today, many people are just as naïve, believing life should be equal and tranquil. Some of the most ‘intelligent’ people believe life should be fair and trouble-free and get bitter when life isn’t perfect. Even in stringently controlled laboratory settings, the unexpected often arises. How much more in the dynamism of life, where many changes and unwanted surprises abound! Truths like “Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward” and “In this

world, you will have tribulation, ..." (Job 5:7, John 16:33) usually are not some of our favorite Bible promises.



This is about the two choices life gives every person: You sit, sulk, and dwell on how unfair life is to you. Or you figure out how to wisely adjust to an unwelcomed situation and let it work in your favor.

Which choice characterizes you?

It seems logical when bad or wicked people encounter many of life's pains as just payment for their deplorable behavior. But when the good or righteous people suffer while living morally, red flags go up, and shouts of "Life is not fair!" are heard.

Others may feel immune from trial or hardship as if an invisible, impenetrable bubble should shield them. Then, a healthy dose of reality enters, and adversity pops their bubble. And on cue, grumbling cries of, "Why me?" or "Why now?" are often voiced.

I heard of a devout Christian woman being raped, beaten, and publicly humiliated by a few men in an African country. Yet, shortly after her terrible ordeal, she had a divine impression deep within her heart in the form of a question: Can you be thankful and trust Me in this experience even though you may never know why?

In asking, "Why me?" or "Why now?" when trials come our way, is it not equally fitting to ask the same questions when good things happen to us? We often focus on a few negatives at the expense of the many positives. It's no wonder why countless are depressed, aimlessly pouting about, and lacking a zest for life. By contrast, *deliberately* counting our blessings promotes mental,

emotional, physical, and spiritual health.



Tennis superstar Arthur Ashe died of HIV/AIDS. He received contaminated blood through a transfusion during heart surgery. His greatness transcended the tennis court, for he was a gentleman whose exemplary behavior inspired many. Ashe could have become bitter, wallowed in self-pity, and blamed another guy for his painful, disabling, and deadly disease.

But Ashe maintained a grateful attitude. He explained, “If I asked why me about my troubles, I would have to ask why me about my blessings? Why my winning Wimbledon? Why my marrying a beautiful, gifted woman and having a wonderful child?”

A positive perspective is vital and requires our best effort to maintain an upbeat outlook. Eighteen months after my dear, loving stepfather died from cancer, my dog died unexpectedly. John Boy was a 90-pound yellow Lab mix. At the time, I was a month away from receiving my Master of Arts in Psychology from Pepperdine University, and academic pressures were mounting. Four days after my faithful furry friend of eight years passed, I finally gave in to my emotions, weeping over the phone with my mom.

With empathy, she comforted me by sharing her loss and the necessity of looking at the bright side. She said, “One thing I’ve learned concerning Dad’s (my stepfather) passing was to be thankful for the 15 wonderful years enjoying his companionship. I miss him, and his absence saddens me, but I cannot afford to concentrate on that. In the same way, be grateful for the years you spent with John Boy. Go and grieve, but not at the expense of forgetting the good times you spent together.”

Such was a wise lesson for me in 1983 and still is. Undoubtedly, every hardship

has some elements of good in it. Finding them may take a diligent effort, but they are there! Looking for the positive fosters gratitude and helps keep life in perspective. Yes, an optimistic perspective.



The sooner you learn that life is not fair, the better off you'll be, because you'll spend less time railing against life's unfairness and feeling aggrieved and entitled, and more time figuring out how to maximize your assets, and your talents and how to deal with things that you're not very good at.

— Condoleezza Rice —

AZ QUOTES

Regarding perspective, life isn't so much about curing as making the best out of a tragic situation. Such truth describes Christopher Reeve and his wife, Dana. Four months after Christopher became a quadriplegic, Barbara Walters interviewed this phenomenal couple on ABC's television program *20/20*. The transcript below is a little long but well worth pondering its powerful message:

In seconds, 43-year-old Christopher Reeve was transformed from a towering athletic man into a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the neck down, on the edge of death. Months later, his mind and attitude were soaring after his tragic horse-riding accident, though trapped within his body. Soaring far higher than his role as *Superman*, a movie Reeve made by the same name.

Because his spinal cord was severed from his brain, the messages necessary for normal body functioning had ceased. This created a tremendous problem with his lungs, making him dependent on a

ventilator to breathe. That was not all. His liver, bladder, and bowel function and the ability to vocalize words were adversely affected. He also was unable to sweat and experienced muscle spasms. Virtually, he had no sensation from the neck down.

Realizing the extent of his disability, Christopher suggested to his wife Dana to have the doctors pull the plug to not burden his family. “Do you still want me, even in this state?” Dana replied, “You’re still you, and I love you. I will be here for the long run, no matter what.” But even these assuring words from his adoring wife were not enough. Only after his four children entered the hospital room could Christopher feel how much they needed, wanted, and dearly loved him and that his will to live returned.

“The first two months after my injury, the demons would come and get me in the middle of the night. The hours between 2:00 AM and 7:00 AM were the worst. I couldn’t sleep but lay there thinking about what would become of me. Woe-is-me. I’m so miserable.

“In my dreams, I would be whole, riding my horse, playing with my family, working on our boat, and suddenly awake at 2:00 in the morning, and I am lying in bed, hooked to a ventilator,” Christopher remarked.

In time, the demonic, self-deprecating onslaught ended, and he now sleeps through the night. What made a marked difference in Reeve’s life? He explains, “I began to see there is a future. With the love and support of family, friends, and people worldwide – as all these things came to me – I realized their value. Then I said to myself, Man, am I lucky. I am so lucky; it is unbelievable! When things like this happen, I say, ‘Okay, something else is coming. I don’t know what it is, but I have got to find it.’”

“There is nothing easy to him,” said Dana. “Everything is a struggle. Of course, there are the things we are slowly mourning the loss and moving on from being such an active man. He does whatever he does at the highest level he can achieve. That is part of who he is.”

The accident has only strengthened their love and commitment to their



marriage. When asking Christopher what he learned from Dana, he said, “There is a true commitment. True commitment transforms you. It shows you where you stand. You have

a base to live your life. You are not on shifting sand anymore. Any relationship can grow and change. We were always happy and in love, but after the injury, we have transcended where our moments together are even more valuable than ever.”

Christopher considers Dana as his Rock of Gibraltar. She admits it is a big responsibility to have him so dependent upon her for her love and everything she does for him. Yet, instead of remorse, Dana’s commitment is steadfast. “This responsibility is a real test of the wedding vows. He’s my partner; he’s literally my other half. It is not within my imagination to do anything less than what I am doing. We will make the best possible life out of our life,” Dana remarked. “There is no question that he will continue to be a leader and a strong, funny, and lively person.”

It is emotionally hard for Dana to hug Christopher and hold his hand,

knowing he cannot hug her back or feel her touch. So, she strokes his face and shoulders, two places where he can feel.

He comments, "I'm gradually discovering that your body is not you, but the mind and the spirit are. The challenge is to move from obsessing, *Why me? Or It's not fair* to move toward what lies ahead.

Four months after the accident, I can see the opportunities and potential I couldn't see."

Reeve experienced the "genuine joy of being alive on a trip to Virginia. Every moment was more intense and valuable than ever." In addition, the vast outpouring of fan mail made him wonder why we need disasters to feel and appreciate each other.

"I'm gradually discovering that your body is not you, but the mind and the spirit are. The challenge is to move from obsessing, Why me? Or It's not fair to move toward what lies ahead."

CHRISTOPHER REEVE

Christopher senses his accident was no accident. He speaks of a far greater purpose in which overcoming personal physical hurdles becomes subordinate. "If I can help people understand that this can happen to anybody, that's worth it right there. I really feel I am on a journey. It's fascinating."

Though he expects to walk again, defying the probabilities, he graciously concedes he might not. Whatever the outcome, he deems it necessary to persevere. "Either I walk again or don't; it is that simple. It's just like a game of cards. If you think the game is worthwhile, then you just play the hand you're dealt. Sometimes, you get a lot of face

cards; sometimes, you don't. But I think the game is worthwhile. I really do."

Barbara Walters states, "Christopher Reeve has become a symbol of the best the human spirit can achieve. This is certainly not his dream role, but he carries his burden with grace and fortitude. Instead of despair, Christopher has chosen hope. Instead of pity, he asks for our help finding a cure for spinal injuries. In the meantime, Christopher Reeve is moving ahead with the love and support of the public and his family."

The joyful countenances of Christopher and Dana during the television interview were evident. The couple has gained an intense appreciation for life's beauty through humility and perseverance. Such an extraordinary family should encourage us to make the greatest of our adversities.

(NOTE: Christopher died in 2004 at age 52. Dana died in 2006 at 44.)

Lori and Dori are their birth names, and each profoundly appreciates life. They spent over 60 years of the most atypical years together. Both are happy and freely communicate with each other. One spends her time as a hospital volunteer, while the other is a semi-professional country singer.

They live lives of self-denial by giving of themselves to the activities of the other. These two endearing sisters seem inseparable, and indeed, they are.

They are congenital twins, joined at the skull, sharing bone, vital blood vessels, and brain parts. Each sister faces in the opposite direction from the other. A special wheelchair was made since one sister was born without a leg.

You would think if any two people felt shortchanged by life and by God, these two had a legitimate case. Yet, seeing them interviewed on television, viewers may have been stunned by their positive perspectives on life. Despite their severe hardships, helping and bringing others joy remains essential. They never



asked God,
“Why us?”
but accepted
their lot by
making the
best of it.
Their
unwillingness
to question
God came
from a
settled
assurance

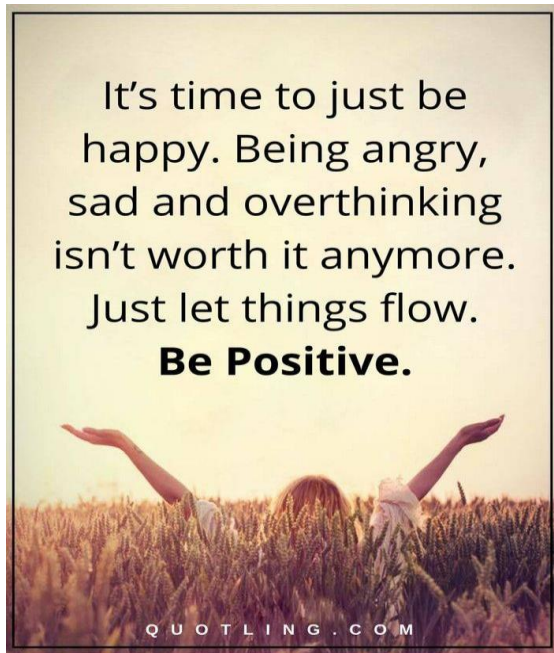
that “God had a purpose.” [Inseparable Sisters](#)

Life goes on, imperfect and unfair as it is. It is said that winners make adjustments; losers make excuses. The stories of the people mentioned above emphasize making wise adjustments when dealt a heavy blow. It is noteworthy that *these adjustments are rooted in being grateful.*

Elizabeth Hallowell offers her take on being grateful for problems: “When you realize life would be empty and boring without problems, you begin to accept them, and you can even have fun with them. When you enjoy facing problems instead of resisting them, you take care of them when they’re easy before they turn into an overwhelming mountain.”

There are two chief responses when we view life as unfair: (1) Sit in perpetual sadness, blame others and things for our misfortune, or (2) Decide to be happy and take constructive action by operating a proverbial ‘lemonade stand.’ They use life’s lemons to refresh themselves and instill courage in others in their adversities. And to thank the Lord for another day to excel in life, no matter how difficult life gets. It’s no mystery which one I’m choosing. Dear reader, you

are cordially invited to join me in making wise adjustments and being happy and positive. Are you in?



The next chapter discusses the most vulnerable and desperate, needing help. Will we turn a blind eye to their difficulty or intervene with heart and purpose? If the latter, we will enrich their lives and, in doing so, our own.

Chapter 8

Life Is Too Precious to Cheaper

There is so much loneliness
On this uncharted earth.
It seems each one's a prisoner,
Within a cell from birth.
There is such a need for union,
Such need for clasping hands,
Yet we deny the brotherhood
The human heart demands.

Anonymous



It isn't a matter of hating others, but we often find it easier not to get involved with those with legitimate needs who deserve help. Even extending simple acts of common courtesy can become burdensome.

HAVING TROUBLE
SPOTTING A SELFISH
PERSON? IT'S ABOUT
THEIR SCHEDULE, THEIR
NEEDS, THEIR HURT
FEELINGS, THEIR IDEAS,
THEIR GOALS, THEIR ...

– SHANNON THOMAS

We are born selfish and self-absorbed. *Dictionary.com* defines selfishness as “devoted to or caring only for oneself; concerned primarily with one's interests, benefits, welfare, etc., regardless of others.” Thus, we must be taught not to be selfish.

If selfishness is unchecked, it can grow into something destructive and divisive. Selfish conduct is the solvent eating away at the human bonds of love

and kindness, ideally connecting us. Being self-absorbed brings out the worst by keeping us in our little world. It impedes personal and spiritual growth and healthy interpersonal relationships.

Selfishness often causes us to forget our responsibility to someone else or denies one's duty. Selfish people discount the value of others genuinely needing help. Frequently, the self-absorbed can resent anyone who interferes with what they are doing or plan to do.

By contrast, selfless giving gets us out of ourselves and creates a rewarding experience. I relearned this lesson from none other than my Great Dane, Sarah. She sleeps on a cushion in one corner of my bedroom floor. I get out of bed on cold nights and gently cover her again with a blanket around 3:00 because she has repositioned herself, making the blanket fall off. Instead of focusing on the inconvenience, I find myself appreciating Sarah more.

Beyond our pets, sacrificial giving should be the norm among people. For example, resolving interpersonal differences is most likely achieved through sacrificial giving: displaying humility and forgiving each other. Unfortunately, the prideful resist doing this kind and considerate act.

Moving from being self-centered and self-absorbed to being selfless is often a lifelong process. Some find making this transition easier than others. The strides made produce emotional and spiritual maturity. It makes us increasingly helpful, understanding, accepting, grateful, compassionate, gentle, godly, and generous. Yet, these results come at a cost for most of us, requiring persistent effort. Why? Because we are battling our base, sensual nature, where the primary concern and care for oneself have a strong pull.

Happiness doesn't come
through selfishness, but
through

selflessness.

Everything you do comes
back around.

Admittedly, some people seem to be givers throughout their life. Observers comment so-and-so doesn't have a selfish bone in his body. Whether born that way or learned from an early age to keep selfish desires in check, the motive should be the same: Giving is more blessed than receiving.

We provide immediate help regardless of inconvenience when we see someone in need. Wise advice, right? Well, it depends on the situation and how the Lord directs.

Do you feel uncomfortable around those experiencing tough times? If so, you are like me. I may *feel* uncomfortable, but that's not a legitimate excuse to keep sitting on my hands. Many times, I play the role of rescuer. At the drop of a hat, I avail myself to meet the needs of others. At times, being a rescuer is appropriate, but if it is a pattern, as was the case with me, self-evaluation is in order:

- Am I only doing it to make me feel good?
- Am I only doing it to impress others?
- Is my generosity counterproductive by enabling others?
- Can I trust the person and wait patiently to find success on his own?

When possible, one helpful option is to teach someone a lasting skill, thus ending his reliance on others. As the ancient saying advises, *Give a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and he is provided for a lifetime.*

Rescuing others isn't always appropriate, nor is helping everyone who says they are in need. Opportunists abound, armed with an arsenal of sad stories, pulling at our heartstrings. Though challenging, I believe the key is discerning what kind of help people *need* – not necessarily what they *want* or *desire*, and acting accordingly. Sometimes, the loving and caring way to help is to do nothing. That's right, nothing. In such cases, the solution to their predicament is up to them.

As a teen, my parents taught me never to use my disability as an excuse not to help others when they justly need it. To respect people for who they are, for they possess intrinsic value regardless of background, social status, ethnicity, or degree

of physical and mental ability. The Golden Rule tells us to treat others the same way we want to be treated.

Regardless of concerted efforts to recycle bottles, cans, and paper, we live in a throwaway society regarding the most vulnerable among us. Tragically, when the elderly, the unborn, and the suicidal warrant our time and energy, we often sit unmoved. We can forfeit our moral and God-given responsibility to help these priceless souls. Though not always a conscious admission, they are often viewed as inconvenient, bothersome, and even burdensome by interfering with our careers and comfort zones.

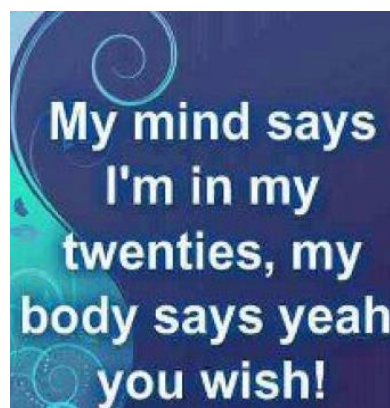
Let's consider how we have cheapened human life instead of maintaining its precious value.

The Elderly

Not many generations ago, the United States and third-world countries viewed their elderly alike. Each treated older adults with dignity and was vital to their social fabric. Moreover, the younger members regarded older members as invaluable sources of wisdom, knowledge, and good role models for future generations.

When parents could no longer live independently, they gladly were welcomed into their adult children's homes, where they enjoyed loving care. As a result, the family unit remained close and productive, filled with warmth where each generation benefited from the other.

Sadly, this traditional cross-generation living experience is fast falling by the wayside. As a result, the United States has a significant blot or stain, as I see it. Our seniors are increasingly susceptible to an age where we dispose of so much



with little thought. No, not euthanasia (thankfully), but by not giving them the proper honor and place in our homes and culture.

Many times, seniors are put into facilities for the aged for legitimate reasons.



These vital services help care for seniors' specialized physical and medical needs. These facilities also remove much of the burden of loving and devoted family members who cannot provide such skilled care.

Yet, I wonder if the real reasons we give for placing parents in such facilities are often less than admirable. We convince ourselves our parents are too slow, old-fashioned in their thinking, too complaining, too much hassle to care for, or would interfere too much with our

professional pursuits. But try using these reasons to persuade "primitive" peoples in third-world countries. To our shame, they can teach us (all-knowing, all-wise) Americans a lesson about forbearance, love, and inclusion toward our elderly.

We may sincerely appreciate our parents' enormous sacrifices in raising us, but such giving may not be returned when they need our help. A mother can care for ten children, but ten adult children sometimes cannot (or won't) care for one mother. Often,

A mother can care for ten children, but ten adult children sometimes cannot (or won't) care for one mother. Often, seniors feel rejected and like castoffs.

seniors feel rejected and like castoffs. Though living nearby, many family members only make obligatory visits on holidays or birthdays. *ABC News* reported that many never got a visitor of Florida's millions of seniors. It is no wonder why nursing homes are frequently considered the last stop before the grave.

In my upbringing, and later aided by my Christian faith, I saw how valuable our seniors are. Few people have impacted my life as much as my former next-door neighbor John Edge. Born in 1901 and having a sixth-grade education, John was rich in life experiences – 'been there,' 'done that.'

Almost daily, we talked about 20th-century history, philosophical issues, and, most importantly, the meaning of life. Realizing his collective knowledge of some 70 years at the time was no match for this kid with a couple of years of college, I was smart enough to listen and learn.

It's been a privilege to visit and make friends with hundreds of residents in nursing homes for nearly 30 years. It wasn't easy to adapt to the sights, sounds, and smells, even in the most well-kept facilities. Sadly, the faces of

despair and loneliness are widespread. Some hallways are lined with residents in wheelchairs yelling out of frustration and pain. And some vocalized repetitive words or sentences due to dementia.

Mostly, I travel alone by city buses to visit these precious souls. The atmosphere is not too appealing. But lest I forget the doctor's advice to my parents decades ago



to institutionalize me, I continue to happily visit. I am mindful that all individuals have inherent worth and beauty regardless of their diminished physical and mental abilities.



Their frail bodies make them vulnerable to abuse, causing them to be very cautious around new people. And this is particularly the case with me. Understandably, my clumsy physical appearance and the sound of my deep, muffled voice frequently make them cower back or be suspicious.

However, words cannot describe the satisfaction derived when I take the time to make them feel valued. Giving a gentle touch, a warm smile, a helping hand, a listening ear, and encouraging words works wonders. They create trust and friendships. And the joy, comfort, and meaningful interaction they give me are beyond belief.

Knowing their next breath could be their last, the thought of eternity weighs heavy for many. Seniors might need assurance during these sunset years; bright hope is on the horizon – their Maker loves them just the way they are. Jeremiah's truth spoken long ago partly motivates my visits: "The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved" (Jeremiah 8:20).

I am grateful to God for using me to persuade many elderly gently to Him. Though their bodies continue to waste away, their spirits frequently soar. And though some are treated as social outcasts, the Lord gladly calls them His own.

I met Sylvia, a spunky woman who is 80+. She said, "These may be my golden

years, but I'm a bit tarnished." Her comment got me thinking: What if we began giving seniors the place of honor they deserve, including them in our daily lives whenever possible? Probably, they would shine brightly again, and maybe, for the first time, so would we, no matter our age. [Young girl makes seniors feel remembered and cherished.](#)

The Unborn

Let's go from the golden years back to ground zero and consider the modern treatment of many unborn.

Around 1970, I became sympathetic to the pro-choice cause, for their arguments seemed sensible: A woman can choose what is best for her. Moreover, she has the sole right to her body, especially if she regards the pregnancy as only a *tissue mass*. And, no more failed back-alley abortions, reducing the risks of terrible medical outcomes for women. Finally, why give birth only to have an unwanted baby anyway?

My perception of anyone opposing such credible arguments had to be narrow-minded. I viewed the "religious right" as fitting this description perfectly and found their disapproval of abortion clinics without much merit.

Even before becoming a Christian, my pro-choice position changed, and I



realized that I and everyone I knew could have been aborted. What a horrific thought! If there is no sanctity within the



womb,
the
unborn
is no
greater

worth than a pesky insect.

Maybe the most compelling argument against abortion stems not from the Bible but from biology. Christian defender Greg Koukl provides this insight:

Suppose a boy asks his mother, “Can I kill this?” as she has her back turned toward her son. She cannot responsibly answer unless she turns around and knows what “this” is. If it’s a cockroach, smash it. If it’s a mosquito, swat it. If it’s a pet bunny, no. If it’s a kid down the street, absolutely not!

Knowing what “this” is shifts the focus to the only important question on the abortion issue: What is the nature of the unborn? Notice I use the term “unborn.” It is an ambiguous word everyone can live with rather than an “embryo,” “fetus,” “baby,” or “human.”

In answering the question about the nature of the unborn, three observations are clear: First, it is alive because abortion kills something. This something is a patch of individual cells attached to the woman. Second, these cells are different than the mother. We know this because a pregnant woman with no penis can have an unborn with a penis. And third, once the sperm fertilizes the egg, it becomes a separate living being. Yes, it is a living being, not just a random cell like a skin cell.

Only one question remains: What *kind* of being is it? According to the *Law of Biogenesis*, every living being is a distinct kind of being. This law teaches two things: All life comes from pre-existent life, and all life reproduces after its kind. Thus, any offspring of two beings is exactly like its mother and father. Dogs have puppies, not kittens. Human beings produce another being and absolutely nothing less than a human being.

But when does it become a human being? At conception, for it is a being when it comes into existence. Therefore, the being it is *is human*. Remember, this is all according to biology.



Despite different stages of development, all are human beings. They cannot be otherwise.

Before the ethical question, let's summarize. A pregnant mother has a separate, distinct, living, and growing human being inside her. As it develops, it changes shape; as its capacities are realized, it never becomes human. It is always human.

Critics may say an acorn is not an oak tree. Sure, that's like saying a child is not an adult. But an acorn is oak, just like an oak tree is an oak. They are both oaks but at different stages of development. Thus,

an unborn is at an embryonic and fetal stage; the newborn is at the baby and the child stage; an adult is at the adult and senior stages. Despite different stages of development, all are human beings. They cannot be otherwise.

Now for the ethical question of the abortion issue: How are we obliged to treat a human being considered to be "in the way" and cannot defend himself? Again, the answer is no different than killing any other bona fide human – we don't, regardless of disability, financial burden, or inconvenience.

Dennis Prager doesn't tackle whether abortion should be legal or illegal. His five-minute video does focus on [The Most Important Question About Abortion](#).

Apart from endangering the mother's life, the above discussion is why I consider abortion murder. People could infer I favor shooting abortion doctors and bombing their clinics to save innocent, defenseless human lives. Two wrongs don't make a right. I believe such violence only shows pro-abortionists the hypocrisy of those who claim they are for life but kill outside the womb.

At times, I stood outside an abortion clinic with others, praying for women headed into the building to have a change of heart. Occasionally, women listened to us as we respectfully tried to reason with them. Thankfully, a few chose not to abort.

One of my most memorable exchanges wasn't with a woman but with a married man visibly distressed. He was trying to find his wife, who had left an appointment reminder on their bedroom dresser. The note had the clinic's name, address, and appointment time. The troubled man felt betrayed by his wife, who had an abortion without consent. "My baby, my precious baby, is dead," he wildly cried aloud as tears streamed down his cheeks. "This was my baby, too, and she never asked me!" I tried to comfort him but to no avail.



**YOU MAY
CHOOSE TO
LOOK THE OTHER
WAY, BUT YOU
CAN NEVER SAY
AGAIN THAT
YOU DID NOT
KNOW...**



Whether you are pro-life or pro-choice, the five questions below merit your careful consideration:

What is the difference between a tissue mass and a baby? Decades ago, I

knew a woman who was given medicine-inducing labor nearly eight months into pregnancy. This is because staying inside the womb threatens the mother's and unborn's health and life. This disorder is known as *preeclampsia*. The preemie was given intense medical attention for weeks before the baby went home.

Is there any difference between partial-birth abortions (abortions within the third trimester) and inducing labor within the same trimester? You tell me. In both situations, removal occurs despite the difference in terminology: a "tissue mass" and a "baby."

Isn't it prudent to make adoption a top priority rather than abort? With one out of four pregnancies terminated, where is our logic in aborting, given so many want to adopt? Have we turned a blind eye to the nearly 900,000 abortions performed yearly while about 135,000 babies/children are adopted annually in the United States?

Imagine if women with unwanted pregnancies were encouraged to give birth, followed by adoption. (An [open adoption](#) is an option worth considering.) What joy a baby could bring to a couple or a single person who would provide a loving, nurturing environment. The young life, in time, is challenged to find his unique niche in being a positive role model.

