

***FINDING HOPE AND HEALING IN
THESE DAYS AND TIMES***

When You Hurt

***By
Dr. James E. Potts***

Lesson 1

In one way or another, we are all hurting. We all need healing of our inner hurts. We need to know how to get hold of a genuine peace and a true freedom from the bondage of various problems and hurts. It is sin that causes many of our problems and hurts. Even the laughing, happy-go-lucky crowd is hurting. They try to hide their hurt by drinking and joking, but it won't go away.

Who hurts? The parents of a prodigal son or daughter. Millions of parents have been deeply wounded by children who have rejected their counsel. Those loving parents grieve over the deception and misbehavior of children who once were tender and good. The victims of broken homes are hurting. The abandoned wife whose husband rejected her for another woman is hurting. The husband who lost the love of a wife is hurting. The children who lost their security are hurting.

Others suffer illness: cancer, heart problems, and countless other human diseases. To be told by a doctor, "You have cancer; you may die!" has to be terrifying. Yet many have experienced such pain and agony. Lovers break up. A boyfriend or girlfriend walks away, trampling on what was once a beautiful relationship. All that is left is a broken, wounded heart.

And what about the unemployed? The despondent ones whose dreams have collapsed? The shut-ins? The prisoners? The homosexuals? The alcoholics? It's true! In one way or another we are all hurting. Every person in this world carries his own burden of pain and hurt.

There Is No Physical Cure

When you are deeply hurt, no person on this earth can shut out the innermost fears and deepest agonies. The best of friends cannot really understand the battle you are going through or the wounds inflicted on you. Only God can shut out the waves of depression and feelings of loneliness and failure that come over you. Faith in God's love alone can salvage the hurt mind. The bruised and broken heart that suffers in

silence can be healed only by a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, and nothing short of divine intervention really works.

God has to step in and take over. He has to intercept our lives at the breaking point, stretch forth His loving arms, and bring that hurting body and mind under His protection and care. God must come forth as a caring Father and demonstrate that He is there, making things turn out for good. He must, by His own power, dismiss the storm clouds, chase away the hopelessness and gloom, wipe away the tears, and replace the sorrow with peace of mind.

Why Me Lord?

What hurts most is that you know your love for God is strong, yet you can't seem to understand what He is trying to work out in your life. If you were cold toward His love, you could understand why prayers went unanswered. If you were running from God, you could probably understand why the tests and trials kept coming on. If you were down-and-out-sinner, who could despise the things of God, you could bring yourself to believe you deserved to be hurt. But you are not running, you are not rejecting God in any way.

You want to do His perfect will and want only to serve Him with all that is in you. That is why your hurting is so devastating. It makes you feel there is something terribly wrong with you. You question your spiritual depth, and at times, you even question your sanity. From somewhere deep inside you, a voice whispers, "Maybe I'm defective, somehow. Maybe I'm being hurt so deeply because God can't see much good in me. I must be so out of His will; He has to discipline me to make me obedient."

Friends Try Hard to Help

A bruised or broken heart causes the most agonizing pain known to mankind. Most other human hurts are only physical, but a heart that is wounded must carry a pain that is both physical and spiritual. Friends and loved ones can help soothe the physical pain eases, and there is temporary relief. But night comes, and with it comes the fear of spiritual agony. The hurting explodes when you are all alone, trying to understand how to cope with the inner voices and fears that keep surfacing.

Your friends, who really don't understand what you are going through, offer all kinds of easy solutions. They get impatient with you. They can't understand why you don't simply snap out of it. They are like Job's babysitters, who knew all the answers but who could not relieve his pain. Job said to them, "***You are all physicians***

of no value” (Job 13:4). Thank God for well-meaning friends, but if they could experience your agony for even one hour, they would be changing their tunes.

Time Heals Nothing

Then there is that age-old cliché, that says, “Time heals all wounds.” It sounds good, but it is not true. Time heals nothing; only God heals! When you are hurting, time only magnifies the pain. Days and weeks go by, and the agony hangs on. The hurting won’t go away, no matter what the calendar says. Time may push the pain deeper into the mind, but one tiny memory can bring it to the surface. And you feel unworthy of the Lord, because your problem lingers on, in spite of all your spiritual efforts.

Heartbreakers Don’t Get Off Easily

Part of the pain a broken heart must suffer is the thought that the offender, the heartbreaker, is going to get away with it all. The heart says, “I am the one hurt and wounded, yet I’m the one who pays the price. The offender gets off scot-free, when he should pay for what he did.” That’s the problem with crosses; the wrong person usually gets crucified.

But God keeps the books, and on Judgment Day, the books will be balanced. But even in this life, heartbreakers pay a high price. No matter how they try to justify their hurtful actions, they cannot drown out the cries of the ones they have wounded. Like the blood of Abel, which cried out from the ground, the cries of a broken heart can pierce the barrier of time and space and terrify the hardest of hearts. Hurts are usually caused by outright lies, and every liar must eventually be brought to justice.

Is there a balm for a broken heart? Is there healing for those deep, inner hurts? Can the pieces be put back together and the heart be made even stronger? Can the person who has known such horrible pain and suffering rise out of the ashes of depression and find a new and more powerful way of life? Yes! Absolutely yes! And if not, then God’s Word would be a hoax, and God Himself would be a liar. That cannot be!

A Few Simple Thoughts About How to Cope with Your Hurt

First, stop trying to figure out how and why you got hurt. What has happened to you is a very common ailment among mankind. Your situation is not unique at all. It is the way of human nature. Whether you were right or wrong means absolutely nothing at this point. All that matters now is your willingness to move on in God and trust His mysterious working in your life.

1 Peter 4:12-13

God didn't promise to give you a painless way of life: He promised you a way of escape. He promised you help to bear your pain and to give you strength to put you back on your feet when weakness makes you stagger. Most likely you did what you had to do. You moved in the will of God, honestly following your heart. Love was your motivation. You did not abort the will of God; someone else did. If that were not true, you would not be the one who is hurting so.

You can't understand why things blew up in your face when God seemed to be leading all along. Your heart asks, "Why did God allow me to get into this in the first place, if He knew it would never work out right?" But the answer is clear. Judas was called by the Lord; he was destined to be a man of God. He was handpicked by the Savior; he could have been used by God in a mighty way.

But Judas abandoned God's plan. He broke the heart of Jesus. What started out as a perfect plan of God ended in disaster, because Judas chose to go his own way. Pride and stubbornness wrecked the plan of God that was in operation. So, lay off your guilt trips. Stop condemning yourself. Stop trying to figure out what you did wrong. It is what you are thinking right now that really counts with God.

Second, remind yourself God knows exactly how much you can take, and He will not allow you to reach a breaking point.

1 Corinthians 10:13

It is true the Lord chastens/disciplines those He loves. But the chastening is only for a season and is not meant to hurt us. God is not the author of confusion in your life. It is human failure. It is the enemy sowing tares in your field of endeavor/work. It is the deception in someone else near you, who lost faith in God. The enemy tries to hurt us through other humans, just as he tried to hurt Job through an unbelieving wife.

Your heavenly Father watches over you with an unwavering eye. Every move is monitored. Every tear is bottled. He identifies with your every pain. He feels every hurt. He knows when you have been exposed to enough harassment from the enemy. He steps in and says, "Enough!" When the hurt and pain no longer draw you closer to the Lord, when, instead, it begins to downgrade your spiritual life, God moves in.

He will not permit a trusting child of His to go under because of too much pain and agony of soul. When the hurting begins to work to your disadvantage, when it begins to hinder your growth, God must act and lift you out of the battle for a while. He will never allow you to drown in your tears. He will not permit your hurt to destroy your mind. He promises to come, right on time, to wipe away your tears and give you joy for grief. God's Word says: "***Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning***" (Ps. 30:5).

Third, when you hurt the worst, go to your secret prayer closet and weep out all your bitterness. Jesus wept. Peter wept bitterly! Peter carried with him the hurt of denying the very Son of God. He walked alone on the mountains, weeping in sorrow. Those bitter tears worked a miracle in him. He came back to shake the kingdom of Satan. At times, the first thing you do is cry. Cry until there are no more tears left. Then you begin to move closer to Jesus, until you know His arms are holding you tight.

Jesus never looks away from a crying heart. He said, "***A broken heart will I not despise***" (Ps. 51:17).

If you are hurting bad, then go ahead a cry! And keep on crying until the tears stop flowing. But let those tears originate only from hurt, and not from unbelief or self-pity.

Fourth, convince yourself you will survive, you will come out of it; live or die, you belong to the Lord. Life goes on. You would be surprised how much you can bear with God helping you. Happiness is not living without pain or hurt—not at all. True happiness is learning how to live one day at a time, in spite of all the sorrow and pain. It is learning how to rejoice in the Lord, no matter what has happened in the past.

You may feel rejected. You may feel abandoned. Your faith may be weak. You may think you are down for the count. Sorrow, tears, pain, and emptiness may swallow you up at times; but God is still on His throne. He is still God!

You can't help yourself. You can't stop the pain and hurt. But our blessed Lord will come to you, and He will place His loving hand under you and lift you up to sit again in heavenly places. He will deliver you from the fear of dying. He will reveal His endless love for you.

Look up! Encourage yourself in the Lord. When the fog surrounds you and you can't see any way out of your dilemma, lie back in the arms of Jesus and simply trust Him. He has to do it all! He wants your faith, your confidence.

The bottom line is faith. And faith rests on this one absolute: ***“No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper” (Isa. 54:17).***

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***FINDING HOPE AND HEALING IN
THESE DAYS AND TIMES***

You Can't Carry Your Own Cross

***By
Dr. James E. Potts***

Lesson 2

It is very true that Jesus said to His disciples, ***“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24)***. But Jesus could not carry His cross, and neither can you! Jesus fell under the load of His cross, weary, exhausted, and unable to carry it another step. John said, ***“And He bearing His cross went forth into a place called . . . Golgotha” (John 19:17)***. The Bible doesn't tell us how far Jesus carried His cross. We know Simon of Cyrene was compelled to pick it up and carry it to the place of crucifixion (Matt. 27:32).

Jesus did take up His cross and was led by His tormentors, like a lamb to be killed. But He could not carry it for long. The truth is, Jesus was too weak and frail to carry His cross. It was laid on somebody else's shoulders. He had reached the end of endurance; He was a physically broken and wounded man. There is only so much one person can take. There is a breaking point.

Why did they compel Simon to pick up that cross? His cross had become too heavy to bear. What does this mean to us? A cross is a cross, be it wooden or spiritual. It is not enough to say, “His cross was different; our cross is spiritual.” It encourages me to know I am not the only one burdened down to the ground at times, unable to go on in my own strength.

If we are going to identify with His crucifixion, we must also identify with the steps that led to the cross. We must face the truth that no human being can carry his or her own cross. Don't look for some hidden interpretation; Jesus knew exactly what He was saying when He called us to take up our crosses and follow Him. He remembers His cross. He remembers that another had to carry it for Him. Why, then, would He ask us to shoulder crosses He knows will soon crush us to the ground? He knows we can't carry them all the way in our own strength. He knows all about the agony, the helplessness, and the burden a cross creates.

There is a truth hidden here that we must uncover. It is a truth so powerful it could change the way we look at all our troubles and hurts. Even though it almost sounds sacrilegious to suggest Jesus did not carry His own cross, which is the truth. What it means to us today is that Jesus, who is touched by the feelings of our infirmities, must experience for Himself what it is like to be weak, discouraged, and unable to go on without help. He was in all points tempted just as we are. The temptation is not in failing or in laying down the cross because of weakness.

The real temptation is in trying to pick up that cross and carrying it on in our own strength. God could have supernaturally lifted that cross and magically floated it all the way to Calvary. Then, too, He could have taken the weight out of the cross and made it light as a feather. But He did not. The crucifixion scene was not a series of blunders, and though Christ died at the hands of sinners, the entire plan was borne in the heart of God from the foundation of the world.

God put Simon there, ready to play his part in the plan of redemption. God was not caught by surprise when His Son could no longer carry the cross and therefore fulfill prophecy. God knew Jesus would take up His cross, follow toward Golgotha, then lay it down. Jesus forewarns us, ***“Without me ye can do nothing”*** (John 15:5). So, He asks us to take up our crosses and struggle on with them until we learn that lesson. Not until our crosses push us down into the dust do we learn the lesson that it is not by our might nor power nor strength, but by His power.

That is what the Bible means when it says His strength is made perfect in our weakness. It has never meant that God’s way is a little better than ours or that His strength is a bit superior. It means that God’s way is the only way; His strength is the only hope! Jesus looks upon the world—filled with confused children going about trying to establish their own righteousness and trying to please Him in their own ways—and He calls for crosses.

The cross is meant to break us, to drain us of all human effort. We know we have One stronger than Simon who will take over the burden, but He cannot take over until we come to that point where we cry, “God, I can’t take another step. I’m exhausted! I’m broken! My strength is gone! I feel dead! Help me!”

Jesus was crucified ***“through weakness, yet He lived by the power of God”*** (2 Cor. 13:4). It was when we become totally weak that we witness the crucifixion of our own pride. Out of weakness we are made strong, by faith in the Lord. Our spirits are willing to carry our own crosses, but our flesh is weak. Paul could glory in his cross, taking pleasure in how weak it made him. He said:

2 Corinthians 12:9, 10

Paul was not weak and strong at the same time. He grew weak because of troubles and distresses. But when he was cast down to the ground by his cross, he did not despair. It was out of that weakness he became strong. Paul rejoiced in this process of being made weak, because it was the secret to his power with Christ.

What is your cross? It is any burden or pressure that threatens to break you down. Junkies call theirs “a monkey on the back.” This is how they define their image of a burden that crushes them to the ground. I have heard husbands and wives refer to their marriages as their “cross to bear.” Others see their cross as an unfulfilling job, and illness, a state of loneliness, or divorce.

Since Jesus did not describe the details of the cross we are take up, I suggest it is anything that will rush/push a crisis in our spiritual lives. For example, loneliness can be a cross if it becomes a burden too heavy to bear and if it finally brings us to the end of ourselves. It is then we can allow the Lord to reach down to us and lift us out of our pity and self-destructiveness. Loneliness is a good thing if it makes us weak enough to want only His strength.

Sometimes spiritual pride can be a cross. You take on a heavy load when you begin to testify about the great things God is doing in your life. God gives you a broken and remorseful/regretful spirit; others come to you for help, and they receive blessings; you are used in wonderful ways to encourage people all around you. It begins to dawn on you that God has made you tender and loving and you are growing so much in the Lord.

You feel as if you are about to break through into a life of spiritual glory and power. A few days later, you are crawling around in the dust; your spiritual balloon burst, and everything seems to have drained out of you. The joy just disappeared. You don't seem to have anything in you now to give to others. You are dry and empty. What happened? God will never allow you to feel as if you have arrived. That's the trouble with too many believers today. Way back, they received a great blessing from the Lord. God did a wonderful work in their lives. The Holy Spirit came upon them and redid their lives, through and through.

They started telling the world about their awakening. But it's been downhill ever since. They have been riding out that one great experience and, in the process, have become self-satisfied and complacent. Take heed when you think you stand, lest you fall. Finally, that once-blessed believer ends up feeling weak and empty. After try-

ing, unsuccessfully, to recreate the blessings, he gives up in despair. Your love for Jesus can put you on your knees, but your cross will put you on your face—on the ground, in the dust. God meets you in your prostrate condition and whispers, *“I have chosen the weak things of the world, the foolish things, the broken things, the things that are nothing, that no flesh should glory in My presence.”*

We have to carry our cross until we learn to deny. Deny what? The one thing that constantly hinders God’s work in our lives: self. Look again at what Jesus said: ***“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”*** We are misinterpreting this passage if we emphasize self-denial, that is rejection of material or unlawful things. It is far more severe than that. Jesus is asking that we deny ourselves. This means to deny our own ability to carry any cross in our own strength. In other words, don’t take up your cross until you are ready to reject any and every thought of becoming a holy disciple as a result of your own effort.

God will not allow us to think our good works and clean habits can save us. That is why we need a cross. You can rise up and follow Jesus as a true disciple only when you can freely admit you can do nothing in your own strength. You cannot overcome sin through your own willpower. Your temptations cannot be overcome by your self-efforts along. You cannot work things out by your own intellect.

Jesus never forces a cross on us. He said, ***“Let him take up his cross.”*** Never once does our Lord say, “Stoop down and let Me lay a cross on you.” Jesus is not in the drafting business; His army is all volunteer. If you are hurting now, you are in the process of healing. If you are down, crushed under the burden of a heavy load, get ready! God is about to show Himself strong on your behalf. You are at the point of revelation. At any time now, your Simon will appear, because God does use people to perform His will. Someone is going to be compelled by the Holy Spirit to come into your path of suffering, reach out to you, and help lift your burden.

Your cross is a sign of His love. Don’t think of your trial as judgment from God. Don’t go about condemning yourself, as though you have brought down upon yourself some dreaded penalty for failure. What you are going through is a result of His love. Are you being disciplined? Do you feel as if you are being dragged down? Are you in pain? Are you suffering? Good! That is evidence of His love toward you.

Submit! Take up your cross! Be prepared to go down even more. Get ready to reach the end of yourself. Be prepared to give up. Be prepared to hit bottom! Please understand that you are in Christ’s own school of discipleship. Rejoice that you are going to become weak in order to experience His overpowering strength in you.

He laid His cross down; why won't you? For Him, a Simon appeared. For us, a Savior appears. We get up and go on. It's still our cross, but now it's on His shoulders.

*Two are better than one;
because they have a good
reward for their labor. For if
they fall, one will lift up his
companion: but woe to him
who is alone when he falls;
for he has no one to help him up.
Ecclesiastes 4:9-10*

06/01/22

***FINDING HOPE AND HEALING IN
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When You Feel Like Giving Up

***By
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Lesson 3

Growing numbers of believers are at the breaking point. None of them talk about giving up has to do with the Lord. Few believers would even dare entertain thoughts of quitting on their love for Christ Jesus. Most hopeless believers think only of giving up on themselves. You hear it often: “I just can’t go on anymore. I can’t make it, even though I try so hard. It’s hopeless. Why try?”

They look into the uncertain future, fearful and worried. Loneliness, anxiety, and depression hound them daily. Positive thinking won’t make their problems go away. Confessing these problems don’t really exist doesn’t change a thing. One should always think on good and honest reports; but pain, poverty, and suffering have fallen upon some of the saintliest of God’s people.

There are many who at this very moment, are on the verge of giving up. They can’t understand what is happening to them. Something is missing; and, try as you will, you simply cannot find the key to make things work out right. The secret struggles in the believer’s personal life are critical. The inner battles of the average believer today are staggering. Multitudes are involved in situations too hard to comprehend.

Paul said, ***“For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened” (2 Cor. 5:4)***. I doubt we could even count the numbers of believers who groan in secret because of the burdens they carry. Paul talked about trouble: ***“Trouble which came to us . . . we were pressed out of [burdened beyond] measure, above strength, inso-much that we despaired even of life” (2 Cor. 1:8)***.

We all have seasons of despair, along with feelings of failure. At times we have all thought of quitting. We all had thoughts of giving up.

Why do we feel like giving up at times? Mostly because we act as if God has forsaken us. We don’t doubt His existence or His reality, but our prayers seem to go unanswered. We cry out for His help, in desperation, and He seems not to hear. We

struggle along, making one mistake after another. We make promises to do better, we get into the Bible; we cry and pray and helping others and doing good. But we are often left with an empty, unfulfilled sensation. The promises of God haunt us. We claim those promises in what we believe is honest, childlike faith, but time after time we fail to receive what we ask for.

Doubt creeps in, and Satan whispers, “Nothing works. Faith in God doesn’t produce results. In spite of your tears, prayers, and trust in God’s Word, nothing really changes. Days, weeks, and even years go by, and your prayers, hopes, and dreams are still unanswered and unfulfilled.”

Every believer on this planet reaches that crisis point at one time or another in life. And in that moment, when the walls seem to be caving in and the roof appears to be collapsing, when everything seems to be coming apart and sin demands the upper hand, a voice deep within cries out, “Walk away from it all. Pack it in! Escape! Why put up with it? Run away. You don’t have to take it. Do something drastic.”

