



God, I've Got a Problem

A publication of



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"GOD - I'M DEPRESSED"

Most Christians face the same problems non-Christians face. However, many Christians are unaware that God has provided principles in His Word to help handle life's pressures and problems.

You have to understand and examine some of man's basic problems in the light of God's Word. I am aware that simplistic answers do not solve the sticky problems of everyday life. I am also aware that there are some Scriptural principles that deal effectively with problems of all kinds.

No single problem stands alone. Usually it is inter-related with others.

Taking time to think about the above problems I started with number one "I'm depressed."

Webster defines depression as being pressed down, gloomy, dejected, sad, to have low spirits. He also says, ***"Psychological depression is an emotional condition characterized by discouragement and the feeling of inadequacy."***

Some symptoms of depression are a collapse of self-esteem, the feeling in others that no one loves or cares, a dwindling of interest in others, and an intense absorption in self. Also the person suffers from self depreciation -- "I just can't seem to do anything right." Some depression is physical which can be caused by physical exhaustion or an imbalance in one's physiological system.

Depression may be caused by disappointment and the inability to live up to one's expectations. Didn't Peter stoutly maintain he would remain faithful to the Lord though all others denied Him? When the pressure mounted, Peter denied the Lord, and when the rooster reminded him of his failure, he went out and wept bitterly. According to some, crying is a symptom of depression, especially in men.

Depression can also be caused by success. Someone once said, "There is nothing more disillusioning than having aired!" Some think that success is a shield against depression, but it often turns out to be the doorway to anxiety and sadness. The moment we become successful, we are vulnerable.

Depression is devastating because it cripples a person's life and draws them into their own tiny world. Remember what our Lord said, "become first, then you must go last place."

The tiny world I spoke of is the world of introspection. Such people become wrapped in a cloak of self-pity and is useless to himself, God and society. Self-pity can become very intense to where people take their lives.

Depression is demoralizing, it's essential that we know how to deal with it. The old home

remedies are not effective. Its useless to whistle in the dark, smile and think it will go away by itself, it won't.

Oversimplification is what some Christians try to use in a direction of what they call "Faith Only." Being a Christian will not automatically solve all our problems, because Christians also suffer from depression. Further, if depression is the result of a physical ailment, you'll maybe need treatment of some kind. And if it isn't physical, it may be deep enough to require the help of a professional.

But as Christians we have-something going for us. We have. a new insight about ourselves and experiencing-the love of our God, our Heavenly Father. God makes it realistically, to deal with our depression.

Perhaps the greatest example of depression in the Bible is the story of Elijah. He had been God's spokesman for over three years, faithfully calling the nation back to God. In a dramatic battle with four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, Elijah proved conclusively he was God's servant. God also affirmed Elijah by answering him, his prayers to send rain to break the drought. But as he returned to Jezreel before Ahab's chariot, Jezebel sent a sharp message to Elijah. "By tomorrow at this time you will, be dead. I will personally guarantee it."

Frightened, forgetting everything God had done for him, Elijah ran eighty-five miles into the wilderness.

Chapter 19 of I Kings describes Elijah's dejection as he sat under a juniper bush in the wilderness. "It is enough!"

Now, O Lord, take my life; for I am not better than my fathers." (I Kings 19:4) Elijah is at the depth of depression..

As you examine Elijah's situation we discover four things to help us defeat depression.

First: Get away for a rest (I Kings 19:5-8) This is what Elijah did. After doing a mighty work for God and running totally a hundred and ten miles, he was physically exhausted. He had been so busy caring for the spiritual needs of the nation that he neglected his own. Exhausted, he fell asleep under the juniper bush and had to be awakened by an angel to eat. After a good rest and food, he got up and had enough strength to travel forty days and nights to Mount Horeb.

Things really haven't changed much since Elijah's day. Many still get weary from well-doing. What begins as a fun or joyful ministry often becomes a wearying grind. Like he, we sometimes need to get away for that rest.

Second: Get your frustrations off your chest. (I Kings 19: 9-10) After Elijah traveled the additional forty days he came to the cave in Horeb. There the Lord came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" In effect God was saying, "Elijah, tell me what's bothering you."

And Elijah took this opportunity to pour out his frustrations. "Lord, he said, "they didn't appreciate a thing I did. Even when the drought was broken, they went against -me. :In fact, they are looking for me now to: kill me. Furthermore, I am the only one left who is Your servant and it looks like I'M wasting my life. Its no use living any more I may as well die and get it over with." In one exasperated moment, Elijah poured out the venom that was poisoning his soul. And without realizing it he bequeathed us a workable pattern -- get your frustrations out in the open and tell God what's eating you!

God is interested in the things that bother us. He understands stands our problems and, rather than condemn us, He wants to help us overcome our infirmities.

If however, you think it strange to tell God your problems, then tell an interested friend. Many find speaking their problems helps them discover the problem is not nearly as big as they thought it was. God knew this and encouraged Elijah to get his frustrations out in the open.

Third: Get a fresh awareness of the personal presence of God. (I Kings 19:11- 12) Elijah left forsaken by God as well as the nation, all his friends. He began doubting the power and personal presence of God. As Elijah stood at the entrance of the cave, a tremendous wind came up, so strong it split rocks; but "the Lord was not in the wind." Then came an earthquake; "but the Lord was not in the earthquake." After that a raging fire, and He wasn't in the fire." In a few moments, Elijah had seen mighty demonstrations of the power of God, but God was not in them. When these awesome manifestations ended, the Scriptures says, "and after the fire a sound of gentle blowing." After everything quieted down, Elijah became aware that God was in the gentle stillness. "And it came about, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle ---" He knew God was present, he wasn't alone; God had not forsaken him. In a moment Elijah received a fresh awareness of the personal presence and power of God.

When we are depressed, we too, need a fresh awareness of the personal presence and power of God in our lives. When we are rejected by friends, loved ones or anyone, its easy to fall into depths of depression and insulate ourselves from God in our blanket of self-pity. We want God to demonstrate His mighty power so we can be aware of His presence. Instead, we need to seek God's presence in solitude and quietness because it is here the Lord will meet us with a fresh awareness of His personal presence.

Fourth: Get back to work (I Kings 19:13-16) Elijah had been the instrument of God to begin a mighty revival in Israel on Mt. Carmel. But he gave it up and :sat around moping about how badly, he had **been** treated. God again came to Elijah and asked, "What are you doing here Elijah?" And even after his first rest, and new awareness of God's presence, **Elijah** still complained about how mistreated he had been.

At this point God tells Elijah two important things. The first is to get up and get back to work! "Elijah, you were commissioned to be a prophet, so get up off your self-pity and be a prophet! Go and anoint three men. One of the three, Elisha, is to be your successor. As long as

you sit here you will continue to nurse your self-pity." A return to an active ministry was necessary to get his mind off himself.

Then God tells Elijah, "You are not alone in the work of God. There are an additional seven thousand who remain faithful to me!"

When Elijah learned he was not alone in serving God and that others were actively working with him, he overcame his depression and went back to work, back on the road to do the job God called him to.

Like Elijah, once we have rested and had a fresh awareness of the presence of God, we must get up off our self-pity and get back to work. Idle hands and minds provide fuel for depression but resumption of activities takes our mind off our personal problems and makes us useful and productive again.

God didn't design us to be crippled by depression. We can beat it if you'll follow our Father's way, the four above steps are some I feel of His ways He left for our study and use if we wish or dare to.

Feel down, gloomy, dejected and worthless? Try them and see.

"GOD - I'M TEMPTED"

Temptation has been defined as "an effort to try to persuade, induce, entice especially to something sensually pleasurable or immoral." It means "to arouse a desire." Basically, temptation is that inner voice that says "go ahead and do it" when you know you should not.

Like a story been told of a man hunted in vain for a parking space and in desperation left his car in a no parking zone with a note on the windshield: "I've circled this block ten times and I have an appointment to keep or lose my job. Forgive us our trespasses."

A police officer who read the note left this reply: "I've circled this block for twenty years. If I don't give you a ticket, I'll lose my job. Lead us not into temptation."

In order to gain some insight into defeating temptation, lets look at the experience of the only three perfect people who ever lived on earth. All three faced temptations. Two gave in and lost their perfection. Only one was able to successfully defeat it. From the experiences of these three, we learn important lessons in how to overcome.

As we study God's Word we see an illustration of temptation early in the Scriptures. Adam and Eve were given everything they could desire (Gen.--3.:1-6) :The only restriction was: not-to eat, of one tree. Satan' came to Eve disguised as a snake and said, "Go ahead, eat-it. It won't.-hurt-anything. God was --selfish when - He told you not to eat."

The crux of the temptation was not the fruit Eve ate, but the ***command of God***. It was an attempt to get Eve to do what God said she should not do. She knew it was contrary to what God had commanded, but was persuaded to "go ahead anyway." The essence of any temptation is to get us to do what God has commanded we should not do.

It would be a misconception to say that temptations are ugly. On the contrary they are usually most appealing. Eve found this to be so as she looked at the fruit of the tree and saw it was "good for food." Nothing wrong with food value! Probably had plenty of every essential vitamins! Eve also saw it was a "delight to the eyes" and was "to be desired to make one wise." It represented a short cut to wisdom.

When Eve looked at the fruit, it seemed foolish to bypass it just because God said to leave it alone. Anything so appealing couldn't be that bad! Perhaps God was just being unreasonable about the whole matter. Everything she heard and saw from the serpent provided her with the necessary rationalization to go contrary to the specific command of God.

While temptation appears attractive and provides the necessary rationale to do it, the thing it doesn't do is reveal the danger involved. Since the time of Eve, the first human failure falling prey to temptation and persuaded Adam to eat the fruit, human life has been filled with ***daily*** temptations. Unfortunately, our temptations are usually more than a desire to eat an extra potato chip! They strike three basic areas of life: physical, psychological and religious.

The best way to see each of these is to look at the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. (Matt. 4:3-4)

The first temptation Jesus faced was physical. He was hungry and Satan suggested He use His power to turn stones to bread and eat. "Use your power to satisfy your Physical need for food," said Satan. "Why be hungry when you have the power to do something."

And because we have become people attached to our creature comforts, we seem to go into the same traps. We are, tempted to use our last dollar to get a gadget that will make us more comfortable. The tempter says "Go ahead and get.. it. It will make life easier for you. God isn't interested in your material needs, so look out for "yourself To the youth. he whispers.." Go ahead enjoy sex before marriage. It's all right as long as you love each other. Physically the temptation is: "Why deny yourself things you want? Use everything and anything to satisfy your personal desires."

The second temptation was psychological. (Matt. 4:5-7) Satan urged Jesus to throw Himself from the temple in order to make a dramatic show before the crowds below. What a scene it would have made! Everyone would have been astounded when Jesus landed unhurt.

Satan also tempts us to take premature steps in order to make ourselves look great. "Don't wait for God to promote you. He prefers you to be a nobody'. have you ever had the urge to see(recognition by doing something spectacular? If so, you've experienced psychological temptation.

We also have religious temptation. (Matt. 4:8-10) In Jesus' third temptation, Satan urged Him to make a "little" compromise so He could be a world ruler. "All you have to do is to fall down and worship me," suggested the tempter. "That's a small price for such a rich reward." The real issue here, of course, is who is going to be Lord of our lives. Satan says if we let him run the show, he'll pay handsome dividends. He says it's all right to bend the rules in order to get more for yourself. Compromise of your standards is the name of the game. If you ever had the urge to hide your scruples in order to make a better deal, then you've had a religious temptation!

Satan chips away at little things in our lives and seeks to destroy our foundation by getting us to do things that seem insignificant. He bombards us with an inner voice which says, "Go ahead and do it. it really isn't all that bad. Its just a little white lie."

It s not easy to defeat the bombardment of temptation, because it comes in so many disguises. But God gives us a formula -to help defeat it.

First: Recognize temptation for what it is. Temptations do not come floating through the ventilating system they have a tempter behind them! In Eden, the tempter came as a snake and queried, "Indeed :has God said?:" In our Lord's temptation, we read He was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be "tempted, of the devil." The "tempter" is identified as the devil and he, not God, is responsible for every temptation. God does not tempt us.

Since temptations come from the devil, it is also incorrect to say that temptations come in order to strengthen our character. Though strengthening of character may result from withstanding temptations, that is not their purpose! The devil is not interested in strengthening our character. His aim is to cause the failure and destruction of our character.

The Greek verb "PEIRAZO" which is translated "tempted" means "to discover good or evil." It is his intent to discover weakness and defeat.

Because Satan wants to see failure, he strikes at our most vulnerable point. He repeatedly concentrates his efforts on our weakness until fellowship with God and harmony with ourselves is broken.

Wake up to the fact that temptations come from Satan, and he is not out for fun and games. He plays for keeps! Therefore the first step in defeating Satan and temptation is to recognize it for what it is an attempt by Satan to get you to rebel against God.

Second: Realize God has given us the power to resist temptation. "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able; but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it".(I Cor. 10:13)

Notice the verse says that no temptation is unique. Every temptation we face has been faced by others. As long as we think we are facing a unique problem, we're on the road to giving in and suffering defeat. Cheer Up! Others have defeated your temptations, so can you!

Another delightful truth in this verse is that God will never permit any temptation too great for us. When Satan tempts us, he's operating under God's permissive will. God has laid the ground rules and Satan can go only so far. This was the case with Job.

J. B. Phillips translate this portion, "But God can be trusted not to allow you to suffer any temptation beyond your powers of endurance ---."

God knows exactly how much pressure we can bear.

A third truth revealed in this verse is that God gives us strength to defeat any particular temptation. With "a way to escape." This doesn't mean God halts the temptation. Rather it means God makes it possible for us to break temptation's power. He does this so we can endure the temptation without failure.

When temptation ways heavy, understand that God is vitally concerned and has provided you with the power to defeat your temptation. The power is available, but you must want to resist temptation in order to use the power that God makes available.

Third: Use the Word of God.

When Jesus was pressed by Satan, He repeatedly turned to the Word of God. Each time Satan came with a suggestion, Jesus said, "It stands written," and then quoted what God had said. What we see here is mind of God and the mind of Satan in conflict. When tempted, Jesus turned and quoted the mind of God in each matter. After Jesus used the Word of God three times in His defense, we read, "Then the devil left Him----." The word of God was used to defeat the suggestions of the devil.

While God Himself provides us with the external protection by limiting Satan's power, He also provides us with the tool for defeating him -- His Word. The Psalmist cried, "Thy Word have I treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee." Psalms 119:11)

The Word of God should be our standard of reference in all matters. When any suggestion goes contrary to the mind of God we should tell Satan what God has said about the matter. Never make the mistake of trying to reason with Satan. You may be smart, but no one is smart enough to outwit him. Allow God's Word to defeat him!

A word of practical exhortation: If you hope to use the word as a-defense against the subtle suggestions of the devil, it will require two things. First, you must invest time in learning what-the Word of God says. Second, after spending time learning the mind of God, be willing to obey His Word! Its useless to know what God says unless you have a willingness to put it into action when temptation comes. When you do obey, God will bring His word to your mind and you will experience victory. Peace. However, when you choose not to obey, you will go down in spiritual defeat.

Ever since Adam and Eve, Satan has enticed man to go contrary to God. Because he frequently disguises himself as an angel of light. (II Cor. 11:14)

Satan often tricks people into following him because they believe he has been authorized by God. Do not be taken in by that lie!

Use these above. I don't know what current temptation you may be facing, but God's promise is you can defeat it. Why not let Him prove it?

“GOD – I FEEL GUILTY!”