Where is our priority in living sexually responsible lives? By bringing the unborn to term, both parents own up to their actions and make the required sacrifices for the baby's well-being. And if a single person is sexually active, what is wrong with raising the baby yourself? Novel idea, huh? Think what a good example it sets for others who consider aborting the unborn or offering up the baby for adoption.

Why deal with the possibility of a bothersome conscience and a sharp decline in mental health? Bringing the unborn to term averts the torment of any second thoughts about having made the wrong decision. Misgivings can take a

heavy toll by an irreversible action.

Carefully consider this quote: “Women who had an abortion were 34 percent



**Misgivings can take
a heavy toll by an
irreversible action.**

more likely to develop an anxiety disorder, 37 percent more likely to experience depression, 110 percent more likely to abuse alcohol, 155 percent more likely to commit suicide, and 220 percent more likely to use marijuana.”

Some might think this quote is from a right-

wing or pro-life propaganda media outlet. Well, think again. These statistics are from *CBS News*, an article titled “Abortion Tied to Sharp Decline in Women’s Mental Health,” September 1, 2011.

Why does the pro-choice crowd hate late-term ultrasounds? States requiring women to view their ultrasound images can still opt for an abortion. However, according to *TheBlaze*, about 90 percent of women intending to abort decided against it after seeing the ultrasound images of what is growing inside them, clearly resembling a baby. And as a deterrent, someone commented, “If you want an abortion, you should be required to watch one performed.”

Before concluding this section on the unborn, there are encouraging signs to protect the unborn’s life. One hopeful sign comes from the world’s most powerful political leader. In a January 2018 commentary, “The President and the March for Life,” Albert Mohler at *townhallreview.com* wrote the following:

The president recently made a historic appearance by satellite transmission to the *March for Life*, becoming the first president of the

United States to do so.

Just a few years ago, President Trump had described himself as very pro-choice, but now he can only be described in his actions and statements as very pro-life.

I cannot dream of understanding exactly how he came from a pro-choice position to a pro-life position, but I know this: he put himself very much on the line in that webcast of the *March for Life*. He has also put himself and his administration on the line for the pro-life position in numerous executive orders and developments, even just the day before.

Whatever happened in the thinking and the heart of Donald Trump's policies over the last several years must happen amongst millions of our fellow Americans. That's what we strive for, hope for, pray for, and that's what we work for.

The Suicidal

Today, the "good life" means self-fulfillment, personal satisfaction, and successfully avoiding hardship and pain. At least, that's what the movies tell us, and we often believe this fantasy ourselves. Sadly, in our pleasure-seeking society, any rocking of the boat in our lives, and some are ready to jump ship – struggling with negative and suicidal thoughts, particularly wanting to end life.

We lost much of the social stigma once related to suicide. The entertainment industry often trivializes taking one's life and sometimes even glorifies it. In the 1950s and 1960s, I saw family and friends go to great lengths to see a troubled soul develop a strong will to live. In those days, suicide was considered a horrific act.

In those days, **suicide** was considered a **horrific act**.

At age 13, I found mom attempting suicide using natural gas from unlit stove burners. I encouraged her to get help. Upset over the divorce from my dad, she was treated at a psychiatric ward for a week, returning to a welcoming home.

These days, there is a tendency to sidestep suicidal intervention by extending “understanding and compassion” instead. A statement like, ‘Poor guy, he’s been rejected by many. It would be a blessing if he ended it all, so he doesn’t get hurt further,’ is humanistic hogwash! Such a statement is anything but understanding and compassionate.

Natural law is violated when one commits suicide because we instinctively seek self-preservation, not self-destruction. But what about those who firmly defend taking one’s life as a morally acceptable option? Would they first go to great lengths to persuade a depressed soul not to attempt suicide? It's not likely.

I find my words of encouragement to the suicidal are only as helpful as their ability to embrace and set in motion at least some of the following truths:

They are not alone in their misery. The suicidal don’t have to feel ashamed or think they are among a few experiencing severe problems and everyone else is doing just fine. No, we all have difficulties and vary in our ability to cope at any given time.

Taking one’s life affects others negatively. Family and friends are devastated, suffering enormous grief, ongoing physical and emotional pain, and torment. Survivors are often haunted by second-guessing themselves and how they could have prevented the tragedy. And sadly, taking one’s life encourages copycat behavior. [Suicide: The](#)



[Impact on Believers](#)

Their lives matter. Despite feeling that the world would be better without them, the suicidal have inherent value since their lives are gifts. They, as is us all, are accountable to God. Promoting good mental health and positively impacting those around them is a worthy endeavor.



Take advantage of enthusiastic supporters. There are a host of people eager to assist through one's depression. Whether it's a mental health professional, a doctor, a pastor, trusted family members, or an appropriate support group online, be bold to seek help without delay.

There is hope for a bright tomorrow. Even if they take tiny baby steps in fruitful lives by doing well for themselves and others, tomorrow can be met with new purpose and optimism.

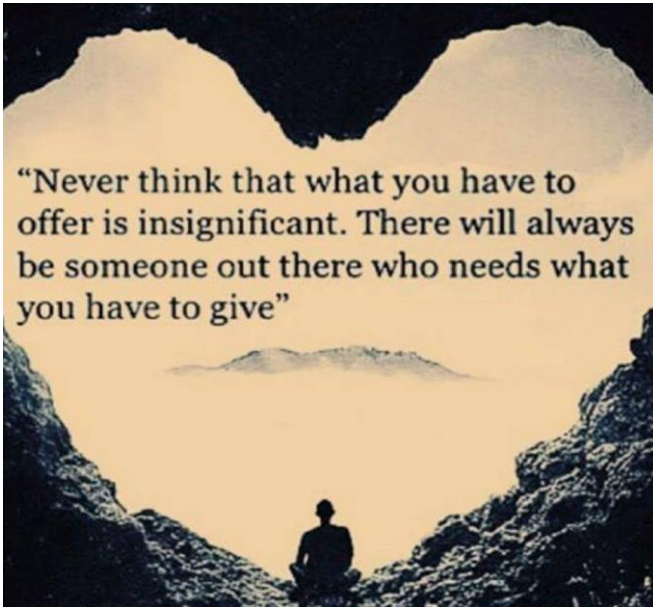
Some criticize me for making the above five points "too simplistic." One woman accused me of being "enormously ignorant. WOW!" For the record, I didn't say changing one's mental or emotional misery with a hopeful outlook is easy or quick. Progress is often complicated and slow, and considerable effort is expended and required. Such is especially true when deep-seated mental issues and medical issues are involved.

I'm not a psychotherapist, but I know life is a daily struggle with many choices.



Convincing ourselves that we can't do something means we seal our fate. And regarding our topic, it is a dismal fate. But we can change a grim, depressed, destructive destiny. So, let's cut the "I can't do it" card by (1) stopping the

excuse-making, and (2) choosing life-enriching endeavors. It won't be easy, but life and death hang in the balance, and choosing life is gloriously rewarding!



Allow me to share a different short video of the impactful story of Paige Hunter. Many consider her an *Earth Angel*. [Messages of hope tied to a bridge.](#) You and I can impact others in need, also. Someone wisely wrote, "Never think that what you have to offer is insignificant. There will always be someone out there that needs what you have to give."

Consider the lives of Arthur Rubinstein and William Cowper. Both came to wondrous conclusions after their failed suicide attempts.

As the most celebrated classical pianist of the 20th century, Arthur Rubinstein allowed his depression to try hanging himself inside his garage. As he kicked the chair out from under him, the rope snapped. He staggered outside and suddenly found himself overwhelmed. Overwhelmed with the beauty of life! Later in life, he repeatedly described himself as "the happiest man he knows."

Like Rubinstein, William Cowper's rope broke as well. Then he went to a bridge where the deepest part of the river was to drown himself, but onlookers kept him from jumping into the water. At home, he pulled an ornamental sword off the wall and desperately thrust it into his chest. But his rib bone snapped the

blade in two. At that instant, he exclaimed, "Lord, forgive me!" Upon these three words, Jesus Christ profoundly came into his life. Cowper wrote a poem that became the *Light Shining Out of Darkness* hymn, also titled [God Moves in a Mysterious Way](#).

Church worshipers sang Cowper's lyrics years later. The words gladdened their hearts, and renewed hope sprang up despite a tornado devastating their homes days before. Yes, life is beautiful when choosing the bright side of adversity.

Many consider the remarkable outcomes surrounding Paige Hunter, Arthur Rubinstein, and William Cowper as feel-good stories.

Indeed, they are positive stories, but what about you, dear reader? Are you struggling with sadness, depression, or thoughts of ending your life? If yes, many people are experiencing the same pain as you. Please take to heart the comforting and encouraging words in this 12-minute video,

I don't think suicidal people get enough credit for not acting on their suicidal thoughts.

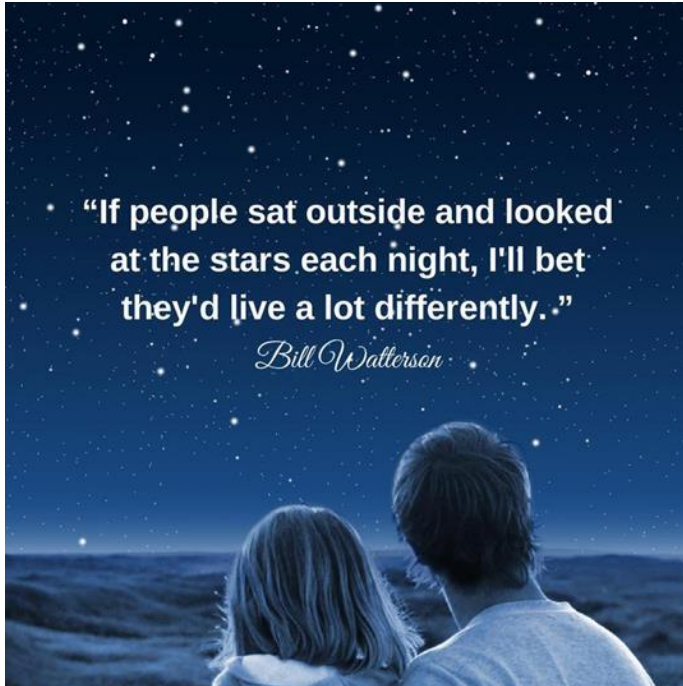
This post is for all of you who have survived the urge to end your life, either coming out the other side or still fighting to stay alive.

I noticed how when someone has a physical illness such as cancer, and they come out the other side or even remission, they are able to celebrate surviving. I think all of the survivors of being suicidal should too.

Congratulations, and keep on fighting.

[Rick Warren's message for those considering suicide](#). You may save your life. Or save someone else's life by intervening.

Two significant problems today are the high cost of living and the cheapness of human life. Maybe we cannot lower the cost of living, but we can deem human life as infinitely precious, dare I say, sacred. The Creator of the stars also created us. Ever wonder what message God tells you and me as we gaze into the night sky?



Mandy Hale motivates people such as stargazers to “make a difference in someone’s life. You don’t have to be brilliant, rich, beautiful, or perfect. You just need to care enough and be there.”

Along with human life, our dreams and aspirations are precious when acted on. This topic is discussed next.

Dare to Dream! Dare to Act!

“There are risks and costs to a program of action, but they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction.”

— President John F. Kennedy



We should have dreams and aspirations so grand and decent that they need our best effort to bring them into reality. If this is not our approach, we often shortchange others and ourselves and live disgruntled and bitter. And when God plants a dream inside us, it will usually be tough to fulfill on our own. Why? So God can be a big part of bringing it to pass, and we can become better people as He guides us along this brave path.

Essayist and poet Henry David Thoreau remarks, “Dreams are the touchstones of our characters.” As yardsticks or standards of our characters, be it far from us when our dreams only amount to daydreams. Life is too short and too crucial for time wasted by lazy daydreaming.

Some dreams appear benevolent and logical but may not achieve the greater good. A husband wants his wife to work full-time instead of raising and homeschooling their two kids. This is so he can return to school to be a better provider financially. Though his motive is admirable, such a change in the family structure would severely jeopardize their children’s enriched upbringing and learning. “In this world, it is not what we take up, but what we give up, that makes us rich,” asserts H.W. Beecher.

Initially, I intended to title this chapter *Live Out Your Dreams!* Soon, I realized many of us are scared to even dream. And if we want to dream big and venture out, what frequently holds us back are fearing disappointment, ridicule, failure,

self-doubt, or rejection. Thus, we consign ourselves to the status quo. Abbie Hoffman says, “The status quo sits on society like fat on cold chicken soup, and it’s quite content to be what it is. There won’t be a change unless someone comes along to stir things up.”

It is important to note there are times when maintaining the status quo is perfectly fine. So, when is it okay to challenge it? I believe it is when there is an



opportunity to improve the situation. Admittedly, this is subjective; while one person deems it an improvement, another may not think it’s better.

Innovators, visionaries, dreamers, and ambitious thinkers have a common thread: taking risks and not giving up despite difficulties and failures.

Edward James Olmos, an actor and humanitarian, did not give up. Addressing students at a middle school, he said, “I started just like you. I had no natural talents or gifts. I’m a perfect example of what happens to someone who holds onto a dream.”

Don’t be afraid to fail; be afraid not to try. Fear can thwart the noblest dreams by concentrating on the impossibility of their fulfillment. We tend to write it off without encouraging signs. But that’s where strong faith and hard work can sometimes turn a dream into reality. Taking a risk is being committed and, with it, possibly suffering ridicule and failure.

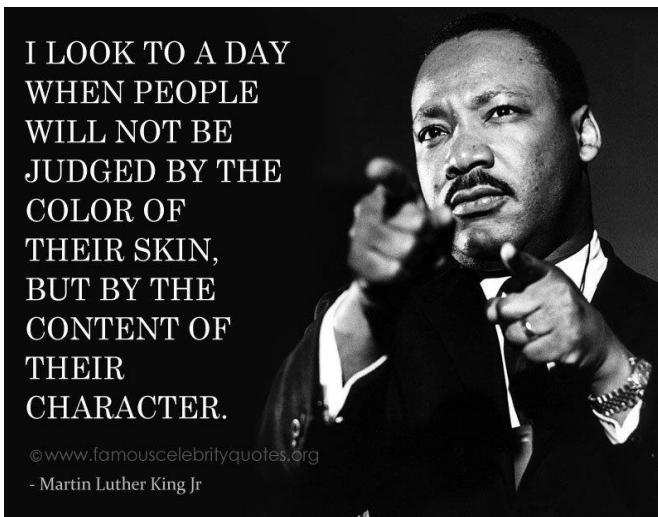
My best friend, Dana, had terminal cancer at the time at age 32. He

experienced naysayers but held to the dream God would heal him. It never happened. His optimism wasn't some desperate ploy by bargaining with God. It was based on an attitude he embraced long before his cancer. A positive outlook holding:

- At times, God heals others miraculously.
- Nothing is impossible with God.
- "A turtle never moves until he sticks his head out first," a bold life principle Dana confidently embraced.

Dana's personality did not change during those final months. He remained gracious and continued to care for the needs and interests of others. Such actions, done in good faith, can be the antidote to despair. There is something marvelously worthy about going beyond the norm, not allowing a noble and courageous dream to die before we do.

Baptist minister and civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. said, "I have a



dream that "people will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." Despite physical violence and hateful speech from his opposers, King peacefully and compassionately held fast to his conviction. He did not allow this virtuous dream to die before his

assassination. Thankfully, his vision is increasingly realized with each passing year.

Martin Luther King's life underscores the following words of Helen Keller:

“Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.”

American explorer Matthew Henson provides further insight: “There can be no conquest to the man who dwells in a groveling life’s narrow and small environment. There can be no vision of the man whose horizon is limited by the bounds of self. But men who had high ideals and received great visions have achieved the great things of the world, the world’s great accomplishments. The path is not easy, the climbing is rugged and hard, but the glory at the end is worthwhile.”

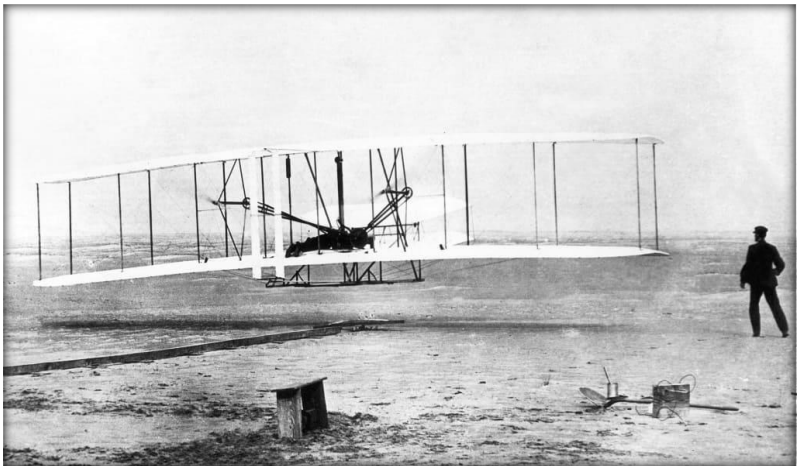
Some dreams materialize because their time has come to satisfy society’s needs and wants, technology, science, leisure, transportation, etc. In 1903, a dream became a reality. Necessity dictated an improved travel mode, which eluded humanity through past ages.

When it happened, ironically, it only lasted about 12 seconds! It traveled 120 feet, rose roughly 10 feet high, and had 30 miles per hour airspeed. Orville Wright had made the world’s first successful engine-powered flight. It was man’s

beginning of no longer drooling with envy as birds flew overhead.

(Today, we watch these marvelous creatures fly overhead, but

with a watchful eye to dodge their droppings.)



When advancements in aviation began to take flight, aviator Amelia Earhart said, In all the marvels of modern invention ... flying is perhaps the most dramatic of recent scientific attainment. In 30 odd years, the world has seen an inventor's dream, first materialized by the Wright brothers at Kitty Hawk, become an everyday actuality." Wow, the power and courage of an inventor's dream came to pass through determined effort!

It's a popular notion that blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed. Such a concept makes common sense. The flip side of this argument is nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Although discretion comes into play here, I opt to risk in hopes of profiting rather than being disgruntled by mediocrity or keeping the stale status quo. How about you?

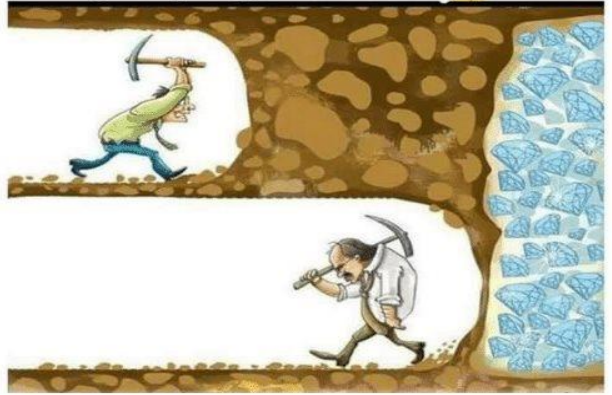
Industrialist and automaker Henry Ford spoke of the natural tendency to hold back rather than blaze a trail. He said, "The majority of the people are naturally stragglers. They are not in the world to pioneer but to be as happy as possible. If pioneering a cause brings discomfort, they would rather not be among the pioneers. They would rather stand on the sidelines and wait and see which proves the stronger in the combat between truth and error. Though they may have a lazy faith that truth, at last, will win, they do not wish to lend premature support."

Some of our most significant inventors received much encouragement when they wanted to abandon their dreams. Let's encourage others to understand what Ralph Waldo Emerson meant, "And what is a weed? A plant whose virtues have not been discovered."

Though a new dream can provide new hope, having no plan for success is not wise. Dr. Robert Schuller explains, "Most people who fail do so not because they lack talent, training, money, or opportunity. Rather, they didn't plan to

succeed. Though we don't know what tomorrow may bring, failure is assured if we cast our fate to the wind. As much as possible, plan your future, for you will have to live in it. Use all the tools and resources available to you. If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail." Dr. Schuller suggests a few fundamentals to maximize a plan's success:

You never know how close you are, so never give up on your dreams ! 👍



Set definite goals. Write them down and draw a picture of their attainment. Affirm out loud your hope for success daily.

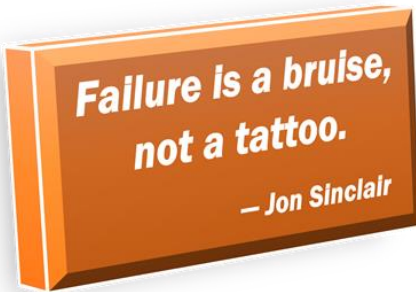
Break up each goal into smaller, more attainable parts or phases.

Every athlete knows that if he is to win a medal, he must be first successful in the small things (e.g., good nutrition, proper rest, and an effective exercise program) if he is to succeed.

Whenever possible, set a definite time limit. Each phase must be accomplished within this limit. Otherwise, you will forfeit the progress made thus far through distraction, procrastination, and delay.

Dr. Schuller heard a woman say she never made any goals for herself because she would have nothing to look forward to if she reached them. Schuller replied, "Your greatest danger will not be failing to reach your goal. Your greatest danger is making it and failing to set new goals. Understand that goal setting is a never-ending activity of living persons and institutions. It is the pulse beat that tells you there's life."

It will be ideal if the merits or worthiness of dreams are evident. That is, which dreams to diligently pursue and which ones to discard. Since there is no formula for a dream's worthiness, I believe the prudent course is to evaluate the situation periodically. Is the dream still honorable, relevant, and delivering the desired result? And are the necessary resources present to possibly make it a reality? If you can't tell, do not be too quick to discard the dream. "There are no hopeless situations; only men who have grown hopeless about them," says Clare B. Luce.



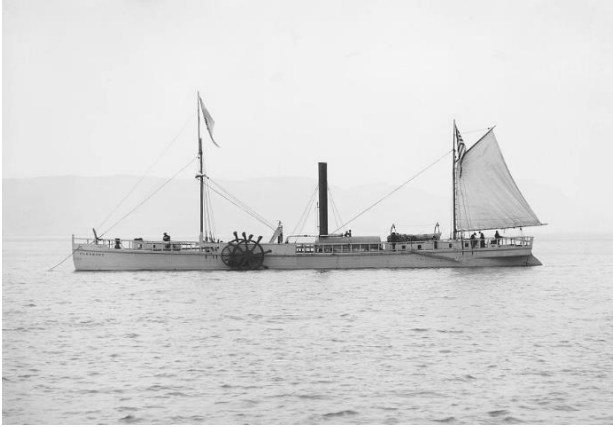
Daily living brings its share of failures and discouragements, adversely affecting mood, physical and mental health, and healthy interaction with people. Instead of allowing adversities to make us crabby where no one wants to be around us, let's face our difficulties with a refreshing approach. Yes, a determination to learn from them as Thomas Edison did, putting a refreshing, positive perspective on failure.

This brilliant inventor sought to find the most suitable plant species of rubber grown on American soil. He conducted thousands of experiments; each failed. Frustrated, one of his assistants commented, "Mr. Edison, we performed thousands of experiments and still no results." Edison exclaimed, "We have wonderful results. We now know thousands of things that won't work!"

We fail, but this doesn't make us a failure, especially if we learn from failure. We do not fail all the time; no one does. Likewise, we do not succeed all the time; no one does. We can use our failures as stepping stones to success. *Our attitude, more than most factors, determines our success or failure.*

In a Christian radio broadcast, June Hunt gave six arguments for why we fear failure and how others have used failure as stepping-stones to success:

They will make fun of me if I fail. This is a fear of ridicule. People



laughed at Robert Fulton's strange, smoking craft chugging down the river (left). The *Clemont*, nicknamed "Fulton's Folly" by those mocking him, was the first successful steamboat

in 1807. So, just because people may laugh or mock you doesn't mean you should give up on your endeavor. If you believe God is leading you to do something, do it. Then, trust Him to bring the results.

I'm going to fail anyway, so why try? Albert Einstein failed his university entrance exams on his first attempt. Here, one of the greatest minds the world has ever known did not become discouraged when he failed.

We often condemn ourselves by saying, "But I've made so many dumb mistakes." Well, consider Henry Ford. He forgot to put a reverse gear in the first car he made and marketed. What if he had given up?

Gathering our little toys, going home, and licking our wounds is tempting. Instead, we must learn from our mistakes and move forward, letting God be the master designer of our lives.

It has never been done that way before. It won't work. It doesn't matter what has not been done before. The question again comes down to what God is leading you to do. The Wright brothers first offered their flying machine to the United States government but were not taken

seriously. A few years later, they signed a contract with the United States Department of War for the first military airplane.

I don't think I can do it. Understandably, you would think a baseball player who struck out 1,330 times would undoubtedly experience a lack of confidence.

His failures did not stop him from swinging the bat, connecting 714 times for home runs. Babe Ruth should inspire us all to keep swinging when opportunities in life come our way.

A lack of conviction. A person who contends it really doesn't matter is setting himself up for failure. Does it matter to you and me to turn on a light instead of cautiously groping through a dark room? Of course. Thomas Edison thought it mattered as well. His conviction propelled him forward despite a multitude of failures, finally developing the light bulb.

Not trusting in God's provision. Some say, "I really don't have what it takes." Well, consider Paderewski, the great pianist. His music teacher told him his hands were too small to master the piano when studying the piano. But the question is, was he destined by God to be a pianist? Yes, he was.

Often, recounting mistakes and failures stir up anger and despair. God understands our failures infinitely better than we do, so let's be positive. Don't forget success, at times, comes through the back door. Thus, humbly learn from our mistakes and failures and boldly go forward.

A mistake that makes you humble
is better than
an achievement
that makes you arrogant



Are “successful people” commonly thought to get the most out of life different from what society labels “failures”? Are there born winners due to a genetic endowment, or could it be a learned, practiced behavior that is shaped and modified over time?

Dr. Irene Consorla interviewed 20 of Britain’s most successful men. She found they were optimistic and willing to take responsibility when things went wrong, not blaming someone else. They were also honest and vulnerable.

They made a teacher out of failure. Some of them had a sizable failure rate. Yet, they remained so active and experimental and had so many projects that their success rate was extremely high.

Today, it is wonderful to congratulate those who made their dreams a reality!



We might feel resentful or envious when our dreams seem out of reach, but we can decide to be happy for them instead. This positive mindset pleases God and brings calmness to our hearts. And maybe this cheerful mindset creates more chances to see our dreams come to fruition. [She Was a Jobless,](#)

[Penniless, Single Mother With Depression.](#)

Successful people are not only measured by *doing* but also by *being*. And notably by being grateful (thankful, happy) no matter what they face. The outcome of expressing gratitude is amazing. That’s what the next chapter is all about.