Job was a perfect man in God’s sight; yet he, too, experienced a time when he wanted to give up. Job’s agony came from a terrible dilemma. He was convinced, in his heart, that God knew where he was and what he was going through; yet he could not enter into the presence of God.

Job 23:8-9

Job was saying to himself, *“I know God is there someplace, looking down on me in all my trouble. He knows the way I take; but in spite of all I do to find Him, He keeps hiding from me. I believe God is real; He is there, but I just can’t see Him.”* In desperation, Job cries: ***“I am afraid of Him. . . The Almighty troubles me” (Job 23:15-16).***

All those fearful and troubled thoughts about God were the result of what Job thought was a divine do-nothingness. Job argues that God doesn’t cut him off, yet He doesn’t remove the darkness (Job 23:17). The bottom line for Job was simply this: either cut me down or make things right; just don’t be silent toward me. Even if You cut me off, at least I’ll know You are there.

What Is the Remedy?

How can we learn to hold on and live one day at a time? You can begin by forgetting all shortcuts and magic remedies. The longer I live for Christ, the more difficult it is

for me to accept easy, cure-all solutions. In my own struggles I've found great comfort and help in two principles.

First, God really loves you!

God is not in the business of condemning His children—failures or not. He hankers over us as a loving Father, wanting only to lift us out of our weaknesses. God is with us even when we fall. We do not fall without the Father. He does not fall into our sin, but He does come down to our fallen condition. He does not abandon us on our way down. He never forsakes a crippled child.

Oh, but He does love you! Often, we recognize His great love only when we have hit bottom and find ourselves in such need of it. You will have won a great victory if you can be convinced God loves you even in your wounded, cripple condition. And it is our wounds, our hurts, our helplessness that causes His love and compassion to overshadow and enclose us.

Our strength is renewed by His everlasting love. Just rest in that powerful love. Don't panic. Deliverance will come. God answers us by showing His love. When we have learned to trust His love and forgiveness, He will stoop down and gently help us back up.

Second, it is your faith that pleases Him the most.

“Without faith, it is impossible to please Him” (Heb. 11:6). “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:3). God wants so much to be trusted. That trust He counts as righteousness.

There are some very holy, sanctified people (at least outwardly) who walk the straight and narrow. They would never once admit to feelings of failure and despair. They think of themselves as saints, but their great sin is doubt.

What do you do when temptation rolls over you like a flood? What do you do when your short comings overwhelm you, and you see the reflections of your weaknesses? Do you give up? Quit? Never! Bring to God all you have left: your faith in Him! You may not understand why He seems to take such a long time to intervene, but you know He will. He will keep His word to you.

I am convinced Satan wants to rob us of only one thing, and that is our faith. He really doesn't want your morals or your good deeds or your dreams. He wants to destroy your faith and make you believe God has forsaken you and this world.

A fall is never fatal to those who keep their faith intact. In spite of continual struggles and feelings of helplessness at times, we must still believe the Lord. In spite of despair and pressures that stunt the mind and sap the strength, believe God. Believe He will keep you from falling and present you faultless before the throne of glory with exceeding great joy.

He loves us, and He wants us to keep on trusting; so, we will accept that love, and keep our faith strong. ***“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusts in thee” (Isa. 26:3).***

06/08/22

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Going Through a Dry Spell

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Lesson 4

There are times when you feel dry, far away from the warm presence of the Lord. In these moments of dryness, you have no yearning to read the Word; your reading of the Bible is done mostly through a sense of obligation. When you're dry and empty, you don't even feel like praying. You know your faith is intact and your love for Christ Jesus is strong. There is no desire in you to taste the things of this world. It's just that you can't seem to touch God in those days and weeks of spiritual dryness.

It's like sitting in church and seeing those all around you getting blessed, while you feel nothing. They cry; they pray; they worship with tremendous feelings. But you are not moved upon at all. You begin to wonder if there is something wrong with your spiritual life. Believers all around you are telling stories about how God is blessing them and answering all their prayers. They seem to live on a mountaintop of happy experiences, while you just drag along.

Some of your prayers still have not been answered. You don't shout, clap your hands, lift your hands, stomp your feet, say amen, rock from side to side. You have no stories to tell about some miracle you've witnessed. It almost makes you feel like a second-class believer. I believe all true believers experience dry spells at various times in their Christian lives. Even Jesus felt isolation when He cried aloud: "***Father, why hast thou forsaken Me?***"

You probably never once doubt your eternal salvation. What you doubt is your ability to understand how God works. It is not enough to know the Father loves you; it is not enough to believe all His promises; it is not enough to walk in faith; it is not enough to know you want the Lord with all that is in you. There must be more.

There must be the nearness of the Lord, the still small voice and the joy of hearing that voice. There must be the knowledge that He not only abides, but that His Word is even in your mouth. The heart must feel His warmness. The flow of God's presence must fill the room. The tears that are all bottled up inside must find release.

The joy of the Savior must rush through your mind. The heart must know He has come to guide, comfort, and help in the hour of need. There must be no doubt, no question that God has chosen to come and commune with His child.

Without the nearness of God, there can be no peace. The dryness can be stopped only with the dew of His glory. The hopelessness can disappear only by the assurance God is answering. The fire of the Holy Spirit must heat the mind, body, and soul.

You want God's total presence. You want to flow in His river of love. You want complete forgiveness of all your sins, but more than forgiveness, you want freedom. What is forgiveness without freedom? You need freedom from the power of the sin that so easily besets you, freedom from the slavery of all passions, freedom from the chains of all iniquity.

You know God's Word promises freedom. You know the Scriptures that talk about walking in the Spirit. Other Scriptures flood your mind about overcoming the world, but there are times you are not able to find the key. What does it really mean to walk in the Spirit? Does that mean we will never fall again? A child keeps falling while learning to walk. Adults stumble and fall. Can you fall, even while walking in the Spirit, then get up and walk again, getting stronger as you go?

If God is not there in your time of dryness, there is no hope. God must be there. You don't want God to give up on you when you're hurting. Yes, your flesh is weak. Yes, you fail Him over and over again. Yes, you've promised to forsake the world and everything in it, but at times, you can't seem to keep your word.

In spite of all that, somehow you know He is not far away. Somehow you know He will bring you out of this dry spell. You have in you a burning that will not be smothered. You seem to know the promises will be fulfilled. In His time, in His way, He will turn your dryness into a river of love. Where is that day-by-day victory? Where is the power to keep yourself holy and pure?

Somewhere there has to be victory over all the power of the enemy. Somewhere you can put aside the weight, the burden, the harassment. God promises total freedom, total victory over the power of the enemy. Someday your foot will not longer be entangled in Satan's trap. Someday God must lead all His children to a place of freedom from sin's power.

The only hope is the Holy Spirit, who will supernaturally lead you to the truth that will set you free. You can't understand any of it without the Holy Spirit revealing it

to you. You want to know what God expects of you; you want to know how much is your part and how much is His!

If God gave you everything you wanted, it would be a bed of confusion, with no order or harmony left. All your human desires are blind. They are usually out of keeping with your real needs and are contrary to God's moral laws. It is so easy to desire what would cause the greatest damage to yourself, lead to the worst misery, and bring on the most tragic kind of confusion.

Sin causes your desires to be loosed from God's moral law. Your desires can often be very morally bad. These evil desires seek to identify with our best thoughts, trying to make the mind accept them as God's thoughts. You allow your personal desires to deceive you into accepting them as the still small voice of God in the inner man. May God keep you from the deception of your own immoral desires.

What Should Be Done to Overcome Spiritual Dryness?

First, you must maintain a life of prayer. Why is it that we don't pray as we should anymore? We know God is wanting to comfort and help us. We know our burdens can all be lifted when we are shut in with Him. There is something deep within us that keeps calling us to prayer.

It is the voice of the Holy Spirit saying, "Come!" Come to the water that satisfies that soul thirst. Come to the Father, who pities His children. Come to the Lord of life, who promises to forgive every sin committed. Come to the One who refuses to condemn you or forsake you or hide from you.

God does not hide from us when we sin. That is only our fear condemning our hearts. God did not hide in the garden, when Adam and Eve sinned. He still came to them, calling for their fellowship and love. We, ourselves, hide because of our guilt and condemnation.

Come boldly to His throne of grace. He immediately forgives those who repent with godly sorrow. You don't have to spend hours and days in guilt. You don't have to earn your way back into His good graces. Go to the Father, bend your knees, open your heart, and cry out your agony and pain. Tell Him all about your failings, all about your struggles. Tell Him about your loneliness, feelings of isolation, fears, and failures.

We try everything except prayer. We read books, looking for formulas and guidelines. We go to others looking everywhere for a word of comfort or advice. We seek mediators and forget the one Mediator who has the answer to everything.

We don't pray, because it's so hard to do—most of the time. It's not hard when trouble comes, or when sickness strikes, or when a loved one dies. At these times we are so broken in spirit that we cry and pray. That's all right, but we should be leaning on Jesus through the good and the bad. We should be getting our strength and help long before the crisis overwhelms us. We should be pouring out our hearts to Him every day of our lives.

This is why we are so dry and empty. We have neglected the secret closet prayer. It is not really dryness; it is lukewarmness. It is a growing coldness caused by drifting along, getting away from the holy place.

Nothing dispels dryness and emptiness more quickly than to be shut in with God. We know our love for Him should lead us into His presence, but we busy ourselves in so many other things; then time slips away, and God is left out. We lean in His direction a whole range of "thought prayers." But nothing can take the place of that secret closet with the door shut, praying to the Father in seclusion. That is the solution to every dry spell.

Secondly, you must no longer be afraid of a little suffering. Christ's resurrection was led by a short period of suffering. We do die! We do suffer! There is pain and sorrow! We don't want to suffer or be hurt. We want painless deliverance. We want supernatural intervention. We pray, "do it, God, because I am weak and always will be. Do it all while I go my way, waiting for a supernatural deliverance."

We want someone to lay hands on us and drive away all the dryness. But victory is not always without suffering and pain. Suffering endures only for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

God sets before you a choice. His love demands a choice. If God supernaturally lifted us out of every battle without pain or suffering, it would end all trials and all temptation; there would be no free choice and no testing as by fire. It would be God superimposing His will on mankind. He chooses to meet us in our dryness and show us how it can become the way into a new life of faith.

It is often according to the will of God to suffer dryness and even pain: ***“Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator”*** (1 Peter 4:19).

Thank God, suffering is always the short period before final victory! ***“But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you”*** (1 Peter 5:10).

06/15/22

***FINDING HOPE AND HEALING IN
THESE DAYS AND TIMES***

***God Can Use You in Spite
of Your Weaknesses***

***By
Dr. James E. Potts***

Lesson 5

God has determined to accomplish His goals, here on earth, through men and women with weaknesses. Isaiah, the great prayer warrior, was a man just like the rest of us, was weak and wounded. David, the man after God's own heart, was a murdering adulterer who had no moral right to any of God's blessings. Peter denied the Lord God of heaven, cursing the One who loved him most.

Abraham, the father of nations, lived a lie, using his wife as a pawn to save his own skin. Jacob was a conniver. Paul was impatient and harsh with converts and associates who could not live up to his serious lifestyle. Adam and Eve turned a perfect marriage arrangement into a nightmare. Solomon, the wisest man on earth, did some of the senseless things ever recorded in history.

Samuel murdered King Agag in a rage of anger, in an obsessive show of righteousness. Jonah wanted to see an entire city burn, to justify his prophecies against it; he despised the mercy of God toward a repentant people. Lot offered his two virgin daughters to a mob of sex-crazed Sodomites. The list of those who loved God, who were greatly used by God, who were almost driven to the ground by their weaknesses, goes on and on. Yet God was always there, saying I will accomplish my will regardless!

One of the most encouraging Scriptures in the Bible is ***2 Corinthians 4:7***; ***“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”*** Then Paul goes on to describe those earthen vessels as dying men, troubled on every side, perplexed, persecuted, cast down.

God mocks man's power. He laughs at our egotistical efforts at being good. He never uses the high and mighty, but instead He uses the weak things of this world to confound the wise.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

God calls us in our weaknesses, even when He knows we'll do it wrong. He puts His priceless treasure in these earthen vessels of ours, because He delights in doing the impossible with nothing.

God delights in using men and women who think of themselves as unable to do anything right. All the hotshot believers who go about bowling people over with their great abilities never impress God. Men often use God to achieve fortune, fame, honor, and respect. Talent, personality, and cleverness are all used to advance God's kingdom, but God is not impressed. His strength is perfected in those of weakness.

God does not use people weak in righteousness. A man's weakness can lead him into adultery, gambling, drinking, and all kinds of indulgences. God is not referring to that kind of weakness. The weakness God speaks about is our human inability to obey His commandments in our own strength.

God calls us to a life of holiness and separation. He tells us we can be free from the bondage of sin. His Word promises freedom from sin's power, as well as forgiveness. God's Word comes to us with some impossible challenges: ***“Resist the devil! Walk in the Spirit! Come out from among them! Do not commit Adultery! Love your enemies! Enter into rest! Leave behind all your fears! Put down your lustful desires! Let no sin have dominion over you! As He was in this world, so, be you! Overcome self, pride, and envy! Sin not!”***

Think honestly about how little you can do, on your own, to fulfill these challenges; then you will realize how weak you are. The call to holiness is frightening and disturbing. You know what God asks of you, but you don't seem to know how to fulfill it. Some think they can do it on their own, so they go into a convulsion of all their inner resources.

They grit their teeth and muster up all their human powers. They set out with great energy calling upon all they have and taking matters into their own hands. They proceed to obey, or die trying. It works for a little while, until God crosses them up. He steps in and stops all men's schemes and self-determined efforts of the flesh. Then failure strikes, just at the moment all seemed to be going so well. These do-it-yourself believers end up frustrated, defenseless, and weak.

That is when our Lord takes over! He comes with a comforting message: ***“Lay down your weapons. Stop trying to be self-sufficient and strong. I am your weapon, your***

only weapon. I am your strength. Let Me do what you can never do. You are not supposed to do it on your own; I must do it, so you will glorify only Me. I will give you My righteousness, My holiness, My rest, and My strength. You can't save yourself; you can't help yourself; you can't please Me in any way, except by receiving the blessings of the cross, by faith. Let Me be in charge of your growth in holiness."

Gideon is an example of a called man who had too much going for him. He was called to deliver God's children from slavery. He blasted the trumpets and called together a mighty army. Thousands of brave fighting men rallied under his banner, but God said to Gideon, ***"Your army is too great; you have too many men, too much strength. Send them back. If you win the victory with all this show of strength, you and your people might think you won on your own abilities. You have too much going for you, and I don't want you to steal the glory. Strip down your army!"***

One by one, those men left Gideon's army. He must have stood by thinking, "How ridiculous! Win by weakening ourselves? God calls me to do battle, then asks me to disarm. This is the craziest thing God has yet asked me to do. There goes my plan to become a legend in my own time."

From a human standpoint, it is foolish to have great victories with small remnants, walls tumbled without a shot fired, armies put to flight by a diverse orchestra of trumpet players. But the power of faith alone, weak men confound/confuse the world.

No matter how powerful and honorable a man may be, God cannot use him until he falls in the dust and gives up all his idols. Human pride must be crushed. All our boasting must be silenced. All our thoughts and plans must be abandoned. All human achievement must be recognized for what it is: filthy rags and a stench in God's nostrils. Man must become powerless, defenseless, and hopeless in himself. He must come with fear and trembling to the cross and cry out, *"Be the Lord of my life."*

There are believers who fail the Lord. They love Him very much; they worry about grieving Him; but, in spite of their love and good intentions, they fall into sin. Some of these children of the Lord are guilty of the sin of Peter: they have denied the Lord who called them.

There is only one thing that works. Faith is your victory. Abraham had weaknesses: He lied, and he almost turned his wife into an adulteress, but Abraham ***"believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness"*** (Rom. 4:3). God refused to hold his sin against him, because he believed.

Yes, you have failed. But do you believe Jesus has the power to free you from sin's power? Do you believe the cross of Jesus means sin's bondage is broken? Do you accept the fact that He has promised to deliver you from the snare/trap of Satan?

The victory is your faith. Let your faith rise. Let your heart accept all the promises of victory in Jesus. Then let your faith tell your heart, *"I may not be what I want to be yet, but God is at work in me, and He has the power to loosen sin's hold on me. I'm going to keep my momentum toward the Lord, until I'm free at last. It may be little by little, but the day will come when faith will conquer."*

I will not always be a slave. I am not the devil's puppet. I am a weak child of God wanting the strength of Jesus. I am not going to be another victim of the devil. I am going to come forth as pure gold, tried in the fire. God is for me. I commit it all to Him who is able to keep me from falling and present me faultless before the throne of God with exceeding great joy."

06/22/22

***FINDING HOPE AND HEALING IN
THESE DAYS AND TIMES***

God Has Not Forgotten You

***By
Dr. James E. Potts***

Lesson 6

God has not forgotten you! He knows exactly where you are and what you are going through right now, and He is monitoring every step along your path. But we are just as the children of Israel, who doubted God's daily care for them, even though prophets were sent to deliver wonderful promises from heaven.

God's people sat in darkness, hungry and thirsty, praying for deliverance and comfort. God bottled every tear, and He heard their cry and answered, ***"I will preserve you. . . You shall no longer hunger and thirst. . . I will have mercy on you and lead you by springs of living water . . . for the Lord will comfort His people and have mercy on all the troubled ones"*** (Isa. 49).

Did Israel rejoice in these promises sent directly from the throne of God? Did God's people quit their fretting and begin trusting in the Lord to see them through? Did those who were hurt and confused believe a single word of these promises? No! These were not degenerates or sons of the devil. Instead, they were those *"who sought the Lord . . . the sons of Abraham . . . those who knew righteousness . . . in whose heart was the law of God."*

How much clearer must God make His Word to these stubborn, unbelieving children? God was greatly concerned because they were not hearing His promises.

Isaiah 51:12-13

Here we are, as children of the same holy God, having in us the glorious promise of Holy Ghost comfort; yet we go about, daily, fearing the oppressor. We know what our Lord has promised us: guidance, peace, a shelter from the storm, a way where there seems to be none, a supply for every need, healing for every hurt.

Do we believe any of it? Do we just put these promises out of our minds and go on our way, worrying and fretting and taking matters into our own hands? I think so!

We get in a tight place; we get lonely and depressed; we fall into temptation; we make serious mistakes and live in guilt and fear; through it all, we choose to forget all God has promised us. We forget we serve a God who laid the very foundations of this earth. We forget our Father is all-powerful, and all things that exist were made by Him. We see only our problems. Our fears shut out the vision of His power and glory. We get afraid; we panic; we question; we doubt.

We forget, in our moment of need, that God has us in the palm of His hand. Instead, like the children of Israel, we are afraid we are going to blow it all and be destroyed by the enemy. How difficult it must be for our loving Father to understand why we won't trust Him when we are down and in need. God must think to Himself, ***“Don't they know I have graven them on the palms of My hands? I could no more forget them in their moment of need than a mother could forget her suckling child . . . and even though a mother could forget her child, I cannot forget a single child of Mine” (Isa. 49:15-16).***

Again and again, God came to Israel, pleading for their confidence and trust in times of crises.

Isaiah 30:15

God said to them, *“You didn't ask at My mouth or pray for help and guidance. You didn't wait for Me to help. You didn't return to Me for help and strength when you really needed it. You didn't accept My counsel; you didn't wait for Me to work. You didn't wait for that quiet word behind you that whispers, ‘This is the way; walk ye in it.’ You didn't believe My strong arm could deliver you. You didn't call upon My name or rest in the shadow of My palm. No! You took matters in your own hands; you de-pended on others; you trusted in your own thoughts.”*

God seems to shout at Israel:

Isaiah 34:16: 35:3-4, 10

Jesus was concerned that when He returned to this earth, He would not find any faith left. He had just finished a message about how God certainly answers prayer. He had just promised that the heavenly Father would ***“Avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him” (Luke 18:7)***. It must have been with a heavy heart that Jesus spoke the following: ***“I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8)***.

