

STUDIES IN THE PSALMS

BY GLENN PEASE

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1. THE MAJESTY OF MAN Based on Psa. 8

King Louis XIV of France was once reminded by the chaplain of his court that he was a sinner and in danger of damnation. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "All true, no doubt, but the good God will think twice before He casts out so good of Prince as I am." Here was a man of pride who thought of himself more highly than he ought. On the other hand, when the medical student defines man as "A highly developed vertebrate, a more or less clever and successful ape, who has worsted his competitors in the struggle for existence," we say this is foolish pessimism, and an all together too low a view of man. What is man anyway?

J. S. Whale wrote, "What is the truth about the nature and end of man? This is the ultimate question behind the vast debate, the desperate struggle of our time. Ideologies- to use the ugly modern jargon-are really anthropologies. They are answers to that question which man has not ceased to ask ever since he began asking questions at all: Namely, what is man?" This question becomes even more relevant when we think of the Incarnation, for our attention is focused on the fact that God became a man. This adds a whole new dimension to our thinking, for whatever man is in his essential nature God became that, and because of it we have a human Savior.

Several millenniums ago David asked this question from the point of view of a believer. He looked into the starry sky and gazed attentively at the moon, and suddenly the majesty and magnitude

of it over whelmed him. In wonder at the great contrast between all of this and himself he cried out in amazement to God, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the Son of Man that you visit him?" If David had cause to wonder what made him an object of God's concern, how much more do we in our age of astronomy? Fred Hoyle of St. John's College says that our earth is only a speck of dust, for in our galaxy alone there are ten billion stars as big or bigger than our Sun, and there are more than one hundred million more galaxies.

Sir James Jeans in his book *The Mysterious Universe* says that the majority of stars could be packed with hundreds of thousands of our earth, and some giants are so large that even millions of millions of our planet could not fill them.

We are so materially insignificant that the universe would suffer no more loss by our destruction than a vast forest would suffer by the burning of one leaf. Who can fail to be humbled by such facts? Someone might say that man has gone a long way by getting to the moon. But this does not change the picture in any measurable way. It is like the boy who, when he heard that the Sun was 93 million miles up, asked if that was from the ground or the top of the house? When you are dealing with the figures involved with astronomy, anything that man does in space is relatively insignificant. We can only stand in awe at the magnitude of it, and ask with David, "What is man that you are mindful of him?"

In our search for an answer to this question we find that men fall into two categories in their conclusions. One group is pessimistic as to what man is, and the other group is optimistic. This is an over simplification, and it does not mean there are not all shade of differences. You can never divide men into two camps on anything, for they have the capacity for a great variety of opinions. Someone said that there are only two kinds of people in the world-those who think there are two kinds of people in the world, and those who know better. We know better, but we are dividing them into two camps on this question. First of all we will look at-

I. A BIOLOGICAL VIEW OF MAN.

By biological I mean those who, because of ignorance or false intelligence, cannot see that man is anymore than an animal. They see him strictly as a product of fate and evolution, and not of creation. In other words, it is a view of man that leaves out God. The result is pessimism, for although they recognize that man is the animal of supreme intelligence, they also recognize he has a pathetically poor record of applying it. He can develop all kinds of schemes to protect himself, and then go to war and destroy everything he developed, and himself as well.

Bernard Shaw said that the folly of man convinced him that earth was a cosmic insane asylum where the people on other planets brought their cases of insanity. H. G. Wells, who was an optimist at one time, said, "At one time my faith was: Man must go on-conquest beyond conquest-but now I see man being carried more and more rapidly along the stream of fate to degradation, suffering and death." Without God the man who sees only biological man has no goal, and all seems so futile. Other pessimists express their futility by defining man as-

"A bundle of cellulose matter on its way to become refuse."

"A voice crying in the night with no language but a cry."

"Some random mutation on a wayside planet."

"A pigmy among the giants of creation, a puddle reflecting a star."

"The saddest of all beasts of the field." Homer.

The result of this strictly biological pessimistic view of man is the philosophy that says, "Let us eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Man loses his dignity, for he is a mere animal living on an animal level with his life being guided by the lust of his body. This is what leads to all kinds of open corruption on the basis that it is realistic. This is the way man lives, and so this is the way he should be portrayed on TV and in movies. Without the concept of God and the soul people never ask whether or not if what is realistic is right. For biological man what is right is determined by what is being done. To see man as a complex animal only leads to secularism, materialism, and pessimism. Now let's consider-

II. A BIBLICAL VIEW OF MAN.

No view of man's material origin can be lower than that of the Bible, for it tells us that God formed man from the dust of the ground. The Bible is also clear that all has sinned, and that the heart of man is desperately wicked. If we looked at the biblical view of man in his sin only, we might conclude that it too leads only to pessimism. But the Bible gives us a balanced view that leads to a positive perspective. In verse 5 we see that man is God made. It is true he was made of dust, but God breathed into him the breathe of life and made him just a little less than divine. The word here for angels is Elohim, which means God. And so man was made a little less than God, or a little less than divine. He was made in the image of God, and for the glory of God, and for fellowship with God. Therefore, man is of infinite value.

Leonard T. Towers said, "It is not that we are worth it, but that God has made us worth it." We are worthy of God's consideration because He made us of infinite value. Man maybe small, but he is the crown of creation. He alone has the God like capacity to think and to reason. All the wonders of the universe do not compare with man, for he can appreciate the wonders and beauty of creation and praise their Creator. Not one of the billions of stars even knows that they exist. The heavens declare the glory of God and show it, but only man can praise his Creator and know it.

The mistake of the pessimist is that they think only in terms of quantity and not quality. Man is materially insignificant, but qualitatively he is of the first rank. Man ought to know better, for they will give more for the paint on a canvas than for enough to cover a battleship, and more for a pearl than for a huge bolder. Man has a standard of values that prefers the smaller over the greater because of the quality involved. Are we to believe that God is of less intelligence, and that he prefers, in contrast to us, quantity rather than quality. Is God a child who prefers the nickel to a dime because it is bigger? All of the arguments for pessimism based on the smallest of earth and man are foolishness, for in spite of his smallest man is greater than all the vastness which he sees.

The heavens declare the glory of God, but they declare it to man. All of the beauty of creation only has meaning because of man's God-given gift of intelligence. The Grand Canyon, sunset, snow covered mountains, and flowers are all for nothing without man's capacity to appreciate them. Does the crocodile admire the beauty of the flamingo, or the sparrow that of the cardinal? Man even in his fallen state is great in the sight of God because God made him, and gifted him with the ability to appreciate what He has created. He is corrupted and like a diamond in the mud, but he is capable of being restored to shine again in great beauty.

In verse 4 we read that God has not only made him, but is mindful of him, and cares for him. In spite of man's rebellion and fall God considers man to be of infinite worth. It was while we were still sinners that Christ died for the ungodly. Why? Because even in his fallen state man was of great value to God. Even ungodly man is still the most God-like creature. The church was wrong for centuries in holding that the earth was the center of the universe, but spiritually they were right, for it alone, as far as we know, is the only planet with a cross. It alone is the scene of the incarnation where God became man to redeem him and restore him to the splendor in which he was created.

The biblical view gives us a balance view of man in which we can see that he is, in the words of Pascal, "Both the glory and scum of the universe." To God he was worth the cross. "He is divine grandeur mingled with dust." It is true that he made shipwreck and sank in the sea of sin, but he took with him the treasure of an eternal soul of such worth that God was willing to seek its recovery even at the cost of the cross. Christmas is God's answer to the fall of man. Deity descended to the depths to deliver man from damnation, degradation and death, and to restore him to the dignity, which is rightfully his as the image of God.

God so loved the world, that is the people and not the plains-men and not the mountains, that He gave His only begotten Son. When the Christ child was born the brilliant star shown overhead. Which was the most precious to God-the star or the baby? In spite of its material superiority certainly no one would say the star was more precious. The Psalmist goes from the heavens to the infants in verse 2, and the impression is, what a drop, but after God has become a babe Himself in Christ, it is not a drop, but a rise. In Christ man has been lifted to the place of highest dignity. When Christ ascended He did so as God-man, and man was crowned with glory and honor in the highest sense.

Christianity has always held to the high worth and dignity of man. When Constantine was converted and the Roman Empire became nominally Christian, legislation was passed to abolish the branding of criminals and debtors on the face because man was made in the image of divine beauty. In contrast to the practice of the day Christians loved all children. Adolf Deissman found an Egyptian papyrus containing a letter from an Egyptian worker to his expectant wife in which he wrote, "If it is a boy, let it live, if it is a girl, cast it out." It was a common practice to expose and abandon any child, who was not wanted, but in 300 years Christianity abolished all such degrading practices.

God made man, He loves man, he redeemed man, and, therefore, anything that degrades man and makes his life cheap is not the will of God, but is contrary to the whole revelation of God. The incarnation was the act of God whereby He said that man is the masterpiece of His creation, and is just a little lower than divine. James Mackey said so wisely, "The baby came because God could not get enough of Himself into anything else to show forth His true nature. There is more of God in the helpless infant lying in the hay beside the cattle than there is in all of the stars and moons of limitless space." Let the pessimist hang their heads and despair at the smallness of man, but we will rejoice, for no man is small or worthless before God.

Muretus, the 17th century French scholar fell ill while he was in exile for being a Protestant. He was taken to a pauper's hospital in Lombardy. The doctors who were consulting about him spoke in Latin thinking that this pauper could not understand the tongue of the learned. One of them said, "Let us try an experiment with this worthless creature." Muretus startled them by saying in Latin,

"Will you call worthless one for whom Christ did not distain to die?" No man is worthless for whom Christ died, and He died for all men.

It is true that man is a strange mixture of deity and dust, and of love and lust. He has the capacity to murder or to be a martyr; to live a life of crime and ignorance, or of compassion or inspiration. Sin has made him abominable, but grace can make him admirable. Christ can restore the lowest to the place of man's original glory when God said, "Let us make man in our image." A poet wrote,

Hark! The Eden trees are stirring,
Slow and solemn to you're hearing!
Plane and cedar, palm and fir,
Tamarisk and juniper,
Each is throbbing in vibration
Since that crowning of creation. E. B. Browning.

The whole story of the history of salvation is about God's acts in history on behalf of man. The creation, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension are all for the restoration and exaltation of man to the place of God's original intention, that we might praise Him and fellowship with Him forever. The point is, that a Christian should have a high respect for the dignity of his own soul, and of those of all people. Someone has said, "Self-conceit may be objectionable, but self-contempt is ruinous." One can be humble and still have a great sense of self-respect, for both are essential to an adequate Christian life. The pessimist looks at the greatness of all God has made and says, "Man is a microbe clinging to a grain of sand, and if there is a God, He is too great to care for me." In contrast the Christian looks at it all and says, "Such a God calls me to be great."

What is man? He is that creature who is made a little less than divine, but who fell from this exalted position through sin. Nevertheless, like a diamond in the mud he is worth picking up. Even as a sinner he is precious in the sight of his Creator, and so God out of His infinite love and mercy sent His Son to redeem man and restore him to fellowship with Himself. This makes man the greatest object of God's concern in all the wondrous magnitude of His creation. He is the only creature God ever made that was worth the cross. The price which is paid for anything determines its value. This means that man is the highest valued part of the universe, for God paid the highest possible price for his recovery. This means that if your life is not involved in God's plan to rescue the diamond in the mud and restore it to a place of beauty, you are missing out on the highest goal in life. Your answer to the question, what is man will determine so much of what your life will be. The story of the Good Samaritan reveals this clearly. The thieves said, "The world is mine and I will take it." The priest and Levite said, "The world is mine and I will keep it." The Good Samaritan said, "The world is ours, and I will share it." He alone had the mind of Christ for he saw the value of man and desired to contribute to his recovery. May God help us all to have a Christ like view of what man is.

2. WE ARE BORN TO RULE Based on Psa. 8:1-9

David did not need a telescope to consider the heavens and the wonders of God's creation. What he could see with the naked eye left him in awe at the majesty of God. Today we go far beyond the vision of David, not only into the macrocosm of the vast universe, but because of new instruments we know what David could never imagine. We know of the microcosm that God has created that is even more basic to life on earth. Back in the late 80's Sallie Chisholm, a biological oceanographer at MIT made a mind-boggling discovery about how God runs this world. She and her colleagues discovered billions of trillions of zillions of plants that man never even dream existed. Man never dreamed that plants could be so small.

It was only a few years earlier that Bob Guillard, the researcher who built up the famous Bigelow collection of phytoplankton, said of these single cell plants of the ocean that he discovered, "A hundred years of oceanography and the most abundant being in the world wasn't recognized by anybody." But like some kind of sports record it soon fell, and is no longer the record holder, for Chisholm discovered plants and even greater abundance. There are as many as 3 million of them in every ounce of ocean water.

They were not discovered by a powerful microscope, but by a new tool called the flow cytometer. Sea water is compressed into a thin stream and the cells are marched single file two thousand per second past an interrogation point where they are bathed in laser light which causes them to fluoresce. The color of the fluorescence indicates what pigment a cell contains. The cells then can be separated into species much like you would distinguish a flow of Japanese and Swedes without looking at them if you had information about their size and hair color. If you had a flow of people all of whom had red hair, and none of them over 4 feet tall you would know you had discovered a new people. That is how Chisholm discovered the new plant. They are 30 millionths of an inch across with a unique type of chlorophyll.

You might say, "Who cares, and what difference does this make to us?" First of all, God made them the most abundant form of life on this planet. Secondly, they keep us alive. They harness the energy of the sun, and by the process of photosynthesis they produce the food of life for all the creatures of the sea. They also take out of the air half of the carbon dioxide we put into it. If they didn't do it the planet would warm up by the green house effect, and we would be the ones frying instead of the fish of the sea.

The point of all this is that man is ever learning of the delicate balance of nature, and of how God has made all of life to work together so that every part of nature is dependant upon every other part. If man throws a monkey wrench into this beautiful living machine he makes a mess of it, and he risks serious damage to his own well being. Christians are as likely to throw the system of nature into imbalance as anyone. Christians have been major supporters of the philosophy that says nature exists for our benefit, and so if we want to abuse it and misuse it that is our privilege. Much like the Christian slave owners in early America, they feel they have the right to use what is their property anyway they please. And they feel they have Scripture to back them up.

Here in Psa. 8:6 it says clearly, "You made him the ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet." Man is made the ruler of nature, and he is made king of creation by the Creator Himself. If we go back to Gen. 1:28 we read these first words of God to man: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves over the ground." The lion is not king of the beasts. It

is man, and he was put in charge by God and told to rule. None can argue with this clear revelation. The problem comes because of the fall of man. He did not become the kind of ruler over nature that God intended. Just as many of the kings over his people led them astray from his will, so man as a ruler over nature abused his God-given power, and he became an enemy rather than a friend to nature.

If we look at Adam before the fall we see the proper role of man in relationship to nature. In Gen. 2:15 we read, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." You will note that it is a perfect sin free world, and God has said of everything that it was very good. And yet in this perfect environment nature needed to be taken care of. The implication is clear that even a perfect nature will deteriorate without care, and man was to provide that care. Man was made to benefit by nature's abundance, and to reap a harvest for his labor, but he was made to be a benevolent dictator over nature and not a ruthless tyrant exploiting nature for himself with no concern for it as a part of God's creation. In other words, though it is true that God made man the ruler of nature, he made him to be a benevolent ruler who would cooperate with God in keeping nature good, beautiful, and beneficial in the way God intended.

Man in his fall became a rebel and decided that his will was what mattered, and he would use nature as he saw fit for his own good regardless of how God designed it. In other words, man became an irresponsible ruler. He abused his power and position. It is the same story as in every other area of man's dominion. God gave man dominion over women for the benefit of both husband and wife. But man abused the power of his position and made women slaves. He turned tyrant and robbed women of the benefit of a benevolent leader and perverted the purpose of God. No ruler is ruling as God intended unless the ruled are greatly benefited by that rule. Any ruler who exploits the ruled for himself and does not make those ruled happy to be under that rule is a rebel ruler and not the responsible ruler that God intends.

This can be applied to nations, tribes, and families, or as we are considering in this message, to nature. God's intent was that man would rule nature in such a way as to make man and nature mutually beneficial. Unfortunately, Christians often feel that power means that you have the right to do as you please. If we rule nature, then we can do whatever we want to it, for it has no rights whatever, and it is our slave. Francis Schaeffer in his book, *Pollution And The Death Of Man: The Christian View Of Ecology*, agrees with the critics that say Christians have been a major cause of the problem in our world today. Christians were duped into believing the philosophy of Plato was more Christian than the Bible. Plato said that the material world is not important. All that really matters is the spiritual. This sounds so good to be anti-materialistic and pro-spiritual that Christians felt it was the superior view of life.

What this led to was Christians who felt no responsibility for caring for the material world that God created. Christians became notorious for their indifference to the balance of nature. What do we care about nature was their attitude. "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue." So why should I care if we pollute and damage the ecosystems that keep the earth in balance so that all life can thrive? Under this false world-view man was permitted to destroy the handiwork of God. Christians did not care for the world, for it was all going to be burned up anyway, and so why bother to protect and preserve what was going to pass away? The whole idea of nature having any rights was as foreign to Christians as was the idea of blacks having any rights to Christian slave owners in the old South.

Schaeffer said that he sided with the hippies in the 60's, for they had a biblical view of respect for nature. Christians, on the other hand, linked up with modern technology, which said that man has the right to exploit nature regardless of the damage. Nature is not a friend we need to respect, but a slave we can use or abuse as we please. Schaeffer wrote his book to get Christians off that wrong track of following Plato and back to a biblical view of nature and ecology.

God created all things and said that it was very good. Creation is the handiwork of God, and just as we respect the works of men, so we are to respect the work of God. We have something in common with all of nature. We are the handiwork of God. We are one in our origin, and one in our ultimate destiny, for God will create a new heaven and earth to replace this fallen world, and all creation will be a part of God's eternal kingdom. This means that a biblical view of nature is not one of indifference to it, but it is one of respect. Our dominion over nature is not just so we can exploit it, but like Adam, care for it. We are to keep it operating according to the laws God has built into it so that it benefits man and is a piece of art for God to enjoy.

Matter is not evil as Plato taught. It is a good work of God. Matter is so good that God sent His Son to become flesh to redeem flesh and take the fallen body of man into the kingdom of God where it will be made new, pure and eternal. God did not reject the material world in favor of the spiritual world. He sent His Son to become a part of the material world that it might be saved and be a part of the eternal world. It is heresy to reject the material world, for God made it co-equal with the world of spirit. It is anti-Christ to reject the material world as evil, for nothing God has made is evil. The whole physical world is an object of His love and plan of redemption. Nature is good, and a biblical view of it leads to responsible rule where man cooperates with God to care for it and respect it. Schaeffer wrote, "A Christian is a man who has a reason for dealing with each created thing on a high level of respect."

Only after man came to realize that he was poisoning his own environment by his disrespect for nature did Christians begin to realize the sinfulness of their disrespect. Only in the last few decades have Christians begun to address the theological issues for respect for nature. The first Earth Day was on April 22, 1970. Since then there have been many conferences on the theological issues in environmental ethics. Christians are becoming more and more aware that if God needed Adam to care for a garden in a perfect environment, how much more does nature need care in a fallen world where sin, corruption, ignorance, and pollution abound?

Bruce Allsopp wrote the book, *The Garden Earth: The Case For Ecological Morality*. Ecology and religion newsletters were started and terms like *geopiety* were born. The religious concern for ecology has changed the history of ecology in recent years. The concern at first was just for the economic issues of being nice to mother nature. It was costly to be abusive of her. Now there is what is called Deep Ecology, and it goes beyond the shallow self-centered concerns to a concern for nature herself. In other words, deep ecology says we respect nature, not just because we can make more money if we do, but because she is worthy of respect as God's creation, and it is right to be nice to her whether we profit by it or not. It says nature is a living thing, and like all living things, it has a right to be respected. It goes even further and says that even non-living things have a right to be respected as God's creation. Everything God made has a right to be respected for what it is, and to be treated in a way that is consistent with the laws God gave to govern it and its purpose.

In 1973 Congress passed the Endangered Species Act that guarantees the right to existence of

any species threatened by extinction. You have a right to make a buck, but if by so doing you send a part of God's creation into extinction you are now forced to seek another way to get your buck, and respect the rights of nature. Many creatures have been saved from extinction because of this new respect for nature. Christians are not always on the side of nature, and have often taken the side of the humanists who say that man is the measure of all things. If it is good for man, then let nature perish. Man is made in God's image, and his good should take precedence over any other creature.

There are many court cases where it is man versus nature, and it would hard to give a vote for nature and save a bird, or some other creature, at the expense of man's right to build condos and make a mint, but it is happening, and creatures are winning because more and more people are agreeing that nature has rights that are God-given, and man does not have the right to trample them under his feet. In spite of the growing number of victories for nature, and a growing ecological awareness, the world is getting worse. Man is still an irresponsible ruler, and his abuse has lead to widespread pollution that is casting thousands of species into extinction, and is killing people as well.

Some feel that man has gone so far in his irresponsibility that we can expect an ecological Armageddon. An unknown poet laments-

I was born in the last years of comfort,
And I'll die in the first years of dearth,
When the fullness of plenty has vanished,
And poverty darkens the earth.

My grandson will wrestle with problems
That only a madman would crave,
And meet them with measures so ghastly
I'm glad I'll be snug in my grave.

Others are optimistic and say that man can still become a responsible ruler. He can work with nature to overcome the problems he has created. Garbologists who do archeological digs in the garbage dumps of our nation have proven that the idea of biodegradable is largely a myth. Trash that is buried and compacted so air and moisture does not get to it remains trash. They have dug up newspapers buried in the 40's and they are as good as new. Newspapers are the largest percentage of all landfills. The American people are responding to this waste and are now recycling, but millions of trees need to be cut down each month unnecessarily because of the waste. All of us can make some difference by recycling. It is the least we can do to show respect for the world of nature that we help to rule.

When God said to Adam to fill the earth, he did not mean to fill it with newspapers, beer cans, and toxic waste. He expected the world to be filled with people who could care for His creation. As American Christians we have a greater obligation than most to develop and ecologically helpful life style. False views of Christians have been a major cause of the present problems, and a more honest biblical view compels us to do a better job in obedience to God's will. A world is a terrible thing to waste, and if we are responsible rulers, we can help keep even this fallen world a place where man and nature cooperate to the glory of God, and provide an environment where men can discover the abundant life and gain the assurance of eternal life in Christ.

The ark of Noah was going to be abandoned by both animals and man, but do you think they were careless with it while it was their only environment for living? Do you think they chopped or drilled holes in it, or lunged against its timbers to see if they would hold? You can count on it that they took care of their environment for their survival depended on their doing so. We need to see our whole world as the ark, and see it as our responsibility to treat it with respect as the source of our survival until God makes a new heaven and new earth.

Dennis Hayes was 25 when he founded the first Earth Day. He drove a Honda and often road a bicycle. He took his reusable bags to the grocery store. He was very conservative in his use of natural resources. As chairman of the 1990 Earth Day Anniversary he knew his small efforts would have little effect on the global crisis, but he plugged away because he had a 14 year old daughter and he cared about her future. The Christian is to care about future generations also, for it is the golden rule to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. You do not want the people who lived in your house or apartment before you to leave all their garbage behind, and have poison and toxic waste all over the place to hazard the life and health of your family. The next generation does not want this earth left that way either, and it is our responsibility to see that they have a world where healthy living is possible.

Even if we had no obligation to people, we do have an obligation to God. Psa. 24:1 says, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world an all who live in it." As good stewards of God's world we are responsible to use it and care for it so that it works as He made it to work, and so that it will be a place for the good of man and the glory of God. A polluted world where life is being killed and degraded is not for God's glory. It is sinful abuse, and a Christian is to have no part in it. The Christian is to work to maintain the health and beauty of all that God has made.

Professor Paul Ehrlich of Stanford University, who is a leading writer in the field of ecology, says that one American does 20 to 100 times more damage to the planet than a person in the 3rd world. The problem is not poor people but affluent people who are wasteful and who do not care that their waste robs the rest of the world of a better life. Some might argue that there are greater issues, and there is much to support this, but John Alexander writes, "In my experience people sensitive to the beauty of nature tend to be sensitive to justice and compassion." He also felt that the issues dealing with race and poverty were more important for Christians to pursue, but he had to admit that people who do not care about the world they live in usually do not care about anybody else in that world. People who care about ecology care about the whole of God's creation, and that includes plants, animals, and people.

We are born to rule. Our eternal destiny is to rule and reign with Christ over a redeemed universe, but we are made to rule now in this fallen world where the only hope of the good life is responsible rulers. Nobody can do everything, but everybody can do something, and the greatest something any of us can do is to be responsible rulers.