Gratitude Is Amazing

“A grateful heart is the beginning of greatness. It is an expression of humility. It is a foundation for the development of such virtues as prayer, faith, courage, contentment, happiness, love, and well-being.”

— James E. Faust



We frequently waste precious time and energy rehearsing bad memories and complaining about people, circumstances, things, and failures. Such a practice negatively affects our mood, mental and physical health, association with others, appreciation of life’s beauty, and relationship with God. For those wanting to change course, start practicing what doesn’t come easy or naturally: being grateful for what we *already have*.



It takes no effort to complain. But *it takes a concerted effort to cultivate gratitude*. A friend said, “When failures and chaotic events attack my mind to bring me low, I refer to my Gratitude List for comfort, peace, and to remember God’s goodness.”

Years before her passing, Mom and I sat at the kitchen table daily, sharing one thing we were

thankful for. Whether it was something new or not, the little time it took to purposefully voice brought a greater appreciation of each other and what we have. Amazingly, it kept life in a positive perspective. The cheer of this simple

exercise prevented us from possible anxiety or depression.

Not grateful for anything? Start listing what you like. Perhaps it's coffee, a scenic sky, or fragrant flowers. Your Like List may soon become part of your expanded Gratitude List with consistent effort. Whenever we feel something is missing, let's look at what we overwhelmingly have and thank God for it.

William Arthur Ward notes, "Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it." I believe a significant way to express gratitude is by serving others, commonly through volunteer work. There are probably plenty of volunteer opportunities within your community. Join a visiting program for shut-ins, be a Big Brother or a Big Sister, make phone calls on behalf of a nonprofit organization you believe in, read aloud for the visually impaired, provide Meals On Wheels, or be faithful in a church-related outreach. Busying oneself by helping others can keep us grateful and is often an essential remedy for those tempted to be self-absorbed, anxiety-ridden, or depressed.

A grateful attitude for others often requires prioritizing what is most valuable. Judging only by surface appearances can prevent valuing a person's true beauty. Society places a premium on an attractive physical appearance, and I fall into this trap. I want others to look past my disability to what lies within. But being grateful quickly recognizes inner beauty and fosters joy!

A woman said, "One key lesson I learned is not to size people up by looks. The nicest men can be short, fat, bald, skinny – not handsome in some surface way. So what! Look deeper for their true values. The possibilities for finding friends are endless."

Episcopal priest Malcolm Boyd says, "Many people can't find a friend or partner because they demand perfection, which



No one in this world is pure and perfect. If you avoid people for their mistakes, you will be alone in this world. So judge less and love more.

does not exist. So, they overlook wonderful people, companionship, inspiration, and joy. Instead of being grateful for their gifts, they're looking for the end of the rainbow."

It takes no effort to fault-find, but is this the best way to win friends and influence people? Certainly not. Imagine a married couple showing gratitude by emphasizing the other's good and admirable qualities. This positive approach strengthens the bonds between the couple rather than causing division by finger-pointing or finding fault. A grateful attitude improves marriages and relationships, requiring a four-letter word: W-O-R-K. This word is dreaded by lazy, self-centered people.



William Arthur Ward observes, "Gratitude can transform common days into thanksgivings, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings." These instructive words should motivate us, but can being grateful make any rational sense in our troublesome world?

First Thessalonians 5:18 states, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Are we to take this command seriously? It can be a severe challenge for even the most devout Christian to give thanks in times of disappointment, pain, or tragedy.

Many legitimately contend they cannot be intellectually or morally honest if they were to give thanks "in" adversity, especially when evil accompanies the difficulty. I see their point. But the Bible doesn't stop here; it goes further. Ephesians 5:20 says we should "always give thanks 'for' all things in the name

of the Lord Jesus Christ to God.” I find this a hard pill to swallow – to thank God for our problem. It may not feel good right now, but we believe the problem will work well for us or us. Mark D. Roberts adds, “We should not thank God specifically for evil things. But we can thank God even amid evil and suffering. The main point of this verse is to encourage us to thank God for so much more than most of us do.” Here’s the bottom line: **Being grateful demonstrates one’s ultimate trust in God’s goodness, love, faithfulness, and supremacy in every circumstance.** “Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life,” writes Melody Beattie. This video is full of insight and encouragement: [Are You an Optimist or a Pessimist?](#)

When circumstances sour, our thankful attitude shouldn’t turn sour, too. By being thankful, we are in God’s will, and that’s a fantastic place to be!

Donald E. Demaray said, “The magic of a thankful spirit is that it can replace

God is faithful. We only
doubt God when we
forget what He has
already done.

anger with love; resentment with happiness; fear with faith; worry with peace, and the desire to dominate with the wish to become a team player. ...” Thankfulness will carry one

through the toughest of times.

There are other benefits, as Dennis Prager describes: “Of all the characteristics needed for a happy and morally decent life, none surpasses gratitude. Grateful people are happier, and grateful people are more morally decent.”

A pastor enthusiastically stirred his congregation to give thanks for everything. Such encouragement wasn’t some intellectual exercise or emotional display resulting from everything going his way. Quite the contrary. He had a major stroke, leaving him paralyzed and unable to walk. From his wheelchair, he smiled brightly and declared, “This is for my good!” To those taken aback by

his positive statement, he asked, “Didn’t God tell us that He is working out all things for our good? I may not understand why this affliction has happened to me, nor can I say I enjoy being in this state. But neither must I fret about it. My

“What would you think of a person who always wanted things from you but never offered a word of thanks in return? We can be that way with God, can't we? Let's remember to thank Him.”

PASTOR GREG LAURIE

love for God assures me that He is using this for my good, and I thank Him for that.” The pastor keeps a thankful attitude amid his challenges.

I work daily to be grateful. Some days are easier than others. I sometimes think I have a brain cramp because grumbling comes so quickly. I had to learn and frequently remind myself of two lessons:

Deliberately appreciate what you have, no matter how small. If we grumble over the little things, the more life-changing items or events that may come later are valued less. This statement might go against those claiming they will be thankful only after getting their new car or moving into a large home. But if we grumble in waiting, we will grumble when we get them.

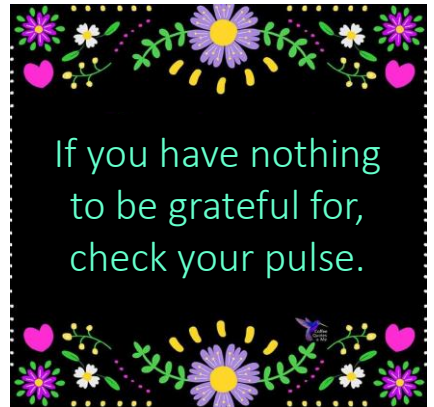
If we haven’t learned to be grateful for the city bus or our small apartment, we will probably feel the same way with a new car or a large home. Besides, these new acquisitions also come with their own headaches and expenses. [A Rich man in Rolls Royce isn't happy until a stranger changes his perspective.](#)

Trusting God’s plans, nature, and power makes it easier to overcome grumbling. Thus, giving thanks ‘in’ and ‘for’ everything is the right attitude. “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11). God is good and does good, is loving, sovereign, and nothing is too hard for

Him (Psalm 119:68, First John 4:8, Second Samuel 7:28, Jeremiah 32:17).

All of us struggle with personal areas. One of mine is grumbling about being single. I'm sure many other singles can relate. On a side note, someone said, "Stop complaining about being single. We have bigger problems here. Like why McDonald's doesn't serve breakfast after 10:30."

As one might imagine, wedding invitations make me feel uneasy. While initially writing this chapter in 1997, I was 46, never married, nor believed I would remain unmarried. But, self-condemning thoughts of being too disabled bombarded my mind that marriage was unattainable. So, when two wedding invitations in one afternoon came in the mail, one might conclude I would be crying the blues.



That day was not the same old story – feeling sorry for myself. Earlier that morning, I thanked God for being single. Though my feelings said I was a hypocrite, I immediately seized this as an opportunity to serve the Lord more faithfully instead of getting what I wanted. I reminded



myself His ways are perfect, and He knows what is best for me at any given time. Since God said He meets all my needs, I must not need a mate, or He would have provided one.

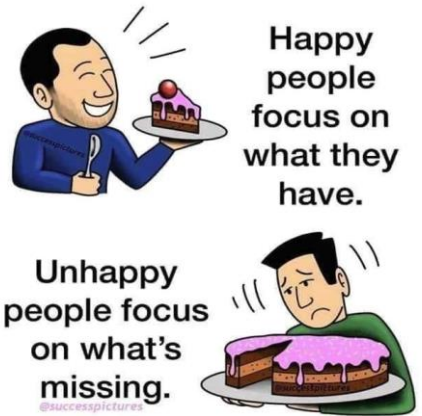
Now, decades later, I continue to be thankful for my present lot in life. It has not been easy, but

knowing the Lord is working His sovereign will for my benefit is heartening. I

find incredible comfort in the ever-enduring truth that God loves me more in a moment than anyone could in a lifetime.

Grateful people are happy no matter what they face. The more grateful, the happier they become.

After posting the picture (right) online, a woman commented, “I suffer from PTSD and other illnesses. I’m not in good shape and in a lot of pain. But I appreciate everything I have in my life. Though I wake up every day in pain, I’m grateful.”



What a stellar example for us! Instead of complaining, she *intentionally and consistently chooses to be grateful*. A lifestyle of gratitude doesn’t just happen overnight. It requires refocusing and saying our many blessings and God’s goodness and love aloud instead of grumbling about what we lack or don’t like.

Below is a portion of a letter written by a man who grew to appreciate God’s hand of abundant provision in times of suffering. The man lost his sister to cancer within the last seven years, lost his good friend, almost lost his mother, and his wife divorced him. Out of his losses and pain, he wrote his pastor:

One might be tempted to ask what made it possible to wade through all that successfully? Obviously, it was God’s grace. Specifically, it was the spiritual awakening that God is sovereign and good.

Nothing happens anywhere in the world, including in my little life, beyond His presence. Nothing occurs without Him already knowing.

No force can exert pressure on me, exceeding His strengthening me. I have thrived. I am who I am, not despite my history but because of it.

This church is my home. I never went through any of this alone. Urge the people not to forfeit any spiritual growth and power by manipulating or avoiding discomfort. Pain in the hand of Almighty God is an instrument of life. [Count Your Blessings](#)

Such a favorable outlook in our times of suffering should also strengthen us.

Giving thanks can be selective, raising doubts about God's love and goodness. The day after Trans World Airlines Flight 800 exploded and fell into the Atlantic Ocean in July of 1996, an interesting question was asked, "If God is so loving and good, why would He allow all 230 on the plane to perish?" Though the questioner is a self-proclaimed atheist, let's face it, many Christians may be equally puzzled and accusatory.

If an atheist or skeptic asked me the same question, I would reply, Are you thankful for the countless planes worldwide landing safely, bringing passengers and crew daily to their desired destinations? If not, why the double standard? Many use a magnifying glass to fault-find God while tightly shutting their eyes when God's goodness is visible to any willing to see.

Most people have about 90 percent good and 10 percent not-so-good lives. Sadly, many focus on the 10 percent, which is not good. By doing so, they

No matter how good or bad
you think life is, wake up
each day and be - - -
thankful for life.
Someone somewhere
else is fighting
to survive.

distort reality, making themselves feel lousy and alienating others with a sour, cynical disposition. By contrast, *making a conscious effort to be grateful for the 90 percent good keeps life in perspective and brightens the outlook of others.*

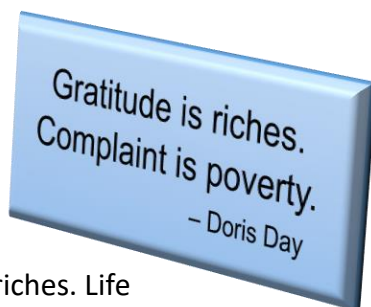
Gratitude is contagious and makes what we already have enough. In every area of life – health, business,

relationships, and even politics – gratitude likely creates beautiful and favorable results.

Day after day, Abraham Lincoln was weighed down by his nation torn by civil war. A woman went to the White House to see him, a woman he had not known. She had something in her hand. As they sat down, he asked about the nature of her visit. She placed a plate of cookies before him, saying, “Thank you, Mr. President,” and stood to leave. Tears began to run down Lincoln’s cheeks. His weary face suddenly lit up, explaining her visit was refreshing, for many other visitors only wanted something from him.

Notice the woman’s generosity and gratitude produced Lincoln’s profound appreciation, lifting his spirit. By contrast, implied is that others who only wanted something from him were, at times, draining.

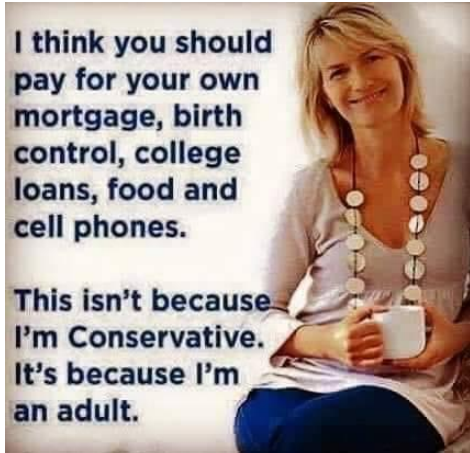
Actress Doris Day summed up a profound truth in six words: “Gratitude is riches. Complaint is poverty.” President George Washington wrote the first *National Thanksgiving Day Proclamation* in 1789. Washington wrote Thanksgiving Day is “[to] acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor.” Such illustrates Gratitude is riches. Life lesson: A grateful person is a generous person.



Having done a good deed or sacrificed on behalf of someone else might receive a kind word of appreciation. Or perhaps a hug, a simple gift, or another form of expressing gratitude to the giving person happens. But some who receive from the toil, generosity, and kindness of others do not respond with gratitude. Sadly, this is true even among some non-disabled, mentally stable people.

Entitlements and misunderstanding the Equal Rights Amendment are examples

of “Complaint is poverty.” Some think certain rights, material items, or economic benefits are *owed* or *entitled* to them. Such people believe they have a right to pleasurable things and not have anything they don’t like. Those who



feel entitled to get free stuff (paid by others) are often arrogant and ungrateful with what they have. They sometimes rely on the government to provide for them while complaining, “I’m a victim.”

The *Equal Rights Amendment* of 1972 does not mean equal rights for economic gain when job effort is absent. The amendment guarantees equal rights for all citizens regardless of sex, mainly

providing *employment opportunities*. Thus, seizing upon the possibilities through a person’s effort is required. “There is no free lunch,” despite what many misguided complainers believe. It’s said, “You can’t eliminate income inequality until you eliminate effort inequality.” Bingo!

There are three ‘magic words’ kids and adults should regularly say: “Please” and “Thank you.” When said warmly, they create an atmosphere of humility, appreciation, and understanding. These warm sentiments foster healthy relationships, help build character, and set an excellent example.

Discussing the importance of gratitude, I often take for granted some basic things. Among these essential things is freshwater, which I have in abundance; probably, you too. But billions of people aren’t so fortunate.



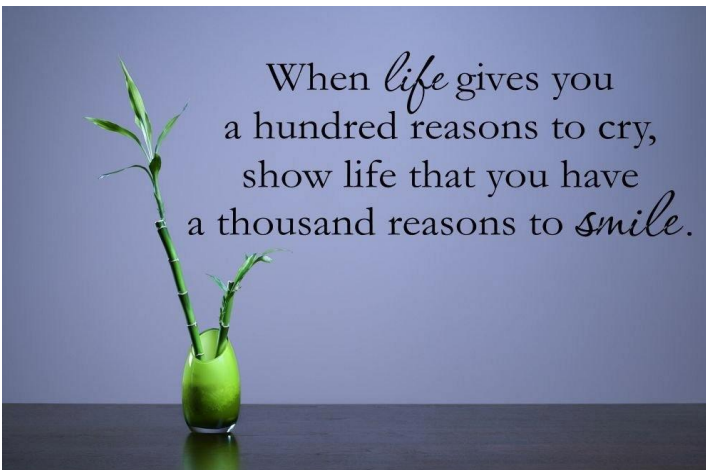
Are you grateful for clean drinking water? Are you thankful for freshwater for sanitation and hygiene? Let’s consider a cup of

drinking water. It is easy to obtain, plentiful, healthy, and inexpensive. Since this is true, how many people cannot access clean water?

According to the Web, “85% of the world population lives in the driest half of the planet. 783 million people do not have access to clean water, and almost 2.5 billion do not have access to adequate sanitation. Six to eight million people die annually from disasters and water-related diseases.” Some travelers in the driest regions take up to eight hours to search for water. Sadly, at times, the water isn’t clean.

So, the next time we drink or use freshwater, perhaps pause for a moment of gratitude. Consider this contrast: The freshwater we regularly wash cars and freely hose down sidewalks is the same natural element needed for the billions who don’t have adequate sanitation to prevent millions from dying yearly.

[These two words will lead you to a better life.](#) After viewing this video, some



ask, Who are you giving thanks to? For many, thanking God is fitting. For others, thanking a person or people for the blessing is appropriate. And given the situation, a combination of the divine and human activity receives a

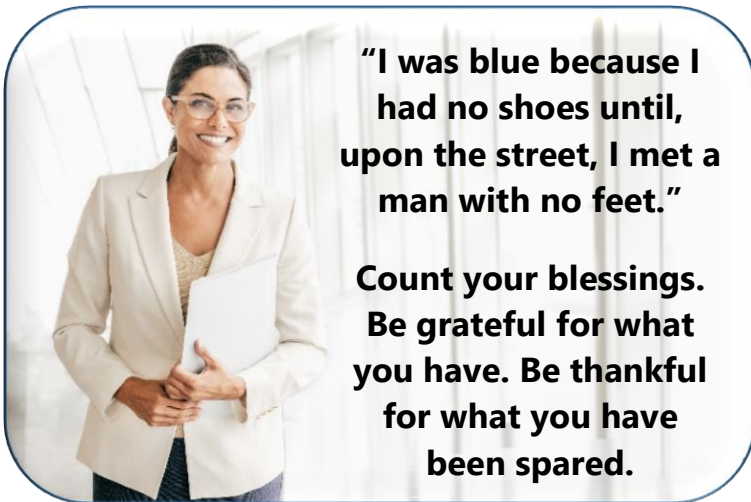
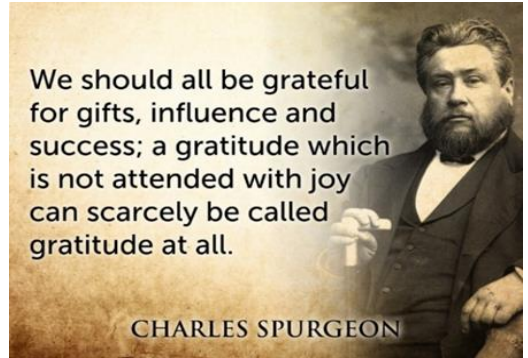
heartfelt “Thank you!” But gratitude is not limited to God and people. Objects and services also get a nod of appreciation, such as a reliable timepiece, a sturdy bathroom grab bar, and a high-speed internet connection.

Many say they are grateful, but their countenance says otherwise, for joy is

absent. Charles Spurgeon writes, “We should all be grateful for gifts, influence, and success; a gratitude which is not attended with joy can scarcely be called gratitude at all.”

Perhaps I’ve been living under a rock for too long. I have never known a genuinely joyous person who always complains or is ungrateful. Have you? Probably, he doesn’t win a “Most Likeable Person” award. His joyless and thankless misery is mainly self-inflicted.

Still, there is hope for him by heeding this truth: “Gratitude is a powerful



process for shifting your energy. It brings more of what you want into your life. Be grateful for what you already have, and you will attract more good things,” someone noted.

Some life lessons are difficult to practice daily, and Spurgeon’s quote sheds light on a significant weakness of mine. Though I am grateful for my desktop computer, I cannot say that joy fills my heart every time I use it.

Typing is slow and physically challenging due to my disability and old age. But writing is the primary form of communication for yours truly. When tempted to complain, for the most part, I choose not to let emotions rule me. God helps

me remember that many people struggle far worse than me. This comparison aids me in viewing life from a positive, grateful perspective.

Allow me to underscore the above thought. There will always be someone far worse off than us. So, let's be grateful for what we have and learn from others about selfless love. Such truths characterize [AJ and Mom](#).

Motivational speaker Jay Shetty encourages us to press forward through life's many ups and downs, recognizing how fortunate we are. [Before You Waste Your Life, Watch This](#)

The following is from the *Institute of Youth Development and Excellence*:

Importance of Gratitude on Your Well-Being

In many ways, as a society, we've lost touch with the true meaning of gratitude. And that's understandable – gratitude requires reflection and stillness, two things that can be difficult in our busy, overstimulated everyday lives. As a result, we're also missing out on the benefits of gratitude, which may be greater than many people realize. As it turns out, the effects of gratitude can be important for our overall well-being for four reasons.

1) Improved mental health. If you're struggling with anxiety or depression, gratitude might be the last thing on your mind. However, as it turns out, gratitude could be a key component of helping with your mental health. One study showed that participants who wrote gratitude letters regularly displayed significantly better mental health than those who didn't. In fact, brain scans suggested that gratitude might even have the power to rewire our brains for the better.

2) Improved physical health. Better sleep and immunity? Yes, please! Fortunately, neither requires a doctor's visit or a new prescription. Gratitude has been shown to help with both and may even be linked to reduced pain and

improved cardiovascular health.

3) Stronger social bonds. It's no secret that people like to feel appreciated.

Gratitude kept to yourself can have tremendous benefits. Expressing your gratitude makes it real to you, benefits the recipient, and is tied to one's physical and mental well-being. Most importantly, expressing your gratitude builds connections and improves your relationships.

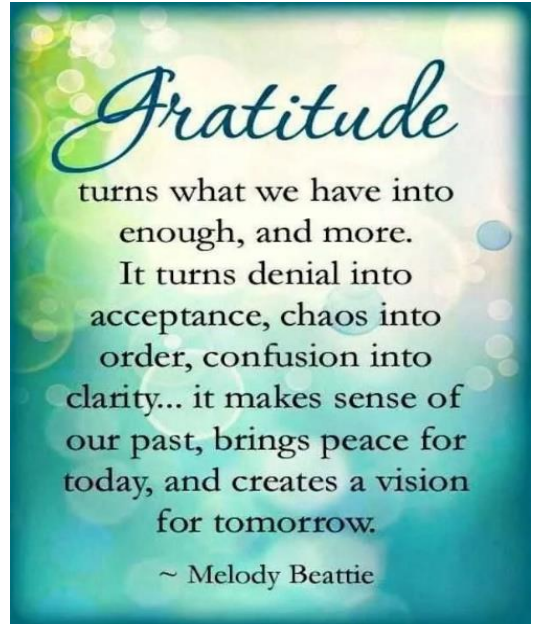
4) Resilience. Gratitude has the effect of helping us to refocus on positive emotions. It guides us to take an optimistic, solution-oriented approach to our challenges. Both of which are hugely important to

building resilience. Resilience, in turn, improves our overall quality of life by enabling us to bounce back from the hardships we face.

By now, it is evident that gratitude truly is amazing. I visited Israel in 1983 and deeply appreciated the Jewish people, their customs, and their history. Yael Eckstein, a Jew, writes about a valuable spiritual practice:

“According to Jewish law, everyone must recite at least 100 blessings to God daily. This may sound like a lot, but it's easier than you might think because we Jews bless God for just about everything! There's a blessing for the fact that we can stand up, one thanking Him that we can see, one more thanking Him that we can walk, and on and on.

“Perhaps the most unique blessing we say each day is the one we say every time we go to the bathroom. Yes, we praise God each time we



finish caring for our basic bodily needs! In this blessing, we thank God for keeping our bodies working properly. After all, we know that any small problem in our organs can cause great pain and danger.”

Yael Eckstein continues, “So where did this practice come from?

“It probably comes as no surprise that the practice originated with King David – the author of an entire book of the Bible dedicated to praising God! In Psalm 34:1, King David wrote, ‘I will extol the LORD at all times; His praise will always be on my lips.’

“The Hebrew for ‘I will extol’ is *avarecha*—literally, ‘I will bless.’ David wrote this to remind us not to take anything for granted and to not forget about God, especially the small things in life.

“The Jewish sages teach that during a certain period in David’s reign, one hundred people died prematurely each day from an unknown plague. The spiritual reason was eventually found. The nation was not paying enough attention to God. Since then, it was decided that every person would commit to saying one hundred blessings – or one hundred expressions of gratitude – and the plague stopped immediately.

“Since then, it has been Jewish tradition to recite at least one hundred blessings daily. We are careful to maintain a state of gratitude lest we find ourselves cut off from our blessings.

“Can you find one hundred reasons a day to thank and praise God? Try it and see how it transforms your life! 🙏”

As we shall explore next, grateful people recognize and appreciate the silver linings of hardships more readily than grumpy, dissatisfied people. Intentionally looking for silver linings often provides incredibly beneficial results.

Look for the Silver Linings

“Our happiness is certainly mixed in with the tragedies of life. You have to find the lemonade. You have to find the silver lining in the middle of everything that happens in life.”

— Chandra Wilson



Have you ever been thrilled about life because of a series of successes and triumphs? We get excited when our favorite team wins 10 or 15 straight games. When everything on the home front, at work, and at school goes our way, and we are healthy, we feel invincible, riding high! But we can be in a tailspin when the slightest disappointment or hardship arises.

Disappointments and tragedies bring a sense of soberness to the glamorized idea of always having a beautiful, happy life.’ Those who felt they were once on “top of the world” begin realizing that life is temporary, fragile, and imperfect. Perhaps they admit they don’t have all the answers after all. As a result, they may even start thinking about their mortality.

This reality check and humbling create a wholesome character that builds instead of tears down if the person allows it. It comforts instead of annoys and encourages instead of obstructs.

When the storms of life come, and they indeed will, I believe there are still silver linings in the darkest clouds. A silver lining is a metaphor for optimism. Looking past an adverse or tragic event to consider the bright side will, but not always, produce a hopeful and positive outcome.

A casual glance may not quickly reveal anything favorable from hardship, loss, disappointment, or pain. Silver linings usually become evident after we actively

seek them out. Such a learning process requires patience and settled assurance that things will work out, though the outcome may differ from what we had planned or hoped for. Through time, we may gain more understanding, mindful



of the adage, “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.”

