

THE SOWER

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Dealing with Adversity



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LETTER FROM THE CEO

Dan Gallagher

This month's issue of *The Sower* deviates greatly from tradition (something we tend to do in our ministry). Normally people start off the new year by talking about resolutions, vows, and commitments, and you can be assured that we seriously considered going in that same direction. However, after great deliberation and prayer, (something we also tend to do a lot of around here), we decided to devote this issue to the theme of adversity. I can hear you ask, "Why adversity?" and I tend to agree because, after all, who wants to talk about opposition, difficulties, trials, pain, derailment, etc.? Looking at these elements of our lives can be painful, but sticking our heads in the sand and hoping they will go away really doesn't work, does it? Neither does taking the attitude that we should just learn to "get over them" and move on.

The subject of adversity can definitely generate a lot of questions, such as, "What is the source of adversity in my life?" "What part, if any, have I played in bringing on the adversity that I'm experiencing, and what is the appropriate response I should take to the adversity?" Because there are many theological opinions about adversity, there is great potential for misunderstanding and error. This month's feature article by Mark Graeser, "Dealing with Adversity," is very illuminating, and we hope it brings great clarity to this subject.

There was a time when I believed that there is a spiritual reason behind most of the obstacles in a person's life. It was my thinking that if I lived with a positive mindset (what I falsely thought was faith), I could overcome all adversity. Whenever things continued adversely, I would tell myself, "It must be my lack of believing." But the problems kept coming even when I knew I was thinking and confessing positives, and at times they increased significantly. The testimony of what was really going on in my life helped me discard this erroneous thinking. When I began to travel to other parts of the world, I took note that in very impoverished countries I was finding extremely devout Christians who had great faith but still lived in very adverse conditions. I began to realize that adversity is an inescapable reality of life, and I also realized that my wrong thinking was limiting my ability to see God at work.

When we do not understand adversity from a biblical perspective we will tend to react to it improperly. Too many times I've lashed out in anger, withdrawn in pain, or even laughed it off as if everything was fine. Denial and avoidance definitely help us avoid adversity, but eventually such an approach demands a payment of great cost. I have experienced the loss of relationship and authentic connection to others as a result.

Many times I have had the attitude that I just need to "get over it." This too has seemed successful for a while, but I now realize that there are some things that we really do not "just get over." How does a woman ever really get over being raped, a parent get over the loss of a child, or a person get over being abandoned as a child? It's not a matter of "getting over" these things; it's a matter of learning how to properly process such traumas in a healthy and godly way.

Like every year so far, this coming year will be filled with adversity. There will be wars, earthquakes, tsunamis, disease, and suffering. Personally we will all be faced with many of the ups and downs of life. I wish I could say that every decision I make as a husband, father, friend, minister, and CEO of this ministry will be right, but I know that won't be the case. Some of the problems I will face this year will be my own fault. We also know that as a ministry we will be challenged, confronted, and at times opposed on both a physical and spiritual level. When you take on the tradition of entrenched theological and denominational systems and fight for truth, you have to expect that adversity will "come with the territory." Resolutions, vows, and commitments are a good thing, but this issue of *The Sower* is dedicated to dealing with adversity because we believe that by gaining a more holistic understanding of this subject we can be better prepared to make the right choices and responses, and thereby increase our opportunities for successful living.

We all love you and we pray for you daily.

P.S. My resolution for the year: "to stand faithful in the face of adversity."

DEALING WITH ADVERSITY

Are we relating to adversity in a healthy, biblical way?

BY MARK GRAESER

If there is one thing that unites us humans it is the fact that all of us must deal with adversity. For some people, adversity is a constant, a way of life. For others, it is an occasional reality. As believers, we too will face adversity and therefore we need to give some serious thought to whether we are relating to it in a healthy, biblical way or not. Doing so will really open our eyes to how much of God's Word addresses the issue of adversity. This is an important theme throughout the entire Bible.

The following test is designed to help us see what our general attitude toward adversity is. Go ahead and take the test and see which statement(s) feel the most true to your experience and teaching:

- a) If one is really walking with God, life should be easy, and things should come together without a lot of stress and strain. Hassles, adversity, and opposition indicate that God is not leading us in that direction.

Always True, Sometimes True, False

- b) Persistent adversity in our lives indicates a lack of faith, because as sons of God we have the power to overcome adversity and the Adversary. We are superconquerors over every situation, meaning that we can and should exercise a victorious faith over negative circumstances because it is God's will that we not suffer through adversity and He wants us to demonstrate His power.

Always True, Sometimes True, False

- c) That adversity is caused by one's personal sinfulness, and brought on because sin and idolatry have weakened our defenses. If we are really loving and obeying God as we should we would be spared adversity and manifest victory.

Always True, Sometimes True, False

- d) (1) That adversity, temptation, or suffering is specifically, personally, and intentionally sent by God to discipline us, to purify our motives, or to prepare us for service to Him. (2) God is in complete control of everything that happens to us, good and bad, and that nothing happens unless it first goes across His desk for approval.

Always True, Sometimes True, False

- e) Adversity is the direct result of demonic oppression or the attack of the Devil. Adversity validates that we are on the right path and the Enemy is trying to discourage us.

Always True, Sometimes True, False

- f) Adversity is the necessary consequence of sin's entrance into the world, and affects believers and unbelievers alike. Everyone will face adversity, which may or may not be related to our choices or actions, or that God or the Devil are involved. Learning to handle adversity well will result in purification of our motives, strengthening of our faith in God's deliverance, and free us from the bondage of needing to be comfortable, among other things.

Always True, Sometimes True, False

This last statement is the only one that is always true. The others are sometimes true, or in the case of D. (2), false. Believing that God is in control of all adverse circumstances, as unfortunately many Christians do, is to be rendered unable to be discerning about the various sources of adversity—God gives it all. Furthermore, believing that God is the source of all adversity makes it hard to pray for deliverance, and in many cases results in people turning away from God altogether when they need Him the most. That adds tragedy to what may have only proven to be temporary adversity.

Recently the news has been full of natural disasters that affect saint and sinner alike. Hurricane Katrina has been a devastating storm, inflicting billions of dollars of damage in the Southern U.S. Then Hurricane Rita followed closely behind, wreaking even more devastation. People on our mailing list, strong believers in God's blessing and providence, have suffered along with the rest of the population in those areas. Their challenge, as ours, is to endure such things with faith in God's goodness and ability to bring deliverance and redemption to the situation.

Besides natural disasters, there are many other ways that we experience adversity. Marital breakdowns, parents facing teenage rebellion, financial hardship, crime, sickness, disease, accidents, problems with neighbors, friends, bosses, coworkers, city governments, and on and on. Sometimes the world seems like it spawns an endless amount of adversity. On top of that, being a Christian believer in an unbelieving world only increases the level of adversity that we experience. As it is written, "...everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12).

When it comes to dealing with adversity, we all tend to have a default way to deal with it—get angry, get shut down and depressed, feel overwhelmed, etc. But to deal effectively with adversity we need to have a range of responses depending upon the source and nature of the adversity. Mental health is indicated by a healthy range of responses appropriate to whatever the situation requires. When we are under spiritual attack, for example, the appropriate response is to become aggressive in prayer and to take authority over the spiritual wickedness sent against us. When we are dealing with the kind of adversity that results from our choices and commitments, then we learn to take it in stride and not become reactive at all. We just accept it as the predictable effect of our choices.

"Adversity" is a state of hardship or affliction; misfortune. "Hardship" is "privation" or a "lack of the basic necessities of life." Much of what we in more prosperous countries run into is hardly worthy to be called adversity. The Western world, with most of the rest of the developed world not far behind, is becoming increasingly committed to comfort, ease, and convenience. We are determined to make life easier and eliminate hardship—we have indoor plumbing, electricity, cars, stores to buy everything under the sun instead of growing it, making it, etc. We have more and more "drive through" convenience but maybe we are not better off—we have added more stress, we're busier than ever, and in our commitment to being comfortable we're losing our ability to endure hardship.

It may help us to recognize the difference between an inconvenience, a problem, and a predicament. An inconvenience is a circumstance that is not suited to one's comfort, purpose, or needs. Most of the time we just need to endure these situations with patience and hope.

A problem is a circumstance that is a hindrance to us achieving a goal. We need to work to find solutions to our problems, using our faith, our resources, our imagination and intellect to overcome our problems. It is not healthy to expect God to overcome our problems for us. He has given us, and will give us, what we need to overcome our problems ourselves. He guides us and helps us along the way, but allows us to grow up, to be resourceful, and to be fully alive and aware of His provisions around us. This also takes faith, and is an expression of faith—we trust that God has provided the solution to our problems and we just need to act accordingly.

A predicament, however, is a set of circumstances that defies a solution, and reaching a goal is impossible with our available resources. These situations are common in our fallen world, and cry out for us to have faith in the God of the possible. As the old hymn says, "God specializes in things called impossible." The sooner we

realize we are in a predicament, the sooner we can turn the situation over to God, recognizing that it is out of our league. This can bring us great peace in the midst of adversity.

A “crisis” is defined as a situation that demands more of us than we have resources to cope with it. When we run out of our standard coping resources, this is an invitation to reach out to God and others for help. How we handle such crises tests our faith, our humility, and our patience to endure apparently hopeless situations with the kind of hope that Abraham had when told he was to father a child at 99—“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed...” (Rom. 4:18).