3. SANCTIFIED SILENCE Based on Psa. 46:1-11

You can learn in silence what sound can never teach you. Howard Thurman tells of one of his

University students who was a deep sea diver. He wrote of his experience of being on the bottom of the ocean. The water was clear and he was in the midst of a coral rock garden. He sat down to look around. Occasionally a fish would swim up to take a look at him, and then pass the word to his friends, for soon there were many curious fish about him.

As he sat there, the beauty of the garden became more intense. Plants had opened up revealing what looked like blossoms. He felt like he was in a beautiful flower garden. It was wonderful. He enjoyed it for a long while, but then he realized he could not stay there forever, and he started to go about his business. As soon as he moved all the flowers disappeared. They were living things, and they emerged only when there was silence and stillness. The activist sea diver who comes splashing through such a garden would never see its full beauty. He learned that there are marvelous things you will never see unless you sit in silence.

Professor Johnson from Bethel taught us this is true on land as well. Tens of thousands of people visit Como Park, but only a few ever see the Ruby Crown Kinglet. The only way to see this tiny little bird is to crawl into the hedges and sit in silence. Soon this pretty little creature will come flitting right up to you, and give you a view that the noisy people passing by will never see.

The point of Psa. 46:10 is that there are things about the Creator, as well as His creation, that can only be learned by those who have developed the discipline of silence. "Be still, and know that I am God." An unknown poet wrote:

In every life
There's a pause that is better than onward rush,
Better than hewing or mightiest doing;
'Tis the standing still at sovereign will.
There's a hush that is better than ardent speech,
Better than sighing or wilderness crying;
'Tis the being still at sovereign will.
The pause and the hush sing a double song,
In unison low and for all time long,
Of human soul, God's working plan
Goes on, nor heeds the aid of man!
Be still, and see!
Be still, and know!

The Bible has a great deal to say about the value of quietness, but it is greatly neglected in our culture because we are a sound oriented culture. We specialize in making everything that makes sound portable so that we can have the sound even at the beach, or out on the lake, or camping in the woods. We have made it possible to escape silence completely, even if we find ourselves in the most remote area. We have made it possible to banish silence from our lives almost completely.

There was a tunnel down in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida where radio waves did not penetrate, and there was a 20 to 30 second break as motorists went through. A man got permission to set up a system inside the tunnel to give weather information so drivers would not have to endure the agony of that few seconds of silence. We live in a culture which is anti-silence, and the result is, even Christians have a very difficult time identifying with a Biblical values of quietness. Eccles. 9:17

says, "The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools." Because of radio and TV we tend to hear the shouters and noisy voices rather than the quiet ones.

Psa. 131:2 says, "But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me." The peace and contentment of a satisfied child is an ideal state of mind. The crying aggravated child whose hunger pain makes it a noise box of perpetual disturbance is not the ideal. Christians tend to fall into these two categories: The bawling baby always discontent, and with spiritual colic, who disturbs the family of God continually, or the contented child who feels loved and satisfied, and gives pleasure to the family by perpetual pleasantness. It takes a lot of silent feeding on the milk of the word to be such a contented child. Most Christians in our culture do not know how to enjoy the silence of being still and knowing God in this way.

Paul wrote in I Thess. 4:11, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life." He wrote to Timothy also, and urged him to pray for kings and all in authority. Why? Because he goes on to say in I Tim. 2:2, "That we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." It is obvious that the noisy and riotous lifestyle is not a Christian ideal. We cannot look at all the Bible says about the importance of silence, but we want to focus on the fact that God so often does His greatest works in silence. And anonymous poet wrote:

Silently the green leaves grow
In silence falls the soft, white snow
Silently the flowers bloom
In silence sunshine fills the room
Silently bright stars appear
In silence velvet night draws near...
And silently God enters in
To free a troubled heart from sin
For God works silently in lives
For nothing spiritual survives
Amid the din of a noisy street
Where raucous crowds with hurrying feet
And "blinded eyes" and "deafened ear"
Are never privileged to hear
The message God wants to impart
To every troubled, weary heart
For only in a QUIET PLACE
Can we behold GOD FACE TO FACE!

Now, lest we idealize silence too much, as if it was an inherent virtue, and always of value, we want to see some of the negative side before we pursue the practice. Solomon said in Eccles. 3:7, that there is a time to be silent and a time to speak. If you are silent when its time to speak, it is no longer a virtue. So for the sake of balance we need to look at the negative side.

I. SILENCE CAN BE DESTRUCTIVELY WICKED.

I once knew a church leader who was a good one, and I liked him for most everything about him.

There was one exception, and that was the way he used silence. His wife would call me once in a while and say he had not spoken to her for a week again. When he would get angry over something he would punish her by silence, and it worked. She would cry and beg him to talk to her, and nearly have a breakdown before he would speak again. I thought it was terribly cruel way to deal with a problem. Silence can be just as destructive to a relationship as harsh words. Pascal, the great scientist and theologian, said, "Silence is the worst form of persecution." Jews are still angry that the Pope kept silent when a few words of protest may have saved many Jews from Hitler's persecution.

Silence can convey false messages. Robert Louis Stevenson said, "The cruelest lies are often told in silence." The whole system of the Mafia is a system of silence that lies by saying nothing. Vincent Teresa in *My Life In The Mafia* wrote, "Silence is what protects the Office. Each man is a wall protecting the next guy higher up. Let's say you want to do business with Tameleo. You can't do business with him. You got to do business with someone down the line who does business with him or a guy between. We figured every man is a wall. When you come to me, I'm a wall and I stop. Let's say I did business with you, and after that I did business with Tameleo. You would never know it. You could turn me into the law, but the law would never nail Tameleo because I don't talk about what I did with him."

There is even the negative silence of sound without meaning. Simon and Garfunkel sold their song in vast numbers called *The Sound of Silence*.

And in the naked land I saw ten thousand
People, maybe more,
People talking without speaking;
People hearing without listening;
People writing songs that voices never shared.
No one dared disturb the sound of silence.

It was all meaningless racket, and noise that was saying nothing. It was sound, but it was empty, and, therefore, a form of silence, for nothing was being communicated. There has been a lot of study on noise pollution in our world today, and it is a major factor in the stress of modern life. But Americans are so conditioned to it that even when they can escape they take their noise with them. I read a teenage girls statement that describes for me an experience I once had. She said, "When my brothers are upstairs screaming and yelling, that's noise. When they're upstairs playing a game, that's sound."

Driving the young people to release time is often enjoyable, and I get pleasure in their sounds, but this past week they were wound up and were just making noise and racket. It was both tiring and disturbing. The sounds of children having fun are a blessing, but the noise of children just being noisy is a burden. I learned one thing about kids. If you want to know what they are really like, don't ask their parents, and don't ask their teachers, and don't ask their friends: Ask their bus driver. He or she sees and hears them at their best and their worst.

The weakness of this theory is that sometimes it is the parent who is also the driver. Listen to this description of a cartoon. "Mother is driving home with her four small children, the family dog, and several bags of groceries. On her face you can see a combination of tension, frustration, anger, and near hysteria, as the steering wheel begins to vibrate under her ever-tightening grip. Behind her all

four small children are talking at the same time. Listen to the conversation behind her: 'Tell Billy to stop waving at the car behind us.' 'Daddy's good hat is back here, and Dolly's standing on it!' 'Which bag are the lollipops in?' 'Blow your horn and make that police car get out of the way, mom.' 'Jan just dropped the ketchup bottle in on top of the prune juice, and the bag's leaking.' 'Drive faster, we're missing a good program on TV.' 'Stop bouncing the car, I can't read the message on the cereal box.' 'It's cold back here, sitting on this frozen food.' 'Who put the fingerprints on the back window?' 'Why'd you turn the radio off?' 'Jimmy's opening the cookie bag.' 'You don't smile very much when you drive, do you, mommy?' " She was being bombarded with the sounds of silence-that is, disturbing racket that does not contribute to life, but deprives it of pleasure.

Then there is the destructive silence of not caring about injustice. Paul Rees wrote this back in the 70's. Twice recently I have seen a quotation from Pastor Martin Niemoller so memorable in its diction and, in some respects, so contemporary in its implications that I want to pass it on:

"In Germany, the Nazis came for the Communists,
And I didn't speak up because I was not a communist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak up
Because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the
Trade Unionist and I didn't speak up because I wasn't
a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Catholic and
I was a Protestant so I didn't speak up. Then they came
for me....By that time there was no one to speak up for
anyone."

Rees goes on, "There are times when silence, far from being "golden," is craven. There are times, too, when the noise we evangelicals make on the safe issues (e.g., drugs and obscenity) makes all the more conspicuous our tight-lipped muteness or own low-keyed generalizations on the gritty causes (e.g., civil rights, war, poverty, wasted) that are abrasively alive for millions of Americans.

Psa. 32 is all about the folly of silence when one tries to keep it hidden. If we confess and deal with it, and get it forgiven, then we are wise. If we keep silent about it and refuse to confess it, we do ourselves damage. So with awareness, we must nevertheless pursue the positive Biblical revelation:

II. SILENCE CAN BE DELIGHTFULLY WISE.

Eccles. 3:7 says, "There is a time to be silent and a time to speak." It is often hard to know which is the best at any particular moment, but there are some great examples of when silence was the wise choice. A service station attendant foiled a robber without saying a word. It was around three in the morning when the intruder walked into the station, pulled a revolver and said, "This is a stickup." When the man didn't reply, the thief repeated: "This is a stickup." Again the attendant remained silent. This was too much for the thief, and so he turned around and went out the door saying, "All right, then, I guess this isn't a stickup."

The ability to speak in several languages is truly an asset, but to be able to hold your tongue in one language is often priceless. Thomas Carlyle once said, "Silence is more eloquent than words." There were several occasions when Jesus refused to speak. He let His silence do the talking. In

Matt. 27:12-14 we read, "When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, He gave no answer. Then Pilate asked Him, don't you know how many things they are accusing you of? But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge-to the great amazement of the governor."

To be silent in the face of such charges was a guarantee of conviction, but Jesus refused to defend Himself, for He needed no defense for one thing, and secondly, He was submitting to their crime for our salvation. Silence was actually a means to our salvation. We were saved by the Savior's silence, which sent Him to the cross. In Luke 23:9 we read of Herod trying to get all he could out of Jesus, and this was what he got: "He plied Him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer." This was the Herod who put to death John the Baptist; the one Jesus said was the greatest man of the Old Testament era. Jesus would not give him the pleasure of answering a single one of his curious questions. Jesus illustrated that there is a time for silence.

These illustrations might give the impression that silence is only a negative method of non-communication. Not so! It can also be a positive form of communication. The best thing the three friends of Job did was their first week with him. They sat on the ground for seven days and seven nights, and Job 2:13 says that no one said a word to him. Their silence was golden, and it said to him, we care and we sympathize. It was only when they opened their mouth that they became cruel and obnoxious. In silence they were being true friends.

It is good for us to remember that silent caring often means a lot more to people in grief and suffering than some flimsy cliches, or thoughtless efforts to explain things away. Joyce Landorf in her book *Tough and Tender* gives a good example of what professional silence meant to her.

"After our infant son David died, I was recovering from a Caesarian section and went to our doctor's office for a postnatal examination. I had not seen my doctor since David died and I'll never forget our meeting. It was soon after surgery so Dick had brought me to the doctor's office in my nightie and robe. I was very weak and the nurses helped me up on the examining table. Then everyone left me alone to wait for the doctor. When he came in he said absolutely nothing. He did not give me a phony, cheery greeting. He merely walked over to me and very tenderly put both of his hands over mine. I looked up at him and with teary eyes he turned his head to the window and continued to hold my hands-but he never spoke a word. What he communicated in those brief seconds spoke volumes to my heart. It even brought a measure of healing, because I knew he deeply cared about my loss; yet nothing was said then or ever."

The point is, don't worry that you don't know what to say to people in crisis. That can be your greatest asset as a comforter. Silence can be healing. Leslie Weatherhead, one of the great preachers of England, in his book *The Significance of Silence* gives this testimony:

"I never realized how dreadfully irrelevant and almost

vulgar words could be in the hour of grief until an experience befell me in a home where a little girl dearly loved one particular doll. The doll was broken by the carelessness of a person who turned on the little child and said, in words that seemed to sear one's brain as they were spoken, "I'll buy you another." A child's grief is so real and so terrible that it seemed as bad as saying to a mother who has lost her child, "Well, you have other children," or to a man who has lost his dearest friend, "well, you have other friends." No newly bought doll, however expensive and marvelous, could make up for that dear treasure on whom love had been so lavished that the very paint had been kissed off its face. There it lay in cruel pieces, and nothing on earth could replace it or make up the sense of loss. With the sublime dignity and the spiritual insight that made Jesus Himself put a little child in the midst of men, this little girl looked up into her mother's eyes and said, "Don't talk about it, please, Mummy." She wanted only to be quiet. There was nothing that could be said. The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and healing for that heart is silence."

A picture is worth a thousand words because a picture conveys a powerful message in silence. Sign language is vital for communication and it is done in silence. The Quakers make a science out of silence, and by the power of silence they did things others could not do. During World War II they walked boldly into the Berlin Gestapo office of Himmler's Deputy Chief Reinhard Heydrick. They implored him to let them take persecuted Jews out of Germany. He listened, and then asked them to wait in an adjoining room for his reply. Unknown to them the room was wired, and Heydrick was listening, for he expected them to criticize his cruelty, and blast the evils he perpetrated on the Jews. But the Quakers sat silently in prayer, and did not say one negative word. Their silence impressed even this butcher, and he granted their request. Many Jews were spared by the power of silence.

Many Christians would have been so busy condemning the evils of this monster that they would have, by their mouthiness, condemned their Jewish friends to the gas chamber. Only disciplined silence could have saved them, and only rare Christians know how to be so disciplined. We live in an electronic age where silence is practically a sin. The worse thing that can happen on radio or TV is for there to be silence. It is called dead time. Any pause in sound is the equivalent of evil. Silence is the feared demon, and this spirit invades our culture. We need to go against the grain and be non-conformist to develop the positive side of silence.

Silence has the advantage of being a two way street. By silence we speak to God, and also allow Him to speak to us. Silence is both saying something, and listening to something being said. Let's consider each of these: The language of silence, and the listening of silence.

A. THE LANGUAGE OF SILENCE.

Thomas a Kempis said, "Thou, O Lord, hearest my voiceless tongue, and my silence speaketh

unto Thee." The Bible urges us again and again to praise the Lord, and to sing and shout to Him in expressing our joy. This is a vital part of worship. But we forget that the opposite of a good thing is not necessarily a bad thing. A liquid is not bad because it is not a solid, and white is not bad because it is the opposite of black.

The point is, silence can also be a means by which we communicate with God. By silence we can convey respect. If the president, or any dignitary, was in our presence speaking, we would listen in silence, and not be blabbing away as if what we had to utter was more important than listening to them. Hab. 2:20 says, "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him." Even praise has to stop at times so you have a chance to listen. Silence is saying that I love your Word Lord, and I desire to know your will. I silently wait and listen for you to speak and give guidance. As much as God loves your flow of praise, He also loves it when you stop praising and start listening. This will lead you to ever fresh reasons to renew your praising. Silence is a vital part of a total worship experience, for silence gives God a chance to love you back.

Since we are a sound oriented culture this is hard for us. We do not like silence, for to us it is like empty time. We have an urge to fill it with sound. In our culture everything that makes sound is also made portable so we can take it everywhere we go, lest we find ourselves stranded in some place of silence. Silence on our part says to God, I am open to you to speak to me. I honor your right to have access to my mind, and to give me that which you desire for me to possess. Psa. 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God." Devotional books used to be called the quiet time, and Christians recognized the need to be silent before God. Eveleyn Underhill wrote, "Most books on religion have thousands of words—we need only one word, God—and that surrounded not by many words but by silence." Christopher Crouch put it in poetry:

Thou so far we grope to grasp Thee,
Thou so near we cannot clasp Thee;
All-pervading Spirit flowing
Through the worlds, yet past our knowing.
Artist of the solar spaces,
And these humble human faces.
Though all mortal races claim Thee,
Though and language fail to name Thee,
Human lips are dumb before Thee,
Silence only may adore Thee.

B. THE LISTENING OF SILENCE.

God listens to us, and He appreciates it when we return the favor and listen to him. Often the answer to our prayer is received by listening. The solution to many a problem is found in having the mind of Christ, and this comes by listening to His Spirit. Friendship between two people is hard to develop if there is all talk and no listening. We miss the depth of the friendship of Christ if we do not learn to listen.

A typical worship service does give opportunity for listening. There is the choir and special music, and there is prayer and the sermon. All of these you listen to, and God can and does speak to us through them. But silence is seldom used as a means of worship. The reason is because we are

not into silence as a way of listening. The result is, it is not very effective on a public level. It is a value that has to be developed in private. We need to learn to pray, "Lord, what is your will for me today in these areas of my life?" Then we need to listen to hear if God puts any ideas into our head.

"Be still and know that I am God." There is a knowing of God that can be learned only in silence. Silence plays a major role in learning of God, for we need quietness when we study and meditate on His Word. This is hard to do for us as Americans, for we are conditioned to keep our minds busy. Jamie Buckingham followed the footsteps of Moses and tells of being camped at Mt. Sinai.

I lay on my back in my sleeping bag, my hands folded beneath my head to cushion it from the pebbly rocks, and stared upward at the unbelievable canopy of stars overhead. The outline of Jebel Musa-Mt. Moses-was an awesome granite shadow against the glistening black of the sky with its billions of flashing pinpoints of yellow and green. It was cold-and silent. I remembered something an old monk had written, hundreds of years before, of his first experience in the Sinai: 'It is the silence that speaks the loudest.'

That night, looking up into the magnificent display of God's creation in the heavens, a cosmorama that yet defies description, I, too, experience the silence of Moses and Elijah-an outer silence that only accented the noise within. It started when I heard, for the first time in my life, my own heart pumping blood through my veins. Turning my head, I could hear the bones of my neck rasping together. But it was the deeper noise that caused the ultimate distraction. The moans of things left behind. The clatter of anxiety for things to come. The ping of guilt. The rumble of fears. The sigh of memories. The tearing sound of homesickness. That night, at the base of the holy mountain, I understood why God had to keep Moses alone for 40 days and nights before Moses could hear him speak. For God speaks in silence, and silence is hard to come by."

He went on to climb the mountain in silence, and experienced a unique sense of the presence of God in that silence. But it was hard, and some of his companion climbers just could not get into the value of silence. I don't believe most American Christians will ever learn the value of silence, but I share it with you because it is a part of God's revelation, and a potential way to spiritual growth that many have discovered.

Elizabeth O'Connor, on the staff of the famous Church Of The Savior in Washington D.C., wrote a book called Search For Silence. In it she tells how silence is promoted in their church. She recommends that you start by being silent for five minutes a day. Just withdraw from all activity of body and mind and listen to God. This silent focus will often save you time and give you direction so that your day is concentrated on His goals. I have done this and know its value, but even so, it is hard to do, and far harder to continue. May God grant us the power to heed his call to be still and know that He is God. May it be the blessing of some at least that they discover the deeper life of sanctified silence.

4. SAINTS IN THE COMPLAINT DEPARTMENT Based on Psa. 77

It is always a shock when an innocent little child all of the sudden lets loose with a swear word, or some other sort of vulgar language. We are startled because we had no idea the pollution of the world had seeped into their little mind. We have the same emotion when we read the Bible, and all of the sudden we are hearing unbelievable words of doubt, despair, and all kinds of negative language of complaint. It is the Holy Bible, and yet, the language at times sounds like it is coming from the gutter of unbelief. It is like a sweet little innocent 4 year old talking like a pimp.

The Psalms are especially loaded with language that our Western ears find shocking and inappropriate. The concept of praising God by means of complaining and griping is one we cannot grasp very easily. Yet, we cannot really value many of the Psalms unless we learn to enter into the Hebrew understanding of emotions and worship. If I write a song to sing in our service that went like this:

Lord you just don't seem to care,
And you don't answer my prayer.
I'm feeling so low and in despair,
Because life is so very unfair.

You would think its been too long since my last vacation, and you would recommend I get away and rest my weary mind. But the fact is, this kind of blues song was sung in the temple on a regular basis. The Jews were really into the blues. They sung about how they really felt, and they often felt down.

It was a Jewish conviction that all emotions should be expressed, and none should be suppressed. They did not leave any feelings out of their songs just because they were negative feelings. If they felt hate, they sang about hate. If they felt depressed, they sang about depression. If they felt God-forsaken, they sang about it, or if they felt God was not being fair, they sang their complaints to Him. They sang how they felt, and they felt all the emotions, good and bad, and so they are all in their Psalms.

It is hard for us to buy into this. We prefer to sing only the positive feelings, and go to therapy to deal with the negative ones. The Jews had no therapists, and so they had to bring all their feelings to God. God was the one they had to deal with to have mental health. They had to get all their negative feelings out before God. They had to lay all the cards on the table, and be open and completely honest before God.

Only a secure people can feel free to complain to God and sing about it in worship, or confront God with their complaints in prayer. This sounds to us like being a rebel child, but the Psalms make it clear that it can be the way of the secure child that knows he or she is loved even if they do not understand God's ways, and tell Him so. The more intimate the relationship, the more likely one feels free to complain without loss of love. Children develop bad feelings toward their parents, and will on occasion blast out with words like I hate you, or your way of doing things stinks, I wish I had

been born to other parents. You can respond to these negative thoughts with a whip, or you can say, I'm glad you could be honest with your feelings. Let's talk about them, and see why you feel that way.

Freedom of expression is a key way to keep a family sensitive to each other, and it can prevent long range resentments. This does not mean that it is healthy to be ever complaining and shouting nasty words, but it means that there is a legitimate place for complaining and communicating negative emotions in the family. A gripe session is not out of line for a Christian family. It was not out of line for God's people even in church, for they knew how to praise God even in complaining.

Psalm 77 is one of these negative complaint type Psalms, and Asaph, who was apparently gifted at lamenting and complaining, has a whole series of pessimistic questions in verses 7 through 9.

1. Will the Lord reject us forever?
2. Will He never show His favor again?
3. Has His unfailing love vanished forever?
4. Has His promise failed for all time?
5. Has God forgotten to be merciful?
6. Has He in anger withheld His compassion?

How is that for a half dozen depressing thoughts for the day? Asaph is obviously not very high on the reading list for positive thinkers. He is the patron saint of the pessimists. It would be fascinating to hear the tune to which his gloomy message was sung. It was not likely a very bouncy or lively piece, but more likely similar to a funeral chant. We might have tough days when these awful questions enter our minds, but we don't want to sing about it in public, or call God's attention to such treasonous thoughts.

Who of us has not gone through a night like he describes here? He has cried out to God, and there is no response. It's like calling 911 and getting a busy signal. The system seems to be ignoring my need. God does not seem to care that I am at the breaking point. The burden is crushing, and no one gives a hand. God seems to be on vacation in some remote part of the universe, and is indifferent to my petty life and problems.

Have you ever complained to your mate after a restless night and said, "You kept me up all night with your coughing or snoring, or your tossing and turning?" Most mates have done this at sometime or another. But who of us has ever had the audacity of Asaph to blame God for a sleepless night? In verse 4 he point blank fires these words at God: "You kept my eyes from closing." In other words, it is your fault God that I didn't get a wink of sleep. Asaph seems to have a gift for complaining to God. He wrote a dozen of the Psalms: Psa. 50 and Psa. 73-83. If you read them, you discover he was the expert in the complaint department, and a specialist in the art of pessimism. He is the author of much of the blues songs in the temple of God.

He sings in Psa. 73 about almost losing his faith because God seems to care more about the ungodly than about him. He felt that trying to obey God and live a good life was not rewarded anyway, so why not be like the wicked world? In Psa. 74 he writes of the depressing picture of the days when the enemies of Israel came with axes and hatchets and smashed all the beautiful art in the sanctuary of God. All of the places of worship were destroyed and burned to the ground. And fools

mocked God all day long. Then he writes a couple of Psalms-75-76-that have more joy and praise mixed with the negatives of judgment. But then he comes to 77, and all this complaint, and Psa. 78 is his masterpiece of pessimism. It is the long history of all the stupid, rebellious failure of God's people that lead them to experience the wrath of God's judgment. It is one of the longest of the Psalms, and full of the awful folly of God's people.

Asaph was not likely ever the life of the party. He was Israel's pessimist par excellence. How in the world could God's people allow Asaph to be one of their song writers? And why would God allow this sort of thing to be a part of their hymnal that they used in their worship of Him? They actually set this stuff to music and sang it to the Lord. It is obvious that we have lost an awareness of how negative emotions can be a positive part of worship and praise. We would never dream of looking for a person who is often depressed, and asking them to write out some of their feelings so we could sing them in the morning service. The very idea would be anti-spiritual if we did not have so many examples in the Bible. This is a Biblical pattern of worship far more frequently referred to and illustrated than dancing, lifting the hands, or speaking in tongues, but you don't hear of many groups who are bragging that we complain more in our worship than most others do, and so we are more Biblical than most other Christians who only rejoice in worship.