Sin is the culprit in a guilty conscience. Paul's tells us, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23)

Man was created in the image of God and designed to be a reflector of His holiness. When man rebelled he was no longer able to live up to God's standard of holiness. Since then whenever we do something that violates the holiness of God, our "conscience light" glows.

Few days go by that our conscience doesn't inform us that we've violated God's standard of holiness. Unless we are able to deal with it, we will gather a load of unresolved guilt which in turn will cause many problems and prevent us from being the kind of free people God designed us to be.

The human is a delicate mechanism. Small problems can cause emotional, physical, and spiritual upsets. Of all the problems that plague people today, guilt is one of the most pernicious and persistent. The main problem prompting people to go to see a minister for help is the problem of guilt.

What a handful of sand will do to a piece of machinery, unresolved guilt will do to us --- make a mess of our lives and constrict our usefulness: Unresolved guilt causes emotional tension and saps our happiness. True contentment and joy results only when there is no inner conflict.

Guilt demolishes our confidence, and since confidence is based in part on concealment of our past failures, many people live in constant fear of someone will find out about their past. Like an escaped criminal, they fear the discovery of skeletons in their closet.

Unresolved guilt can cause great emotional stress and physical problems. And to escape the pressure of a guilty conscience some drown their guilt in drink, food and dull its sting by drugs and other things.

Guilt may. also drive a person to a life of reckless abandon in a frantic effort to escape the condemning finger of conscience. Many live such a high pace they need tranquilizers for sleep and a roll of antacids to soothe the upset stomach.

Unresolved guilt will cause spiritual tensions, rob us of our fellowship with God, and make us afraid of Him. After Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they tried to hide from His presence because they didn't want to be confronted with their failure. Guilt deadens the desire for the Word of God and fellowship with other believers, because they serve only to aid conscience in accusing us.

Guilt will rob us of spiritual joy. We may go through the motions of being a "happy little soldier of Jesus," yet at the same time feel like there's a rock in the pit of our stomach. Going through the motions of Christianity with a guilty conscience compounds our misery.

Remember David ? he poured out his heart to God in his great psalm of confession. "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit." (Ps. 51:12) Sin had ripped away his joy, but once David experienced the forgiveness of God, he could rejoice and say, "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." (Ps 32:1)

Since guilt is basically a spirit problem, it requires a spiritual solution. Human attempts to resolve guilt only magnify the problem.

Some of today's modern thinkers try to relieve guilt by excusing our actions. Its become popular to say we are the product of our environment; there for, we have no reason to feel guilty. Some existential philosophers may proclaim our innocence for our sins: but the man in the street knows by experience he's responsible, guilt would not be the problem it is.

A popular cliché suggests: "Time heals all wounds." Time may heal all wounds except a wounded conscience!

There was a story I read about many years ago, it happened in Scotland, where sheep stealing was a capital offense, a farmer reported the loss of several of his flock. To catch the thief the authorities placed two officers on surveillance. Late one night they spotted a man approaching. Then just as he reached the spot where the officers were hidden, he turned and ran: but they caught him. He was subsequently brought to trial and condemned to hang. But the judge felt uneasy about the verdict and penalty, and visited the man prior to his hanging. After explaining why he had come, the judge asked, "Why did you run if you were innocent?" The man broke down and sobbed, "Twenty years ago, I killed a man at that spot. I don't know why but I feel compelled to return there often. But everytime I near the spot, I break and run. My conscience has haunted me for two decades. I deserve to die. Maybe if I'm hanged, I'll find peace."

Time does not heal a wounded conscience. Paying the penalty demanded by society will not heal the wounded conscience. A man may satisfy the demands of the State for a given crime, but that will not deliver him from the scourge of a condemning conscience.

If you have tried all the solutions and panaceas but are still plagued by guilt, perhaps you are ready for God's remedy.

Hebrews Chapter 10, has some practical helps for those who want to be freed from a guilty conscience. Actually, the solution on paper is easier than putting it into practice.

Three things are necessary.

First: You must **accept that complete forgiveness is possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.** Hebrews reminds us the Israelites knew nothing of the complete

forgiveness that is possible for us today.

"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices, which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers once purged should have had to more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

Or as the Living Bible says: Verse three, "But just the opposite happened! those yearly sacrifices reminded them of their disobedience and guilt instead of relieving their minds."

What a difference we have now through Christ.

Their sacrifices did not bring forgiveness, but rather served as an annual reminder that they were guilty before God. "But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year." Israel was not permitted to forget that they were guilty of violating God's holiness. Each year as the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, they were reminded that the sacrifices covered their sins without bringing complete forgiveness.

But that system of reminders ended with the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus did not come to remind us of sin; He came to forgive! He offered Himself once as a sacrifice to take away the sin of this world (all past sins covered previously by animal sacrifices, were carried away by His death.)

"By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.

And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins, but He having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time sat down at the right hand of God." (Heb. 10:10-12

For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." (Heb. 10:14)

By His sacrifice, He made provision for the complete forgiveness of sins. The Bible declares that His death satisfied God, and the penalty for sin was paid in full. You can have complete forgiveness for every sin you have ever committed.

Second: You must accept that God forgets when He forgives.

"Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more. When God grants remission of sin there can be no question of making further atonement. (Heb. 10:17-18)

How long do you remember a paid bill once you have paid it, we forget it, God says the death of Christ paid our bill for sin. Once its paid He forgets it and never again, reminds, us of it!

Paul declared a new day for the believer "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" (Acts 13:38). Christ bore the guilt of sin when He paid the penalty on the cross. Because Jesus Christ come to make us whole, He

forgave and then forgot!

In practice, this means the death of Christ took care of all the sins we have committed before we trusted Him as Saviour and Lord. It also means His death will take care of any sins we commit after trusting Christ. When we sin, we can experience instant forgiveness by confession. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

When you sin and then confess to God, He forgives you. His forgiveness assures us He has forgotten and will never remember it again. Accept that fact.

If God forgets our sins as soon as we confess them, why is it that we continue to be tormented by a guilty conscience? Any reminder of sins already confessed is from Satan. He is the one who causes people to, "God couldn't forgive the horrible thing I did," and may prompt them to consider suicide. Once we accept God's forgiveness and believe He forgets when He forgives we can stand tall and call Satan the liar he is when he suggests God couldn't or wouldn't forgive us.

Third: You must accept yourself as God does. Quit torturing yourself with a past sin. God had forgiven you now accepts you as though you had never sinned.

You may say, "But you don't know the terrible thing I've done. I can't forgive myself." It doesn't matter how small or great your failing, God forgives and forgets. He took your sin and mine and laid it on Jesus Christ. Now He accepts you in Him. For your own mental and spiritual health, forgive yourself, drop that load of guilt, and accept yourself as God does.

If after confessing your sins to God you pick up your bundle of guilt and take it home with you, you are worse off than before, because now you have rejected God's forgiveness and carrying your guilt alone. Jesus invited us to come unto Him for rest. Part of that rest is rest from the torture of a guilty conscience. God has taken care of the problem, so, quit torturing yourself. Accept yourself as God does, and you will have genuine peace of mind.

Go ahead, unload your guilt on Christ and enjoy the blessings of a clear conscience.

"GOD - I'M WORRIED"

Worry has been defined as anxiety - a state of being uneasy or apprehensive about what may happen. The definition suggests a mental distress of agitation over some problem. Uneasiness of mind results from facing responsibilities or problems we feel incapable of handling. I've heard it said, "Worry is the interest paid by those who borrow trouble."

In the New Testament, "Worry" (Merimna) means "to divide." which comes from the Greek verb MERIZO. People who worry are "divided" - mentally torn apart.

Just reading the newspapers exposes us to a multitude of problems capable of producing worry. Sometimes we feel we're sitting on a pile of gunpowder while world leaders play with matches.

Inflation is another problem to worry about. While we watch our money buy less and less, we wonder how to feed and clothe our families on a shrinking income.

Also, ecologists are giving more publicity to the energy crisis, and the word "rationing" is becoming a live option. For years we have lived with the feeling there was no bottom in the bucket of our natural resources; but now, faced with the possibility of shortages and rationing, anxiety begins to chip away at our peace of mind.

And in the midst of big crises are little daily crises: The garbage disposal breaks down; an important exam tomorrow; taxes due next week; our child breaks an arm; what to serve to dinner guests, what would be the "right thing" to wear to the party. When we add our personal crises to the national and international problems, we see why people are weighed down with worry.

Being a Christian doesn't provide immunity from the threat of worry. God doesn't provide a super anti-worry vaccine for the Christian. Joe Christian faces the same worry-producing problems that plague everyone else.

Once we allow pressures to worry us, they will snowball - the more we worry, the more we'll find to worry about. "I have lived a long life and seen lots of trouble, but most of it didn't happen."

Jesus placed His finger squarely on the main worries of life (food and clothing), "For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink: you shall drink: nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food and the body than clothing? (Matt. 6:25). (Anxious" is the same Greek word MERIMNA translated "worry". In this sense, worry and anxiety are synonymous.)

Why do we worry? We worry because we fail to believe God. Jesus illustrated the point vividly by turning to nature:

"Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?"

And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin.

Yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these." (Matt. 6:26,28-29)

Since God feeds the birds of the air and clothes the flowers of the field, we can rest assured He will meet our needs also, for we are worth more than the birds and flowers. Jesus said that the Father knows what we need. "----- for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these thing." (Matt. 6:32)

Since God knows our needs, failure to trust Him to meet our basic needs is lack of faith.

"But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith?" (Matt. 6:30)

Failure to believe God, is unbecoming to the Christian. Unbelievers don't know how to trust God for their "daily bread," so the worry. Jesus said, "for all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek." Matt. 6:32) But God is not responsible for meeting the needs of the unbeliever (as He is for the believer.)

Christians have abundant promises from God that He will meet their daily needs. "My God shall supply all your needs ----- (Philippians 4:19) This is a promise! Worry about any need is a sin because it's a True to believe God s promises. Nature shows how God takes care of the birds and flowers. We may see birds working, but we'll never see them worrying:

But you object, "if you knew the problems I face, you wouldn't call worry a sin. ".its not necessary to know your individual problems because God has promised to take care and supply all our needs. God has also promised to take better care of us than the birds, wo why worry?

Worry will create many problems and won't accomplish a single constructive thing!. It will only make bad matters worse.

What does anxiety do? It does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow; but empties today of its strength. It does not make you escape evil it makes you unfit to cope with it if it comes.

You can't solve problem by worrying. Worry will not move you one inch in the direction of the solution. Jesus said, "And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life span?" (Matt. 6:27) When you worry, the problem seems to grow larger and larger by the moment. With just a little effort, worry can build your problem into a gigantic impossible situation.

Worry will create emotional problems making you tense, nervous jumpy, withdrawn. It will impair your emotional ability to make decisions and make you progressively incapable of dealing with life. Every decision you face will become more and more difficult as you doubt your ability to make right decisions.

Worry will cause physical problems and chop years from your life expectancy. People who don't know how to fight worry die young.

It will also add misery to the years you do live. Eighty percent of the stomach disorders that come to us are not organic, but functional. Wrong mental and spiritual attitudes throw functional disturbances into digestion. Most of our ills are caused by worry and fear, and it is my experience that faith is more important than food in the cure of stomach ulcers.

Worry will also produce spiritual problems for the Christian. Anytime you do what God has forbidden, spiritual problems will arise, and since worry is forbidden, the person who worries can expect problems.

Worry will neutralize the effect of the Word of God in your life. In the parable of the soils, Jesus was talking about the productivity of the Word in lives. He underscored at worry will do when He said, "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the Word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful." (Matt 13"22)

You can read the Word, but if you are filled with worry, it will be unfruitful in your life. This explains in part why *some never* get to first base in their Christian life although exposed to the Word for years. They allow worry to neutralize the Word making it impossible to germinate and produce fruit.

Worry causes an imbalance in spiritual priorities. When Jesus visited the home of Mary and Martha, Mary was *content* to sit quietly listening while her sister "fussed about the kitchen" getting dinner ready. Luke 10:40 says "But Martha was distracted with all her preparation ----."

In distress - Martha came to Jesus and complained that while she was working her fingers to the bone, Mary sat there doing nothing! "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me."

Jesus answered with tender reproof, "----Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things: but only few things are necessary, really only one: for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41-42). A modern paraphrase might read, "Martha, Martha, you're worried about putting on a big dinner when a sandwich would be fine. Mary has her priorities right. It's more important to hear the Word."

Worry will cause us to lose sight of the imminent return of the Lord, and allowing our minds

to become enmeshed with daily cares and problems negates the urgency to be prepared His coming. Jesus said, "Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness, and worries of life, and so that day comes on you suddenly like a trap." (Luke 21:34.)

Most of us know worry paves the road to misery; But knowledge without a remedy only intensifies that misery. Is there any way we can combat the problem of worry? If you have ever worried, God has good news for you; He has made it possible for you to stop worrying. Though God does not promise to remove the pressures that produce worry, He does make it possible for us to face the pressures of life with inner peace.

God does not suggest that we follow His way to cure worry--He commands it! God's cure for worry involves three things:

First: Stop worrying and start trusting. Jesus said, "Do not be anxious then, saying what shall we eat? or, what shall we drink? or what shall we clothe ourselves? For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." (Matt. 6:31-32)

The command to stop worrying is based on the Father's care. God takes care of the birds and flowers (and we are more precious in His sight), therefore, He commands us to stop worrying about our daily needs.

We are also to start trusting God to meet our needs, we have His written guarantee that He will meet all our needs. Jesus said quit worrying about things and "-----seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and these things (physical necessities) shall be added to you." (Matt. 6:33) God has promised (in writing!) to meet our needs; so start trusting Him. Let Him be God; stop usurping His place as provider.

I have a health *insurance* policy which carefully details everything that is covered should I become ill. If *anything* is not covered, it says so. Once I know what the policy covers, I need no longer worry about the medical cost in that area. Likewise, the Bible contains a statement of all God has promised us. Since He has given us His "policy", we should trust Him to provide the promised benefits.

By contemporary standards my family was poor when I was growing up. No matter how hard things got, when we the children needed something, shoes, lunch money, etc. my parents took care of my needs. Conversely, God our Father, has promised to take care of all our needs; we have no need to worry.

Second: Stop straining and turn loose. Does that sound hard to do? If it does, it's because we think God is not interested in solving our problems. Did God care enough to take care of our sin problem on the cross? He did! then doesn't it stand to reason if He was interested enough to give us life, He is interested in helping us with the problems of life?

"Casting all your anxiety upon Him because he cares for you" (I Peter 5:7) God does care for

us. " God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet *sinners*, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) The cross is irrefutable proof that He cares and wants to bear our burdens.

What does "casting all our anxiety upon Him" mean? It means we are to give Him all our problems by simply letting go of them. He doesn't tell us to throw our cares on Him as the English seems to convey. The Greek word means to hand them to Him. If we had to throw them His way, it would imply He is distant, but God is closer to us than hands and feet.

Assume you were carrying a hundred pound weight on your shoulders. If I told you to throw it fifty feet, you would say, "That's impossible", I agree. But If I told you to quit straining and let it fall to the ground, it would be easy.

Little story to share with you. Once a woman carried a huge bundle of sticks on her back as she walked down the road. A man in a truck stopped and offered her a ride. Gratefully she accepted and climbed in the back of the truck to join several other passengers. As the truck drove down the road, the woman kept the bundle of sticks on her back. When one of the passengers suggested she lay the bundle down, the old woman replied, "Oh no, I couldn't do that. It's enough that the man is carrying me. I wouldn't ask him to carry my bundle too."