It’s natural to question how unfortunate and dire circumstances are considered “good.” What’s so good about a beautiful long-term relationship that

is now broken, a severe car accident where someone dies, a birth defect, or being born in abject poverty? These may not be inherently good, but they can be used for a greater good, purpose, and inspiration in the grand scheme.

That’s precisely the case with Jim Abbott. Watching him work his trade, I was hard-pressed to hold back tears as inspiration, ingenuity, and grit took center stage on a dirt mound.

It is one thing to be an accomplished pitcher in Major League Baseball, not to mention hurling a relatively rare no-hit game. That’s what happened in 1993 with Jim Abbott. I mean, you must hand it to the guy, right? Jim would probably laugh at my rhetorical question. For him, the word “hand” really means something. You see, Jim was born with only one hand. As a kid, Jim’s parents never discouraged him from playing baseball despite the inherent danger of having just one hand to defend himself during a game. Through much hard work and ingenuity year after year, he developed a unique baseball skill. How did he play baseball with one hand?

According to *Wikipedia*, “When preparing to pitch the ball, Abbott would rest

his mitt on the end of his right forearm. After releasing the ball, he would quickly slip his hand into the mitt, usually in time to field any balls that a two-handed pitcher would be able to field. Then he would secure the mitt between his right forearm and torso, slip his hand out of the mitt, and remove the ball from the mitt, usually in time to throw out the runner at first or sometimes even start a double play. Teams tried to exploit his fielding disadvantage at all levels by repeatedly bunting to him, but this tactic was never effective.”

Throughout his career, Abbott had to prove himself. His perseverance in winning over baseball skeptics stemmed from a decision many years before entering professional baseball. “I could have become bitter, but I decided to use my gift to the best of my ability,” Abbott concluded.

Jessica Cox is an incredible motivational speaker. She says, “If there is



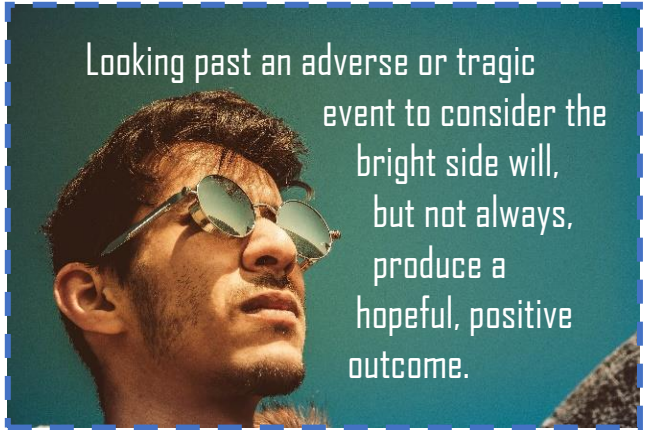
something you want to do, don’t let anything stop you. With that, you must be persistent. Think about the last time you said, ‘I can’t.’”

Her quote isn’t some empty, feel-good lip service. Jessica’s accomplishments are in a class by themselves, a collection of unbelievable triumphs. Described as “kind, positive, and unstoppable,” she looks for the silver linings in her adversity. This short video shows [Jessica’s can-do spirit](#).

Silver linings are similar to the famous saying, *Turn your scars into stars*. For some, this slogan is a cute rhyme without much meaning. In truth, it can be interpreted as a polite kick in the pants to stop complaining about one’s trials.

Allow them to serve a greater good, often appreciated way down the road.

A man of considerable means suffered a progressive degenerative eye condition impairing his vision. He could have been angry since he was only middle-aged and afflicted by a disease almost exclusively found in seniors. Although disappointed with limited sight, at least he could navigate his surroundings and read from large-print books. Upon hearing success stories from Russia, the man traveled for promising eye treatment. In his case, the procedure was a disaster, leaving him blind.



But all was not lost because his blindness became a springboard for something significant. The man used his wealth to build a medical foundation providing needed help and hope for thousands with the same eye condition. He had every natural right to become bitter and stay bitter. Instead, he sought the silver lining by choosing to bless others.

The human spirit has an incredible ability to turn tragedies into triumphs. That said, how much more when we invite the all-powerful and loving God into the situation! I marvel at His ability to transform a person's life. God, through Christ, can take a life crushed by adversity and replace despair with hope and well-being, far beyond human effort alone.

Life is full of sharp edges. Many circumstances are painful and hard to comprehend, accept, or adjust to. I don't presume that getting over the death of a loved one is either quick or effortless. And looking for any silver lining in a

loved one's passing may not be appropriate. In a culture where grieving can be interpreted as weakness, we tend to stuff in our emotions to our detriment. Allowing ourselves to grieve is vital and healthy.

The grieving process varies in length according to the person and the situation. Dr. Robert Jeffress shares helpful and compassionate insights in [Moving from Grief to Acceptance](#).

The stages of the grieving process are one thing. But when it extends well beyond the healing process's usual course, maybe an ulterior motive is at play.

As I interact with others and sense an ulterior motive, I try to be as loving and understanding as possible. Unfortunately, some wallow in self-pity and seem to enjoy it. Extending this mourning behavior can take an unhealthy life of its own. It draws unnecessary attention and sympathy from others. It often rewards the mourner for continuing his ploy to stay in a rut, avoiding meaningful relationships. And it can hinder him from partaking in quality, healthy activities.

Consider Ruth Shulman. Her tragedy caused much sorrow, but Ruth didn't stay sad. As an occupational therapist at UCLA Medical Center, when she tells patients that a disability doesn't mean the end, they listen.

Paralyzed from her chest down and in a wheelchair, Ruth has returned to work full-time. She passes what she has learned to do to others: get the most out of each day.

"I've had patients say to me, 'How can I complain when I see what you do,'" said Ruth, a 52-year-old car crash victim. "I tell them, 'Yes, I'm in a wheelchair, but life goes on. I think I'm a more effective therapist now because of my injury than if I was returning to work on my two feet.'"

She helps hip replacement patients, accident victims, and stroke sufferers who

need instruction handling everyday activities of getting dressed, bathing, and using the bathroom. Many patients think these activities are unattainable until they see Shulman wheeled into the hospital's rehab room, her face aglow with a warm, broad smile. "She's a big inspiration to the patients. She teaches them how to cope again," said hospital volunteer Grayce Reidenbach, 97, who volunteers in the rehabilitation department.

Ruth Shulman's life illustrates, "Other people will find healing in your wounds. Your greatest life messages and most effective ministry will come out of your deepest hurts," observes Rick Warren.

Can poor eyesight produce a brighter vision of nature? I recently heard of a woman whose sight began deteriorating rapidly. Medically, her condition was not correctable. But, rather than yielding to fear, frustration, or bitterness, she chose to view things from a fresh perspective.

Before the vision problem, no thought was given to her sight, for she took it for granted. Now, she appreciates how precious good eyesight is. And because she sought the silver lining of her situation, she said nature suddenly became beautiful, and profound gratitude for God's magnificent splendor and power was realized. Through dimming eyes, her focus was enlightened and enlarged. Her change in attitude, not the adversity alone, produced a profit from loss.



And because she sought the silver lining of her situation, nature suddenly became beautiful, and profound gratitude for God's magnificent splendor and power was realized.

We can make our own silver linings when put to the test. Eddie Olgin writes:

I'll never forget Easter 1946. I was 14, my little sister Ocy was 12, and my older sister Darlene was 16. We lived at home with our mom. Our dad had died five years before.

A month before Easter, our church pastor announced a special Easter offering would be taken to help a poor family. So when we got home, we came up with ideas about what to do.

We decided to buy 50 pounds of potatoes and live on them for a month, saving \$20.00 in grocery money for the Easter offering. Also, we thought if we kept the lights off as much as possible and did not listen to the radio, we could save money on the electric bill.

My sister got as many yard and cleaning jobs as possible. And both of us babysat for neighboring families. For 15 cents, we discovered we could buy enough cotton loops to make three potholders and sold them for \$1.00. So we made \$20.00 on potholders.

That month was one of the best months of our lives. Every day, we counted the money we saved. Then, we sat in the dark at night and talked about the poor family we'd be helping.

The day before Easter, we counted it all up. We had saved and earned \$70.00 for the sacrificial offering. We, kids, had never seen so much money. That night we were so excited we could hardly sleep, for we had \$70.00 to give to the poor family.

We couldn't wait to get to church on Sunday. The rain was pouring, but we didn't care how wet we got. The cardboard in Darlene's shoes was soaking wet. At church, we sat together, so proud. And when the collection plate came by, Mom put in a ten, and each of us put in a fresh, new twenty that we got from the bank. And when we walked home after church, we sang all the way! It had been an Easter to

remember forever.

The pastor came calling that Easter evening. Mom went to the door, and he gave her an envelope. Money, having 17 ones, a ten, and three



crisp twenties. The pastor was delighted, saying we were the family for whom the money had been raised.

Mom put the money back in the envelope, and we sat there staring at the floor. Just moments before, we had been the richest kids in town, and all at once, we were poor.

We probably have seen triumphs arise from our dark, even bleak circumstances. But one triumphant event forever changed the course of human history. This event is explained in *Our Daily Bread*:

There was nothing “good” about Good Friday. The best man in human history was crucified on a Roman cross. Mankind’s brightest hopes and dreams were dashed. His murder was so devastating that even the mid-afternoon sun immediately stopped shining. Was it a bad Friday, or was it not? Yes, it was a bad Friday, apart from Resurrection Sunday.

All of us have “bad Fridays.” We may become disheartened and deem life as having no purpose or meaning. And yet, if we wait patiently, looking with keen expectancy, our own kind of Resurrection Sunday will arise! “God’s most striking victories rise out of the graves of apparent defeats,” observes Dr. Haddon W. Robinson.

Herbert Schlossberg wrote, “We are not lords of history and do not control its

outcome, but we have the assurance that there is a Lord of history, and He controls its outcome. We need a theological interpretation of disaster that recognizes God's acts in such events as captivities, defeats, and crucifixions. The Bible can be interpreted as a string of God's triumphs disguised as disasters."

Let me get back to Joni Eareckson Tada, mentioned in the chapter, *The Suffering Advantage*. As you may recall, at age 17, she developed quadriplegia due to a diving accident and struggled with religious doubts for two years. In a recent video, Joni shares the biblical worldview of suffering and the importance of reaching

those with special needs. Joni explains what "The Indispensable Church" is and its necessity. She gives uplifting examples of courage and trust in the Lord Jesus among those with severe and chronic disabilities, including her chronic condition. This video is a real eye-opener, looking for the silver linings in the darkest sufferings. [The Indispensable Church](#)

On a personal note, at least two situations didn't go as planned. But, with God in the mix, looking for the silver linings made each outcome more significant.

The first situation: At home, I periodically made three loaves of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, wrapped them individually, and offered them to the homeless in city parks. Most shunned the offer. Neither did they want to talk or take a simple-to-understand Gospel tract. I can't blame them; my disability



could scare King Kong or Godzilla. But, whether they were open to having a friendly conversation, taking a 'delicious' sandwich, or reading a Gospel tract, I always left each visit humbled, realizing that I could be in their shoes, ever mindful that *by the grace of God, go I*.

Your worst day could be someone else's best day. Think about that for a moment.

The second situation: Being disabled, I received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) from the government but wanted to get off welfare by becoming self-sufficient. Even with a master's degree in psychology, the severity of my disability prevented gainful employment. And various home-based business ventures didn't work out.

Finally, I concluded my plans to become self-reliant and use psychology to help a relatively few individuals was not God's plan for me. It became clear that I could not sit at home eating sweets and watching television all day. Instead, use my time to spread the Gospel and develop meaningful friendships. So, for the next 30 years, I participated in various activities. They included:

- Visiting elderly shut-ins weekly.
- Reaching out to the homeless.
- Sharing Jesus with others by passing out approximately 200,000 Gospel tracts in public settings.
- Teaching Bible study to the disabled three times a week.
- Participating in church-related outreaches.
- Ministering to those in juvenile hall and county jails weekly.
- Helping edit and distribute newsletters of several missionaries serving in foreign lands.
- Going on mission trips to foreign lands.
- Fulfilling the responsibilities of a church elder and helping oversee church finances.

- Participating in daily group prayer.
- Leading teenagers in Youth Ministry.
- Shepherding a mid-week home fellowship group.

Please note: Some of these bullet points will be discussed more fully in upcoming chapters. That said, the above activities, however, gave way to a sedentary lifestyle. My body is wearing out due to my age and the health complications of cerebral palsy. But as Bishop Richard Cumberland encourages, “It is better to wear out than to rust out.” So, failing health isn’t going to stop this guy from reaching out to others in a different setting – the internet.

Many hours daily are spent on Facebook, mostly communicating in groups whose members are depressed, anxiety-ridden, suicidal, and other self-harm forms. These sufferers need help. Through my public posts, comments, and private messages, the Lord has graciously touched souls crying out for guidance and encouragement to come alongside and ‘listen’ as they vent.

Whether on Facebook or interacting face-to-face, I believe in the power of self-

I believe in the power of self-discovery. Some people know how to improve their lives but need coaxing for it to surface.

discovery. Some people know how to improve their lives but need coaxing for it to surface. This technique is achieved by asking thought-provoking questions and gently guiding them to find possible solutions to their difficulties. Self-confidence grows once excuse-making is put aside and baby steps

are taken to reach their goal. As a result, they begin to flourish.

Not all interactions turn out favorably, at least on the surface. Some discontinue their communications with me in the middle of being helped.

Perhaps the sufferers couldn't handle more help at the time. I've learned not to take it personally by (painfully) putting aside my ego and admitting there are many helpful people online and elsewhere when sufferers resume assistance.

I use an online translator to better communicate with those in India, Pakistan, and Spain when needed.

As I'm wearing out physically, my short-term memory is beginning to fade, too. However, I still recall this quote: "As you get older, three things happen. The first is your memory goes, and I can't remember the other two," says Sir Norman Wisdom.

Focusing on silver linings frequently provides comfort and hope and brings splendid outcomes. But, even if favorable results don't materialize, maintaining a positive outlook sure beats being downcast, bad-tempered, and looking like we sucked on a box full of sour lemons.

Efforts to bring out the best in others likely create surprising and meaningful success stories, as described next.

Bring Out the Best in Others

“Some people come into our lives and quickly go. Some people move our souls to dance. They awaken us to a new understanding with the passing whisper of their wisdom. Some people make the sky more beautiful to gaze upon. They stay in our lives for a while, leave footprints on our hearts, and we are never the same.”

— Flavia Weedn



I do not win many popularity contests with sad sacks. Sad sacks spend much time and energy complaining about their problems and hardships. I encourage them to redirect their time and energy for decent purposes to benefit others and themselves. But such coaxing is often dismissed or considered ‘strange.’ “There is nothing so powerful as truth – and often nothing so strange,” declares orator Daniel Webster.



“Experience is not what happens to you. It is what you do with what happens to you. Don’t waste your pain; use it to help others.”

PASTOR RICK WARREN

Imagine if everyone took the initiative to get involved in just one facet of community service. Imagine if each person shared their unique gifts and talents to benefit someone else in the right direction. As a result, an enriched world! “If God only used perfect people, nothing would get done. God will use anybody if you’re available,” asserts Rick Warren.

I posted the above two paragraphs on

Facebook. Stef R. replied, “I started to get involved with *Meals of Love* for hospice patients with my church. I needed something to keep me busy and keep me from thinking of self-harming. It’s hard to do, but if you take that first step, you will be so thankful, and the feelings you get from helping others are unimaginable.”

Motivational speaker Zig Ziglar challenges us to be the agents of helping people achieve happy, healthy lives even if incredible odds are stacked against them. Such is the case of Carol Clap, who impacted the life of Linda Isaac. Ziglar recounts Linda’s story:

Linda is a black girl, a dwarf, diagnosed as learning disabled. As her mother entered Linda into the first grade, she told the teacher, “Don’t worry about teaching Linda anything, for she cannot learn.

She’s a pleasant girl, and her classmates will adopt her as their class mascot, calling her “Shorty.” She’ll be popular, and everybody will love her.” And that is what happened. So, no one took the time to teach her anything.

She was promoted to the next grade year after year despite the constant cry, “Linda can’t learn. Linda can’t learn.” The rationale was simple: Since Linda can’t learn, why keep her in the first grade indefinitely, always making new friends? So, each June, she advanced a grade and graduated high school on time but functioning at a first-grade level.

What are Linda’s chances of succeeding in our competitive world? Probably very slim indeed, right? Linda’s aging mother could no longer take care of her daughter. Well, Linda was taken to Dallas to live with her aunt, who introduced Linda to Carol Clap of *Goodwill Industries*.

Soon after interacting with Linda, Carol discovered the purpose why

Linda was brought into her life to uncap and maximize Linda's full potential. Linda responded well given some simple tasks, only assigned more challenging tasks, which she handled masterfully.

A different aura surrounded her as Carol and others exclaimed, "Linda can learn! Linda can learn!" And within the next 12 months of training, Linda had catapulted to a fantastic place. She grasped answering the phones, checked the payroll, and almost functioned as a full-fledged secretary.

Linda learned more in one year than in the past 18. As a result, Carol and others stopped considering Linda not teachable and started reinforcing what she could do. Linda's story is another example: As we sow, so shall we reap.

It makes one wonder how many people have been consigned to a life of mediocrity because they were repeatedly told, You can't. You can't. You can't. Researchers say that by age 18, the typical American is told "No" or "You can't" 148,000 times. It's shameful that countless youngsters



Perhaps one of the greatest good we can do for others is to share our riches with them, and share their hidden riches with them.

fall short of their potential by believing what others repeatedly told them – their lives won't amount to anything good.

Perhaps one of the greatest good we can do for others is to

share our riches with them, and share their hidden riches with them.

The late radio personality Paul Harvey tells Teddy Stoddard's remarkable story:

Today, I want to introduce Jean Thompson to all teachers who have no idea how important they are. Her story begins on an autumn day on the first day of school. She stood before her fifth-graders to announce that in her class, all students would be treated alike. "I love each of you equally," she said.

Slumped in a third-row seat was little Teddy Stoddard. Ms. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before. She noticed he didn't play well with the other children, his clothes were unclean, and he always seemed to need a bath. Teddy Stoddard was so unpleasant that the teacher took a bit of delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen "F" for Failure. Teddy was sullen. Nobody seemed to enjoy him either.

However, Ms. Thompson was required routinely to review each child's records. She put off Teddy's until last. But eventually, she opened his file and asked, What's this? His second-grade teacher had written, "Teddy is a bright, inquisitive child with a quick laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners. He's a joy to be around."

His third-grade teacher had written, "Teddy is an excellent student. He is well-liked by his classmates but troubled because his mother has a terminal illness. Life at home must be a struggle."

His fourth-grade teacher had written, "Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He has no friends and sometimes sleeps in class. He is tardy and could become a problem."

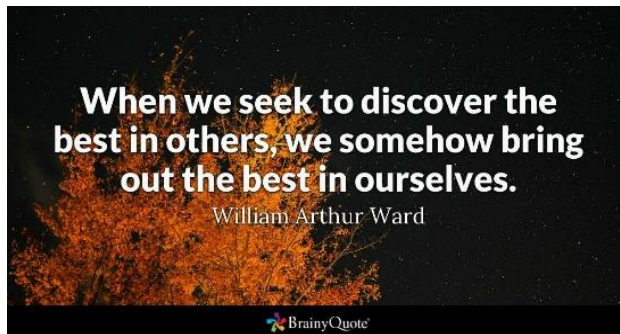
By now, Ms. Thompson had recognized the problem. But Christmas was coming, the school play, and there was no time to focus on Teddy. Her

children brought her presents in bright paper tied with ribbons, except for Teddy's gift. His was wrapped clumsily, using crinkled brown grocery bag paper tied with string.

Ms. Thompson took pains, however, to open it in the middle of the others. Inside was a rhinestone bracelet with several stones missing. There was also a bottle of about one-fourth full of perfume. Some students giggled, but Ms. Thompson silenced the giggles when she said how pretty the bracelet was and dabbed some of the perfume on her wrist.

Teddy stayed behind after class long enough to say, "Ms. Thompson, today you smell just like my mom used to." When he left, she cried for an hour.

That day, Ms. Thompson quit halfheartedly teaching reading, writing, and spelling. Instead, she truly began teaching children, paying



particular attention to Teddy. As she began to work with his mind, he seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the more he responded. She would remember

the perfume on days when there would be an important class test. By the end of the year, Teddy was one of the smartest children in the class.

A year later, Ms. Thompson found a note under her door. Teddy said that she was his favorite of all the teachers he had in elementary school. Six years later, she got another message from Teddy. He wrote that he finished high school, was third in his class, and she is still his

favorite teacher. Four years later, another letter said there had been some tough times, but he stayed in school and graduated with honors. The postscript said Ms. Thompson was still his favorite teacher.

Now, more years passed before there was another letter. This time, Teddy explained, upon receiving his bachelor's degree, he decided to go further. He just wanted her to know she was still his favorite teacher. And this letter was signed, "Theodore F. Stoddard, M.D."

Just weeks ago, the most recent letter stated that Teddy had met a woman and was about to marry. He explained that his father died two years ago and wondered if Ms. Thompson might agree to sit in the pew, usually reserved for the groom's mother.

This week, she did, wearing a bracelet with several rhinestones missing and smelling just like Mom.

Unfortunately, virtuous role models are becoming less prevalent today. But of those who remain, thankfully, their impact can be extraordinary.

Chills ran down my spine upon hearing a couple from our church forgiving a 14-year-old boy who stole their car to go joyriding. But this is not the end of the story. While joyriding, the boy ran over the couple's son, killing him.

After dealing with their initial resentment and sorrow, the couple compassionately reached out to the boy. As a result, he became a profoundly remorseful Christian, now using his energies to benefit others within his community. "Whatever makes men good Christians makes them good citizens," asserts Daniel Webster.

I found Webster's observation true regardless of a person's lawless background, especially if incarcerated. Before explaining what I mean, let me first say many people complain about our social ills as if complaining alone

somehow solves wrongs. Or they are convinced that grumbling frees them from being part of the solution.

Most people are concerned about the crime problem in our nation, and for good reason. In February 2017, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the annual cost of mass incarceration in the United States was \$81 billion. In 2008, there were 2,418,000 inmates in prisons, jails, and juvenile halls.

As a boy, I remember Dad telling me, “Unless you can suggest a possible solution to a problem, there’s no need to gripe about it.” This sound advice often kept my lips quiet and the wheels in my head turning.



In the late 1970s, I wanted to do my part in redirecting the lives of troubled youth. The result was teaching Bible lessons for 15 years at Central Juvenile Hall (CJH) near downtown Los Angeles.

I visited the male inmates almost every Sunday morning, ranging in age from 8 to 17. But for the mornings I missed, I sure heard about it the following Sunday. The questioning came not from the chaplain in charge but from the juveniles themselves. “Where were you last week, Paul?” asked out of concern and disappointment.

On the surface, I was the most unlikely of candidates to visit those in such a setting. After all, who would give a listening ear to a guy with another skin color who talked funny, walked funny, and has never been in trouble with the law? Could we relate to one another? Besides, youths can be cruel, so why the

concern and endearment? I believe it was the call of God. And another reason was I got them involved in an enjoyable and meaningful time sharing the Bible.

As the 15-25 voluntarily entered the dayroom, I smiled, made eye contact, and shook hands with each boy. The weekly turnover rate was about 35 percent in the unit I was regularly assigned. Some first-timers, of course, felt a little uncomfortable due to my disability. So, I said, "If you have a hard time understanding me, that makes two of us." This got them laughing, and often, the wall of uncertainty crumbled.

"If you have a
hard time
understanding
me, that makes
two of us."

As a volunteer with *Christian Jail Workers* and later with *Chaplain Christian Services*, both organizations allowed me to break away from their traditional teaching method by giving the youths lessons to keep. Initially, this leeway was to help compensate for my disability in conveying the topic. The methods soon became so helpful some teachers followed suit.

I made a lesson handout for them to study more thoroughly in the following days. Each week's one-page lesson took many hours to compose, type, and make copies, but the ultimate effectiveness outweighed the effort. The weekly topic was easy to understand and relatable to their lives. And when applied, each male could begin changing for the better. Every lesson included verses from the *Living Bible* and a few questions. Those who felt comfortable were encouraged to read aloud.

I brought paper name tags and a marker, calling each boy by his first name. Gang names were not permitted. Getting them involved was crucial because peers often learn more from one another than the teacher. I reminded the group each week of my four ground rules:

- Everyone is encouraged to participate.

- Only one person speaks at a time.
- Give your full attention to the person speaking.
- There are no stupid questions, so ask.



As I guided the group along with the Scripture-oriented handouts, asking questions pertinent to their daily lives, they began teaching themselves how to live as Christians. And, because the words came out of their mouths, they held themselves more accountable to live what they professed.

I didn't think my effort at Central Juvenile

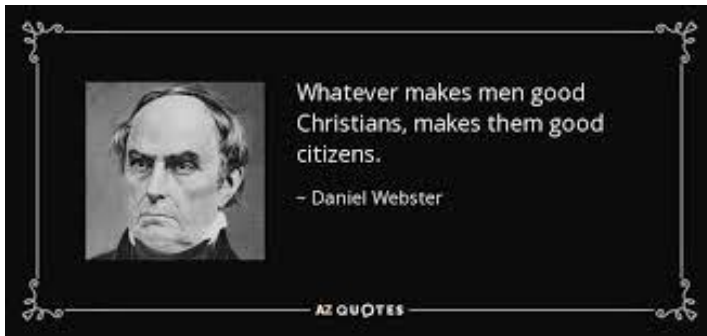
Hall was anything special. I only wanted the love of Jesus to impact their self-image and have a positive ripple effect on others. CJH regulations prohibited Sunday school teachers from following up once inmates were released. However, I saw how some were doing among the approximately 8,000 males while teaching there for 15 years.

Traveling around the city, some youth and (now) men approached me, asking, "Hey Paul, remember me?" If I didn't, I took an educated guess, replying, "Eastlake?" (The name the guys commonly called Central Juvenile Hall, located on Eastlake Street.) Asking how their lives had changed since being on the 'outside,' I got mixed responses. Some admitted to continuing their criminal behavior, while others thanked me for helping them become better people.

After my 11th year at CJH, I was among a select few to receive a commendation plaque as *Volunteer of the Year* by the City of Los Angeles. Each volunteer represented a different service program within the city. I felt humbled to be among such wonderful, giving people.