Inconveniences, problems, and predicaments all represent “temptations.” Temptation is not sin, but it is an *invitation* to sin. It is *also* an invitation to have faith. Adversity tempts us to doubt God’s provision and protection, and presents us with an opportunity to sin. It therefore serves us by letting us see what is in our hearts. To “tempt” is literally “to pierce.” So in a sense to be tempted is to be cut open so that what is inside is revealed. Sometimes we do not know how strong we are until we are tested. Other times we fail the test and wimp out. In either case, adversity helps us to see what we are made of, and when we do not like what we see, to have the opportunity to shore up our faith and character so that we will not break there again. It is said that the place where metal is welded together after a break is stronger than the original metal. If it breaks again, it will not be on the weld.

God is like a plumber who will test pipe joints by gradually raising the water pressure and seeing where the leaks are before turning the pressure on all the way. God works that way with us as well, to bring us along in the faith so we can handle more and more responsibility and spiritual pressure.

We often just do not have the right attitude toward adversity. We think it is from God when it is not. We think it’s from the Devil when it’s not; we resist it when we need to accept it; we accept it when we need to resist it. Sometimes we blame others when it’s the consequence of our own choices. We need to take more responsibility for the consequences of our choices instead of playing a victim role and feeling persecuted.

Rather than being times that seem to threaten our faith, or reveal our lack of faith, shouldn’t we look at these times of adversity as the very times that most invite us to deepen our faith in God?—and to endure in faith with much profit to ourselves and others? Shouldn’t we learn to let adversity drive us into the loving arms of our strong Father to depend upon Him and His goodness?

But sometimes we try to tough it out instead of reaching out to have others help us. We do not let our needs be known, or request to have people pray for us. We are always amazed by those silent sufferers who have been dealing with terrible circumstances without telling a soul. But we were meant to face adversity in community with others—and how wonderful is it when a community comes together to help one another—like in the aftermath of 9/11, or the recent hurricane disasters. When other Christians have hurt us we often withdraw and isolate ourselves thinking that we will be better off. But isolating ourselves in order not to be hurt does not eliminate the potential for pain but it does prevent the possibility of being connected to others for mutual support in times of adversity.

People who have been taught a prosperity/health/wealth gospel are often filled with shame for being unable to cope with their adversity alone and needing help from others. Feeling shame on top of the painful circumstances they are experiencing doubles their misery. Somehow they think that they are not a very good believer if they are facing such adversity, forgetting that God’s Word says that we will all have a full measure of adversity to deal with as Christians.

Correctly handling or “rightly dividing” God’s Word as to the place of adversity in the life of Christian faith is difficult; we must find a balance between the extremes of “faith conquers all” and “God sends all adversity so do not bother praying to be delivered from it.” Perhaps there is some truth to these beliefs, but not in every case and situation, and rigidly holding to them as absolute truths is toxic. We have got to understand the place of adversity in the life of a Christian and come to a healthy attitude toward it—one that will be able to use adversity as a means of building faith and godliness.

The biggest key to handling adversity well is to keep in mind how endurance can further God's purposes in our own lives, and on others' lives as well by our example and influence. God is interested in building our faith, our trust, and our character—and helping us to learn to trust Him. Sometimes He does this by asking us to endure hardship. He is more committed to our growth in godliness than in ensuring our comfort. Adversity of all kinds can be used by God to fulfill His purposes in our lives; in fact, true godliness is revealed, developed, and strengthened through facing and handling adversity well.

Adversity comes from four main sources and we need to discern the source in order to handle it appropriately:

- The fallen world
- Our choices
- The Devil and wicked spirits (Eph. 6)
- God and Jesus Christ

The Fallen World

Since sin entered the world through Adam's fateful decision to disobey God's direct command, enduring adversity has been a necessary part of the life of all humanity in this fallen world ever after. This reality is described poignantly in Genesis 3.

Genesis 3:16-18

(16) To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

(17) To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

(18) It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

When sin entered the world, adversity followed like the tail on the dog—guaranteeing it as a universal human experience. This means that we all must accept our own measure of pain and suffering—we cannot get out of it; I cannot suffer yours for you nor can you endure mine for me. Owning my own pain means that I should not make others pay for my pain. I do not want to be one of those hurt people who hurt others. I want my hurt to be redeemed and used by God to help me heal others. I want it to make me compassionate, committed to relieving the pain of others, and long for the new heaven and earth wherein dwells righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13-KJV).

Our choices

Because adversity is a reality, we cannot choose to avoid it. But we can often choose what adversity we want to deal with. For instance, we can choose to be married, and accept the "trouble in the flesh" that comes along with it (1 Cor. 7:28-KJV). Or we can choose to remain single and deal with the adversity of aloneness. We can choose to live in the path of hurricanes, or on earthquake fault lines. Whatever we choose to do, we should accept responsibility for whatever adversity comes our way because of our choices, whether the consequences are known or intended.

Furthermore, enduring adversity is a necessary part of the life of a believer. When a person chooses to accept Jesus Christ as their savior, they move from death unto life and from the power of Satan to God. The Devil will do what he can to make us regret that choice, and "...steal and kill and destroy..." (John 10:10) when he can. The Apostle Paul, a very strong believer, describes his experience in 2 Timothy 3.

2 Timothy 3:10 and 11

(10) You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance,

(11) persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

Paul then makes a profound prediction in verse 12: “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” If this is so, is the solution then to live an unrighteous life in order to keep from being persecuted? No way, because the wicked person will flee when no one pursues, and has a host of problems of his own (Prov. 28:1, etc.). Plus, the ungodly have no basis for believing they will be delivered from their problems, where the righteous can expect to see the salvation of the Lord: “A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all” (Ps. 34:19).

Yes the LORD is faithful to deliver His people when they trust in Him. They have chosen the adversity that comes from serving the true God, and for that they will be richly rewarded in this life and in Christ’s Kingdom.

Another choice we make is whether to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, or to love something else more. Biblically, these are called “idols.” Idols are a poor substitute, and cannot deliver us when we are in trouble. When we discover that we have been caught up in worshiping idols, we repent and turn again to God. This will make a big difference in our ability to see the power of God deliver us from troubles.

The Devil and Wicked Spirits

Sometimes our adversity comes as a direct result of being attacked by the Adversary. The Hebrew word for Satan even means “Adversary.” His entire purpose is to oppose the purposes of God, and if we are in the will of God helping to accomplish His purposes we can expect to have satanically inspired opposition. We ought not to take this opposition personally, though, as if the Devil has any personal interest in us. Rather, his purpose is simply to oppose God, and we are getting in his way. This helps us to remember not to attempt to fight him in the flesh, but by prayer, by faith, by holding forth the powerful Word of God. We resist him, and he will flee from us, promises James 4:7.

Once we have eliminated other possibilities and realize that we are under spiritual attack, we should respond aggressively and go into “warfare mode.” We resist the Devil, not accommodate him or accept his schemes. We seek to bring his schemes into the light, and resist them aggressively. When God’s people are not discerning and fail to see the attack of the Enemy, they accept circumstances that they ought not to accept. This is particularly true of sickness and disease, but is also true of other kinds of circumstances that God has nothing to do with. In such situations, God is waiting for us to trust Him for deliverance, which will not happen if we are willing to accept the circumstance, or not fight back.

Dealing with adversity tends to make us feel put upon, but its value is found in how it can serve to further God’s purposes in us and in those we serve by and *through* the adversity. Even when adversity is directly sent against us by the Enemy, which certainly happens, God can use it for His purposes, as He did with Jesus’ torture and death by crucifixion.

God and Jesus Christ

Sometimes God calls us into adversity, or is the source of adversity. He drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil (Matt. 4:1), and He disciplines us as a Father does his children. That often means that He lets us learn from our mistakes, but sometimes it means that He asks us to endure hardship that is training in righteousness or godliness.

The Bible is honest about the reality of hardship for those in relationship with God, and it prepares us for hardship by describing the often-difficult lives of David, Jesus, Paul and many others. In fact, this is one of the

stated purposes of God’s Word—to prepare believers for adversity by providing them with examples of godly individuals who show courage, hope, and the capacity to endure.

Romans 15:4

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

There is a very close relationship in Scripture between godliness (being like God) and adversity. In fact, godliness is more clearly seen and revealed through adversity. The following Scripture shows that godliness is built upon perseverance, which is enduring adversity:

2 Peter 1:5 and 6

(5) For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;
(6) and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;

In James 1:2-4, perseverance is given a human quality, being pictured as one who works. The work that perseverance does is a “perfect work,” purifying faith and godliness.

Romans expresses a similar truth by founding godly character upon the basis of perseverance:

Romans 5:3 and 4

(3) “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;
(4) perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

Hope, called an anchor in Hebrews, serves like an anchor on a ship to keep us facing the adversity and helping us to ride out the storm.

Having godly character is a good way to get God’s attention when you’re in a predicament. 2 Peter 2:9 says that the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials.

God’s Word actually compares physical exercise and “exercising” godliness.

1 Timothy 4:7 and 8

(7) Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.
(8) For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

Just as there are many benefits of physical exercise, so there are of godliness. Physical exercise requires resistance against something: gravity, weights, body weight, etc. No resistance, no work, no gain. But the benefits of physical exercise are many—relieving tension and stress, stimulating the mind, helping maintain stable weight, controlling appetite, boosting self-image, improving flexibility, increasing “good” (HDL) cholesterol, strengthening bones, etc. Similarly, godliness is training against resistance. We actually exercise (and grow) our faith by and through handling adversity. Memorizing Scripture is a good mental exercise, but when remembered and applied in times of adversity it is especially profitable. Scriptures held in the mind but not applied are profitless.