I Peter 5:7 is telling us to quit straining with our burdens, turn them loose and let them fall on Christ. that thought has been captured in a phrase of a song I remember, "Take your burdens to the Lord and leave them there." We are invited to give our worries to the Lord so He can carry them for us. It's His responsibility, not ours.

Third: Stop the panic and start praying.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

We're not to let anything throw us into a panic. "Be anxious for nothing" can be translated "Don't worry about anything." Look at that again -- It's a command, not a request. It's an important command that touches the grass root problems of life.

What happens when an emergency situation arises? The first reaction is to panic! Common sense tells us panic is not the correct reaction. Nevertheless, we hit the **"Panic button."** The Word tells us it's wrong reaction, because panic is uncontrolled worry. Even though panic is a natural response, it's the wrong, response.

"Okay, I've got it. Don't panic. but what do I do now?"

Paul continues by telling us to pray about the problem. "----but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." What are we doing when we pray about it? We are telling God our problems and inviting His concern and aid on our behalf. Our prayer is to be with thanksgiving --thanking God for two things: First that we

have the problem which forces us to recognize our dependence upon Him; Second, that we can come to" Him with our problems.

Will that work? Of course it will. Paul goes on to tell us that when we commit the problem to God in prayer, our mental anguish will cease because His incomprehensible peace shall stand watch over our troubled hearts. Worry comes when there is mental anguish and is dispelled when God's peace floods our very souls. Once we have committed our need to God. His peace stand military guard duty over our spirit and is the antidote to worry.

During some real trouble times of much pressure back in the late 60's my wife and I were under, the doctor said I had but a short time live. So brave old me"put everything in order to see that she and the children were taken care of. I came home Saturday morning to prepare to die, I had been bleeding all week long, pretty badly. So I got in bed to get the job over with, with little fan fare. (How about that for vanity?) You see my trust was not in God, but in the doctor who told me this and I accepted it without question. BUT my wonderful wife would not give up. She finally got me to time hospital after trying to get me help elsewhere. There is no doubt she and I had much concern (or worry). She really couldn't believe it was happening to us, she felt I would go on forever. She was so worried about me as our sons were also. My worry (yes, my worry) was who would take care of them? I guess I thought I was the only one who could do that job. Yes, I forgot for a moment, then I submitted my very concern to our Father. I placed this problem (worry) on His shoulders and just as soon as I committed this to Him in a pure heart, He turned my life around and wiped my tears of pain away.

His peace came over me, my whole being became at peace within me. The doctor told me he was losing me, I thanked him for his efforts and help. He began to tell me that they did all they could for me that he was sorry, so sorry. I told him "please don't feel bad I thank you for caring, God bless you." I continued to pray and I felt that I heard in my heart and mind these words, "Take the fear (worry) from your heart for I am with you, you will not die this night, be at -peace."

I told the doctors this laying right there in the operating room, he smiled, but didn't believe me. (Later he told me this). From that moment and till now I have *known* a peace beyond all understanding. I have never worried again. I have learned to place my troubles in His hands and He has never but never failed to care, to be there when I needed Him. I now live with n̄ that rest, of that wonderful peace He gives so freely to us. I trust Him to keep His promise for "I know He loves me, and I have grown to love Him so very much. My life is complete in Him.

I have seen these doctors over the last several years from time to time. One said to me when we met, "See you are still living, I wouldn't have believed it, but I also see something else, I saw your eyes, your face changed from pain to a look of peace before my eyes, now I see even a much more refined look about your eyes, your face. You have really learned what its all about haven't you? You have learned the secret of peace within yourself! Not many men come to such a completeness. Your God and you have done the impossible. And I have learned there is something greater than these hands of mine as well as the knowledge I have, thanks." he said to me and I thank God I told him.

I share these thoughts and His word with you, this precious promise from Him, from His

Word, He loves you.

When you and I pray and commit our problems to our Father with our Lord's help you'll see as I have, peace will come to your heart and mind. Its a wonderful peace never known to mankind, please don't pass it up.

We all face problems that are apt to produce worry. Unless we deal with worry, it will cause serious problems. But God makes it possible for us to move off the toll way of worry.

We are commanded to, won't you please try.

“GOD - I'M LONELY”

SEVERAL years ago, a popular television series called Gilligan's Island dramatized one of society's gnawing problems. The series centered around the comical and usually frantic efforts of a group of castaways to extricate themselves from their small uncharted island. Between the emotional tides of high hopes and subsequent failures, they lived a relatively normal life. But with each failure, one sensed the group's despair. Life went on as they continually contrived ingenious ways of coping with their situation, and all the while hoping to contact the outside world. They frequently came close to freedom, but their efforts were always thwarted. It seemed they were condemned to live forever as marooned castaways on their lonely island.

I watched with the kids and laughed at the comical efforts of Gilligan and his gang; but inwardly, each episode struck a responsive and emotional chord. Most of us can identify with their plight because at times we all feel like castaways. Though we carry on our normal activities, we feel isolated from the rest of the world. At times it seems the whole world passes by our island of loneliness without seeing our frantic distress signals.

Like Gilligan and his friends, we desperately try to signal the world to stop and pick us up, but it passes by without slowing down or looking our way. After each unsuccessful attempt to break out of our isolation, we feel the chill damp fog of loneliness settle on our souls, and secretly cry out, "God --- I'm lonely".

Have you ever said to a friend, "I'm so lonely; I could just curl up and die?" In the quietness of our own souls, honesty impels us to admit we all suffer from loneliness. Because, like it or not, we are as vulnerable to loneliness as the common cold.

Webster says loneliness is the feeling of "standing apart from others of its kind; isolated unhappy at being alone; longing for friends, company---".

Loneliness is that sense of solitude, glooms and unfulfilled yearning for companionship. It makes us feel no one knows or cares about our plight. We feel isolated and cut off from the mainstream of human activity.

We could cope with loneliness if it were possible to pinpoint the ONE thing that causes it. But that's impossible because there are many causes of loneliness.

Death of a loved one can cause a once beautiful world to crumble and fall apart. My Mother died and shortly after that my step-father. Within a short span of time I watched him out of loneliness die each day of his life. I spoke with him of this. One of the saddest aspects of the work of caring for people and counseling with them is to see one partner of a long, happy marriage die and the other left to spend the remaining years alone. The loneliness created by the death of one partner is almost more than the living partner can bear.

Loneliness can be caused by the feeling of being in the way -- a common experience for many of our senior citizens and so many others of all ages. After years of productivity, they are tucked away in a retirement home --castaways from the "now" generation. Weeks and months can go by without any interest from their family. Loneliness closes in like a fog obscuring visions and hopes for any kind of future. Many feel they no longer have anything to contribute and would be better off dead.

Betrayal by a friend can also be devastating. Have you ever shared an intimate problem with a trusted friend only to have him or her break confidence? When this happens we begin to feel no one can be trusted and withdraw into our shell to nurse our hurts. We would rather suffer alone than dare open our heart to anyone again for fear of being hurt.

Society's "IBM approach" can cause loneliness. People in our mad, mad world have seemingly been robbed of their personhood. They have been made to feel like IBM cards stamped "do not fold, spindle, or mutilate". The vastness of our society makes us feel like numbers rather than people.

But the most profound sense of isolation is spiritual separation from God. Adam and Eve knew perfect communion with God in Eden, but when they sinned, they were driven from God's presence and were the most alone, desolate people in history.

Modern man with all his technological know how has designed equipment to put man on the moon and developed cures for polio, measles, whooping cough. But will all our technical advances and sophisticated machinery, we have not been able to cure the problem of loneliness.

We were created by God with need for fellowship and, unlike 1 11 machines, were not made to sit in a quiet corner and run for days and years. We need to touch, hear, rub shoulders with other human beings. We feel alone and isolated when those we care about do not include us in their plans. The need to belong is part of our basic make up. We have to interact and relate to others to confirm our sense of personhood.

Things never satisfy! Assume it were within my power to give you every luxury your heart could desire---with one stipulation --that you live on an island---alone. You could have anything and everything you wanted --except human contact. How long do you think your happiness would last? Not long! Things do not satisfy that longing of the soul to see and be with other people. This is why placing a man in solitary confinement is such a terrible punishment; it violates his basic need to be with people.

Loneliness is recognized as a. tragic characteristic of our frantic society. The great disease of the Twentieth Century is loneliness, the lonely crowd.

Emptiness is the central neurosis of our time. The pressures and problems of our complex society have produced a world of lonely people jammed together like sardines in the can called "earth".

If it is any comfort, loneliness is not a problem unique to modern times. Many great men of the Bible spent time on the "island of loneliness". Think about Joshua, the conquering general and man who did great exploits for God. We read that after the death of Moses on Mt. Nebo, "----- the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, Moses my servant is dead ---" (Joshua 1:2)

Imagine how Joshua must have felt when he heard Moses' death. For forty years he had been number two in command as Moses' "Executive Office." Certainly, he felt keenly the loss of a personal friend. But what struck Joshua was the over whelming realization that the mantle of leadership had fallen on HIS shoulders. He was now number one in Israel. Moses, in his farewell address not long before, had already set Joshua apart as his successor. (Deut. 31)

But now Joshua was alone. When a crisis arose He could no longer say, "Moses, what do we do now?" The nation would look to him to solve their problems. The position of leadership set him apart---to stand alone.

The apostle Paul also suffered the anguish of loneliness. We usually think of him as a great preacher who almost single handedly shook the world as he preached the gospel of Christ. He endured many trials in the course of his successful ministry. But some of the last paragraphs penned while he was in prison reveal his lonely heart. He laments that no one stood with him in his defense (II Tim. 4:16); he pleads for Timothy to come and see him because Demas had gone back to the world and others had been dispatched to points of ministry. The only person with him was Luke. We can sense the loneliness of Paul in his pleas: "Make every effort to come to me soon". (II Tim. 4:9) " ----pick up Mark and bring him with you --" (II Tim. 4:11)

He needed the companionship of friends in his hour of trial.

These great men of God had moments when they felt like castaways and no one cared. But to curl up and let the world go by would be no solution. Loneliness which is allowed to bud and blossom will eventually run riot and destroy a person.

But to break the smothering grip of loneliness is not easy. Most avenues of escape are dead end.

Some try the escape of popularity. A man may have world acclaim, be a box office attraction, and still be lonely. The suicide attempts of Hollywood's most popular "super stars" illustrate the inability of box office acclaim to meet the aching needs of the human spirit.

And paradoxically, we can't necessarily escape loneliness by being around people, for sometimes people accentuate our loneliness. We can be lonely at family gatherings and in a crowd.

Also, success is not a sufficient antidote to loneliness Hemingway, an eminently successful author, said toward the end of his life that he, " lived in a vacuum as lonely as a radio tube when the batteries are dead and the current off."

Tennyson described his visit and assessment of the regal Queen Victoria when he said, "Up there in her glory and splendor, she was lonely."

Now add to loneliness the frustration of being unable to escape or cope with it ---crippling despair sets in, often triggering suicidal thoughts. How tragic to be mired in despair so deep that death seems preferable to life.

Though human solutions fail to break our loneliness, we need not feel strained; God has provided an escape from loneliness.

First: Realize we are never alone. God has given all who know Christ His personal presence. Only those who do not personally know Christ are truly alone!

When Joshua stood alone as the head of the nation Israel, he experience the loneliness of command. But God did not allow him to feel alone for long. God promised the nation success under the leadership of their new general, and more important was His personal assurance: "--as I have been with Moses, I will be with you. I will not fail you or forsake you." (Joshua 1:5) do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9.) The promise of God's personal presence dispelled Joshua's awesome sense of isolation and inadequacy.

You may not be Joshua, but God has a personal promise for you, too. Jesus told His frightened disciples as He faced the cross, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." (John 14:18)

After His crucifixion and just before His ascension, Jesus promised the disciples His personal presence. "--- and lo, I am with you, always, even to the end of the age." (Matt 28:20)

Once we accept the reality of Christ's personal presence in our lives, we can face the pressures of daily living with the comfort that no matter what happens, we're not alone! Christ is present in our lives and we can talk to Him at anytime. The woman who has to wash her dishes to the tune of three crying sick children and who has been housebound for a week desperately needs to remember that she is NOT ALONE.

Paul exemplifies this truth in II Timothy 4:17 when his friends faded into the woodwork after he was thrown into prison. With strong confidence he said, "But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me---".

We too, who know Christ, have a friend who stands with us at all times and meets the longing of our heart for companionship. When we place our faith in Christ, we establish a VERTICAL relationship with God that brings His presence down into our life.

After recognizing this vertical relationship we need to Realize there are other people in the same boat. Frequently we think we're the only ones, but we're not! Elijah thought he was all alone as God's prophet, but he discovered God had an additional seven thousand people who worshipped Him. Multitudes suffer the same pangs of loneliness ---the same desire for belonging and having someone who cares.

But to realize and understand is not enough; we need to reach out. It is amazing how we can overcome our own loneliness when we take the initiative and seek out other people who are down. Sitting around complaining about how lonely we are only adds fuel to the fires of our misery. The answer to loneliness is never found by an invitation brought on a silver platter.

Paul instructed Timothy to bring Mark along with him because Mark was "profitable" to him in the ministry (II Tim. 4: 11). The presence of Mark would be an encouragement to Paul

Some said, " People are lonely because they build walls instead of bridges." Because we are people, we need people, helping someone else who is lonely will be the antidote to our loneliness.

As we seek to establish and nurture HORIZONTAL relationships, we begin to lift ourselves from the morass of our own loneliness and help others escape with us.

Finally: Get involved in God's program. Its essential for us to be engaged in the total plan of God for our lives. Its not enough to realize that God is personally present with us, nor that others are in the same boat. We must go on --reach out to others and personally commit ourselves to an active participation in God's program.

Paul reminds us that we are "partners together with God." (I Cor. 3:9) Think of it. You are in partnership with God in this life. As God's partner, you have a task to do; and you will not be completely free from loneliness unless you are engaged in that task.

Consider Paul's dilemma: He was in a Roman prison and couldn't go to Spain; he couldn't preach in the forum; he couldn't go anywhere. What could he do? He did the only thing he could do; he utilized his time studying. "When you come," he pleaded, "bring the books, especially the parchments." (II Tim. 4:13)

Paul didn't spend time sitting around feeling sorry for himself. He was busy studying for the day he would be released. He redeemed the time! We all should redeem the time our Father gives us also.

Did it ever occur to you that God may allow isolation to come so you will have time to do something you've been neglecting? Take a new look at your loneliness. Is God trying to tell you something you're failed to do for Him? Don't overlook this as a possibility.

Far too many Christians suffer from loneliness because they are sitting instead of serving. Loneliness comes when we sit instead of stepping out in the work of God. Once you begin to actively participate in God's program, you will find a deep camaraderie developing between you and the other workers of God. This will then place the vertical and horizontal relationship in proper balance. Final deliverance comes by realizing your proper place in the program of God along with other people.

Indeed, we all have times when we feel alone and deserted. But God does not intend for us

to languish from loneliness; He has provided an escape.

Why not follow the steps He has set and join the freedom flight from the island of loneliness?

“GOD - I HAVE DOUBTS”

Frequently people say, "When I get to heaven, I'm going to ask Paul what he meant when he said ----", or "I want to ask Peter what possessed him to deny the Lord the night of His trial"; or "I want to ask the apostle John what it was like to be close to Jesus."

Many desire to have an audience with some great men of the Bible in order to satisfy a personal curiosity. But I've never heard anyone say, "When I get to heaven, I want to talk to Thomas."