We Have Begun to Doubt That God Still Answers Prayer

Could it be that we continue in our hurt, in our sin, or in living in defeat and failure simply because we really do not believe God answers our prayers anymore? Are we guilty as the children of Israel in thinking God has forgotten us? Are we acting as though the Lord has forsaken us and given us over to our own devices, to figure things out for ourselves? Do we really believe our Lord meant it when He said God will act just in time, in answer to our prayer of faith?

Jesus implies that most of us, even though called and chosen, will not be trusting in Him when He returns. Some of God's people have already lost their confidence in Him. They do not believe, in the deepest part of their souls, that their prayers make any difference. They act as if they are all on their own. Instead of submitting to the Lord in quiet confidence and resting in His promises, we try so hard to work out our own solutions. Then when our way of doing things blows up in our faces, we get angry with God.

Has your faith been weak lately? Have you almost given up on certain things you have prayed so much about? Have you grown weary with waiting? Have you thrown your hands up, as if to say "I just can't seem to break through?" And you feel as if God has said no to you.

What about all the lonely people in the world who are torn apart by their isolation? They cry at night. The telephone becomes their lifeline, and when things get unbearable, they call someone—anyone—just to talk for a while. Does God still answer that kind of prayer? You know—the old-fashioned kind where Christian young ladies still pray for Christian young husbands and Christian young men pray for Christian wives? Can God send friends and mates into lonely lives, in answer to prayer and faith? I still believe God works that way. Yet I know, there are a quite a few who really don't believe God's promises.

Instead of praying with faith, instead of quietly trusting His promises, instead of reading God's Word and growing in strength, instead of committing their futures to His keeping—grow spiritually dull. Their faith is weak because they are spiritually crippled. They pray only in quick grabs. They wallow in self-pity and self-condemnation. They are stunted and unbelieving, ready to think God has picked them out of the crowd to be treated wrongly. I say to all lonely people: Get back to the secret closet! Get back to simple, childlike faith! Start developing a hunger for Jesus more than for friends or mates. God will, according to His own Word, meet your every need.

I hear believers say something is missing in their lives. They get a broken spirit; weep and cry often. They want more from God and more out of life. They want to be holy. They want to know God and get through to Him. Do you feel as if you are just outside the gates, so close, and about to break through to a life of joy, faith, answered prayers, and victory? Is there something in you that keeps condemning you, as if you never do enough to please God? At times do you think to yourself, "I'm just not doing anything. I'm not getting anything accomplished. I'm not growing. I'm not making real progress?"

What does it all mean when prayers go unanswered, when hurts linger, when suffering continues, and God seems to be doing nothing in response to our faith? Often God is loving us more at those times than ever before. The Word says, "***Whom the Lord loves He chasten***" (Heb. 12:6). When you are hurting, it could be God's hand spanking you out of your stubbornness and pride.

God could be saying to you, "*I've promised to meet your every need. I told you I would do anything you asked of Me in faith. You need to submit to a season of chastening; it is the only way I can make you into an experienced vessel of love. You may ask to be delivered, but it will only delay your spiritual growth. Through this*

We have faith in our faith. We place more emphasis on the power of our prayers than we do on getting His power into us. We want to figure out God so we can read Him like a book. We don't want to be surprised. We are so busy working on God, we forget He is trying to work on us. That's what this life is all about: God at work on us, trying to remake us into vessels of glory. We are so busy praying to change things that we have little time to allow prayer to change us.

Prayer is not for God's benefit; it is for ours. Faith is not for His benefit, but for ours. This is why we miss the true meaning of prayer and faith. We see God only as the Giver and ourselves as the receivers. But prayer and faith are the avenues by which we become the givers to God. They are to be used, not as ways to get things from God, but as ways to give Him those things by which we can please Him.

Something Better Than Answered Prayer

Do you want a promise, or do you want the Promise Maker? Do you want answers to prayer, or do you want Him who works all things together for good? Can you imagine a wife who sticks with her husband only for the benefits she receives? She enjoys the prestige of her husband, and she freely uses his name to enhance her own position. She enjoys all the luxuries he provides; she spends on his credit cards. Yet

she takes for granted the one who loves her. She has little time to spend with him; she is preoccupied with her own comfort and pleasure.

Is that not the way we treat our Master? We demand the use of His credit cards, while showing little interest in His love. All the promises are given to us so we can become participants of Him. He wants to get His divine nature of love into our puny bodies.

Do you believe all the promises are yours? Do you believe God still answers prayer? Do you believe He will comfort you, deliver you, give you the things you need to be free and fulfilled? Your answer should be Yes!

But all God does in you and for you depends on this one thing: You must believe He hears you when you call! He bottles every tear; He is more willing to give than you are to receive; He is anxious to answer every prayer that will help you be more like Himself; and He will never withhold anything you need any longer than you can bear to be without it.

God has not forsaken you or me. Right now, He is wanting us all to believe He is working all things out for our good. So, stop trying to figure it out! Stop worrying! Stop doubting our Lord! The answer is coming! God has not shut His ear. We reap in due season if we faint not!

06/29/22

***FINDING HOPE AND HEALING IN
THESE DAYS AND TIMES***

“Will God Ever Answer My Prayer?”

***By
Dr. James E. Potts***

Lesson 7

Have you ever asked that question? Is there a special situation you have been praying about for a long time, with no apparent answer in sight? Are there times when you wonder if the answer will ever come? Have you honestly done everything you know you should do? Have you fulfilled every requirement of prayer? Have you wept, fasted, and fervently petitioned God in true faith? And yet nothing seems to happen?

If you must answer yes to all the above questions, you are in good company. You are not some strange kind of believer, suffering chastisement from the Lord. The delayed answer to prayer is one of the most common experiences shared by even the saintliest of God’s children.

There are thousands of confused believers, all across this nation, who are condemning themselves for not being able to produce an answer to a desperate prayer. They know God’s Word is true, that not a single promise can fail, that God is faithful to all generations, that He is good, and that He wants His children to expect answers to their prayers. Yet, for them, there is that one prayer that goes unanswered—indefinitely. So, they blame themselves.

Some are giving up because they have come under bondage to teachings on faith that suggest all unanswered prayers are a result of human error. In other words, if it didn’t work for you, you did something wrong; so keep doing it until you get it right.

Our faith should not be afraid to investigate Bible passages that deal with God’s delays. His seasons of silence, and even His sovereignty—the times when He acts without giving man an explanation. Paul warned that faith should not stand alone. He said, ***“Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience”*** (2 Pet. 1:5-6). Faith without patience and virtue and self-control (temperance) becomes self-centered and unbalanced.

There are times in the Bible when God could not, or did not, answer—no matter how many times it was asked for—no matter how great the faith or how positive the confession. Paul was not delivered from the affliction that buffeted him, even though he prayed diligently for an answer. ***“For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me” (2 Cor. 12:8).***

First, God wanted to see the work of grace completed in Paul. He would not permit His child to become puffed up with pride. He would not rejoice in a deliverance, but in learning how God’s power could be his in times of weakness. But look what it worked out in Paul, proving God was right in not answering his request:

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Was Paul lacking in faith? Full of negative pride? Wrong confessions? Why didn’t Paul preach the message we hear so much today: *“You don’t have to suffer infirmities, poverty, distresses, suffering. Claim your victory over all suffering and pain”?*

Paul wanted more than healing, more than success, more than deliverance from thorns: he wanted Christ! Paul would rather suffer than try to overrule God. That is why he could shout, ***“I glory in my present situation—God is at work in me through all I suffer. In and through it all, I know my present suffering cannot be compared with the glory that awaits me.”***

We abuse our answers. We become ungrateful, and we so often turn our deliverance into disaster. That’s what happened to Hezekiah. God sent a prophet to warn him he was to prepare to die saying, ***“Thou shalt die, and not live.”*** Hezekiah wept, repented, and begged God for an additional fifteen years. God granted his prayer. He was given a new lease on life. The very first year into his reprieve, he compromised, exposing Israel to the enemy kings. He brought disaster upon his family and his nation.

There are other times when God refuses to answer our prayer request because He has a better way. He will answer, all right, but we will not recognize it as such. We will see it as rejection, but, through it all, God will be doing His perfect will.

You find this principle at work when Israel was being led away captive, to the land of the Chaldeans. *“What a disaster,” they cried. “God has rejected our prayers; we are forsaken. God has turned a dead ear to us.”* Those who were left in Jerusalem became puffed up, thinking God had heard their prayers and blessed them by allow-

ing them to stay. But those who stayed behind were totally destroyed by sword, famine, and pestilence, until they were all consumed (see Jer. 24:10).

But those who were taken captive were told, ***“You have been sent out of this place into the land of Chaldeans for your own good”*** (Jer. 24:5). They never did recognize God at work, preserving a remnant, but those who were *“saved through suffering”* were returned to rebuild the land.

The facts are that you have earnestly prayed about situations. You have laid hold of every promise in the Bible; you have confidence that God is able to do anything. Yet the years roll by and you have not yet seen some of your prayers answered. Thousands of your prayers have been answered. You see answers to your prayers every single day of your life. But still, there is that particular prayer has not yet been answered.

But don't worry about it, God is bringing a balance into your faith. And the joy and freedom when your faith in God no longer depends on just getting answers. What a release when your faith focuses only on Jesus and receiving His holy character.

I believe in Holy Ghost timing. In God's own time, all our prayers will be answered, in one way or another. The trouble is, we are afraid to submit our prayers to Holy Ghost scrutiny. Some of our prayers need to be purged. Some of our faith is being misspent on requests that are not mature.

We are so convinced that “if our request is in accordance to His will, we should get it.” We simply do not know how to pray, ***“Thy will be done!”*** We don't want His will as much as those things permitted by His will. So, we all search through God's Word and cleverly lay out all the reasons why we should be granted certain blessings and answers. We match the promises to tailor our specific requests. When we are convinced, we have a good case and have gathered enough promises, we march into the presence of God, as if to say, “Lord, I've got an iron-tight case—in no way can You turn me down. I've checked my faith. I've got Your Word on the matter. I've done everything according to plan. It's mine! I claim it! Right now!”

Is that all that faith is about? Simply a tool to pray out to God the benefits of promises? A test of His Word? A key to unlock God's blessing room? It seems we are marching into God's throne room ready to claim all that is due us. Until God restructures our desires and ambitions, we are going to keep on squandering our faith on things created, rather than the Creator. How corrupt our faith becomes when it is used only to acquire things.

Faith is a form of thought, divine thought. But Jesus warned us not to give one thought to material things. ***“Only the Gentiles [heathen] seek these things (Matt. 6:32).*** Jesus is very clear on this matter, saying, ***“Therefore. . . take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. . . For your heavenly Father knows that ye have need of all these things” (Matt. 6:25, 32).***

Even the wicked prosper, at times, and it can't be said that faith produced it. God rains His love and blessings on the just as well as the unjust. The idea of teaching believers how to use faith to become prosperous or more successful runs contrary to the teaching of the Nazarene who called on His followers to sell out and give to the poor.

He warned against building bigger barns and criticized the hunger for worldly goods. He had no time for those who stored up treasures here on earth. He taught that His children should not become entangled with the deceitfulness of riches, but that faith should cause us to set our affection on things above.

Compare much of the materialistic faith today with the faith described in Hebrews 11. The things hoped for by these great men and women of God could not be measured by any worldly standard. The substance they sought after was not money, houses, success, or a painless life. They exercised their faith to win God's approval of their lives.

Abel's faith focused only on righteousness, and God gifted him with it. Enoch's faith was so God-centered that he was translated. His faith had but one single motive: to know and please God. Faith, to Noah, meant “moving with fear” to prepare for the coming judgment. How that man would weep if he could ever witness the madness of materialism, which grips our generation. Abraham exercised his faith to keep reminding himself he was a stranger on this earth. His blessing pact on this earth produced only a tent in which to dwell, because he put all his faith in that city whose builder and maker is God.

Yes, the faith chapter closes by saying, ***“God has provided some better thing for us” (Heb. 11:40).*** But how shall we define that better thing God has prepared for those who have faith today? Better health benefits? Better goatskins? Better financial arrangements? Better times of ease and prosperity? Better seasoned-saints benefits? Bigger barns, filled with all we need to retire in style?

I don't think so! God has provided for us something better in His only begotten Son. He came to earth as man, to show us an even greater, single-minded faith; and that is "to do the will of the Father." We should be spending more time getting into Jesus than trying to get something out of Him. We should not be praying that God make things happen *for us*, but *to us*. There is a faith that rests not in answered prayer, but in the knowledge that our Lord will do what is right for us.

Don't worry about whether God is saying, "*Yes!*" or "*No!*" to your request. Don't be downcast when the answer is not in sight. Quit thinking of faith formulas and methods. Just commit every prayer to Jesus and go about your business with confidence that He will not be one moment early or late in answering. And, if the answer you seek is not forthcoming, say to your heart, "He is all I need. If I need more, He will not withhold it. He will do it in His time, in His way; and, if He does not fulfill my request, He must have a perfect reason for not doing so. No matter what happens, I will always have faith in His faithfulness."

God helps us if our faith serves the creature rather than the Creator. God forgive us if we are more concerned about getting prayers answered than in learning total submission to Christ Himself. We do not learn obedience by the things we obtain, but by the things we suffer. Are you willing to learn obedience by suffering a little longer with what appears to be unanswered prayer? Will you rest in His love, while patiently waiting for the promise, after you have done all the will of the Father?

Faith is a gift, not a diploma. Faith should not be a burden or a puzzle. The more childlike it is, the better it works. You need no seminar or textbook; you need no guide. The Holy Spirit will lead you closer to Jesus—who is the Word—by whom comes faith.

07/06/22

***FINDING HOPE AND HEALING IN
THESE DAYS AND TIMES***

Jesus and Storms

***By
Dr. James E. Potts***

Lesson 8

Jesus ordered His disciples into a boat that was headed for a collision. The Bible says He constrained them to get into a ship. It was headed for troubled waters; it would be tossed about like a bobbing cork. The disciples would be shoved into a mini-*Titanic* experience, and Jesus knew it all the time. ***“And straightway Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him unto the other side, while He sent the multitudes away” (Matt. 14:22).***

Where was Jesus? He was up in the mountains overlooking that sea; He was there, praying for them not to fail in the test He knew they must go through. The boat trip, the storm, the tossing waves, and the winds were all a part of a trial the Father had planned. They were about to learn the greatest lesson they would ever learn. That lesson was how to recognize Jesus in the storm.

They recognized Him to this point as the Miracle Worker, the Man who turned loaves and fishes into miracle food, the Friend of sinners, the One who brought salvation to every kind of lost humanity. They knew Him as the Supplier of all their needs, even to paying their taxes from a fish’s mouth.

They recognized Jesus as the Christ, the very Son of God. They knew He had the words of eternal life. They knew He had power over all the works of the devil. They knew Him as a teacher, having taught them how to pray and forgive, to bind and loose. But they had never learned to recognize Jesus in the storm. Tragically, those disciples who thought they really knew Him best could not recognize Him when the storm hit.

That’s the root of most of our trouble today. We trust Jesus for miracles and healing. We believe Him for our salvation and the forgiveness of our sins. We look to Him as the supplier of all our needs. We trust Him to bring us into glory one day. But when a sudden storm falls upon us, and it seems as if everything is falling apart, we find it difficult to see Jesus anywhere near. We can’t believe He allows storms to

teach us how to trust. We are never quite sure His is nearby when things really get rough.

The ship is now tossing; it appears to be sinking; winds are blowing; they have everything going contrary to them:

Matthew 14:24-27

They were suddenly swamped, so suddenly overwhelmed; the very thought that Jesus was nearby, watching over them, was hard to swallow. One probably said, “This is the work of Satan; the devil is out to kill us because of all those miracles we’ve had a part in.”

Another probably said, “Where did we go wrong? Which one of us had sin in his life? Let’s have a heart searching; let’s confess one to another. God is mad at somebody on this boat!” Another could have said, “Why us? We’re doing what He said to do. We’re obedient. We’re not out of God’s will. Why all of a sudden, this storm? Why would God allow us to be shaken up so much on a divine mission?”

In their darkest hour, Jesus went to them. How difficult it must have been for Jesus to wait on the edge of that storm, loving them so much, feeling every pain they felt, wanting so much to keep them from getting hurt, yearning after them as a father for his children in trouble. Yet He knew they could never fully know Him or trust Him until the full fury of the storm was upon them.

He would reveal Himself only when they had reached the limit of their faith. The boat would never have gone down, but their fear would have drowned them more quickly than the waves beating on the ship. The only fear of drowning was that of drowning from despair, fear, and anxiety—not water.

Remember, Jesus can calm that sea at any time simply by speaking the word, but the disciples cannot. Could faith on their part have been exercised? Could not they command the sea in Jesus’ name? Could not the promises have been put into practice? (***“All things asked in prayer. . . ye shall have!”***) These cannot happen until we have learned to recognize Jesus in the storm, have received faith to ride out the storm, and have learned to be of good cheer when the boat appears to be sinking.

When the disciples saw Jesus, they thought He was a spirit, a ghost. They did not recognize Jesus in that storm. They saw a ghost, an apparition. The thought of Jesus

being so near, so much a part of what they were going through, did not even enter their minds.

The Greatest Danger

Here is the danger we all face: not being able to see Jesus in our troubles—instead we see ghosts. In that peak moment of fear when the night is the darkest, the storm is the angriest, the winds are the loudest, and the hopelessness the most overwhelming, Jesus always draws near to us, to reveal Himself as the Lord of the flood, the Savior in storms. ***“The Lord sits upon the flood; yea, the Lord sits King forever” (Ps. 29:10).***

The disciples made their fears worst. Now, not only were they afraid of the storm, they had a new fear: ghosts. The storm was producing ghosts; mysterious spirits were on the loose.

You would think at least one disciple would have recognized what was happening and said, “Look y’all, Jesus said He would never leave us or forsake us. He sent us on this mission; we are in the center of His will. He said the steps of a righteous man are ordered by Himself. Look again. That’s our Lord! He’s right here! He’s never been far away. We’ve never once been out of His sight. Everything is under control.”

But not one disciple could recognize Jesus. They did not expect Jesus to be in their storm. They expected Him at the Samaritan well. They expected Him to be there with outstretched arms, bidding little children to come. They expected Him to be in the temple, driving out the money changers. And they expected Him to one day be at the right hand of the Father, to make them kings and priests. But never, never did they expect Him to be with them, or even near them, in a storm!

It was, to them, just an act of destiny, an unexpected disaster; a tragic accident of fate; an unwanted, unexpected, unnecessary trial; a lonely, fearful journey into darkness and despair. It was a night to be forgotten! But God saw that storm through different eyes. It was as much a test for these disciples as the wilderness was for Jesus. God took them away from the miracles, shut them up in a small, frail boat, far from the upper room, then turned nature loose. God allowed them to be shaken but not sunken.

The Greatest Lesson

There was only one lesson to be learned, only one. It was a simple lesson, not some deep, mystical, earth-shattering one. Jesus simply wanted to be trusted as their Lord in every storm of life. He simply wanted them to maintain their cheerfulness and

confidence, even in the most difficult, the darkest hours of trial. That's all. Jesus did not want them to call up up ghosts; but they did, just as we all still do. Jesus must have appeared as twelve different ghosts in the twelve separate minds of those disciples.

Perhaps one thought to himself, "I know that ghost; that's the ghost of lying. I lied a few weeks back. That's what the storm is all about. That's the reason we're in trouble: I lied. That's the ghost of lying. Just get me out of this mess and I will quit lying."

Another probably thought, "That's the ghost of hypocrisy! I'm two-faced. I'm a phony. Now I can see what I am in this storm. That's why the storm. God sent that ghost to warn me to straighten up. No more hypocrisy! Just please deliver me!"

Another: "That's the ghost of compromise. I've been compromising lately. I've really failed the Lord. It's been a secret thing I tried to hide, but I'm scared now. You allowed this storm. You sent that ghost to warn me to get back to holiness. Just give me another chance."

Another: "That's the ghost of covetousness/greedy. I've been too materialistic." Another: "That's the ghost of wasted time. I've grown lazy. I've not been witnessing. I've grown cold, lukewarm, but now I've learned my lesson!"