The Apostle Paul was in godliness training all his life. 2 Corinthians 12 describes one such training experience:

2 Corinthians 12:8-10

(8) Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

(9) But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for **my power is made perfect in weakness.**” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, **so that Christ’s power may rest on me.**

(10) That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For **when I am weak, then I am strong.**

Paul prayed three times, thinking that he could alter his circumstances. But the answer to his prayer was not to change the circumstances but to change him—to give him whatever he needed internally in order to endure the outward circumstances. Jesus experienced the same thing in the garden of Gethsemane. His prayer for another way was not answered, and he surrendered to the will of God, which in that case was to endure the cross, and despise the shame associated with it (Heb. 12:2).

Next time you are dealing with adversity, try the “three prayers test.” If after the three intense prayers your circumstances are unchanged, perhaps you need to go *through* the adversity and not around it. Begin praying for strength to endure, for patience, for love for others, for other elements of godliness.

Sometimes by God’s grace we triumph over the adversity and see the miraculous transformation of our circumstances—as in the parting of the Red Sea or other miracles of God’s provision. Other times the transformation is internal—the Christ in us is magnified and we come out of the adversity with greater faith and confidence in God and ourselves. We learn that we have the ability and strength to endure and keep trusting God regardless of what life throws at us. That is very freeing, and even more valuable than deliverance from any particular adverse circumstance.

Is there something in your life that you might pray three times about? Go ahead and pray, and keep praying for the will of the Lord to be done. But try this also: ask God to use the situation to produce godly fruit in your life instead of just praying for the situation to be over. These times test our commitment to God’s purposes in our life. Do we want to be like Christ and have godly character? Sometimes this must come at the expense of our comfort, our convenience, and our autonomy or independence.

Requirement for Christian Leaders

Handling adversity well is a requirement for those who would lead God’s people. In 2 Timothy 2:3, Paul encourages Timothy to “endure hardship with us [the English transliteration is *sugkakopatheo*—literally “suffer evil,” i.e., undergo one’s share of suffering or share in hardship with someone] like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” He then likens Christian servant-leadership to military service, which involves a lot of hardship, and athletic competition, which also imposes a good deal of discipline and hardship. In athletic competition it is always harder to compete by the rules and some will therefore try to cheat. But competing within the often-difficult rules is the very thing that makes the competition exciting. Similarly, Christian servant-leadership requires a strong commitment to the purposes of God even at the expense of our own comfort. We must be prepared to go the more difficult way if that is the way the Lord leads.

Again, Paul exhorts Timothy, and thus all who would serve the Body of Christ, to “...keep your head in all situations, endure hardship (Greek ...discharge all the duties of your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5). Clearly it is not going to be easy doing so, and one will face much adversity in the process. But the rewards will be great, in this life and in the Millennial Kingdom.

The fact is, the Body of Christ needs servant-leaders who have demonstrated an ability to handle adversity in a healthy way—people who can endure all kinds of personal opposition, accusation, judgment, and persecution without bitterness, desire for revenge, defensiveness, and lashing out against others. Anyone can pretend to have godly qualities in evidence when things are going well, but to manifest godliness in the face of adversity shows that it is real and can be trusted. Some of these will be people who have hit bottom, cratered under adversity, but bounced back and are the better for the experience.

Christian servant-leaders must be people of integrity, who do not sell out their values when things get tough and they stand to lose something. They are people who exercise godliness regardless of the personal cost. A wise man once said, "Following the path of least resistance makes men and rivers crooked." Christian servant-leaders should be men and women who are prepared to meet the greatest resistance when necessary. The true God is not calling us to an easy life, but a life of obedience and faith despite the circumstances.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us revisit the test you took at the beginning of this article, and rewrite each statement so it is accurate.

- a) If one is walking with God, sometimes life is easy, and things come together without a lot of stress and strain. Other times we can be in the will of God and all hell is breaking loose. We cannot judge the righteousness of our spiritual path by the circumstances that accompany us.
- b) Persistent adversity awaits those committed to a righteous path, but God will deliver them from all their troubles. We are superconquerors in Christ, if not in this life, in the next because of the reward that will come to us for our faithfulness to stand in the face of adversity.
- c) Adversity is sometimes caused by our personal sinfulness, and brought on because sin and idolatry have weakened our defenses. When we suspect that this may be the case we quickly repent and seek God's forgiveness and restoration of fellowship with the expectation of deliverance. We take responsibility for our choices and the consequences that followed from them, both intended and unintended. In this way we grow in wisdom and understanding about how life works and how to avoid many problems.
- d) That some specific kinds of adversity or suffering is allowed by God to discipline us and fashion our character. We know He is for us, and only against our sin. This in no way impinges upon our faith in God's goodness, and that we can go to Him for comfort and deliverance in times of trouble.
- e) That some adversity is the direct result of demonic oppression or the attack of the Devil, and may or may not mean that we are on the right spiritual path. We steadfastly resist these assaults by being strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. We fight a spiritual fight using the name of Jesus Christ and the sword of the spirit, the Word of God. And we always keep in mind that the Enemy is interested only in hindering the purposes of God, and otherwise has no interest in us personally.
- f) That adversity is the necessary affect of sin's entrance into the world, and affects believers and unbelievers alike. Everyone will have a measure of adversity that can result in purification of our motives, strengthening of our faith in God's deliverance, and free us from the bondage of needing to be comfortable. The believer has the advantage of having faith in God to help during the trial and to deliver him or her out of it.☼

Further Study Materials

For further study, read our book "Don't Blame God! A Biblical Answer to the Problem of Evil, Sin, and Suffering." See page 5 of the enclosed price list or read key sections online at www.TruthOrTradition.com
Topic: Recommended Reading.

No More Mr. Nice Guy

By John W. Schoenheit

Everybody said he was the nicest guy in town,
But now he's dead; he's no longer around.
There's no more Mr. Nice Guy.

He used to sit on his porch
and wave as we drove by on our way to church,
where our spirits were lifted high.
That doesn't happen now, because
there's no more Mr. Nice Guy.

Nobody reached out to him with salvation's message glad.
He seemed so friendly, who would risk making him mad?
None of us dared tell him being "nice" wasn't good enough to get you saved.
We said that just seemed too tough.
Now, there's no more Mr. Nice Guy.

We wonder if he would have believed if we'd have pressed in hard.
Would he have let Jesus meet his need
and taken him as Lord?
Well, now we'll never know, because
there's no more Mr. Nice Guy.

A bunch of us feel guilty that we never took the risk
to reach him with salvation's call,
to tell him about Jesus, the All in All;
to press in hard, and maybe fall,
But I guess our guilt is nothing at all
compared to his future at Judgment's call, now that
there's no more Mr. Nice Guy.

Now a decision time has come
because Nice Guys are dying every day.
Til Jesus comes we can cry in our rum,
or harden our hearts til there is no way
to feel any pain for those who are gone forever, and
there's no more Mr. Nice Guy.

But we don't have to cry or harden our hearts.
There is a third choice we can make.
We can witness, even if it smarts,
and the message of Jesus boldly take
to a dying world, without hope or love,
that needs to believe in the Savior from above.
We must do this before...there's no more Mr. Nice Guy.
What day of rejoicing it would be,
If all around us we could see,
Millions of Nice Guys, all born again.
And no one ever could say then,
there's no more Mr. Nice Guy.

Want More Happiness in Your life?

Unhappiness is rampant in our society today. The sale of anti-depressants is at an all-time high. Psychiatrists and counselors are doing a booming business helping people cope with life and find even a little happiness. Suicide is a national problem, especially among teens. Why all the unhappiness? Because mankind, and the world in general, is broken. Scripture teaches us that “the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Rom. 8:22). Anyone with eyes to see knows that is the case. The world is broken and people are unhappy. Even animals are unhappy. The “Law of the Jungle” is: “Kill or be killed; eat or be eaten.”

What if you could buy a ticket to a place where things weren't broken and where man and animals could live in peace? You would drop everything and run to your local travel agent, and rightly so. Sad to say, there is no such place...yet. But there will be! The Bible promises a place where all the people will be happy, and “...everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away” (Isa. 35:10b). That is not all, even the animals will live in peace (Isa. 11:6-9).

Want to buy a ticket to that future place? You can't...because the trip is free! Jesus Christ paid for the ticket when he died for us on the cross, and now all anyone has to do to go to God's wonderful future world is get saved, which is easy. Here are the directions: **“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”** (Rom. 10:9). Don't delay, get your ticket for everlasting happiness today.

Figures of Speech: Keys to Effective Communication

Polyptoton

BY JOHN W. SCHOENHEIT

God is the Author of language, and the ability to communicate by words is one thing that sets apart man from all other creatures. God invented words so He could communicate with us and we can communicate with each other. Figures of speech are an indispensable linguistic component, adding emphasis and feeling to what we say and write.

No one has ever used language as precisely as does its Creator in His God-breathed revelation to mankind. When we recognize the figures of speech in the Bible, we are able to more fully enjoy the richness of the Word of God, and also learn much more truth from it. It is important, therefore, that we become at least somewhat familiar with figures of speech in Scripture, of which there are more than 200 varieties.