Why should anyone want to talk with Thomas? We know he is called "Doubting Thomas", and is the one people think of as unbelieving. What could we learn from him?

Nevertheless, we shouldn't write off Thomas because we probably have as much (or more) in common with him than any other person in the Bible! He is the man whose faith faltered ---who had honest questions and doubts concerning Jesus Christ. Because his problem is recorded, we can all learn from his experience.

Doubt is one of our daily tormenters. How often have you said, "I just don't believe it," "It just can't be" - - - "That's impossible", "That's a likely story". Have you ever secretly said, "God ----I have doubts".

When we drop our masks of piety, we must admit most of us are plagued with secret doubts. Doubt is one of the destructive forces constantly at work eroding our confidence in ourselves and Christianity. Successful Christian living however dictates that we learn how to cope with it.

Doubt has been called the unsettled feeling in one's opinions or beliefs. It means one is inclined to unbelief (which is the antithesis of belief or faith). It's the nagging inner feeling that we will not be able to do what we've planned, or what we have believed may not be true after all.

Many things cause doubt. Calamities jar our confidence in ourselves or the future. If a doctor reports we have a terminal illness, it's a jarring experience. We want to believe with all our hearts that he's wrong, yet inwardly we have no confidence in our future health.

When faced by an impossible situation, doubts bubble to the surface, especially when past failures shake our confidence in our abilities to undertake a new venture. A church which has had nothing but struggles finds it difficult to launch a new expansive program believing God can and will supply. The same is true for an individual.

Failure to look beyond our natural abilities and resources breeds doubt. Doubt inevitability

comes when we look at some of the situations we face and evaluate our resources for meeting them.

Many men (particularly in their forties) lack confidence in themselves. As they join the era of the four B's (baldness, bifocals, bridges and bulges) they entertain fears of losing their virility and manhood and may seek reassurance by having a fling.

Television ads make us uneasy about our social acceptance. We are barraged by advice to use a certain mouthwash, toothpaste, or dandruff shampoo in order to make us socially acceptable. We succumb to their appeal and spend our money on confidence-producing products. But all the time we are with people, we wonder (in the words of one deodorant mfg.) if "its working".

Abraham and Sarah didn't think they were physically able to accomplish the staggering things God promised them. As Abraham approached one hundred and Sarah ninety, God reaffirmed the promise they would have children (Genesis 18:10). Sarah's doubt concerning her ability to bear children at such an advanced age gave way to laughter. She really didn't believe god could do it.

The competitive atmosphere at work generates doubts. Many older men become unsure of their abilities to compete with the younger men. As years pass and their tasks become more complex, the question of abilities becomes more frequent. Doubts concerning ability to perform a task will hinder performance and halt promotions to higher levels of responsibility.

After years in a given career, some entertain second thoughts (doubts) as to whether or not it is the right career for them. They fear they will never amount to much in their given field of endeavor. As middle age approaches and promotions don't come as often, they begin to think about getting into another line of work.

John the Baptist had a moment like this. He spent his entire ministry preparing people for the coming of Jesus; he preached with great boldness condemning sin where he saw it (even in the palace of Herod); he pointed out Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel. but when Herod had him imprisoned John entertained second thoughts concerning his life's work. Could it be that he had wasted his life? Two of his disciples were dispatched to Jesus secretly to ask if He was really the Messiah. " Are you the Coming One, or shall we look for someone else?" (Matt. 11:3) To put it bluntly, John wanted to know, "have I wasted my life for a cause that wasn't worth it?"

People have doubts about God. They ask, "Could God love someone like me?" "- - - - Is the Bible really God's Word?" --"Can God help me with my problems?" Our personal doubts about God stem from our inability to believe God is interested in our problems.

Doubt gives us a nagging feeling that we can no longer rest in the power of God. We become a bundle of nerves with no confidence in anything. When confidence in God is gone, we can expect to live a tense, uneasy and jumpy life, because we are left with only our own resources.

Doubts weaken our witness for Christ. People are desperate for something or someone they can believe. Having tried many unsuccessful cures for their ills, they are now ready to hear what God says and turn to the Christian to ask if it's real. But if we witness with "I hope" --- "It may be" ---- "I think", they will not be interested. In witnessing for Christ, don't tell people your doubts; they have enough of their own!

Unresolved doubts condemn us to a life of mediocrity. The great men who were filled with doubts never became great :because their potential for greatness was sabotaged by doubts. Their greatness simmered in the pot of doubts, leaving them in the category of those "who also ran."

"Thanks a lot!" You say, "Until you ripped the covers off, no one knew I had doubts; but now I've been exposed. My self-condemnation was bad enough, but having doubts exposed really hurts."

It's not a sin for a Christian to have doubts; sin results when we persist in unbelief. Living with doubts shows us we are failing to trust God. We don't have to live this way because God has made deliverance from doubts possible.

The best way to come to grips with doubts is to learn from one who has been there --- "Doubting Thomas." An examination of Thomas' experience (John 20:19-31) reveals some pertinent principles that, if followed, will enable us to escape the stronghold of doubt.

We learn to escape four basic principles from Thomas.

First: Honestly admit our doubts. Thomas did! After the resurrection, ten of the apostles were together in the upper room when Jesus made His first appearance to them. Thomas was absent. When he returned he found the ten in an uproar. "Thomas, guess what? We've seen the Lord: He was here in this room while you were gone!"

Thomas was unimpressed. "You fellows are putting me on. I don't believe you."

The ten persisted. "he's been resurrected and we've seen Him!"

Thomas probably reacted with, "Men, I'll be honest with you. Unless I see Him with my own eyes and touch Him with my hands, I won't believe you."

He flatly rejected the testimony of the ten because he didn't believe it could happen. And the enthusiasm of the ten didn't seem to phase him. "-- Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my hand into His side', I will not believe." (John 20:25)

Give Thomas credit. He had the fortitude to stand up to the ten and say, "I don't believe you." He honestly admitted he didn't believe Jesus had risen._

What a striking lesson! If we ever hope to deal with doubt, we must reach the point where

we are willing to honestly admit that we don't believe. Thomas wasn't willing to live out his life pretending to believe something he didn't. He couldn't smile and proclaim "He is 'risen'" while not believing inside.

It is impossible to drown our doubts in the creeds of the church, singing loudly (when our hearts don't believe what our mouths are saying) won't make them go away. Through the years the church has often communicated the idea that "nice people don't have doubts about God." As a result, people don't begin to suspect the church doesn't have answers to life's problems.

Have you had a discussion with someone where they become disappointed in the church because they couldn't get help with answers to questions that troubled them others asked? Questions about creation, science and the Bible began to bother them.

They ask their pastor, "Why does the Bible say the earth was created in six days and scientists claim its billions of years old? and what about the evolution of man? who is right?"

And --- the pastor's response was shattering: "We don't ask questions like that around here." And then the pastor ushered you out or he left quickly.

So many now believe that church is not the place where honest questions and doubts about God are discussed or even doubts of their leaders. Most concluded the church did not have answers to the doubts that plague men; and many leave and never return. A bright young mind is lost to the cause of Christ because their doubts were hushed when they should have been dealt with honestly. What a tragedy; Let the church come out of its bomb shelter of fear and handle the honest doubts of the people.

Until we are willing to honestly admit our doubts, we won't overcome them. When we are able to say, "I know I'm supposed to believe that, but I need proof," we're on the road to liberation from the tyranny of doubt.

You know if you ever sat and listened to a rap session young people have and the problems they face, you'll hear one of them or more will say and they put their finger on the pulse of the issue when they say, "From the time we were little we believed certain things because our parents told us. But there comes a time in our life when we no longer believe something just because our parents tell us. We want to know why we should believe these things."

They at least admit what everyone knows and feels. We all have doubts that must be satisfied by facts, not pious clichés from a church that is hiding its head in the sand.

Unless we are willing to honestly admit our doubts, we will continue to mouth the creeds of Christianity while inwardly saying, "I will not believe." We will be torn by what we know we should believe, but don't. Liberation begins when we honestly say, "God I have doubts."

Second: We need to rely on the fellowship and association of other believers. Where was Thomas when the Lord appeared to the ten? What he feared most, happened his Lord had been crucified; but instead of remaining with the others, he sought refuge and consolation in isolation. In his absence, Christ came and Thomas missed his appointment with the Lord. The

ten were enthusiastic about the resurrection because they were there and saw Him; but Thomas had set himself apart and thus doubt quenched his joy.

We need the fellowship of other believers to strengthen our faith. Isolation from the assembly breeds and nourishes doubt. The longer we remain in isolation, the greater our doubts become. Experience in counseling has shown me that people who are infrequent attenders of fellowship with other believers have far more doubts than those who fellowship with other believers.

These occasional attenders the "nod to God crowd") miss encouragement to their faith that comes from being with other believers it is no accident that we are exhorted "not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some." (Heb. 10:25) Our faith is strengthened by the corporate, collective witness of other believers.

Third: We need to remember the promises and power of God.

Apparently, Thomas forgot a promise Jesus often repeated. Jesus frequently spoke of the cross, but He always affirmed that He Would rise again. In His personal grief Thomas forgot the wonderful promise of the resurrection and was unable to believe the resurrection announcement. (Do you have trouble with this one?)

Many doubts arise because we have either forgotten or don't understand God's promises concerning our problems. We are told in Scripture: "I can do all the things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Don't be like Thomas; remember the promises of God to you.

We also need to recount the power of God that has already been demonstrated. Thomas had been an eyewitness to many miracles. He had seen water turned into wine, lepers healed, blind eyes opened, the dead raised, but when it came to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, he said in effect, "God can do anything but that." Every miracle should have prepared him for that momentous occasion, but they slipped his mind, and he refused to believe.

We face situations when prudence says we best not raise our hopes too high. When a doctor says there is no hope we have a bad habit of taking his word for it! We should not give up hope so quickly. If we stop and recount the times we've seen God turn impossible situations into happiness the easier it will be for us to say along with Abraham, "Is anything too hard for God?" (Genesis 18:14) The only justification we have for giving up is when we rely on our own power rather than God's. When doubts begin to rise, we need to remember the promises and the power of God. the impossible situations are opportunities for the Power of God to work.

Fourth: We need to bring our doubts directly to the Lord.

Thomas wanted a personal audience with the Lord Jesus. He heard' the ten declare the resurrection but was unwilling to accept their testimony without personal experience with Christ. For eight days Thomas wallowed in his doubts. Then Jesus came again:

" - - - Peace be with you! Then He said to Thomas, reach here your hand, and put it into my side; and be not unbelieving, but be believing." (John 20:26-27).

Our Lord in loving grace presented Himself to Thomas and invited his personal examination. We have no record of Thomas accepting the invitation. The next words records the worship of a now-believing disciple. Thomas cried out, " ----- My Lord, my God." (John 20:28)

The visible presence of Christ was enough to dissolve Thomas' doubts, and he fell before his Lord in worship and adoration.

Jesus dealt tenderly with doubts of Thomas. But He did not stop there; He added special benediction for believers in the centuries to follow. " Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." (John 20:29)

We are able to believe without a personal audience with Christ. We can bring our doubts directly to God and have Him deal with them. When we cry out, "I don't know how God could love me," we can be reassured because of the visible reminder of the cross. It makes us fall in adoration and worship of him who really loves us.

When we wonder, "Lord, what can you possibly do with me?" We know He did something with a man like Thomas and He can do something with us. When we bring our doubts directly to God, we will find He deals with our doubts in love and tenderness.

We have to admit we are at times plagued with paralyzing doubts. But at the same time, we know God has provided a way to deal with doubt. Through the experience of Thomas we know doubts can be dissolved if we will.

I God delivered "Doubting Thomas" from his doubts. Why not come to Him and let Him deal with your doubts and restore you to effective service?

"GOD - I'M PROUD"

One afternoon Goethe and Beethoven chatted and strolled together in the valley. As they walked, passersby saluted, pointed them out, and bowed with ostentatious deference.

"Isn't it maddening?" exclaimed Goethe. "I simply can't escape this homage."

"Don't be too much distressed by it," said Beethoven. "It is just possible that some of it may be for me."

If this story is true, Goethe, the great German poet, was suffering from a rather advanced case of pride! None dare question the poetic ability of Goethe, this is an established fact. But in the presence of an equally great man -- Beethoven -- to assume that homage was to him alone was a mark of crass human pride. Beethoven did a masterful job of deflating Goethe's ego.

Pride afflicts many great men --and many not so great! It's easy for some to become wrapped up in their self-importance and think the world revolves around them. Other people, they believe are around only to reflect their self-perpetuated glory. Someone has wisely said that the man who is wrapped up in his own self-importance makes a very small package! One can have world acclaim but not be truly great because of pride. The larger a man becomes in his own eyes, the smaller he becomes as a person, because self importance works to obscure true greatness.

Is there anything that can be done to counter the problems of sickening pride? God has made it possible for us to deal with this problem. This should come as good news because pride is one of the ugliest of all human problems.

The dictionary says that pride is an over high opinion of one self it is exaggerated self esteem. Pride comes from the Greek word PHUSIOO Which means "to be puffed up, inflated" --- the idea of a bellows used by the blacksmith to blow air on the coals and keep the fire going. Pride is being filled with hot-air; being puffed up with the air or self-importance; having an inflated opinion of oneself.

Pride is like an egg --too full of themselves to hold anything else, or as someone said, "Pride is arrogant self-esteem."

Pride bears an unsavory reputation, but it also has a positive side. In the good sense, pride refers to dignity and self-respect. A person who doesn't possess the dignity of his own worth goes to the other extreme to false humility. Don't let the word pride rob you of your rightful dignity and self-respect.

But when a person becomes inflated with self importance, he imitates Lucifer (the Devil), the father of pride and lies. Lucifer was beautiful when created by God. He was given an honored place among the angels (Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28). He was placed over all the angels receiving and transmitting glory to God.

One day he wanted to grab some of the glory for himself. He thought "I will make myself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:14). He rebelled against God in an effort to boost his own career ahead of what God intended. Pride began in the heart of the fallen one, Lucifer, and all manifestations of pride since have been fueled by the fires of hell.

Pride causes us to become impressed with our own abilities. given enough rope, pride will eventually make us think we are capable of operating independently of God; it makes us feel self sufficient.

Pride falls into several different categories. We may succumb to the "pride of position", because of the job we hold. This is particularly true of many who have reached the place where they have a carpet on the floor and a title on the door!

"Pride of position" has a first cousin called "pride of organization." Churches are easy prey for this problem. Some put forth the confident assertion that "we are the BEST or THE ONLY TRUE ONE in the world." This is frequently used to foster esprit de corps among the members. However, these three words can be translated by one word -- pride.

Its an error of the highest degree to suggest everyone should attend their church because it's the "best" in town. Such claims show a basic ignorance of a church personality. No one church is the right church for everyone in town because churches have different emphases in their ministry that serve the particular needs of those in attendance. This doesn't make them all right either. Organizational pride originated in the pits of hell.

Another member of the family of pride is the "pride of possessions." Unconsciously people often rate themselves as part of a certain social strata because of what they own --- pride of living on the right side of the tracks, driving a prestige automobile, or belonging to the country club. People struggle to own things that outwardly inflate their egos. The more material possessions we own, the more we must be on guard against pride of possessions.

A fourth member of the family is called "pride of intellect." The modern world has gone berserk over knowledge and learning. A Bachelor's Degree is no longer sufficient to command favored position in the job market. Now, one must have an M.A. or PH.D. In our age of dialogue, many Christians have become overly impressed with their degrees. Christians should strive to be as well educated as possible, but at the same time be on guard against the price of intellect.