Another: "That's the ghost of grudges. I've not been forgiving as I should. I've been avoiding certain people. That's why God is shaking me up, to teach me to quit holding grudges." Another: "That's the ghost of secret sin; evil thoughts. I can't seem to give them up, so, God had to send this storm to expose me."

Another: "That's the ghost of broken promises. I promised God I would do this thing, and I didn't do it. Now God is getting back to me. He's mad at me, so, He put me out in this storm. That's the lesson; I've learned my lesson!"

No! No! Those are all ghosts of our own minds, apparitions only. None of these are the real lessons to be learned. God is not angry at you. You are not in a storm because you failed. These ghosts are not even in your storm.

It is Jesus at work, seeking to reveal Himself in His saving, keeping, preserving power! He is wanting you to know the storm has one purpose only—and that is to bring you to complete rest and trust in His power and presence at all times, in the middle of miracles and in the middle of storms. It is so easy, in a storm, to lose a

sense of His presence and feel we are left alone, to battle against hopeless odds; or that somewhere along the line, as a result of sin or compromise, Christ has forsaken us and left us out here, all alone, in that tossing boat.

What about those times when the contrary winds of sickness, disease, and pain? What about when cancer strikes, disease, and pain? What about when pain and fear are so overwhelming, you can't spare a thought about the closeness of Jesus? Your storm is upon you, and there is no other thought than survival. You don't want to die; you want to live. You see the ghost of death in the shadows, and you tremble. You don't have the strength to face even the next hour.

That is what the presence of Jesus is all about. It is a revelation that is the most powerful when it comes to us at that most needed time.

07/13/22

***FINDING HOPE AND HEALING IN
THESE DAYS AND TIMES***

The Ultimate Healing

***By
Dr. James E. Potts***

Lesson 9

Resurrection from the dead is the “ultimate healing.” These mortal bodies of ours are but just shells, and the life is not in the shell. The shell is not for keeping, but a temporary housing. Every true believer has been endowed with eternal life. It is planted as a maturing seed in our mortal bodies. It is within us, an ever-growing, ever-expanding process of development; and it must eventually break out of the shell to become a new form of life.

This glorious life of God in us uses/puts pressure on the shell, and, at the very moment resurrection life is mature, the shell breaks. The artificial bonds are broken, and, like a newborn baby chick, the soul is freed from its prison. Praise the Lord! Death is but a simple breaking of the fragile shell. At the exact moment our Lord decides our shell has served its purpose, a sudden rush of eternal life floods the soul, and God opens the shell—only to free the new creature that has come of age.

As life itself abandons/leaves the shell, after it has fulfilled its function, so must God’s people abandon/leave their old, corrupt bodies made from the dust from which they came. Who would think of picking up the broken pieces of shell and forcing the newborn chick back into its original state? And who would think of asking a departed loved one to give up his/her new, glorified body—made in Christ’s own image—and return to the decaying shell from which they broke free?

Paul said it: ***“To die is gain” (Phil. 1:21)***. That kind of talk is totally foreign to our modern spiritual vocabularies. We have become such life worshipers that we have very little desire to depart to be with the Lord. Paul said, ***“For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Phil. 1:23)***. Yet, for the sake of edifying the converts, he thought it best to “stay in the shell.” Or, as he put it, ***“live in the flesh” (v. 22)***.

Was Paul morbid [unpleasant and disturbing thoughts]? Did he have an unhealthy fixation with death? Did Paul show a lack of respect for the life God had blessed him

with? Absolutely not! Paul lived life to the fullest. To him, life was a gift, and he had used it well to fight a good fight. He had overcome the fear of the “sting of death” and could now say, ***“It is better to die and be with the Lord than to stay in the flesh.”***

Those who die in the Lord are the winners; we who remain are losers. How tragic that God’s people still look upon the departed as losers—poor, miserable souls, cheated out of a greater measure of life. Oh! But if our spiritual eyes could be opened but for a few moments, we would see our loved ones on God’s side of the universe, walking in the pure, crystal river of eternal life, trying to shout at us, “I won! I won! I’m free at last! Press on, dear earthlings; there is nothing to fear. Death does not sting. It is true; it is better to depart and to be with the Lord.”

For sure, it is natural to mourn and weep for those who die. Even the death of the righteous is painful for those left behind. But as followers of the Christ who holds the keys of death in His hand, we dare not think of death as an accident brought on by the devil. Satan cannot destroy a single child of God. Satan, though permitted to touch Job’s flesh and afflict his body, could not take his life. God’s children always die right on His schedule, not one second too soon or too late. If the steps of a righteous person are ordered by the Lord, He orders the final one, too.

Death is not the ultimate healing; resurrection is! Death is the passage, and sometimes that passage can be painful. I have seen many of God’s chosen people die in tremendous pain. But Paul answers that well by saying, ***“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18)***. No matter how much pain and suffering wreak havoc on these bodies, it is not even worthy to be compared with the unspeakable glory that awaits those who endure the passage.

I’m convinced that death comes to the saint long before the last breath is taken. Somehow, God lets that person who is being pulled to know it is happening. He/she is given an inner knowledge that they are going home. They have already seen a bit of the heavenly glory. While loved ones gather around them to plead for their resurrection, you can sense they don’t want to stay trapped in their shell any longer.

A crack has appeared; they have peep through and have glanced the New Jerusalem, with all its exciting eternal joys. They have seen a vision of the glories waiting for them. To turn back would be emptiness.

It is sad to hear believers condemn God for taking their loved ones from them. They argue, “Lord, it’s just not fair.” Even though it is difficult to condemn what people say in times of deep grief, I believe such questioning can be selfish. We think only of our loss, and not their gain. God only plucks out of this world those He can no longer love at a distance. The mutual love of God and the believer demands that they be in His presence. It is then love is perfected. To be with the Lord is to experience His love in its fullness.

So, you stand helplessly by as your loved one enters that passage called death. You know it’s dark, lonely path, and can hold that hand only so far. The time comes when you have to let that loved one go and let Jesus take them by the hand. He/she is no longer yours; they belong to Him. You feel helpless, but there is not one thing you can do but rest in the knowledge that the Lord has taken over and that your loved one is in good hands.

Then, in a moment, they are out of sight. The battle is over. Only the broken shell remains. The delivered soul has taken flight into God’s holy presence. The death of the righteous is a precious thing. David, the psalmist, wrote, “***Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints***” (Ps. 116:15). God looks upon the death of one of His children as a cherished moment. But humans find little or nothing to cherish in this experience.

Should we stop praying for the dying? Should we give up on the terminally ill? Should we just lie down and die, if that is the ultimate healing? Never! More than ever in my life, I believe in divine healing. We should pray for everybody to be healed. And the only people who are not healed, according to our concept of healing, are those who are chosen for God’s ultimate healing. Some are not given restored organs or limbs; instead, they are given the perfect healing: glorified, painless, eternal bodies. What is there that our minds can conceive as being a greater miracle than resurrection from the dead?

Any talk about death bothers us. We try to ignore even thinking about it. We suspect those who talk about it of being morbid. Occasionally we will talk about what heaven must be like, but, most of the time, the subject of death is taboo. The first Christians were quite different. Paul spoke much about death. Matter of fact, our resurrection from the dead is referred to in the New Testament as our “blessed hope.” But nowadays death is considered an intruder that cuts us off from the good life we have been accustomed to.

We have so cluttered our lives with material things; we are bogged down with life. The world has trapped us with materialism. We can no longer bear the thought of leaving our beautiful homes, our lovely things, our loved ones. We seem to be thinking, "To die now would be too great a loss. I love the Lord, but I need time to enjoy my life. I need more time."

Have you noticed there is very little talk, nowadays, about heaven or about leaving this old world behind? Instead, we are bombarded with how to use our faith in order to get more things. This is a stunted concept of God's eternal purposes. This is why so many believers are frightened by the thought of death. The truth is, we are far from understanding Christ's call to forsake the world and all its entanglements.

He calls us to come and die, to die without building memorials to ourselves, to die without worrying how we should be remembered. Jesus left no autobiography, no headquarters complex, no university or Bible college. He left nothing to preserve His memory but the bread and the wine.

What is the greatest revelation of faith, and how is it to be exercised? You will find it in Hebrews:

Hebrews 11:13, 16

Prayer

Lord, help me cut loose from the bondage of things. Let me not waste my gift of life on my own selfish pleasures and goals. Help me to bring all my appetites under Your control. Make me remember I am a pilgrim, not a settler. I am not Your fan, but Your follower. Most of all, deliver me from the bondage of the fear of death. Make me finally understand that to die in Christ is gain. Help me to look forward, with precious anticipation, to my moment

of ultimate healing.

***“I am He who lives, and was dead: and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen”
(Rev. 1:18).***

07/20/22

PRAISE AND WORSHIP
Purpose and Power

God's Original Plan for Mankind

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 1

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (Gen. 1:1). Land and seas, plants and animals, birds and sea creatures all came forth at His spoken word.

Genesis 1:26-28

The crowning act of creation was a result of God's desire to have a family. He wanted someone to be His friend and to live with Him as a son. God's original plan was that man would share in His authority and rule. God was interested in a completely different kind of relationship than we normally think of when we talk about a king. He wanted sons who would not only be led by the King but who would also exercise the king's authority and rule on earth.

The first thing God gave man was His image and likeness, because that was the first thing God wanted to have. The second thing God did was to place man in His presence, which is the meaning in the language of the word *Eden*. Therefore, God's greatest desire was that man would act like Him and live with Him.

The word *image* means "resemblance" or "exact likeness," "image." Therefore, to be made in God's image means that man resembles God and is an exact likeness of Him. He has God's true nature and His spiritual and moral character. In the Scriptures, the word *Eden* refers to a place of God's presence. So, God gave man His nature and then put Him in His presence.

There were no religious traditions or religious activities in the Garden of Eden. There was simply a relationship between God and man. Establishing and maintaining this relationship continues to be God's primary concern. He is much more concerned about our fellowship with Him than about our works, our activities, our traditions, and even our busyness. God wants relationship—that's the bottom line—and everything God established for man was built on this desire for fellowship.

Therefore, God created man for a specific purpose to have dominion over all the earth; with an image different from that of all other parts of His creation. The Scriptures clearly show this intent of God that man would be more like Him than the rest of creation, and that he would think and act like God.

Psalm 8:4-6

The creation of man was God's greatest production, and He described the man He had made as being "*very good*" (Gen. 1:31). Sadly, what God intended for man and man's current experience are quite different. The difference is a result of man's choice to disregard the principles that are part of God's creation.

Man's ability to fulfill his purpose and to be all God intended him to be is based on the requirement that he obey the principles God established when He created human beings. Everything He created was established to operate by certain principles that guarantee its proper function. We were created to operate by principles that God established before He created us.

These principles or rules of operation for human beings are found throughout the Bible, although not always referred to as principles. They may be referred to as God's laws, ordinances, precepts, statutes, commands, commandments, decrees, instructions, word, and ways. We may prefer lawlessness, which is the freedom to do whatever we want to do, but our very creation by God, our Manufacturer and Source, requires that we follow His principles.

Should we choose lawlessness—doing what we want, when we want, how we want—we can expect to reap the unavoidable results, which include slavery, death, and the loss of privileges or freedom. This is what happened to the man and the woman in the Garden of Eden. When God placed the man in Eden, He gave him some instructions that were to govern his life in the garden. One of these instructions concerned what he could and could not eat.

Genesis 2:16-17

Death is the prescribed consequences for disobeying this principle. Death is the absence of the presence of God in a man or woman's life. This physical death that will claim every person, whether a baby or seasoned saint, is not the only death man suffered because of his disobedience. The more serious consequence of man's disregard for God's principles for life in the garden was his loss of the Holy Spirit and his separation from God.

This spiritual death, as it may be called, is at the root of all the ills that plague us as individuals and as a society. Man cannot and will not live up to the potential and purpose God built into him until the love and closeness God and man enjoyed in the garden is restored. Because life in the presence of God is man's ideal environment, God's presence is also his greatest need. Man cannot truly live until the relationship between God and man is restored.

Since God is a God of principles, everything He created was established to operate by certain principles that guarantee its proper function. So, all created things—whether plant, animal, fish, bird, star, or human being—must follow the principles that govern their life if they are to release their potential and fulfill their purpose.

One of the most important of these principles ordained by God to preserve and protect His handiwork is the principle of environment. The word *environment* is defined as “circumstances, objects, and conditions by which one is surrounded” (environment). Everything in life was created to function within the particular environment that God prescribed for it before He created it.

Before the moment of creation, God decided both what He would make His creation from and where He would place it after He had made it. When the environment was ready, God called forth each creation from its intended source and put it in the specific environment He had made for it.

Finally, God was ready to make man. When God made man, He spoke to Himself and man came out of Him. Man was created both to be of the same essence as God, who is spirit, and to live in the same environment as God, which is the realm of the spirit or the environment of God.

God prescribed an environment for everything He created. Therefore, environments can be good or bad, positive or negative, healthy or unhealthy depending on what the manufacturer prescribed for the product you are using. The environment itself is not necessarily bad, negative, or unhealthy. Instead, the problem is a misplaced product. A particular environment is wrong only because the product was not designed to function in it.

For example, you bought a \$4,000 television, throw it in a lake, then try to make it work, you will soon realize that you wasted your \$4,000. You put the television into the wrong environment. The manufacturer never intended for you to put the television into the lake. A wrong environment—that is, an environment where the product is out of place—will always translate into wasted potential.

When God planned what man would be (spirit) and how man would function (by faith), He also determined where man would live (his ideal environment). God didn't take the man and put him just anywhere on earth. God chose a specific spot on this big planet and put man in that specially chosen place, which we know as Eden.

Now let's try to figure out what Eden is. The Greek version means "delight." Therefore *Eden* is translated as the garden of delight. Other place of the word *Eden* in the Old Testament associate *Eden* with the garden of the Lord.

God prepared a garden for man, an environment where it was pleasant and where His presence touched earth. Eden was the one place where God's presence dwelt on earth. It was the garden of His presence, the spot of His pleasantness, and that was where God placed Adam. Unbroken fellowship between God and man was the environment that God planned for man. Your ideal environment is nothing more and nothing less than the presence of God Himself, which was God's first gift to Adam.

His presence in your house is the most awesome presence in the world. God gave Adam Himself before He gave him a woman. Anything or anyone outside of God's presence is a state of malfunction for yourself. Everything that is not in its ideal environment malfunctions, so man must stay in God's presence. Man's life and the fulfillment of his destiny are possible only to the extent that he walks and talks with God in the garden of His presence.

Sad to say, what God intended and the reality of man's situation today are quite different. The reason for this difference is man's choice to not be governed the principles of God's design. The fall of man, as man's choice to sin is often called, is really a fall from God's presence. Since God created man to live in relationship with Him, and sin caused a breach in that relationship, man's opportunity to live in God's presence ended. The Book of Genesis describes it this way:

Genesis 3:23-24

Man's banishment from Eden meant banishment from God's presence. The creature God has created to live in His presence was condemned to live apart from the One who was essential to His well-being. That's human history. Now we have to work hard to get in God's presence; but that was not what God intended for the human beings He had created.

We were supposed to wake up every morning and go walking in the garden with God. We weren't supposed to have to work ourselves up with singing, instruments,

and worship exercises to get us into the right mood or frame of mind for worship. God's intent was that we would wake up in His presence, go to sleep in His presence, work in His presence, talk in His presence, eat in His presence, cry in His presence, laugh in His presence, dance in His presence, and on and on. Every part of our life was to be done within the presence of God.

Oh, how we have fallen. What was once our God-given privilege is now denied us by God Himself. For when God sent the man and the woman away from Eden, from the place or moment of His presence, He also set cherubim at the entrance to the garden to be sure that mankind would not return to the environment that had been his home before his sin.

Why would God, who loves man and who created him to live in fellowship with Him, do this? Why would He banish man from His presence and made sure he could not return? Might it be that the presence of God was so important God would not allow it to be contaminated by man's sin? Might it be that man could no longer endure the presence of God because he had lost the Holy Spirit, that which enabled him to communicate with God and to enjoy fellowship with Him?

02/02/2022

PRAISE AND WORSHIP
Purpose and Power

Creating A Dwelling Place For God

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 3

God is in the restoration business, and the Bible is a record of His efforts to get us back into His presence. Therefore, the stories in the Old Testament are not primarily about the patriarchs, judges, kings, and prophets, or about the victories and defeats of God's people. Instead, the Bible can be summed up as an account of God's acts to get man back into His ideal environment.

This work of God to get man back into His ideal environment reached its peak in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God's Son. Everything Jesus did was to get God's presence back into man's experience. This is why He had to shed His blood. God's temple, namely us, had become unholy, so God had to cleanse us and make us holy again through the sacrificial death and blood of His Son.

We cannot be qualified to receive the presence of God into our life until the blood of Jesus cleanses us and makes way for the return of God's Spirit to our human temples. Therefore, the key to the continuing work of Jesus in each of us is the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit is alive and well in us, He restores the presence of God to our life and leads us into the holiness that was our birthright at creation.

But long before God sent Jesus and the Holy Spirit, man attempted to bridge the gap that his sin had created between him and God. These early attempts at worship begin in the Book of Genesis. Man's first act of worship is recorded in Genesis chapter 4, right after the story in Genesis 3 of man's sin and his fall from God's presence.

“In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock (Genesis 4:3-4a).

What were Cain and Abel doing here? They were trying to get back into touch with God. They, no doubt, knew they needed to be in communication with God. This effort to get God's presence back into man's life is noticeable throughout the Old

Testament. Over and over again, God's people, built altars to prepare a place for the presence of God to come and offered sacrifices either to invite God to come or to commemorate a time and a place where He had come.

After the offerings given by Cain and Abel, the next record in the Bible of man's attempt to communicate with God through sacrifices and offerings is found in the story of Noah. After the flood, when Noah, his family, and all the animals had exited from the ark, Noah built an altar and offered burnt offerings unto God (Genesis 8:21-9:1).

God was pleased with Noah's attempts to communicate with Him. As a result, God blesses Noah and his sons. Keep in mind now, that Noah is still a malfunctioning man. Although man is again communicating with God, this relationship does not have the moment-by-moment intimacy of the garden fellowship that God and man had enjoyed.

Abraham (Abram) is the next man who Scriptures tell us built an altar to the Lord. This is but the first of many altars that Abraham built to God. Perhaps the most well-known altar Abraham built was the one on Mount Moriah when God commanded him to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering (Gen. 22). Abraham was a worshiper.

Believing that God would provide a lamb for the sacrifice, yet not knowing that at the very last-minute God would provide a ram to take the son's place, Abraham bound Isaac on the altar and raised his hand to kill him. Only God's voice stopped him from giving God what He had asked for.

As is often in the Bible, the place of one sacrifice becomes the place of another. This time the worshiper is David. He has sinned by counting the fighting men of Israel and God has shown His anger by sending a plague on the people. When David sees the killing/bloodshed among his people, he pleads with God to punish him, not them, because he is the one who has sinned. God, through the prophet Gad, then tells David to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah (same place as Mt. Moriah where Abraham offered up Isaac; 2 Chron. 3:1) so that the plague may stop.

This was not the only time David built an altar to the Lord. As a youth tending his father's sheep, he had learned to seek the presence of Yahweh. These early experiences with God helped him so much that when faced with the choice of three years of famine, three months of running from his enemies, or three days of plague, David chose the plague.

“I am in deep distress. Let us fall into hands of the Lord, for His mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men” (2 Samuel 24:14b).

Why did David choose the third option? He had rather fall into the hands of God rather than in the hands of men. Why would David choose God over man? David knew the God he had sung to as a shepherd boy playing his harp. Now, when he is king and is faced with a difficult decision that means suffering not only for him but for his people, David draws on what he had learned during those years of private worship before he entered the public eye. Praise must be learned in private before it is shown in public. David knows that God is good and His mercy endures forever, so he entrusts himself and his kingdom to God.

David’s relationship with God is also seen when he takes Bathsheba, another man’s wife, to his bed and tries to cover his sin. When the prophet Nathan confronts him, David responds, ***“I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Sam. 12:13b)***. He doesn’t argue or make excuses, He accepts the truth of Nathan’s words and the justice of God’s punishment.