I left Central Juvenile Hall to make visits to two county jails. Every Tuesday evening, I shared the Gospel with a small group of 4-6 men and one-on-one. Monthly teamed with two others, addressing the 80-120 attending chapel service. We spoke for about 15-20 minutes each. I explained my disability and the doctor's prognosis, adding, "This 'vegetable' became a fruitcake!" After the laughter, a few Bible verses were shared.

We have something in common, I said. We have two strikes against us – you with the law and me with my disability. The good news is that it's not a "three-



strikes-you're-out" ballgame. Keep swinging until you hit the ball! Life is hard, and we must persevere through difficult times, especially as

Christians. Celebrate, not envy, the good deeds of others. Do not fall into feeling sorry for yourself, expecting pity from others. Learn from past failures, not dwelling on them. Live one day at a time by making steady advancements, reflecting your new life in Christ Jesus.

I encouraged the men to continue believing in the One who believes in them – God. It won't be convenient, easy, or popular, but remember that they are examples, so their thinking, behavior, and speech should honor the Lord. Also, to redirect their energy and talent to become productive citizens by associating with moral people. And since many inmates are fathers or will-be, they appreciated J. Edgar Hoover's truth, "The cure for crime is not in the electric chair, but the highchair."

I shared with inmates the tragic truth that people are great wasters. We waste time, energy, good food, and sometimes even our lives. But with God, there is

no waste. He can use your troubled, painful past and turn it into a meaningful future by surrendering your life to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

After giving my spiritual pep talks, I led those desiring to live for Jesus in prayer. Usually, a standing ovation followed at the end of each chapel service. Many of the men swarmed around me, some with tears. They were unafraid to give me a warm handshake and offer kind words of appreciation as I fought back the tears. Free copies of my paperback book were handed out for the taking.



Now, a story of a violin. An expert craftsman made a violin out of superb materials. But it lacked the tonal quality he expected from such a beautiful instrument. So, the violin was deliberately smashed into pieces. Then, painstakingly, the craftsman glued the violin back together, piece by piece, resulting in a superior tone.

Some people see a similarity between my life and the violin. For instance, after consistently seeing the warm and enthusiastic response from inmates, the chaplain remarked, "Paul, God doesn't use you *despite* your disability, but *because* of it."

Dear reader, I am no one special. Each of us has a calling or mission in life to touch the lives of others. That's right, all of us can be agents who bring out the best in others, regardless of background, physical appearance, or ethnicity. "There is no exercise better for the heart than reaching down and lifting people up," encourages John Holmes.

Reaching down and lifting people up doesn't necessarily require a long time. A

friendly wave, a warm smile, or a few timely words encouraging a sad soul to brighten his day can work wonders. In turn, he is apt to uplift someone else.



It is often unnecessary and shameful when healthy and rewarding relations are foolishly discarded or let slip away. Consider the photo (left). Someone noted, “The girl is running out of time and doesn’t even know it.” Our seniors (and our kids) deserve far better.

Seniors are vast reservoirs of love, knowledge, wisdom, and experience. To all parents, I lovingly advise you to train children correctly, regardless of age. Set a

good example by modeling and teaching the Golden Rule: Treat others how you want to be treated.

The success stories of Linda Isaac, Teddy Stoddard, and many detainees show the life-changing power of encouragement. Positive support frequently requires our best effort to steer others in the right direction. Whether we see others flourish at the time or not, the effort expended is a joy and privilege.

Below is a devotional from *Our Daily Bread* titled “Talking Bananas.”

“Never give up.” “Be the reason someone smiles.” “You’re amazing.” “It isn’t where you came from – it’s where you’re going that counts.” Some schoolchildren found these messages and more written on bananas in their lunchroom in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Cafeteria manager Stacey Truman took the time to write encouraging notes on the fruit, which

the kids dubbed “Talking bananas.”

This caring outreach reminds me of Barnabas’ heart for the “spiritual youngsters” in the ancient city of Antioch (Acts 11:22-24). Barnabas was famous for his ability to inspire people. Known as a good man, full of faith and the Holy Spirit, he prompted the new believers to “remain true to the Lord with all their hearts” (verse 23). I imagine he spent time with those he wanted to help, saying things like: “Keep praying.” “Trust the Lord.” “Stay close to God when life is hard.”

New believers, like children, need loads of encouragement. They’re full of potential. They’re discovering what they’re good at. They may not fully realize what God wants to do in and through them, and often, the enemy works overtime to prevent their faith from flourishing.

Those of us who’ve walked with Jesus for a while understand how hard living for Jesus can be. May we all give and receive encouragement as God’s Spirit guides us and reminds us of spiritual truth.



Don't envy others. God created you with a unique personality, a set of traits, talents, and abilities to fulfill a God-given purpose that only you can fulfill.

Your Good Trace Cannot Be Erased

You may think that you are completely insignificant in this world.
But someone drinks coffee from the favorite cup that you gave
them.

Someone heard a song on the radio that reminded them of you.

Someone read the book that you recommended, and plunged
headfirst into it.

Someone smiled after a hard day's work, because they remembered
the joke that you told them today.

Someone loves themselves a little bit more, because you gave them a
compliment.

Never think that you have no influence whatsoever.

Your trace, which you leave behind with every good deed, cannot
be erased.

“A good character is the best tombstone. Those who loved you and were helped by you will remember you when forget-me-nots have withered. Carve your name on hearts, not marble,” writes Charles Spurgeon. A large part of possessing a good character is marked by those who forgive and are kind.

Forgiveness and Kindness

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as God through Christ forgave you.”

— Ephesians 4:32

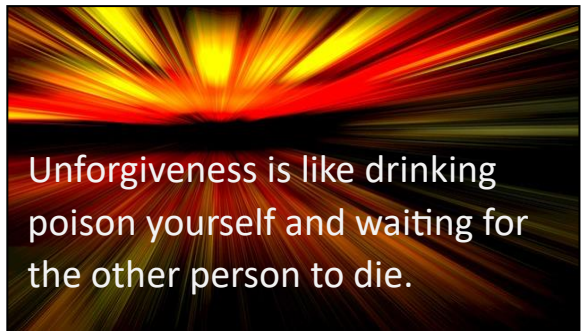


If a blind man bumps into you, you wouldn’t get mad and say, “Hey, buddy, watch where you’re going!” Realizing he cannot see, you forgive him, extend kindness, and help him to his destination if necessary.

We come across blind people every day, including the person in the mirror. The fact is selfish thoughts can blind one’s unforgiving and unkind behavior. Like a cool breeze on a hot summer’s day, how refreshing it would be if someone helped us recognize these two character flaws and gently guided us to forgive and be kind. Such an act of love would undoubtedly be a blessing.

Everyone has received cruel remarks, abuse, and injustice to some degree or another. Did such treatment make you feel hurt, vengeful, bitter, and unforgiving? Someone knows how you feel – Jesus Christ. He was ridiculed, suffering abuse and injustice beyond belief. Yet, He forgave, but not in every case. Thus, forgiving is tricky because it often ignores three elements: repentance, compensation, and whether the offense is against you. (More about this later in the chapter.)

Unforgiveness is one of life’s most poisonous attitudes to keep. Its results are



devastating, robbing our joy and contentment. It saps vital energy and impedes proper emotional, mental, and physical health. It can cloud our thinking, making wise choices difficult. Unforgiveness, if unchecked, may lead to physical violence, causing property damage and death.

Forgiveness of self and others has been the most powerful predictor of depression and suicide. The more forgiveness, the less incidence of depression and suicide.

Journal of Applied Sciences, 2009

Unforgiveness alienates people and creates a wedge between God, the ultimate source of love and forgiveness, and us. With such a wedge, it hinders our prayers from being answered. If you have received God's forgiveness but do not forgive, God will not forgive you. Let go of an offense without delay and trust God's justice to be carried out as He sees fit. [The Pardon of Prayer](#)

People who refuse to forgive often do so to punish others, but the people they punish most are themselves. To forgive and do well are two actions Christians are commanded to do (Matthew 6:14-15, Romans 12:18-21).

To love our enemies is unique to the Christian family, a badge identifying us as the very sons of God. The best way to deal with bitterness is to forgive.

Pastor Lee Strobel talked with a young woman who was the target of a vicious crime. Someone broke into her home, sexually assaulted her, beat her with a revolver, and then put a pillow over her as he shot her. Her forearm absorbing the bullet's impact was the only thing that caused her to survive.

The man was caught, and the day came for her to testify at his sentencing. In court, the Christian woman said:

Yes, society does need to be protected from this man. However, your honor, you need to know that I'm not after vengeance. I'm not after retribution because I know those things won't change what has

happened to me. They will only poison my heart.

I want to help this man. I have discovered through the investigation that he is mildly retarded. Obviously, he needs help, and I want to ensure he gets that help for his own sake because I hope he someday will be a free man again. I don't want him to suffer, for I've suffered enough for the both of us. I want what is in his best interest, and with God's help, I want to forgive him.

As she spoke, tears began running down the cheeks of the judge sitting on the bench. Then he started to sob uncontrollably. When he finally composed himself, he explained, "I am crying because of her forgiving nature. It is so unusual for the victim of such a vicious crime to have such a forgiving attitude, and I think this reflects all the best in human nature."

The extent of her love and forgiveness may not only be the best of human nature, but more appropriately, it reflects the best of what the Lord does in the hearts of Christians.

Acts of kindness can be a powerful antidote to hatred. While teaching Bible study at a residential facility

for the disabled, Nancy was troubled. Confined to a wheelchair and primarily nonverbal, Nancy was verbally abused by a woman named Barbara.

I shared with Nancy what the Bible said about the importance of forgiving Barbara (Matthew 6:15) and bringing peace when we have an enemy: pray for and bless them (Matthew 5:44). After praying with Nancy, a candy bar was given to Barbara. "This candy is a token of Nancy's love for you," I told her. Almost overnight, Barbara's heart changed, and they became good friends.

As in the above two stories, not every hateful circumstance has a warm and



favorable outcome. Even if the offender remains unchanged, this is not a license for the offended party to harbor resentment and be unkind. Otherwise, the offended party can make his own life a living torment.

While many think reconciliation and forgiveness are the same, they are not. For example, in the case of infidelity, reconciliation might not be possible in a divorce situation, though one person forgave the other.

Given the above discussion, one could conclude forgiveness is indeed a good and praiseworthy act. Not always. Unconditionally forgiving someone can sometimes send the wrong message regardless of the situation. Consider the following example.

A woman called a Los Angeles talk radio station and identified herself as a Christian. The topic of the hour focused on forgiveness. She said she needed to forgive others no matter what.

The talk radio host Dennis Prager asked, “Do you forgive Timothy McVeigh?” (McVeigh had been found guilty of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing of a federal building where 168 people died and scores were permanently injured.)

“Yes, I forgive him,” she answered. Then, Prager asked if she knew God’s forgiveness was based on repentance. “Yes,” she replied.

“So how can you forgive McVeigh, who, after three years, is anything but repentant?” he asked. “Because I believe it is the right thing to do,” she said.

“Okay,” Prager concluded, “as long as you know, you are more moral than God.” To which she ended, “I still must forgive, for I am commanded to.”

Earlier, I wrote, “To forgive is a bit tricky.” It is tricky because unconditional forgiveness can be counter-productive, though appearing right and honorable. First, like the woman caller, it makes well-intended Christians look stubborn and unreasonable. Second, and most importantly, it can spread evil and

bitterness regardless of circumstances. Strong words that need an explanation.



“It is a terrible idea that no matter how much evil is committed, and against any number of people, it is one’s duty to forgive. Such a position is not biblical, logical, moral, or compassionate. It is just wrong, morally wrong,” maintains Prager.

Christians or not, those who think it is right to act like an automatic

forgiveness machine should rethink their position. And even if they retain their stance, at least come up with a good defense.

If anyone could unconditionally forgive, it is Jesus Christ, the embodiment of love and forgiveness. But He did not. He placed a stipulation on forgiveness – *repentance*. Jesus said in Luke 17:3, “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.”

Jesus forgave one criminal at his crucifixion but not the other. One was repentant; the other was not.

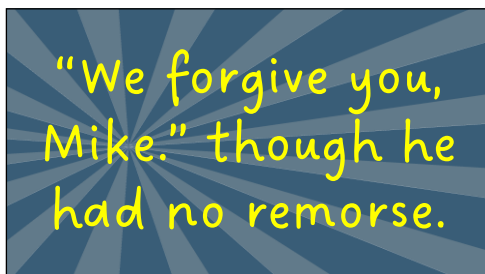
Since God’s forgiveness is contingent upon repentance, many Christians, as stated above, make themselves more moral than God because they forgive irrespective of repentance.

Forgiving someone is highly inappropriate without the person taking responsibility by being contrite and possibly making restitution. Why? Because it worsens the problem, sending a clear message of *approval for wrongdoing*. The offender must be held accountable for his actions, not pamper or overlook his severe wayward behavior. Unfortunately, such truth wasn’t followed by the

sympathizers of Michael Carneal.

At age 14, Michael Carneal killed three Kentucky classmates and wounded five while all were praying. He told police he had seen and was impressed by the movie *Basketball Diaries*, where a high school boy shot up a room full of classmates.

The day after the Kentucky murders, fellow students made a sign and placed it in front of the school. The words did not attempt to console, sympathize, or support the grieving families. The sign read, “We forgive you, Mike.” though he had no remorse.



In this situation, unconditional forgiveness is a perversion of common sense and instinct – not to be outraged at a horrible wrong and forgive an unrepentant murderer. It’s not compassionate but cruel to the dead, the families, and society,” Prager asserts. Evil thrives when justice is compromised, often resulting in bitter people.

You may wonder about turning the other cheek. Matthew 5:39 states, “If someone strikes *you* [italic added] on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” Correctly understanding this verse is essential, as Dennis Prager explains:

If the wrong is against *you* [italic added], then *you* can forgive anyone, anytime, any offense. At times, it may even be beautiful to do it. But, as the Kentucky students did, forgiving a boy for killing and hurting others is incredibly misguided. The students had no right or privilege to forgive. Once again, forgiveness is only necessary when someone sins against *you*, not someone else.

You can be forgiven, but first, you have to make restitution, and in the case of murder, I believe restitution borders the impossible. Human

beings cannot forgive murder; only God can. Therefore, the society that forgives its murderers cannot survive and, in my opinion, does not deserve to survive.

I believe there are three possibilities where unconditional forgiveness arises:

First, some fear making moral judgments, thinking it is more ethical to be nonjudgmental. They cite Matthew 7:1 – *Do not judge so that you will not be judged.* “Modern culture garbles this comment into a command to never disapprove or correct the actions of another. This mishandling of Christ’s words is out of context *three times over*,” states a [Commentary on Matthew 7:1](#).

While we cannot judge another person’s motives and soul, we can and must judge what a person does and says. To judge a person’s behavior is not only natural but prudent. A concerned parent warns his teenager not to go down the street, a known area for gun violence. Also, the premise of our judicial system is that people are mainly judged on behavior and the person’s remarks made. However, to judge one’s soul is entirely different, for that alone belongs to God.

Second, in some cases, those who rush to forgive unconditionally do so because they are hostile to goodness. They want a license to do evil or bad things without being answerable or held accountable for similar bad behavior.

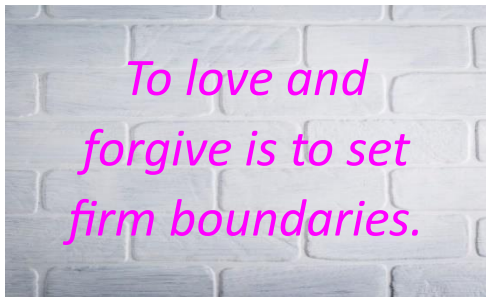
Third, it is sometimes difficult to confront someone about a given wrong, so it is conveniently dismissed or downplayed. Some people choose not to ‘rock the boat’ for many reasons. But love confronts, especially when done humbly and at a time when the person is more open to listening and change.

To hold a person accountable for his misdeeds without harboring resentment against him is the essence of forgiveness and love.

In 1997, 15-year-old Missy Jenkins was paralyzed after being shot by Michael

Carneal. Jenkins says she forgave Carneal not to diminish what he did, but she forgave to “move on” – to make the best out of her life and be happy. She is now a married mother, loves her job, and is a public speaker.

Missy questioned Michael’s apology after murderabilia continually appeared online from him while in prison. “He needs to deal with the consequences of his actions. We [as Carneal’s victims] don’t get a second chance to change what happened to us. So, why should he get a second chance? That was the choice he made.” [Missy’s Reasoning](#)



To love and forgive is to set firm boundaries. As a kid, I was punished for bad behavior, accusing my folks of not loving me. They replied, “It’s because we love you; that’s why we are disciplining you. Why go through this trouble to teach proper behavior if we don’t care?”

When Jesus forgave the adulterous woman, He held no hostility against her. However, in John 8:11, Jesus set a boundary by warning her against continuing that lifestyle by saying, “Go and leave your life of sin.” Thus, once again, forgiveness and repentance are linked.

While it is tempting to pass judgment on the sincerity of a person’s repentance, God ultimately knows the genuineness of his heart. Appearances can be quite deceiving, so it is necessary to trust God’s perfect justice in dealing with him.

Some believe unless an offense is forgotten, it is not forgiven. Ancient Latin writer Publilius Syrus wrote, “The remedy for wrongs is to forget them.” If this were true, especially regarding painful offenses, we need a severe case of memory loss. No, only God can forget wrongs. We must forgive quickly and not stoke the fire by repeating the offense constantly in our minds or reminding

the offender of his wrongdoing.

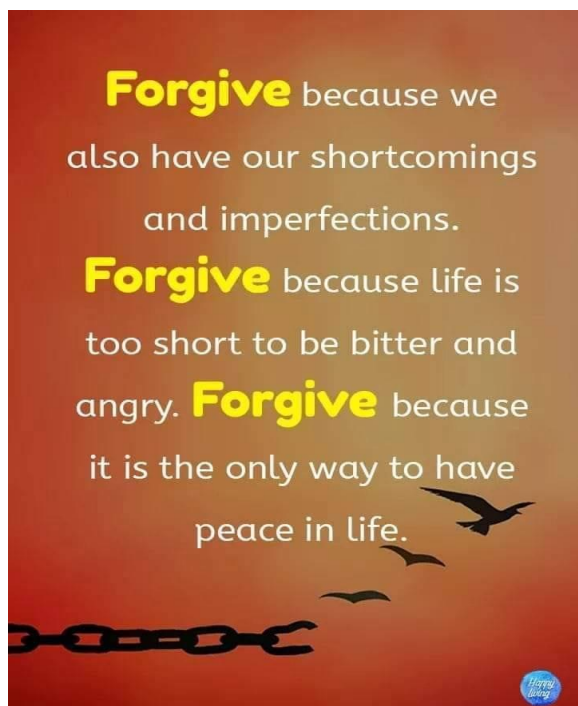
As a Christian, the quicker you forgive, the more spiritually mature you are.

“Once a woman has forgiven her man, she must not rehear his sins for breakfast,” advises actress Marlene Dietrich. And author Dr. Gregory Popcak says, “Bitterness is unforgiveness fermented.”

To forgive is hard, but to carry unforgiveness is harder. Holding no resentment is critical. Lewis B. Smedes writes, “To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.” Consider forgiveness as a gift, a gift you give to yourself. Forgive others, not because they necessarily deserve forgiveness, but because you deserve peace. [A Gift to Grandpa](#)

In his last speech before resigning from the presidency, Richard Nixon urged, “Always give your best, never get discouraged, never be petty. Others may hate you, but those who hate you don’t win unless you hate them, and then you destroy yourself.”

“There are no justified resentments. Practice forgiveness. Send love in some form to those you believe have wronged you and notice how much better you feel and how much more peace you have,” says Dr. Wayne Dyer. And Meghan Sandai writes, “Think of how many people you know whose daily conversations



are based on how ‘wronged’ they are by the world around them and their life circumstances. I can’t think of a sadder way to waste one’s life.”

Pastor Joyce Meyer exhorts, “Forgive quickly and frequently. The quicker we forgive, the easier it is to do it. One way to forgive is to believe in the best of people and understand where they are coming from. Talk it out, for the issue could be a misunderstanding. Instead of being offended by how we are treated, they may be having a bad day. Showing kindness and understanding is

admirable. God gives us the grace to forgive.”

Some of the most forgiving and kindest people I have met are disabled. This may be surprising given their poor health and often made fun of. Why kindness? I believe many embraced the divine truth in the photo (left).

Now, let’s focus on kindness. I try helping some people who are always angry but with little success. Their

bitterness against situations, God, people, and things is fully displayed. Self-hatred, thin-skinned, and talk laced with profanity describe these troubled souls. What doesn’t define them is being kind and forgiving. When we are kind, it is easier to forgive. Duh!

Throw kindness around like confetti. I believe being kind can become second nature through intentional and consistent effort. Maren Johnson writes about health and wellness. She suggests, “Try something new this week: throw kindness around like confetti! Notice if you feel better, happier, and more at ease. ... It is surprising that holding the door for someone, saying ‘Thank you,’



or complimenting someone could brighten their whole day.”

So, no matter who we contact, let's practice being considerate. This isn't too much to ask, for it takes no money to be kind, but it does require a change in attitude. Kindness supersedes the differences between us.

There is hope for those struggling to be kind, including me. Here's a helpful reminder: Realize that each person has inherent value, created in God's image



and deeply loved by Him. Viewing others in this light, kindness (gentleness, concern, service) will show forth.

A beautiful person is a kind person. Kind people are kind to all and quick to forgive without a grudge. When forgiveness and kindness are heartfelt and practiced throughout the day, we experience a blessed life.



Dear reader, have you heard the latest buzz? It isn't the hottest news about your favorite entertainment celebrity. The buzz is about bees. Primarily known as pollination agents and producers of honey, God also uses these amazing

creatures to teach us an incredible life lesson. Below is this lesson, found online:

My dad has bees. Today, I went to his house, and he showed me the honey from the hives. He took the lid off of a five-gallon bucket full of honey. On top of the honey, three little bees were struggling. They were covered in sticky honey and drowning.

I asked Dad if we could help them, and he said he was sure they wouldn't survive. Casualties of the honey collection, I suppose. I asked him again if we could get them out and kill them quickly. After all, he was the one who taught me to put a suffering animal (or bug) out of its misery.

He finally conceded and scooped the bees out of the bucket. He put them in an empty yogurt container outside. Bees were flying outside because he had disrupted the hive with the earlier honey collection. We put the three little bees in the container on a bench and left them to their fate.

My dad called me a little later to show me what was happening. Their sisters surrounded these three little bees (all of them were female). They cleaned the sticky, nearly-dead bees, helping them get all the honey off their bodies.

We returned quickly, and only one little bee was left in the container. She was still being tended to by her sisters. When it was time for me to leave, we checked one last time. All three bees had been cleaned off enough to fly away, and the container was empty.

Those three little bees lived surrounded by family and friends who would not give up on them. Family and friends refused to let them drown in their own stickiness. They resolved to help until the last little

bee could be set free.

We could all learn something from these bees: bee sisters, bee peers, bee teammates, and always bee kind!



A central part of a blessed life is recognizing one's bitterness (or any other character and behavioral flaw) and striving to overcome it, as discussed next.

Overcoming Bitterness

“Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.”

— Henry Ford



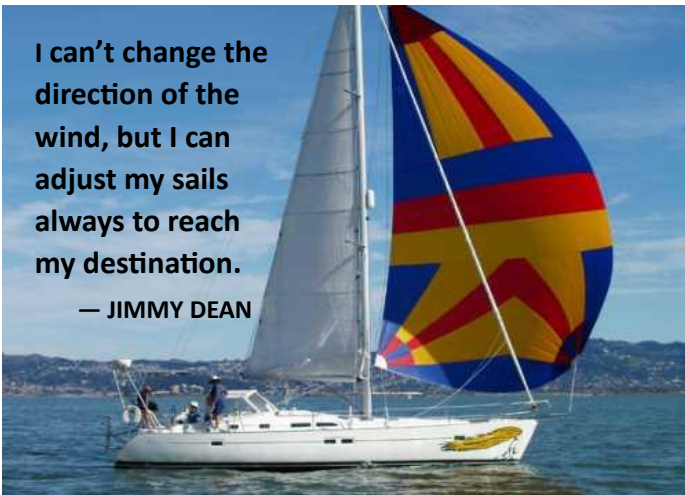
I was trapped in a horrible pit. A dark hole of my making. Bitterness had adversely affected my thoughts, behavior, and relationships. I began hating myself, but I found excusing this awful situation was easier than solving the problem.

Some readers might be surprised by the above admission, having thought I had successfully dealt with bitterness years before. In a sense, I had. So, what changed? Simply, by not emotionally and mentally adjusting to life.

Hardly anything in life is permanent. Life is forever changing. Self-monitoring efforts to keep my emotions and attitude in check were mainly abandoned. I

I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails always to reach my destination.

— JIMMY DEAN



should have heeded Jimmy Dean's words, "I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails always to reach my destination."

We can adjust our sails daily by learning more about ourselves and the world through various

means. These include introspection, prayer, Scripture meditation, regular church attendance, sharing with others, and information outlets. Ideally, this learning helps us become better people and ultimately makes a better world where virtue reigns.

Bitterness is a massive weapon of self-destruction. Overcoming bitter feelings does not happen overnight. Triumph over bitterness is not a straight line nor a smooth path, even when leaning on the Lord's help. Sometimes bitterness rears its ugly head in us, while other times, we act good-tempered. Hopefully, with each passing day, the trend is toward being good-tempered.

At age 27, I let my guard down, and the ugly head of bitter feelings arose. I felt shafted by life and ungrateful. Bitterness and discontentment were on full display. At the time, many people I knew were critical of others to some degree or another. Such a negative attitude seemed relatively harmless, so I didn't think twice about being much different from them.

Regularly, I minimized the redeeming qualities of others and magnified their faults. This was to cover up my faults, to feel better about myself. The proper use of psychological instruction learned in school became shamefully twisted. I viewed others more critically, often without merit. Any ideology opposing mine was rejected regardless of its worthiness. That's how defensive I became.



**YOU CAN'T BE BITTER
AND EXPECT YOUR
LIFE TO BE SWEET.**

My suspicious and abrasive attitude began alienating some friends and family members. The unloving attitude gnawed on me, but I found the gnawing more tolerable than being welcoming and supportive. As I demonstrated, the human psyche can justify anything to fortify its self-centered bent.