TA last child in the family is called, "pride of accomplishment," or as the apostle John calls it, "the pride of life" (I John 2:16). Its an ever present danger to view success as a result of our own personal efforts rather than the blessing of God. It is easy to be humble when faced

with failure, but difficult to do so in the hour of triumph and success; its easy to depend on God when we are at the bottom, and easier still to depend on ourselves when we are at the top.

When success arrives, the temptation is to tell God to go help someone else because we are now able to go it alone.

A farmer knows only certain kinds of plants grow in a certain type of soil at a certain altitude and a certain season of the year. Unfortunately, pride is hearty and thrives in any climate---in any area of the world. Look closely and you'll find pride of position, possessions, intellect, or accomplishment growing all around you.

When you go to the doctor with a problem, one of the first things he wants to know is your symptoms. Once he knows them, he is on the track of finding the cause of your illness.

Pride, like a medical malady, has symptoms that are easily detected. One case study in pride is the church at Corinth; a cursory glance reveals several tell-tale signs of pride.

One symptom of pride is the development of cliques. Paul struck right in the middle of this clique-oriented church when he declared, "For you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul, and another, "I am of Apollos ---(I Cor 3:3-4): " that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other (I Cor. 4:6).

Pride results when we follow men rather than a ministry. The Corinthians were guilty of pride in their man which cause contention within the church. Someone said, "You can't raise turkeys and peacocks in the same area because both are stutters." when we begin to follow individual men, cliques develop within the church.

The tendency to gloss over sin is another symptom of pride. Gross immorality was prevalent in the church at Corinth, so gross it made the Gentiles blush. Instead of being grieved and taking action to root out the immorality, Paul said the Corinthians had "

become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst" case of immorality was permitted to exist believers were too arrogant to deal with our ability to see things as they really (I Cor. 5:2). A flagrant in the church because the this sin. Pride obscures are.

A third symptom of pride is a lack of concern for others. The Corinthians used their liberty in Christ with such an uncaring attitude that young believers were damaged.

"But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

For if someone sees you who have knowledge dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?

For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died" (I Cor. 8:9-11).

A person filled with self-importance will demand his own way or rights, regardless of the effects on others. Pride makes it easy to rationalize one's own importance and make everyone else subservient to his wishes.

pride is deadly! It doesn't come into our lives with the force of a freight train. It doesn't come up and say "My name is pride. How about me sharing your life?" it slips in subtly and continues to inflate the ego until it has a stranglehold. By the time its sinister presence is realized, pride may have delivered the coup de grace to your testimony and spiritual life.

The Word of God sets forth three basic principles which, if followed will deflate our balloon pride.

First: Be alert to the dangers of pride. When allowed to exist, Satan will use it to defeat us. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling" (Proverbs 16:18).

Paul made it clear that a young convert should not be chosen for roles of leadership; maturity is a prerequisite for leadership. "And not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil" (I Tim. 3:6). A young believer is more apt to become impressed with his own self-importance if elevated to a position of leadership. When this happens, it is a rerun of Satan's rebellion against God.

Failures of others are recorded in the Bible as divine objects lessons. Paul detailed some of the failings of the children of Israel (I Cor. 10) as object lessons on "how not to live."

When confronted by the bitter failures of someone else, we face a danger of letting pride put words in our mouth such as, "Isn't that awful --I would never have thought he would do that -- --I would never do that!" Paul drives home an important point when he says, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (I Cor. 10:12) We walk along a narrow ledge and are just as apt to fall into the same sins as those we quickly condemn. The minute you think you are beyond the devil's reach, the fall is just around the corner because pride makes you vulnerable.

Second: Be honest with yourself and God.

Take a good look at yourself in the light of God's Word, and you'll discover God has a different opinion of your capacities than yours. If you want an honest evaluation of what you are really like, read the Word of God (not your autobiography). The Bible doesn't give a touched up version of man; like a mirror, it tells it like it really is. Any man who sees himself as someone to be admired makes it evident he has not given much thought of God's evaluation of himself.

Paul gives an unvarnished treatment of the basic nature of all men in his epistle to the Romans. Listen to his description of us in Chapter three.

"There is none righteous, not even one. There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God, all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grove, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are **in** their paths, and the path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:10-18)

Don't try to escape by saying Paul is describing the pagans in his day, as so many do this day. Go back and read the statement of universality like "NONE" and "ALL". Yes, God includes all of us in His description of what man is really like.

Incidentally, the Bible description of man is a good argument for the divine inspiration of Scripture. No man in his right mind would write a book containing such a universal condemnation of himself. Man wouldn't, but God did!

We can't bypass the effects of our "badness" by being super good. Some might try to circumvent the awfulness of their nature by doing loads of good deeds. Isaiah set God's stamp of disapproval on all our self-help projects: "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment ---" (Isa. 64:6).

Do you take rags used to wipe up grease and lay them up in the closet with your best linens? The filthy rags of our righteousness will never, and can never, be placed with or in God's "linen closet" of righteousness.

A word of caution. While being realistic about who we are we are to evaluate ourselves honestly. Even though we are not what we might think, we are somebody. He says, "For through the grace given to me, I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith." (Romans 12:3)

This reminds us that we are somebody, not just a speck of dust in the totality of a vast universe.

Realizing we are somebody, we are to take an honest look at who we are in the sight of God. While we are not to over think (*hyperphroneo*), we are not to under think either. We are to exercise sound judgment concerning ourselves. Sound judgment (*saphroneo*) means "to be in one's right mind." One man suggested Paul treats pride as a species of insanity. Failure to agree with the evaluation of yourself in the Word of God is pride.

The story is told of a young girl who confessed to the Catholic priest she had incurred the sin of vanity.

"What makes you think that?" he asked. "Because every morning when I look into the mirror," she replied, "I think how beautiful I am".

Never fear," said the priest, "that isn't a sin -- that's just a mistake."

Third: Be thankful to god for what you are. If you have attained anything, give the glory to God because it came from Him in the first place.

Thank God for your position as a gift from Him. In the famous passage on the vine and branches, Jesus declared, "----- for apart from ME you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Promotions do not come from the employer, but from God. They are not based upon one's super ability, but upon His grace. When promoted, it is right and proper to acknowledge the role of the employer; but he is only fulfilling the decree of God.

Position in life is a grace gift from God. If you have been blessed with a high salaried job with prestige, great! Give God the credit for placing you where you are. If your job is one of lesser means, praise God who has placed you in the best position possible for you.

Our possessions likewise come from God. James makes this clear: "every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of light, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow: (James1:17). Possessions do not result from native abilities and shrewd planning, but from God's grace. Now it doesn't mean we are not to plan properly. It means we are receivers of God's gifts, not the originators. Since God gave them, we have no basis for an inflated opinion of ourselves based on our possessions.

wisdom is also God's gift (not our brainpower): "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). God is the dispenser of wisdom to His creatures: "For who regards you as superior? and what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (I Cor. 4:7). The differences between men is a result of the creative activity of God.

Face the facts. What we are and have are visible results of God's grace. Since we received these blessings from God, what right do we have to be puffed up with pride? None! Take some practical advice from the words of Paul: "But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

Spend time giving glory to God for His act of love at Calvary, and you will not have time to puff up your own ego. Rather, you will be drawn up short in worship of the Lord God. Self-glory is strangely out of place when you are giving glory to Christ ---the only one who deserves any glory.

If we aren't careful pride might sneak into our lives, and before we know it, we'll be puffed up with a bad case of self importance. If this should happen to you, you can deflate that ego if you will.

Following what God says you will find it easy to deal with the nasty problem of pride.

"GOD - I DON'T WANT TO DIE"

How can we get into this one, no one really wants to die, deep inside of their selves. Most will do anything to keep from dying or being kill. Though some call Death a friend as they grow older, they feel its the only peace they may ever have. The choice is to escape either way from frying or from life.

Maybe a little story comes to mind that might help. There was a wealthy householder who sent his servant into the market place to buy food for a banquet. When the servant came to the market place, he saw Death. Terrified he fled and returned to his master and said, "Master, I just saw Death in the market place. Please let me borrow your horse and flee way up into the hills where I will hide in a cave."

Later the same day the master went to the market place and he too saw Death. he approached Death and said, "Death, why did you frighten my servant so today?"

"Oh", said Death, "I didn't mean to frighten him. In fact I was surprised to see him here, for I have an appointment with him tonight in a cave high up in the hills."

The servant in this story is typical of who do everything within their power to flee death. Few people are willing to understand of life the many people the presence of that death is part Death is not usually the topic of conversation during a ball or any other party. People who are having fun are not interest in discussing morbid subjects.

Have you noticed the tone of a conversation changes when death is mentioned? People become nervous and edgy; they hope by ignoring death it will go away. Even in the last-..moments of life, there is the struggle to avoid death and a cry to God for the continuation of life.

Whether we are willing to discuss or even think about it, death is a subject we will ultimately have to face, because all have an appointment with death.

Most people fear death, and even Christians frequently express uneasiness at the thought of dying. WHY? Because death is unknown; and anytime we face something unknown or strange, we experience tension or foreboding.

After the resurrection, Jesus talked about life, not death. He didn't spend the forty days telling the disciples what they could expect in the moment life ceased and they entered the other side. He spent time talking about what they were to do with their lives.

Another reason we fear death is the dread of facing God. We know we will have to stand before God to answer for our lives and are painfully aware we have not lived as we should nor

done

all we could. The thought of seeing our lives put on God's instant replay screen is chilling!

I've heard it said, "I am in great fear of death. I could not face God unless I had a chance to reform before my life was up." This expresses the innate fear of most people.

Death is something people desperately seek to avoid or delay regardless of cost. Millions are being poured into research in our effort to deter or defeat the grim reaper. People want new hearts new kidneys and other "spare parts" that will enable them to prolong life. (This I know only too well.) If this mad pursuit is continued, hospitals will have a "parts" department just like the auto shop; Medical science may prolong life, but in the end death always wins.

People invest fortunes in an effort to stay death's hand for a short while longer. Just before Thomas Hobbs, an English skeptic, died, he said, "If I had the whole_ world I would give it to live one day ."

People frantically search for that eternal fountain of youth. Women try to find it in an assortment of creams and oils. But alas, time marches on and their faces and figures show the weight of years. Men, too fight off the approaching of the forties. They dye their hair and get a young girlfriend, but their aching muscles tell them that old age cannot be delayed --time marches on! Each generation ignores the facts while seeking a way to remain forever young.

Since no one is anxious to die, how do we account for the increasing number of suicides? The man who commits suicide doesn't want to die; he wants an escape from misery. Suicide is not a desire for death, it's a frantic rebellion against society and the aging of life. The suicide victim would avoid it if he could. find an alternative to his miserable life.

In spite of the fear of death, it is part of life because life is temporary. The prophet Isaiah described life as a tender succulent plant that is exposed to the scorching sun:

"---All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flowers fades, But the word of our God stands forever." (Isa. 40:6-8)

Crops in the early morning summer dew looks fresh and crisp, but by mid-afternoon the burning heat causes the same plants to wilt and droop. Life is like that; we begin fresh, but with the weight of years, we wilt and fade away.

James uses a different figure to describe the transient nature of life. "---You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). Think about it ---your life is no more than the early morning mist that is burned away by the sun.

Death is a reminder of man's rebellion against God. Man was created to live forever, but after his rebellion, he lost that right. He was evicted from the Garden which prevented him

from partaking of the tree of life. Eating the forbidden fruit brought man the curse of death. Never has so much been lost by so little. Adam and Eve lost the right to physical life, and the forces of death began to tug at their bodies.

But more than physical life was lost in Eden. Adam and Eve experienced spiritual death long before their physical demise. They experienced spiritual death when they were driven from God's presence in Eden. Actually, physical death was a blessing, it would be an unimaginable torment to live forever in bodies cursed .by sin ----subject to disease and infirmities.

Each time we read the obituary notices or see the funeral coach pass, we see a grim reminder that the penalty is sin is being exacted.

Each of us has a divine appointment with death that can't be ignored. Since death is certain, do we need to be afraid? No! God has made it possible for us to face death-afraid.

The only person who has any reason to fear death is the one who has never by faith trusted Christ as his or her personal Saviour. But once you have, you no longer need to fear death.

An examination of God's Word reveals several provisions that make it possible for the Christian to face death unafraid. These provisions are designed to give comfort and confidence in the face of death.

First: We need to view death as the stepping stone to eternity. " it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment." (Hebrews 9:27) Regardless of the length of life, our days are numbered. The Psalmist says, "As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years----" (Psalms 90:10). Three thousand years ago the age span of man was set at seventy years. Today with all our medical research, the current life span for a man is 67.7 years while a woman's is seventy four. These average out to be just over seventy. Medical science hasn't been able to do much to delay our appointment with the grim reaper.

Death introduces us to the first phase of eternity ---judgment! Life is a series of opportunities in preparation for the day of judgment. The first thing you will do in eternity will be to give an accounting of the stewardship of your life. Preparation for that event must be made during life.

Eternity begins when life ends. Death is the doorway to eternity through which we must pass to experience eternal life. It has been said that life begins at forty, but this isn't true. We have to die before life really begins!

Second: We need to see that death represents a promotion. Most people think of death as the destruction of all we hope for. How can we say that death is a promotion people ask me? Death ushers us into the presence of Christ.

"Therefore, being always of good courage and knowing that while we are at home in the

body we are absent from the Lord -

For we walk by faith, not by sight -- we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." (II Cor 5:6-8)

As long as we walk around in the house called our body, we are earth-bound, separated from Christ. But the moment we die, our house (body) drops away and we are ready to be ushered into the presence of the Lord. This tremendous truth is the basis of Paul's good courage. He faced the prospect of death everyday. Without a divine perspective, he could have been glum and depressed, but he wasn't. He saw death as an usher who would bring him to the presence of Christ. Be of good courage, death takes us to be with our Lord!

Paul goes on to say that dying is better than living. He wasn't a morbid, withdrawn skeptic who was miserable in life. On the contrary, he was filled with zest and enthusiasm for life.

Life was great, but he anticipated something greater---death. Listen: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21). Even though he was stoned, imprisoned, and beaten for preaching the gospel, he was consumed with the passion of living for Christ. But as he thought about what lay beyond death, he said that is gain.

The knowledge that dying is better than living creates a tension in life. He said, "----I am hard pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." (Phil. 1:23-24) Paul never hinted that death represented a bleak fearful prospect. He anticipated the promotion of death!

Be careful here. Just because death promotes us to the presence of Christ, we are not to rush out into the freeway and flirt with death. Life has a purpose.

The only reason we are here on the earth now instead of in heaven with Christ is that we have a task to complete before going home.

Life is great! Live it to the full, but don't let your zest for life obscure your vision of the promotion that comes the moment you leave this life on earth.

Third: Remember death has been conquered by life. The dictionary is incorrect when it defines death as a permanent ending of life. The Bible makes it clear that death is not a permanent ending to life, it is a transfer to another sphere of life.

Jesus Christ is life and His life conquers death. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." (John 1:4) "I am the resurrection and the life ---" (John 11:25). "I am the way, and the truth, and the life ----" (John 14:6).

Once we realize that Jesus Christ abolished death, it removes the sting and power of death. Paul tells us, "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Cor. 15:56-57).

Tombstones in the cemetery are visible reminders of the power of sin to kill the body. But when we lay loved ones in the ground, we can be comforted in the knowledge that Jesus passed through physical death and came back victorious defeating death. Death is no longer the sovereign king over man.