Psalm 51 shows us just how much he valued the presence of the Lord. Although he interceded for his son’s life while the child still lived, David didn’t criticize God for taking him. Matter of fact, Psalm 51 shows that David thought of a punishment far worse than the loss of his son:

Psalm 51:10-12

You see, David was used to having his own private worship services. He knew the joy and power of living with God. He also knew what happens to a man when sin takes the presence of God from his life.

As a young man, David had played his harp for King Saul when an evil spirit tormented him. This spirit came to Saul after the Lord had departed from his life because of his failure to obey God. The memories of those hours with Saul, no doubt, contributed to David’s own plea that God not take His Spirit from him. He knew the misery man endures when faced with the absence of God. Losing the Holy Spirit and the presence of God would have been a punishment much greater than the death of his son.

Moses, as the leader of a grumbling, dissatisfied people, he often cried out to God. So, when God told Moses to take the people up to the Promised Land, but that He would not go with them in case He destroyed the people as they traveled, Moses

said, “No sir!” He wasn’t going anywhere unless God was going with him (Exodus 33:12-15).

Well, God agreed to do the very thing Moses asked because He knew Moses by name and was pleased with him. Like Abraham before him and David after him, Moses was hungry for God. He wanted to know God and to find favor with Him. Not only that, he wanted to see God. It wasn’t enough that God spoke to him from the pillar of cloud whenever he entered the Tabernacle and that his face shined with God’s glory even after he had left the Tabernacle. Moses wanted to see God face to face.

God knew that Moses’ request was a problem. No man in his sinful nature could see God and live. But since Moses was so determined on seeing Him, and because Moses was His friend, God agreed to let Moses see His glory. What else could Moses do but bow to the ground and worship. He had seen the glory of the Almighty! Now he was surer than ever that he didn’t want to go anywhere if God was not going along (Exod. 33).

The outdoor altars of Cain and Abel, of Noah, of Abraham and his descendants, and of Moses eventually gave way to the enclosed/walled sanctuaries of the Tabernacle and the Temple, but their purpose remained the same. All were place of God’s presence, and sacrifices were offered there with the belief that God would accept them and be pleased with them.

In the Tabernacle and the Temple, the worship of God became more regulated. The building of the Tent and the Temple, as well as the praise and worship offered there, were governed by the specifications of God Himself, with no room for adjustment.

Exodus 25:1-3, 8)

God wanted a place to live among His people so He told Moses to bring an offering. All this money was not about having a nice building with soft comfortable chairs. God told Moses to gather an offering from the people because He wanted to get His presence in their midst. It wasn’t enough for Him to meet with Moses on the mountain. He wanted to live with all His people.

Building a place for God is always about having the presence of God in the midst of His people. A big fancy building may look like a church and may even be called a church, but in reality, it is very far from being one. Building a church for God is not about the building or the equipment. It’s about God’s presence. If God’s presence is

not with you, it doesn't matter how nice your building is, how well-educated your staff are, how well planned your worship services are, how dynamic the preaching is.

Without God's presence, all you have is a big building filled with people. On the other hand, you can meet in a plain room with simple worship and an untrained preacher but have everything. The difference is in the absence or the presence of God. God's presence is the only necessary ingredient in worship. Our praise and the other elements of our meetings must lead us into the presence of God. If they don't, there is no reason to do them. Yes, they may be nice and make us feel good, but the purpose of gathering is to enter the presence of the Lord. Anything that doesn't contribute to this is just unnecessary clutter.

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God's presence in our worship is the only worthwhile end to our gatherings. This was God's entire purpose for instructing Moses to build the Tabernacle. He wanted to get close to His people. God's blueprint for the meeting place between Himself and man guaranteed that could not just stumble or wander into His presence, lest he be consumed by God because of his sin.

This is why God's dwelling place was in the central part of the Tabernacle. God was safeguarding His presence to keep it holy. He also gave Moses very specific instructions concerning the priests, the sacrifices and offerings, and the atonement procedures so that nothing profane/irreligious would come close to Him. Each piece of furniture, bowls, plates, and other utensils were also made according to God's exact instructions, as well as the Tabernacle itself and the curtains that hung inside.

Particular attention was given to the Ark of the Covenant, where God would dwell between the cherubim, and to the rest of the inner chamber that was known as the Holy of Holies. The furniture in the Tabernacle each revealed something about God's intent concerning His people and His presence among them.

In the Outer Court stood the altar of burnt offerings, where the sacrifices of the people were presented to God to atone for their sins. Within the Tabernacle in the Inner Court, also called the Holy Place, stood the table of shewbread, on which the priest put the fresh bread of the presence every Sabbath. This was eaten only by priests and only in the Holy Place. Across from the table of shewbread stood the golden lampstand or candlestick.

The final part of the tabernacle was the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. On the Mercy Seat above the Ark and between the cherubim that were part of the lid to the Ark was the place where God would dwell. Cherubim, the protectors of God's presence, were also plaited into the veil that hung between the Inner Court and the Holy of Holies (Exodus 25).

All this was part of God's plans and preparations to provide a place where He could live in the midst of His people. The same was true for the Temple in Jerusalem, when God gave the plans to David and entrusted David's son Solomon with the task of building it.

With the coming of Christ, each of the furnishings in the Tabernacle was revealed to be a type of Him. The Tabernacle, the very house of God, was a type of the Church, where God wants to live. The table of shewbread represented the physical body of Christ and the Christ that would be incarnated/alive in the man. The lampstand, which never went out, represented the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. The altar of burnt offerings was a type of the sacrifices of praise that continually came from God's people.

The courtyard, or Outer Court, spoke of the assembling of God's people. Even the material of the priests' clothes and the things in the Ark of the Covenant revealed part of God's plan that would be fulfilled in Christ. The priests' clothes were linen, not wool, so the priests would not sweat in God's presence. (Sweat represented work. See Exodus chapters 28-29 and Ezekiel 44:17-18).

The articles in the Ark of the Covenant were the tablets of the Ten Commandments, the rod of Aaron, and a small jar of manna that was a reminder of the wilderness. All these represented important things to God. The rod of Aaron represented the death we experience because of sin, and the rebirth and new life that come through Christ. It also represented the burial of Jesus Christ and His resurrection. The manna represented God's grace, received through no work of man; and the tablets containing the Ten Commandments spoke of our helplessness to keep the law of God and in so doing be righteous before Him.

When the priests poured the blood on the top of the Ark, it covered all those things that revealed our sin and our lack of grace. Instead of seeing our sin, God and the cherubim who protected His presence saw the blood. Therefore, God could come to dwell above the Mercy Seat without destroying the priest because of his sin and the sin of the people. The law that condemned us was covered by the blood of grace.

Through Jesus, we gain access to every part of God's dwelling place. He is the sacrifice, the blood, the dwelling place, and the presence of God. He is also the One whose death destroyed the veil that separated God's dwelling place from His people.

Now everyone has access to God—everyone, that is, who accepts the gift of grace that is made available to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This way provided by God is the same today as it was two thousand years ago. There is no new and improved Savior and no new and improved blood. The Savior has been, is, and always will be Jesus Christ, and His blood is the only sacrifice sufficient and acceptable to atone for our sins. Jesus is still the only way to God.

We may be looking for new and improved ways to worship, but God is not. He does not want experts in worship. What God wants is people who will follow His instructions every time they approach Him. This is just the way God is. He isn't looking for change, since He doesn't change. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8).

His bottom line continues to be His passion for getting His presence back into man's experience. This is His plan for the entire human race because Adam carried in him all the nations of the world. Therefore, when God removed Adam from His presence, He removed all the nations as well. So, when Jesus came to earth, He came to restore the Holy Spirit to all mankind. Before He could do this, He had to clean us up so that we could receive God's Spirit.

To say that we are impure does not mean that we are dirty, as in the filth of dirt. What it does mean is that we are impure in God's sight. What we believe, what we say, and what we do don't match. This is what impurity is to God.

Therefore, God sent Christ to restore a pure heart to us so that we can be united in thought, word, and action. Only when our heart is once purer can we become the temple in which the Holy Spirit lives (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). Since the Holy Spirit is God, He is the key to getting us into God's presence today. He is also the only One who can teach us what God requires of us now (John 14:26).

God's only purpose is not just that we will fly away to Him someday, but that we will live in His presence today in this world. The issue is not so much where you are located, but who is located where you are. You need God's presence to function.

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea” (Revelation 21:1).

Because praise is the way you get into God's presence, you don't have to wait for this new earth to live with God. He wants to come to you right now. He wants to live in your home today. He can if you will start praising Him and filling your home with testimonies of how great He is and how good he has been to you. Just start bragging about God from a pure heart, and He will come to you right where you are. We know that He wants us to have His presence. The only question is whether we will make room for Him to come to us.

You do this by filling your environment with praise until He comes and fills the place you have made. You make room for Him, and He comes. And you do this through praise.

- 1) All God's work throughout history has been to get His presence back into man's environment.
- 2) Altars, sacrifices, and offerings invite God's presence to come or they celebrate where He has been.
- 3) The whole purpose of the Tabernacle and the Temple was to provide a place for God to live in the midst of His people.
- 4) God's presence is the only necessary ingredient in worship.
- 5) The design and worship of the Tabernacle looked forward to Jesus and the return of the Holy Spirit.
- 6) God wants His people to follow His instructions when they come to meet with Him.
- 7) God wants to live with you today.

02/23/22

PRAISE AND WORSHIP
Purpose and Power

What Is Praise?
(Part 1)

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 4

The Scriptures are filled with commands to praise the Lord:

“Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever” (Psalm 106:1).

“Praise ye the LORD. Praise O Ye servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD” (Psalm 113:1).

“O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise Him, all ye people” (Psalm 117:1).

“Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD” (Psalm 150:6).

If we are to obey these commands from God, we must first learn what praise is. *Praise* includes expressing approval or a favorable judgment of; glorifying.

Expressing Approval or Favorable Judgment

To *approve* of someone is “to have or express a favorable opinion” of him or to show esteem/regard. Personal experience is at the heart of this expression of praise as well. The Psalms contain numerous examples of personal expressions of approval toward God.

Praise by approving is turning our thoughts toward God and remembering how He has won our praise. It’s reciting the wonder of who He is and how He has made a difference in our life and the life of others. Many Scriptures do this, but Psalm 23 is possibly the most well-known passage of Scripture that is a personal approval for God. David praises God by describing Him as the Shepherd who cares for David, His sheep. Each image from the life and work of a shepherd in some way speaks to David of God’s work in his own life.

This is why Psalm 23 is such an awesome Scripture to use during private praise and worship. It encourages you, the worshipper, to see and celebrate God's personal care shown in your life and to express your adoration and gratitude to God for His goodness to you. To do this, you might read or recite a line from the Psalm, then praise God for how it's been true in your life. As you praise Him, you will find that you are building an impressive resume of God's greatness, faithfulness, and love as you've experienced Him.

Words associated with praise—words like *thank, sing, honor, or worship*, record glimpses of someone's favorable opinion of God, glimpses that invite us to praise Him as well by expressing our approval of Him and our gratitude for His grace and mercy shown to us throughout our life. Praise that approves is like writing a letter of recommendation for God.

Glorifying

To *glorify* someone is to “bestow honor, praise, or admiration.” In other words, giving glory to someone specifically identifies what is admirable in the person. For example, God is recognized as being *good* (Ps. 34:8), *faithful* (Ps. 33:4), *righteous* (Ps. 11:7), *just* (2 Chron. 12:6), and *merciful* and *forgiving* (Dan.9:9), to name a few.

Psalm 103 is a good example of Scripture that glorifies God. In this Psalm, David lists some of the many praiseworthy benefits of knowing God. God forgives our sin (v. 3), heals our diseases (v. 3), redeems our life (v. 4), crowns us with love and compassion (v. 4), satisfies us with good things (v. 5), works righteousness and justice for the oppressed (v. 6), is slow to anger (v. 8), does not always accuse (v. 9), does not keep His anger forever (v. 9), does not treat us as our sin deserves (v. 10), and removes our transgressions from us (v. 12).

All of us can recall times when God worked in our life in one or more of these ways. Praising God by glorifying Him is recognizing and testifying to all these admirable qualities of God.

Another way we honor God is to recite His names or other designations of who He is. For example: “*The Lord is a warrior*” (Exod. 15:3a). “*The Lord is God in heaven above and on earth below. There is no other*” (Deut. 4:39b). “. . . *the hand of the Lord is powerful. . .*” (Josh. 4:24). “. . . *The Lord is Peace . . .*” (Judg. 6:24). “*The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer*” (2 Sam. 22:2). “*The Lord is my light and my salvation*” (Ps. 27:1a).

As we honor God for who He is and for what He has done in our lives, we make room for Him to work on us and in us every day. We give Him a place to dwell in the midst of our lives because we refuse to take His benefits to us for granted. We know we are sinners saved by grace, and we give Him the glory for saving us and for being there for us when we need Him.

Characteristics of Praise

Praise Puts God in First Place

Praise is always turning our attention from ourselves to God. It's remembering who He is and what He has done, instead of wallowing in the mire of self-absorption. We are self-centered people. Our first thought is always how something or someone is affecting us.

Praise turns our eyes from ourselves to God. It focuses our thoughts on His majesty and power and invites others to do the same. Instead of gazing at ourselves we raise our eyes and our heart to see His face and affirm our gratitude for His love and mercy, and our total dependence on Him.

Praise is bragging about God, instead of about ourselves or the idols of this world. It's celebrating who He is and how He relates to His people. We are so self-focused that we treat praise and worship as preliminaries that we have to get through to get to the important stuff, which of course is the teaching and preaching that makes us feel good.

I'm sure God is not pleased with this behavior. There's no reason to have a gathering if praise and worship are not the central focus of our time together. We have no hope of worshipping God if we are not willing to give Him the praise that is due Him.

Praise Flows from Our Friendship with God

People who praise God on a regular basis do so because they have found the Lord to be so altogether lovely that they can't stop thinking of Him and talking of Him. They have gotten close enough to Him to see His true nature and character, and they have found in Him more than everything they have ever hoped for.

You see, you can't brag about someone you don't know—or at least your bragging cannot be truthful and sincere. Therefore, although praise may start with what you know about God, it must eventually move to what you yourself have experienced of Him. This is when praise becomes more than a chore or a duty. You don't have to work up your praise, because it automatically bubbles up from within you.

Your relationship with God has confirmed for you that you are blessed at all times. He is your joy, your strength, your comfort, your peace, and on and on. Your life is anchored in Him, and His goodness to you brings His name to your thoughts and your lips repeatedly.

In other words, praise that flows from a deep relationship with God is genuine and true. Your words and acts of adoration come naturally from your heart. This does not mean that you will always feel like praising. In all honesty, this does not matter. When your relationship with God is deep and lasting, praise comes no matter what you are experiencing, because how you feel does not change who God is in your life.

Praise Is a Conscious Choice

Praise is an act of your will. When you offer God true praise, you make a conscious decision to approve, and glorify Him. Praise, therefore, is not based on your emotions or feelings. You don't have to feel great—or even good or OK—to praise the Lord. Despite the many things in your life that may seem to be wrong, praise is your conscious choice because you know that God is the answer to your problems. As long as He is in charge, things will get better. Your intimate relationship with Him makes the difference. You can focus on what is right—God and His goodness to you—no matter what else is wrong.

This attitude is noticeable in Psalm 42, where the psalmist expresses his grief and sorrow that his life is not like it once was when he went to the house of the Lord with great joy. His body hurts. Tears are his portion now instead of music and laughter. He even fears that God has forgotten him, so long has it been since he felt God's presence. Yet this hurting, hopeless, miserable man makes a conscious choice. He exercises his will and chooses to remember God and His goodness. Nevertheless, his misery and his sorrow, the psalmist gives himself a lecture. He says:

Soul, why are you so upset? Why are you moping and fretting as though you have no hope? Don't give up! Put your hope in God. He has not given up, even if you have. So, stop dwelling on everything that's wrong and start thinking about all that's right. Remember the friendship we've enjoyed with God. Recall His many acts of kindness to us. The difficult place we are in right now isn't the end of the story. I'm still going to praise Him, my Savior and my God (Psalm 42).

Maybe you are carrying a heavy load right now. You are going through some of the toughest times humans experience. Don't let your troubles keep you from praising

the Lord. I know that you may feel like you are facing hardships that others have not had to face, or that you have lost hope that your circumstances will ever change. This is the exact time that God asks you to praise Him. He knows that you are hurting. He also knows that things won't always be the way they are now. Matter of fact, He's waiting to act on your behalf, but He needs you to provide a dwelling place for Him, an altar in your life where He can show up. Praise is that altar.

03/02/22

***PRAISE AND WORSHIP
Purpose and Power***

***What Is Praise?
(Part 2)***

***By
Dr. James E. Potts***

Lesson 5

Praise Is a Willing Sacrifice

Biblical expressions of praise often include the word *will*.

“The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him: My father’s God, and I will exalt Him” (Exodus 15:2).

“I will praise the LORD according to His righteousness, And will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High” (Psalm 7:17).

“I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me” (Psalm 13:6).

“The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; Therefore, my heart greatly rejoices, And with my song I will praise Him” (Psalm 28:7).

Although “*will*” can indicate a future, it can also speak of a conscious choice. In other words: “I am determined to praise God.” This is what the Scriptures call a sacrifice or offering of praise.

“I will sacrifice a freewill offering to You; I will praise Your name, O Lord, for it is good” (Psalm 54:6).

“Therefore, by Him let us continually offer

***The sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the
fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name”
(Hebrews 13:15).***

Praise becomes a sacrifice when you offer your praise to God just because He deserves it and asks you to do it. You may not feel like praising Him, and in truth, it may be quite difficult for you to look beyond the difficulties in your life. Yet, when you choose to open your lips and speak forth your adoration, gratitude, and thanksgiving to God, you please Him.

In all honesty, you can always give the Lord some sacrifice. No, you probably won't bring God a lamb, a sheep, or a goat as God's people did in the Tabernacle and the Temple. This does not free you from the responsibility of bringing Him a gift when you come to worship Him. Praise from an obedient heart is the gift that pleases God the most. You may not have anything else to bring Him, but you can always give Him this sacrifice of praise.

Notice that Hebrews call this “*the fruit of our lips*” (Heb. 13:15). Fruit speaks of a harvest. Farmers will tell you that bringing in the crops is hard work. Sometimes praise requires the same effort. Instead of calling people and waiting for them to minister to you when you are having a hard time, why don't you go ahead and have your own praise service. Sacrifice your hurt feelings, your financial problems, or your troubles with your boss or your spouse or your son or daughter on the altar of praise.

Make it your conscious choice to lay aside all that pulls you down or makes you afraid or causes you to feel like giving up, and open your mouth and talk to God. Tell Him how wonderful He is. Tell Him how thankful you are that He is in your life. Tell Him that you are glad He is with you. Tell Him that He is worth more to you than everything else in the world.

This sacrifice of praise won't cost you any money, but it will cost you your self-centeredness and your natural tendency to dwell on whatever is wrong in your life. Giving God your sacrifice of praise means that you choose to dwell on Him instead of on yourself. Your mouth is filled with all that is good in your life instead of everything that is bad.

This sacrifice can never be forced from you by someone else. You may sing or raise your hands because someone tells you to, but outward show is not inward praise. A

sacrifice of praise comes from inside you. It is your will taking control over your emotions and doing what God wants and empowers you to do.

The Book of Leviticus says it this way:

“When you sacrifice a thank offering to the Lord, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf” (Leviticus 22:29).

The King James Version ends Leviticus 22:29 with these words: *offer it at your own will,*” The sacrifice that is pleasing to God is what you give from your heart despite what you are feeling or what your circumstances are. Somehow, you find the power in the midst of your difficulty to praise the Lord with what little strength you have.

Praise with whatever strength you have left in hard times, rather than to complain. Complaining accomplishes nothing more than to further drain your strength. Praise brings the Lord into our thoughts, thereby lifting us above whatever is causing our struggle. Celebrating God by focusing on Him instead of on ourselves is the essence of praise. When we do this, God takes our sacrifice and blesses us.

So, don’t wait for things to go right before you start praising God. Start praising the Lord, and things will go right. As time passes on this sacrifice of praise, you will see that you find many things for which to praise Him. Without a doubt, He is deserving of every word of confidence, approval, good report, and honor you can give Him. The more you notice Him and His benefits to you, the more He will bless you and give you more reasons to praise Him.