My mental state showed signs of paranoia. Noticing people talking or laughing from afar, I often interpreted their behavior as belittling or mocking me.

Until that time, I had never experienced an eating problem. Now, obsessed with the thought of food all my waking hours, I secretly ate weird food combinations: peanut butter and mustard sandwiches and chicken soup with dried oatmeal poured in. Tasting dry dog food took place a few times, though its flavor was nothing to write home about, nor was a dog bowl used.

Outwardly, personal accomplishments and living on my own gave many the impression that I had it together. But, inwardly, I finally had to admit I was in grave danger, in mental torment.

Lest somebody suggest I should have given my life to Jesus to solve my bitter state, I did so two years earlier. Many problems and personal hang-ups don't automatically disappear upon becoming a Christian. Yes, God provides supernatural deliverance, but it is primarily a process. God allows us to overcome behavioral and character flaws with persistent effort.

Once I wanted to change, it took months to progressively let go of bitterness. Meditating on specific Scriptures related to loving God, loving others, humility, and being content, coupled with fervent prayer, helped tremendously. Now, to a lesser extent and decades later, I continue ridding bitterness.

Bitterness can slay the strongest of men. Not only can bitter feelings bring out the worst in us, but they can also warp our sense of value and appreciation of others.

A mortician in California tells of a man who spent \$200,000 on his funeral. Estranged from his wife and children, he became consumed with bitterness by squandering all his money on his burial. His family was left with nothing. The casket and other expenses cost \$100,000, so he purchased \$100,000 worth of orchids! His resentment alienated so many that only three people attended the

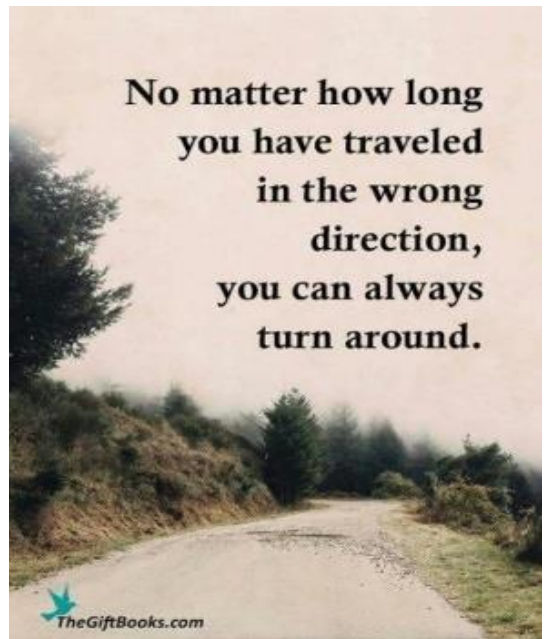
funeral service.

As the above event shows, bitterness can leave a trail of devastation in its wake. The family was discarded like an old dishrag. Monies could help support his survivors, and worthy causes were frivolously spent on extravagant items, evidencing his disdain for those left behind.

If anyone was justified to become and remain bitter, it was God. After all, He made a perfect world for humankind to live in. Moreover, God provided for man's every need, including a sweet fellowship with Him. But man's rebellion threw the world out of whack; man's free will chose against his loving Creator. But God's nature – benevolent and good – continues to draw sinful man back to Himself through Christ as Savior and Lord.

President Abraham Lincoln had the resolve to heal a bitterly divided nation. He stated, "The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise high." Success always has its price, but inaction can cost much more; we must change course!

Though not necessarily in order of importance, below are some general suggestions in our quest to rise high to overcome bitterness and perhaps other frailties.



Realize bitterness is not an insurmountable foe. Anger can become such a part of our personality that letting it go can feel like departing forever from a cherished friend, but it necessitates vigorous opposition.

Some think bitterness can be appeased, soothed, defended, or justified. But

such compromise is out of the question. Only the weak seek compromise, not the strong. God's command is clear and emphatic: "Get rid of all bitterness" (Ephesians 4:31). Within this command is the power to do it, for we are workers with God (First Corinthians 3:9).

Roman poet Caecilius Statius wrote, "He who does not believe that God is above all is either a fool or has no life experience." God's supremacy can help us crush this seemingly insurmountable foe.

Gaining ground may be slow, but don't get discouraged when missing the mark. Attainment is often achieved through tiny increments of successful attempts. Continue to be persistent and mindful of the goal. Equating mere activity with achievement is unwise; you can run in place but not get anywhere.

Freedom comes after release. Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned letting go of my bitterness. "Letting go" is a significant phrase.

One way to trap monkeys in the wild is to place a banana inside an immovable jar. The container's opening is wide enough so the monkey can slip his hand inside. Grasping the banana stretches his hand, making it difficult for him to escape. Only when the banana is released can the monkey free himself.

"[Bitterness] prevents you from experiencing the potential joys of living fully in the present – vs. dwelling self-righteously on the past wrongs inflicted on you."

DR. LEON F. SELZER

The same principle applies when wronged – let it go! Dr. Leon F. Seltzer states, "[Bitterness] prevents you from experiencing the potential joys of living fully in the present vs. dwelling self-righteously on the past wrongs inflicted on you."

Share your resources. Few people realize a general principle: Almost everything or anyone who turns inward will eventually self-destruct.

My friend Dorothy knows this truth well and practices the opposite – turning outward. She’s 83, although she doesn’t look a day past 70. Life is difficult for her, but she makes the best of it.

Living in a nursing home and using a wheelchair, Dorothy has an oxygen tank to help her breathe. But, as a happy Christian, she commented, “I am mainly here to help and encourage others.” How refreshing to come across people who do not wallow in their problems but lend support to others who are possibly better off than themselves.

Sharing resources takes many forms: financial, volunteering, random acts of kindness, physical and emotional support, praying for someone, etc. And as seen in Dorothy’s case, it is to help and encourage others.

Generosity and kindness are linked to happiness, studies say. When we are generous and kind, we are happy. Conversely, the outflow of being happy is generosity and kindness. It makes perfect sense. [Small acts of kindness and generosity can go a long way.](#)

Give in secret. One of the most effective ways of dealing with bitter feelings is little used. Specifically, to give anonymously.

Decades ago, I shared a house with some men from our church. One of them rubbed me the wrong way for no fault of his own. After tolerating the situation for several years, my judgmental and bitter attitude changed the very hour I placed a five-dollar bill into an envelope and left it on his desk without mentioning my name. The small amount had a

One of the most effective
ways of dealing with bitter
feelings is little used.

A gift in secret pacifies
anger (Proverbs 21:14a).

priceless effect: A good friendship developed, and his personality no longer bothered me. Who knew?

Admit your faults. I have difficulty speaking anyway, but to say, “I’m sorry, I was wrong.” is particularly challenging to voice – too much pride. Even those with no speech impediment sometimes find it incredibly hard to utter these five humble words.

A sincere, remorseful admission of one’s fault or bitterness is crucial in overcoming. Admission’s light begins dispelling the darkness of a bitter soul. And there is another upside when we admit our failings: We become more tenderhearted and merciful, often to others’ delight.

Some people realize they need to admit their faults but stop there, satisfied (in their mind) that they have arrived – no additional effort is required. However, realization is only the first step toward completing the action. Without proceeding further, it is somewhat like removing only 25% of cancer from the body. An active follow-through is essential. Rooting out all bitterness or other vice must be based on one ultimate reason: it is the correct action.

Checking one’s motive is vital when admitting faults. Admission is just manipulation if it solely satisfies the offended party’s expectation. Without changed behavior, admission rings hollow. Thus, the best apology is a changed behavior.

Simple things can help. Here is an easy rule of thumb, which is obvious but often overlooked: Never make an irreversible decision on one of your down days or in the heat of the moment.

It may sound simplistic, but a small prayer, a walk, a good night’s sleep, or even a few deep breaths can help put temporary distress into perspective. It can bring peace of mind and a workable solution to a challenging problem. Using time-outs can quell feelings of anger and anxiety.

Act the way you want to be. Practice imitating the person you want to be; you will become that person through consistent effort. Initially, this exercise might feel phony or insincere, but continue the *process* of thinking, speaking, and behaving in a new way. Small increments of success can lead to a transformed life.

Actress Alicia Witt said, “Acting is magical. Change your look and your attitude, and you can be anyone.”

Learn to be content. A multi-millionaire was asked what would make him happy. “Another million,” the rich man replied. A greedy person is always in want. God’s tenth commandment states we must not covet. One reason is that greed makes us less appreciative of what we already have.

In my travels to the poorer countries, something amazed my American mindset. Many people with little possessions were more joyful and content than those abundantly supplied. What an eye-opener!

The words of apostle Paul assure us we can learn to be content with what we have if we learn to stay in the process: “I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. Whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through Him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:11-13). [An Attitude of Contentment](#)

Learning to be content is a process that includes trusting God’s hand of provision and supplying our *needs* and not necessarily our *wants* and *desires*.



Such is a reassuring thought. God saves us from harmful or untimely wants and desires, though often we might only admit or appreciate it later in life.

A strong will. In almost any area of life, human desire is a powerful resource. Legendary football coach Vince Lombardi stated, “The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will.” A strong will is sometimes evidenced by sports upsets and dramatic healings mystifying medical science. Also, a person once considered a “loser” or a “nobody” becomes highly regarded because he is determined to succeed.

Don’t critically compare. Comparing the calling or responsibility of one person with someone else’s is not wise. Depending on the situation, it can lead to bitter feelings of superiority or inferiority. God gives us different assignments.

Faithfully doing what God assigned you to do with a grateful heart is essential. Stay-at-home moms have often been flooded with thoughts that their tireless efforts are something to be ashamed of. As a result, they can buy into the misguided notion that raising children at home is less noble than being part of the ‘esteemed workforce.’ Nonsense!

Have you ever seen a dedicated mother and housewife? It is a crucial 24/7/365



job and, many times, *thankless*. I encourage mothers there’s no greater responsibility than to model and mold children in the right direction. The impact leaves an indelible mark, positively influencing the children’s

character and their relationship with God. A mother’s greatest masterpiece is her children, which she sacrifices for. [Paid in Full](#)

Be resilient. Some always seem happy, exceedingly energetic, and apparently shielded from hardships. But these people are no different from anyone else except for their ability to bounce back from adversity. They are resilient. No matter how intense or frequent the hardships, they have learned to remain calm and hopeful. They do not allow initial visceral reactions and negative thoughts to upset them.

Don't try to impress others. Most of us tend to put our best foot forward only to find we trip ourselves.

Some college friends at the time were surprised when I shared my constant struggle not to be a perfectionist. Seeing their raised eyebrows and perplexed looks was amusing. They tried making sense of my physical awkwardness with perfection. But the physical limitations were the spark behind the perfectionist, do excellent hand-in-school presentations lest others think less of me.

Hours spent on a school document to look exactly right, reading without a hint of ambiguity and no typos. These are valuable but must not be a substitute for what should reflect a person: integrity and doing good deeds as God directs.

The burden of being a perfectionist is a weighty one. I'm learning that eating spinach doesn't help handle the load. Thankfully, I'm becoming comfortable in my skin more each year and enjoy being myself. And as Diane Von Furstenberg suggests, "You're always with yourself, so you might as well enjoy the company."



Have a healthy sense of humor, and laugh more. I like joking around because

it (1) helps brighten others' day, and (2) there is a part of me that regards life too seriously. Do you take life so seriously that you cannot enjoy it? Is making friends difficult? Without a sense of humor, enjoying our days is a struggle. Always being too serious tends to alienate others, are hypercritical of ourselves, get easily offended, and live with little or no spontaneity. Thankfully, there are some simple solutions to these negative experiences if practiced regularly.

“Smiling is one of the best beauty remedies. If you have a good sense of humor and a good approach to life, that’s beautiful,” says Rashida Jones. Rather than sternly correcting others, many times, sharing a humorous truth can be a helpful tool to get your point across. How about saying something Will Rogers may have said to someone who loves being in the spotlight: “We can’t all be heroes because somebody has to sit on the curb and clap as they go by.”

Medical science notes the value of humor and laughter in helping depression sufferers. Such therapy should not come as a surprise. Solomon wrote about 3000 years ago, “A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Proverbs 17:22). Discretion must guide one’s laughter; laugh more at your troubles and a lot less at your neighbor’s. [10 Health Benefits of Laughter](#)

Replace self-worth with godly worth. Frequently, our sense of self is flimsy. We try to prop it up and impress others with educational credentials, club memberships, trophies, expensive cars, extravagant clothing, eye-catching tattoos, fame, etc. These aren’t inherently bad, but these ego supports are external things, and comparing ourselves with the next guy often causes us discontent. The truth is, there will always be someone who has more than us.

But this picture of discontent may get worse. For instance, a jealous person can view others as a threat or a rival. He may resent, hate, and even wish calamity on them to feel better about himself. What a conniving and joyless way to live.

Don't Compare Yourself to Others

But knowing who we are in Jesus, our reliance on self-worth is of no redeeming value. Knowing we are joint heirs with Jesus Christ, conformed to His image (Romans 8:17, 29), provides the foundation for godly worth and fulfillment. What security!

Look for the good in everything. Instead of harping on an attribute or two that we don't like, let's recognize the admirable qualities in people, circumstances,



and things. I suggest using the AAA approach, which can be beneficial. No, Martha, the AAA does not mean the American Automobile Association. In this case, it stands for Acceptance, Appreciation, and Admiration.

When it comes to people, as much as possible, let's accept them for who they are. Oh, sure, we won't see eye-to-eye on everything. But sharing what we have in common is productive. Acceptance is vital in establishing ongoing, meaningful relationships.

And in a negative context, a primary reason our youth are so susceptible to gang membership is that they are readily accepted.

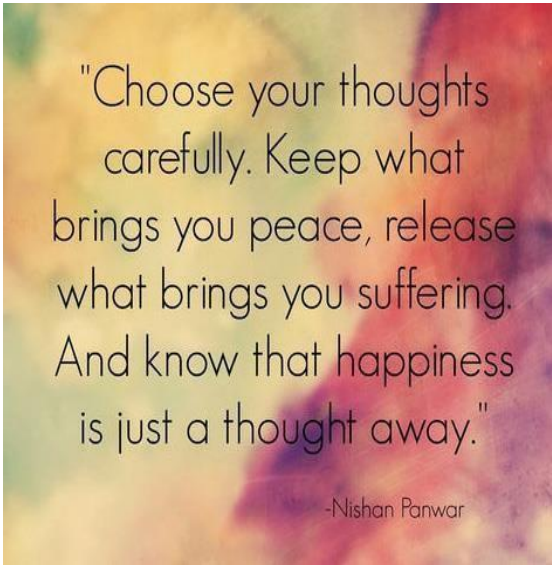
A sincere appreciation and admiration of one another can bring out the best in both parties. It reminds others they aren't taken for granted. It is an antidote for prejudice and fosters a healthy dependency on others, tapping into one another's strengths.

A good thought life. A negative mind will never give you a positive life.

Thoughts regularly enter unintentionally; they just ‘pop’ into our minds. These thoughts make no statement as to who we are.

It is what we *do* with thoughts that will eventually define our character and destiny. Educator and author Stephen R. Covey said, “Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.”

Philippians 4:6-8 outlines a healthy thought life: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.” The words we say impact our thinking and behavior. Encourage yourself by voicing aloud what God’s Word says about your concern.



"Choose your thoughts carefully. Keep what brings you peace, release what brings you suffering. And know that happiness is just a thought away."

-Nishan Panwar

Success is based on significance, not fame alone. All of us have probably eaten at a fast-food restaurant. Have you ever considered your attitude toward those serving you? I have, and it’s been demeaning, to my shame.

I thought of something that helped change my snobbish attitude. Employees who clean tables, mop floors, promptly remove the garbage, and clean the

restrooms are vital to the restaurant's success as the manager and the owner. Why is that?

Imagine the restaurant offered generous portions of incredible-tasting food at very reasonable prices. The manager and the owner are top-notch, essential for a high-profit margin. But if the place is dirty and reeked of old garbage, it would not be long before the restaurant would go belly-up (excuse the pun).

Thus, success is based on significance, not fame alone, in the workplace or elsewhere.

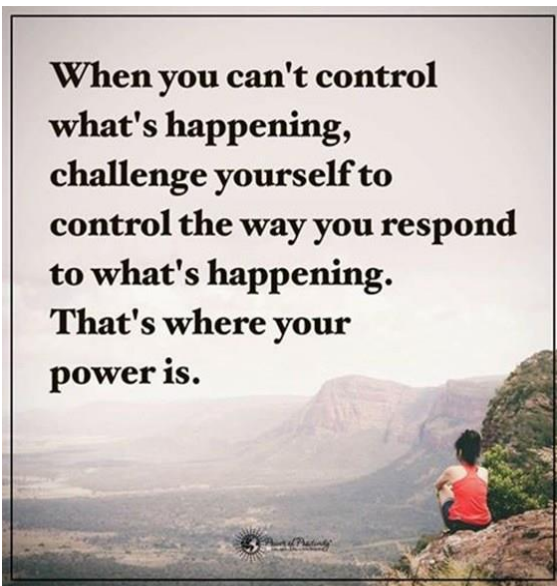
When you cannot change the situation, change your approach. Life is full of

expectations and disappointments. We can be too specific about what we want, and there we are – forever waiting. Some things are out of our control, so why make ourselves miserable trying?

However, we can control the way we respond to the situation. Romantic poet James Lowell addressed this topic, "There is no good in arguing with the inevitable. The only argument

available with an east wind is to put on your overcoat."

Deliberately refrain from an action to develop appreciation. This question may sound odd, but have you ever had an itch and intentionally didn't scratch it? If so, probably its discomfort became so irritating that you finally gave in. Ah, what a relief! Was there a lesson learned in this exercise of refrain?



While teaching Bible study, I was baffled why so many severely disabled, non-verbal residents at the residential facility would abruptly scream for no apparent reason. Their body language responses to my three questions were often negative: Do you need to go to the bathroom? Are you in pain? Do you need to be repositioned in your wheelchair/gurney?

Being in the dark, I had become increasingly frustrated and uptight with them. Then it finally came to me (the dunderhead that I am). Most likely behind their sudden outbursts was their inability to scratch an itch or swat away a pest. I felt ashamed, and apologies followed. Sometimes, I refrain from scratching or swatting to appreciate what my hands can do, a cue to be kind to the less able.

Responsible pet ownership is rewarding. According to *livescience.com*, "... they surveyed 217 people, determining differences between pet owners and non-owners ... they found that pet owners were happier, healthier and better adjusted than were non-owners." But pet ownership can be a nightmare if the owner is not committed to maintaining the animal's proper care and sense of well-being. A pet is not a toy, as cute and soft as it might be. A pet requires *lifelong, loving devotion to the pet's best interest*. To maximize the benefits of owning a pet, make the pet part of the family as much as possible.

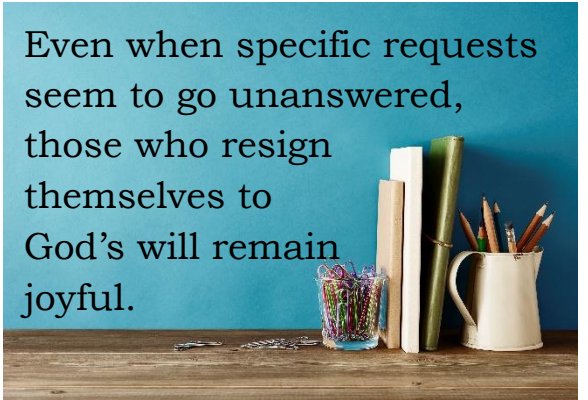


On a personal note, we got this little angel from the animal shelter in June 2017. Colleen (Ling Ling) is a 15-pound bundle of pure joy. She is a former 'bag lady' who was homeless, wandering city streets, and greatly underweight. Praise God, animal control rescued her. Colleen is a Border Terrier who lays close to my wheelchair, providing me comfort and protection. She gives so much love, and our household is much happier now. Her personality teaches me to be a kinder, less insistent person.

Don't take anything you have for granted. Yes, *anything*! A person may scoff when I ask, “Are you grateful for shoelaces, your ability to swallow, a tissue or handkerchief, or someone who provides a listening ear?” You might say in astonishment, “Paul, these are so commonplace and humdrum – no big deal.” Yes, keeping shoes securely on your feet is no big deal until you don't have shoelaces. The ability to swallow is no big deal until you must be fed through a feeding tube. A tissue or handkerchief is no big deal until you have nothing to sneeze into. And the only one who provides you a listening ear is no big deal until the person has nothing to do with you again. Those who appreciate all things, significant and insignificant, will realize God's goodness!

Trust in God's will. Decades ago, I frowned upon those who asked God for His will to be done after making a specific request. I viewed them as weak, wimpy Christians who had no firm expectations. But my view changed when pondering Jesus' prayer in Luke 22:42. It reads, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup [of gruesome suffering and death] away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.” I noticed Jesus' request for divine intervention was followed by resignation to God's will.

It's good to make requests and then resign yourself by asking God's will to be done. Even when specific requests seem to go unanswered, those who resign themselves to God's will remain joyful. They have a settled assurance in His goodness, wisdom, plan, and timing. (More about this in a later chapter.)



Even when specific requests seem to go unanswered, those who resign themselves to God's will remain joyful.

In the article, *The Root of Bitterness*, Dr. Adrian Rogers offers three steps to eliminating bitterness:

1. **Let God reveal it.** Sometimes, people say, “I know my heart; there’s no bitterness in me.” The truth of the matter is you don’t know your heart. God’s Word tells us, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). A deceitful heart cannot diagnose a deceitful heart. You need to let God the Holy Spirit do radical surgery.
2. **Let grace remove it.** A bitter response is never right when someone has done something wrong to you. You need to ask God to forgive you, and He will stand by His grace. If someone has wronged you, cut it down and forget it. By the grace of God, bury that hurt in the grave of God’s forgetfulness. Justice is God giving us what we deserve. Mercy is God not giving us what we deserve. Grace is God giving us what we don’t deserve.
3. **Let good replace it.** Hebrews 12:14 says, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” You cannot be holy unless you follow peace with men. It is so worth it when you forgive. But, you say, “Look what they’ve done! I am not going to let them off the hook.” Well, they are not on the hook – you are! When you forgive, you set two people free; one is yourself.

You will discover your life is more joyful when you uproot your bitterness. If God gave us justice, every person reading this would die and go to Hell. Thank God for His mercy that removes His hand of punishment from us. Praise God for His grace that gives us a brand-new life!

*You will discover your
life is more joyful when
you uproot your
bitterness.*

Success in overcoming bitterness and other character flaws can be a lifelong process for many. Determination and perseverance to bounce back after a setback is vital. As H.G. Wells encourages us, “If you fell yesterday, stand up today.” Typically, nothing worthwhile comes with ease. Author and entrepreneur Wilson Mizner warns us, “Many people talk about the road to success, but the easy street is a blind alley.”

How necessary are determination and perseverance when attempting to succeed amid trials? An illustration might provide an answer.

A young man approached a sage, asking, “Which way should I take that will lead me to success?” Without a word, the sage pointed in the direction and warmly smiled, assuring the traveler. As the traveler proceeded in that direction for a while, suddenly, there was a splat. Dirty and a little scraped, the young man gathered and returned to the sage.

Again, he asked, “Which way should I take that will lead me to success?” The sage points in the same direction as before, and he coaxes the traveler onward with a gentle pat on the back. Along the way, the traveler experiences another splat, more significant than the prior. He haggardly treks back to the sage with his body bleeding and clothing in tatters.

Once more, he asks the same question, and again, the same direction is given. The traveler became outraged, scorning the sage due to all that befell him.

“My friend,” the sage calmly and lovingly replied, “success is just *beyond* the splat.”

Let’s now examine how resigning to God’s will and prayer are vital to experiencing success, comfort, and divine trust beyond the splat.

Resignation to God's Will and Prayer

"Prayer is not so much the means whereby God's will is bent to man's desires as it is that man's will is bent to God's desires."

— Charles Bent

"The Christian life is not a constant high. I have my moments of deep discouragement. I have to pray to God with tears in my eyes and say, 'O God, forgive me,' or 'Help me.'"

— Billy Graham



Possibly, no one likes a quitter except another quitter. Is there a *Quitters Anonymous* support group? If so, how do they keep their members?

There is a difference between quitting and resigning, though both actions involve discontinuation. To quit suggests a sense of hopelessness and disgust. But in some instances, resigning indicates a sense of hope, love, and peace, especially among the faithful. Resignation is the quiet submission to the Divine will, without discontent or murmuring. This high level of compliance is not instantaneous. It is achieved through time and, yes, often through adversity.

Resignation is the quiet submission to the Divine will, without discontent or murmuring.



Horatio Spafford was a lawyer, a prominent Presbyterian church elder, and a Chicago real estate investor. His story is remarkable and inspirational. In 1871, the Great Chicago Fire left the city in ashes, tragically leaving 300 dead and

100,000 homeless. With the aid of others, Horatio helped the less fortunate get back on their feet.

Horatio was monetarily well off and had purchased an extensive area along a stretch of Chicago shoreline. But the fire leveled his six buildings, devastating him financially.

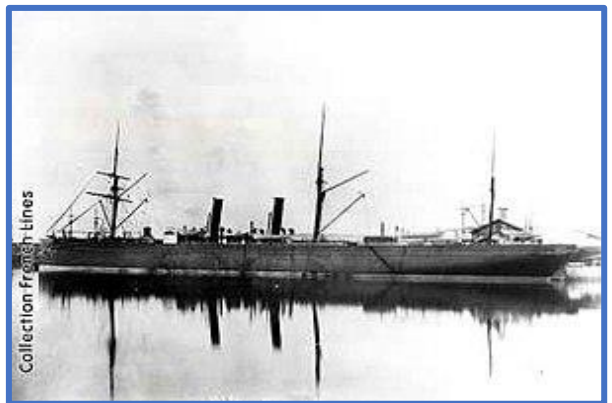
At the time, Anna and Horatio had four daughters and one son. According to the doctor, their four-year-old son became gravely ill with scarlet fever and was about to die. Horatio and his friend, Phillip Bliss, prayed all night for God to spare the boy and return him to health. But sometimes, God says no. His son passed away less than 24 hours later.

Spafford had greatly appreciated his four daughters in the following months. Still, his heart remained heavy over the loss of his son. Such misfortune and grief were difficult to overcome, but the Lord comforted him. In time, joy returned to the Spafford household.

By November 1873, plans were set for Spafford and his family to vacation in England. But, at the last minute, Spafford was notified he had to appear before the Chicago Building

Commission. So, he sent his family ahead by steamship and planned to join them a few weeks later.