Death has everyone in its appointment book. We have no idea when our number will come up, but this is no reason for pessimism, gloom, or fear. God has made it possible for us to face death unafraid. You and I can be free from fear of death if you will trust in God. -

Knowing this and Jesus Christ allows us to face life and death unafraid!

“GOD - I'M AFRAID”

Many people feel they'll get rid of fear as they grow older. but because fear is one of the base emotions of the human heart, we never seem to be completely free of it.

The dictionary gives three different shades of meaning to fear: (1) Fear is a feeling of anxiety and agitation caused by the presence or nearness of danger. Practically speaking, its the feeling you get in the pit of your stomach when you're called in to see the boss after doing something wrong! (2) Fear is a feeling of uneasiness. For example, when your teenager isn't in by curfew you're afraid something has happened to him. (3) Fear is also a feeling of a respectful awe or dread ----as when you encounter a snake.

Fear is an emotional response which is consciously recognized, stimulated usually by some real threat. Fear is the tense feeling which grips you when you are faced with the tough problems of life. Have you ever felt your emotions were like taut guitar strings? Fear stretches your emotions and leaves you feeling all wound up.

In the New Testament, three different words are translated fear: (1) DEILIA which is always used in a negative sense. It is used of those who denied the faith under duress. It is the anxiety that comes from pressures. (2) PHOBOS(from which we get the English word "Phobia") is more neutral. Sometimes it's good for a person to have phobias. Fear **in** the presence of danger is a good type of phobia. (3) EULABEIA indicates reverence toward God. It is always used in a good sense; as in Hebrews 12:28: "Therefore since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe."

Lets focus on the negative aspect (DEILIA) of fear.

People are afraid of many things ---the dark, high places, the unknown, other people, failure, bad breath, of not being accepted by God, the day of judgment. Our minds can't be at rest when fear is pumping adrenalin into our system with the signal to "fight" or "flee".

I was working on the greenhouse taking the side off and I pulled and opened one side up above my head and thousands of ants fell out and all over me. On my head and face, in my mouth and all over my body. Later I looked all over as I was speaking to my wife and said no bites, thank you, My Father. My wife said to me, one of the reasons you don't get the bites like the rest of us do is you do not become afraid, you do not get your adrenalin pumping like the rest of us so there is no signal of fear. She was right I just took my time brushing them off easy. Results, no bites, but most of all the credit goes to God for His protection He gives us.

In recent years, doctors have found that some fears are caused by physiological problems. When the human system is out of balance, fears may result. A person who suffers from constant fears should first see his doctor for a thorough check up.

But most fears can be traced back to a spiritual problem because the ultimate cause of fear is sin. The first record of fear in the human race is in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve were placed in God's beautiful garden where He had fellowship with them and came to see them every day. It was a beautiful relationship. Then one day as God came looking for Adam and Eve they were nowhere to be found.

God called out to Adam, "Where are you?" Adam replied from the bushes where he and Eve were hiding, "----I heard the sound of You in the garden and I was afraid ----So I hid myself." (Gen. 3:9-10)

Afraid? Why should Adam be afraid of God, his creator and friend? He had disobeyed God, and now fear gripped his soul. The immediate consequence of sin is fear of God.

Paul tells us that God established governments and we are to be subject to them. As long as we are doing what is right, we have no reason to be afraid of the government. But the rebellious citizen who has violated a command of God should be afraid of the authorities; they are God's ministers to execute wrath upon the evil doer (Romans 13:4). "If you want to dance," says an old saying "you will have to pay the fiddler." Fear is one of the consequences of rebellion against God and government.

Fear does not originate with God, "For God has not given us the spirit of timidity, (fear) but of power and love and discipline" (II Tim. 1:7). Since fear doesn't come from God it must come from Satan, and it's one of his best tools to make you ineffective for God.

Sin causes fear! (But that doesn't mean every fear is a sin.) We don't want to face God when we have sinned against. We don't want to face our parents when we have disobeyed them. We don't want to face the boss when we have failed to carry out our assigned responsibilities, why are we afraid? Because we haven't done what we know we should. We have disobeyed --and the resulting consequence is fear.

Chronic fear wrecks havoc in our lives: "-----fear involves punishment ---" (I John 4:18.) When fear is present, we suffer penalties; fear produces physical, emotional, and spiritual problems.

In the physical realm, fear can limit the normal life span. People live under the constant threat of heart failure, and one of its chief culprits is hypertension. Research concerning this silent killer reveals that tensions and fears are contributing causes. Unresolved fear will add to our tension and perhaps be a factor in cutting short our three-score and ten. It can also limit many enjoyable activities. How many people do you know who are afraid to fly in an airplane?

Fear will cause a person to withdraw from daily activities, Some people have phobias (fears) that cause them to hide in their houses and not come out. Their life activities are circumscribed by fears.

Fear also creates emotional problems and impairs a person's ability to reason logically. What happens when we panic? We can't think straight; we're too busy trying to swallow our hearts to think logically.

Fear can produce a persecution complex. I know some people who think everyone is out to get them. Every time they hear a siren they're sure the police are coming for one of the family, or an ambulance is carrying a family member to the hospital. That kind of fear will put you through an emotional wringer.

Fear causes spiritual problems and paralyzes faith. As long as fear is allowed to persist our effectiveness for God is limited. Faith will banish fear, or else fear will banish faith. Some become so afraid that not only can they not trust God for something big, they can't even trust Him for their daily bread. Fear causes many spiritual paralytics.

Fear condemns you to a life of immeasurable misery, and few things are as unbecoming and pathetic as a miserable child of God. (Even the misery of a non-Christian cannot compare to that of the child of God who is heir of the universe, power, love and wisdom of God!)

We know we're not supposed to be afraid, but our efforts to "kick the habit" are fruitless. We cry out, "Why can't I quit being afraid? I know I'm to fear not, but I don't know how to obey god's co=-and. How can I stop?"

God's solution for fear deals with unnecessary fears. We should have a respect or dread of danger to walk off a ten story building is not fearlessness; it's foolishness. We are supposed to maintain a reverential awe (or fear) of God. God's solution for fear deals with the inner tension that comes to tear us apart emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Three things are essential in coping with fear.

First: Realize fear is not part of God's program for us. We are told emphatically to "fear not" Likewise, we are commanded to be "bold" -- boldness is the opposite of fear.

Since fear is not part of God's plan, we are to do something about it. We can't escape it by taking a daily dose of tranquilizers, nor by a weekly visit to the psychotherapist. We can't defeat our fears by taking a rest at the Sheraton where "busy executives unwind." Deliverance from fears begins with a correct mental attitude.

Second: Recognize we do not face our problems alone.

It makes no difference how severe our problems become, we are not alone. God does not jump out of the boat and leave us to "paddle our own canoe" when the going gets rough. God is with us even when our personal safety is threatened. The survival instinct is a powerful drive and most people will do anything to stay alive. Even though we have the prospect of

leaving this life and being with Christ which is far better, most of us are in no hurry to do so.

You know how the old joke goes when the pastor preaching on going to heaven issued this unique invitation, "all those who want to go to heaven, stand up."

Everyone in the church stood up except a little man on the front row.

"Sir, Don't you want to go to heaven?" asked the preacher.

"Yes," the man replied.

"Then why didn't you stand up with the rest of the people?"

"Oh, I thought you were making up a load to go tonight!"

Most people want to go to heaven or to be with God, but are in no hurry to catch the flight.

Our Lord gave some pertinent advice to His disciples when they learned they would face problems and persecutions. "----do not fear those who kill the body ---" (Matt. 10:28). Why shouldn't we be afraid of those who are able to kill us? We are going to die anyway, so why fear those who have the power to bring about death?

We are not to fear those who have the axe or gun to rob us of our physical house. Rather Jesus instructs us to fear the one who has the power to kill the soul! The body is temporal, the spirit eternal. The only justifiable fear is divine fear, because God deals in eternal matters. We need not fear men who can hurt the body because God is the keeper of the spirit.

Many people are anxious and concerned about their personal worth. Jesus made it clear the real worth is measured by God, not those around us. It is nice when our peers confirm our value, but it is nothing to get uptight about if they don't .

Quit worrying about what you're worth to those around .."you; their evaluation isn't what counts. God is the one who places the value on your personal worth.

Jesus continued His comforting words to the disciples: "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? and yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; You are of more value than many sparrows." (Matt 10:29).

Even insignificant little sparrows are of value to God; He takes note when one of them falls. But we are of more value than many sparrows. It doesn't matter what value other men place on our lives. We are worth something to God. He is with us always to take care of His investment.

God is with us even though we may only have a few of this world's possessions. People have the tendency to be fearful in the presence of those who have great material fortunes. We fret and stew about what we have or don't have, as though it were important to God.

Let your way of life be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). We are

not to be afraid; regardless of what we have, be content. This is a radical departure from contemporary philosophy which says "get more and more and more."

So that we can say confidently, "The lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?" (Heb. 13:6) Once we recognize God is involved in our lives, our point of reference will change from temporary to the eternal. God's omnipotent presence with us when we face problems will remove the poison darts of fear.

Finally: We need to rest_ in the peace Christ gives. Peace means a "mind at ease." Jesus Christ promised us His relaxed mental attitude toward life's harried moments. It's hard to comprehend Christ's example of peace in the face of problems and danger. He knew better than anyone the kind of agony and suffering He would have to endure on the cross. But with assurance from God and a relaxed mental attitude, He endured the taunts and abuses heaped upon Him because He knew He was carrying out God's will. He faced agony with His mind at ease and thus left a perfect example of a life lived without Tear

The night before His death on the cross, Jesus gathered the disciples together in the upper room for farewell instructions. In the midst of the discourse, Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, do I give to you." (John 14:27)

After the promise of peace, He urged them to rest on His peace: "Let not your hearts be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (John 14:27). When we can relax in His peace, rest in His peace, we will not be ripped to emotional shreds by the shears of daily tensions and problems. When we allow fear to invade and sear our lives, we admit we're not utilizing the relaxed mental attitude Jesus promised us.

He doesn't guarantee to immunize or keep us from danger and problems; but He does guarantee peace in the midst of danger. Most of us frantically pursue protection from the problems rather than seek God's peace through them. We desperately cry out to God for deliverance but seldom pray for a relaxed mental attitude. Seeking deliverance rather than peace may cause us to miss the lesson God wants to teach us. The next time the bottom falls out, instead of asking God to put the bottom back in, ask Him to grant you the ability to relax and enjoy His peace.

We all face pressures that produce anxiety, uneasiness, and fear. We can't stop the pressures but we can learn to deal with them.

If we want to live above the anxiety producing circumstances, we will have to understand His will.

When fear seeks to paralyze your life, let God bring you out of its darkness into the light of His peace.

"GOD - I'M BORED"

Have you, like most, ever wondered how different life would be if you could follow the wind and find yourself on a sandy South Sea island riding the wild surf off Hawaii sitting astride a camel by an Egyptian pyramid? But being in exotic places, doing exciting things, and hobnobbing with glamorous people is not part of our daily routine. The more we think about the excitement of travel, the more painful is the awareness that we're trapped by life's daily drag. Life isn't exciting ---- its monotonous! The more our world closes in on us, the more frantic we seek to climb out of the rut by indulging in daydreams. But try as we might, we can't dream ourselves out of the rut.

Have you ever said, "I'm bored to death with the life I'm living. I never do anything or go anywhere that's exciting?"

Most of us have made this confidential confession to a trusted friend; but, have you ever said to God, "God I'm bored with my life?"

Boredom is one of the major problems infecting society today; all of us are susceptible! Boredom is easier to describe than define. Its the weary feeling we experience around something or someone who is dull, uninteresting, or monotonous. Its the emotional fatigue stemming from the sameness of daily life. Boredom makes us feel life is little more than a rut (a rut has been called a grove with both ends kicked out!) -

The feeling of being trapped in--a-monotonous routine with nothing to look forward to but more of the same it leaves us with an' emotional flat tire.

Boredom results from our basic attitude toward life---the tendency to look at life as a monotonous drag. If a woman says she is bored with her lot, it doesn't mean she doesn't love her family; it means she is tired of seeing the same kids and dishes day after day.

Men often view their job as a monotonous bore. At the end of the day they come home emotionally flat with little desire to do more than sit in front of the TV, hoping to blot out the thought of going back to the "grind" the following day.

People become bored with their friends. After a while, they feel few of them have anything interesting to say. How many interesting friends do you have? If you are normal, the number will probably be under five.

Television producers are largely responsible for intensifying our boredom. Picture the harried housewife (wearing a frayed and bedraggled chenille bathrobe) standing at her ironing board with a mountain of un-ironed clothes; her children have made a shambles of the house;

the sink is full of dirty dishes. In an effort to escape the chaos, she makes a mistake and turns on the T.V. There a beautiful shapely woman sways to the romantic strains of Hawaiian music. She looks back at the stack of ironing, the dirty dishes in the sink, the upside down house, the frayed bathrobe and says to herself, "YUK!" (What she really feels like doing is kicking in the picture tube and running away!) Knowing she can't do that, she sits and seethes, feeling hopelessly trapped by the drudgery of her housework.

Some women just go stir crazy after 15 or 20 years of nothing but taking care of the kids, dogs, cats, catering to the husband and doing the housework, many get sick, psychologically sick --- a wife feels trapped at home. She is unhappy with her husband, bored with her children, and tired of the daily monotony.

Compounding her misery is the itch of envy out there in the big world of business: "If only I could get out there and compete", she thinks.

But men suffer the same type of boredom on their jobs. Sometime ago I heard a T.V. station question men on the streets if they were in a rut.

So many said yes, oh but yes, "I do the same thing every day, get up, go to work, come home, eat, go to bed, boy I've got to make some changes."

Another said, "I am. I measure all day long, Then I go home, sit down, watch T. V. Next day right back to work, measuring again all day long."

Yet another said, "Yes, I work all day long and then at night, well, I'm a married man. I'm doing the same thing other married men do. I have a job in the day and I work on my marriage at night."

So you can see it covers all this boredom.

To many they regard their jobs as a dead end and you know what that can do to you with no where to go, makes it dull, boring, and degrading!

Boredom it's not an occupational hazard, it's an attitude toward the occupation. In our impersonal, mechanized society, every job has an element of the routine. But it's not the routine that leads to boredom; it's one's attitude toward the routine!

The housewife can look at her children as a trap or as a privilege granted to shape the lives of part of the next generation. A husband can see his job as a monotonous drag or as a small part of getting a significant job done. One's attitude makes a difference.

If not dealt with properly, boredom will cause emotional sickness. Some of the emotional symptoms of boredom are despair, depression, pessimism, and ultimately suicide.

Bored women suffer from imagined ailments. they must find an outlet hobbies, sports, education something interesting to take their minds away from the household. Such outlets

brings or may bring temporary relief, but fail to deal with the basic problem of attitude. An outing may do wonders for the moment, but once back in the house, the four walls of boredom close in again. And in a desperate attempt to break the drab drag, bored people may seek thrills in drugs, sex, alcohol, or the occult. In addition to the social impact of such fruitless efforts, the emotional toll and scars left on family members is immeasurable.

Some observers believe boredom is responsible for much of the violence in the world today. They say "Boredom and Violence" stated many surveys indicate job dissatisfaction plays a large role in the current national wave of discontent. In seeking other outlets for their energy, more people are choosing violence and justifying it."

It is easy to follow the warped logic of some who reason "Why work in a boring job all day for a pittance when you can rob a bank and come home with a bundle?" The element of danger even the threat of jail if caught, adds excitement and seems preferable to the dull routine of the job at the "sweat shop."