Praise is an Expression of Faith

Faith without deeds (works) is dead (James 2:17). Likewise, praise that is in the heart but is not expressed is dead. Therefore, faith is the highest act of praise, and praise is the highest form of faith. Both are expressions of agreement with God. When you have faith, you hold to His promises no matter what you see at the moment. When you praise Him, you proclaim what you know to be true despite the evidence to the contrary.

Think of Abraham when he tied Isaac to that altar on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22). I’m sure Abraham wasn’t singing, dancing, and praising God in a joyful way. Most likely his heart was quite heavy. Yet, the very act of placing Isaac on that altar was an act of praise. Why? Because Abraham was expressing his trust in God and his confidence that somehow everything would come out right.

An attitude of faith in the midst of hard times is always at the core of sacrificial praise because it is based in the assurance that anything is possible with God. What may be impossible for man is not beyond the reaches of God simply because of who He is. So, praise that clings to who God is rather than to what we human beings see or do is a vital expression of faith. It is saying:

I don't know what You are doing, why You are doing it, or how this whole thing is going to end up, but I trust You, God. I know You will be faithful to me. You will never abandon me. Therefore, I'm going to obey You in as much as I understand to do. The rest is up to You. I do this because You are my God and my Savior. All I have, am, and ever hope to be is Yours.

Such praise free God to work in our lives.

Principles

- 1) To praise means to command, to approve, to give a favorable judgment, to glorify, and to esteem.
- 2) Praising God by commendation means that we entrust ourselves to His care and recommend that others do the same.
- 3) Praising God by approval means that we have a favorable opinion of God, which we tell Him and others.
- 4) Praising by giving God glory means that we honor Him and express our admiration for Him.
- 5) Praise turns the focus of our life from us to God.
- 6) Before we can consistently praise God, we must get close enough to Him to see His true nature and character.
- 7) Praise is a conscious choice, an act of our will.
- 8) A sacrifice of praise is the praise we give God from obedience despite how we feel.

03/09/22

PRAISE AND WORSHIP
Purpose and Power

When Are We to Praise God?
(Part 1)

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 6

God is worthy of our praise all day, every day, no matter what kind of a day it is. Perhaps you've heard the saying that there are two times to praise the Lord: when you feel like it, and when you don't. Any other time you don't have to praise Him. The implication is that you are to praise the Lord at all times. This is the message of the psalmist: ***"I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth"*** (Psalm 34:1).

Therefore, praise is to be an everyday part of your life. No matter what happens—whether you are having low moments or high moments—your focus is to stay on God.

In other words, God is worthy of your praise in ***the best of times, the worst of times***.

In the Best of Times

King David dreamed of building a permanent house for the Lord to replace the mobile Tabernacle that had housed the Ark of the Covenant since the days of Moses. The prophet Nathan had even put his stamp of approval on David's plans. *Then the word of the Lord came to Nathan at night,*

Go tell My servant David, "This is what the Lord says: You are not the one to build Me a house to dwell in. I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought Israel up out of Egypt to this day . . . I declare to you that the Lord will build a house for you: When your days are over and you go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for Me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be My son . . . I will set him over My house and My kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever (1 Chronicles 17:4-14).

What a promise! God was giving David a house instead of David giving God a house. Isn't this just like God? We plan something great and God does something even better. It is true that David didn't get to build God's house—his son Solomon did—yet David was so overcome with gratitude to God after hearing Nathan's report that he had his own little praise session (1 Chron. 17:20-24a).

Later on, David gave gold and silver for the building of the Temple and asked who would join him in providing for God's house. The leaders of Israel gave willingly and the people rejoiced because of their generous giving. King David, overjoyed by the response of the people, again praised the Lord (1 Chron. 29:20-21a).

At some point in the praise and worship, God's presence must have come to His people, for the next verse says, ***“They ate and drank with great joy in the presence of the Lord that day”*** (1 Chron. 29:22a). Then they acknowledged Solomon as king. David's world was definitely right that day. The leaders of the people had given generously for the building of the Temple and had acclaimed Solomon as king. Then God's presence had come, a joy David knew and loved above all else.

Keep in mind now, that this high moment was not a chance occurrence. I believe that God's coming in the midst of His people was not only prompted by the praise of David and the people, but also by David's lifestyle of praise. David never took God's goodness to him for granted. On many occasions he told God how good He was and how grateful he, David, was for God's many blessings to him.

We would do well to follow David's example. Yes, we may praise God for a specific blessing, but few of us have developed a lifetime pattern of seeing all the good in our life as gifts from the hand of God. Praising God in the good times—of which there are many more than most of us admit—is an essential ingredient of our praise.

In the Worst of Times

Paul and Silas were suffering one of life's low moments. For many days they had been followed by a slave girl who had a spirit that enabled her to tell fortunes. Day after day, she had shouted, ***“These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved”*** (Acts 16:17b).

Finally, having had enough of this, Paul commanded the spirit in the name of Jesus to leave the girl, which it did. The girl's owners, upset by the fact of their loss of income, stirred up the crowd and the leaders of the city until Paul and Silas were stripped, beaten, and thrown into jail, where their feet were placed in stocks.

What would most of have done in such circumstances? We probably would have moaned and groaned about how unfair the events of the day had been. What did Paul and Silas do? They didn't start complaining about the darkness, the slimy moss on the walls, the stench of the urine in the hole where they had been thrown, or the rats they could hear and feel. Instead, Paul said, "*Silas, let's sing.*" They spent the night praying and singing to the Lord, and not in a quiet subdued manner, either. Their worship service was loud enough for the other prisoners to hear it.

Suddenly, God entered the jail through an earthquake, and the cell was too small for God to sit down. This is when the doors flew open and the chains dropped to the ground and not just the chains that had held Paul and Silas in the stocks, either. When God moved in, things changed in that whole jail (Acts 16).

I'm sure that Paul and Silas' injuries hurt. They could have had quite a pity party. Yet, this was not their response because not only did they recognize their problem, they also knew that God was up to dealing with it. Therefore, they did the one thing that would get God's presence into that urine-soaked cell with them. They had a prayer and praise session.

I wonder what kind of prison you are in or what problem threatens to defeat you. It's easy to complain when you are faced with things that frighten you or circumstances that never seem to get better. Nevertheless, if you want God to come into your cell, you must resist the temptation to grumble, murmur, and complain. You have to make the decision to praise Him instead.

Just look beyond your feelings, your fears, and your circumstances to God. Praise Him for whatever goodness you have enjoyed from His hand, however small or insignificant it may seem to be. Instead of recalling everything that is wrong in your life, remember everything that is right.

If you will do this—if you will consciously choose to trust God and to proclaim His goodness to you—He will loosen your chains and dispel your darkness too. No, you may not feel the earth tremble beneath your feet or see doors fly open, but you will find that your attitude and your outlook change as your praise brings His presence into your life.

Try it. Start somewhere. Find something in your life to praise God for, then open your mouth and create a place for Him to sit with you. You just might be surprised by what He does!

03/16/22

PRAISE AND WORSHIP
Purpose and Power

When Are We to Praise God?
(Part 2)

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 7

In-Between Times

Don't think that you have to be on the mountaintop or in the valley to have your own private praise session. Oftentimes the normal days of our life are the hardest times to praise God because there's nothing in particular to draw our attention to Him. This is why we must get into the habit of praising the Lord. Most of us have habits of murmuring/complaining. What would our life be like if we used that same energy to praise God? How might our days go if we turned our attention to Him instead of the other things that draws our attention.

David talked to himself about God all the time. I don't think we have practiced that enough. We like to sing, "*Bless the Lord, O my soul,*" but how often do we really do it? (Psalm 103:1a). This phrase is a command to our soul to praise the Lord. Your soul is your whole self: your *will*, your *emotions*, and your *intellect* (Gen. 2:7). Therefore, if you are telling your soul to praise God, in reality you are commanding your body to respond to all three.

In other words, you first give yourself a talking to and take control over your will, your emotions, and your intellect. Then, once all three are focused on God and your body acts in accordance with the instructions it receives from them. This is why you can still praise God when your will is indifferent, your emotions are dull, or your mind is bored. Your body responds with praise because your will, your emotions, and your intellect tell it to do so.

We think we have to have something great in our life before we can praise the Lord. This is not true. David praised the Lord, day in and day out. Whether he messed up or had just won a battle, he talked with God about it. He didn't need some special reason to sing, shout, or dance his adoration. He just did it all the time—even when things were boring and ordinary.

It becomes necessary to develop an attitude where praise becomes your protection all the time as you bring God around you. Whatever you are doing, you are going through the whole day with God. Don't wait for something special to happen. Instead, make sure God is with you every day and all day as you keep Him with you through your praise. Then, no matter what happens in your life, God is there to handle it.

Some of us wait until church on Sunday before we praise God, and even then, we don't come with praise and thanksgiving in our heart. Instead, we come with bad feelings and wait for someone to make us feel better. Maybe you were up all night dealing with stuff that got you bent out of shape. Whatever the reason, you come to church in a bad mood.

Before you get to church, you are supposed to be praising God. Even before you get into your car, you are supposed to have your own private praise service, so that when you join the rest of God's family, you are ready to be in God's presence with everybody else. As a matter of fact, when you prepare in private for public praise, you don't need a worship leader/praise team to make you feel like praising God. Yes, there is a place for worship leaders in our corporate worship, but it is not their job to make you feel good enough to tell God how great He is.

If you have been talking to your own soul throughout the week the way you are supposed to be, you won't need anyone to get your attention and stir you up. You will already be excited and ready to go. You will find yourself like David, who said, *"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord"* (Ps. 122:1).

David rejoiced when the doors of God's house were open and he could go in. He was excited to worship with God's people. The same should be true for you. Your worship in private throughout the week should prepare you for Sunday worship with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Therefore, be careful not to come expecting something great in your public praise and worship if you haven't had an individual/private meeting with God first. Praise in your private life is what brings power and authority to your public experience.

David had no problem dealing with Goliath because he had a worship service behind the mountain before he went out to meet the enemy. His instructions and encouragement from God gave him the courage he needed to fight a giant who was nine feet tall (1 Sam. 17). David's pattern of private worship had given him the opportunity to see God's work on his behalf in the past. Therefore, he had the confidence to trust God again in these new circumstances.

If we functioned as David did, we would have a worship service at home before we go to the bank to get a loan. Most of us go for the loan first and cry to God if we don't get it. On the other hand, if the loan comes through, we praise God for the moment, then go back to life as usual.

I tell you; your life would be quite different if you praised God before you met a challenge. Just try it. Have a private worship service in your home before you go to work. Spend some time with God before you walk out the door. Don't listen to the news before you go to work. Listen to God. Then He will fill your day with Himself because you started your day with Him.

Many times, the Lord works all day to get into your life because you didn't give Him the day in the beginning. He watches you go through your struggles and says, *"My goodness! How I wish I could get into your day, but there's no space or place for Me to sit. You haven't praised Me, so there's no place for My presence to be introduced."*

Praise is how we make room for God in our life. Sometimes our praise is offered directly to God, which is probably what we are most familiar with. We magnify Him by speaking or singing our praise to Him as David did in Psalm 9:

I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High (Psalm 9:1-2).

Not all our praise is to be direct. God also wants us to praise Him indirectly. This happens when we acclaim/mention God and express our approval of Him to others. God wants you to share with others what He is doing in your life. No matter how unimportant His activity in your life may seem to be to you, talk about it. Tell your family, friends, and coworkers how He has sustained you and brought you through a difficult time. Testify about God's goodness and what He has been doing for you. This is how He receives glory and honor.

Most of us tell people about our problems, complaints, dislikes, and misunderstandings. We are much more likely to mumble and cry than to speak of the Lord's goodness to us. How sad! We are no different from the children of Israel who complained their way through the wilderness and failed to recognize God's blessings and to give Him credit for everything He had done for them. They were so dissatisfied that they wanted to go back to Egypt, the land of their slavery!

God doesn't want you to have an attitude as such. He wants you to see and proclaim the difference He has made in your life. Again, David is a good example of a man who did this. (No wonder God saw him as a man after His heart!) His praise was contagious because he wasn't satisfied to praise God by himself. When he went to the Tabernacle, he wanted everybody else to praise God too (Psalm 34:1-6). David wanted everybody to know what God had done for him, and he wasn't shy about asking others to join him in glorifying and exalting God. We talk/gossip about everything else. Now it's time to talk/gossip about what the Lord is doing in our lives.

Sing a New Song Every Day

This is what the Scriptures mean by singing a new song:

***Sing to Him a new song, play skillfully,
and shout for joy (Psalm 33:3).***

***Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the
Lord, all the earth (Psalm 96:1).***

***Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new
song, His praise in the assembly of the
saints (Psalm 149:1).***

Our new song is to be a song of all that God has done for us. It is based in our experience with Him. David did this on a regular basis. Because he was always seeing God at work in his life, his song came out of the latest thing God had done for him.

God *wants* to hear a new song from you as well. Could it be that He is tired of hearing the same old testimonies you have shared repeatedly? I believe if you will listen, you will hear Him asking you, "*Do you have to tell the same old story again? Haven't I done anything for you since that wonderful time?*" Without a doubt, your most effective testimony is to brag to other people about what God has done for you this week. Tell people what He did just yesterday, or even this morning. Then your song will always be new.

This is what the children of Israel did when God drowned Pharaoh and all his army. Moses started singing, and his sister, Miriam, picked up a tambourine and led the women in a victory procession, singing and dancing before the Lord (Exodus 15:1-12).

Detail by detail, they told the story of what God had done for them. They had a big celebration because they were certain that the events, they just witnessed were evidence of God's protection and of His love for them. Therefore, they weren't afraid or ashamed to sing or dance before Him or to pass the song on to their children, who told their children, who told their children, until we read it ourselves today in the Bible.

This song and dance of praise is not an isolated incident. The Scriptures are filled with testimonies of the goodness and greatness of God. For sure, you can tell what God did by what the people sang. Nevertheless, not all these testimonies are joyous. Some show that God's activity did not always bring celebration.

03/23/22

PRAISE AND WORSHIP
Purpose and Power

When Are We to Praise God?
(Part 3)

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 8

The Scriptures are filled with testimonies to the goodness and greatness of God. Definitely, you can tell what God did by what the people sang. Nevertheless, not all these testimonies are joyous. Some show that God's activity did not always bring celebration. Consider, for example, Psalm 137:

- 1) By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down,
Yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.***
- 2) We hanged our harps upon the willows in
Midst thereof.***
- 3) For they that carried us away captive required
of us a song; and they that wasted us required
of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of
Zion.***
- 4) How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange
land? (Psalm 137:1-4)***

We see here that God's people had nothing to sing about because they had not seen God work in their lives for a long time. Their disobedience had brought His judgment on them and had taken them into exile far away from Jerusalem and the Temple that was God's dwelling place. So, they hung up their instruments and refused to sing.

This should not be true for you—unless, you too are in exile because of persistent sin and wickedness in your life. You may sometimes want to recall those high points in your life when God really came through for you, but be careful you don't get hung up there. Not singing a new song might lead people to believe that God hasn't done anything for you lately—and you know that's not true!

Every single day you should have a new song to sing before the Lord and to share with others. This is how it is with praisers. Songs just show up because God's pre-

sence comes and stays. His anointing flows naturally through those who have learned to see and testify to His goodness. These songs of the Lord don't have to be worked up, because they flow from the present moment, from the intimate experiences between God and His people. Such praise also keeps and seals the reality of those times with Him.

Therefore, if you want God's presence in your life, learn to be a praiser. Don't keep silent about His many benefits. Make it your purpose to find something new to sing to the Lord about every day. No matter what the circumstances are, surely you can find at least one praiseworthy thing each day. Then, when God sees your gratitude toward Him and your habit of celebrating His goodness to you, He'll come and stay with you. He'll make every day a blessing as He enjoys your attention and takes pleasure in your joy in Him.

God wants you to be bragging about your heavenly Father all the time. If you aren't, it just may mean that He isn't your Father yet. You haven't made the connection. You haven't established the relationship.

When God becomes your Father, praise becomes a natural part of your life. You don't have to think about it. Praise just naturally flows from your lips because you are seeing your Father's handiwork all the time and you just can't help telling Him how thankful you are that He is in your life.

This is the way it should be with you and God. It doesn't matter who else is around, or what they may be doing or thinking, when you sense the presence of your heavenly Father, you have eyes and ears for nothing and no one else. Your praise bubbles up from within you just because He is there. Times may be good; times may be bad. This does not change your relationship with God.

Once you have found the secret dwelling place of God in the midst of your praise, you go to Him day in and day out because there is no place you would rather be. His presence has become your true home, the environment for which you were created.

Summary

1. You don't need a special reason to praise God.
2. Every moment of every day is a good time for praise.
3. A lifestyle of praise teaches you to see and trust God's work in your life.
4. Private praise prepares you for public praise and worship.
5. Private praise prepares you for public victory.

6. Praise in the beginning of the day gives God room to handle whatever comes your way in the rest of the day.
7. Praise may both be direct and indirect.
8. When you mention God to others, you are praising Him indirectly.
9. Complaining destroys the atmosphere created by praise.
10. Your new song every day keeps God's presence with you.

03/30/22

PRAISE AND WORSHIP
Purpose and Power

How Are We to Praise God?

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 9

Praising God has many forms, all of which have a common denominator: Praise is always extroverted. In other words, praise can always be seen or heard. It cannot be hidden or kept silent. Therefore, all expressions of praise must be vocal or in some other way outwardly expressed.

For the Hebrew people, this seemed to be easy. A study of the Old Testament shows that they were an emotional, expressive people. Maybe this is why God liked them. They were not afraid to openly show how they felt about God. Celebration and excitement were regularly part of their worship.

This is not always the case for us. Some believers seem to prefer to sit and soak in church rather than be active participants. (Be the concert. Don't just attend one). This type of behavior is not true praise. Just like you cannot cheer on your favorite sports team without moving around and making some noise, so you cannot praise God calmly and quietly.

This is not to say that quiet times of worship are not sometimes appropriate—especially after the presence of God has become manifested among His people. Yet, praise must be declared or manifested in some way. Otherwise, it is not praise. Sadly, some let go of ourselves to praise. We don't want to express it in an noticeable manner. To avoid this outward expression is to disobey God, since He specifically commands us to let the sound of our praise be heard: ***Oh, bless our God, you peoples! And make the voice of His praise to be heard (Ps. 66:8).***

Many people assume that this command refers to singing. Singing, however, is not the only form of biblical praise that can be heard. Shouting, clapping, laughter, singing and praying in the Spirit, and playing musical instruments are all expressions of praise that can be heard. Therefore, we must be careful that we don't exclude (reject or dismiss) certain forms of praise simply because we are uncomfortable with them. Instead, we should seek to understand why we are uncomfortable, and make adjust-

ments that will challenge our comfort zone. Otherwise, how can we fully proclaim the good tidings that are ours in Christ Jesus?

***O Zion. You who bring good tidings,
Get up into the high mountain,
O Jerusalem. You who bring good
tidings. Lift up your voice with strength.
Lift it up, be not afraid: Say to the cities
of Judah, "Behold your God!" (Isa. 40:9)***

This certainly seems to indicate that our praise is to reveal a definite conviction and involvement. We are not to talk or sing in a timid manner, but with energy and assurance. When we are uncomfortable, it is difficult to be either assured or energetic. Therefore, we must challenge ourselves to go beyond the forms of praise we have always used.

This is not to say that our praise is to be showy for the sake of show. Quite the opposite is for sure. Our praise is to be genuine/sincere, rising out of our relationship with God. Therefore, our praise can reflect no more than what is truly inside. If we have no passion in our heart for God, we should not be surprised when our praise is absent of passion. The absence or presence of passion for God will become evident in our expressions of love, adoration, and appreciation.

Some of us may find a particular form of praise difficult because we prefer to be entertained rather than do the praising ourselves. We enjoy going to concerts where there is lots of energy and excitement, but we resist showing that same level of intensity/passion in our praise on a Sunday morning.