We all use such figurative language when we write or speak, often without being aware of it. It helps us to appreciate them, and understand the emphasis they bring to the text, when we recognize them for what they are. The “Figure of the Month” that we are going to cover is *Polyptoton*, which brings powerful emphasis to the subject being discussed, both in speaking and writing. *Polyptoton* is the repetition of the same word with the same meaning, but in a different case, mood, tense, person, degree, number, gender, etc.¹

A wonderful example of *Polyptoton* occurs early in Genesis, when God is speaking to Adam. By using *Polyptoton* He gives a strong warning to Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:17

but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

The words “surely die” are a translation of the Hebrew *mut mut*, (the “u” is long), but the first *mut* is an infinitive form of the verb, while the second is an imperfect form. We would translate the Hebrew literally as, “dying, you will die.” This is a strong statement about the consequences of disobedience. The “surely die” of the NIV carries the sense, but does not have the same feel as the *Polyptoton* when accurately translated. “Dying, you will die” is an especially strong warning in light of the fact that, out of His goodness and grace, God had just told Adam that he could freely eat of every tree of the Garden, which He also expressed by *Polyptoton*: “Of every tree of the Garden, eating you will eat” (Gen. 2:16b; author’s translation).

Examples of *Polyptoton* occur throughout the Bible, in both the Old and New Testament.

- To Eve God said, “...increasing, I will increase your sorrow...” (Gen. 3:16). This is usually translated, “...I will greatly increase your sorrow....”
- God said to Jeremiah, “...weep bitterly for him who is exiled, because he will never return...” (Jer. 22:10b). The Hebrew text reads, “...weeping, weep for him....”
- When Isaac realized he had not blessed Esau, his firstborn, he “trembled violently” (Gen. 27:33). Young’s literal renders that Hebrew, “Isaac trembleth a very great trembling....”
- Numbers records the dissatisfaction some of the Israelites felt about eating manna every day. “The rabble with them began to crave other food... (Num. 11:4a). The Hebrew records their craving more powerfully, using *Polyptoton*: “And the mixed multitude...lusted a lust.”
- Jesus expressed his great desire to eat the Passover with his disciples: “With desire I desired to eat this Passover with you” (Luke 22:15; author’s translation).

- Paul’s instructions to Timothy have more emphasis because of the *Polyptoton*. “Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction...that by following them you may fight the good fight” (1 Tim. 1:18).

The above examples are all more or less in the same form, and are easy to see in the original Hebrew or Greek. Other uses of *Polyptoton* are not as easy to see, but Bullinger gives more than 100 examples in his book on figures of speech, and we can learn to recognize them. *Polyptoton* is one of the colorful figures of speech that God has used to add emphasis to His Word, and if we pay attention to it, “helping it will help us” get more out of reading our Bible.

(Endnote)

1. E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, reprinted 1968), p. 267-285.

THE VINE

Spotlight on a Fellowship

Rudolfo & Liza Odarve in the Philippines

“Hunger is my native place in the land of the passions. Hunger for fellowship, hunger for righteousness—for a fellowship founded on righteousness, and a righteousness attained in fellowship.” This was the statement of a Swedish statesman and diplomat, Dag Hammarskjöld (1905 - 1961).

I attended a seminar fourteen years ago when John Lynn first visited Cagayan de Oro City teaching the Word of God. My friend, the late Gerry Estandarte, invited me to attend the Truth or Tradition Seminar there. For the first time I heard John Lynn boldly share the Word that is against my doctrinal belief. At the end of the seminar John Lynn encourage us all to continue to search the Scripture to see to it that what he taught us is really the Word of God and also to see it by our selves.

Hunger for the truth was in my heart. I graduated Seminary and became a leader in our youth organization for three years and was an ordained minister in my denomination for 13 years. When I went home after the Truth or Tradition seminar, I scanned my notes and re-read my books comparing the seminar notes and the books that John Lynn gave me. I found out that what John taught was more biblically accurate than what I learned from the seminary for four years. After a thorough study and weighing the possibilities of the outcome of being kicked out from the group, losing of job, money, friends and even loved ones, I decided to embrace my newly-found truth because I know what I believe is the truth and it is able to give me real freedom.

In embracing my newfound faith, my problems was not started with the leaders of my former denomination, but in my own family. My wife, Liza, grew up in the same denomination. She was very faithful, loyal, and proud to be a part of that group. I needed to show her the truth that will convince her. So I shared to her the basic biblical doctrine that I learned through this ministry. From 1991 – 1996, six years of striving, determination, courage, patience, sleepless night of sharing the truth, my wife Liza came into conclusion that she will accept the truth as I taught to her. She said she was ready to suffer with me for the truth’s sake. Liza later confessed that when I was away from home, she read and studied my notes.

On the Sunday after Liza’s acceptance and pledge to go with me, I openly and boldly shared the Word of God to the Church during our Sunday Worship. I shared that Jesus Christ is not God, but is the Son of God. Right on that moment a man stood up and asked a very tricky question, “Is Jesus Christ God or not?” I did not dare to answer his question but instead I am insisting to him that Jesus is the Son of God. After three times of asking the same question, he said, “You are a Bible reader, not a Bible believer. You are antichrist.” Then the man with four other guys left the building but we still continue our service for many people were still left. I felt like there was an arrow pierced in my heart but my wife proved me her commitment that she is ready to suffer for the truth. On that moment she stood up and defended me and said to the congregation that no father will teach to his children a wrong direction. Lately I recognized it and am very happy because really, “I am worthy to partake the sufferings of Christ.”

I was called twice by my denominational section and district leaders to question my belief and I defended before them that my newfound belief is more accurate and biblical and for that, I am ready to be kick out from the denomination for that belief. So last 2001 I was kicked out from the said denomination without money, food, or shelter. My family and I are like passengers on the plane that the captain order us to jump out with no parachute. Knowing that we will burst ourselves when we reach to the ground, but God helped us at the right time through this ministry.

Almost half of the congregation followed us when we are ejected from our former denomination. Some are living in different places due to their job but they are still standing for the truth that I shared with them. The

majority of my former denominational church is now fellowshipping with us in our new home fellowship in Misamis Oriental, Philippines.

Now we are blessed by God in many ways and aspects of life. I was chosen as one of the Philippine Elders for this ministry. I started translating our teaching materials into the Cebuano dialect, and when I went to the Home Office in Indianapolis, Indiana this past Sep/Oct I built a Cebuano website—www.TruthOrTradition.com/cebuano. I was able to attend the Servant-Leadership Conference and the Men's Retreat.

My daughters got the very good performances in their schools. Vanessa Shalom (17) is now in college taking Computer and Electronics Technician. My twin daughters Hananish Joy and Majvell Kay (16) are in college taking Bachelor of Science in Physics. Catherine (11) is in her first year of high school and Jeff Ryian (5) is now in the nursery. My wife Liza got a job in the Education Department of our Government and she is recently promoted to a Teacher III. At present Liza and I shared the Word we have to her co-teachers and they are very eager to listen and learn it.

As an Elder, I have an area of responsibility in Misamis Oriental, Bukidnon Provinces and Camiguin Island. I am doing Seminars with some of the Elders (James Batao my partner in Surigao del Sur and Surigao del Norte, Willie Matub in Davao City, and Rey Delima in Cebu City in the Visayas Region). Other Elders are Benjie Casido in Negros Oriental, James and Nenita Butoy and Leonidas Duazo in Agusan del Norte and Peter Alcantara in Southern Mindanao.

The freedom we have now is incomparable. Even though friends left me because of my newfound faith, yet God through His Son gave me many real brothers and sisters not only in the Philippines but also in the whole world with their faith the same as I have and with the same goal: to be like Christ—obedient to the will of his heavenly Father.

I am thankful to God for this ministry for teaching us how to love God deeply, to follow the Lord Jesus Christ's example without reservation, and to love the community with passion and live in the world as lights to speak the truth in love.

Rodolfo and Liza Odarve
Misamis Oriental, Philippines

THE CONTENDER

FINDING HAPPINESS IN AN UNHAPPY WORLD

By John W. Schoenheit

Adversity, affliction, pain, and suffering are a part of everyone's life. With Satan and his evil minions causing problems, the problems we have due to the world being in a fallen state in the first place, the problems that others cause for us, and the problems we cause ourselves due to our own sin and ignorance, suffering is a given until Jesus sets up his kingdom. If we are going to live happy, joyful, productive lives, it is not going to be because we get rid of all affliction and suffering. Rather, it will be because we learn to be happy and joyful in spite of the pains of this life.

Who would not say, "I want to be happy"? Everyone desires this too often evasive feeling. It seems logical that if God created the world for people, and God is love (1 John 4:8b), that everyone would be happy, at least most of the time. Yet true happiness eludes most people, not just sometimes, but throughout most of their lives. Why?

Most people's first response would be: "Because life is so hard, and there is so much pain and suffering." It is true that hardship, pain, and suffering make it more difficult to be happy, and everyone will be unhappy at times. Ecclesiastes tells us that in every life there is "a time to weep" and "a time to mourn." However, it also tells us that there is "a time to laugh" (Eccles. 3:4). If we are ever going to laugh from our heart, and be genuinely happy at least some of the time, there are some basic things that we must understand about happiness, chiefly that it is a by-product, not an end in itself.

Happiness is not something we can achieve by striving for it alone, nor by focusing on it as a goal. If that were the case, we could assume that since there are millions of people who want to be happy, at least some of them would have achieved it and told others how to achieve it too. If millions of people wanted to climb Mt. Everest, for example, many would make it. Why is it that people who strive for happiness are not happy? One of the main reasons is that happiness is a by-product of something else, something meaningful that a person does in his life.