One of the most interesting revelations I have seen by studying the worship of the Bible is that there is unbelievable variety, and there is no body of Christians anywhere, that I am aware of, that uses all the Bible forms. Everyone picks those that most fit their needs and comfort level, and ignore the rest. The one we are looking at now, the praise through complaint, is probably the most universally ignored of all. My interest is not to try and revive complaining to God, anymore than I want us to dance in the aisles. My interest is in learning what values these complaining negative Psalms represent, so we can reap the benefits of those values in our personal life of devotion.

First, let's face the reality that every kind of personality can be used of God. Asaph does not seem the type we would want to run our music program, but both David and Solomon chose him to be the chief singer and music director for the tabernacle and temple. Almost all the music we have in the Bible was arranged by Asaph, and when he died his sons carried on the orchestral and choral arrangements. He was the music man of the Old Testament. Spurgeon writes of Asaph, "Asaph was a man of exercised mind, and often touched the minor key; he was thoughtful, contemplative, believing, but withal there was a dash of sadness about him, and this imparted a tonic flavor to his songs. To follow him with understanding, it is needful to have done business on the great waters, and weathered many an Atlantic gale."

In other words, his songs are not always relevant for all times. They are songs for the suffering and the depressed. They are songs of sadness, anger, and frustration. They express what you feel when you feel terrible. The question then is why is it good to sing about how you feel when you feel terrible? Wouldn't it be better to just stay home, brood, and mope around until the clouds break and the sun shines again? Then you can come to church again and rejoice. This is how we think, but this is not how God thinks, and thus, not how the Hebrews thought. Worship was to them not only a praise to God, but it was therapy for them. Worship had a dual purpose: to exalt God and glorify Him, and to bring healing to His people.

The healing can happen when we feel forgiven of our sins, and when we feel God's love and care through His people. But what we forget is that healing can also come through confession.

Confession is the catharsis of getting all the poison out of our spirit. We get so much contamination in our soul that we are full of irritation and frustration. We get angry at life, at God, and at His people. We are full of spiritual poison that saps the joy out of our life, and makes us bitter and resentful. The Psalms of lament and complaint tell us this kind of negative pollution needs to be poured out so we can be cleansed, and filled with a new spirit. It is like an oil change in your car. You get the old stuff out so you can have a fresh supply of clean oil that will protect your engine. If you did not have a way to get the old out, it would lead to a break-down. If your car can get sick without getting rid of its inner pollution, so can you.

The God who built us this way is telling us by these negative Psalms that we have to get rid of the poison or we will have a breakdown. Our health on all levels: physical, mental, and spiritual, depends on our being able to remove the pollution from our inner life. How do we do it? We complain to God. We sing about our anger and frustration, our envy and jealousy, and all the negative feelings that we harbor in our soul. Here is the amazing thing, modern studies are revealing that what the Hebrews did for all those centuries in worship took the place of psychologist, psychiatrists, counselors, and therapists of all kinds.

Listen to some of the facts that doctor Bernie Siegal has revealed in his book, *Love, Medicine And Miracles*. An internist, Dr. D.M. Kissen studied smokers with lung cancer and discovered that those who had a personality where they withheld their emotions and had no outlets for their discharge, got cancer with far fewer cigarettes. In other words, people who can express their emotions can resist damage to their body far more effectively than those who cannot complain and get the poison out of their system.

Dr. Morgan Jensen, of the Yale Psychology Department, found that women with breast cancer die far faster when they cannot be honest about their complaints. They are the ones who smile and say they are fine, even though their world is collapsing. Since this is how Christians really feel they should be, it means Christians would tend to die faster than those who, like a good Jewish woman, could complain her head off about the unfairness of life. Her realistic facing of negative facts and emotions actually helps her live longer. We would never dream of giving a Christian friend who is dying of cancer a collection of the songs of Asaph. But the fact is, we could be giving them life by doing so. We are locked into the superficial theory that only positive thoughts should be our food in time of crisis. We follow the theories of men and ignore the Word of God, and by doing so we rob people of the therapy that could be healing.

Dr. Siegal says the best chance of winning the battle with cancer is being totally and frankly honest about the enemy. It is a frightening monster that we need to fear and fight with all our might. Those who smile and pretend there is no battle suppress their emotions, and in doing so they die more quickly. Asaph would be crying out, "Why my Lord? Why do I have to be rotting with this stinking disease? It isn't fair, and I feel cheated and disgusted with the whole lousy plan!" He would not be saying this continually, for he would also be praising God for the life he has, and for his family, and for the service he has had the privilege to perform. He would express his thankfulness to God also, but would not suppress the negative emotions when they came. The result would be, he would have a better chance of survival.

Dr. Siegal says, "Lack of emotional outlet is a common theme in the history of cancer patients. It is probably the reason cancer is more common in convents than in prisons: In jail you can at least

act out your frustrations." The Hebrew people had a powerful preventative medicine right in their hymnal. They could go to church and sing out their awful negative feelings, and they could get rid of the stress and poison that could damage their bodies and minds. They got rid of their poison, but we store it up, and the result is, Christians have lost a major tool for good health right in the Bible.

Now let's be clear about this. Pessimism and depression are not good things. They are just real feelings that all people, including God's people, have. It is not a blessing to have them, but the point is, when you do, it is okay to sing about how you feel. Asaph is not recommending that you feel down, forsaken, and cheated by life. He is recommending that when you do, you are to be honest about how you feel, and tell the Lord just how you feel. You say, "I'm going to pour out all this poison before you because it is there, and I want to get rid of it, and who else but you can take this putrid poison and cleanse me, and make me whole and happy again by filling me with your Spirit in place of this awful one I now have?"

The goal is not to have a mess of sorry saints who are full of complaints, but rather, victorious saints who have gone beyond their complaints to a spirit of rejoicing. If you always take the shortcut and go right to praise without getting the poison out of your system, you can rob yourself of the joy of praise, for you will still have the suppressed anger and bitterness in your soul. Your praise will not be real, for the negative feelings will be there cutting down the energy of your joy. The joy of the Lord is your strength, but when a major portion of your energy is devoted to keeping your inner negatives suppressed, you will have very little left to empower your joy. You are draining away your power source. Get the negatives out and expressed so you can have your full capacity for rejoicing.

Dr. Howard Macy, who got his PHD from Harvard, and who is an outstanding Quaker scholar, writes in his book *Rhythms Of The Inner Life* these words we need to hear.

"Many modern teachers gloss over this reality. From the Cathedral of the Perpetual Smile to First Happy Baptists, there are plenty of people who would mistakenly have us believe that the life of faith is basically one long joyride. To sustain this illusion and the quest for the Holy Grin, they transform the church program into a religious amusement park hawking a thrill-a-minute, fun-filled experience, complete with emotional roller coasters, religious variety shows, verbal trick mirrors, and more. Such teaching is a half-truth at best, a shoddy imitation of authentic joy in faith. Both the Scriptures and our experience refute it.

The fact is that the life of faith includes struggle. We suffer dryness and "the dark night of the soul." We hear the piercing question, "why?" and blush at not having a tidy answer. We cringe and cry out when life seems hollow and unfair. We smart under the sting of mockery and lies aimed at us. We sometimes plead, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

But even when we see the struggle in ourselves, we are tempted to conceal rather than disclose it. Some-

times we even put on our brave face before God. After all, to admit struggle seems to be admitting that we have failed as disciples. So while we feign joy, we trudge on, silently stooped by our burdens, and we secretly waste away. What we need to do, instead, is to unmask our struggle and despair and to learn, as people of faith, how to encounter them.

At this point the Psalms are a helpful guide, for songs of struggle-the laments-are the most common type of song in the Psalter. The Hebrews singers often sang "the blues," and the way they did it can teach us about our own times of darkness and how to open them to the light."

I do not think the blues will ever be as popular in the church as it was in the temple, but we now have the whole Bible available to us in print. We don't have to go to the temple where there was just one copy. We can benefit by the psychology of the Bible in our privacy. All we need to learn is that it is okay with God if we are honest about how we feel. We don't have to like how we feel, or want to so feel, but if we do, we can share that honestly with God, and He will not be offended. The people He loved the most, often felt rotten, and they told Him so. Moses said to God, "Why do you treat your servant so badly?..." "If this is how you want to deal with me, I would rather you killed me!..."(Numbers 11:11,15) Elijah, Jeremiah, Job and others complained, argued and even accused God. They trusted God's love enough to know He loved them even with their negative feelings, just as a good friend would. They knew that in the end all would work out and God would come through, but they felt terrible at the time, and they let God know they did not like His timetable on doing things.

When Jesus cried out on the cross that He felt forsaken, He entered the human world of depression and despair. The overwhelming negative feelings that can enslave the minds of men had their hold on Him. He was loved by the Father and was soon welcomed into the Father's presence. His complaint, however, was legitimate, and it was how He really felt in baring the sins of the world. We are being Christlike and wise to bring our complaints to God, for if we don't get rid of the poison in His presence, we will make ourselves sick, as well as make those around us sick of us. The way to perpetual praise is to get rid of the poison of complaint. Sometimes even complaint can be positive, as we see in these lines by Cowper.

Lord, it is my chief complaint
That my love is weak and faint.
Yet I love Thee and adore;
O for grace to love Thee more!

May God's Word help us all understand that complaint has a valid place in our prayer life when we are going through hard times that we do not understand. It is not lack of faith, but confidence in God's love that enables us to complain to Him, and know that He will heal the negative feelings and give us peace.

5. THE PLEASURE OF POSITIVE THINKING Based on Psa. 84

Have you ever watched a movie or play that ended with some basic problems unresolved? It is a great let down, for we expect that no matter how bad the situation is the bottom line will be a happy ending. We are conditioned to this. It is a part of our heritage through our fairy tales, novels, and most movies. Walter Kerr writes of an experience he had. "Not long ago I spoke to an articulate woman who is a fervent theatergoer and disliked, intensely, the position in which a certain play had put her: She felt obliged to dismiss it in spite of its obvious merits and her obvious emotional involvement with it. Yes, she agreed, it had caught her interest. Yes, it had created a lump in her throat. 'But when I came out of the theater, the lump was still there!' She expostulated, angry and dissatisfied. She had been moved, but she remained moved, in a way she did not like; some further agent ought to have intervened to dissolve that lump, to distribute that emotion in some meaningful way."

Where do we get the idea that every story should have a happy ending? We get it from the Bible, which has influenced our whole culture. Even wise secular authors, movie makers, and play writers will conform to the Biblical pattern of coming to a positive conclusion. The Bible is filled with sin, folly and tragedy, but the bottom line is always victory over sin, suffering, and Satan. The Bible ends, and they lived happily ever after. God's grace is always sufficient to guarantee that the final act is one of triumph. The result is, the Bible is the world's greatest source of positive thinking. Nothing can be so bad that God cannot bring it out right. Nothing can be so dark that God cannot make it bright.

Positive thinking is an absolute necessity for anyone who calls themselves a Biblical thinker. What a pleasure it is to live in a fallen world, where there is no end of things to complain about, yet, still be able to fill life with praise, because of trust in God. This is where the Psalmist is in Psa. 84. He has his negatives to endure. He is temporarily cut off from the temple, and envies the birds who can chirp the praises of God in that lovely environment. He has to plod through the valley of Baca, and figure out how to make it a place of springs. This can be hard work and a challenge, and he cries out to God to hear his prayer for strength to press on. He finds himself in a lowly position as a door keeper in the house of God. There are many notes in the minor key in this great song, but the over all theme is in the major key of positive thinking.

Positive thinking does not mean, if you always think positive nothing will ever go wrong. That is wishful thinking, and it won't work. Positive thinking is telling yourself that even when things do go wrong, that is never the last word. They can be fixed, modified, overcome, or scrapped, but whatever, life goes on and God's will can be done on earth as it is in heaven. Positive thinking is the conviction that God always has the last word. Nothing can go so wrong that He will be at a loss to bring good out of it. Jesus said we are not to fear those who can kill the body and that is all they can do. The worse thing that can happen in life is somebody killing you. That is a seriously negative in anyone's book. But Jesus says that is all evil forces can do. That is the limit of their evil. Don't sweat it, for you are still in the hands of God, and the story does not end as a tragedy, but as a triumph, for in Christ you enter His kingdom where all pain, sin, and folly is gone forever.

Paul suffered terrible things in his life, and was finally killed as a martyr. His positive thinking was not a superficial philosophy that said, everyday in every way the world is getting better and better. His positive thinking was that he trusted in God and was confident that God would write the final chapters of his life, and they would be chapters of victory. That is why he practiced what he preached: Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice. Paul was a man of praise because no matter how much he suffered, he had the perpetual pleasure that comes with positive thinking.

Positive thinking is just a descriptive way of saying faith or trust. Psa. 84 ends with, "O Lord Almighty blessed is the man who trusts in You." That is, happy is the man of faith, or, happy is the positive thinker. Heb. 11:1 says, "Faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see." Faith thinks positive about the future even when the present finds you in the valley of Baca trying to survive. Faith reaches out to that happy ending and brings the power and joy of it back into time. God says he will work in all circumstances of life to bring forth good. Positive thinking is trusting in God to do just that, so that even when you are feeling the pains and sorrows of this fallen world, you are also anticipating the pleasures of victory.

Getting to this blessed state of trusting God is a process, and sometimes we are the man who said to Jesus, "Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief." He had a mixture of faith and doubt, and that is where we often find ourselves. We are thinking positive, but the negative is there trying to take over and dominate. Rhonda Kelly in Divine Discipline tells of her lesson in faith.

"Several months ago I was suddenly confronted with the meaning of faith. I arrived by taxi early one morning at Victoria Station in London. I loaded all my bags on a cart and headed toward the train for the airport. When I couldn't find an elevator to go downstairs, I asked the janitor for help. He told me to push my long cart onto the escalator and release the handle. What a foolish idea! I knew the luggage cart was much too big and much too heavy for me to manage on a escalator. And I wasn't about to risk all my earthly possessions. But he insisted, "push the cart down the escalator and let go." There was no one else around to reassure me, and my plane was to leave before long. So, finally, I stepped out in faith. I pushed the cart on the escalator; and as it moved down I released the handle. My heart raced. I worried to death. But do you know what happened? The escalator steps flattened out to hold my cart and my luggage was safely carried down. The escalator was specially designed to hold luggage carts. However, the escalator could have never worked for my cart if I had not given it a chance. I often wonder how many times my lack of faith has limited God's power to work."

I had a similar experience with the computer. I would type a poem and then save it, but I was always fearful that it would not save the work I had done. So I would go instantly into the program to open up the file to see if it did, in fact, save the poem. I had doubts, and only after seeing that it did save what I asked it to, did I get confidence that it would do what it says it will do. My doubt turned to faith and I am a more positive thinker about what the computer will do. My faith is growing by a process by giving the computer a chance to do what it says it can and will do.

So it is with God. The positive thinker puts his trust in God, and grows in his assurance that God will work in all things for good with those who love Him. Not everything is good. Much is bad and messed up in this world, but by the grace of God good can come out of every mess, and every valley of Baca, for those who have learned to enjoy the pleasure of positive thinking. In II Tim. 1:12 Paul puts the negative and positive side by side, and lets the positive dominate. He writes, "That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day." Paul does not have faith in life, history, fate, circumstances, or human nature. So much positive thinking is superficial and Pollyanna because it is faith in something, rather than faith in someone. Paul says, "I know whom I have believed."

John Oxanham stresses this in his poem:

NOT what but WHOM I do believe.
That, in my darkest hour of need,
Hath comfort that no mortal creed
To mortal man may give.
NOT what, but WHOM.
For Christ is more than all the creeds,

And his full life of gentle deeds
Shall all the creeds outlive.
NOT what I do believe, but WHOM.
WHO walks beside me in the gloom?
WHO shares the burden wearisome?
WHO all the dim way doth illumine,
And bids me look beyond the tomb
the larger life to live?
NOT what I do believe, but WHOM
NOT WHAT
BUT WHOM!

Positive thinking that does not rise to the level of trusting in God the ultimate WHOM is going to fall short, and does not come with a guarantee of a happy ending. This Psalm has a happy ending because it ends with faith in God. The Bible has a happy ending because God is the one who determines the last chapters. We can, therefore, press on confident that the best is always yet to be. Robert Crumly has captured the message of trust and positive thinking in the kind of poetry I can really enjoy. He wrote-

Far out at sea, at close of day,
A lonely albatross flew by.
We watched him as he soared away--
A speck against the glowing sky!
Thought I : This lordly feathered one
Is trusting in the faithfulness
Of wind and tide, of star and sun;
And shall I trust the Maker less?

O soul of mine, spread wide thy wings:
Mount up; push out with courage strong!
And--like a bird which, soaring, sings--
Let heaven vibrate with thy song!
SPREAD WIDE THY WINGS, O SOUL OF MINE,
For God will ever faithful be:
His love shall guide thee; winds divine
Shall waft thee o'er this troubled sea.

Though dangers threaten in the night,
Though tides of death below thee roll,
Though storms attend thy homeward flight,
SPREAD WIDE THY PINIONS, O MY SOUL!
Though shadows veil the verdant shore,
And distant seems the hallowed dawn,
Spread wide thy pinions--ever more
Spread wide thy pinions, and press on.

The poet recognizes the reality of the negative, but his focus is on the positive, and this is the Biblical perspective on life. Evil is real, but only good is eternal. The success of Walt Disney was due to his recognition of this truth. Ann Ortland tells of being in Disneyland watching a film of Walt Disney explaining his philosophy. Listen to what he said.

We were sitting in a little theater in Disneyland
Watching an old film clip of Walt Disney philosophizing

On what makes a good movie. Back he leaned in his leather chair. "Nobody could have predicted how well Snow White was going to do," he said. "Not in our wildest dreams. Heady with success, we put together another, Alice in Wonderland. But do you know-it never went over very well. So we sat back and tried to analyze why. And we came to the conclusion that Snow White- and every successful production-had two ingredients: Laughter and tears. That was a milestone discovery. After that, everything we turned out had to have both laughter and tears."

He had discovered the Biblical perspective that made him famous, and one of the greatest entertainers in history. Be realistic about the sadness of this fallen world, and portray its evil, but always come to a happy ending where evil is defeated, and good celebrates the victory. The whole movie industry has learned that human nature cannot tolerate a story that does not end with good defeating evil. Man is made in the image of God, and by nature he is made to feel that any story is incomplete until good is victorious. No matter how much people may enjoy the cleverness and violence of an evil person, they expect the good guy to win in the end.

Positive thinking is built into human nature. It is part of the image of God that man does not lose even in his fallen state. But the problem is that it has no personal value until people find the foundation for this conviction in God. Blessed is the man who trusts in you, says the Psalmist. People can watch all the good movies in the world, and see all the good plays, and read all the good novels, with all the happy endings, and yet never be happy themselves because they have never made a personal commitment to trust in God. They believe good will always win, but they are not on the winning side if they do not trust God and receive His plan of escape. God has given man a Savior and the assurance of being on the winning side when the battle is over. Jesus Christ is God's gift to man, and those who receive this gift by trusting Him as Savior will have eternal life. They will have the happy ending.

The negative side of positive thinking is that it can deceive masses of people into thinking they are secure, and everything is okay because they are basically good people. They are not like the evil people they see on the screen, but more like the good guys who win. This gives them a sense of false security, and they do not feel any need for a Savior. Their positive thinking leads them to trust in human nature to come out okay in the end. This is what humanism is all about. It is positive thinking about human nature with God left out because He is not needed. This is the way of disaster. Positive thinking for the humanist means man will make everything come out okay in the end. Positive thinking for the Christian means God will make all things come out okay in the end.

The Christian agrees with the humanist that the good will be victorious over the evil, and the story will have a happy ending. The Christian disagrees as to why this will be. The humanist says it is because man is basically good. The Christian says, yes it is true the basic image of God is still there, and man even in his fallen state has the God-like love for the triumph of good over evil, but he cannot pull it off on his own. He can never save himself. Without a Savior he is sunk and will go down in defeat before the forces of evil.

Man's only hope is to trust in God. Jesus said that he was the way, the truth, and the life, and that He was the only way to the happy ending. C. S. Lewis concludes the last of his Chronicles of Narnia like this:

For us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real

story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: Now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: Which goes on forever: In which every chapter is better than the one before.

The humanist has no such hope. This kind of happy ending is the hope only of those who accept the Biblical revelation of God's victory over all evil in Christ. Only those with this hope can fully enjoy the pleasure of positive thinking.

6. THE PLEASURE OF PASSION Based on Psa. 84

Dick Van Dyke in his book, *Faith, Hope And Hilarity* tells of the Sunday school teacher who was struggling with how to explain the complex concept of the Trinity. She got the inspiration to go to the church kitchen and come back with an egg. She said, "Class, imagine God the Father is the yolk of this egg, and Jesus His Son is the white of the egg, and the Holy Spirit is the shell. They all combine to make one." To show what she meant she broke the shell over a small bowl and out came a double-yolk egg. Murphy's law strikes again. Her simple experiment only led to more complexity. She learned, however, that you cannot assume an egg only has one yolk.

Words are like this too. You cannot assume a word only has one meaning, for you will often break them open and discover a double yolk. I mean by this, they will have two meanings, and often the meanings will be complete opposites. Instead of being identical twins like most yolks are, they will be completely different. This is the case with the word passion. In the Bible and out of the Bible passion is most often a reference to what is negative. It is the lust of the flesh and all that is called worldly. Lust and passion are just not positive words in Christian circles.

But then we pick up this word in the Greek which is 31 times translated lust, and we break it open, and out comes a double yolk. We discover that this word for strong desire and intense emotion is a virtue as well as a vice. We read, for example, that Jesus said in Luke 22:15, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." Jesus used the same word used all through the New Testament for lust to describe His passionate desire to eat the final Passover with His disciples. He had a passion for the Passover. Paul had this same passionate desire to be with his Lord. He uses the same word in Phil.1:23. "I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." Paul had a lust for, or a passion for, heaven.

Paul was a man of intense emotion, and he uses the word again to describe how he felt about getting to see the Thessalonians. He wrote in I Thess. 2:17, "Out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you." There are other words that describe the strong emotions of Jesus and Paul, but this is the very word for lust, and so we are forced to see the positive side of passion. All of us are moving in the direction of our ruling passions. What we most enjoy and desire is the force that determines how we spend our time and resources. For example:

1. Some have a passion for music, and so they are often at concerts, or before the radio, or listening

to CD's.

2. Some have a passion for sports, and so they are often at sporting events, or glued to their TV.
3. Some have a passion for reading, and so they are ever with their nose in a book.

We could go on endlessly, for there are people with passions for everything imaginable. The point is, passion is a strong desire that may be for what is evil or for what is good. Christians have used the word so often for evil that it is hard to accept the reality that you can also be passionate for good. It is Biblical and Christlike to lust for the pleasure of those things that are pleasing to God.

Most everything you find on lust and passion deals with the negatives of sex and anger. Issac Watts, the author of many of our favorite hymns, wrote one for children that went like this:

But, children you should never let
Such angry passions rise.
Your little hands were never made
To tear each others eyes.

And Moore wrote this warning to adults:

Alas! Too well, too well we know
The pain, the penitence, the woe
That passion brings down on the best
The wisest and the loveliest.

It is true, and only the spiritually blind can be unaware of the dangers of passion, but for now we want to focus on the other yolk—the positive reality of the pleasure of passion. It is not just in this Psalm, but in many of them that we see the passion for worship. In verse 2 we see a man possessed by passion. "My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." This is not the language of the uncommitted. You don't hear these words from those who say we have nothing better to do, so let's go to church. This is the language of one who longs for the presence of God like one longs for a lover who has not been seen for a long time.

The Psalmist for some reason is not able to get to the temple of God to worship, and he is filled with envy for those who do have access to the temple. He even envies the sparrow and the swallow who build their nest in the temple area, and even more so, those blessed ones who dwell there, and can praise the Lord continually. He would be greatly rewarded if he could spend one day in the house of God as a mere door keeper, than if he had a thousand days in the plush tent of some wealthy man of the world. Here is a man with a passion for worship. It is a source of his greatest pleasure. I found a similar testimony of one outside the Bible. Leonard Griffith of the St. Paul's church of Toronto, Canada said this in a sermon on Psa. 84. "Ever since I was a child I loved to be inside a church. I think it's my favorite place in all the world. A theater comes close second, then a baseball park, but first the church. I mean the sanctuary, the place where God is worshiped, where the mightily organ sounds and the congregation rises to sing. I like a church even when it's empty, though I prefer to see one full."