Praise requires effort on our part. It is not something another person can do for us. Yes, a worship leader can make suggestions that lead us into praise, but we must make the choice for ourselves as to whether or not we are going to praise God.

Often, we become self-conscious because we are not God conscious. Yes, we may be feeling poorly, or things in our life may seem to be falling apart, but this is exactly when we need to run to God. He is the only One who can heal us and put us together again. Whether we feel like it or not, we need to praise Him.

You need to praise God, and you need to do it with your whole being. Your need is more critical than your level of comfort. When you relinquish your will and praise

God however His Spirit leads you and you will find that His presence is the only place where you can find everything you really need.

Biblical Forms of Praise

Every form of praise contained in the Scriptures is an expression that the Church as a whole, and we as individual members, need to use. We have a tendency to choose which expressions of biblical praise we will use, but this is certainly not God's intent. Our degree of comfort of a particular form of praise does not change the fact that it is both commanded in the Bible and taught by example.

Singing

“Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His, And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name” (Ps. 30:4).

Singing is the most common form of praise practiced today. In Scriptures, singing was part of both private and public worship, as well as celebrations following a victory God won.

Examples of these victory celebrations include the song of Moses following the drowning of Pharaoh's army, the singing of the Israelite women after David killed Goliath, and the song of David after God delivered him from the hand of Saul (Exod. 15; 1 Sam. 18:6; 2 Sam. 22).

Shouting

“Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth; Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises” (Ps. 98:4).

Shouting is a less common form of praise today than singing. Even so, singing and shouting are commanded together in the Scriptures, and either word may be used to translate the same Hebrew verb, *ranan*. Therefore, shouting and singing are to be companions in our praise. Together they express joy and excitement, as is seen following the consecration of Aaron and his sons, when the fire fell from God's presence and consumed the sacrifices (Lev. 9:24). The people rejoicing is described as shouting.

Making a Joyful Noise (So It Can Be Heard)

“Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise” (Ps. 98:4).

There is a place for victorious celebration and loud worship. God is not nervous, so we can make noise. He definitely enjoys it, for the Bible includes commands that we make a joyful noise before Him. This joyful noise may be singing, shouting, or some other noticeable form of praise.

Laughter

“He will yet fill your mouth with laughing, and your lips with rejoicing” (Job 8:21).

This form of praise is rarely used today and is even treated with suspicion by some people. Yet, the Bible tells us to rejoice with laughter. *Psalm 126*, in particular paints a picture of laughing with delight over God’s goodness in bringing His people back from exile. It is an expression of pure joy and wonder following a difficult season. The same seems to be true in Job where joy and laughter are also used in a parallel form.

Thanksgiving

“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving. And into His courts with praise. Be thankful unto Him, and bless His name” (Ps. 100:4).

Thanksgiving and praise are often paired in public worship. The Book of Nehemiah, where it states that the priests were to stand opposite each other and perform a form of praise and thanksgiving, provides an example of this. Psalm 69, and Ephesians 5:19-20 also seem to indicate that thanksgiving included singing.

Standing

“They were also to stand every morning to thank and praise the Lord. They were to do the same in the evening (1 Chronicles 23:30).

Standing is a bit common form of praise than some are, but we need to increase our times of standing before the Lord in worship. We stand in worship because it shows our respect for God.

Kneeling

“Oh, come let us worship and bow down: Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker” (Psalm 95:6).

Kneeling is a form of both humility and honor in our praise and worship. It shows our recognition that God is the Lord and we are His people. Some people still kneel for prayer, but in many denominations and congregations, kneeling is no longer practiced.

Clapping Our Hands

“Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph!” (Psalm 47:1).

Clapping is a show of approval and appreciation. Many churches don’t encourage people to clap their hands to the Lord. Those who leave out clapping from their praise do themselves harm because God is the One who determines how we should praise Him.

Clapping has benefits that we don't fully understand. Studies done in Japan over the years have shown that our hands and feet contain nerves that attach to every organ in our body. When we walk, we are therefore stimulating all our organs and giving them life.

The same is true of our hands. Maybe this is why God commands us to praise Him with clapping. He knows that as we clap, the nerves in our palms and fingers stimulate our whole body, bringing us life. So, when God says, "*Clap your hands,*" He's really saying, "*Get life.*" Nobody but God would give us commands regarding praise that not only bring honor to Him but also benefit us in ways beyond the blessings of obedience.

Dancing

"Let them praise His name with the dance; Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp" (Psalm 149:3).

Few congregations use dance in worship, and some folks actually disapprove of it, but dancing before the Lord is scriptural. Psalm 149:3 specifically encourages us let people praise Him with dance. For sure, dancing must be done decently and in order. Yet, we must be careful not to limit such expression because we do not believe in it or do not understand it. Dancing us both an acceptable and essential part of our worship.

Uplifted Hands

"Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and bless the Lord" (Psalm 134:2).

Many of us sing about praising God with uplifted hands, but we seldom do it. Yet, we see here that we are commanded to lift our hands in God's sanctuary. The sanctuary is where we come to worship. It's God's holy dwelling place.

Our praise must meet God's requirements all the time. We can't choose when and where we will lift our hands or do any of the other forms of praise. Obedience requires that we follow the leading of God's Spirit wherever we are and whenever He prompts us to praise.

Making Music on Instruments

Psalm 150 in its entirety strongly encourages us to Praise the Lord, and instruments are an important part of the praise.

Finally

The characteristics of our praise to the Lord depend on the depth of our relationship with Him. Praise reveals on the outside what is happening on the inside. Also, our

praise is no longer governed by traditions or comfort zones. Instead, we find that we need every form of worship God has given us because no one form or expression can adequately reveal the love and faith we feel inside.

1. Praise takes many forms but must always be visible or audible.
2. We cannot choose which forms of praise we want to use. We need to praise God with our whole being.
3. Nobody can praise God for us.
4. Biblical forms of praise include:
 - Singing
 - Shouting
 - Making a joyful noise
 - Laughter
 - Thanksgiving
 - Standing
 - Kneeling
 - Clapping
 - Dancing
 - Uplifted hands
 - Making music on instruments

04/06/22

PRAISE AND WORSHIP
Purpose and Power

Why Are We to Praise God?

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 10

Why should you praise God? This is a good question. Does God have an ego problem so that He needs you to tell Him how great or good He is? Does God have fits of depression so that He needs you to encourage Him every now and then? Does God have an emotional problem that makes Him crave your praise and attention?

No! God does not need your praise. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). He isn't moved by what you say or do. God is not moved by you. He is the same whether or not you praise Him. He is not emotionally unstable so that your praise changes how He feels about Himself—or about you.

Why, then, if your praise does not move or change God, does change sometimes come because of praise? Who does the praise affect?

Praise Affects You

God is the same all the time, but you are not. This is why you need the stability of God's unchanging presence to keep your world in balance. You need Somebody who is, and always will be, the same every day, all day.

Our days go up and down—sometimes higher, sometimes lower. This is never true for God. His days are always up. He is there all the time with the same attitude, the same abilities. Therefore, His presence in your day is quite important.

When He is with you because you have created an atmosphere in which He can dwell, your day is a day of His making no matter what is holds— *“Lord, help me to remember that there is nothing in this day that you and I can't handle together.”* In other words, God makes your day when you give it to Him at the start through praise. This gives Him the opportunity to get into your environment where He can touch and heal you.

In essence, no matter what is going on in your life, if you will invite God into your day through praise, He will fill your life with Himself. Then the words, “*make my day,*” become a reality as God takes the threads of your life and weaves them together to His glory. This is why the apostle Paul could say, “***And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose***” (Romans 8:28). When God’s plans and purposes are worked out in your life, every day and all day becomes good.

Praise Puts God to Work

Praise also invites God to do more good things for you. God enjoys showing us that He is even greater than we imagined and much more capable than we have yet seen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

What would our life be like if we consistently attracted/involved God through praise? What would our families and neighborhoods look like? Would the bars and clubs in our town be empty and our churches be full? Would divorce and child abuse become things of the past? Would decent housing be available for everyone and would the streets of our cities be safe to walk at night? Scenes like these may seem to be impossible, but God specializes in the impossible. There is no telling what is possible when He arrives and takes over.

Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, in 2 Chronicles chapter 20, no doubt, knew this. When threatened by a large army that struck terror in his heart, Jehoshaphat turned to God for help. He proclaimed a fast, called the people together, and had a praise session in front of the Temple.

5. Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, 6. And said: “O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there no power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?” (2 Chronicles 20:5-6).

Notice what he did. He bragged about God. He proclaimed that power and might are in God’s hand, not men. He testified to his faith that no one can withstand God. Then he reminded God what He had already done for His people and confirmed his faith that God was up to the job.

In verse 20 he says, “***Tell us what to do, God. We’re not doing anything until You tell us what we should do. We’re just waiting here for You because You are our God and we trust You.***” Praise, expectancy, and obedience. This was Jehoshaphat’s

response to the threat of war. This should be your response as well in the face of adversity, because praise is the secret to the power of God.

Now, I know that some of you have little time for this “spiritual stuff” because your needs are practical needs. I’ve heard people say, “Yeah, I appreciate all this praise and other things you’re talking about, but let’s become practical now. Let’s be reasonable. All this spiritual stuff isn’t going to pay my rent/mortgage or get my boss to stop hassling me or get my children to stop hanging with the wrong crowd. I’m dealing with real issues here, and I need real answers.”

Yes, you are dealing with real issues—issues that are every bit as threatening as the army that would soon be on Judah’s doorstep. So, maybe you had better deal with them the same way Jehoshaphat dealt with the Moabites and the Ammonites:

2 Chronicles 20:20-21

What did Jehoshaphat do? As he led his people into battle, he said, *“Let’s sing. I want you to thank God for His faithfulness and to celebrate His love. Tell Him how beautiful His holiness is.”*

This may appear to be an unreasonable response, but let’s see how it worked out.

2 Chronicles 20:22-24

Not one man from the attacking army escaped the proof of God. To understand what was so special about Judah’s victory, you need to understand what was behind their praise. Those singers out front of the army weren’t just having a casual praise session. They were doing serious business because they were appealing to God’s integrity. This is what *“the splendor of God’s holiness”* (v. 21) refers to.

His holiness means that He can’t do anything other than what He has promised. Therefore, the men at the head of the army were praising God as though the army coming at them was already dead! They were rejoicing in God’s faithfulness before He had been faithful. Why could they do this? They believed that the One who had made the promise would do exactly what He had said.

2 Chronicles 20:17

The average person would have run from that approaching army. He would have found some way to escape the coming destruction. This was not what Jehoshaphat

did. His words to his people show just how different his response was: ***“Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper”*** (2 Chronicles 20:20b).

A song of faith in the night is the highest form of praise. It shows that you believe God’s word to you to be true, and you trust Him to fulfill it. You attract Him through praise because your praise shows that you have faith. ***“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, because anyone who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him*** (Hebrew 11:6).

Faith pleases God. This is why, when trouble is coming toward you and you begin to praise Him, God says, ***“I will deliver you from the hands of this enemy.”*** He begins to work for you because He is pleased with your praise and the faith that enables it.

Praise Puts Flesh to Our Faith

Praise fixed firmly upon faith opens the door for God to work for you, and through you. it allows Him to handle all the things in your life that you cannot. This was certainly true for one leper whom Jesus healed. The Gospel of Luke tells us that ten lepers begged Jesus for mercy, but only one returned to thank Him (Luke 17:17-19). Praise also followed the faith of the blind beggar who told Jesus that he wanted to see (Luke 18:35-43).

You need to praise God in the midst of your problems, and you need to do it now. Your praise is what attracts God to you. It is what gets you into His presence.

- Praise Him because you believe in Him and want to please Him.
- Praise Him because you want to honor and obey Him.
- Praise Him because you know you cannot live apart from Him.
- Praise Him because you need Him every hour of every day to be truly human.
- Praise Him because there are circumstances, events, and relationships in your life that you don’t know how to handle.
- Praise Him because He has made promises to you that have yet to be fulfilled.
- Praise Him because you are certain He will be faithful to fulfill all He has spoken to you.
- Praise Him because there’s power in praise and you want to tap every bit of that power.

- Praise Him because His ultimate goal is that you will bask in His presence and eat at His table for evermore.

Finally, if these aren't enough reasons why you should praise your God, praise Him simply because His presence is more important to you than anything and everything that's keeping you from praising Him.

1. God does not need your praise.
2. Your praise does not change or affect Him.
3. Your praise changes and affects you.
4. Praise brings God into your day so He can handle whatever comes your way.
5. Praise turns impossibilities into victories.
6. Praise based on faith thanks God for what He will do, before He does it.

04/20/22

PRAISE AND WORSHIP
Purpose and Power

Qualified to Be in God's Presence

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 11

Sincerity is No Substitute for Purity

God comes to those who meet His conditions. He doesn't come because we want Him to come. No doubt, this is why so many believers never experience the reality of God's presence. They truly want Him to come, but they have no idea of what qualifies them to receive this awesome gift.

Yes, God responds to our desire for Him, but our desire must be shown in ways that meet His standards. We must be holy, as He is holy. God's holiness means that He is pure in motive. He is united in His thoughts, words, and actions. He cannot lie; neither can He pretend. Those who want to live in His presence must be as He is.

The father of lies (John 8:44) has deceived us into rejecting God's truth and accepting his falsehoods. The only way this can change is if God's holiness rubs off on us as we spend time with Him. In other words, we become holy by associating with Holiness.

Therefore, the whole purpose of God's commands concerning the Tabernacle and the Temple was to provide a way for His people to associate with Him without being destroyed because of their sin. The rituals of the priests and the people were the means by which man fulfilled God's requirements for coming into His presence. When they did it right, God rewarded them, appearing to the priest between the cherubim in the inner sanctuary and to the nation in smoke or a cloud.

Consecrate Yourselves

Coming into God's presence is not something to be done casually. This is why the command "***consecrate yourselves***" was a constant buzzword in the Old Testament. God demanded that His people cleanse themselves from sin before they came into His presence.

For the ancient Hebrews, this meant a series of ritual washings of themselves and their garments, both for the people and the priests (Exod. 19:10, 22). Consecration in preparation for serving God or meeting with Him also meant that the priest were to wear certain clothes and symbols and to present prescribed sacrifices (Exod. 29-30; 39-40; Lev. 8).

Priests and common folks were also obligated not to touch anything that was unclean according to God's definitions (Lev. 11). To touch these things made a person unfit to gather with God's people as they stood in His presence. Each rule and regulation concerning the work and worship of God's people, both within the Tabernacle and within their everyday lives, was prescribed so that they could be holy in God's sight.

7. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God.

8. And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I am the LORD who sanctifies you (Leviticus 20:7-8).

Jesus makes it clear, but that uncleanness on the outside is not the only form of impurity. Matter of fact, it isn't the most important source of contamination. Instead, uncleanness of heart is what pollutes our lives.

Truth and Purity

Coming to God with praise requires that we cleanse our heart from all the evil that has taken up residence there. This is the message of ***Psalm 15 (1-5)***. What is in our heart matters most of all because this is where truth and righteousness, or lies and unrighteousness, start.

Truth is at the core of the requirements presented in this Psalm—truth with God and truth with our fellow man. What is in our heart and what we do and say must match. We can't say one thing in public and another in private. We can't act one way in worship on Sunday morning and another way throughout the week in our homes and at our jobs. Righteous unity in all our life is evidently essential if we want God's presence to come and stay with us.

This requirement of inner purity is also evident in ***Psalm 24:3-6*** and

“He who works deceit shall not dwell within My house; He who tells lies shall not continue in my presence” (101:7).

Clean hands, a pure heart, and truth in the innermost being: These are the characteristics of the man or woman who may stand in God's presence. Purity and truth in

our heart are the critical factors that determine whether our praise is acceptable to God. If the form and timing of our praise is right but our heart is not, we cannot expect to receive the gift of His presence.

God Comes When We Truly Want Him

The point is that you don't get God presence just because you ask for it. You get His presence when you qualify for it. Yes, the torn veil in the Temple because of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ now gives us direct access to the throne of God that the Israelites did not have. And yes, the way is open to all. Yet, we too must ascend into God's presence, climbing the hill of the Lord much as the people of the Old Testament climbed Mount Zion on their way to the Temple.

God wants honest, pure, and committed worshipers. These are His standards for those who would approach Him through praise. Which means that just any praise will not bring Him to us. Goosepimples and warm fuzzy feeling won't do it. Neither will praise that is concerned more with what we can get from God than with who He is. Our praise must be praise that has no ulterior motives; praise that comes from a heart cleansed from sin and totally yielded to and controlled by Him; praise that acknowledges the reality of God; praise that is focused on Him and the glory of His name.

Most of the time when we come to God and say, "I love You," we have this long list in the back of our mind that we want Him to fulfill. Or we are worrying about our families, or about the mortgage, the car payment, or some other bill. We aren't really focusing on God. He is not our heart's true desire. Instead, we are trying to get Him to give us what we want. This is not pure praise because we are not approaching God in truth.

God looks through the crowds who come to church on Sunday morning for a few who are totally given to Him in their praise. Many come to praise Him, but few believers are true worshipers. These devoted ones refuse to be distracted by the events of this morning, yesterday, or last week. They are not concerned with what others have on. Their focus is totally on God, and He is their delight.

God doesn't want you to be thinking about anything or anyone else when you say, "I love You." Nor does He want you to come to Him only when you have a long list of needs and wishes. When you do this, He stays away because He knows that you don't really want Him. You only want what you think you can get from Him.

God is holy—that is, He is pure in thought, motive, and attitude—and He expects you to be holy too. Don't tell Him something unless you really mean it. He is not pleased when you do something on the outside that doesn't match what you think or feel on the inside. God isn't going to show up. He recognizes that your mouth is saying one thing but your body is doing another. You don't really mean what you are saying. You are saying the right words, but your heart is not at one with your mouth.

God is seeking true worshipers. He wants your praise on the outside to match what is inside your heart because then your spirit is doing what God's Spirit is telling it to do. You are letting God's holiness rub off on you. This is why Jesus said that true worshipers would worship His Father not only in truth, but also in spirit (John 4:23-24).

The word *spirit* in John 4:23-24 is spelled with a lowercase "s," not an uppercase one. In other words, Jesus wasn't talking about the Holy Spirit, but about your spirit. He was saying that the time would come when people would fix up their spirit before they came into His presence. They would get their life in order.

Worship is contact with God, and He isn't willing to be contaminated by junk in your spirit. He requires that you clean up your life before He comes to live with you. Once you have purified your attitudes, priorities, and motives, He can believe what you say to Him in praise. He can trust that you are really blessing Him when you say, "Bless the Lord" or "Glory to His name."

In spirit and in truth is the bottom line for praise and worship because you can't fool God by trying to fake something that isn't in your heart. True praise requires integrity of heart and humility of spirit that are not easily attained. Those who persevere receive the high prize of God's favor and God's presence.

So, check yourself when you come to God. Be sure that what you are saying or doing is in agreement with your heart and spirit. Otherwise, you are wasting your time because God comes only to those who are qualified to enter His presence. These are the people He permits to worship Him.

- 1) God is united in thought, word, and action.
- 2) God's holiness rubs off on us as we spend time with Him.
- 3) Uncleanness of heart pollutes our life.
- 4) Truth with God and our fellow man is required of those who want God to come and stay.
- 5) Cleaning up our heart prepares us to worship God.

- 6) God is seeking true worshipers whose words and actions match their heart.
- 7) Focused praise permits no thought other than God.

04/27/22

PRAISE AND WORSHIP
Purpose and Power

The Relationship of Praise and Worship

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 12

The goal of praise is to create an atmosphere for the presence of God. This is why Abraham, Moses, and David were such close friends with God. They made room for Him in their lives. Their deep hunger to know and obey Him was the basis for their relationship with Him.

This is true for all real worshipers. They love to be with God and He loves to be with them. He shows up because they have a genuine devotion to Him and a passion for Him. Therefore, praise and worship are related but very different activities and experiences.

- Praise is initiated by us. Worship is God's response.
- Praise is something we do. Worship is something God releases.
- Praise is our building a house for God. Worship is God moving in.