Let us compare happiness to the ordinary housecat. Often, if you want it to come to you so you can hold it, it stays away, sometimes seemingly just out of reach. If you pursue it, it moves away (usually under a piece of furniture where you can see it but not reach it). Eventually you give up trying to hold the cat, and get about doing your work around the house. Shortly you feel something touching your ankle, and lo and behold, the cat, which stayed away when pursued, is now rubbing against your leg, wanting to be picked up.

Happiness is like that housecat. When we pursue it for its own sake, it remains out of reach. For example, many people are surprised to find out how little happiness material things bring. This is an area where our flesh tricks us. We should all know that possessions do not make people happy, because there are so many unhappy wealthy people who can buy whatever they want. As the common proverb says: "Money can't buy happiness." In spite of that, our flesh seems to say, "If I just had (whatever), I would be happy." Although it can be momentarily satisfying to acquire what we thought would make us happy, the feeling does not last long.

Like the housecat, happiness comes when we engage in work and other activities that are meaningful to us. At those times our focus is not on ourselves or our own happiness, but on what we are doing. It is while we are engaged in a meaningful activity that we realize we are happy and enjoying life. Therefore, it is important for us to find meaning in life and the activities we engage in. This is often no small task. God designed life to have meaning, but many people do not find it, and live their lives the way the person who wrote Ecclesiastes started out.

Ecclesiastes 1:2

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

The book of Ecclesiastes contains the story of a person who calls himself “the Teacher,” and who outlines his journey to find meaning in life. He did many and varied things, looking for anything that held inherent meaning. He tried gaining knowledge and wisdom, but discovered “...with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief” (1:18b). He tried fun and laughter, but concluded it was foolish and accomplished nothing (2:1, 2). He tried wine and alcohol (2:3), accomplishing great tasks (2:4-7), amassing wealth (2:8), entertainment (2:8), and, of course, sex (2:8), but all to no avail. He did not know God, and therefore he correctly understood that his final end, no matter what he achieved or accomplished, was the grave, a hole in the ground, and that eventually he and his activities would be forgotten (2:16). In that light, nothing he did could be truly meaningful, because there was no actual purpose for anything he did. With nothing in life that was meaningful, he came to the point he “hated life” (2:17).

Thankfully, the teacher kept looking for meaning in life, and at some point he had a revelation that set him on the right course.

Ecclesiastes 2:25

for without him [God], who can eat or find enjoyment?

Amen! What the teacher discovered was that the first and most basic step to having meaning in one’s life was to realize that God created his life to have meaning. The dictionary definition of “meaning” is “a purpose or intention.” God intended to create us, that is, He had a purpose for us before we existed. Existence in and of itself does not have meaning, which is why atheists and people who believe that life is nothing more than a series of random “accidents,” cannot find true purpose or meaning. By their own definition, life has no meaning, i.e., no purpose or intention, it is just an accident.

Once the teacher discovered that God had created him with a purpose, a genuine meaning, he began to relate to life differently. He realized that it was not the works he did that had inherent meaning, but rather that it was his doing the work that had meaning. From that point of view, he began to realize that he could find happiness in productive work.

Ecclesiastes 2:24

A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God.

Notice that the teacher is not looking for happiness (satisfaction) on its own. No, he lives his life, (“eats and drinks,”) and works, and because he himself has meaning, he brings meaning to what he does, and gets satisfaction and happiness “in” his work. The same holds true for us. We bring the meaning to our work, and because God has created us the way we are, there is some work more meaningful to us than other work. As we engage life like that, thinking of ourselves and our work as having meaning, we find that we are content and happy, without seeking to be happy. This is the “housecat happiness” we discussed earlier.

It is important to make a distinction between happiness and joy. As we use the terms, “happiness” relates more to a feeling of gladness or contentment that is “outside in,” i.e., the meaningful and productive activities a person is doing produces a feeling of gladness, satisfaction, etc. “Joy,” on the other hand, is “inside out.” It is a fruit of the spirit

(Gal. 5:22) that a person experiences as he endeavors to be like Christ and keeps in mind the hope that is in store for him. The hope of healthy bodies on a newly created and wonderful earth never changes, so no matter what a person is doing, or experiencing, he can have joy. It is important to understand that, though we cannot always be happy, we can always have joy. Often joy and happiness occur at the same time, and this is certainly very desirable.

Just as we can always have joy because our basis for it never varies, so too we should always be thankful. We have so much to be thankful for, in fact, the Bible *commands* us to be thankful (Col. 3:15b).¹ One of the keys to happiness **is being thankful** no matter what our circumstances are. Attitude has much to do with whether we are happy or not. Certainly there are times when circumstances in our lives make happiness at that moment out of the question. No one should expect to be happy all the time. However, it is not wrong to want as much happiness as possible.

As we look for meaning in our lives, it is helpful to realize that each Christian is uniquely equipped by God to do great things for Him and for other people. Corinthians tells us that each person is placed in the Body of Christ as God wants him to be.

1 Corinthians 12:18

But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

Ephesians says that God has created each person for good works and we are to do whatever good works we can. God has made it possible for you to do good works here and now. In fact God has even prepared us for this.

Ephesians 2:10

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

It may take an individual time and effort to discover things that are truly meaningful to him, but each of us can be assured that he has meaningful work with which he can be satisfied. Ecclesiastes calls the ability to find satisfaction in the work we do "the gift of God."

Ecclesiastes 3:13

That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God.

The tie between meaningful work and happiness, or satisfaction, is a major theme of Ecclesiastes, coming up many times, especially in the opening chapters. We live in a fallen world, one that requires hard work if we are to survive and prosper. God told that to Adam, and we should expect the same difficulties.

Genesis 3:17b and 19a

(17b) ...Cursed is the ground because of you [Adam]; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

(19a) By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground....

Ever since the fall of man, life has been difficult, and this often makes it hard to be happy. We in the United States of America have so many laborsaving devices that we can be deluded into thinking that life should be easy. Older generations knew it wasn't. "Not until after the War of 1812 did American terms like "easy" and "difficult" appear with any frequency; before that, most people expected life and its necessary tasks to be hard."² Eventually we all discover that life is not easy, so we must be clear about the fact that we can be happy in our work whether it is easy or hard. Ecclesiastes was written long before automobiles, dishwashers, washing machines, running water, or other laborsaving devices, and it shows that people can be happy in their lives even if the work is hard, if it is meaningful to us. Ecclesiastes helps us understand this:

Ecclesiastes 5:18 (RSV)

Behold, what I have seen to be good and to be fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life which God has given him, for this is his lot.

The *Revised Standard Version* does a good job here of showing how God emphasizes that life on earth is going to involve a lot of hard work. The figure of speech *Polyptoton* is the repetition of the same word with the same meaning, but in a different case, mood, tense, degree, number, gender, etc.³ In this case, the *Polyptoton*,

“...toil with which one toils...” emphasizes the extreme toil that life entails. In spite of that toil, we see that it is possible, and even “fitting” to find enjoyment or happiness, in it. After all, God put mankind on this earth, and earthly life involves work, more work because of the Fall, to be sure, but even Adam and Eve had jobs to do. They had to tend the Garden of Eden, and guard it from the beasts of the field (Gen. 2:15).⁴

It is important that we do not see work as an obstacle, something satanic that somehow robs us of happiness. God designed us to work and derive happiness from, and during, our work. We can short-circuit our happiness if we view work as undesirable. The media and the world around us do a good job of making us think that work is something to be avoided. There are dozens of sayings and mind-pictures in our environment making it seem like work should be avoided at all costs. This is a trick of the Adversary, who knows that happiness is not an end in itself. He realizes that the more he can get people to focus on being happy, the less happy they will be. We Christians need to be clear on the fact that God created Adam and Eve with work to do, that there is fruitful work to be done now, and there will be work to do in the future kingdom. Seeing our purpose in life and thus bringing meaning to our work now is a great key to happiness.

That is not to say that one can be happy in every task. There are many things required of us that range from tedious to painful. It is important that we are willing to do whatever it takes to live godly lives. This can sometimes be easy, but it is usually difficult and time consuming. Everyone has hardship and suffering, and nothing we do can change that. No amount of prayer will reverse God’s declaration to Adam that he (and his descendants) would experience “painful toil.” No amount of money will buy happiness.

What can we do to have happier, more fulfilled lives? It all starts with developing a relationship with God that will bring meaning to our lives. We must also develop the fruit of the spirit known as joy, and learn to be thankful, focusing on the blessings of the Lord, which are so numerous. We must have a positive attitude about work, see it as something valuable, and as a blessing and a gift from God (Col. 3:23). As we bring meaning to our work, and work at fruitful tasks, we will find that even amidst adversity and hardship, we are happy much more of the time.☀

(Endnotes)

1. In the Greek text, “be thankful” is in the imperative mood, and thus is a command.
2. Stuart B. Flexner, *Listening to America: An Illustrated History of Words and Phrases from Our Lively and Splendid Past* (Simon and Shuster, New York, 1982), p. 153. Flexner covers such terms as “duck soup,” “a picnic,” “easy as pie,” etc.
3. E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, reprinted 1968), p. 267-285.
4. For a more detailed description of the work that God had for Adam and Eve, see our book on pg. 5 of the enclosed price list, *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul* (Christian Educational Services, Indianapolis, IN, 2004), p. 118.