I can imagine a lot of people envying this pastor when he is at the theater. And plenty would envy him when he is able to get to the ballpark, but it is hard to imagine many who would envy him for being able to go to church and worship. This is not a popular passion. Jesus had it when He was just a boy of 12. You recall when His parents left the city to journey home He was discovered missing. When they finally found Him He said, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house." From a youth Jesus had a passion to be in the place of worship. He desired strongly to grow in grace and knowledge. He followed His dominant passion, and was faithful all His life to be in the temple or

synagogue to worship. He found pleasure in His positive passion.

Think about it! The main reason church is so boring to many people is for the same reason trigonometry is. There is no passion for it. If a Christian does not feel the strong desire to praise God and get more light from His Word, going to church is just another obligation to get out of the way, so you can get on with what you have a passion for. When Christians feel this way they are deprived of one of the greatest pleasures of time and eternity-the pleasure of worship. This will be one of the great pleasures of eternity, and we can get a taste of the things to come by developing a passion for worship in time.

We learn to enjoy many things in life with passion because we get to know the rules of the game, or the values of the music, or hobby, or whatever it is we get pleasure out of. The point is, it is a Christian obligation to learn how to get pleasure out of worship and praise. The Christian is not truly mature until they have the pleasure of passion for worship. When this is the dominant passion of life, all other passions will fall into place, and not be idols. But as long as we lack the passion for worship, we will be in danger of idolizing all other passions. They may be legitimate in themselves, but they become competitors with God when we lack passion for Him.

Passion is the fire that motivates us, and the wind that catches our sails, and propels us toward the goals we long to reach in life. If we lack enthusiasm for the things of God we will be fired up by other passions that lead us away from the things of God. So we need to fight fire with fire. We need to build fires of positive passion to protect us from the fires of negative passion. If we let the fires of godly passion go out we will soon be burning with some secular passion that will burn us out and lead to pain rather than pleasure.

Thomas Aquinas, the greatest theologian of the middle ages wrote, "No one can live without delight and that is why a man deprived of spiritual joy goes over to carnal pleasures." God made us to desire pleasure, and if we do not find it in what He delights in, we will find it in what is not pleasing to Him. Stefano, the young husband of Princess Caroline of Monaco, had a passion for power boat racing. He knew it was dangerous, and he told a reporter, "I am traveling at speeds of 110 miles per hour and more. It is much too fast and I realize it is getting much too dangerous. I am afraid, many times I am afraid, but it is my passion." Such a passion becomes one's god. A couple of months after he made this statement he sacrificed his life to this god of racing, leaving his wife and three children under six years of age. There is power in passion to propel people to pursue a goal at any cost.

When people get a high level of pleasure out of any activity they find the time and the energy to pursue it. There is an intense interest and desire that produces an inner fire that gives power for pursuit. In 1958 Van Cliburn won the Chaikousky competition for piano. The man who came in second was Liu Chi Kung of China. He was later thrown in prison during the cultural revolution in China. He had seven years with no access to a piano. Yet, when he was set free his skills had improved. It was because he had a passion for the piano. He explained after his release how it was possible to improve without a piano. "Everyday I rehearsed every piece I had ever played, note by note, in my mind." His passion motivated him even in a very negative setting.

When people have a passion they are able to do the unusual. Ida Grovald had a passion to get her bachelor's degree. What made this unusual was she was 69 years old. She had leukemia and her husband had Alzheimer's. These handicaps did not stop her because she had a passion. She had an accident and needed fifty stitches in her face. She fell another time and broke two ribs. But her passion empowered her to press on, and five years later at the age of 74 she graduated. She had a passion, and it motivated her to overcome all obstacles to achieve her goal.

If you read the history of anyone who has accomplished something great, you will be reading the

history of a passion, for without passion people do not achieve significant goals. Achievers are not like the six year old who was asked to name his favorite Bible verse, and he said, "I like the one about the multitude that loafs and fishes." This was not the spirit of Louis Pasteur who at age 46 suffered a stroke that left his arm and leg permanently paralyzed. This did not put out the fire of passion he had to solve medical problems.

He went on to prove the germ theory of disease, and that sterilization and antiseptics can cut the death rate radically. He proved the value of vaccinations and developed the process of pasteurization. His passion for fighting disease is probably one of the main reasons many of us are here and alive right now. He knew God had blessed him with a passion. He described it with the word enthusiasm: "The Greeks have given us one of the most beautiful words of our language, the word enthusiasm--a God within. The grandeur of the acts of men are measured by the inspiration by which they spring. Happy is he who bears a God within."

The Bible describes this fire God within with many different terms, but one that runs through both Old Testament and New Testament is the phrase "with all your heart."

Serve Him with all your heart.
Trust in the Lord with all your heart.
Seek me with all your heart.
Rejoice with all your heart.
Love Him with all your heart.
Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart.

The point of Psalm 84 is, there is great pleasure in worship for those who have a passion for worship, and cry out for it with all their heart. The Psalmist does have this passion, and his heart and flesh cry out for the presence of the Living God. He has a passionate hunger for the courts of the Lord.

Like one dying of thirst in the desert longs for the water of the oasis, so his thirsty soul longs for the water of life. For him it is a pleasure to get to the house of God. It is pure pleasure to praise God. It is not a mere custom of the culture with him, it is a solemn duty, but also a pleasurable privilege to go to the house of God and praise his Creator and Redeemer. Psa. 122:1 says, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord." Do you think such a passion for worship leads to greater pleasure in worship? You can count on it, for there is already pleasure in the passion. A Swedish song says--

What joy there is in coming to God's own courts so fair,
Where faithful souls are blooming like lilies in His care!
Outside the world outside makes merry, unhappy 'mid its joys;
But in God's sanctuary the soul finds heav'nly joys.

When we let the pleasure of passion fade the fire goes out. This is true in marriage also when passion fades. If any relationship ceases to be pleasurable, it will cease to be a motivating power. Friendships fade, marriages decay, and spiritual fervor for Christ burns out. Why? Because there is no passion. Someone said, "too many Christians worship their work, work at their play, and play at their worship." This is not what we see in the Psalms. These are songs of passion with intense desire to worship. Psa. 27:4 says, "One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple." This is equivalent to a love song. The parallel of the romantic and the religious is not just in the Song Of Solomon, but in the Psalms as well.

Passion for pleasure is everywhere, and all of us have it. We lust for certain foods. We lust for the

pleasures of sex. We lust for acceptance or recognition. We lust for a higher degree of wealth to satisfy the lust for other things. Lust or passion is the motivating fire in all of our pleasures, but where is the lust for worship: The passion to praise God? Jesus said in Matt. 5:6, "Blessed (that is happy-filled with pleasure) are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Passion is the key to the happy life. If you can develop the same passion for the things of God as you have for the things of the flesh you will have the highest level of happiness this life can offer, and you will be prepared for the ultimate happiness of the life to come. May God help us to develop a passion for worship that we might more completely enjoy the pleasure of passion.

7. THE PLEASURE OF PERFECTION

Based on Psa. 84

Christians have always had mixed feelings about pleasure. They know God made us to enjoy many pleasures of life, and yet there are also the forbidden pleasures. These are often just extremes of what is acceptable. Sex is good, but immorality is bad. Food is good, but gluttony is bad. Abundance is good, but excessive luxury is bad. Power is good, but tyranny is bad. Every pleasure seems to have a danger zone where it goes to far and become a negative. It is like the heat gage on your dash. It is necessary for your car to develop heat, but when it keeps rising it goes into a danger zone, and is then a threat to your car. A good thing gone to far is a bad thing. So it is with pleasure.

Adam and Eve had all the pleasures of paradise, but when they took the forbidden fruit they went into the danger zone, and that pleasure was very costly, for it led to great pain. Christians tend to focus on one aspect or the other of pleasure-the fair or the forbidden. The Puritans spent much of their energy focused on avoiding the forbidden. They even passed laws forbidding laughter on Sunday. Their idea of entertainment was sitting on a hard wooden bench listening to a three hour sermon. They feared pleasure lest it be taken to extremes. They felt the best way to avoid extremes is to avoid even the legitimate pleasures of life. They found pleasure in avoiding pleasure.

Modern Christians have rejected this approach, and feel the Christians should take advantage of the pleasures God has made available. It is obvious we are made to enjoy a great many pleasures. God has given us taste buds to enjoy many tastes, and then provided us through nature a multitude of foods to stimulate these taste buds. A major part of our joy in life is the pleasure of eating. God built us with a nervous system designed to enjoy the pleasures of sight, smell, touch, and sound, and not a day goes by in which we do not experience pleasure by our senses. These are all legitimate and motivate us to seek ways to add to our pleasures.

This may be more healthy than the Puritan approach, but it faces the same danger of lack of balance. Christians can get so caught up in the pursuit of pleasure that they neglect their spiritual life. The Psalms are God's gift to His people to prevent this, and promote the pleasures of the soul, so that we maintain a balance between the pleasures of the flesh and those of the inner man. The pleasure we want to focus on is the pleasure of beauty, and more specifically, the pleasure of God's beauty, or the pleasure of perfection.

Psalm 84 begins with an expression of pleasure in God's dwelling place. "How lovely is your

dwelling place, O Lord Almighty." There is a deep longing in this song to experience again the pleasure of being in this lovely environment where the presence of God could be felt. We are made in the image of God, and so there is a magnetic attraction to what is lovely, beautiful, and perfect. When we see perfect beauty we are compelled to praise. Why do you think millions are spent to make cars look beautiful, and why beautiful women are used to advertise them? It is because what motivates people to buy things is the beauty and pleasure of perfection. We all want to own beautiful things with perfect shape, perfect colors, perfect efficiency. The perfect price is unachievable, of course, but we will pay the price if the beauty is near enough to perfection.

Anybody selling anything uses beauty to promote the product. Better Home and Gardens gives you pictures of what is a perfect home and garden. This produces in people a desire to possess such perfection. The love of perfection is built into us, for it is part of God's image, and that is why the classics never die. They are classics because they never lose their appeal, for they are aesthetically pleasing to our ears or our eyes. Truly beautiful music and art are permanent for they appeal to human nature in every age, and will continue to do so for all eternity.

God expects man to have pleasure in worship, for it is to be experienced in an environment of beauty. The Temple was designed by God to be filled with the beauty of colors, artwork, sculpture, and gold to appeal to the eye. The vast choir was to produce music appealing to the ear. The incense was to appeal to the nose.

The sacrifice was to appeal to the taste. Worship was to be sense oriented so that the whole body, mind, and soul of man would experience the pleasure of perfection, and out of that pleasure praise the God of perfection.

The reason most churches are built with an attractive sanctuary is because beauty is a stimulus to worship. Beauty makes us feel nearer to the Creator of beauty. Ugliness makes us feel nearer to the Lucifer, who by his rebellion brought ugliness into the perfect world of God. Disorder, dirtiness, and anything that repulses us is a hindrance to worship. That is why we must work at keeping the environment of worship one that appeals to our aesthetic nature. God is everywhere at all times, but we do not always sense His presence. It is beauty and perfection that produce in us the sense of His presence.

We may never achieve perfection in this world, and all we do may always have defects and flaws, but it is still our duty to strive for perfection and seek to provide an atmosphere that gives pleasure to the senses. It is possible to worship and praise God in a muddy foxhole or in a dusty bamboo hut.

From every place below the skies
The grateful song, the fervent prayer
The incense of the heart, may rise
To heaven, and find acceptance there.

There is no atmosphere where God cannot be praised, but the Bible stresses the beauty of the house of God as an ideal environment in which to worship. Beauty is an aid to worship for God is the most beautiful of all beings. David in Psa. 27:4 writes, "One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, and to seek Him in His Temple." You may not be aware of it, but for centuries the highest

goal of life for Christians was the beatific vision. This is the vision of God's beauty, which we will see when we behold God in all His glory on the throne. John in the book of Revelation got a preview of this beauty, but all Christians will get this vision and experience forever the pleasure of perfection which will lead to perpetual praise.

Worship is to be a foretaste of heaven. It is a sip of that cup of pleasure we will drink for eternity. If we come to church and do not get any pleasure we have not worshiped. If the truth of God's Word does not reveal to us any beauty to appreciate; if the music does not give us pleasure by the message or the tune, then we have missed the essence of worship, which is to praise God for the pleasure of His beauty. If there is no pleasure in some aspect of beauty you will not be worshiping, for worship is expressing pleasure in who God is and what He has done.

The purpose of coming to church is to experience more of the beauty of God. Augustine called God "the beauty of all things beautiful": "The most beautiful": "The fairest of all." He said of God's Word: "Thy truth, bright and beautiful above all." He wrote, "I was borne up to thee by thy beauty." He came to Christ after a life of sin and he lamented, "Too late have I loved thee, O thou Beauty of Ancient Days." Beauty is an aid to worship because it is a reflection of the beauty of the One we worship.

Fortunately we can rise above our environment and worship God even in very non-beautiful surroundings. Corrie Ten Boom had to worship God in a concentration camp where there was ugliness of the physical and spiritual. The sin of man's nature was never more ugly there, yet she worshiped the God of beauty there. But when she was asked to help develop housing for the homeless after the war she directed the rehabilitation of old factories and buildings. One was a former concentration camp. She ordered that the barbed wire be removed and that everything be painted with bright colors, and every window have a flower box. She knew the awfulness of a bleak environment, and she was determined that sorrowing families have some beauty in their lives.

Beauty is basic to pleasure, and pleasure is basic to happiness. Every realm of life is affected by the beauty, or lack of it that we experience. That is why the goal of coming to church is to experience the pleasure of beauty. But since beauty is in the eye of the beholder, that is why there is a need for variety. Some people see beauty in old songs, and some see the beauty in new songs. Some see beauty in the King James Version, and others see it in the Living Bible. Some see beauty in the solo, and others in the choir. Some like hand clapping, and others prefer silence. Variety is a part of beauty, for there are many different tastes.

The history of the church is a history of the struggle to find balance in beauty. The Catholic Church went wild and spent fortunes in building great cathedrals with ornate art work and stain glass windows. The Puritans rebelled against this excess, and built plain churches with no art. Some went so far as to forbid paint. Even today some Christians refuse to wear ties because their beautiful colors detract from the attention we should give to God.

All agree, God is beautiful, but they disagree as to how to be made aware of that beauty. Some say use physical beauty to symbolize God's beauty. Others say ignore all other beauty so God has no competition. Probably both work for different personalities. The Old Testament focuses more on the use of external beauty as an aid to worship. The New Testament Christians did not have a temple or church building and so their stress was on the beauty of the spirit. There is no escaping

the fact, however, that the environment has a powerful effect on our spirit and makes us more aware of certain truths about God.

The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament His handiwork says Psa. 19:1. The Psalms are loaded with references to nature being a cause for praise. The beauty of what the artist has made makes you want to praise the artist. That is why creation is an aid to worship. Its beauty provokes us to praise its Creator. Abraham Lincoln, one starry night, experienced what we all at sometime have experienced. He looked into the starry heavens and said to his friend Captain Gilbert Greene, "I never behold the stars that I do not feel that I am looking into the face of God." The awesome beauty of the universe compels a believer to be aware of the presence of God. That is what Psa. 84 is all about. It is about experiencing the pleasure of God's presence by means of the pleasure of beauty.

Wherever beauty is it should be an aid to worship for the Christian who is being sensitive to all beauty as God's gift. The problem with the pagan world was that they saw the beauty of creation as an end in itself, and they worshiped the creation rather than the Creator. This was their folly. But we are to get pleasure in the beauty and perfection of creation that leads us to praise God as the author of that beauty. This is worshiping God in spirit and in truth, which Jesus said is what God is seeking in us. God wants us to recognize that He is the author of all that is beautiful. The goal of all beauty is the praise of God, and not the praise of beauty.

Pleasure is not perfected until it leads to praise. When it leads to praise it is the pleasure of perfection, for you are pleased enough with something that it makes you think of the perfection of God. If you do not get that far, but stop short by just admiring the beauty of the setting, or song, or whatever, you have robbed yourself of the highest pleasure. You will note that the Psalmist in verse 2 makes it clear that the goal he longs for is not the beauty of the dwelling of God, but God Himself. His heart and flesh cry out for the living God. He does not want to get to God's house merely for the aesthetic pleasure of seeing the beauty of it. He wants the pleasure of perfection; the pleasure of the ultimate beauty; the beauty of God's presence. The practical implications of this are clear.

We need to make a constant effort to look past both men and nature to see the perfection of God. Man is fallen and so is nature. But man still has the image of God, and nature is still a marvelous revelation of the wisdom and beauty of God, but both are far from perfect. The pleasure of perfection comes to us, and makes our worship authentic, when we see all we do, and all that nature reveals, as a sign pointing to the God of perfection. The song will not be perfect, but it can have a degree of beauty that makes us think of the perfect beauty of God. The sanctuary will not be perfect, but it should be pleasant enough to make us think of the perfect setting of God's presence.

The point is, as we worship we need to use the inadequate beauty of time as a stepping-stone to the infinite beauty of eternity. This means worship takes effort. You have to love God with all your mind, and by mental concentration let the imperfect beauty of your environment lead you to the pleasure of God's perfect beauty. This is often forgotten in our modern culture where the focus is on self-pleasure and entertainment. We are gluttons for entertainment because it draws the crowds. The problem is entertainment is self-centered and not God centered. The issue is did I feel good, and not, did I meet with God and worship Him. It is not that feeling good is bad, but when that is the goal it takes the place of worship.

One of the leading authors on worship is Robert E. Weber. He writes in his book, *Worship Is A Verb*, "We must let go of our entertainment expectations and remind ourselves that we are not in church to watch a Christian variety show. We have gathered together in worship to be met by God the almighty. God, the Creator of the universe, the one who sustains our lives, our Redeemer and King, is present through proclamation and remembrance. He wants to communicate to us, to penetrate our inner self, to take up residence within us. And as we go through the experience of meeting with Him in this mystical moment of public worship, we are to respond." His point is, worship is not just something that happens to you, it is something you do. You use the environment as stepping-stones to get to God. The music and the message are not ends in themselves, but means to the end of experiencing the pleasure of God's perfection.

I do not profess to be an expert in worship. I know for a fact that I hear many a soloist and many a choir, and my pleasure ends with their performance. I experience pleasure in the music, but I do not let it lift me to the pleasure of perfection. I fail to rise on the wings of the song and sore to the presence of God, and praise Him. My worship becomes self-centered, and my focus is in how the music is affecting me, rather than how it is lifting me to praise God. It is hard to overcome the conditioning we develop by our habits.

I read this story that illustrates the problem. "A young family took a vacation to the South Western part of the United States, taking along grandparents who had just retired from farming. As they stood over looking the Grand Canyon, everyone made delightful comments about its beauty. They were overwhelmed with the variety of colorful hues and the magnitude of this vast gorge. They noticed that grandpa wasn't saying anything, however. They soon learned his silence was not a result of awe when he said, "You can't grow much corn here!" An opportunity to sense the awe of God's wisdom and beauty was lost because of a self-centered focus.

Because of this you can have the most beautiful setting possible, and be in a sanctuary that is an architectural wonder, and still fail to worship, because worship is not a matter of state of the art, but a matter of state of the heart. You need to come to God with a passion to praise Him, and a passion to worship Him, and a passion to sense His presence, and then you will experience the pleasure of perfection.

8. THE PLEASURE OF POWER Based on Psa. 84

Every day of your life you enjoy the pleasure of power. The power to flip switches and give light in the darkness, and heat in the coldness. The power of electricity is the source of abundant pleasure. When we lose that power we are deprived of all our electric devices, and it is a major pain. All of us have electrical devices and gadgets that no longer work. They look just as nice as they did when they worked, but they are powerless to give us pleasure anymore.

All the pleasures of life revolve around some kind of power. Life itself is a form of power, and when that power ceases we are just like an electrical device that no longer works-we are dead. Power is life and power is pleasure. The Sun is the source of the power of life on the physical level. God made it that way, but He is Himself the Sun of our spiritual solar system, and all of our power

to have life, and to enjoy it, comes from Him.

The Psalmist says in verse 11, "For the Lord God is a sun and shield, the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does He behold from those whose walk is blameless." God is our sun, the source of all our pleasure, because He is the source of all our power. Power and pleasure are linked together as one. This theme is everywhere in the Psalms. Here is Psa. 84 verse 5 he says, "Blessed are those whose strength is in you." Then in verse 7 he says, "They go from strength to strength." God is the source of all our power, and the whole point of the Christian life is to grow in that power, for that is what the abundant life is all about. It is about power to achieve the purpose of God in our lives. Paul said he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him.

This theme is found often in the Psalms.

Psa. 22:19, "O Lord, O my strength haste Thee to help."

Psa. 71:16, "I will go in the strength of the Lord."

Psa. 18:1, "I will love Thee, O Lord my strength."

Psa. 18:32, "It is God who guideth me with strength."

Psa. 27:1, "The Lord is the strength of my life."

Psa. 28:7, "The Lord is my strength."

Psa. 59:17, "Unto Thee, O my strength will I sing."

There are many more, for this theme is one of the major themes of the Old Testament. God is the source of the power to experience all that is good and pleasurable. Without Him we are like an electrical appliance that is not plugged in. We do not function to produce pleasure for God, for others, or for ourselves.

Norman Vincent Peale in most famous book, *The Power Of Positive Thinking*, tells of the husband and wife who went through a terrible trial. Bill was the vice president of his company and expected to become the president. But when the time came he was passed over by a man brought in from the outside. His wife was furious and insisted that Bill tell them off and quit. He was reluctant to do so. Doctor Peale was a good friend, and so they sought his advice. He urged them to sit in silence before God, and ask Him to give them the power to choose the right way. They were to plug into their power source, so to speak, and see how the power of God flowing through them would help them function in a way that would please them. As they waited on the Lord the wife had a change of spirit. She realized anger and not wisdom was controlling her.

She agreed to encourage Bill to work with the new man to see what would happen. It turned out that Bill really liked the new president, and the new man consulted with Bill often. Two years later the president was called to an even better job and Bill became president. He and his wife were so grateful they did not let the power of anger decide their future. They let the power of God do it, and the result was great pleasure.

Power to do the will of God is one of life's greatest pleasures. Weakness that lets the flesh determine our direction in life is one of life's greatest pains. The great battle of life is between pleasure and pain, and which one dominates is determined by our source of power. That is why verse 5 says, "Blessed are those whose strength is in you." Happiness in life means God is the source of our power. This theme breaks into many parts. There is-

The power of praise.
The power of prayer.
The power of passion.
The power of priority.
The power of participation.
The power of pursuit.
The power of persistence.
The power of purpose.
The power of possessions.
The power of purity.
The power of prevention.
The power of positive thinking.

All of these and more are themes of power and pleasure in Psalm 84, and the rest of the Psalms. Power and pleasure are linked to just about any theme you can imagine.

The Bible makes it clear that how we look at life makes all the difference in the world in how much power we have to enjoy the pleasures that also please God. The power to focus, for example, is a key power for enjoying the pleasures of life. Jesus said in Matt. 6:34, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Jesus is saying the power to focus on today, and the problems in front of your face right now, and not be filled with anxiety about the future, is a key to the good life.

The Pilgrims in Psa. 84 are focused on making every day a day of praise, and a day of victory. Even in those days where they must pass through the valley of Baca, the focus is on making it a place of springs. The power to make every day a day of progress is a basic pleasure of life. Alcoholics Anonymous has used this principle to help millions of drinkers get power over their lives again. They teach them to break their life down into manageable segments. One day at a time is their slogan. Don't worry about staying sober the rest of your life, but just stay sober today, and just start by staying sober this hour. Success comes by the power to gain control of your life by taking hold of small enough chunks of it. Try and deal with all of life, or even a year of it, and you lose control. Just grab hold of now, and do what is best, and you will grow in your power to control your life.

Those who ride bicycles say it is easier to ride a bike up a hill at night than in the day time. Some terribly hard hills have been negotiated at night that are practically impossible in day light. The reason being, at night the cyclist can only see the few feet his lights hit in front of him. He feels he can go that few more feet, and so he keeps on. But in the day light he sees the whole hill, and the whole problem at once. He is overwhelmed by the enormity of the task, and his strength is sapped. The power to keep going is increased by focus on just a little at a time. Likewise, the power to live the Christian life is more available when we take it step by step, or at most, a day at a time.

If you go through life asking yourself what I would do if atheism takes over our nation, and I am forced to choose my faith or be cast out of the country, you are loading down your emotion system with burdens that are folly, and which Christ has forbidden you to carry. It is not your responsibility to worry about what might be. Just do today what you know is right. Every day you live in obedience for that day will make you stronger so you have the power to do what is right when a

testing time may come. Worrying about it before it comes weakens you for the day it does arrive. Power to do the will of God comes with focus.