Along the voyage, the *Ville du Havre* (pictured) experienced fog during the night and collided with another vessel.



Twelve minutes later, the ship sank. About two-thirds of those aboard perished. Anna's telegram to Horatio read, "Saved alone. What should I do?"

After the collision, a fellow survivor, Pastor Weiss, recalled Anna saying, "God gave me four daughters. Now, they have been taken from me. Someday, I will understand why."

Horatio sailed on the next available ship to join his grieving wife. It was during the voyage that he composed his most significant work. Informed by one crewman that they were near the shipwreck, Spafford went to the top of the deck to look and talk to God. It went something like this:

It is so peaceful now, Lord, like a gentle river. Even when the sea billows roll, they will never reveal the sorrow in them. Oh, God, my heart is so heavy. I don't think I can bear it. My children, my precious children!

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. You know what I feel. You also lost Your Child. And because of that, I will see my children again. My sins are nailed to the cross; I bear them no more. My Jesus, come soon! Come soon. If it is not soon, give me the strength to bear the pain. Help me contend with Your will. Teach me to say it is well with my soul. It is well with my soul.

Spafford penned a poem and cabled the words to Bliss. When Horatio and Anna returned home, Phillip composed music for the poem. The result is one of the best-loved hymns of all time, *It Is Well With My Soul*. This hope-filled song has inspired and helped countless others through bad times and good times to say and sing ["It Is Well With My Soul."](#)

Years later, the couple had three more children, two daughters, and one son. Once again, they lost another young son due to disease in 1880.

Spafford faced so much tragedy and still wrote such words of hope and faith. What an example of resignation to God's sovereignty. *Sovereignty means God's freedom from outward restraints, unlimited rule of mankind, and control over His creation and world history without overruling human free will.*

Since God is sovereign, Spafford's story brings into question the value and effectiveness of prayer. Spafford and Bliss prayed earnestly all night, and still, the boy died.

In a human sense, I would have wanted the boy to live. In my human mind, it is easy to question God's goodness and intent when tragedy hits someone I love or myself. God's sovereignty sometimes bugs me, mainly when I do not get my way and according to my timetable. Though subtle, there is a pervading thought that God should be accountable to me, according to my understanding and wisdom. Am I alone, precious reader, or do you sometimes think God should be answerable to you?

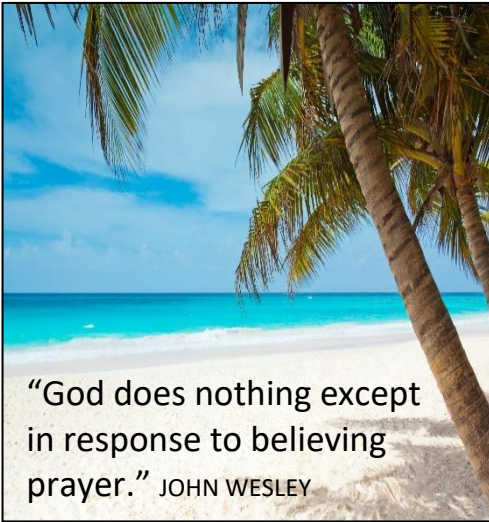
The truth is, God serves neither you nor me but lovingly and persistently coaxes us to carry out His perfect plan to benefit us. He works everything in conformity with the purpose of His will (Ephesians 1:11). God works in us to fulfill His good purpose (Philippians 2:13).

God's nature, purposes, and intentions for our lives are good. This is not to say everything is inherently good, but He will use adversity for the ultimate good. I can forget such truths when pain and human reasoning tempt me to accuse God of being unfair or unjust.



At such times, I must, with difficulty, bring my thoughts in line with who He is and what He does. No one but a loving God can use everything for good, no matter how bad or bleak it may appear. Hence, we must trust, not despair! God

is trustworthy even if He chooses not to change something we want. Why? Because God knows best, far beyond our puny human understanding and logic.



Let's explore God's sovereignty and the value of prayer. Prayer is an absolute privilege and perhaps the most powerful resource to Christ's followers. Many times, God limits Himself, needing our participation through prayer. "God does nothing," wrote John Wesley, "except in response to believing prayer." We must trust God's biblical promises in faith, regardless of outward (temporary) circumstances.

[Haven't Seen It Yet](#)

Before going further, let's understand what prayer is. The late Christian Evangelist Billy Graham offered this simple, basic explanation:

Prayer is spiritual communication between man and God, a two-way relationship in which man should talk to God and listen to Him. Prayer to God is like a child's conversation with his father. It is natural for a child to ask his father what he needs.

There are many promises in God's Word to encourage us to pray. Such as: "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him" (Psalm 91:15); "And it shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24); "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). The Scriptures tell us to pray for one another and assure us that God hears and answers prayer.

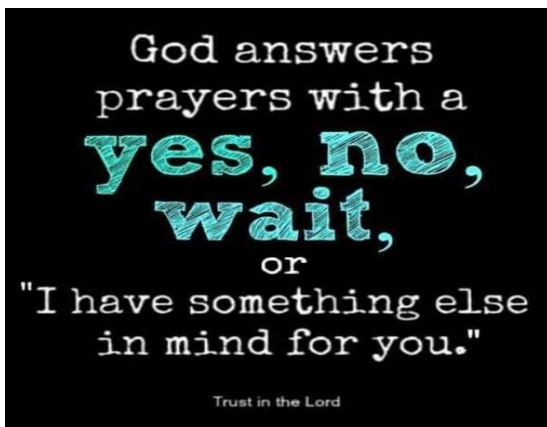
When you receive Christ into your heart, you become a child of God and have the privilege of praying to Him at any time about anything. The Christian life is a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

And best of all, it is a relationship that will last for all eternity.

Being a prayer person, I wonder why participation is lacking in this significant, valuable activity. A church group held a three-day retreat at a Christian conference center. The first evening, there was a worship service. At its conclusion, the pastor announced a prayer meeting for those wishing to attend the following morning. Of the 335 who heard the announcement, only 40 people showed up to pray. [Effective Prayer](#)

Countless people are convinced of the power of prayer. Medical science has confirmed this truth, as will be discussed later. So why don't we pray more than we do? Is it because God doesn't answer prayer with any consistency? Or is it because we have a preconceived idea of what answered prayer is?

Do you know why illegal drugs are so prevalent today? One reason is they generally work at once. Can we say the same thing about prayer? No, we can't, not from *our limited human perspective*.



I believe God answers every prayer. Does this mean we get everything we ask? Of course not. When God doesn't grant our request, His answer is *no*, as in Spafford's case when his son succumbed to the disease. Or the answer is to *wait*, as it is not the right time, from [God's perspective and ours](#). Or, His answer is

something different in mind for us.

Keep praying, but be thankful that God's answers are wiser than your prayers. How many of us, in retrospect, are grateful God did not grant us every whim and plea, saving us from needless misery and worry? Yet, many make themselves emotional wrecks, obsessed with anxious thoughts and stressed. Worry is like a rocking chair. It gives you something to do but gets you nowhere. "Faith is a deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time," says Oswald Chambers. [Persistence in Prayer Strengthens Your Faith](#)

I posted the left photo on a Facebook depression support group website. Marie responded, "A symptom of depression is worrying about life. You can't just flip a switch to make it stop. Anyone who struggles with depression understands this."

"Marie," I replied, "you have a good point. Respectfully, I am not saying, 'Just flip the switch to stop worrying.' Many, if not most people, tend to worry regardless of depression or not. It's like a default setting humans have. The good news is that we can choose to worry less and pray more. This may not be easy at first. But with persistent effort, life becomes more enjoyable, and our trust in the Lord deepens. I know this from personal experience and have seen many depressed people make changes for the better as they prayed more. Even if it's only baby positive steps in the right direction, often such effort yields amazing results by staying in this PROCESS." Marie responded with a 'Like' emoji.



Prayer does not always change the circumstances. Prayer changes the person praying. As C.S. Lewis explains, "I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God. It changes me." Prayer has changed this author by (1) developing a deeper appreciation of God's goodness, saving me from my

sins, (2) being more understanding and compassionate toward others, and (3) less insistent on getting my way by desiring God's will be done.

I know miracles happen today, and I don't hesitate to ask God for a miracle when circumstances paint a bleak picture. But God doesn't promise us to act miraculously every time we ask. He promises us the ability and grace to endure



the most difficult times, becoming godlier as He enables us. This holy change of the heart is the greatest miracle and privilege, bar none.

We take many things for granted, such as good health. We all have different needs, and health concerns touch us at various times. So, what about the physical healing power of prayer?

A second study at the California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco confirmed the first report: AIDS patients who were prayed for but were unaware of the prayers were considerably healthier six months later. The group receiving prayer had a hospitalized stay averaging 10 days compared to a 68-day average of those not receiving prayer.

I often pray for the sick and find it easier to pray for others than for my complete healing. I cannot heal a headache, a common cold, or a serious ailment. But Jesus has used me to restore health to some instantly and to others gradually. People ask, Why doesn't Jesus heal you? I can't give them convincing answers. It has baffled me; I accused God of being cruel or unfair decades ago. However, three possible reasons provide me peace:

It is humbling not to get what I want when I want it, for God protects me.

Since I know myself, worldly temptations would be more alluring if not limited by physical infirmities. Thus, not being healed acts as a loving boundary, more likely keeping me from dangerously wandering into immorality.

Not being healed shows my allegiance.

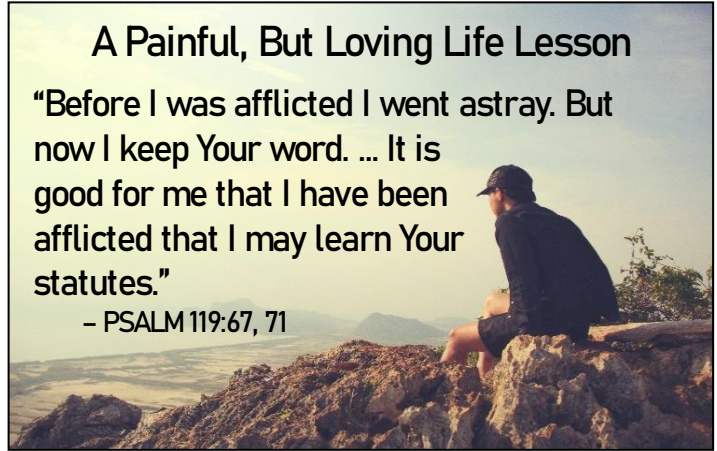
Must I be healed, or will I follow God anyway? The latter, without a doubt.

God is not obliged to heal me. While Jesus healed multitudes, He did not heal everyone.

To think total physical healing is God's best, and anything less, is challenging the sovereignty of God. Sin and a lack of faith can hinder one's health, but our weaknesses do not stop God from acting on our behalf. God knows what's best for us.

God heals through nature, doctors, medicine, and miracles. Too often, many only ask for divine healing or a miracle. Asking for a miracle is good, but many health concerns are in our hands, which means being *proactive*. So, let's remember the all-important practical, common sense aspects of health, healing, and well-being through the daily practice of:

- Acting on God's Word (Proverbs 4:20-22).
- Getting proper sleep.
- Consuming nutritious food and drink (especially water).
- Performing physical, mental, and deep-breathing exercises.
- Maintaining good hygiene and dental care.
- Keeping a healthy body weight.
- Enjoying the great outdoors.
- Staying warm when the air temperature is cold.
- Not harming one's body by smoking, abusing prescription medications, using illegal drugs, and drinking excessive alcohol.



- Having a sense of humor.
- Smiling and laughing.

Also, regular medical and dental checkups can prevent minor problems from becoming severe, painful, and costly.

Does God get more glory from a person receiving total physical healing than those who still love, trust, and obey God without such a blessing? For years, I held fast to the mistaken notion a healthy Christian is *always* in a far better position to bring glory to God than a Christian struggling with health concerns.

Stephanie, a good friend, has prayed for my healing for years. One evening, at a midweek home fellowship group, she said, "It's going to be a great testimony

*As Christians, we are to accept
what God gives, relinquish what
He wants to take, gracefully
suffer whatever He allows, and
become what He desires.*

to God's glory when Paul is healed!" Others took exception, stating no physical healing, as incredible as it would be, could eclipse the testimony already done in Paul's life in affecting others for God's glory.

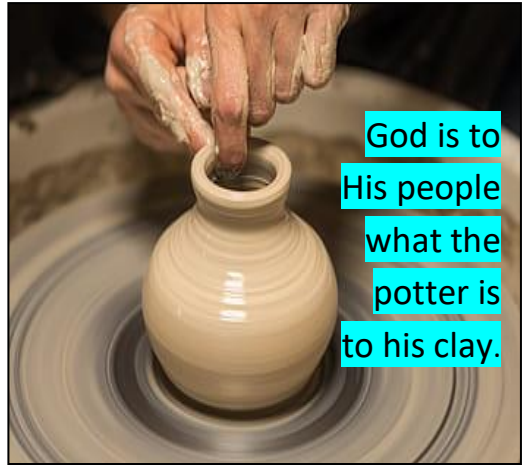
God works with us individually, healing some while giving others the grace

and strength to *joyfully persevere in suffering*. As Christians, we are to accept what God gives, relinquish what He wants to take, gracefully suffer whatever He allows, and become what He desires. This attitude of resignation points to a grand truth: He is the divine Potter, and we are His clay.

In the art of pottery, flaws are inherently part of the process. The potter doesn't give up because the vessel is initially improperly formed. He takes it and throws it on the wheel again for a new beginning. After repeated efforts,

the artist finally achieves his desired product.

Jeremiah 18:1-6 mentions a parable. In summary, God is to His people what the potter is to his clay. Have you wished for an image of God to help explain how He can love us so profoundly while allowing us to be crushed by life's circumstances? Perhaps this image of God as the divine Potter is the image you need. God turns the bad into the good and the ugly into the beautiful. And He transforms the worthless into the valuable and the weak into the strong.



Consider the opening lyrics of the hymn, *Have Thine Own Way*:

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
 Thou art the Potter; I am the clay.
 Mold me and make me after Thy will,
 While I am waiting, yielded, and still.

We are the clay; the Potter is at work by molding us to His will. So, there is a reason to hope. Remember, you are clay in the divine Potter's hand, which means the best is yet to be! [Potter and Clay](#)

C.S. Lewis described the love of God for His people as "being persistent as the artist's love for his work. ... God loves us with such a persistent passion that He is willing to use temporary pain to create eternal beauty."

Since God doesn't give up on those He loves, we should never give up on ourselves and never give up on others, consigning certain people to the waste pile of lost causes.

As mentioned earlier, Billy Graham's description shows how vital prayer is. But can our prayers be too vague? There's a story of a woman who asked her pastor to pray for her. The pastor asked, "What specifically should I pray for?" She replied, "Nothing specific." The pastor informed her, "Then that's what you'll get – nothing specific."

Can prayer backfire? I'm convinced it can if the person praying limits God as to its fulfillment. "Lately, I have been looking at how prayer can be harmful," said Larry Dossey, a medical internist.

Dossey describes a man who was convinced his prayers would be answered. The man prayed for his ailing wife to return to health. Dossey comments, "That didn't happen, and he became mentally deranged. We can shoot ourselves in the foot if we have only one answer in mind when we pray. Rather than lobby for an outcome, it is better to ask that God's will be done."

I heard a man pray for his close friend who was terminally ill with cancer. He offered an impassioned plea for healing. With the same vocal quiver, he added, "I acknowledge Your sovereignty. Help me be willing to bear the discomfort of Your will if he is not healed." Such resignation is refreshing in these selfish days.

Known as the *Serenity Prayer*, Reinhold Niebuhr offers this request: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the

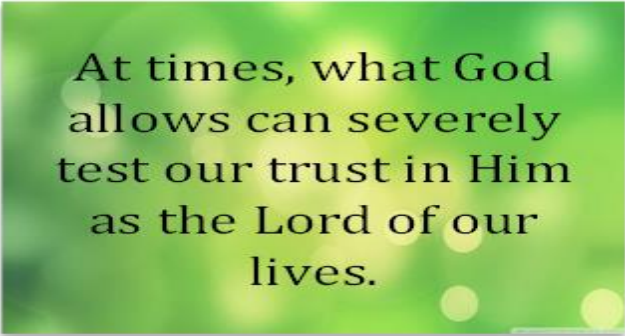


difference.”

At times, what God allows can severely test our trust in Him as the Lord of our lives. My dear friend, Tran Edwards, lost her only son when he was 36. John would buy gasoline for a stranded motorist, a mother with a small daughter beside her. Suddenly, a large flatbed truck appeared. It barreled down from a hill and struck John, instantly killing him. How fitting the way John met his early death: helping others.

A coworker of Tran, Ivory, said of John's death, “I didn't question God when my brother died at a young age nor when I got breast cancer at age 40. But I still have difficulty understanding how God would allow such a loving, caring person to be taken in his prime. He was so full of energy, profoundly enriching the lives of many people like me.”

Such an untimely death often raises questions about the fairness of life. As a devout Christian, John devoted himself to restoring health to the sick and disabled by being the best medical doctor he could be. In a world where unselfish giving is increasingly rare, some deaths are hard to understand.



At times, what God
allows can severely
test our trust in Him
as the Lord of our
lives.

A week before the accident, Tran shared with others in a small Bible group Job's attitude in trusting God amid his many trials. She cited Job's declaration, “Though He slays me, I will trust Him” (Job 13:15).

The day Tran heard of John's accident, she echoed the words of Job, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). Initially, she felt no anger at God. Tran was in a state of shock. But shortly after that, she became overwhelmed with grief. She said to the Lord, “You took

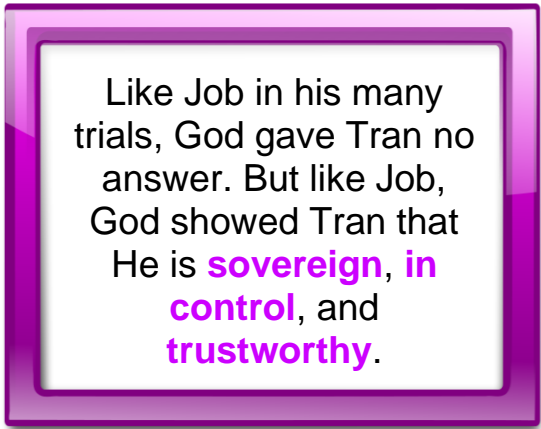
my son and slain me." The Lord spoke gently deep within her, asking, "Do you still love Me, Tran?" "Yes, Lord, I still love You," she replied reluctantly.

She continued to struggle; her love for the Lord became shallow. She became consumed with the thought of her loss. "I lost the best thing in my life when my son died" and intended to commit suicide.

Tran held a bottle of sleeping pills and a glass of water. Once again, she sensed God speaking to her on the inside. "You have your mother, husband, and daughter to care for. You cannot die." "Yes, Lord," Tran humbly acknowledged.

As time passed, Tran found new strength and courage from the Lord to deal with her loss, just as Joshua did after his leader, Moses, had died. Yet, some days, it took Tran all she could muster to believe that her life must go on. She took solace in the reassuring words of Joshua 1:5, "... I [God] will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Tran began the long process of getting out of herself by comforting and encouraging her family in their mourning.



Like Job in his many trials, God gave Tran no answer. But like Job, God showed Tran that He is **sovereign, in control, and trustworthy.**

Still, one question haunted Tran: Why was John, a servant of God, taken while doing the Lord's work? After studying the Book of Job, she gained a greater appreciation of who God is and His lordship. Like Job, in his many trials, God gave Tran no answer. But like Job, God showed Tran that He is sovereign, in control, and trustworthy.

A year after John's death, the Lord led Tran to start a bereavement support group at her church, where many grieving survivors have turned their sorrows

into joy.

John was born in war-torn Vietnam. He desired to help the Vietnamese people in any way possible. Tran is fulfilling John's desire by heading a ministry outreach to Vietnam. Tran asks physicians to partner with her by donating medical equipment, medicine, and supplies to help people still feel the war's effects. Along with her husband, Jim, Tran spends much of their finances buying items that are not donated.

Every autumn for nine years, she travels to Vietnam to discreetly share her faith in this communist country. The Vietnam outreach has brought relief and wholeness, physically and spiritually, to untold thousands. Tran and Jim have accepted those things they cannot change and changed those unacceptable things.

John's legacy of caring and comforting continues to spread, blazing a trail of hope to the downcast, the hurting, and the lost. The responsibility of meeting the needs of the whole person passed to Tran. Such has not been without a high personal cost to this aging, fragile mother.

She remarks, "My son's death will always be painful, but he didn't die in vain. I have learned to trust the Lord more than people and to love and forgive more deeply. I am better able to see that life is very unpredictable. We never know about the next moment. That's why my philosophy is that *life is very short. Take the time to love.*"

Tran demonstrated taking the time to love means tending to the

At the end of life,
 what really matters is not what
 we bought but what we **built**; not
 what we got but what we **shared**;
 not competence but our
character; and not our success
 but our **significance**. Live **a life**
that matters. Live a life of **Love!**

needs of others. Let's use our blessings to bless the less fortunate instead of the "Bless me, bless me" type of selfish prayer.

With this emphasis, St. Francis of Assisi offered the following prayer:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

On the lighter side, I came across a prayer by Margot Benary-Isbert on growing old. Though we might chuckle, it might benefit us to pray the following with sincerity:

Lord, thou knowest better than myself that I am growing older and will soon be old. Therefore, keep me from becoming too talkative, especially from the unfortunate habit of thinking I must say something about every subject and opportunity.

Release me from thinking I must straighten out other peoples' affairs. With my immense treasure of experience and wisdom, it seems a pity not to let everybody partake in it. But thou knowest, Lord, that I will need a few friends.

Keep me from the recital of endless details; give me wings to get to the point. Grant me the patience to listen to others' complaints; help me endure them with charity. Seal my lips on my aches and pains. They increase with the years, and my inclination to recount them is also

increasing.

I will not ask thee for improved memory, only for a little more humility and less self-assurance when my memory doesn't agree with others. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally, I may be wrong.

Make me loving without being sappy, helpful, and not bossy. Let me discover merits in people I had not expected and talents I had not thought to possess. And, Lord, give me the grace to tell them so. Amen.

Has the above discussion about resigning to God's will and prayer still left you baffled as to why some painful events happen? If yes, scoot over so I can join you. But let's not sit there unhappy, second-guessing God. So before ending this chapter, here's a reassuring, personal observation:

Someday,
everything will make
perfect sense. So, for now,
laugh at the confusion,
and smile through the
tears. Keep reminding
yourself that everything
happens for a reason.

The longer I live, the more I am convinced that God has a purpose and reason in every event of a person's life. Events don't happen haphazardly or by coincidence. If events occurred by chance, God would be surprised or caught off-guard about the events of the individual,

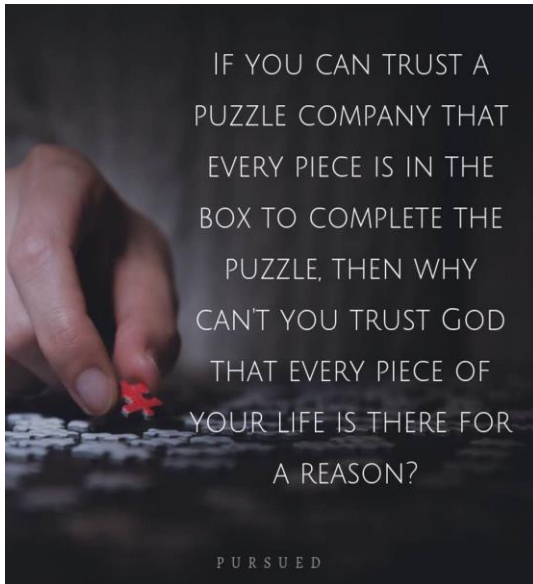
humankind, and the universe. He would only be a powerless spectator.

Consider Proverbs 16:33 in the *Amplified Bible*. It reads, "... even the events that seem accidental are really ordered by Him."

Does this mean we understand the reason behind every event? No. Is a lesson made known in every circumstance or an immediate blessing experienced? No.

However, the purpose and blessing of some events are evident quickly. For example, a person is in the right place at the right time to prevent a tragedy. A man at a sidewalk cafe sees a small boy wandering alone and enters a busy street. The man runs and swiftly carries the boy to safety a moment before a speeding truck would have severely injured, if not killed, the boy.

Other times, God's purposes are realized in retrospect. Perhaps months, years,



or decades later, an acknowledgment of a far greater plan was working behind the scenes for the ultimate good. And often, all of us can attest when His reasons remain a mystery, at least on this side of Heaven.

"Our problems can indeed be significant, even crushing. In His loving sovereignty, God is still standing over all of human history and weaving it all together into a beautiful tapestry, ultimately

glorifying Him. When troubles strike, remember this: God uses such situations to direct us to Him and the long-range view of life. He calls for us to trust, to hope, to wait," encourages Martin R. DeHaan.

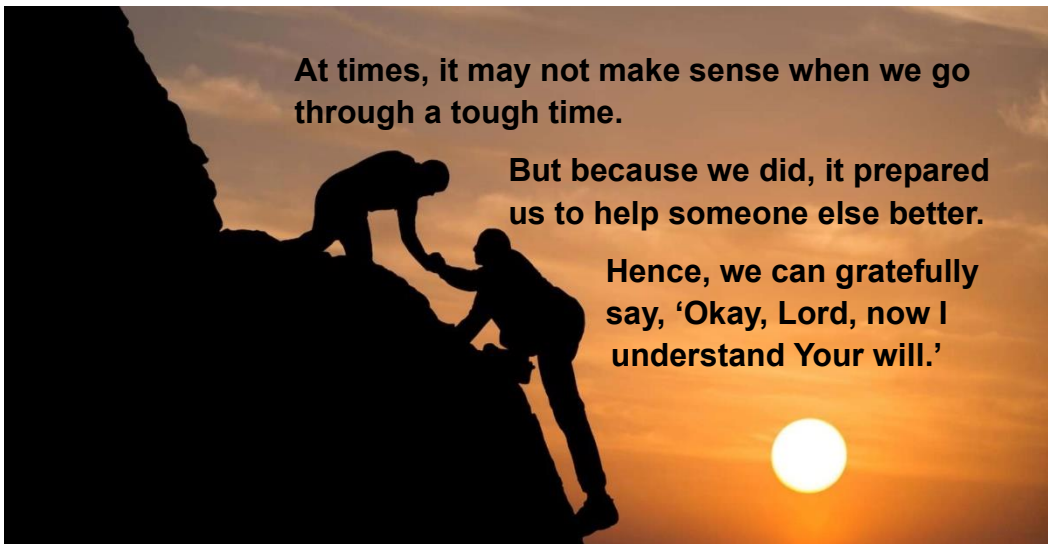
Romans 8:28 says, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, to those who have been called according to His purpose."