PARTNER PROFILE

Kathy Lunardini

Greetings and God bless you!

I am Kathy, for whom the Lord provideth. For I truly believe that out of what the Enemy meant for evil in my life, the Lord has brought reconciliation, freedom, and deliverance. I have seen the Lord's blessings emotionally, physically, mentally, spiritually, and financially.

I was abandoned by my husband, but not forgotten by the Lord. For nearly 15 years, the Lord has delivered me from financial despair and repeatedly provided abundance for my family. I first became associated with this ministry while attending nursing school and supporting my three young children on public assistance or welfare more than 10 years ago.

Initially, I have to admit, I was not ready to give my money to this ministry, but I was willing to serve. I had limited financial resources and little trust in any organizations or men, but I did have a heart for children and a desire to serve. So, I started by attending conferences and giving my time by helping with Children's Fellowship. As I met the families and partners of Spirit & Truth, I began to see God's grace, mercy, and vision for setting people free with the truth of the Word of God.

I wanted to do more—I wanted to help. Initially, I literally gave a “widow's mite.” Then I decided to become a Partner. The definition of partner according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary is “one who plays on the same team as another; one of two or more persons contractually associated as joint principles in a business.” I wanted to do the Lord's business and be part of setting captives free and reconciling others to Christ. Through the years, the Lord has opened miraculous doors for me and my family.

For example, even when I graduated from nursing school, I was told I would have to work second or third shift as a new nurse. As a single mom with three young children who would need me home in the early evening to help with homework, and attend their school events, this was unthinkable to me. I would profess to my fellow nursing students that God would provide a great daytime job for me—and He did. My first job was in public health, working weekdays, no nights, no weekends, no holidays. God provided the perfect job to meet my family's needs.

A pastor of another church once asked me why I stand with this ministry. I told him that it was in this ministry that I was encouraged to learn, grow, and walk out in my giftings, talents, and ministry. Spirit & Truth Fellowship International is about helping others be who God has created them to be as individuals and live in the fullness of their callings. This ministry empowers people to not only understand that we have the power of God, but also to walk in that power to the degree that one feels inspired and moved to do so. If you dance, dance for the Lord. If you teach, teach the truth with passion and conviction. If you encourage, encourage one another unto good works, empowering others not caretaking and disabling them.

Now I am passionate about giving not only my heart and time, but finances as well. The way I see it, I am tired of the Enemy, Satan, crippling the Church. Think about it—Satan has already convinced many churches that women should not teach, thus silencing half the Body. The Enemy has convinced many that speaking in tongues, prophecy, and miracles died with the original apostles, thus disempowering the Church [To read some empowering articles on these subjects visit www.TruthOrTradition.com]. And he has convinced many others that churches and ministries are not to be trusted with our hard-earned money, thus keeping the Church financially poor and unable to accomplish the visions and missions the Lord has set before them. Ultimately, who really pays the price for that? It is we, the Church.

I say let us silence the Enemy, empower the Church, give freely and generously, and trust that the Lord will provide for each of us liberally. Praise God we are no longer under the bondage of the law, but are free to give

as each of us has purposed in our hearts (2 Cor. 9:7). We are free to sow generously and reap endless benefits now and in the age to come. I see our young people at the Teens & Twenties Camp, Family Camp, and Live Out Loud, and am inspired to sow for their future. I am encouraged by their passion and energy to walk out in power and faith. I want to equip them with the tools, resources, camps, books, tapes, music, and facilities necessary to continue to minister to the broken-hearted and unsaved.

I stand with Spirit & Truth because this ministry has stood with me. People have prayed, taught, loved, encouraged, reprovved, and mentored me and my children through the years. This is not just a ministry; this is my spiritual family. I stand with my brothers and sisters in Christ and fight for a brighter future, for stronger marriages, and for bold and courageous youth who have hope and faith in a personal Savior, Jesus Christ. I can't imagine giving to a greater cause than reconciling others to Christ.

I have never once regretted giving a gift. I have, however, regretted not giving one. Our God is so big, so gracious, and so full of blessings that I love to give generously, knowing that He will bless me unexpectedly, over and above my expectations. I am convinced that I cannot out give God.

May you share in the joy and intimacy of a personal relationship with Christ our Savior and our heavenly Father.

Walking in faith and liberty,

Kathy Lunardini
Richland, MI

"Together We Can!"

FUEL FOR THE FIRE

Nine Steps to Facing Adversity in Starting a Fellowship

BY NATE GRAESER

Have you ever thought about starting a fellowship? It could be one of the most rewarding experiences you could ever have, and an amazing opportunity to see God work. Although there are many benefits, you may still be thinking that it is not for you. You might even be thinking of all of the reasons why you cannot do it.

When I considered this same question some years ago, I found that most of my angst was generated by what lay in the unknown. There are many unknowns in starting or leading a fellowship, and some of them regard the adversity you will face if you decide to spread the Gospel in this way. Since there is no denying the adversity associated with starting a fellowship, I wanted to give you a list of nine steps to help you do so. I have found that if you apply these steps in your future fellowship, they can significantly help you deal with the adversity that can and will come your way.

1. Pray

One of the first things to remember in starting a fellowship is to get God involved. This is where prayer comes in. Many times prayer gets overlooked, but I believe it is the most important thing you can do when starting a fellowship. If you do start a fellowship, make a commitment to pray about all the details. The Lord Jesus will work with you, just as he has worked with many people before. He knows what he is doing when it comes to building his Body, and he appreciates your desire to help. Often it is in your prayer time that God will give you ideas about places to go and people to talk to. Remember that prayer is to be dialogue with the Lord, so keep your ears open all day long to what he would have to say to you. As you pray for the people with whom you come into contact, you will see God move. Over time your habits of praying for people will be passed on to your community. Others will see the fruit of prayer and join in, and God will do the heavy lifting and provide the increase.

2. Get a vision for the fellowship

Pick out some Scripture verses that give you a vision of what you want your fellowship to exemplify. Study the book of Acts and the early Church to see how those believers so effectively spread the Word and touched people's lives. Those in your fellowship should decide what they want it to look like. Look at the needs of your fellowship community and set forth your vision statement accordingly.

3. Decide on the day, time, and place

Work with the people to choose a time and place for your fellowship that best fits their schedules. Once you pick a time, stick with it so that people can plan their schedules accordingly.

4. Look for committed people to come alongside you

Moses traveled with Aaron, Paul traveled with Barnabas, and Jesus traveled with his disciples. Christianity is a "team sport," and we were designed to have other people with us. Be looking for people who will support you and come alongside you to help build the fellowship. God will bring them.

5. Get the word out—tell people!

The biggest limiter to growth is fear. Tell everyone you **know** that you are starting a fellowship. Tell everyone you meet and **do not know** about your recent fellowship. Invite everyone you meet, and see how many people God will bring to you. Many times if you share your life with people and show people a lot of love they will want to see what you do. This can be a great opportunity to see how God will work when we just do our best to care for people. As you tell and share with people about your latest plans, you will see God bring people from everywhere.

6. Make a tentative plan for how you will run the fellowship...and tell more people!

Lay out a plan for each fellowship, but be flexible. What will you do about praise and worship? Will you have it in the beginning? What songs will you sing? Who is teaching the first week, the second, etc.? Will you have a season of prayer? Manifestations? While it is important to be flexible, that does not mean you should not have a schedule or tentative plan for the meeting. After all, it's a lot easier for God to move a rolling stone than one that is sitting still. Let God work in you to adjust things in order to meet the needs of the people. And tell more people about the fellowship and follow up on the other people you talked to.

7. Stick to it—and tell more people!

It is really important that you do not give up if the first few people that said they would come, do not show up. That's what the Devil would love you to do. Try again, talk to more people. If only a few people show up the first few meetings, it can be daunting, but make a commitment to stick to it no matter what. Tell everybody, follow up on people who said they wanted to come and never did. Be persistent and loving! Remember, it is *people* who Jesus came to save, and people that he has called us to reach.

8. Learn to be sensitive to what God wants to do—and tell even more people!

Be sensitive to the fact that people go through stages of growth, and that therefore the “flavor” of your fellowship will probably change as time goes by. Be ready to adjust anything that does not meet the needs of those who are attending. For example, in one fellowship people needed discussion time after the teachings, in another the praise and worship was saved for last. Be adaptable. There is a saying in the military that “All plans are thrown away at first contact.” Sometime when things get started it does not look exactly like we thought, that's OK. Sometimes God calls us to be a flexible “Gumby” for Him.

9. Seek good counsel and resources—tell more people!!

No one knows all the right things to say or do. Each of us has blind spots, both regarding others and ourselves. We need “a second opinion.” A recent study polled a large group of pastors as to the greatest attributes of a leader. Afterward, they were all asked if they knew anyone who met all the criteria they had come up with. Naturally, the pastors unanimously agreed they did not. In other words, no one has it all together so you are in good company. Other people have been where you are. Learn from what they have learned, perhaps from books they have written. Leaders are readers. You can also go to ministry events and volunteer for things that will give you ideas and help you become a better leader. Become a sponge for better ways to do things.

Our heart is to help you learn from what we have experienced. We want you to be the most you can be for the Body of Christ, and we are here to help you in any way we can. So go get'em! Give it your all, and God will bless you for it.