Paul had no control over how other people would treat him. Often they treated him badly, and he found himself in the valley of Baca. But Paul always made it a place of springs. His best letters were written from Roman jails. Some of his greatest songs of praise were sung in a dungeon. He had the power to experience pleasure in the most painful of situations because of his ability to focus on the positive. John Bunyan wrote *Pilgrims Progress* while in Bedford Jail. It became the best selling book next to the Bible for many decades. He had the power to focus on the real issue which was, how do I make this barren desert produce life? He did it and gave pleasure to millions.

Helen Keller is quoted by millions because of her determination to make her barren desert a place of beauty. She did it and brought pleasure to herself and masses of others. She said, "The one resolution, which was in mind long before it took the form of a resolution, is the key note of my life. It is this: Always to regard as mere impertinence of fate the handicaps which were placed upon my life almost at the beginning. I resolved that they would not crush or dwarf my soul, but rather be made to blossom like Aaron's rod with flowers."

The power to find a positive focus in every situation is the potential for every child of God. It is not automatic, however. It has to be a conscious desire. Paul was an expert at it, but he says as a mature Christian in Phil. 3:16, "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection...." Paul is ever seeking the power to make springs in the desert valley. He is ever seeking ways of bringing life out of death, as Jesus did in the power of His resurrection.

Easter is the greatest celebration of power in the Christian year because Jesus on that day produced the greatest pleasure—the pleasure of endless life. His power to do that is the foundation for all the pleasures of the Christian life. Paul says without the power of resurrection all else is worthless. But in that power we can make springs in every valley. Cooper wrote, "Brave your storm with firm endeavor, let your vain repining go! Hopeful hearts will find forever roses underneath the snow."

J. Oswald Sanders in his book *Spiritual Problems* writes, "We live in a power-hungry and power-conscious age. Every heart, whether regenerate or unregenerate, craves for power in one form or another." We have power to do things today that our parents never had. Several months ago I had only the power to plug in a computer and play some games. In just a few months I had the power to search the entire Bible and do marvelous studies with the power of the computer.

There is great pleasure in growing in power. Every Christian should be hungry for power to be more effective in living the Christian life. The Gospel is the good news that the powerless people of the world can still have the greatest power in the world, the power to get right with God, and experience His forgiveness and the joy of salvation. Many of the early Christians were slaves who had no power whatever in society, but they had the power in Christ to experience all the pleasures of salvation and the abundant life. They had the power to love God, to love their neighbors as themselves, and to fill the whole vast valley of this fallen world with the springs of pleasure.

The Bible has much to say about power. Look at just a few key verses: Prov. 24:5, "A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength." Knowledge is power, and all

Christians should be determined to get knowledge, especially knowledge of God's Word. One of life's greatest pleasures is knowing the will of God. Peter says in II Peter 1:3, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him..." We have the power to know all we need to know for the good life. It is found in the Word of God. It takes time and effort to get that knowledge, but great pleasure awaits those who seek, for seekers will find.

We have to deal with the reality of Christians who are constantly burning out. They labor long hours and put forth great effort to serve the Lord, and often it seems to be all for naught. It gets discouraging and they lose their energy and the will to press on. Pastors and Christian leaders drop out continuously because they lose their power. Paul had to deal with this in his day. In Gal. 6:9 he writes, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Sadly, however, many weary Christians do give up. They come to the end of their rope and they throw in the towel. But this does not need to happen if they tap into the power that God provides.

We read in Isa. 40:29-31, "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." How do we get in on this revitalization and rejuvenation when our batteries are almost dead? Is there a spiritual energizer that will enable us to keep on going and going? Yes there is! The Holy Spirit is the believer's energizer, but like any source of power, the Holy Spirit does not work in us if we are not plugged in. We must first of all trust in Christ as our Savior, and ask Him to be Lord of our lives. When we invite Jesus into our lives as Lord we become capable of receiving the power of the Holy Spirit.

We then have to open the lines for that power to flow, and we see the Biblical way of doing this is by means of praise. David had a pattern in his life of praising God to begin his day, and, thereby, tapping into the strength of God. In Psa. 59:16-17, he says, "I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God." David links power with love so that to be always loving is the same as being always strong. When we are not full of love for the people or the project we are into, we become weary with it. It is all work and no joy. But when love fills us for the people and the purpose we have power, and there is pleasure in what we are doing. God's power flows through love, and so if you do not love you short out the flow of His power, and have to operate on human strength alone. This soon leads to burn out.

This is why praise is so essential to power. Praise is what keeps us in love. As soon as you cease to praise, your love begins to decline. This is true for mates, for friends, and for children of God. Show me a weak marriage, and I'll show you people who seldom praise each other. Show me a weak Christian who no longer has time and energy for the things of God, and I'll show you a Christian who has ceased to praise God in the morning, or any other time of the day. Praise is love expressed, and love expressed is the equivalent of plugging into the source of power. Cease to praise and you cut your power lines. Praise often, and you open up more lines for greater power and more pleasure.

The Christian life begins with power. By faith in Christ we are empowered to become Children of God. Then growth comes as a matter of increasing in power, and becoming stronger in the Lord.

Just as a new born child grows stronger until it can roll, then sit up, and then walk and talk, and ever growing in power. So the Christian is to be ever growing and able to do for God this year what they could not do last year for lack of power. The prayer of Paul for believers in Eph. 3:16 is, "I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His spirit in your inner being." Pray for power, and praise for power, for it is God's will for believers to be ever advancing in their enjoyment of the pleasure of power.

9. THE PLEASURE OF PROGRESS

Based on Psa. 84

Spain once controlled both sides of the Mediterranean Sea at the Straits Of Gibraltar. On her coins were stamped the two Pillars Of Hercules. They represented the two great rocks, and the words NE PLUS ULTRA=no more beyond. As far as they were concerned, Spain was the end of the world. Paul wanted to get to Spain, for that was the end of the known world, and he wanted to touch the whole world for Christ. But then, brave men developed the courage to sail beyond these pillars, and they discovered a whole new world. Spain was forced to change their coin. They just took off the first word and left PLUS ULTRA=more beyond.

There is always more beyond, because God has written the principle of progress into His plan for man. Progressive revelation characterizes the Bible. God does not tell man everything all at once. He first gives the law, and later the Gospel. Jesus said to His disciples, "You are not yet ready for all the Holy Spirit will teach you. It will come when you are ready." They first followed Him and became loyal to Him as Lord. Then they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and empowered to carry the good news into all the world. The body of Christ started small, but grew until it was a world wide organization. The principle of progress is everywhere in the Bible. We start as babes in Christ, and then press on to become mature servants in Christ. Growth, advancement, development, improvement, and progression are the very essence of the Christian life. Jesus said to His disciples that they would one day do even greater things than He did.

Every Christian is to be pressing on to gain that more in Christ that can never be exhausted. Progress is to be a permanent part of the Christian life. There is no level where we have arrived at the end of our potential. Paul said we know only in part. In fact, progress is eternal so that even in heaven we will be guided by the motto-more beyond. The idea of a static heaven where there is no more progress is contrary to the nature of God. It would be mean we would exhaust the infinite creativity of God, and be stuck in a perfection where nothing new and exciting could be added to our experience. This is a denial of the infinite, which by definition has no level beyond which it can not go. If it cannot go further, it is finite and not infinite. By definition progress is eternal with an infinite God.

The saints and theologians of history have all agreed that heaven will be a place of progress. For progress to cease we would all have to become equal with God, and that can never be. We will, however, be ever moving in that direction. The poet was right who wrote-

Thank God! There is always a land beyond
For us who are true to the trail;

A vision to seek, a beckoning to peek,
A farness that never will fail.

I like that phrase, for those who are true to the trail. This is one of themes of Psa. 84. Progress in Psalm 84 is portrayed as a pilgrimage in verse 6. They are called blessed who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. These are people who have determined their lives will be a journey, which will draw them ever closer to God. That is their goal says verse 7, to appear before God in Zion. For the Old Testament saint this meant getting to Jerusalem. For the New Testament saint it is getting to the New Jerusalem in heaven. In either case, life is a journey through some tough places, like the valley of Baca, but they never quit. They go from strength to strength, that is, they get stronger with every challenge they face and overcome. They keep on keeping on, making progress until they arrive at their goal.

So the main thing we see about Biblical progress is—we need a goal. You cannot define progress without a goal. If you are on highway 35 heading South at 65 miles per hour you are making good time, but there is no way to know if you are making progress until your goal is known. If your destination is North, we know you are not making progress, no matter how fast you are going South. If you are only going 20 miles per hour, but you are going North, you are making progress. It is not the speed, but the goal that defines progress. It is the goal that makes any race meaningful. Without a goal you only have motion and action, but no progress, for a goal is necessary to measure progress.

The goal is the motivating power that keeps you on the journey. It has to be something you really want to achieve, or you will turn back when you come to the valley of Baca. The key to progress in your Christian life is to set goals that you know are consistent with the will of God, and then, like Paul, press on until you reach that goal. We need to do it as individuals, as families, and as churches. Goal setting is a crucial process in the journey of making progress for the glory of God, and our own pleasure in living for God.

The question Christians so often debate is whether the world is getting worse or better. The fact is, every new person on the planet adds to the sin level of life on this planet. So with over 5 billion more people on the earth since the New Testament was written, you have billions of more sins. The crime and immorality of man is multiplied by the billions of more sinners. Of course, the world is worse today than it ever was. But it always has been, for every generation produces more sinners. Paul Harvey said, "In times like these it helps to recall there has always been times like these."

Yet, on the other hand, there are more people to respond to the Gospel than ever before. Billy Graham can see more people come to Christ in one crusade than Paul saw in his whole ministry. There are more churches in the Twin Cities than there were in the whole world in Paul's day. There are more Christian schools, Christian organizations, and Christian missionaries fulfilling the great commission than Paul could have ever imagined. Of course, the world is better than ever before. There are more Bibles, more Christian videos, and more Christian resources of all kinds flooding the world than ever before in history.

There is more sin, and more holiness today than ever before. Both good and evil have made great progress in our world. This is not surprising

since that is just what Jesus said would be. He said the wheat and the tares would grow together until the end. So you a right to be pessimistic about the growth of evil, but you also have an obligation to be optimist about the growth of the wheat. The great commission of Christ to His church is being carried out. The Word of God is reaching millions every day, who before, had no light. The goal of the church is to give everyone on the planet a chance to hear of Jesus, and that goal is being achieved.

This goal never would be happening if Christians had not gotten together to set goals. Many Christian organizations have set goals to reach the worlds unreached peoples by the year 2000. The year 2000 is a time goal, and the unreached peoples are a number goal. Whether all are reached by that time or not, there will be progress toward that goal just because the goal was set.

Do you want more pleasure in your Christian life? You need to set a goal. Do you want to grow? You need to set a goal. Do you want to please God? You need to set your hearts on pilgrimage, and get on a trail leading to a goal. You need to be persistent, and not quit when you go through the valley. Progress means change for the better. It is not progress if cannibals eat with folks and knives. It is just more efficient and more sophisticated, but it does not make the evil less evil. The crook who steals millions by means of a computer seems less threatening than the thug with a pistol, but it is not really progress, for the evil heart is not changed, and God's will is being disobeyed just the same.

Technology makes radical changes in our lives, but they are not progressive unless the better means to reach a goal are aiding us to reach goals that are pleasing to God. G. MacDonald said, "All growth that is not toward God is growing to decay." The Prodigal Son thought he was making progress. He was independent, free of his father's house, and he could do as he pleased. He could spend his money on wine, women, and song, and nobody could tell him to stop. He, no doubt, felt really grown up and mature. He interpreted all this change as progress, but he could not see he was heading for the pig pen. His goals were not God's will for his life, and the result was, he was regressing and not progressing.

The paradox is, he had to go back to get ahead. Progress for him was to back track and get on the right trail. If you miss the road, and take the wrong turn, you can't make progress no matter how far or fast you travel. You have to be on the right road, and so progress sometimes means going backwards. He went back home and got on the right trail. The story ends happily because he set new goals that were consistent with the will of God. Here was a case of getting back to the future. He had to get back to his past, and get on the right trail to have a good future. The good news is, nobody has to stay on the wrong road. They can get off a road of regression, and get on the road of progress anytime they choose to set goals that are pleasing to God.

Paul was on the road to Damascus with the goal of arresting Christians, and punishing them for being followers of Christ. But when he was confronted by the risen Christ, he changed his goals, and became a servant rather than an enemy of Christ. Conversion involves a change of loyalties and goals. Paul changed from desiring to wipe out the body of Christ to being the greatest builder of the body of Christ. He was zealous as an angry Pharisee persecuting Christians, but he was not making progress for his goals were out of God's will. You can only make progress when you

are moving toward a goal that is in God's will. Paul was building fires in the valley of Baca before his conversion, but when Christ was Lord of his life, he began to make it a place of springs, for he brought good news and comfort to both sinners and saints all over his world.

Every Christian is obligated to be a pilgrim with the long range goal arriving at heaven, but with a host of short range goals that make the journey a constant taste of heaven on earth. The famous sculptor, Thorwaldsen, was asked, "Which is your greatest statue?" And he replied, "The next one." He expected to do better and better, always making progress. More beyond was his motto. He never stopped improving, and that is to be the goal of every Christian. The practical issue we all need to deal with is not, is the world getting better or worse, but am I? Am I making progress in the Christian life? Am I setting goals and moving toward them? Am I on a pilgrimage for the glory of God?

In striving to be a progressing Christian we have to wrestle with the tension between the sacred and the secular. There is a secular progress going on all around us. It's goal is to do everything faster and more efficiently. This, however, is not enough to make it progress pleasing to God. You can go further and faster to reach goals that are not in God's will. Alexander Solzhenitsyan said at Harvard in 1978, "All the glorified technological achievements of progress, including the conquest of outer space, do not redeem the 20th centuries moral poverty." 20th century technology has been used to enslave and kill people more swiftly. The tyrants have used modern technology to do their evil. This is the problem with so-called progress. It is often just the opposite.

In the fascinating book, Peace Child, the Sawi people gaped in awe as one of their own brought back, from the outside world, a metal hatchet. Stone axes is all they ever had, and they could not believe their eyes when he felled a tree with four blows. For three minutes the people danced and shouted in amazement. It would take forty blows with their stone axes to do the same thing. The men sat around passing the wondrous instrument from one to another, caressing its hardness and sharpness. Here was glorious progress! Or was it? On one level it clearly was, but when you hear of the cost of this advance, it is doubtful. The man who had it sold one of his children into slavery to purchase the new ax. Thus the tension between technology and morality. It is not enough that a goal be good and consistent with the will of God. The means of getting there must also be consistent with the will of God.

This is where the Christian gets caught in the tension between the secular and the sacred. The secular world around us makes great progress in technology, but does not care if it makes you a better person or not. You can use it to be a more effective sinner if you so choose. This is the tension we see in verse 10, "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked." The implication is, it may seem more progressive to be in the tent of the wicked, and really be with the times, but if it takes you off the road leading to the presence of God, it is regressive. You are like the Prodigal, going off to the far country to enjoy the worldly life, but you are not making progress. You are going downhill away from God. Better is the lowly job of opening the door of the house of God than worldly success that robs you of the goal of being close to God.

The point is, if wealth, position, technology, or any secular advantage takes you away from Christian growth, it is not progress. It is just change, and change that does not lead you closer to God is change for the worse. All improvements in the secular life need to be evaluated in the light of how they affect our passion to praise God and serve Him. If they lessen that passion they are enemies of the soul. If they enhance it they are friends of the soul. This is the criteria by which we measure the value of secular progress.

Too often in history Christians have opposed change and progress just because they were convinced the present state of things was the best. This has often been shown to be folly. When Benjamin Franklin invented the lightning rod there were some Christians who were outraged. They said he was trying to prevent the judgment of God. The Rev. Thomas Prince of Boston published a lengthy sermon in 1755 charging that an earthquake in Boston that year was the result of God's anger at Americans who had erected lightning rods. In England no church was protected by a lightning rod for nine years after Franklin's discovery because they were seen as a means of trying to prevent God's judgment.

It took a great tragedy to change the minds of the clergy. In 1767 a lightning bolt crashed into the church of San Nazaro in Brescia, Italy. The church was also used as a storehouse for 200,000 pounds of gun powder. It was ignited and the explosion leveled a 6th of the town killing over 3,000 people. Lightning rods on the church could have prevented the whole tragedy. This made Christians more open to the value of new technology. History is filled with examples of Christians being on the wrong side of progress, and changes that could benefit people's lives.

This should be a warning to us not to oppose change just because it is change. The issue is not change, for change is built into history by God Himself. The issue is, is the change a step in the right direction. Does it move us closer in our journey toward God, or does it take us off into the far country where we abuse and misuse our freedom, and do nothing for the glory of God. Any change that aids us in our praise of and service to God is progress.

Anna Mow in, *Say Yes To Life*, tells of being on a ship in the Mediterranean Sea when a terrible storm struck. The ship had three engines, but it only needed one to move forward at normal speed. In the storm, however, all three were used and they still could not move forward at all. It took all their power just to stand still in the storm. But she said, it was still progress, for by standing still they were not smashed against the rocks of the North African shore.

It may sometimes take all of your energy just to stand still in a stormy period of your life. The Psalmist in Psa. 84 is stalled somewhere, and cannot get to his destination in Jerusalem to worship in the presence of God. But he does not give up, for his face is pointed in that direction, and his heart is set on pilgrimage. He has a goal and he will not forsake it, for he knows God will not withhold any good thing from those who walk is blameless. If you never cease to aim for goals pleasing to God He will guarantee progress, and this is one of life's greatest pleasures—the pleasure of progress.

10. REVIVAL Based on Psa. 85:6

Clovis Chappell, the great Southern preacher and author, said in one of his messages, "What announcement could the average pastor make to his people next Sunday that would create less enthusiasm, less approval, less holy expectancy, than that he would soon to begin a revival?" Rather than this being a beginning of anything creative, it would in most cases meet with a yawn. The word revival used to be an exciting word to Christians, but in modern times it has lost its charm. Chappell points out that we are not opposed to revival in other areas of life. The revival of nature appeals to us, and we anticipate spring. New life is restored to the vegetation of earth. The bare limbs of trees are clothed in glorious green. The naked earth puts on the garments of grass and colorful flowers. We rejoice and feel good about such a revival.

We love a revival of the body. If it has been sick, we rejoice when it is restored to health, and we walk in joy with our new strength. It gives us a new zest for living to be rid of the body as a wearisome burden, and have it restored as willing companion of the spirit. Such a revival is cherished. What if it could be announced that the economy was heading for revival? Everyone would eagerly listen to such an announcement and receive it with enthusiastic gratitude. Chappell says, "But when we begin to speak of a revival in religion our interest wanes, our minds wander, we slip into a comatose state and wonder how soon the tiresome ordeal will be over." Even if this is an exaggeration, the question is, why is it close to the truth?

The answer seems to lie primarily in the fact that too many so-called revivals in the past have been man-made counterfeits. Many have gotten up a 3 ring circus and manipulated masses about by the use of emotional techniques, and then left them to settle down into a state of coldness and depression, making them worse off than before. This negative experience has made Christians fear revival. Counterfeit healings have made people skeptical of believing in the real thing. S. P. Long in his book *Prophetic Pearls* wrote of conditions many years ago. "The religious vaudevilles which have been carried on in some of the cities in this country during the past few years by the get-rich-quick actors who do not fit in the pulpit, or on the stage, has so disgusted the cool-headed, thinking Christians, that we have been led almost to shun the word, 'revival.'"

Many of us can identify with this negative attitude to revival, but let us recognize that no abuse of truth should be allowed to rob us of the use of it. We dare not throw out the baby with the bath water. Let us not cease to quote the Scripture because the devil himself quoted it to the Lord in temptation. Everything good can be used poorly, and even for evil, but it is folly to forsake all good because it can be abused. Revival is not only a good word used in Scripture, it is also a good and positive experience. When rightly understood, we will long for it in the religious realm as we do in all other areas of life.

The prefix *re* means back, and it refers to going back to some original or former state. To *re-pay* is to pay back, and to *re-strain* is to hold back, to *re-ply* is to talk back, and on and on we could go. So the way to get ahead is to go back to the best you ever were. This means we were at some point in the past more dedicated, and now we have become cold and lost the fire we once had. Revival is not going back to the same old thing, but to that which is better, and to the best we have ever been. The Renaissance was a return to the classical spirit and a restoration of the noblest achievements of the ancient world. The Reformation was a return to the Bible and a restoration of

New Testament Christianity. A revolution is an overthrow of the present system in order to return to a former system thought to be more excellent. Revival is getting back to the best.

There are numerous synonyms of revival. You have renew, refresh, renovate, resuscitate, reanimate, reinvigorate, and even to repair, for that is to restore something to its original and better state. It does not matter that a person or church is dead, for Christianity is about the resurrection of the dead, and the good news is that revival can bring the dead back to life and restore people and churches to what they were at their best.

Notice why the psalmist is praying for revival in verse 6. What is it that he expects to gain by being revived? He asks, "Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?" The goal is a right relationship to God that makes the people joyful. Emotion is involved in revival, and especially the emotion of joy. If you can look back on happier days in your Christian life, and days of greater rejoicing, then you need revival. We need to be restored to the joy and zeal in service that we once had.

Revival implies a loss of something we once had. You cannot be restored to what you never had and never were. You cannot go back to where you have never been. The Psalmist looks back to the marvelous mercies of God in the past in the opening verses. His request for revival grows out of his recollection of the past. Note the past tenses in, "You showed favor to your land, you restored the fortunes of Jacob, you forgave the iniquity of your people, and you covered all their sins." Then he goes on in verse 4 to say, "Lord, do it again, restore us again." Who wants to live in the winter of coldness and gloom when the spring we once experienced is possible again, and with all of its warmth, beauty, and joy? Some unknown poet wrote,

A hint of softness in the air,
The answering note to nature's prayer;
Spring's wondrous miracle to be-
Let it be springtime, Lord, to me!

Long have I dwelt in winter's night,
When moon and stars withheld their light,
With raging winds and roaring sea-
Let it be springtime, Lord, to me!

Who of us can look at revival, as seen in this light, and refused to long for it? The only ones who may not have a longing for revival would be those who are right now in the happiest state they have ever been in their relationship to Christ, or possibly those who have so little experience that they cannot look back to former joys. Most of us, however, have lived long enough to know that the joy that is in Christ can be greater than what we now have. Let us, therefore, pray, "Revive us again, that we may rejoice in Thee."

There must be reviving to be rejoicing. Had the Prodigal Son never looked back to the good old days of love and comfort in his father's house, he would not have risen, returned, and been restored to fellowship and have a great party with rejoicing. The story of the Prodigal is the story of revival, and the story of revival always has a happy ending, for it is a restoration to a rightful relationship with God. To often we are just enduring our salvation and not enjoying it. It is a distress rather than

a delight, and a burden rather than a blessing. That is why we do not share it with the world. But when believers are revived there is an outreach that touches the world. The Psalmist after looking back to the good old days begins to anticipate even better days ahead. There is a shift in the tenses from past to future.

Note in verse 8 that he says, "I will listen to what God the Lord will say; He promises peace to His people..." And in verse 12 he says, "The Lord will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest." When revival comes we can look ahead to God's being a blessing to our world through us. The history of revival reveals that when Christians are right with God, and are rejoicing in Him, He uses them in marvelous ways to accomplish His purpose. They develop a greater compassion for the lost. When Christians are not happy themselves they tend to be indifferent to the needs of the world, but when they are revived and happy they have compassion, and they go into action to meet the needs of the world.

Dr. F. B. Meyer said, "There has never been a great religious revival without social and political reforms." Stephen Olford in his book *Heart Cry For Revival* says, "The abolition of slavery followed a revival. The end of child labor resulted from a revival. Movements like the YMCA, the Salvation Army, and most of our charitable and educational institutions stem from revivals. Most of the good that God has given to the earth has come out of revival, and that is why we should always be praying-

Let it come, O Lord we pray thee,
Let the showers of blessing fall,
We are weeping and expecting,
Oh, revive the hearts of all.

11. A NEW SONG Based on Psalm 96

It is easy for us to do what the psalmist urges us to do, "Sing to the Lord a new song." The number of new songs to sing today is enormous. Back in 1891 Dr. Julian in his famous *Dictionary of Hymnology* examined four hundred thousand hymns, and he did not cover them all. There are, no doubt, over a million hymns in the world today.

But the path to this abundance of new songs was not easy. It might be hard to believe, but the singing of hymns in church, now so popular, was once opposed. In the middle of the 18th century, a church in Aberdeen, Scotland hired a soldier they heard singing hymns with some troops to come and teach them how to do it. He was a great success, and so the church got him discharged from the army to be their song master. Students from the university flocked to the church to join in this novel practice of singing a new song.