Referring to the above verse, *Christianity.com* comments:

That's an amazing promise because it demonstrates that an all-powerful God cares about you and me. Also, this promise cannot be fulfilled unless the One Who gives it is all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful, and

all-loving. Thankfully, these attributes characterize God. Thus, the promise itself is a testimony to God's sovereignty.

God makes that promise, and millions throughout history have testified to its truth because He has repeatedly proven His ability to back it up. Think about the implications of that promise. Because God is sovereign and loves you, nothing will ever come into your life that He doesn't know, decree, or allow. Consequently, no matter what you face in life, you can take comfort in God being sovereign.



At times, it may not make sense when we go through a tough time.

But because we did, it prepared us to help someone else better.

Hence, we can gratefully say, 'Okay, Lord, now I understand Your will.'

Making a meaningful life requires us to finish well. But, to finish well, how should we live? The next chapter answers this question.

Finish Well: A Meaningful Life

“I have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. Now there is the crown of righteousness in store, which the LORD, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that Day. And not only to me but to all who have longed for His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

— Apostle Paul



Most kids know the story of the tortoise and the hare. They can speak to its lesson – It’s not how well you start but how well you finish. No matter our age, acting upon this truth is vital.

A meaningful life is a life worth living. Yet, many live with little or no meaning, without passion. They merely exist with no purpose for being and doing their best. Tragically, many do not choose to take baby steps out of their self-imposed rut and despair. But there is always hope when knowing and acting on God’s purposes. In his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren explains,

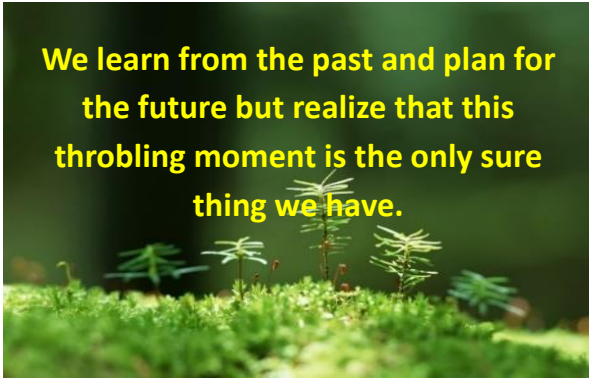
“Nothing matters more than knowing God’s purposes for your life, and nothing can compensate for not knowing them – not success, wealth, fame, or pleasure. Without a purpose, life is motion without meaning, activity without direction, and events without reason. Without a purpose, life is trivial, petty, and pointless.”

A meaningful life is guided by biblical values to (1) fulfill God’s incredible calling and plan for our individual lives, (2) enrich others in word and deed, and (3) shed one’s undesirable character traits. Whether we make great strides toward a life filled with meaning and purpose or barely move the needle, we know we can do more. As the tortoise methodically plots along his course until

completion, we must also strain and press forward our course to finish well. In doing so, our lives are meaningful and gloriously worth living.

I suggest seven broad areas to make life meaningful:

Live in the present, doing your personal best. We are to live here and now, not



there and then. The past is relevant but gone. We learn from the past and plan for the future but realize that this throbbing moment is the only sure thing we have. By living in the moment, uneasy feelings about the past or the future will not preoccupy our thoughts.

Rehearsing past failures in one's mind or looking to the future with extreme expectations wastes time by second-guessing or fosters self-hating. These thoughts usually begin with "What if," "If only," "I should have," and "When." Examples are: What if I had done a better job? If only I married someone else. I should have finished school. When I'm famous, the world will be at my feet.

Doing your personal best means any number of things. Here are five:

- Don't manipulate others, for it demeans them and taints your character.
- Know and accept your limitations and promote your strengths.
- Take personal responsibility instead of shifting blame or playing that you are helpless.
- Don't pretend to have all the answers, but be teachable to wisdom, especially biblical wisdom.
- Give every moment your best, even in the worst times, knowing time is precious.

Although it will not be a cakewalk, living in the present and doing your personal best is part of finishing well and making life meaningful.

Live a life of service. One of the most powerful lessons I learned wasn't from a church pulpit or classroom. Not a single word was uttered. Instead, the setting was an Olympic track meet. As expected, the athletes practiced well in advance with effort and anticipation.

I sat in the stands, eagerly looking down at the participants below. Excitement filled the air. However, worldwide media coverage was absent, not even national reporting. Only a couple of local media folk were present. Not one race was shown on television. Too bad because in one of the races, something profoundly beautiful happened.

As the runners neared the finish line, the lead runner fell. The second-place runner stopped, picked up her injured competitor, and helped her finish. Instead of pressing forward to win the race, the caring act placed her dead last. She saw serving someone else as what real winning is all about.



This story is unusual in another way: All the athletes had some mental deficiency or physical disability. This was the *Special Olympics*. A life lesson came from the most unlikely athletes that would have made the world better if more people had

witnessed it. Since I saw it, I have attempted to do my part in spreading its uplifting truth. Will you join me by spreading its truth as well?

In his inaugural address, President George H.W. Bush stated:

My friends, we are not the sum of our possessions. They are not the measure of our lives. In our hearts, we know what matters. We cannot only hope to leave our children a bigger car or bank account. We must hope to give them a sense of what it means to be a loyal friend, a loving parent, and a citizen who leaves his home, neighborhood, and town better than he found it. And what do we want the men and women who work with us to say when we're no longer there? That we were more driven to succeed than anyone around us? Or that we stopped to ask if a sick child had gotten better and stayed a moment there to trade a word of friendship?

God does not ask about our ability or inability. He only asks about our availability. Living a life of service is also part of finishing well and making life meaningful.

Live a life of faith. We can fall headlong into whatever tantalizes and grabs our senses, often to our detriment and others. Feelings certainly have their place but change moment by moment. Thus, relying on emotions *alone* usually clouds sound thinking about acting virtuously.

A beautiful poem is on a children's home wall in Kolkata, India. This home is one of many started and run by the *Missionaries of Charity*, founded by Mother Teresa. This poem encourages us to take the right path, irrespective of feelings and difficulties.

Anyway

People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered,
LOVE THEM ANYWAY.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives,
DO GOOD ANYWAY.

If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies,
SUCCEED ANYWAY.

The good you do will be forgotten tomorrow,
DO GOOD ANYWAY.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable,
BE HONEST AND FRANK ANYWAY.

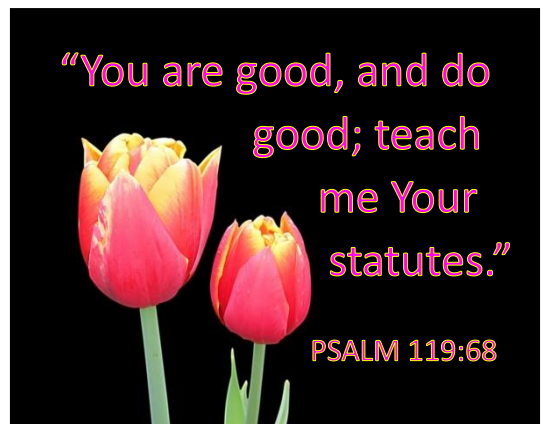
What you spent years building may be destroyed overnight,
BUILD ANYWAY.

People really need help but may attack you if you help them,
HELP PEOPLE ANYWAY.

Give the world the best you have, and you'll get kicked in the teeth,
GIVE THE WORLD THE BEST YOU'VE GOT ANYWAY.

Some boldly assert that *life can become meaningful only when we seize the opportunity to do good*. It's praiseworthy to govern our lives by doing right, guided by faith. This also is part of finishing well by making life meaningful.

Trust in God's good and giving nature. Many misunderstand God. He is not Santa Claus, who gives good gifts to the good and a lump of coal to bad people. Do the rain and the sun fall upon the just and unjust alike? Does the unjust prosper so much that some believers wonder if living a God-honoring lifestyle is worth it? Is there a final day of reckoning coming when God will execute perfect justice according to each



person's deeds, thoughts, and intents? The answer to these three questions is a resounding Yes! [God Is Good, and God Does Good](#)

It's easy to forget God's good and giving nature when adversities come. God either spares us from suffering in many situations or will allow us to bear it joyfully. What God allows is much different than what He ordains. I don't presume God never ordains suffering for His sovereign reasons. But it's crucial to remember God's intent when suffering comes: to conform us to His character (Romans 8:29, First Peter 4:1-2, James 1:2-4).

Trusting God's good and giving nature in times of hardship is also part of finishing well and making life meaningful.

Live a life of love and acceptance. A hospital orderly was driving to work one morning when involved in a terrible accident. In intense pain, he was carefully removed from the wreckage. The white work clothes he wore were torn and bloodied.

The paramedics noticed the work badge on his lapel and decided to take him to the hospital where he worked.

"Don't take me there!" he protested. "Why? It's a good hospital, isn't it?" "Oh, yes," he answered the paramedics, "the hospital has an outstanding medical reputation, but take me to the local bar instead." "But why?" they asked.

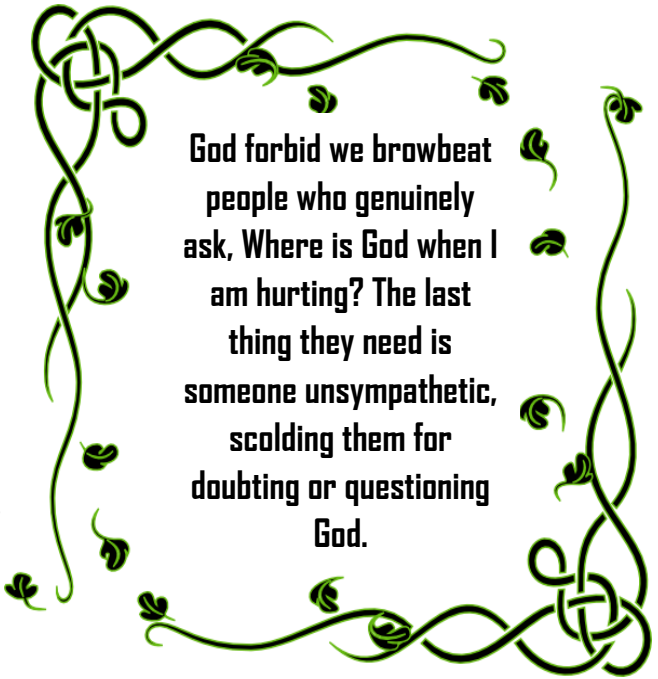
"The hospital only sees me when I'm chipper and energetic. When my clothes are white and pressed. The bar sees me depressed and at my worst. They accept me," the hurting man said. This story has implications for Christians.

Some Christians behave unbecomingly to those whose faults are glaring or whose faith has become weak. This lack of love and acceptance pushes away rather than endears, criticizes instead of encourages, and acts smugly rather than humble and helpful. Whether true or not, some people claim the only

army which kills their wounded (figuratively speaking) are Christians.

God forbid we browbeat people who genuinely ask, Where is God when I am hurting? The last thing they need is someone unsympathetic, scolding them for doubting or questioning God. On the contrary, extending a listening ear and a gentle spirit can have a calming and reassuring effect.

No matter how much we are sensitive to the Lord, we don't have all the answers to every painful situation. Can we be comfortable just coming alongside someone troubled, putting our arms around him, weeping, and being silent? Play a supportive role by being relatable and maybe sharing your struggle with difficulties. Of course, use discretion when sharing.



God forbid we browbeat people who genuinely ask, Where is God when I am hurting? The last thing they need is someone unsympathetic, scolding them for doubting or questioning God.

There is no harm or shame in telling the truth by saying something like this: I don't know why this has happened, but I encourage you to trust God's nature. He is a God of compassion, grace, and is slow to anger. He is abounding in love and faithfulness. He maintains love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. He is a God who arms me with strength, and His way is perfect. He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him (Exodus 34:6-7, Psalm 18:30).

A word of caution: Extending love and acceptance has its boundaries. Thus, compromising one's biblical morals to gain favor with a person through an

unholy alliance is not wise. But when sinful and ulterior motives are absent, loving and accepting others during their tough times is highly beneficial. Such is also part of finishing well and making life meaningful.

Live life from a positive perspective. This topic has been illustrated in various ways throughout this book. Below are other aspects that help us to keep life positive when unfortunate and trying events happen.

Barton Goldsmith, Ph.D., is a psychotherapist. His reasonably new computer just died. He said, “With all the tragedy in the world, I wasn’t going to let something like this make me upset or crazy. But I woke up obsessed with returning my data and transferring everything to the older computer. I was worried I might have lost some documents and photos that weren’t backed up.”

He found attempts to retrieve lost data and photos by phone calls to tech support were a waste of time. Instead of getting mad at the tech support, he made the unfortunate event a learning experience. Consequently, he learned more about his computer and eventually retrieved the lost files. Goldsmith concludes:

My obsession ended when I tweeted, “It was just a computer crash, not a car crash, and no one died or was injured, not even the guy at tech support.” We must decide what will twist us and what isn’t worth getting twisted about in these troubled times.

Things break in life. As long as it isn’t your heart, you have all you need to get whatever is fixed without exploding inwardly or outwardly.

The idea is to choose what needs serious attention. Then, let go of those things that don’t or that are out of your control. Doing that last part is not easy, but it lowers your stress. I want a low-stress life and to live as fully as possible. Therefore, I know that keeping things in

perspective is a far better way of going on with this (mostly) wonderful journey than ruminating about things I have no control over.

Gospel singer Sandi Patty remarks, “It’s all about perspective,” and gives examples of why she chooses to see her world differently:

- I’m thankful for the piles of laundry because it means my loved ones are near.
- I’m thankful for the mess after a party because it means I have been surrounded by friends.
- I’m thankful for that lady who sings really off-key behind me in church because it means I can hear.
- I’m thankful for all these wrinkles I have because they don’t hurt.
- I’m thankful for those clothes that sometimes fit a little too snugly because it means I have enough to eat.

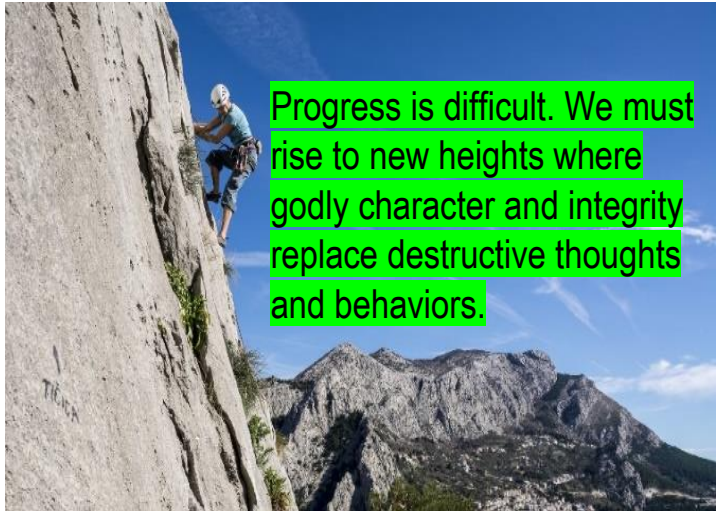
Finding the good in unfortunate and trying events keeps life positive. Such is also part of finishing well and making life meaningful. Now to my last point.

Prepare to meet God. In the early years of aviation, one of the pioneers was Handley Page. He landed in a field in India on one of his longer flights.

Once rested, he took off again, only to hear strange, scurrying sounds in the back of his plane. He didn’t think much of it at first. But as time passed, Page began wondering if giant rats from the field had gotten inside, causing havoc with the plane’s inner workings. He thought a deadly crash would be inevitable if I didn’t do something quickly. He remembered that rats only live at low altitudes.

So, Page ascended as high as the plane could climb while remaining conscious. Any compromise in altitude ensured his death. Sure enough, upon landing were the dead rats.

This story is what the Christian life must be – overcoming trials. Think about the wise words of Dr. Charles Stanley, “Adversity removes the cloak of what we’re supposed to be to reveal the truth of what we are.” There are often bad attitudes and values that gnaw at our inner workings. They hinder what God called us to be and do.



Progress is difficult. We must rise to new heights where godly character and integrity replace destructive thoughts and behaviors.

As with Page, the price of complacency for us is far too great. Progress is difficult, but we must rise to new heights where godly character and integrity replace destructive thoughts and behaviors. From God’s perspective, we are always “Under Construction.” Yes, we are a work in progress; there’s no shame in this truth. As Frederick Douglass encourages us, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.”

Page’s extraordinary flight wouldn’t be his last. He would again ascend high, but this time without a plane! And where was his destination? Well, his destination was where you, I, and everyone else would arrive upon death. Rabbi Harold Kushner answers the destination question by making the following observation:

As human beings, we need to be taken seriously as moral agents. Deep

within, we know we need to be judged. A college student spends a week putting his best into research and writing a paper, turning it in on time.

The paper is returned to the next class meeting with a checkmark. The student felt cheated because the professor never read it. He had only given the student credit for doing the assignment. “Why should I knock myself out if nobody cares?” the student concludes.

God replenishes the weak and suffering with love and courage, and that He cares. He cares about what I do and how I treat others. This is where the need to believe in the Last Judgment comes from.

By his admission, Ricardo was not ready for the Last Judgment. It took a significant wake-up call to get his attention again.

On a 1997 trip to Sao Paulo, Brazil, Ricardo drove me to a church where I spoke. En route, Ricardo shared how he chose to go astray from his Christian upbringing to live years of recklessness as a drug abuser. He left a wake of devastation behind, mistreating others and harming his mental and physical health. All this to gratify his self-centered life.

Then, a bullet was fired. The gunman thought he had killed Ricardo, the intended target, but it was not. Someone else died. This case of mistaken identity served as a wake-up call for Ricardo to return to his senses, realizing he needed help. Now, he serves God faithfully, living a joyful and productive life.

Dear reader, is God using adversity to get your attention? At the very least, we all need some fine-tuning of undesirable attitudes and behaviors. Like Ricardo, perhaps you may need a significant overhaul to get your life running admirably again. Or maybe you are tired of living apart from your Creator and desire to travel through life with a fresh, meaningful, God-honoring perspective.

Unlike Ricardo, who chose to do an about-face, others ignore their wake-up calls from God and are forever embittered by their stubborn decisions. And what about the gunman's victim? He didn't think that bloody day to be his last.

On the surface, it seems unfair and harsh that an innocent bystander would die, grabbing someone else's attention who had gone astray. Was this God's perfect plan? Certainly not. But God can use man's brutality to show us how fragile and temporary we are.

Planning for tomorrow is good, but most importantly, wisely plan for eternity. Being prepared to meet God can never come too soon. Tomorrow is promised



to no one. We don't know when, but there will surely be a day of accountability for everyone. *No one is exempt.*

Chances are, many of my readers are Christians. As Christians, living each day to please God in thought, word, and deed is essential. But when we become spiritually lukewarm, let us not stay indifferent: [The Church That Makes God Want to Vomit.](#) Let

us come boldly to the throne of grace. Our loving Lord provides forgiveness, strength, guidance, and assurance that He is in control for our good. So, get up and get going!

For those who haven't trusted in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, consider this: The devil tricks people into thinking he does not exist. Unbelievers often portray the devil as a cartoon character, wearing a red suit, holding a pitchfork, and grinning. He convinces the naive that there is no Hell. But the devil is real, and so is Hell. Hell is a horrific reality created for the devil and demons.

Hell is a place so repulsive many people do not acknowledge its existence or talk seriously about it. Instead, they joke about this place of eternal torment.

The thought that a good and loving God would send what many consider "good and decent people" to Hell is frightening and seemingly unfair. But what must be understood is a good, loving, and merciful God is trying to save people from Hell already headed there. All are sinners, guilty before a holy God. He attempts to pluck us as a burning stick from the fire to save us (Zechariah 3:2).

Many will condemn themselves to an eternity of darkness and damnation by *rejecting God's gift of eternal life* offered them through Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

[God So Loved](#)

Undoubtedly, this topic makes many people uncomfortable, even defensive. Decades ago, I was in the same boat. But after serious soul-searching, I chose to live life differently. Has it been easy living as a committed, born again, Spirit-filled Christian? No, it isn't easy. Has it been worth it? Definitely!

Pastor Rick Warren warmly shares why we exist and how to have a personal relationship with God. ["The best news you are ever going to hear."](#)

So, while you still have a pulse, prepare to meet God through a daily reliance on the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is the ultimate in finishing well by

making life incredibly meaningful.



Next, I have some final thoughts to conclude this book.

An Admission, an Update, and the Future

“There is no security on this earth, only opportunity.”

— General Douglas MacArthur



Judge Judith Sheindlin (*Judge Judy*, the TV show) informs, “Life is a journey. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It can be a fun journey or a miserable journey, and everyone has the opportunity to create their own story.”

An admission. This author has feet of clay, falling short of many encouragements and suggestions I give readers to overcome bitterness and other frailties. While writing the paperback edition of this book (published in 1999), I allowed bitterness toward someone I love to consume me. The emotion was so strong that I threatened to kill myself out of spite. Oh, thank God for His forgiveness and patience with me! Though I stumble, God’s love, goodness, and mercy have fortified me to stay in His transforming process.



An update. I have been privileged to interact with others in various meaningful settings for decades. This long season has changed due to failing health. As of 2023, the latest year this eBook was released, I am mostly confined to a sickbed and need 24/7 care.

Yet, I still thrive by God's grace – interceding in prayer, knowing Jesus more intimately, remaining joyful, and sharing my resources with those in need. Each day, I am grateful for life and take comfort in God's goodness and His plan for this crazy guy. I live with a loving Filipino family in California. Their unwavering devotion, care, and godly example have been an incredible blessing since 2006.

The future. Hopefully, this book has challenged the reader to (1) recognize his bitterness and other character flaws and (2) overcome them for his betterment and to those he directly or indirectly influences by living a life of service. This two-part process may take a long time, so don't get discouraged.

Life presents new trials the longer we live. Scientists say that no two people are alike, even identical twins. But we still have much in common, notably, the natural progression of growing older.

Though a comedian, many can relate to Phyllis Diller's comments: "I'm at an age when my back goes out more than I do." She advises, "Whatever you may look like, marry a man your own age – as your beauty fades, so will his eyesight."

We may laugh at Diller's advice, but growing old is not for the faint of heart. Our bodies wear down through time. Aches and pains limit our mobility and activity level. Many internal organs function inefficiently. Our bones tend to become brittle, and there's a greater susceptibility to infectious diseases. Difficulties in hearing, seeing, and maintaining one's balance become common. Mental sharpness and ability to recall often decline. One in 16 people ages 65 or older has Alzheimer's dementia. (I could go on, but I'll spare you.)

Perhaps you are not experiencing any of the above ailments but interact with someone who is. Do you view the person as a burden, not worthy of your time and help? If yes, suppose you traded places with him for a month, a week, or even a day. Would your view change? I suspect yes. And in response, a helping

hand, understanding, and compassion would begin to flow from you.

If you are experiencing any severe ailments or trials, how are you handling them? Is it with grace and cheerfulness, making the best of the situation? Or have you chosen to be short-tempered, ungrateful, impatient with others or things, antisocial, or bitter?

As many people age, many situations can cause anger and discontent. Sorry to say, these life situations often include:

- Ongoing physical and emotional pain.
- Unresolved conflicts.
- Past regrets no longer rectifiable.
- Frustration when comparing enjoyable times and abilities of yesteryear with present difficulties.
- Being bitter and unforgiving.
- Fearing the unknown, especially the afterlife.
- Rejecting God's gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

The sooner a person can best resolve these issues by acting on the suggestions outlined in this book (and other resources if need be), the more comfort, peace, and joy will likely be forthcoming.

Of course, becoming a better person through the perfecting work of adversities



is difficult, but continue to persevere.

Regardless of age, background, and past failures, don't give up whatever you are going through! Take comfort

in knowing that nothing touches us without passing through God's loving, sovereign hands and strengthens all who trust Him.

Suffering (adversity) forces us to choose between gloom and optimism. Author Lisa J. Copen writes, “Suffering forces us to evaluate the direction of our lives. We can choose to despair by focusing on our present problem, or we can choose to hope by recognizing God’s long-range plan for us.”

It doesn’t take a genius to know the behavior of a caterpillar and a butterfly radically differ. In Chapter 2, we learned that a butterfly’s strength to survive and function well is only achieved through adversity by forcefully breaking its cocoon. But what about our kind of ‘cocoon’ or shell? What kind of life are we choosing to live?

Will people remember us allowing the storms of life to shipwreck our lives? Did we let adversity make us bitter and ineffectual in helping others? Did trials cause us to accuse God of evil or deny His existence altogether?



Or will we be remembered as those who broke our comfort zone (cocoon) and live radically differently? Did we accept life’s adversities and sufferings as *tools of divine love*? Yes, tools God skillfully uses to (1) navigate us through life’s challenges and fears and (2) develop a life marked by Christlike character and noble action. A life well-lived so even the undertaker will be sorry upon death.

I suggest two uplifting videos. [Don’t Waste Your Pain](#) by Joel Osteen. He urges us to grow through painful events and provides real-life examples to motivate us. And [Life-Changing Principles](#) by actor and director Denzel Washington. I trust his sound wisdom will enrich and beautify your life when put into practice; it has mine.

Billy Graham makes a timeless observation, “The greatest legacy one can pass on to one’s children and grandchildren are not money or other material things accumulated in one’s life, but rather a legacy of character and faith.”

God loves you and me too much for us to remain unchanged. Something marvelously happens in and through us when we increasingly align our affections, attitudes, and actions with the divine Potter. And, what we ask for might be answered in unexpected ways. [Change My Heart, O God](#)

I Asked

I asked for strength that I might achieve;
I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked for health so that I might do greater things;
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.
I asked for riches so that I might be happy;
I was given poverty that I might be wise.
I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;
I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;
I was given life so that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I had asked for,
But everything that I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered;
I am, among all men, most richly blessed.

– Confederate soldier

In closing, thank you, precious reader, for giving me this privilege of sharing my heart and biblical truths with you. Please consider recommending this eBook to encourage others in tough times. **Caring is sharing. Decide to uplift someone daily by sharing your story of God’s goodness in trials. It will help brighten their day and yours, too!** The following page provides a final thought and a link.