Boredom also creates spiritual problems. Many Christians blame God for their boredom. They feel God is too distant to be concerned about their problems. Some, because they know they have a room reserved in the "heavenly Hotel" adopt an attitude of living high till the "bye and bye."

Others bear their boredom as if it were a cross laid on them by God. They feel licking over the traces would be "unspiritual," so suffer through life bored! Such an attitude causes the feeling of being trapped in a room without windows and doors. And not being able to knock down the walls, they grit their teeth and endure the daily boredom while glibly singing, "Jesus is the joy of living."

Many try various escape routes which usually end up as dead end tunnels.

Some think a new job with more excitement is the way to go. (and changing jobs may bring temporary respite) but every job has its monotonous element.

Others seek escape in travel, meeting new people, new excitements, different places will banish their boredom. Boredom will return.

While others think a higher standard of living would make life more interesting, ' so. they 'secure a second: job, put the wife to work, get a bigger house, a newer car and higher payment. That kind of escape is leaping from the "frying pan into the fire" because it only gives you more comfortable surroundings for your misery. The higher standard of living makes you a slave. How ironic to work eighteen hours a day to pay for all the labor saving devices

Its interesting that Sweden has one of the highest standards of living and also the highest suicide rate in the world. On the other hand Africa, has the lowest standard and the lowest suicide rate. You can never truly buy your way out of boredom.

Face it! Most of our efforts only aggravate the problem, they are attempts to escape by running. One day we'll have to stop running, and when we do, boredom will strike again.

If we stop long enough to take a good look at boredom we will discover God has provided a way out. You say, "I sure hope so, because my home remedies aren't working; I'm tired of running."

The solution to boredom is not found in a constant change of circumstances, but in a change of attitude toward the circumstances.

The first step to curing boredom is: Recognize that God's plan for your life does not include boredom. This is a basic step. Many Christians see God as some sort of cosmic killjoy floating around on a pink cloud looking for Christians who are happy. Once found, He takes immediate steps to make them miserable.

Jesus spoke pointedly to this when He said "- - - I am that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

Did Jesus say He came to make a life a drag? No! Christians convey this idea because they have a warped view of God. Jesus promised two things: Spiritual life in the "new birth" and life that was meaningful. Like any Father, God, our heavenly Father, wants us to experience a life that is full and meaningful with purpose and direction.

God reaches beyond our circumstances and meets the basic need. He doesn't promise us a new job with more excitement; a new place to live where neighbors are more friendly, a new mate who is more understanding; more money to buy things. These things will not solve the problem nor lift the pressure that squeezes the joy out of living.

God makes us new people with new views of life. When we trust Christ, He gives us new minds, new emotions, and new wills equipping us to see life from a different perspective. God gives life, new life, not new circumstances.

God's purpose in salvation is not to make us miserable. We do that to ourselves. He came to give life with meaning.

Second: Realize that where you are is God's will. Elijah is a good case in point. He came from obscurity to the courts of Ahab. Immediately God directed him to go hide by a stream in the desert (I Kings 17). He spent months sitting by the brook alone, being fed by the birds. Think about it! Day after day, he had nothing to do except wait for the birds to bring his food and watch the stream dry up.

Nevertheless, Elijah, the "palace man", found joy and contentment in being alone in the desert without daily routines because he knew God had placed him there.

Our common everyday task is glorified when it is in the will of God. The routine task, no matter how insignificant it seems, is God's will for your life at this moment: so ENJOY IT!

Go ahead; enjoy it! Stop looking at it as a cross to be borne.

It may be that you are in a job you know is not God's will for you. If that's the case, you can never hope to be free from boredom until you find the job God has for you. Unless you have leading from God to the contrary, the job you now have is God's will for your life. When you realize your job is God's will for your life at the present, it will change your attitude toward your circumstances.

Then ask yourself who are you working for? You might say, "I'm doing it for the man who signs my check," or "I'm keeping the house clean for my husband, but he doesn't appreciate it." No wonder you are bored; you are working for the wrong person. Too many go astray because they are working for the employer or mate rather than God. It isn't the job you do, but for whom you do it that makes it worthwhile.

Paul gave some practical advice when he said, "----In all things obey those who are your master on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than, for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance." (Col. 3:22 -24)

"It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. (Col.:3:24) No matter what you work at, all work large and small, exciting or routine is for God not man. Seek God's approval first and this should alter your attitude toward your task of life.

When we murmur and complain about our job or station in life, we are doing it against God. God will judge us by the job we do.

Once you realize that where you are in god's will for your life, it will halt the search for happiness elsewhere; you know it can't be found anywhere else.

Third: Personalize your work: Much of the boredom results from feeling we are only part of the machinery. Impersonalization robs us of our sense of worth. Everything we do should be done for the person of Jesus Christ. Paul declared, "- - - whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Co. 3:17)

Would dishwashing be easier if they were God's dishes? The housewife with a pile of dishes in the sink if they were God's dishes would it be easier? Would: it be easier if He wanted you to do them? Thinking about doing His dishes gives us a new view of a boring job. Once you can realize this, you are doing God's work, it will add a personal touch of infinite worth to the task.

Finally, when you are doing a job, don't just involve your hands, put yourself into the work.

Paul advises, "----do your work heartily, as for the Lord (Col. 3:23). Even lowly chores seem light when our hearts are in it. such an attitude makes a world of difference between two people working side by side. One may be enduring the grind, while the other is enjoying his

work. Why? One has his heart in the work, while the other involves only his hands.

How can you possibly put your heart into your job? Look at your job as a personal assignment for Christ, and it will take on new dimensions. Personalize your work in that way, and boredom will beat a hasty retreat.

Everyday we walk along, the brink of boredom and with little effort, can slip over the edge and be caught in boredom's quicksand. Escape comes not by straggling and changing circumstances, but by changing attitudes to the circumstances.

Boredom involves deliberate, usually unconscious neglect and rejection of non-developed and yearning aspects of ourselves.

Boredom simply cannot exist when we are actively engaged in the process of continuing growth through recognition and development of real resources in ourselves. But for this to take place self-respect is necessary. This means all aspects of self. Boredom represents rejection of one's proclivities and possibilities. It stems from neglect of real resources, which in turn, will bring about a self-hate.

Compassion is the only antidote to self hate and the only human prerogative and alternative to neurotic despair.

Compassion is any and all thoughts, feelings, moods, insights and actions that serve the interest of actual self. These include all functions and protects, sustains and enhances actual self.

Compassion is enhanced wherever and whenever consciousness displaces repression and unconsciousness and reality replaces unreality.

Compassion, as with all other human entities, can only exist on a relative basis, but the battle for compassion is the most life-affirming endeavor of all.

Compassion is, ultimately, a state of mind in which benevolence reigns supreme and in which a state of grace is established with ourselves.

I found out that human efforts, struggles and insights are at best intellectual, superficial and minimal value without compassion. At worst, they become perverted and used in the service of misery. Relative psychic peace can only exist in a compassionate emotional climate.

To move into full compassion we must learn to destroy the illusions we live with.

Illusions can be discovered each time we discover a pride position in ourselves. A gut feeling of change in ourselves takes place when we struggle and succeed to any degree in understanding foolish pride. Discovery of illusion can be followed by almost spontaneous surrender of illusion.

We are, for the most part, illusion-free if we can comfortably and happily, but without

resignation, picture our current here-and-now condition as being the one we live with, without vast changes in the future. That is not to say that change and growth are not certainly possible and often desirable. But compassionate, non-illusionary, realistic change and growth are invariably connected to good feelings about here and now. Envisioned changes dreamed up in hatred of current life in the here and now, are usually full of Heaven-on-Earth illusionary embroidery and are never satisfactory. If you like here and now living and if the finite facts of life and death are neither insulting, disgusting nor terrifying to you, chances are excellent that your illusions on all levels have indeed been significantly neutralized.

Its never too late to do something to change ones life and thinking, life is important too, as it should be.

Involvement and evolvment rather than achievement or accomplishment is important to understand compassion.

Compassion is a way of life.

I AM BECAUSE I AM! Means I exist because I exist and need no justification whatsoever for my existence. The fact of my being is enough. I require no terms, conditions or permits from myself or anyone else. I live and in living, I am fully entitled to go on living. My life, my existence, my being is not predicated on standards, values, achievements or accomplishments. I am not because of books, money I earn, degrees conferred, children I have. I am with or without these accouterments. These things and people are not me! I do not exist because of them. Relative to my life, they exist because of me. While they may give me satisfaction, they in no way justify my existence. How do I feel? is a very important question as applied to people, issues, myself and especially as to my state of well being.

My thoughts, feelings, ideas and opinions are important because they are mine and not because I have achieved any special status in this world. In a state of grace with my self, I do not abandon myself when the going gets tough or should others find me antithetical in any way in their frames of reference. Loyalty means care and kindness at all times.

I readily consult with other people in making important decisions. But I approach them only after I have first approached myself and I consult myself again for my own decision after all consultations with others. In my life I must be the final authority, whatever expertise I choose to get from others.

The free relationships of consult with others enriches my life to no ends, to make changes in the I AM - -

This "I" is dedicated to the belief in myself and in all my individual self-identifying characteristics and proclivities. Change for this "I" involves choice, not compulsion. I do not change myself because others consider me bad or perverse. I change only because I have determined that I want to change. I have decided that change is good for me. Otherwise, I retain my status quo however perverse any of my particular characteristic or attributes may be judged to be within our cultural frame of reference.

I am not dead, I am alive, self acceptance is the essence of integration, born of need to comply with inner and outer dictates. So I don't deaden any aspects of myself. Energy and time are not diverted, wasted in useless rituals of illusions.

I need, I want, I choose, my needs must be taken seriously. I cannot let my needs be a source of embarrassment to me for they come from me. I am human and therefore have needs as others do.

Life is a process. I am smack in the middle of living process all the time. I should always do my best because it is an expression of me at any given time. Therefore, whatever I do is my signature. I should do this because its not a performance or a frame of reference for judgmental deeds.

I must come to understand that I alone have the right to say NO or YES. Without this I am a prisoner of others. It takes away my ability to selective ideas to accept or reject matters.

The same with life and death there's a right to this matter through choices.

Life is tough! How can it be otherwise? As people we are more than complex: We are also the most sensitive, vulnerable and aware creatures on earth.

As humans we are blessed with a capacity to communicate. Knowledge and fear of the finiteness of life and communication breakdown often make great fear.

Knowing life is tough it is an extremely valuable and compassionate process. Just knowing this and accepting it as part of life process makes living easier and better.

Reality is the best friend of compassion. We can't climb every mountain and cross every river and anticipate every pitfall. We are some times right and often wrong. We must fight for the right to be wrong, to fail. In this way we don't make life tougher than it is and we become tougher and stronger by giving ourselves these human rights, these rights enhance our flexibility, and being able to bend, we don't break and crack of rigidity.

Compassion make life easier, but it is in no way a retreat from life nor is it an easy road to take.

“GOD - I'M DISAPPOINTED”

Disappointment is one of the frustrating problems each of us must face. Often I hear people say, "He disappointed me so much." Or have you ever said to someone, "I'M so disappointed in you?" Or even more pointed, "God I'm disappointed." Maybe you like so many just thought it to yourself without mentioning it to any one for fear of the disappointment of not being understood.

If we are to face life realistically, we will have to grapple with the problem of disappointment. It can't be ignored.

What happens inside when we say we are disappointed? The dictionary says it means "to be made unhappy by the failure of one's hopes or expectations." Disappointment then is the sinking feeling we get when our plans blow up in our faces.

From the beginning of history men have had their plans go wrong (even great of faith faced this). The Bible doesn't present these men of faith as cardboard characters with a perpetual smile. On the contrary, Scripture exposes the tender underside of their failures while painting the picture of their accomplishments. The pressing question is not who experiences disappointment, but why? What causes that sinking feeling when things don't pan out?

Disappointment generally falls into two distinct categories circumstances and people.

When things are not as expected, we become disappointed. Abraham experienced this. One day while he was living in the rich alluvial basin around Ur of the Chaldees, God spoke to Abraham and directed him to leave his home for a new land He would show him. Instantly Abraham obeyed, taking his herds ..and immediate' family on a thousand mile journey to this new land. I am sure as he made that long journey on foot, he developed expectation and high hopes about his new promised land.

But the Biblical record of his arrival tersely states: "Now there was a famine in the land- - -" (Genesis 12:10.)

No record is given to Abraham's feelings but its reasonable to assume he was disappointed. As he sat in his tent he must have thought, "I left the beauty of Ur, all my relatives, walked a thousand miles, and what do I get --- a land wasted by drought. This isn't what I expected." (Does that sound about like our nature?)

Disappointment also comes when plans fall through. This frequently happens to parents. Often from the time their child is still an infant, many parents begin to plan the kind of career

their child will enter, where he will go to school, and whom he will marry. Disappointment comes when the child announces he wants something different than what his parents planned.

When extensive plans for a vacation have to be cancelled, we are disappointed. But the most painful disappointment comes when people fail us.

Paul experienced this kind of disappointment. He arrived in Troas fully expecting to see Titus (II Cor. 2:12-14), but Titus was nowhere to be found. Titus' failure to keep the appointment caused Paul disappointment.

Disappointment comes when we trust a person to do something and he fails us. Moses experienced such a disappointment. God called him to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage, but Moses begged off. "God, you know I'm not an eloquent speaker." Graciously God designated Aaron, his brother, as his mouthpiece. After deliverance was accomplished, Moses and Aaron were in the wilderness with the nation at Mt. Sinai. Moses then left the camp and went up in the mount to receive instructions from God concerning His laws. While there, God told Moses to get back down the mountain before He destroyed the people. Moses hurried back to the camp and found it in an uproar. The people had persuaded Aaron to build a golden calf and thus instituted idolatry. Imagine Moses' disappointment in Aaron and the people of Israel.

Disappointment is part of life, and it's important to know how to deal with it. Failure to cope with disappointment can be devastating.

The first consequence of unresolved disappointment is cynicism. A person in this state feels it's futile to rely on anybody; his confidence in people is at such a low ebb he'd rather not believe anything they say. "If I don't expect anything from them, they can't disappoint me."

Disappointment brings discouragement. Constant failure to realize our plans or expectations will cause us to lose confidence and hope, and inability to handle disappointment becomes a great tool for Satan.

A little story about Satan and His tools:

It was advertised that the devil was going to put his tools up for sale. On the date of sale the tools were placed for public inspection, each being marked with its sale price. They were a treacherous lot of implements -- Hatred, Envy, Jealousy, Deceit, Lying, Pride and so on, comprised the outfit. Laid apart from the rest was a harmless-looking tool, well-worn and priced very high.

"What is the name of this tool?" asked one of the purchasers pointing to it.

"That is Discouragement," tersely replied the devil. "Why have you priced it so high?"

"Because it is more useful to me than the others. I can pry open and get inside of a man's heart with that, when I cannot get near him with other tools. Once I get inside, I can make him

do what I choose. It is badly worn because I use it on almost everyone, since few people know it belongs to me."

Disappointment will make us want to give up in despair. "What's the use?" Nothing ever works out for me. Everything always goes wrong. I'm tired of getting my hopes up only to be let down." We will eventually want to crawl off in a corner and let the world go by without attempting to be apart of it.

When disappointment comes, the tendency is to blame somebody else. The man behind bars says, "I got a raw deal," The man whose business fails says, "Its the banker's fault." He wouldn't loan me more money. The person passed over for promotion says "its the boss' fault because he didn't recognize my talents," and so on.

Blaming others for our disappointment is an admission that we have never learned to handle one of the basic problems of life. Failure to deal with disappointment leads to cynicism, discouragement and despair.