As might be expected, it was too good to be true that such enthusiasm would go unopposed. Many felt that the church should stick to the psalms, and put an end to these new songs. They hired Gideon Duncan and two of his friends to sing very loud and out of tune. They succeeded in

disrupting the service, but Duncan was hauled before the magistrate and fined 50 pounds, and imprisoned until it was paid. Many of us can be thankful not everyone who sings poorly in church is arrested. Just imagine, only two centuries ago hymns in public worship were such a novelty they were the center of violent dispute.

Benjamin Keach, the Baptist pastor, was the first man to introduce a hymnbook into a English congregation. It was a book of 300 hymns. 22 angry Baptists walked out of his church never to return. They felt that the Psalms were the only songs Christians should sing. The opposition held back the practice for years, but their delaying tactics could not stop the strong inner desire of men to sing unto the Lord a new song.

This longing for novelty in song is not a part of man's fallen nature, but is a part of his awareness that God is infinite, and therefore, only infinite creativity is worthy of Him, and adequate to glorify His name. It is also essential to keep joy alive in the worshipper. Variety is the spice of life, and a new song is like a tonic that lifts and enables us to feel afresh the love that is always there, but which needs rekindled.

Music is basic to worship, for music is a mover of emotions, and especially the emotion of joy. Out of joy comes praise, and this is a key element in worship. In Psalm 33:1-3 we read, "Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous, it is fitting for the upright to praise Him. Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to Him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy." By means of voices and instruments we praise God and establish the atmosphere of worship. Note, that the new song is emphasized again. The new song is the testimony that God is alive and is working now, and not just in the past.

In Psalm 40:3 we read, "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord." Here the new song is the key to evangelism for it is a testimony that will have an impact on others.

But the new song is not just for out reach, it is for up reach, for God is delighted with a new song from His children, just as you would be from your children. In Psalm 144:9 we read, "I will sing a new song to you, O God; on the ten-stringed lyre I will make music to you." It may sound strange to think of singing and making music to God, but the fact is, all levels of love are enhanced and expressed through music.

Our love for, and praise of God will be connected with music for all eternity. The book of Revelation makes it clear that both vocal and instrumental music are to be a part of everlasting joy. In Rev. 5 we hear the harps, and in verse 9 there is a new song of praise to the Lamb, and in verse 12 the millions of angels sing His praise in a loud voice; then in verse 13 we come to the climax of this heavenly hallelujah chorus and we read, "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: To Him that sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and forever!" There will be new songs to sing forever.

The point is, it is a God given craving to have a new song and He will satisfy that craving forever and ever. Music and song are eternal, and ten trillion years from now the redeemed will be singing new songs. That means the potential in music is infinite. We can never exhaust the potential for

new songs. Leonard Burnstein , the conductor, composer, and pianist has written a book titled, THE INFINITE VARIETY OF MUSIC. He points out that there are only 12 notes in the chromatic scale out of which come all western music. The maximum possible melodic combinations comes to 1,302,061,344. That is a sizable figure, but when you add the fact that there is the same number of chords possible, and each chord can conceivably go with each possible melodic combination, Burnstien says, "We begin to smell infinity."

That is not the end, for each of these melodic combinations can be combined with each other. This takes us beyond the Milky Way, and he hasn't even taken in to account the whole range of tempo, speed, and the innumerable instrumental and vocal colors. All of which he says, "...Add galaxy upon galaxy to this musical universe, whose limits are by this time beyond calculation."

In the light of this potential, there is no need for the child of God to ever be bored with music. But Christians who sang nothing but the Psalms did get bored with them. Isaac Watts was bored with them and complained to his father back in 1692. His father said if you don't like them why don't you write something better. He did, and became the father of modern hymnology. His first hymn began like this-

Behold the glories of the Lamb
Before His father's throne.
Prepare new honors for His name,
And songs before unknown.

This song was sung the next week in his church. It started the avalanche of new songs that fill the world today. The people of his church were so delighted they demanded he write a new song for each Sunday. An 18 year old poet had broken a tradition of centuries. For two years he wrote a new song for every Sunday service, and he paved the way for Wesley, Newton, Cowper, and others to change the course of Christian history through song. He wrote over 650 songs, and now 300 years later we still enjoy singing many of them.

O GOD OUR HELP IN AGES PAST
COME WE THAT LOVE THE LORD
JOY TO THE WORLD
AM I A SOLDIER OF THE CROSS
I SING THE MIGHTY POWER OF GOD
ALAS AND DID MY SAVIOR BLEED
WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS
AT THE CROSS
JESUS SHALL REIGN
COME HOLY SPIRIT
WE'RE MARCHING TO ZION

These were once the new songs promoted by those who felt the latest is the greatest. Now they are the old songs promoted by those who say the old is the best. Of course, they are both right, for some music is the best when it is new, and some when it is old. The need for the new is greater in modern times because of the fast pace of change in our world which makes music, like everything else, obsolete faster.

John Innes, organist for Billy Graham said, "We need new music badly-music that will stir the heart and put new meaning into the faith." Don Hustad, the most famous of Billy Graham's organist's asks, "What's wrong with the old songs?" And answers, "Nothing, but evangelism should have a healthy influence upon culture in our time. Gifted converts to Christ need to give musical expression to their love as they grow in the Lord."

To maintain life and enthusiasm there is a perpetual need for new songs. But it is a mistake to try and sing new songs if they do not achieve the goal of leading us to praise God. The unknown poet has written,

"In union we rise and stand
And wish that we were sitting;
And listen to the music start
And wish that it were quitting.
We past our hymnal to a
Guest or fake a smoker's cough;
We drop our pencil's, lose our
Gloves, take our glasses off.
We move our lips to keep in
Style emitting awkward bleats;
And when the last amen is
Sung sink gladly in our seats.
Oh, Lord, who hearest every
Prayer and savest us from foes,
Deliver now thy little flock
From all those hymns nobody knows."

No matter how recent or how ancient a song is, it is irrelevant and impractical as a motivation for worship if it is not known, and not enjoyable.

That is why Don Hustad in his book, JUBILATE!, stresses the need for music to be functional. He points out that Christians have fought over what is good music for centuries, and will continue to do so, but most of the conflicts are foolish, for they revolve around people's taste. So much is a matter of subjectivity. People are on different levels in their appreciation of music, and they are conditioned by their exposure. Some are moved by Bach, but others are left cold and consider it meaningless. Who is right? They are both right, for to those who are moved, it is a gift of God; to those who are left untouched it is of no value.

Bach's music has blest millions of people for three centuries, and will go on blessing people till the end of time. Everyone should work at developing a love for music that has so lived. Bach was a dedicated Christian who wrote at the beginning of most of his scores, "Jesus, help me!" And at the end of all his scores, "To God alone the glory." But Bach was a musical genius who went beyond most people in his ability, and the result was even people in his own church could not understand him. He went beyond the people, and ceased at that point to be functional. Better is a piece of music far less artistic which moves you to praise God than a classic that does not do so.

That is why Hustad has taught his students for years that Christian music is best when it fulfills

its purpose of moving Christians to praise God. Bach would agree, for he wrote, "The aim and final reason of all music should be nothing else but the glory of God and the refreshment of the spirit." Meaningful music is music that moves us to praise God.

Psalm 98 is very similar to our text. It starts the same way-"Sing to the Lord a new song," and in verse 4 it says, "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music." It is clear that music is meant to be a moving experience. Music is for the heart, and a message is for the mind. A worship experience is to touch both the heart and the head. We are to both feel and to think in a way pleasing to God.

The psalmist gets very secular in his musical emphasis. He does not limit himself to human voices and instruments, but calls on the whole of nature to join in the song. In verses 11 and 12 he writes, "Let the heaven's rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy."

In Ps. 98:7-8 We read, "Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy."

This is obviously poetic language, but it is poetry with a message. Music is a part of life, and we need to see all of the beauty and harmony of creation as part of the music of the universe that is offering up praise to God. Music is everywhere in God's creation. Madison Cowlin wrote,

"All things are wrought of melody
Unheard yet full of speaking spells
Within the rock, within the tree
A soul of music dwells.

A mute symphonic sense that thrills
The silent frame of mortal things.
It's heart in the ancient hills
And in each flower sings.

To harmony all growth is set,
Each seed is but a music-note,
From which each plant, each violet,
Evolves its purple note."

Every science and every field of knowledge add to the music of life, for they all have their harmony, unity, and aesthetic appeal. Broadly defined, everything lovely is a part of music for it has the potential of moving you to sing unto the Lord a new song in praise to Him for the gift of that beauty. Any part of reality which functions as God intended it to, is at that point praising Him. That is why Paul wrote to the Philippians and in the context of trying to reconcile two women in conflict he said in 4:8, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things." Paul is saying the aesthetic life is a key factor in the spiritual life. You cannot be all God intends you to be without developing a growing appreciation of what is lovely.

We all have the same problem, lack of time. I got a kick out of Catherine Bowen, who was

asked how she could have the time for so much music with 2 children, a house to keep up, and her responsibilities as an author and teacher. She replied, "It is managed by a shrewd system of neglect. Neglect is truly an art. There is just no end to the things you can learn to neglect if you really love music." All of us need to learn to neglect lesser values in order to develop that side of life that leads us to sing to the Lord a new song.

I am aware that there are many Christians who do not sing and have very little interest in music. Many of them are like Dr. Johnson who responded to a woman who asked him if he liked music, "No madam, but of all noises, I think music is the least disagreeable." I have known Christian leaders who never sing, but I have never known anyone who claimed it as a virtue. It is considered a handicap, and not a blessing. Artemus Ward said, "I can't sing-I am saddest when I sing. So are those who hear me. They are sadder even than I am."

Like the blind who will not see until eternity, there are non-singers who will not enjoy singing until they join the heavenly chorus. But all Christians should work at enjoying some forms of music, for God Himself delights to sing. Zeph. 3:17 is a fascinating verse for it states clearly that God expresses His love and joy in song. It says, "The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."

Jesus enjoyed singing. It is recorded that He did so with His disciples right after the last supper, and before He headed into the garden of Gethsemane. God sings, the Son sings, the angels sing, man sings, and all nature sings. The entire universe is one vast symphony of song. Shakespeare in *MERCHANT OF VENICE* said, "There's not the smallest orb which thou beholdest but in his motion like an angel sings." Albert Einstein admitted, "This world may consist of musical notes as well as of mathematical rules." Carlyle said, "See deep enough and you see musically; the heart of nature being everywhere music..."

The point is, the psalmist is not being merely wildly poetic when he hears music and song in all of nature. For the scientist, philosopher, and historian can also hear it. But the poets just point it out more often. Byron wrote,

"There's music in a sighing of a reed;
There's music in the gushing of a rill;
There's music in all things, if men had ears,
This earth is but an echo of the spheres."

Emerson put it like this-

"Let me go where'er I will
I hear a sky-born music still.
Tis not in the high stars alone,
Nor in the cup of budding flowers,
Nor in the red breasts mellow tone,
Nor in the bow that smiles on showers,
But in the mud and scum of things
There always, always something sings."

The whole of creation and the host of heaven are perpetually singing to the Lord a new song. All believers are to join this universal choir, not just when they get to heaven, but now in time. May God motivate us by His Word and by His World to make singing His praises a priority in our lives.

12. THIS IS THE DAY Based on Psa. 118:6-14

Many years ago Rudyard Kipling was a popular writer, and it was reported that he was getting ten shillings for every word he wrote. Some students at Oxford University, who were not impressed with Kipling, sent him ten shillings with the request that he send them one of his very best words. He sent a cable back with one word, and it was the word, thanks. This is certainly one of the very best words in the vocabulary of any person. Sometimes it is a battle to make it relevant, however. A mother said to her little boy who had just received a bag of candy from the clerk, "What do you say to the man?" The little guy responded, "Charge it!"

Saying thanks seems irrelevant to many who reason that if you get paid for what you do, thanks is unnecessary. If it is a person's duty to perform a service, then he deserves no thanks. Almost unbelievable is the fact that Meister Eckhart, a Christian mystic, even applied this logic to God. He said, "I never give God thanks for loving me, because he cannot help it, whether he would or no it is his nature to." We can be thankful that the biblical writers came to no such cold conclusion. The Psalmist, for example, knows God is good by nature, but that is the very reason for his thanksgiving, and not a reason for withholding thanks.

It is God's nature that is the basis for His day of thanks, and in verse 24 we see the well known verse so often quoted: "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." Someone put it in poetry this way: "This is the day, the solemn day, which the Lord God has made. In it we will be glad, and joy shall all our hearts pervade." This verse is usually applied to any and every day, and that application is valid, for what day is it that God has not made? People have put this verse on their walls so that each morning when they awake they are reminded that this is God's day, and they should use it well and rejoice in it. However, in this context the Psalmist is referring to a specific day of celebration and thanksgiving.

Scholars are not in agreement entirely, but the generally accepted view is that it is written for a day of rejoicing after the return from Babylon, and when the temple had been rebuilt. Ezra 3:10-11 gives us a picture of the attitude of the people at that time. "And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Aseph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord.... and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, for He is good. For His steadfast love endures forever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord...."

It is a setting in which this hymn of thanks fits well, and scholars have divided it up to show how it was sung responsively by different groups. The point is, the Psalm was written for a special occasion of thanks, and though it is true every day is to be a day of thanks, so it is also true that there are certain days in which we give special attention to thanksgiving. There is a danger in making too much of special days, but there is also the danger of making too little of them. Without days of

remembrance of our heritage we will tend to forget. That is why Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, and that is why it is wise of us to set specific days aside for review and thanksgiving. Every Sunday is unique in that we do what is not done other days. Holidays like Thanksgiving should also be used as unique opportunities to praise God.

This is the day the Lord hath made;
He calls the hours His own.
Let heaven rejoice, let earth be glad,
And praise surround the throne.

Let us give thanks to the Lord for He is good. There is little we can give to God that is not a returning to Him of what He has already given to us. Time and substance are God's gifts to us. Thanksgiving, however, is a product of our own will, and to give God thanks is to give something that is uniquely our own. That is why the thankful heart is so pleasing to God. We need to recognize that the praise of God is not for the purpose of making man feel like an insignificant nothing. The purpose is to give man assurance and security in the knowledge that in God he has a resource for all his needs. God's steadfast love endures forever is the theme repeated over and over. All else may change and decay, but God's love is permanent. Grace Noll Crowell put the message in poetry.

Whatever else be lost among the years,
God still abides, and love remains the same,
And bravery will glimmer through men's tears,
And truth will keep its clean and upright name.
As long as life lasts, there will ever be
Kindness and justice and high loyalty.
Lode-stars for men to stir their courses by,
The eternal things of life can never die.

Because the Psalmist is assured of this, he is able to say in verse 6 that he is free from the fear of man. If one fears God and has the security of God's eternal love, he need never fear men. To fear God and keep His commandments is not only the whole duty of man, it is also his whole difficulty. All our fears and insecurity are due to our inability to fear God and rest on His eternal love. It is easier to quote poetry about it than actually live in the proper state of mind. Part of our problem is that it is hard to think in terms of forever. We know that life can be dangerous, and Jesus said that men can even kill us but we are not to fear that, but to fear God. To be killed or tortured sounds like something to fear, but if we truly rest on the goodness and eternal love of God, even this will be nothing to be alarmed about. Total security and fearless living depends on perfect faith in the nature of God, and an awareness that if God be for us who can be against us?

This sounds like pride to say that God is on my side, and many are the stories of those who are careful to say there were on God's side rather than saying God was on their side. I have read criticism of the well-known book titled *God Is My Co-pilot*. This sounds as if God is in second place, and only a helper rather than the one doing the flying. It is always a danger that we make God our servant, but on the hand, it is equally dangerous and false to suggest that God does take over our lives completely and do the flying. The fact is, God does help and assist when we will to give our lives to the doing of His will. We need a balanced view between being mere robots of God

and being totally self-sufficient. We must work out our own salvation knowing it is God who works in us. We can say that God is on our side when we have chosen to be on His side.

Though foes assail I will not fear,
For at my side the Lord is near;
The Lord my helper, I shall win
The victory o'er the hosts of sin.
The Lord with me, I will not fear
Though humans might oppose;
The Lord my helper, I shall be,
Triumphant o'er my foes.

With deity as one's defense, one need not fear men. Lincoln recognized this as he made his farewell speech in Springfield, Ill. He said, "I now leave, not knowing when, or whether ever, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail." God was with him because he fought for a cause pleasing to God, and he gained the victory. We can thank God even more than the Jews in this Psalm, for we have always been blest with victory, and have not needed the judgment of God as they did. This does not mean that our hope is in our leaders, for as the Psalmist says in verses 8-9 our refuge and confidence is not in man and princes, but in the Lord.

No trust in men, or kings of men, can confidence afford,
But they are strong, and sure their trust, whose hope is in the Lord.

This does not mean we can be indifferent in men and to what our leaders do. It means that they too must put their confidence in God and not in men if they are to lead us well. There is nothing the President, or anyone in the world can do to give us the assurance of God's love and salvation. This is a matter of our personal trust in God and acceptance of Jesus Christ. Victory over sin will not be easier because of any party or person in office. Spurgeon said, "In eternity a prince's smile goes for nothing." All men will fail to meet our personal needs, and so it is foolish to trust them when the Lord offers to meet these needs. "Tis better for to trust the Lord than on man's aid rely. Yeah, better for to trust the Lord than trust in princes high." This is the day to remember this, when there are so many idols that people look to.

In verse 10-12 the Psalmist shows the dangerous position he was in, but how he conquered by God's help. The literal battle and victory here illustrates the spiritual battle of every believer. All of us are surrounded by enemy forces, but in the name of the Lord we can conquer. Like bees the enemy swarms about us, but if we put our confidence in God rather than man we shall be victorious. "Though nations compass me about, the swarming hosts of sin, Yet in the name of God the Lord I shall the victory win." This hope of the Old Testament of certain victory in the name of the Lord became a Christian hope by adding the name of Jesus Christ. In His name we conquer all foes.

Jesus the name high over all,
In hell, or earth, or sky.
Angels and men before it fall,
And devils fear and fly.

In case you may be wondering where all the poetry comes from, everyone of the Psalms has been put into poetry by a number of different poets, and so every verse in the Psalms can be stated in a variety of ways in poetry. The Psalms use to be the only hymns sung in the church, and that is why they have all been made into poetry.

In verse 13 the Psalmist says he was almost sunk on his own, and would have been had the Lord not helped him. This is true of all of us. God not only helps those who help themselves, but more important, he helps those who cannot help themselves. It is this that fills with joy, and cause him in verse 14 to say that the Lord is my strength and my song. "The foe has sought to cast me down, Jehovah has made me strong. He brings salvation unto me, He is my strength and song." He is my strength while in conflict, and my song when the battle is won. If God is your strength then, he will be your song, for victory is the only alternative for those who fight with God's help. Heaven is filled with the song of victors.

Extol the Lamb with loftiest song,
Ascend for Him cheerful strain,
Worship and thanks to Him belong,
Who reigns and shall forever reign.

God has become my salvation he says, and certainly there is no greater praise for praise and song and no greater theme for thanksgiving. There is much more he says, but this is a good peak on which to close. For the believer every day is the day of salvation, and so this is the day for thanksgiving. "This is the day the Lord has made, let us be glad and sing. Lend now prosperity, O Lord, O Lord, salvation bring." Let us be thankful every day for our salvation and for the opportunity to share this good news with others. Let us give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good.

13. TURN ON THE LIGHT BASED ON Psa. 110:105

Almost everyone knows of Lazarus, the man whose name has become immortal because of his experience of being raised from the bondage and darkness of death to the liberty and light of life. Few people are conscious, however, of the Jewish woman by the name of Lazarus. Her poem is engraved on the pedestal of the Statue Of Liberty. When France made known it was going to give this colossus of "Liberty Enlightening The World" to America, a committee was formed to raise money to build a pedestal for it. One of the fund raising projects was to sell manuscripts of Longfellow, Walt Whitman, Bret Harte and Mark Twain. The chairman of the committee asked his friend Emma Lazarus to also contribute a manuscript. Little did Lazarus realize when she submitted her sonnet that it would one day be engraved on that great statue. Listen to this poem she wrote in 1883 called The New Colossus.

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose fame
Is the imprisoned lightening, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand

Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breath free,
The wretched refuse of your teaming shore.
Send this, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me.
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

This poem and the Statue Of Liberty have turned on a light for all the world to see. Millions have seen it and have come out of bondage into the light of liberty which our great nation offers. They are still coming today, and that great lamp of liberty in New York Harbor is the greatest symbol of what America has been, and what we hope it will ever be-a land where the light of liberty burns brightly for all people.

It is fitting that a Jew should be the author of the poem at the base of that great lamp of liberty. The Jews have also been the authors of that lamp of liberty even more notable than the Statue Of Liberty. We are referring, of course, to the Bible. It has been a lamp unto the feet and a light unto the path of God's people all through history. Our heritage as Christians is greater and older, and more noble than our heritage as Americans. In fact, it is our Christian heritage that has made our American heritage the great value it is. As proud as we are of the Statue Of Liberty, we must recognize that the real honor goes to this book of liberty-the lamp of God's light-the Bible. Its flame will never flicker and go out, but will continue to shine forever.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but not the Word of God. Sun moon and stars do not provide light for guidance equal to that of the Bible. Pollok wrote,

Most wondrous book! Bright candle of the Lord!
Star of eternity! The only star
By which the bark of man could navigate
The sea of life, and gain the coast of bliss securely.

God's lights in the heavens can guide our feet on earth, but only His light on earth can guide our steps to heaven. Isaac Watts put it-

The stars, in their courses roll,
Have much instruction given;
But thy good Word informs my soul
How I may climb to heaven.

A Christian never needs to be like the man who could read numbers but not letters. He said that when he travels he always knows how far but he never knows where to. Every man knows he is in a certain year along the path of history, but only those who walk in the light of God's lamp know where the path is going. He has turned on the light of God's lamp, and all the darkness of hell cannot quench it.

Men tried to turn off this light and keep the masses in the bondage of ignorance, but it was as

hopeless as trying to turn off the Sun. Once men saw the light of God's truth, and the glorious message of salvation in Christ, by faith, and for all men, they could never again tolerate the darkness. Great were the struggles to keep the light on, and many died as martyrs in the struggle, but they died victors for they died in the light, and not in the night.

William Tyndale translated the Bible into English, and by using the new invention of Gutenberg's printing press he was able to print large quantities. He was strangled to death for his efforts, but he turned on a light that could not be strangled. Darkness began to retreat, and the 16th century saw a whole series of new translations of the Bible. The Coverdale Bible, Great Bible, Geneva Bible, Bishops Bible, and then in 1611, the most famous of them all-The King James Version.

There is no doubt that the greatness of our land of liberty is a direct and indirect result of the success of these men. It was at the cost of much suffering, and even their lives, but they turned on the light that changed all of history. There may be no way to prove it, but it is likely that the Statue Of Liberty would not be a symbol of America if the Bible had not been put into the English language. We take it for granted because we can pick up the Bible and read it at any time, but so many seldom do. If God's light and wisdom were imprisoned in the darkness of an unknown language we would cry out for someone to have mercy, and to give us a translation in our own tongue. Cowper wrote-

The sacred book no longer suffers wrong,
Bound in the fetters of an unknown tongue,
But speaks with plainness art could never mend,
What simplest minds can soonest comprehend.

We do not treasure what we so easily obtain. Those who had to struggle to get the Bible appreciated it far more. We live in a period of history that has more light from God's Word than any Christians have ever had. Yet with all this wealth we are not walking in any greater wisdom than many of those in the dark ages. It is because we have the lamp, but we do not turn on the light. A man with 20 lamps will still go off the path if he does not turn them on. 20 modern versions of the Bible will be no better than one in unreadable Latin if we do not turn it on.

The Psalmist lived in a dark world where enemies were laying snares for him. He knew the only way to escape and remain free from the clutches of evil men was to turn on the light and walk in it. That is why we see him pledging himself to obey the light of God's law. In verse 45 he says, "And I will walk at liberty for I seek thy precepts." Here is a man who knows how to preserve his liberty and remain free from the bondage of sin. "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee" is his testimony in verse 11. The Bible was his lamp of liberty, and by its light he walked in perpetual freedom, for the weapons of darkness cannot touch the man who turns on the light and stays in it. Richard Crashaw wrote-

It is an armory of light
Let constant use but keep it bright,
You'll find it yields
To holy hands and humble hearts,
More swords and shields

Than sin hath snares, or hell hath darts.

The famous saying, it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness, applies to our subject. There is only one way to overcome and defeat the darkness of sin and ignorance, and that is by turning on the light of the lamp of God. The Bible alone can give us the light we need for guidance. Someone said, "Science equips a man, but does not guide him. It illumines the universe for him to the region of the most distant star, but it leaves night in his heart." The Bible alone can drive away the darkness within, for it alone reveal Jesus Christ, the Light Of The World. Someone wrote,

We trace His image on each page,
In holy letters lined with light:
Redeemer, Prophet, Priest, and Sage-
Who finds His presence reads aright.