Nate Graeser
Indianapolis, IN
Nate@cesonline.org

Book Review Boundaries: Face to Face

Have you ever been offended by someone you were in a relationship with? Have you built up “withholds” against a friend and let months go by without talking about it? Have you ever wanted to confront someone you love, but did not know how to handle it?

Well, I may have the book for you.

I have not seen a better book on this subject than *Boundaries: Face to Face* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. It focuses on how to handle difficult conversations with people in your life, to the end that you have a more intimate connection with them. This book is a practical handbook on the in's and out's of positive confrontation by two award-winning Christian psychologists.

Many of us see confronting people as scary or adversarial, and something to be done only for major problems. Confrontation is not something that we should fear, but something that we should embrace as a tool to bring us into deeper relationship with one another. The Latin word for confront actually means “to turn your face towards.” Many have discovered the wonderful outcome and the intimacy that is created when you successfully confront a problem in a loving way.

Uncomfortable and even dangerous situations can often be avoided or resolved through direct conversation, but most of us don’t know how to go about having difficult conversations. We are often afraid to address relational conflicts with our spouses, or talk with that in-law with whom we have issues. The list goes on and on.

In *Boundaries: Face to Face*, authors Cloud and Townsend take the principles from their best-selling book, *Boundaries*, and apply them to a variety of the most common difficult situations and relationships. For example, they:

- Explain why properly handled confrontation is essential in all arenas of life.
- Show how healthy confrontation can improve relationships.
- Present the essentials of a good boundary-setting conversation.
- Provide tips on how to prepare for the conversation.
- Show how to tell people what you want, how to stop bad behavior, and how to deal with counterattack.
- Give actual examples of conversations to have with your spouse, your date, your kids, your co-worker, your boss, your parents, and more.”¹

I strongly recommend reading this book if you are going to interact with other human beings on a daily basis. To get a good used copy, you can order from Half.com, Amazon.com, or eBay.com.

Ryan Maher
Indianapolis, IN

(Endnote)

1. Cloud and Townsend Resources, www.cloudtownsendstore.com

FAMILY NEWS, VIEWS, AND FEEDBACK

Dear Sower,

Your book *One God & One Lord* was the biggest blessing!!!

In three days I devoured 12 chapters (this is not light reading) and my understanding of the work that God did through our Lord Jesus Christ has grown immensely. I much more clearly understand the unique and intimate relationship God has with His Son. I am more compelled today to discover the unsearchable riches of God. Just to give you some perspective, I travel for a living and I finally decided to drag this book along - it's heavy but worth the workout.

I am so thankful to have been called to this glorious church, and to have brothers like you who are faithful. It is so apparent the extent to which the Adversary has gone to create distractions in this world to keep people in the dark about the truth and the promises of God. For example, religion, sports, television, Ipods, computers, videos, downloads, pornography, not to mention the volumes and volumes of books written about the Bible that don't come close to representing a shred of what God tells us. The list goes on and on.

So a BIG, HUGE, GIGANTIC "Thank you" for your effort. I am going to sign up as a Spirit & Truth Fellowship Partner, and I hope it will help you further the outreach of God's magnified Word.

I know that God guides your work, so be patient, keep the faith, and know that there are others out here who pray for you continually. I look forward to reading and learning more!

God bless all of you. He must be so proud to call you His own.

Warm regards,

Dorothy Allan
Cedarburg, WI

Dear Sower,

Hi, my name is Rachel. I'm ten years old, and *The Good News Class* was a very exciting experience for me. I learned a lot about the Holy Bible and what Satan is doing to the people in the world, and what our God is planning for us. I was born and raised as a Christian, but in *The Good News Class* I learned some things that I did not know before.

One of the things I learned about was God's promises. God has eternal life for us, and I know that because God is not a liar. I loved the small group time because after every session we talked about really amazing stuff that God did for the people in my group. The session was so amazing to be part of because I learned a lot and heard just what I needed to hear.

[The Good News Class is a nine-hour video class that is normally run Friday night through Sunday. If you would like more information on attending or running a class, please visit www.TruthOrTradition.com Topic: Community. Look for the article titled "The Good News Class." In it we have posted some useful information and links to the Good News Class flyer, brochure, instructor's form, and the request form.]

Dear Sower,

Greetings and God bless you all in the wonderful name of our living Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ! God blessed me again today by helping me close another deal, and of course He gets the first portion, which is herewith enclosed.

Reading your books as well as *The Sower* you so thoughtfully send me, and listening to the monthly CD's has afforded me greater knowledge of God's wonderful, matchless Word. Through these materials, I have come to have stronger confidence that your ministry has the biblical integrity to put God's Word first.

Since I left my previous ministry, I have struggled for years to find another source of teaching and ministering where the body of believers considers God's Word as their only source of faith and practice. From the time I found your website, I have been blessed with the opportunity to once again have access to teaching materials that truly support my personal studies. It is from these daily studies that I have become convinced that I have found a proper place to abundantly share. Having a ministry in which I can truly believe that my offering is indeed supporting the movement of God's Word is, for me, the lifting of a tremendous burden. I thank all of you at Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, and I believe God to continue His blessings upon you, your families and your labor of love.

The best part of all of my newfound experience with your ministry is that recently I have "caught" myself with the God-inspired confidence to once again speak His Word to others. That has been missing from my life since I parted ways with my last denomination.

I thank God our Father through our Lord Jesus Christ that you will use this abundant sharing for the continued movement of His undeniable, unbeatable, unmatched Word!

Jonathon H.
Chicago, IL

Dear Sower,

God bless you!

I have my own radio program and I am playing your *New Life In Christ – Foundations for Powerful Christian Living* class on it. Thought you would be blessed to hear this. It is on WRFR 93.3 in Rockland and 99.3 in Camden, Maine.

Ray & Bonnie Littlefield
Rockland, ME

WEBSITE FEEDBACK

www.TruthOrTradition.com www.BiblicalUnitarian.com

Dear Sower,

I have read and studied many of your website articles, and I see that you know the truth on a variety of subjects. I was moved by your article concerning prophets [www.TruthOrTradition.com TOPIC: Servant-Leaders “What is a Prophet?”]. In this world today a person who claims to be a prophet invites negative response, but somehow I feel that this would not be the case with you. God speaks to me in my thoughts and guides me into the understanding of His Word so as to help a small group of people whom I serve.

These people have acknowledged me as a prophet. I did not take this upon myself, and I have found it to be a two-edged sword. For faith to grow, the most important things are love and truth. I love these people and they love me, but I teach them to love God more. I constantly remind them that it is God who does all these things. I both speak and write what God tells me, usually about the restoration of what I call lost truth: things that have always been in the Word but have been corrupted or lost. What I teach is always subject to what God has already revealed in His Word.

In your article you offered a prayer for such people and I thank you for that. I am writing because it very nice to see that there are others who understand. Thank you.

In God’s love,
Lee Bitting

Dear Sower,

Thank you so much for your website [www.TruthOrTradition.com]! It has truly helped me come to terms with some of my questioning of certain religious-based practices. There have been many instances where I have needed something explained, only to be more confused by the “explanations” I heard.

Finally, after reading your website, I no longer feel that I am “out of line” by not believing certain issues presented on Sundays as truth or fact. I no longer feel like “less of a Christian” for NOT just accepting the unproven explanations given to me. Your website has rekindled my faith in God.

Sincerely,
Kimberly in Texas

Dear Sower,

I wanted to drop you a note and let you know that I sent a link to the www.TruthOrTradition.com website about “Where is God When Tragedy Strikes?” One of the people I sent it to was my 12-year-old grandson. He sent me back an e-mail this morning and said he read the article and really liked it, and was going to share some of what he learned at school, since they are talking about it today.

KNOCK MY SOCKS OFF! Is God great, or what?

Jane Bickel
Camp Vision
Bloomington, IN

Dear Sower,

Your article on tithing has given me hope. I was raised in another church where “tithing” was commanded and you were considered sinning and disobedient if you didn’t do it. My husband and I can’t really afford to tithe, so I haven’t had much of a spiritual life because I thought that if I didn’t tithe, I was going to hell anyway, so why bother to go to church.

Your article [www.TruthOrTradition.com Topic: Money “Tithing Vs Giving”] really gave me something to think about. My husband wasn’t raised in the church as I was, so he thinks my “all or nothing” attitude about tithing was crazy, but you have to come from that background to really understand. Anyway, THANK YOU for at least giving me another point of view.

I will investigate the scriptures you quoted and give this some serious thought. Thank you so much! I really like your website.

Darlene Shelby

Dear Sower,

Hi guys!

I want to thank you for your website (www.TruthOrTradition.com). I am one of those Christians who have fallen victim to false teachings about money, which has really affected my walk with Jesus. After reading your “Giving verses Tithing” article, I feel I am set free.

Once again, thanks and God bless you all.

Mike
Australia

Dear Sower,

I found your website article on tithing versus giving very interesting, and have requested to receive your magazine, *The Sower*. I have recently left a mainstream church because I found a lot of what was being taught as God’s truth was not accurate. I have enjoyed looking more for myself at what God has for me and all Christians, and while I know the church serves a great purpose, sites like this one (www.TruthOrTradition.com) are a fantastic asset to tell it like it is without an agenda. Thanks!

Karen Manhattan
Australia

Dear Sower,

Thank you for telling the truth [www.TruthOrTradition.com]. You have confirmed things that I knew and had often wanted to write about myself. As a matter of fact, I feel that in Christendom we have lost some of our luster in God because we’ve lost sight of how God has instructed us to worship, including giving.