The Bible sets forth several principles that when known and applied will keep disappointments from being a problem to you. (Not that disappointment won't come, but they won't get you down -- you can take them in stride.)

Three basic principles are if we want to conquer disappointment. First: Realize God is in control of ALL circumstance. God is sovereign Ruler over the u in verse and cannot be overthrown. Because He is in control of all circumstance, the life of the believer cannot be a series of freak accidents. It is under the direction of the sovereign God, and He makes no mistakes.

What is disappointment to one may well be what makes another happy. The rain at a picnic may make a boy unhappy because it ruined the picnic; on the other hand, it made the father happy because he didn't want to go in the first place. Likewise, rain may make the boy happy because he doesn't have to mow the lawn; it may make the father unhappy because he wanted the lawn mowed. God is in control of the circumstances that come our way and He doesn't make a mistake.

God has a definite plan for our lives -- the very best possible. When we choose to adopt our own plans rather than His, we can look for disappointment. True happiness in the midst of disappointment comes when we know the failure of our plans is in God's control. We have our ideas, but God has a better idea.

A keen awareness that God is in control of circumstances leads to the realization that our disappointments are God's appointments. This will help us beat the "grin and bear it" approach to disappointments. God can use our frustrations for good, if we let Him.

Paul is an excellent example of this. His missionary journeys were cut short and his plans to preach in other regions thwarted by a long imprisonment, We might wonder, "If God was in control of circumstances, why did He permit the fiery Paul to be imprisoned?" Think of the

people he could have reached'.?

This is one way to look at it, but God had a better idea. Paul's disappointment was God's appointment because in prison Paul had time for God to reveal more of His word to him. During those days of disappointment, Paul penned the "Prison Epistles." thereby bequeathing a rich legacy in the books of Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. These three epistles have been a blessing to multiple millions, infinitely more than Paul could possibly reach had he been given another lifetime for missionary activity.

We often emphasize the statement from Hebrews that Jesus "endured the cross." But He did more than endure; He used the cross to bring about redemption for sinful man.

When God permits our well laid plans to collapse, don't go around suffering like a good little scout. Consider it an opportunity to grow stronger and do something special for God. Out of our frustrations, God wants to make something good. God may have to let us fall flat on OUR plans before we will accept His plan. When disappointing circumstances force a change in our plans consider it a divine opportunity to do something special for God.

Second: RECONGNIZE PEOPLE FOR WHAT THEY ARE -- PEOPLE

This will save you great difficulty. Jesus Christ never expected people to be anymore than they are. He didn't suffer disappointment at the hands of men; He knew men's hearts.

He came to the Jewish nation and presented Himself with the credentials of the Messiah. But the religious leaders to show their appreciation to God -- plotted His death on the cross. There He poured out His life for His followers many of whom turned back from following Him because the way was too difficult.

The night before the cross, Peter, one of the inner three, bitterly spit out the words, "I don't know the man." If ever there was a time when the darkness of disappointment would chill one's soul, it was then. But our Lord was never disappointment in men; He was a divine realist. He knew man's capacity, and never expected people to produce beyond their capability.

Following His first miracle, many people believed Jesus was the Messiah, but this didn't-impress Jesus. He knew the fickleness of man's faithfulness:

"Now when in Jerusalem at Passover time, during the festivities many believed in Him as they saw the signs that He gave. but Jesus, on His side, did not trust Himself to them -- for He knew them all. He did not need anyone to tell Him what people were like. He understood human nature." John 2:22-23

Jesus never put man on a pedestal. He knew the marks of sin nature would always be present in man's actions. He refused to be carried away by instant belief manifested over His first miracle. He had a realistic view of man which prevented disappointment.

Conversely, a realistic view of man will insulate you against disappointment when people let

you down. It will keep you from looking for perfection in an imperfect specimen. Every person is capable of disappointing you, if you let them. Don't expect people to be what they aren't -- perfect: When you finally realize people are just people, it will make it easier to avoid condemning them for doing things that wreck your plans. With a correct view of man, you will not expect them to do more than they can do.

(Incidentally, each one of us may bring disappointment to others. We're not certainly always the wronged party!)

A realistic view of man will keep us from becoming cynical. It will keep us from giving up on people. Lets face it -people are all we have to work with; let's not give up on them. but don't place your confidence in them either. Our confidence must rest in God, not the people God created.

When Paul came to Troas and didn't find Titus as pre arranged, he was agitated. "I had no rest for my spirit ---." (II Cor. 2:13) But Paul didn't sit around and stew about being stood up; he forged ahead to Macedonia alone and found God led him in a continuous stream of triumphs in Christ.

THIRD: REMEMBER OUR GOAL IN LIFE. Our goal should be to "walk as He walked". We need to pattern our life to conform to Jesus Christ. Hebrews 12:2 says it like this:

"Fixing our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Jesus Christ's goal was to seek and save those that were lost. A cross lay across the path toward that goal. But He was not turned aside from His goal by the suffering and shame of the cross; He endured the cross because He had His eyes firmly fixed on the goal -- eternal redemption. Keeping His eyes on the goal of redemption did not lessen the agony involved, but it did enable Him to keep going until the task was accomplished!

Think about this for a moment. Keeping our eyes on our goal will keep us from being paralyzed by the frustration of disappointment. It will enable us to see beyond the circumstances and people to the prize. If we get our eyes on the disappointing situations, we will make little progress toward living our lives as Christ did.

The man who carries the football has one thing in mind - to get to the end zone. The lineman he faces are BIG and TOUGH How many touchdowns would he score if when he took the ball he thought, "Those guys really look mean." Probably not many. The runner takes the ball, ducks his head, and drives right into the middle of the line on his way toward the end zone.

In the game of life, we face big lineman, disappointment. Don't become defeated; Jesus Christ has opened a hole for us to follow through the line. If we ever hope to keep from being defeated by disappointment, we'll have to keep our eye on the goal as we follow Jesus Christ.

We all face disappointment. Circumstance cause disappointments. People disappoint us.

Were it not that God has made a way to escape, we would all be defeated.

When the dark clouds of disappointment fill your sky, apply these simple principles and see how God will clear away the darkness of disappointment.

“GOD - I'M BITTER”

I've heard it said "---most of our problems are human problems." This simple statement hits the nail squarely on the head. People are the cause of most of our problems!

Just think of it ---if we no longer had people, prejudice would be erased; wars would cease; pollution and overpopulation would no longer be problems.

Lets face it, our humanness causes most of our problems We are bundles of potential problems looking for a place to happen.

One of the deep problems of human life is bitterness. In his letter to the Ephesian believers, Paul addresses himself to this problem. He deals with the "gut" issues of unity, theft, lying, malice, and to "put off the old man and put on the new man." (Ephesians 4:22-24) Then the fourth chapter of Ephesians closes, Paul zeroes in on the thorny problem of bitterness.

As we examine the context of these verses concerning bitterness, we see that anger has a place in the life of the Christian. "Be angry, and yet do not sin ---" (Eph. 4:26). God permits the believer to become angry. But don't go overboard; anger is permitted, not commanded.

God permits us to become angry for several reasons. First anger is a natural emotion. The inability to become angry would leave one insensitive to wrong and make him apathetic to the pressing problems around him. When citizens fail to confront wrong with indignation and action, society teeters: on the verge of collapse. Apathy has become a major problem in our society and the church. Too often people put on blinders and drive down the road of life with little concern for righting wrongs. The prevailing attitude is, "As long as it doesn't affect my comfortable way of life directly, its none of my business.

A second reason for the permission of anger is that it is expressed by God. Jesus Christ became angry when He observed people defiling the temple by conducting corrupt money changing practices and selling maimed animals for sacrifice. If He had followed today's political strategist, He probably would have suggested they gather for a summit conference to work out a negotiated settlement mutually satisfactory to all concerned! No chance! His anger issued forth in corrective action. He made a whip of cords, drove them out of the temple, and overturned their tables.

Scripture declares that God is going to pour out His wrath upon sin. The capacity to become angry at sin and injustice reflects the moral purity of God.

A word of caution! Even though God permits anger, we are cautioned to "sin not." If we allow our anger to become personalized it becomes a sin. Jesus was incensed with the defiling

of the temple and vented His anger at the wrong. God loves the sinner but hates his sin. We know He loved them and us, He went to the cross for us all.

Though anger is permitted in the life of a Christian, such anger must be temporary. Paul also says "-- do not let the sun go down on you angry." (Eph. 4:26) Natural anger that is permitted to remain becomes sin. How many times in your lives you thought you wouldn't have an argument with a loved one, just because "You love one another" and you exchange words sometimes pretty harsh words at that. When there is a disagreement you normally see harsh words follow. Be prepared to correct it just as soon as possible, like before the "sun goes down." Meaning within the same day. Failure to quickly resolve our anger nourishes it into a grudge and some nursed grudges become irreconcilable, leaving us wide open to the devil. This is why Paul says, "And do not give the devil an opportunity" (Eph. 4:27). Bitterness is a division tool used by Satan to drive a wedge between husband and wife and to destroy their home. Paul says "go ahead and get angry. But then settle the differences and forget it. Kiss and make up!

Bitterness destroys friendships and the fellowship in churches. Notice the theme of Ephesians is the unity of the believers in fellowship in, the Body of Christ. Bitterness will destroy this unity which is so essential in the assembly. Hebrews sheds practical light on the subject, when the writer says we are to follow after peace with all men (even those who have wronged us.) "See that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by it many be defiled." (Heb. 12:14-15)

A word of practical admonition: If you are unhappy in your church, you should either resolve your bitterness or else leave that assembly and find one where you will be happy (joyous).

Failure to be reconciled will only spread your bitterness to others and cause them to sin.

Are you "burned up" with someone right now? Have you let your anger grow into a grudge or bitterness? If you have, here are three essential steps to help break the bondage of bitterness.

First: Recognize it for what it is --- a sin! We are commanded to get rid of bitterness. Paul says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath and anger and clamor, and slander, be put away from you, along with all malice." (Eph. 4:31) This command deals with a number of related disposition problems.

"Bitterness" (PIKRIA in Greek) refers to a malignant disposition, a long standing resentment, or a spirit that refuses to be economized. We normally think of it as holding a grudge.

"Wrath" (THUMOS in Greek), on the other hand, refers to the impulsive outburst -- as when someone "blows his top."

Example: During a ball game a player jumps up, throws his helmet on the ground, and

storms back to the huddle after the referees made what he considered a bad call. The announcer observed the player's anger and wondered out loud if he would seek revenge. Sure enough, the angry player tried to get even during the next play. His "anger" (thumos) gave way to "bitterness" (pikria).

The vehicle for expressing most bitterness (or wrath) is the tongue. A bitter person is frequently involved in what Paul calls "clamor" or loud talking. Most of us have noticed that loud talking or arguing almost always accompanies anger.

Another way we express bitterness with the tongue is through what Paul calls "slander" or "evil speaking and lying." It also means failing to tell the whole truth. Have you ever stretched the truth when recounting what someone did to you? If you have, you are guilty of expressing your bitterness through slander.

We are commanded from Scripture to get rid of problems that come from a malignant disposition. Paul says, "Let all be put away from you along with all malice." We are to make a clean sweep of the bitterness that causes our disposition to go sour. Therefore, if we hope to deal with bitterness, we must begin to recognizing bitterness for what it is Sin, and then deal with it as you would any other sin – confess to God. (I John 1:9)

Second: Try to keep from hurting others. "And be kind one to another, tenderhearted ---" (Eph. 4:32.) This is a direct command to display human kindness to other people. Kind (CHRESTOS) means "pleasant or gracious." Greet people with a smile. A smile goes a long way toward removing seeds that would produce bitterness.

We are to be tenderhearted or compassionate. In practice we find it's easier to be compulsive rather than compassionate. A practical suggestion of how this works is to think of the damage your unkind actions might do in the life of someone else. Kindness and compassion accepts people just as they are (not as you want them to be) and a willingness to overlook personal hurts or wrongs suffered at the hands of others.

It's true many people are easily offended, but unless we are willing to display human compassion and kindness, we will alienate those to whom we are called to minister. It has been said the most flammable material in the world is the chip on the shoulder. Our conduct with others should be based on compassion for them in their desperate needs.

Jesus gave some practical instructions regarding the removal of bitterness in others. But people would like to blue pencil this advice out of the Bible! In His great Sermon on the Mount, He made it clear we have a definite responsibility to take the initiative in restoring those who hold a grudge. Notice what He says:

"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come present, your offering. (Matthew 5:23-24)

Jesus does not discuss who is the blame, nor whether the brother has a right to be angry with you. The right or wrong of his bitterness is not the issue. If you have the responsibility to take the initiative in restoring the brother and effecting a reconciliation. Failure to seek a reconciliation will hinder your worship. Its impossible to worship while you know a brother is holding a grudge against you.

In practicing human kindness, don't be concerned about who is right or wrong. The issue is reconciliation and restoration between two people in order to prevent the fruits of bitterness. You might say, "That is a hard thing to do." I agree!

Yes, one of the hardest things to do is ask forgiveness from a person who had no reason to be mad at us in the first place. If you ever go through such an experience, you will emerge with scars on your soul that will be a tender remembrance of God's forgiveness. Our rebellion broke God's heart and cause Him great personal heartache to bring us back to Himself. Nevertheless, He took the initiative to effect reconciliation.

Third: Practice human forgiveness. Thats what Paul means when he says, "forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." (Eph.4:32) We are to display human kindness toward those who are upset with us whether or not we have done anything to them, forgiveness, on the other hand, is to be practiced with those who have hurt us.

The word "forgive" (CHARIZMAE) is a participle picturing continuous action. It means to forgive freely; not holding back or forgive grudgingly. Think of it! We are to practice forgiving everything others have done against us, whether they seek forgiveness or not. We are to seek their forgiveness when we offend them and then go ahead and forgive others who offend us. That's revolutionary! We have the responsibility to be kind to them as well as forgive them and in doing, we will bid farewell to bitterness.

Forgiveness also involves a loss of memory failure to forget prevents full forgiveness. Example would be like two children fighting-just before going to bed. when their mother put them to bed, she said it wouldn't be good for them to go to sleep holding a grudge because Jesus might come during the night. Reluctantly one of the brothers agreed, "Okay, I'll forgive him; but if Jesus doesn't come tonight, I'm going to sock him in the nose in the morning!"

If we haven't forgotten it, we haven't really forgiven freely as commanded. God has forgotten all the wrongs we have confessed to Him, hasn't He? Then He has the right to tell us to do the same to others.

The divine standard of forgiveness is given to show the extent of full forgiveness. the standard is, "----just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

We might object, "But that will be difficult. It will hurt me deeply to forgive him for what he has don." Stop for a minute and think about how it hurt God to forgive us. It cost God the death of His blessed Son, Jesus Christ. It may wound our pride, but the hurt will never equal how much our sin hurt God. We are to forgive as God does.

Another weak objection we might offer is, "But what if he doesn't accept my forgiveness?" Whether or not he accepts our forgiveness is not our problem. We are to forgive and then leave it up to him to respond. God has provided forgiveness to the whole human race, because He knows many will reject and trample it under foot. God knew that, yet He still holds out the "olive branch" of forgiveness to all men. God's forgiveness is offered whether we accept it or not; ours should be offered to others whether they accept it or not.

When others offend us, we are to practice forgiveness freely because without forgiving spirit, we will never be able to pry loose from the grip of bitterness.

If you have or now allowing anger to develop into bitterness, you can break its grip by following God's pattern for freedom. You can be free from bitterness if you will.

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