Jesus said, "If the Son shall make you free ye shall be free indeed." Our greatest liberty is to walk in the light of God's Word, for in it we find the truth that sets us free from all the chains of darkness. If we are walking in this light, we will want to share it and brighten the path of others. Another poet wrote,

Men die in darkness at your side,
Without a hope to cheer the tomb.
Can we whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high;
Can we to men benighted
The lamp of life deny?

Jacob DeShazer, one of the famed Dolittle flyers, who bombed Tokyo in 1942, was captured and spent 32 months in solitary confinement in a Japanese prison camp. He had a Bible, and he began to read, and found a liberty in Christ that made him free to love those whom he before hated. He resolved to be a missionary to Japan, and four years after his release he was preaching the Gospel in Japan. His printed testimony of what the Bible did to him was read by Captain Mitsua Fuchida, the squadron commander who led the air raid on Pearl Harbor in 1941. It created a desire to read the Bible. He bought a copy, and he also found the light of liberty and in 1950 he accepted Christ as his personal Savior. He began to preach the Gospel, and joined Jacob DeShazer in reaching his people. These two men had bombed and killed each others people, but now they shared a common message of light in Jesus Christ. This is an example of what God can do when people turn on the light.

The Bible is our resource for discovering what God wants us to know. If you want to know how to call somebody, you go to the phone book. If you want to know how to spell a word, you go to the dictionary. If you want to know when the Civil War was fought, or some other historical fact, you go to the encyclopedia. If you want to know how much you have in the bank, you look in your check book. The point is, there is all kinds of books in the world, and each is designed to give you light for certain areas of life. The Bible is that book you must turn to if you want light on the will of God.

We cannot see all the light in the Sun, and we cannot see all the light of God's Word. Our finite minds cannot begin to grasp it all. That is why we often get discouraged with Bible reading. We

tend to get bored because we already know what we are reading, or we don't know at all what we are reading. It is either too simple or too hard, and both are boring. The result is we neglect the Word and do not turn on the light. But the fact is, it is the light that can never be put out.

The Bible has been fought against many times, and some thought they destroyed it, but it is light that no force can destroy. In the year 303A.D. Emperor Diocletian had every Bible destroyed. Thousands were martyred, and after two years of ruthless slaughter a victory column was erected with this inscription: "Extinct is the name of Christian." Twenty years later when Constantine became Emperor, he offer a reward to anyone who could deliver a copy of the Bible. Twenty four hours later 50 copies were brought out of hiding. Diocletian thought he had turned out the light, but not so, for it had been shining in the homes and lives of many, even at the risk of death.

Kenneth Scott Latourette, one of the greatest historians of the 20th century, tells about the Goths overwhelming the Roman Empire. One of them by the name of Ulfilas became a Christian, and he translated the Bible into the language of his people. Many became Christians and they spread the Gospel. Instead of destroying everything they preserved the best in law and learning. Because they turned on the light of God's Word, they recognized what was of value in building a civilization.

When the Germanic tribes, the Angles and the Saxons, overran Britain they extended Christianity. The Irish monks had many beautiful handmade copies of the Bible. The Irish became missionaries to the Angles and Saxons and by means of the Bible England was saved from becoming a totally pagan nation. When the Angles and Saxons became Christians, they in turn sent out the light to Holland and Germany. And so the story goes over and over through history. Where the Bible is read, and the light is turned on, history is changed for the glory of God.

Satan has learned from history that you cannot turn off the light of God's Word by force, and so he is more successful when he uses the subtle method. He gets those who have the Word to take it for granted. This way they are easily deceived into thinking they are in no danger, even though they neglect it, and do not read it. We all need to be aware that we risk living in darkness if we do not turn on the light.

14. A MOUNTAIN TOP EXPERIENCE Based on Psalm 125

Mountains have made men marvel at the majesty of God's creation all through history. Man needs the mountains, for the heights are in his head and heart. Mountains awaken in man the instinct for heaven. He knows when he looks at the mountains that he was made for a high and lofty purpose. "But chief of all Thy wondrous works, Supreme in all Thy plan, Thou has put an upward reach within the heart of man!" Once the mountains get into a man's system he can never be content on the plain. Egypt had no mountains, and so they built their own in the pyramids.

When Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon he married a woman from the hills and took her to Babylon. She was unhappy and so he built for her the famous hanging gardens of Babylon, which was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. Bliss Carman, a modern poetess, knew how she felt, for she also longed for her mountains and she wrote,

I am homesick for my mountains,
My heroic mother hills,
And the longing that is in me
Knows solace ever stills.

Men wonder at the mystery of both mosquitoes and mountains, but they are glad that God made mountains. When you gaze at those massive snow covered peaks you are forced to think big. The mind as well as the eye is lifted by their loftiness. Mountains force the thought of God upon you, for there is not where else the mind can go and be relevant. Man becomes insignificant and humanism melts into oblivion before these rocking monarchs of the earth. In their majestic silence they shout at you that God and only God is great.

I need not shout my faith. Thrice eloquent
Are quiet trees and the green listening sod;
Hushed are the stars, whose power is never spent;
The hills are mute, yet how they speak of God.

Frank Gaebel in *A Varied Harvest* wrote, "From the mention in Gen. 8:4 of Ararat, the great 17 thousand foot peak in Armenia, capped by its glittering ice dome, to Rev. 21:10 where John in his vision is transported to a high mountain, whence he sees the New Jerusalem in all her splendor, the Word of God is full of mountains. Names like Ararat, Moriah, Sinai, Horeb, Zion, Carmel, Herman, Gerizin, and Olivet have rich associations; indeed the basic structure of sacred history might be related to the mountains of Scripture."

In one of his books of sermons Wallace Hamilton told of how the famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright made the statement that all public buildings should be only 12 feet high so people would not feel inferior or insignificant. He had a point, but Dorothy Thompson wrote an article that quickly dulled it. She pointed out that when GI's visited the great Cathedrals of Europe and knelt under the lofty arches of Notre Dame and stared up at the great art of Michelangelo on the dome of St. Peter's, they were not made to feel small, but were awakened to higher aspirations. They were made to think big in the presence of bigness. You do not feel any longing for greatness by gazing in the gutter. It is only in the presence of greatness that one is motivated to greatness. That is why mountains are a must for men's minds. Wallace wrote, "Emerson did not advocate a 12 foot ceiling when he said hitch your wagon to a star...The height to which a man grows is commensurate with his vision. Set his ceiling at 12 feet and he will eventually be living underground."

Man needs the mountains to remind him of how small he is so that he can be motivated to get climbing toward the heights of what God intends him to be. It is the awareness of our need that gets us climbing. Mountains motivate us. Bishop Foster said, "If you have no sense of need, you will assuredly make no progress." This is what we see in the church of Laodicea in Rev. 3. Jesus said that they were neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm, and he tells them why they were on this dead level plain making no progress. He said in verse 17, "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked." They lost the vision of their need. They felt adequate and satisfied. They had a 12 foot ceiling and didn't feel inferior or insignificant. The result was that they lost their motivation to climb.

This can happen to any of us and that is why it is good to go to the mountains. It is healthy to

look at something so big that it forces you out of your self-centeredness. When we drove out of the mountains of Yellowstone down into Cody, Wyoming we had a vision that sent chills up and down my spine. Part of it was due to my fear of heights, and part it was due to sheer awe at the grandeur of it all. It looked like we could look down on the whole world. We were even above the clouds. It must have been just a spot where Jesus was taken in His temptation to behold the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

Jesus had visions from the heights like this before. Henry Van Dyke in his book *Out Of Doors In The Holy Land* describes Nazareth where Jesus grew up as a boy. It was much like the Western part of our nation. Jesus could climb the hills above the city and see for 60 miles in one direction and 20 miles into other directions. He could see practically the whole of the land of His ministry. Jesus did a lot of climbing in His life, for He climbed often to pray, and He preached His most famous sermon the *Sermon On The Mount*, by climbing.

Near the end of His ministry He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem from Jericho. That was a climb all the way, and He was heading for the mountain top experience that makes all other mountain top experiences possible, and that was the cross. Jesus did not die in a valley, but on a hill. It was a hill we call Mt. Calvary, which was the Mt. Everest of Sacred Mountains. From that lofty place He promised to draw all men to Himself. The Lord is a lifter, and you cannot lift unless you ascend to the heights yourself. When he did ascend to the right hand of the Father He did so from a mountain. When He returns He will do so to the mountaintop. He was transfigured also on the mountain. Henry Van Dyke concludes, "Christianity is an out of doors religion. From the birth in the grotto of Bethlehem to the crowning death on the hill of Calvary outside the city wall, all its important events took place out of doors." He might have added that they were not only out doors, but on mountain tops.

Our very language makes up positive and down negative. A valley or low point in our life is negative. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." The God of the heights is with us, but it is still a negative experience. The positive and joyous is a mountaintop experience. To be high is to be happy, and to be low is to be sad. The Christian goal, therefore, is to be like the mountains high and lifted up. According to Jesus every Christian is to be greater than John the Baptist, who was the greatest under the Old Testament. In other words, we are to rise above the people of God in the Old Testament that we make them look like the foothills to the mountains. Christians are to be lofty mountain people. The Old Testament saints were to be like mountains also, and the Psalmist tells us so in our text. In fact, he compares both believers and God to mountains. Those who trust in the Lord are to be like Mt. Zion, and like the mountains surrounding Jerusalem so the Lord is around His people. Mountains are symbolic of what God is and of what His people are to be.

We saw many miles of mountains on our vacation, but I never thought of any of them as Christian mountains, or believing mountains. It is you and I who can be mountains who give literal praise to God. When we can move a Christian to do what God wills him to do, we are movers of mountains. Sometimes it is easier to move physical mountains than spiritual mountains, for believers can become so drunk with the wine of self-contentment that they develop hardening of the arteries of concern. They feel like the poet who wrote,

I wish I was a little rock

A settin on a hill.
I wouldn't do a single thing,
But jes keep settin still.

We saw an enormous number of rocks doing just that, but I know this was not what the Psalmist had in mind when he said those who trust in the Lord are to be unmoved. This Psalm is one of the songs of ascent, which means it was sung by a procession of worshippers as they ascended to Jerusalem. It was a mountain climbing song, and a happy song of climbers as they arrived at their destination. Mountains are used to symbolize two things we want to examine. First,

I. THEY ARE SYMBOLIC OF STABILITY.

The Living Bible states in verse 1 this way: "Those who trust in the Lord are steady as Mt. Zion, unmoved by any circumstances." This is the ancient equivalent of saying, "He's as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar." Reality falls far short of this ideal symbol. James had to warn Christians not to be tossed about by every wind of doctrine. Paul had to encourage them to be steadfast and unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord, and to not become weary in well doing. You don't have to tell real mountains to be stable and unmoved, but we as symbolic mountains need constantly to be challenged along this line. We are a mixture of sand and rock, and we need to be perpetually reminded to build on the rock. Those who trust in the Lord are ever building on the rock, and are stable witnesses to His glory, and they will be even when their heads are snow capped with the white of age.

God wants men and women to match His mountains. When you see the miles and miles of mountains you wonder what they are good for. One tourist asked a rancher, "what can you raise in these mountains," and he said, "Men." Mountains are good for raising strong people. God raised Moses on a mountain. What good was Mt. Sinai? It was good for raising Moses to be one of the highest peaks in sacred history. From that mountain God gave to His people the Law to keep them stable in all their relationships of life.

God knew that man's greatest problem was his instability. His own people were constantly wavering and being moved away from their loyalty to Him. Helen Keller spoke profound wisdom when she said, "Our worst foes are not belligerent circumstances, but wavering spirits." Our un-mountain like spirits are our greatest enemies. They cause the greatest of people to become unstable and to stumble. Noah on Mt. Ararat had just been delivered from God's greatest judgment, and yet he got drunk and brought sorrow into the new beginning of life. Elijah had won a great victory on Mt. Carmel, but soon he was so discouraged he wanted to die. God had to get him to go to Mr. Horeb, the mountain of God, where he was restored to stability by God's revelation. The mountaintop experience enables the believer to remain stable when they reach low points in their life. We need to pray with Neil Griffith,

Builder of mountains, make me like a mountain,
Firm let me stand against the winds of strife;
Give me a soul that reaches up to heaven,
But plant my feet in needs of human life.

II. THEY ARE SYMBOLIC OF SECURITY.

The only way we can maintain the stability of a mountain is by putting our trust in one who is as stable as a mountain. Stability is based on security. When we feel the security that mountains can give, then we can be stable. Believers who feel secure in Christ are the most effective servants. They insecure person burns up all his nervous energy just coping with life. The secure person can apply his nervous energy to creative efforts and to climbing. The sense of well-being that comes to those who live in this mountain like atmosphere of security is what God intends all of to experience. Someone wrote,

Oh, the shear joy of it!
Living with thee,
Lord of the universe,
Lord of a tree,
Maker of mountains,
Lover of me.

Mountains can add music to your life. Security and creativity go hand in hand. Litz and Mendelssohn wrote some of their best music in the Alps. Wagner spent 16 years in the Alps, and he wrote, "Let me create more works like those which I conceived in that serene and glorious Switzerland, with my eyes on the beautiful gold-crowned mountains." Brahms wrote of how friends walking with him in the Alps would say, "That's just like your third symphony." The mountains not only in spire men to climb, but they can give such a sense of security that one is not fearful to strive for greatness. This is the kind of security God wants all His children to possess.

A blind girl sat on her father's knee when a friend came into the garden and picked her up and walked down the garden path. The girl experienced no fear, and the father said, "Aren't you afraid darling?" "No," she said. "But you don't know who is carrying you." She responded, "But you do father." Her trust in her father gave her security. She knew he would not allow anyone who was unsafe to carry her. If only we could so trust our heavenly Father, and have that security that would set us free from all the fears that hold us back. Those fears prevent us from climbing to the heights God wants us to reach. All of us could climb higher if we could be rid of our fears and have a greater sense of security.

Moses failed God in a low period of his life, but God still granted him the blessing of dying on a mountain from which he could view the Promised Land. And then in the New Testament we see Moses on the Mt. of Transfiguration with Jesus in the Promised Land. God gave him a mountain view of the land before he died, and so he could die secure in God's promise. Charles Wesley put these words in his mouth:

Rejoicing now in earnest hope,
I stand, and from the mountain-top
See all the land below;
Rivers of milk and honey rise,
And all the fruits of Paradise
In endless plenty grow.

It is wonderful to be on a mountain looking down, but it is also wonderful to be looking up from below. We were at Mt. Rushmore for the evening lighting service where, after a film, seven or eight

hundred people rose to sing the Star Spangled Banner as huge floodlights focused on the mountain faces. All eyes were lifted, and the point of the film was to look up and as you see those faces look back and remember all they represent of the goodness and greatness in our history. That is what Jesus had in mind for us when He instituted the Lord's Supper. He died on a mountain, and the cross is always lifted up because we are to be always looking up to the Christ is the cross and remembering what He did for us on Mt. Calvary. It is in this mountaintop experience that we gain security and grow in stability. Annie Johnson Flint wrote,

I look not back, God knows the fruitless efforts,
The wasted hours, the sinning, the regrets,
But I look up, into the face of Jesus,
Who graciously forgives, and then forgets.

Jesus climbed for us. He took the high road and struggle all the way to the top to die for us that we might live forever in the heights. The Christian life is a life of saying thank you Lord for climbing for me.

15. WHAT IS SIN? Based on Psa. 51:1-2

I was talking to a man who is a member of the Holiness Church. He said his church was a split off from the Free Methodist Church. When I expressed my surprise by saying that I thought the Free Methodist were a very fundamental group, he responded by saying, "Yes, but what was sin 50 years ago is still sin today. If something has been preached against for years, it is wrong to start accepting it as alright now." I didn't ask what the specific sin was that he had in mind, but it was clear that here was a group of Christians who had been divided because of their views of sin. Apparently they could not agree on just what sin is.

One group says that sin is sin, and what was a sin will always be a sin. The other group apparently believed that what use to be a sin is no longer a sin. It is easy to understand how sin can split a church, but when the problem is over defining sin, this seems even more tragic. Christians cannot seem to agree on just what sin is. As the conversation continued, the 16-year-old son of the man indicated he had been to the singspiration we had in our church. I was again surprised and said, "I didn't know the Holiness Church was involved." He said, "It isn't. My dad goes to that church, but I don't." I did not feel it was proper to probe for details, but clearly there was a generation gap in that home, and the issue of what sin is was evidently a problem there as well.

I had already agreed with the father that sin was sin, but is suspected that it was important to note that though sin does not change, man's understanding does. I didn't know whether or not the man was like some of the old Puritans who believed it was a sin to laugh on Sunday. A pastor of an old Scotch Presbyterian Church was once called before a council because he skated across a lake from the parsonage to the church. The issue was not the skating, but whether or not he enjoyed it. It was considered a sin to have fun on Sunday. Sin hasn't changed, but the thinking of men on what is sin has changed. I pointed out in the conversation that Catholics were taught for years that it was a sin to eat meat on Friday. Now all this has changed and they can eat it with a clear conscience. This is not a change on what sin is, but only a change in man's definition of what sin is. For those who go

by the Bible it never was a sin in the first place. Man made labels can and do change.

Men have labeled the use of almost every new device as a sin. Cars, trains, radio, TV, etc. As these things become universal and owned by everyone they cease to be sinful, at least in the mind of the majority. This has led to confusion in minds of both those in the church and in the world as to just what sin is. Add to this the fact that what was sin in the Old Testament is no longer sin in the New Testament. It use to be a sin for a believer to eat pork, or work on the Sabbath, and there were numerous ways to sin ceremonially in the Old Testament that have all been abolished by the new covenant in Christ. This has also been confusing to the minds of many believers who do not see how what was once wrong can now be right. The result is that many still strive to live according to the laws of the Old Testament, as do the Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists.

Sin is not as simple a subject as it seems, and so it is important that Christians do some serious thinking about what the Bible says about sin. Proper understanding of the nature of sin is essential for salvation and sanctification. I have selected Psalm 51 for the basis of studying sin. It has been called the sinners guide. It uses all the basic biblical terms for sin, and it is a Psalm that grows out of the actual experience of saint who has fallen into sin. This is David's great song prayer for mercy after he was convicted of his sin of adultery and murder.

This is a Psalm which is so complete in its dealing with the issues of sin, repentance and forgiveness that it is on the level of New Testament revelation. It has been one of the favorite Psalms of all ages. Luther wrote in the 1500's, "There is no other Psalm which is oftener sung or prayed in the church." Let's begin our study of it by looking at the terms David used to describe his sin. The first is found in the first verse, and is translated transgression. The Hebrew word is peshah, and it is translated transgression 84 times. Five times it is translated trespass, 3 times as sin, and 1 time as rebellion. This word makes clear that sin is a voluntary act of the will. It is a willful violation of a known law. Sin began this way as Adam and Eve deliberately chose to say yes to the forbidden fruit, and no to the forbidding command of God.

Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary defines sin as, "The voluntary departure of a moral agent from a custom prescribed by a society or by divine law or divine command." There are many problems in the world today because men will not accept the fact that sin is a matter of personal responsibility. David said, "Blot out my transgressions, wash me from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." Modern man has tried to escape responsibility for sin by blaming it on everything but his own rebellious will. Psychologists tell people that they do certain things called sin because of problems in their childhood, and they may very well be correct, but this in no way relieves them of personal responsibility and accountability. Someone could analyze David and say that he grew up with all brothers and was never exposed to the opposite sex, and that is why he lost control when he saw Bathsheba and fell into sin. Even if it was true, he was still guilty of willful rebellion against a known law of God. He was honest enough to admit it and not try to pass the buck on to someone else.

Sometimes Christians try to blame the devil for their sin, and this can be very unhealthy. The devil is never to blame for any sin a Christian commits. He can tempt, but sin only takes place when the Christian chooses to disobey the known will of God. No one can honestly plead that the devil made me do it, for he does not have the power to make a Christian do what he does not will to do. We cannot blame Satan or circumstances, but, like David, we must come to recognize that sin, by its

very nature, is a voluntary act. If a person really could not help what they did, it would not be a sin. If I was bound and forced by men to go with them while they robbed a store I would not be guilty of the sin of stealing. If I was delirious after being in a serious accident, and I picked up a pen that had fallen from the pocket of another driver, I would not be guilty of stealing. Sin is voluntary and willful. It is always personal, and one must have personal responsibility for it.

David makes clear that because sin is willful rebellion against the law of God that only the one sinned against can forgive it. If Bathsheba forgave him, and if Uriah in his dying breath forgave him, that would not cleanse him, nor would it blot out his transgression. The weakness of all religion is that it tries to solve the sin problem through men alone. Even sacrifice is a man-centered effort to gain forgiveness. The book of Hebrews makes it clear that though this was part of the Old Testament religion, it never really was effective. All the blood of bulls, goats and lambs could not atone for a single sin.

Christianity went astray for centuries in trying to atone for sin by works. It was as if sin was no more than a traffic violation, and you pay your fine and forget it. W. S. Gilbert in his ballad Gentle Alice Brown describes the folly of this system of confusion and payment. He writes,

"Oh, Holy Father," Alice said,
T'would grieve you would it not?
To discover that I was a most disreputable lot!
Of all unhappy sinners, I'm the most unhappy one!
The padre said, "Whatever have you been and gone and done?"
I've helped mama to steal a little kiddy from its dad,
I've assisted dear papa in cutting up a little lad,
I've planned a little burglary and forged a little check,
And slain a little baby for the coral on its neck!
The worthy pastor heaved a sigh, and dropped a silent tear-
And said, "You mustn't judge yourself to heavily, my dear-
It's wrong to murder babies, little corals for to fleece;
But sins like these one expiates at half a crown apiece."

Many Christians have been led to a false method of dealing with sin because of the teaching that treats sin like traffic violations. Sin is never taken seriously until, like David, you recognize that it is a violation, not of man-made laws, but of the laws of a holy God. Man's laws can and do change, and even the temporal laws of God for the Jewish people have been changed, but the moral laws of God never change. Any time a man decides he does not need to abide by the moral laws of God, he is in a state of rebellion against God and His law, and that is what sin is all about. Rebellion need not be done in anger, for one can calmly say, "I don't have to obey that moral law. I am free to do as I please." That is *pesha*, which is transgression and rebellion.

The second word David uses is iniquity. In the Hebrew the word is *avon*. Here is some real ammunition for those who are convinced that cosmetics are a sin. *Avon* is translated iniquity 218 times, fault 2 times, mischief once, and sin once. This word for sin describes it as a perversion or distortion. It is a way of life that twists the straight and makes it crooked. Transgression is like seeing a sign saying "no trespassing," but you go through the fence anyway, and willfully ignore the sign. Iniquity is a little more offensive, for it deliberately breaks the fence down to go through. This

term covers all the cussedness and orniness of men who do evil just for evil's sake. This term reveals the depravity of man's nature. It is hard to believe that David could be involved in sin like this, but the Bible makes it clear that no believer is above the danger of falling.

Many Christians wish they could be more powerful, but they do not realize how dangerous it is to be a powerful believer. The worst sins come from the top. There are very few men who could have the power of David and not abuse it as he did. He had the power to have any woman he wanted. He could fix it up so the husband would be killed and be buried with full military honors. He had the power to do such a cover up job that everybody would come out ahead when he was through. Bathsheba would be queen, Uriah would be a great war hero, and David could work it out so all would be well. He had everything figured out except for the fact of God. David had left God out of his way of life, and he fell to the level of iniquity where he was distorting his whole life. Everything had to be twisted to fit his sin. "O what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive."

The third term David uses in verse 2 is the word sin. In Hebrew it is chattath. It is translated sin 169 times and sin offering 116 times. This word matches in meaning the main New Testament word for sin. It means to miss the mark. It is error or failure to attain a certain standard. It actually comes from an archery term in the New Testament. If a man draws the bow and lets the arrow fly, and he misses the target, he has sinned, for he has missed the mark and failed to fulfill the purpose for which he aimed. According to Jesus the whole law can be summed up in the 2 commandments to love God with all our being and our neighbor as our self. To fall short of this is to miss the mark for which God created us. In other words, all sin is in some way a lack of love for God or man. As love is the fulfilling of the law, so all lack of love is failure and a missing of the mark. Every time we fail to love God or others we miss the mark and fall short of the glory of God.

Sin is so powerful, even in the Christian life, because it is so easy to miss the mark of God's high calling. It is the most foolish attitude a Christian can have to think that he could not fall into sin. The Scripture reveals the falls of great men and women just to prevent us from such perverted pride. No man is so godly that he cannot fall. David was a man after God's own heart. Noah was a godly man for years in the midst of wickedness, and yet he slipped into drunkenness. Lot was a righteous man, but he defiled himself in drink and incest. As you study the sins of great men you begin to realize that were not just beginners in the faith when they fell. They were men who walked with God and were men of mature faith. God had blessed them, and they were reaping the harvest of His love when they missed the mark and fell short. In the midst of blessings they let sin ensnare them and bring its curse. This tendency to backslide and leave the zeal of one's first love characterizes the New Testament saints just as it does those in the Old Testament. The vast majority of Christians loose the zeal and glow of their conversion, and they miss the mark of living a Christ-like life, and that is sin.