Thanks again.
Cheryl M. Pheal

Dear Sower,

This is a very, very, very good site [www.TruthOrTradition.com], one of the best that I have found in a long time. Glad to be here.

Patricia

Dear Sower,

Awesome work with all these articles on [www.TruthOrTradition.com]. I am so happy to know that there are other Christians whose point of view is similar to mine. I never let doctrine come between God and my fellowship, but it's good to know that what I have learned from reading the Bible myself isn't wrong.

Thank you guys for following truth rather than tradition.

Darsi

Dear Sower,

Thank you for the article on judging. I really needed to understand how to be salt and light without crushing anyone. Also, I gained perspective about how others judge me and how to deflect their perverted intentions and sift through to the godly intentions. Thank you for your commitment to the Bible.

Brenda Delagarza
Lawrenceville, GA

[To read the article "To Judge or not to Judge? That is the Question" go to www.TruthOrTradition.com Topic: Becoming Like Christ.]

Dear Sower,

Thank God, I found you. I've long doubted that the holy spirit was part of a triune godhead. I think the spirit of Jesus in me led me to your site [www.BiblicalUnitarian.com]. Thank you for so much information. I have been studying your various interlinked web pages for a couple of days, with Bible at hand.

I was christened into Anglicanism, became agnostic as a teenager, Unitarian as a trainee teacher, then reverted to agnosticism for the next 40 years. In my 60s, I became a Salvation Army adherent, and then found another Evangelical Christian fellowship. I was about to become a member of the fellowship when something [Christ in me?] prompted me to surf the web, looking for refutations of Trinitarian belief. "Trinitarian heresy" came to mind and, voila! I found you [Thanks to key word advertising, a ten-cent click that changed a life!].

I'm now 70, happily married for 49 years (with 3 children and 10 grandchildren), and I want to be salt and light within traditional Christian society as well as to those who have other religions, or none. I'll be in touch again when I've read and studied more of what appears on your sites.

Yours in the One Who taught us how to love,
Peter Jeal

Dear Sower,

I love this site! You are doing a great job.

Cynthia Ukam

[Thank you, Cynthia, for your word of encouragement. That made us smile.]

Dear Sower,

God bless you, and thank you for this wonderful website [www.TruthOrTradition.com]. I'm learning so much, and your articles make it so easy to share the Word with others.

Thank you,
JudithAnn Leisten
Signal Hill, CA

Dear Sower,

Thank you very much for providing materials for telling people about the truth of God's Word.

This website [www.TruthOrTradition.com] is an incredible resource to me, and I spend a lot of time here. I especially appreciate the articles relating to Don't Blame God. It pains me to hear so many Christians blaming God for what the Devil is doing!

Our Lord's loving character needs to be manifested, and this website helps to spread the Word.

God bless all of you.
Sara K.
Waterford, NY

[Please visit www.TruthOrTradition.com Topics: Don't Blame God and Don't Blame God 2 to read articles like: "Was Katrina an Act of God?" "Where is God When Tragedy Strikes," "Is Everything That Happens God's Will," and many, many more.]

INTERNATIONAL NEWS AND FEEDBACK

Dear Sower,

God bless you in the most powerful Name in the universe, Jesus Christ.

We have just finished our *Good News Class*, and it was a real blessing for us to have the awesome privilege of presenting it. Mike and Claudia Z. came in from Germany to take the class and that was a blessing for us. Berit and I are so grateful for all that you have done to make this class available. The material that came with each class binder was fantastic.

As for my family and me, we shall stand with you serving the Lord!!!

Walt & Berit Williams
Alingsås, Sweden

Dear Sower,

We are a family in South Africa, and we have loved reading your *One God & One Lord* book. The facts and articulate points are ever so interesting. We are a very young family of four. I'm Luke (26) and my wife is 27. We have two kids, Jamy (6) and Nelly (8).

Why am I e-mailing you? My wife and I are musicians who worship the God of Jesus Christ, and with grace have walked in subjection to Christ's lordship. We are in the process of cutting a prophetic CD proclaiming the name of Jesus and that there is only One God.

We have a lot more to say but for now we are simply looking for like-minded people. We have been walking alone (with my wife's parents) with these convictions for about four years now thinking at times that we could be the only people that believe this.

Do you know of anyone near us who believes in One God and Christ as the king of all kings? If you don't, we would still love to correspond with anyone across the world who lives by these convictions. Thanks again for your book. It was very interesting finding out all the evidence confirming the things that God had revealed to us.

Love in the God of righteousness,
Luke and Lemanja
Cape Town, South Africa

[We have put this wonderful family in contact with some great folks we know in South Africa.]

Dear Sower,

I would like to thank you for your magazine, *The Sower*. At the moment, I am only half way through it, as it came a short time ago. I am very pleased that I found your website, and the same applies to the contents of your magazine.

Paul Harris
St Annes on Sea
United Kingdom

Dear Sower,

With my family and the saints here in Negros Island, Philippines, I am sending our love and thanksgiving for your prayers, coaching, support, and love. We are indeed in a very challenging and fast-changing world, and it seems the changes are from bad to worst. I am not caught in surprise with this, however, because it was long been expressed by the spirit through the Apostle of the Gentiles that this will be the main characteristics of the last days. It is therefore felt by us to be more open to God's leading in whatever we do. Satan and the world are offering lots of "options" and "alternatives" on how we are going to operate instead of operating inside the will of God and under the direction of our Head, Christ.

From this vantage, I am so blessed by the new and wonderful book by John W. Schoenheit about prophecy. Though not a prophet himself, he handles the subject very well from the standpoint of being a teacher. The simplicity of the approach has added to its wonderful truth. The clarity of the terms and presentation burns my heart even in the first reading of the book. The abundance of the scriptural evidence and proofs and illustrations have created a more convincing presentation for the skeptics. I mentioned these because I was saved in a denomination that believes and teaches that prophecy is nothing but a dry part of the revelation and is meant for the nation Israel. Its fulfillment awaits the coming of the Lord.

They teach that there is no direct practical significance a believer in this present dispensation can get from prophecy, and that the "gift" (not manifestation) of prophecy ceased with the setting aside of Israel. But when I read John's book, a mental revolution happened, which leads me to the appreciation of the practicality of prophecy in the lives of the believers in this current dispensation. I long for a prophecy for my personal life and the ministry as well as for us as family and as a group of believers standing with the truth here in Negros. We are attacked by Satan, the world, and even by other religious and denominational leaders for embracing and proclaiming the truth they call "heresy." We are attacked through financial difficulties, social ostracism, and professional mediocrity. In our previous church, we did not hear from God and from the Lord in prophecy because we didn't know that both God and the Lord can still guide us in that way. Thank God for this ministry, which has gradually enlightened our darkened mind to see the truth of the "Gospel" of salvation and service. I love you guys!!!

Thank you and God bless us all.
Love and prayers,
Benjie, Leizl, jj and mm
Negros Oriental, Philippines

MEN'S RETREAT REPORT

Fifty-four men came together at Camp Vision in Bloomington, Indiana on the weekend of October 20-23 for an amazing time of fellowship, insight, accountability, worship, and fun. The theme of this year's retreat, "Becoming Like Christ," was a great attraction for many of the men. Many shared throughout the weekend that the theme had resonated for them and that it had prompted them to attend. We had a good blend of young men and those who are more "seasoned" (i.e., have gray hair).

Together we embarked on a journey of discovery, specifically looking at our own lives to see where we were not acting in Christ-like ways, and encouraging one another to recommit to righteous living. It was powerful to examine "the seven deadly sins" (pride, envy, wrath, lust, greed, gluttony, and sloth) and the logic Satan uses to promote them. We encouraged one another to be honest about what was in their hearts, and bring any hidden motives into the light. This is, after all, how we become free to choose behaviors that are more in keeping with our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. As long as we are hiding from others, and **ourselves** we will continue to walk in darkness and be in bondage.

A variety of interactive exercises throughout the weekend helped to facilitate a deep encounter with the Lord. The first night (Thursday), we had the men pair off with a buddy, and we led them through some dialogue with one another. Every pair reported that they were able to see God's hand in their pairing together, and many of these pairs deepened their connection with one another throughout the weekend.

During our focus sessions we had discussions and exercises on the four elements of "Practicing Right Relationship" (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social management). The point was that we cannot be like Christ if we do not act appropriately in our relationships with others and **ourselves**. We also spent time in small group settings where we were able to speak openly of our struggles, and then pray and work together to bear one another's burdens.

The time we spent in workshops on Marriage and Family Issues, Pornography, Healing, and Deliverance Ministry provided us an opportunity to engage our personal issues and take new ground through aggressive honesty and accountability, understanding that the Lord is for us and not condemning us. The high point for many occurred around the campfire, which we had each night. Those were times of reflection, examination, confession, and repentance. For many they were also times of commitment and vows, either new or renewed.

How awesome it was to be in a safe environment, free of judging, comparing, competition, and posturing to look good, and to just be a band of brothers sharing the same desire for uprightness and honesty of heart. We encouraged the men to continue to create accountability in their relationships with other Christian men. That alone makes a big difference in our lives and accelerates our spiritual growth.

Many of us were on an emotional high by the end of the weekend, but we do not use emotions as the criteria by which we can judge the effectiveness of an event. Just as the health of a tree is known by its fruit, so too the impact of our being together will be judged by the fruit that our life is producing in our relationships. Every participant left with a greater commitment to become more and more like our Lord.