As we examine the meaning of the terms used by David, and all through the Bible, we see that sin is not something remote from us. It is not the problem of the people down at the bar only. It is the problem of even those who are faithful in the pew. No man escapes the battle with sin in this life, and no child of God is beyond a fall. It is just as needful to pray "deliver us from evil" daily as it is to pray "give us this day our daily bread."

The story has been told many times of how Leonardo da Vinci selected men to pose for his

famous painting The Last Supper. He finally found a man with great personal charm and inspiring personality to be a model for his painting of Christ. He found models for each of the Apostles as well, and finally he began to seek for a man to model Judas. He had to be one who had lived a life of sin and deceit and looked like it. When he found a man that fit this description, and he began to paint him, the man broke down and confessed that he was the one who several years earlier had set for the painting of Christ. He had let his life be dragged through the gutter by sin, and he had descended to the place where he was now a model of Judas. This story illustrates what is possible in the history of any man. Every person is a potential Jekyll and Hyde combination. The mercy of God is the sinner's only hope, and David recognized it as the only hope of the saint as well.

The difference between a saint and a sinner is not that sinners sin and saints do not. The difference is that saints know there is only one way to deal with sin, and that is God's way. The sinner has not yet learned this, and does not yet believe that he needs a Savior. When the sinner comes to see that he cannot solve his sin problem, then he will cry out, "God be merciful to me a sinner." I trust that if you have never uttered this prayer and have never asked Jesus to be your Savior that you will do so today, and deal with sin God's way.

16. CONFESSION OF SIN Based on Psa. 51:3

Charles Francis Berry, a major league umpire, was once asked if he ever made mistakes in calling balls and strikes. He looked at the person as if he were joking, and said, "Of course I may mistakes. My only trouble is I can't admit it." The tragedy is that the inability to admit mistakes is not limited to umpires. The world is filled with people going down the wrong road to destruction just because they refused to admit they made a wrong turn. No man ever gets going right until he admits he is now going wrong. No man can ever hit the mark until he is willing to confess that he is now missing the mark. My father had a statement he liked to make frequently to my mother. He would say, "I may not always be right, but I'm never wrong." It was a joke, but most of us take that philosophy seriously. Nobody likes to be wrong, and the result is that confession of sin is one of our least favorite exercises.

In spite of the fact that God has provided a cleansing agent that can eliminate sin, the world is stained, blotted and polluted because people will not confess their need for cleansing. Because people will not admit they are sick they will not take the prescription of the Great Physician. And so you have one of the craziest paradoxes of life. People could be healed and made well by God if they would only confess that they were sick, but they refuse and insist that they are well. The result is that they get sicker and sicker. Hobart Mowrer the psychologist writes, "The neurotic is, without exception in the author's experience, a person who had done things of which he is ashamed, but who, instead of avowing and forsaking his imaturities, has tried instead to deny, repudiate, and repress his own self-condemnation, shame and guilt."

David followed the same foolish path and had to go through a great deal of mental agony, and even physical illness, because he struggled against confessing his sin. David learned that with dealing with sin from God's perspective you must begin with His mercy, and from man's perspective you must begin with confession. He had to learn the hard way, and it is recorded so that we need not

travel the wrong road before we admit our wrong turn. David went a whole year before Nathan confronted him with his sin of adultery and murder. A whole year he tried to hide his sin, and he found out what modern psychologists see everyday, and that is that un-confessed sin can make you sick. It makes you mentally sick first. David prays that God will restore to him the joy of his salvation in verse 12. All the while that he hide his sin he was not joyful, but depressed and unhappy. He longed to be happy again and remarks in verse 8 that he longs for his bones to again rejoice. Physically and mentally he was sick.

To get the total impact of how David relates sin and sickness, and un-confessed evil to deep physical problems, we want to look at several other confession passages in the Psalms. Psalms 6:2 says, "Have mercy upon me O Lord; for I am withered away: O Lord heal me; for my bones are vexed." Psa. 32:2-3 says, "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long." Psa. 38:2-3 says, "There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine indignation; neither is there any health in my bones because of my sin." There is no way to separate medicine and psychology from religion, for sin affects the mind and the body, and only God has the solution to this problem of sin. If a person will not admit they are sick, they will not go to a doctor. If they will not admit they have a mental problem, they will not go to a psychiatrist. If they will not confess they are a sinner, they will not turn to Christ. When you come right down to it, man's biggest problem is not that he is a sinner, for God has made full provision for that problem. Man's biggest problem is that he will not admit he is a sinner, and without confession of sin there can be no cleansing of sin.

Come now again thy woes impart,
Tell all thy sorrows, all thy sin;
We cannot heal the throbbing heart,
Till we discern the wounds within.

The greatest healing ministry in the world is in persuading people to be honest before God and confess their sin in crying out for mercy, as David did. Jesus came to save His people from their sins, and the term Savior has two meanings. It means deliverer and healer. Jesus not only delivers us from the penalty and power of sin, but he heals us and cleanses us from the polluting sicknesses which hidden sin produce. Confession of sin, therefore, is a vital issue, which affects us on all levels-spiritually, mentally and physically. The sinner does not have the power to do anything with his sin, but he has the same freedom as the sick person. He can admit his need and go for help. That is what confession of sin is. It is an admission that one is what God says he is. He is a sinner, and one who cannot get rid of sins destructive effects without God's help.

In verse 3 David becomes a confessor of sin. He says, "I acknowledge my transgressions." He admits he is a sinner and cries out for God in mercy to cleanse him. His confession is the basis for his request. He is admitting his need and acknowledging that God is the only one who can meet that need. Until David admitted that he blotted his own biography he could not expect God to erase the blots. If he would have persisted in hiding his sin, it could never be washed away. He admits that his sin is ever before him. His conscience kept his sin in his consciousness so that however hard he tried to hide it from God and others, he could not hide it from himself. His sin was like a portrait on the wall, and no matter what part of the room he was in, it seemed to be looking at him.

Awakened conscience acts the artist,

Uses the sun of heaven's law
To photograph the sinner's life:
Then holds it up, a hideous monster,
To the affrighted eye.

Unconfessed sin forces a man to watch constant reruns of what he hates on the screen of his mind. Only confession and forgiveness can shut down those x-rated and horror movies of the mind that rob life of its joy, even for believers. We can stand to live in a world with sin all around us, but sin within us is intolerable. Robert Campbell was ordered to raid the Scottish village of Glencoe and put the inhabitants to the sword. He obeyed with merciless severity and committed one of the blackest crimes in Scotland's history as he murdered men, women and children. After this he tried to assume an air of unconcern, but everyone knew he was a changed man, and that the scene of Glencoe was ever before him.

Sin does not look so bad at all before it is a fact. In the fancy of the imagination sin can look so enticing and exciting. Even at worst it does not appear very frightening, but once it becomes an historical fact to be flashed over and over again on the screen of the memory, it gets worse with every showing. David finally got sick of trying to hide a monster in his mind, and so he confessed to God that he was its creator and that he needed God's help to slay it. David could face the giant Goliath with confidence and courage, but this giant of his own making was like a Frankenstein monster, which could not be slain. After much futile struggle he finally came to the conclusion that he could not conquer without confession. The way to victory over the monster of the conscience is to admit defeat and let God deal with it. If you try to fight them or hide them as if they didn't exist he will live in a house of horrors that will sicken you to your very bones.

A simple law runs all through the Bible. It is the same in both Testaments. Prov. 28:13 says, "He who concealed his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." I John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." As simple as this law of life is, it is hard for men to follow. It is hard for man to be honest with himself. David suffered for a year before he came forth in honesty before God. Human pride would rather try all kinds of maneuvers to justify itself. We are all tempted at times to try and be clever rather than confess. We are like the fisherman who had hard luck, and so on the way home he entered a fish store. He said to the dealer, "Just stand where you are and throw me 5 of the biggest fish you have." "But why throw them?" asked the puzzled dealer. The less than honest fisherman replied, "So I can tell my family I caught them. I may be a poor fisherman, but I'm no liar." If clever deceit was limited to fisherman, I suppose the world would not suffer seriously, but there is no such limitation in man's efforts to avoid honesty about his failures.

Edmund Gosse in *Father And Son* tells of a very pious man, a Mr. Dormant, who received into his home a paying guest. The old man was very wealthy and soon died, and he left his entire fortune to Mr. Dormant. A son of the old man returned from abroad and discovered what had happened, and naturally went to court. It came out in the trial that Mr. Dormant had held the old man's hand and made him sign the will on his deathbed. He tried to justify his action before the judge by maintaining that he had only done his duty in preventing so much money from being spent on the evil pleasures of the world. He went to prison but he never admitted to any wrong doing. So great is man's power of self-deception that someone said there are Christians who, if they found someone's

purse left in a pew, could persuade themselves that it was the providence of God in meeting their financial need. Failure to be honest about sin leads to all kinds of hypocrisy. If we walk in the light we will be honest with ourselves, with others, and before God. We will escape much of the sorrow of sin if we are quick to confess it.

Paul said in Acts 24:16, "I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward God and toward men." Paul had too many battles to fight, and too much to do for Christ to get bogged down in the futile struggle of trying to hide sin. He apparently confessed his sin immediately to God, and then went out of his way to confess and apologize to men when he sinned against them. Paul kept a clear conscience and was able to maintain his mental health and moral strength.

Confession of sin can be either a private or a public matter. Sin can be against men as well as God, and the confession then must be made to the offended person as well as to God. When the Prodigal returned he confessed he had sinned against heaven and against his father, and he was no more worthy to be called his son. In verse 4 David says, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." This has been a puzzle for many, but it really is no mystery. He could not confess to Uriah whom he had killed. Bathsheba had shared in his sin and was now his wife. On the human level things have been worked out, and it was only before God that all was still a mess. David had no one to confess to except God. It was God's law that he had broken, and it was God that he was continually offending by his unconfessed sin. Sin may only last a moment, but the sin of being unwilling to confess it can last moments without end, even until there is no one left to confess to but God.

All sin is sin against God. If we sin against people it is only sin because we violate a law of God. All confession, therefore, is legitimate before God, but not all sin should be confessed before men. Confession is to go as far as the sin. If your sin has hurt another person, then confess to that person. If it has hurt the church, then confess to the church. Public confession of private sin is a dangerous practice, which can do more harm than good. Public confession meetings are a gold mine for gossipers. All private sin should be dealt with in private. The person who confesses mental sins is being foolish. Nothing but simpleminded folly could convince a man guilty of lust to go and confess this to a woman. It would be proper to talk to a counselor, but not to the object of lust, or in public.

Confession can be a means of getting attention and of actually promoting sin. A preacher, listening to a young man confess his sin, interrupted, and said, "You aren't confessing, you are bragging." As important as confession is for forgiveness and health, it can be harmful if this rule is not obeyed: "The circle of confession should be the circle offended by the sin." It is foolish to share private sin that never affects others. To do so is like the old German immigrant who years ago ordered a stone from a mail order house. When it arrived it had no legs on it, and he wrote the company as follows: "Vot you mean, the stove came already yet, but I no find some laigs on which it to stand. The stone is no good widout some laigs. I send him back your expense. I paid for stone with laigs, and want my money back quick. PS: "Since writing above I find the laigs inside the stove, not send him back now."

No harm was done by his sharing his frustration, and his sending the letter actually added to the world's store of humor. This is not the case, however, when you share your mistakes about people with other people. If you misjudge someone and later learn you were mistaken, just correct your attitude, but do not go to the person and say I use to think you were a snob, but now I know better. Such a confession is uncalled for, and can be very offensive. It could lead to a strained relationship

that otherwise might have been good. Folly is only magnified by being made public. Never write on the page of history any folly that can be erased while still in your mind. The reason Jesus stressed that sin begins in the mind is so that we can deal with it before it ever becomes a matter of action. Once a sin is out in the open, however, it must be openly confessed to the one offended.

D. L. Moody was giving an address one time and a theological student interrupted him. Moody snapped and irritated retort and went on. When he came to a close he paused and said, "Friends, I want to confess before you all that I made a great mistake at the beginning of this meeting. I answered my young brother down there foolishly. I asked God to forgive me. I asked him to forgive me." Then, as the world's most famous evangelist of that day, he stepped off the platform and went to shake the hands of the student. Someone said it was the greatest thing they ever saw Moody do. Great men of God are men who have learned the importance of keeping a clear conscience before God and man. They are men who frequently must say with David, "I acknowledge my transgression.

17. HONEST TO GOD Based on Psa. 51:6

Branch Rickey use to coach the University of Michigan baseball team before he became manager of the Dodgers. One day they were playing Brown University, and the Brown catcher, Walter Snell, hit what might have been a three bagger, but he stretched it into a home run. The first baseman, however, noticed that he didn't touch first base. Soon the whole team was a howling gang of protesters, and the empire didn't know what to do. Branch Rickey said, "This is easy to settle. Ask Walter Snell. I've known him for 10 years, and he is an honest man." The empire called Snell over and asked him if he touched first. He hung his head for a moment, and then said, "No, I didn't touch first." It cost Brown the game and made Walter feel humiliated. Telling the truth can be costly.

Reuben Donnelley had a mother who used to tell him stories about the ermine. They were so spotless with their white fur that hunters would try to drive them toward the mud because they knew the ermine would suffer itself to be captured before it would soil its pure garment. She told him that her dreams were that he would be a man of honor and truth in the business world when he became a man. Reuben became a stockbroker on Wall Street, and he made a lot of money, but then he went broke and was forced into bankruptcy. He paid off hundreds of his investors 27 cents on the dollar. Many of them were poor people and they lost good money because of his bad judgment. Reuben then invented the classified telephone directory and made a fortune in a very few years. One day he sat down and wrote out checks to all those who had lost money because of his mistakes. He had no legal obligation to do so, but he felt a moral obligation. It cost him to be honest and to honor his debts.

Let me share one more illustration from ancient history. Regulus was a prisoner of the Carthaginians. They sent him to Rome with a convoy of ambassadors to sue for peace. If peace was not granted, he was to return. He took an oath and swore that he would come back. When he appeared in Rome he urged the senators to persevere in the war. This meant he would have to return and be the prisoner of the enemy. The senators tried to persuade him that he did not have to keep his word to the enemy. He replied, "Have you resolved to dishonor me? I am not ignorant that death

and torture are preparing for me, but what are these to the shame of an infamous action, or the wounds of a guilty mind?" He returned to Carthage and died under torture. Keeping your word can be costly.

These three historical illustrations make it clear that being honest is not easy, and often it is very expensive. It may cost honor, wealth, or even life itself, and yet men pay these high prices because they are aware that dishonesty is even more costly. Dishonesty puts you out of kilter with the whole universe. Guilt makes millions feel they are going against the grain of life, and it is a struggle to get they know not where. David went that futile path also, but like the Prodigal Son, he finally came to himself, faced up to his sin and folly honestly, and returned to God. In verse 13 he says he will teach transgressors God's ways, and when he does sinners will return to God. Teaching men the ways of God is a powerful means of evangelism. Many men never turn to God because they do not understand His ways of mercy, love and forgiveness. They do not understand what He wants of them. David learned the hard way, and he records it for all men to learn without first being fools.

The truth he learned, which we want to focus upon, is that in verse 6 where he says, "Surely you desire truth in the inner parts." David learned the major lesson of life that God has built it so that there is no way to be happy without honesty in the inner man. It seems to be a simple enough truth, but the fact is, very few, even among Christians, realize the full implications of God's demands for honesty. Once a man begins to deceive himself and fails to be honest about his own sin and weakness, he soon becomes hypocritical and hardened so that he is almost useless as a servant of Christ. We will come back to the believer, but we need to point out first that the unbeliever who is dishonest about his sinful nature, and who refuses to admit his need for a Savior, can go one of two ways, and both are a foretaste of hell itself.

Some go the way of guilt and suffer a plague worse than the bubonic, which is the plague of conscience. They do not believe in the laws of God, but they have a voice within that does, and it does not let them rest. A little girl heard her father tell her mother he couldn't go with them to grandmothers because he had to work on his invoice. Not knowing what an invoice was, she put her own interpretation on it, and she told her grandma that daddy couldn't come because he was having trouble with his conscience. While conscience is an invoice, and sometimes it lists all the judgments one deserves for his sin. James Magner in *Mental Health In A Mad World* wrote, "One of the surest tests of mental health is a devotion to and keenness for truth." Telling the truth even if it hurts is better than medicine and vitamins, but when men refuse to be honest about their sin they get sick.

When Macbeth sees the pitiful state into which a sense of guilt has plunged his wife because of their murder, he turns to his court physician and pleads, "Cure her of that. Canst thou not minister to a mind disease'd, pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow, raze out the written troubles of the brain, and with some sweet oblivious antidote cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart?" The doctor replies, "This disease is beyond my practice..." There is only one who can handle such cases of the conscience, and His cure demands honesty and truth in the inward parts. There must be admission and confession of one's sin. Masses refused to be honest, and the result is a world of the mentally and morally sick.

The other path that many take is the path where they so sear their conscience and harden it that it hardly bothers them at all. They reject all standards, and right and wrong have no meaning because there is no God for them. God is rejected so that life is every man for himself. Life is a

ballgame with no rules and no empire. It sounds exciting as they plan all they can do in a world of total freedom. But after a while they discover that a baseball game with no bases, a football game without goals, a basketball game without a hoop, and a life without God is meaningless. Their dishonesty leads them to a road that goes nowhere. Gertrude Stein describes the intellectuals she met in Paris "As belonging to nothing, and mastered by no great loyalty. They had no gods to serve." T. S. Elliot describes the frustration situation of those with feelings of futility:

The stained time ridden faces,
Distracted from distraction by distraction,
Filled with fancies and empty meaning,
Tumid apathy with no concentration,
Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind.

Dr. Carl Jung in *Modern Man In Search For A Soul* says that it doesn't make any difference if his patients are rich or poor, social lights or nobodies, he hears them all say, "If I only knew that my life had some meaning and purpose, then there would be no silly story about my nerves!" It is not my intention to over-simplify, but the fact is, the cure for both those plagued by conscience and those cursed by emptiness and meaninglessness is to be found in honesty and truth in the inward parts. Truth within leads directly to Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He alone can cleanse the conscience and fill the life with meaning.

It is surprising how often the Scriptures link the mercy of God with the truth of God. They go together, for it is only when we see His truth and acknowledge it as fitting us that we can expect to experience His mercy. That is the way David came to call upon God for mercy, and this is the logical pattern for all.

Psa. 25:10 says, "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth..."

Psa. 61:7 refers to David as king-"He shall abide before God forever; O prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him."

Psa. 20:28 says, "Mercy and truth preserve the king."

Psa. 16:6 says, "By mercy and truth iniquity is cleanse."

Truth and mercy go together to preserve and cleanse, and in Psa. 85 where there is a plea for God to forgive Israel, and where there is great praise for His bringing them back from captivity, we read this description of what salvation is in verses 10 and 11, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven." All of this gives us a picture of how God and man are reconciled. God is not reconciled with sin in the sinner, but with truth in the sinner. The truth in man meets the mercy of God, and when they meet there is a kiss of peace that cleanses from sin and brings about reconciliation. Truth within, or inner honesty, is no mere minor requirement of God. It is essential for both salvation and sanctification.

Dishonesty will hinder the work of God in the soul of any man, whether they be believer or unbeliever. Honesty, therefore, or facing up to the full truth about ourselves in relation to God and the world, is a subject we cannot afford to neglect. Billy Graham preaches on honesty frequently. In fact, he does so more than any other preacher of which I am aware. I won't repeat his proof that we are living in an age of chiselry in which dishonesty has invaded every level of our society, but he does prove it, and he gives evidence that Christians are also guilty.

We sometimes even use the devil's tools in the service of the Lord. We use trickery and dishonest witness in order to impress non-Christians. If we are honest with ourselves, we will not use deceptive methods, but simply be true to what we are. It is so easy to honor God with the lips when our hearts are from Him. Our hearts are far from God when we pretend to be what we are not. David probably pretended to be happy in the Lord that whole year in which he was miserable. He didn't want to give a bad impression to the people, and so he justified hypocrisy on the basis that it was for the sake of others. He looked like a real worshiper at the temple, and no doubt spoke eloquently of the Lord. He possibly even wrote some songs for worship, but then he would go home and reveal in the privacy of his own family how rotten he could be. His guilt would make him a bear in private, but the mask would go on as soon as he entered public life.

Since total honesty is a perfection that waits for the new heaven and new earth, all of us wear some masks, and are to some degree hypocrites, but the goal of the Christian is to lessen that degree more and more by learning to be more honest with themselves. I enjoy a Christian who does not pretend to have passed up Paul in the Christian race. Some give you the impression they have arrived, and they do not need to press on like Paul had to do. This lack of honesty will keep them back from reaching the goal. The honest Christian is easy to be with. You don't feel uncomfortable because they are real. If they do something stupid, they admit it is stupid. If they have areas of their life where they fall short, they do not pretend otherwise. They can be honest with you because they are honest with themselves. They are not so anxious to impress others that they will deny their faults and needs. Such a Christian will go far in Christ-likeness, for he will strive to be true in his inward parts. He will not settle for self-deception.

The saying is, there is an exception to every rule, and that is true if you recognize that it is true of that rule as well, which means there are rules with no exceptions, and one of them is the rule of absolute honesty before God. There can never be a case where it is right to be dishonest with God, but what about dishonesty with men? Christians debate the issue of whether it is ever right to lie. What if you could save a life by doing so? There are numerous situations in life where deception seems to be the wise thing to do. This is certainly the case in sports. Deceiving your opponent is the key to winning. Some think it is all right to be dishonest if you are honest about it. It is like the store with the ad that said, "Why go somewhere else to be cheated when you can come here?" That sounds quite clever, and being clever is not necessarily dishonest. An old gentleman said to the honest boy who returned the ten dollars he had lost, "I know you are an honest boy but it was a ten dollar bill I lost and not ten ones." "I know mister," said the lad, "But the last time I found a big bill the owner didn't have any change." The little guy was self-serving, no doubt, but not dishonest.

Cleverness, however, can be a great tool for dishonesty. David was very clever in the way he went about his cover up of his sin. You recall how he gave Uriah a leave from battle to be with his wife Bathsheba. He thought that would get him off the hook, and Uriah would think he was the father of the child. When that failed he arranged for him to be killed by enemy soldiers. How much closer to the perfect murder can you get? Who could suspect anything when it was the enemy who killed him? David was clever, but it was all devoted to defying the law of God. No amount of cleverness, however successful, can be acceptable when it violates the revealed will of God.

Even if deceit gets a man into the kingdom of God, he will be saved, but the deceiver will be judged for his sin of dishonesty. God desires truth in the inward parts, and we can only attain the heights by staying on the level. We must level with God and man. The one place where every one

of us can be an expert is in personal honesty. We cannot know a fraction of the ocean of facts on anything, but we can be honest about what we really feel. If I think the earth is flat, as many Christians once did, I am not evil just because I am wrong. Being wrong is no sin, for if that was the case, every time you missed a question on a test you would be sinning. Being wrong is only a sin if you are so proud that you feel you are infallible, and then demand that others be wrong with you. That is what many Christians did to those who refused to believe the world was flat.

True honesty is always humble. Take a look at yourself and you will look at others differently says the songwriter. The honest man is a humble man who looks at others with greater understanding. He understands their struggle with sin, and even their love of sin. There is compassion for others in the heart of the honest Christian, for they know that accept for the grace of God they would be as bad as any sinner. Jeremiah said that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. That is why the hardest battle we have in pleasing God is in letting truth reign in our inward parts.

As important as honesty is, it is not the Gospel. Being honest cannot save us, and it might even destroy us. The Prodigal came home honesty confessing that he was not worthy to be called his father's son. His honesty was not what led to the great banquet prepared for him. His honesty alone led him only to the servant's quarters. He said to his father that he was not good and that he should be made a mere servant. The servant with the one talent was being honest with himself. He said he was no good at business and so he faced his limitations and did nothing. His honesty was severely rebuked, for self-honesty can be a curse. Honesty with self reveals that we are weak and sinful. Honesty with self leads men to despair. Honesty is only a great virtue when we are honest about Christ as well. Paul was honest with self when he said, "I am the chief of sinners," but he was honest about Christ when he said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Honesty, which sees self as an empty vessel is only a blessing when one is also honest about the power of Christ to fill that vessel with the water of life. Truth in the inward parts means that self is humbled and Christ is exalted. When a person combines these two they are being honest to self and honest to God.