Worship cannot be generated by us. It is completely dependent on God. We may seek to enter worship through praise, but it is up to God whether He will respond to our initiative. The truth is, we cannot worship God unless we have first praised Him, and this praise must be genuine. Otherwise, Jesus' indictment against the Pharisees may also be leveled against us: ***These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain (Matt. 15:8-9).***

True praise and worship are tough, but the results are awesome because everything we need is in God's presence. Joy, rest, peace, mercy, power, victory, wisdom: All these and more are available to us in the presence of God. ***In the shelter of Your presence You hide them from the pride of man; in Your dwelling You keep them safe from accusing tongues (Psalm 31:20).***

These gifts of God's presence are not to be the focus of our search. Seeking the blessings of God instead of the face of God never works. When we persist in this, asking God for stuff instead of Himself, we forfeit what we seek. That is, we lose the things

we ask for because we fail to gain the presence of the One who holds them in His hand. Then He says to us, “You have missed the most important thing. Seek My Kingdom first. Then I’ll give you all the land, houses, food, clothes, and jobs you need” (Matt. 6:33).

It is possible that you may find that seeking God first is difficult because your wants and needs demand for attention. Nevertheless, you must persevere. He knows that you come to Him with many problems, burdens, and questions. He understands your need. Yet, He invites you to seek His face before you seek His hand. You may think you need a prayer line, but He knows that you really need time with Him. When He gets into your life, He will fix in one moment things you have been working on for days, weeks, and even years. In this respect, seeking God is quite like praising Him. Your focus must be on Him, and He must be your delight.

God responds to people who have a deep hunger for Him. *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirst for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? (Psalm 42:1-2).* This heart cry of David is the plea of every true worshiper. Where is God? Why can’t I find Him? How can I build a road to where He is so that I may be with Him?

So deep is the hunger and thirst of these committed ones that they seek God until they are caught by Him. Their passion for Him will not allow them to stop until they gain the One for whom they reach. Hours spent in prayer and praise are the rule for them, not the exception.

Why are we so lackadaisical in our search for God? One possible answer is that we have yet to experience the beauty and power of God’s presence. Therefore, we don’t understand that the reward for our seeking is worth every bit of our effort, and more. Another possibility is that our self-centeredness and the competing loyalties within us prevent us from giving full allegiance to anyone, including God. We cannot seek Him with all our heart because there are too many closed doors in us that bar God from entering.

Walking in God’s ways and obeying Him in all things is a privilege, not a hindrance. Yet, we often treat God as such. When things become a little difficult we are quick to assume that coming to church and giving God our full attention is a burden rather than a blessing. How wrong we are!

Remember that God doesn’t need us so that He can be God. We need Him so that we can be human. Seeking Him is for our benefit, not His. When we praise and seek

God, He turns around and finds us. He gives us Himself, which is all we really need. If, then, we find that we are unable to seek God because of the many obstacles in our life, what are we to do? Get rid of the junk and clean house.

As the children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land, Joshua talked about all that God had done for them and challenged them to choose whom they would serve. ***“And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. . . But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD”*** (Joshua 24:15).

The people chose to serve God. Then Joshua charged them, ***“Throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel”*** (Joshua 24:23b). In other words, he told them to make themselves qualified for serving God. Seeking God is always this way. We cannot keep the idols of our heart and expect to receive the gift of His presence. Repentance is an essential ingredient of seeking and praising Him. We must return to Him on a daily basis so He can turn to us. His coming to us is based on the fact that we get rid of all the obstacles that keep us from coming to Him.

Unfortunately, getting rid of everything in our life that keeps us from God is a task that none of us can complete. We are not capable of it. We need God to do it for us. Yet, He cannot free us from all that entangles us unless we are willing to let Him take over our life. Most of us find this easier to say than do. Very often we hand Him the reins one day and take them back the next. Perhaps we do this because we have not learned a truth that was quite precious to David: ***“Those who know Your name will trust in You, for You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek You*** (Ps. 9:10).

Trust is a necessity if we are to seek and praise the Lord. Otherwise, we will take matters into our own hands when we don't like what is happening in our life or we don't understand the path God has set before us. David could have done this many times in the years between when he was anointed king by Samuel. Matter of fact, his trust in God was repeatedly tested.

On one occasion when he was running from King Saul, who hunted him to kill him, David had the opportunity to kill Saul. From a human perspective, this would have advanced David's cause. Yet, David, because he believed in God's faithfulness to him, chose to wait for God's timing instead of taking things into his own hands.

God is searching for such a generation, a people who will value His presence over their own selfish desires and wait for His purposes despite long periods of preparation. Such a generation will approach Him with humility, exposing their pride-filled hearts to these searching of His eyes. They will value Him and His plans for them above all else.

When people genuinely want God's presence, He gives it to them. This is the bottom line of praise and worship. David instructed his son Solomon to continue as he had started.

1 Chronicles 28:9

The same challenge comes to you. Choose to be an Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, or Daniel. Praise and seek God with all your heart. Then wait and see what He will do in your life. I promise you that He will fulfill His ultimate goal and desire for you. He will grace you with His presence.

Worship: The Climax of Praise

Worship is what praise is all about: Seeking God until He graces us with His presence. Once He is present, everybody and everything else is dismissed. The prophet Habakkuk referred to this when he said, . . . ***the Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him***" (Hab. 2:20).

Finding God and enjoying His presence is the sole purpose of our praise. Only then may we know what to do and how to live effectively. God is preparing a generation who will seek Him above all else. When they start singing, governments are going to become afraid. When they start shouting, nations all around the world are going to be transformed.

Then, when God finally comes and sits in the midst of all this praise, our world is going to see miracle after miracle as the walls of prejudice, hatred, and division fall (Joshua 6). Our world will change so fast that we will be hard put to keep up with everything God is doing. This is the power and authority of praise that leads God's people into worship, taking them the whole way into His presence.

- 1) God responds to people who have a deep hunger for Him.
- 2) Passionate worshippers love to be with God, and He loves to be with them.
- 3) Praise and worship are related but different activities:

- *Praise is initiated by us. Worship is God's response.
- *Praise is something we do. Worship is something God releases.
- *Praise is our building a house for God. Worship is God moving in.

- 4) Repentance is a necessary part of seeking and praising God.
- 5) Humility and trust free God to reward those who seek Him.
- 6) God's plans for each person include intimacy with Him and a future full with hope.
- 7) When God shows up in the midst of His people, everything else suddenly stops.

05/04/22

PRAISE AND WORSHIP
Purpose and Power

The Power of Praise and Worship
(Part 1)

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 13

The purpose of praise is to get God into your environment. The power of praise is the presence of God at work in your life.

When God comes, things change. This is not to say that God changes, for He was God long before we were born, and He will be God long after we die. He was God before anything was created, and He will be God after everything has passed away. God is God, even, without us.

To say it another way, when we praise God, we agree with what He has already said and shown us about who He is. We also discover more of who He created us to be, because we were made to be like He is, and His presence is the environment He created us to live in. Therefore, holiness is good for us because when we are holy, holiness meets Holiness.

Things also change when God leaves. The life of King Saul shows us what a difference the absence or presence of God can make. Saul had disobeyed God and was tormented by an evil spirit (1 Sam. 13, 15, and 16). Since no other cure was available, Saul's servants suggested that they find someone to play the harp whenever the evil spirit came. Saul agreed and David played for him.

As David played the songs he wrote, the presence of the Lord filled the room and the evil spirit had to go. When David left, the evil spirit came back, since the presence of God was absent from Saul's life. Saul had to call for David repeatedly because he did not know how to attract the presence of God through praise.

This must not be true for you. You should not have to go to church or call someone else to get into God's presence. You must practice drawing God to you through praise until His presence is with you every day and all day. Then, no matter where you are and what you are experiencing, you will have the key that opens doors no

one can shut, and shuts doors no one can open (Rev. 3:7). So, if something is trying to hold back your blessing, don't get angry or complain. Start praising the Lord. Then He will show up in your situation and make things right.

God's Presence Brings Joy

When the Lord's presence is in a place with you, it makes you feel so good that you want to hang around for a while. You don't want to lose the enjoyable reality you are experiencing. So great is this joy of being with God that you may even do things you normally won't do. For example, you may be nice to everybody, hugging folks you don't even like.

David evidently knew this wonderful feeling because he said, ***“You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11)***. God's presence is the source of joy. If you want to have more joy in your life, spend more time with God. Then the spirit of heaviness that hangs on you will lift as God changes your attitudes and perspectives.

Only joy-filled experience in God's presence is all it will take to make you hunger for more. So, refuse to be content where you are. Seek God each day until joy becomes your constant companion and you become as delighted with God's presence as was David, who preferred one day with God to a thousand with an earthly king (Ps. 84:10).

God's Presence Gives Rest

Rest is also a gift of God's presence. Often, we wear ourselves out trying to meet responsibilities in our own strength. Moses did this. When he asked God to give him help with the work of leading the Israelites, God said, ***“My presence will go with you. . .” (Exod. 33:14b)***. Moses was looking for people to help him: “Give me some assistance, supervisors, and workers.” God gave Moses Himself and the promise of rest.

The word translated here as *rest* means among other things “to settle down,” “to give comfort,” “to cease,” “to be quiet,” and “to cause to rest, be at rest.” The word may also mean “to set one's mind at rest.” Basically, this rest is a ceasing to work because the work is not ours. When God is with us, He is the One who does the work, and we are freed from the anxiety of trying to make things right.

Therefore, God was saying to Moses, “All you need is My presence. When I am with you, you don't have to work hard. I will meet all of your needs and take care of your concerns.” The Church today needs to understand this principle. We become so

caught up in planning and programs that we forget who is in charge of the Church. Success comes when God comes. Until then, we are simply spinning our wheels.

God's Presence Brings Peace

The disciples learned this lesson one night on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had been teaching the crowds and ministering to people all day. As night fell, He said to His disciples, ***“Let us cross over to the other side” (Mark 4:35b)***. While they were on the lake, a terrible storm came upon them so that they feared for their lives. Meanwhile Jesus was asleep on the boat.

So, they woke Him saying, ***“Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” (v. 38b)***. Jesus got up and commanded the wind and waves, ***“Peace, be still!” (39b)***, and there was complete calm. Then He said to His disciples, ***“Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” (v. 40b)***.

The disciples were working hard in that storm. Jesus, on the other hand, said only three words, ***“Peace, be still!”*** He didn't have to shout commands at people. He simply spoke to the wind and the waves, they obeyed Him. God's presence in our life brings the same peace and calm. This peace doesn't necessarily mean that everything is quiet. God's peace means that we aren't worrying about anything.

Sometimes we get uptight when things aren't going the way we want or expect. So, we run around and start giving orders until everyone around us is uptight as we are. Our problem in such situations is that we are trying to deal with our difficulties by ourselves. God wants you to understand that you don't have to solve your problems. All you must do is get Him in the midst of them. Just start praising Him until His presence starts making a difference in your situation. Then you will have total quietness in spirit, and total union with God.

Some of you are stressed and depressed now, and you desperately need God's presence. You need His peace and calm in place of the anxiety and struggle you've been going through. When His presence is in your house, your struggle and anxiety are replaced with His peace and rest. Praise Him for the good things He has brought into your life. Thank Him for the gift of peace He has for you. Thank Him that He is in control of your life. Thank Him for His concern for you and His never-ending faithfulness to you. Thank Him that He will never leave you or forsake you. Just bring Him this sacrifice of praise until you sense His presence in your spirit.

We worry so much because we think that we have to fix everything. God is the one who fixes things, not us. Our responsibility is to make the conditions right so He can

come and do His work. When we make room for Him through praise, He comes in and takes over. This is why protecting God's presence in our life is so necessary.

In essence, we protect ourselves by making room for Him. As soon as we become aware of anything that is disrupting His presence, be that in our personal life or in our life together as God's people, we must activate praise and take charge over whatever is threatening us. Our peace of mind demands this. As we fight for God's presence, we will find moments of crisis and turmoil becomes less often because God is in our environment all the time to bring us peace. Without God's presence, we are always looking for help. With His presence, our souls are at rest and our labors are easy.

God Presence Attracts the Right People

Once we are at peace with what's happening in our lives, we can trust God to bring the right people and the right opportunities our way. Matter of fact, we find that miracles are more abundant when we stop trying to do everything in our own strength. People are attracted to us because they are attracted to God.

Moses evidently knew this:

- 15) Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here.***
16) For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So, we shall be separate, Your and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth" (Exodus 34:15-16).

Your life should be distinguished because God hangs out with you, not for what you have or what you do. When God is with you, people are drawn to you and they don't know why. They see something they can't describe and feel something they can't put into words. They know something is going on with you even if they don't know what. In truth, they are being drawn to God, not to you. His presence with you is what makes the difference.

The contrary is also true. Some folks who come around are attracted more by the things you do and the blessings you have received than by the presence of God. This, again, is why you need the consistent, enduring presence of God. He will clean your house so that people who aren't supposed to be in your life will leave.

God's Presence Brings Blessings

What are God's blessings, and how do we know when we have received them? To receive the blessings of God is to receive anything and everything you need to fulfill your life. King David put it this way: ***"Blessed is the man You choose, and cause to approach You, that he may dwell in Your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, of Your holy temple"*** (Psalm 65:4).

We are tempted to think that the good things of God's house are material things. Although God may certainly bless us with prosperity, the good things of God are the essential qualities of His character: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Therefore, we can testify to the goodness of God in our life when we start to look and act as He does and to fulfill His purposes for us. This naturally happens when God is Lord over all aspects of our life. It is as if He says, "You praise Me, and I'll praise you. You honor Me, and I'll honor you. You lift Me up, and I'll lift you up."

We bless ourselves when we bless God through praise and worship. David testified to this when he said that those who have clean hands and a pure heart will receive blessings (Ps. 24:3-5). The contrary may also be true. God may remove blessings from our life if we refuse to bless and honor His name. This is what happened to Eli the priest, who was serving God when Samuel was born. When Eli was old, his sons were dishonoring God and taking advantage of the people they were supposed to be serving (1 Samuel 2:30).

Actually, our obedience in honoring God and our disobedience in treating Him with contempt/disrespect/disapproval have lasting consequences!

05/11/22

PRAISE AND WORSHIP
Purpose and Power

The Power of Praise and Worship
(Part 2)

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 14

God's Presence Brings Power

God's power activated in our life through praise and worship has many benefits. Matter of fact, we cannot count the sum of them. Nor can we imagine the totality of God's power that is available to us. Yet, we want to list some of the ways God's power is at work in us and through us, making our life quite different from what it would be without Him.

God's Presence Protects Us and Gives Us Security

Daniel and his Hebrew friends were youth when the people of Judah were taken into captivity in Babylon. Despite the hardships of being taken far from home, Daniel and his friends remained true to God in the land of their exile. When their faith in God and their devotion to Him got them into big trouble with the rulers of the land, they still chose to trust God and obey Him, even though their choice meant death.

In the end, their faithfulness to God became a wonderful opportunity for Him to show them and their captors the greatness of His power and the magnitude of His faithfulness to those who trust Him with everything, including their life.

For Daniel, God's presence came to him in a lion's den (Dan. 6). For the other three; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—a fiery furnace was the place of God's visitation (Dan. 3). The place is not important. The faithfulness and power of God are. He is able and willing to meet you in whatever den of lions or blazing furnace you may find yourself, and His power is more than sufficient to preserve you from harm.

So, reach out to Him through praise. Make room for Him to enter the place of your hardship so that you, like these Hebrew young men, may find His presence is sufficient for all your needs.

God Takes Dominion Over Our Environment

We discussed earlier how God came into the prison with Paul and Silas and took over. A similar thing happened to Peter. Herod had arrested Peter and put him in prison because the Jews were pleased that Herod had killed James, the brother of John. Since it was the Feast of Passover, Herod decided to deal with Peter.

Meanwhile, the church was praying for Peter. The night before Peter was to be brought to trial, God sent an angel to him.

Acts 12:10-12

This story is different from God's involvement with Paul and Silas in that the Scriptures make no mention of Peter praising God when the angel of the Lord came to him. We are told that the church was seeking God on Peter's behalf. In other words, they were trying to get God's presence into Peter's environment. As the story shows us, they were successful and Peter's circumstances changed.

The same is true for you. When you bring God into your environment, your circumstances change. You might be quite surprised what would happen if God came and lived in your house and in your neighborhood. Things would change as He took authority over demons and strongholds that you have been powerless to touch. This is the power of God's presence in your life.

God Disarms Satan

Some of us have a hard time inviting God to be with us. We are too busy, we become tired or bored, or we fight against praise that to us seems to be undignified. Look what happens. The devil is always trying to make us unavailable to God or uncomfortable in praise and worship. In other words, Satan does all he can to keep God's power and authority from showing up.

He brings distracting thoughts to our mind: "Did I remember to turn the iron off?" He tries to shame us: "God's not going to accept you after what you did last night." The devil will do whatever he can to keep our mind on other things and off God. Praise that leads to worship stops all this because when God's presence comes, the devil must leave. A praising saint is the devil's worst nightmare. This is why perseverance is called for in such times. You must make the conscious choice to ignore whatever distractions Satan sends.

When this is not possible, you must deal with the interruption as quickly as possible and return your focus to God. By doing this, you render Satan powerless. In part, the

this is what Paul refers to in Second: ***“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4)***. The weapons of our warfare to overcome the enemy are prayer and praise. This praise is to be not only the hymns we find in books, but the prayers and songs only the Spirit can give.

“. . . I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind” (1 Cor. 14:15). Such praise confuses the enemy. He can't believe that you are praising God while he is coming against you.

Praise in your everyday life protects you by disarming Satan before his assault gains momentum. He becomes confused and thinks something is wrong with him because your praise in difficult circumstance makes no sense to him. He can't understand why you are praising God when you are losing your job, and you won't have any income for your family. When he expects you to be the most depressed, you are standing before God singing!

This is the power of praise that begins with thanksgiving and takes you into God's presence. You stop the enemy in his tracks and take the spoils of his warfare right from his hands (2 Chron. 20). Every evil spirit, every disease, every fear, every bout of depression, every seed of bitterness must flee when God's presence comes because He puts our enemies under our feet.

King David speaks of this triumph over our enemies in Psalm 24 when he says that those who stand in God's presence will receive vindication from God. In other words, David is saying that God retaliates against whatever is attacking us or is making life difficult for us. He frees us from guilt, fear, bitterness, hatred, insecurities and anything and everything that causes us to be ineffective and unable to live as He created us to function.

God's Presence Brings Wisdom and Vision

God's presence always blesses us and enables us to do our best. Our trust in Him helps us to look beyond the immediate to what He yet will do. Our eyes of faith cause us to praise Him for the victory that is yet unseen. Confusion, on the other hand, is the result of being outside God's presence. We may not always see what God is doing and where He is taking us. But God's presence gives us the peace to trust Him and to take each step as He reveals it. He intends that the two of you will work together.

As you hold before Him all He has already done in your life, you give Him the opportunity to do more. You also open the door for Him to give you all the wisdom and knowledge that are found in Him. Suddenly, what in your human sight appeared to be impossible, comes to pass because God is working for you, in you, and through you.

This is why Moses could throw down his staff and it became a snake, and pick it up again and it became his staff (Exod. 4:2-4). He was in God's presence, and everything God asked of him, He also gave him the power to do.

The same is true for you. God wants to help you accomplish things you never dreamed were possible. Therefore, you must refuse to be like some folks, who are set in their ways that had they been Moses, they would not have thrown the staff on the ground in the first place. God uses people who are open to Him. He reveals Himself to these believers who long for His presence and readily respond to His leading.

When He is ready to do something new, He turns to them. Others may eventually catch on and start to accept the new stuff from God, but praisers and worshipers are the first to do so. Living in His presence all the time gives you the opportunity to see things from His perspective. In time, He will show you whether what is happening is from Him.

God's Presence is the Answer to All the Needs of Our World

Those who listen and watch closely will have the privilege of being part of the transformation that even now is taking place. The Book of Revelation discloses some of what this advancing Kingdom of God entails. The last two chapters speak of the new Jerusalem that will come ***“down out of heaven from God . . .” (Rev. 21:2b).***

In this city, God will fulfill His purpose of the ages and will make everything new, returning to His original purpose when He created man:

Revelation 21:3

This city will be filled with the nature of God, and the river of the water of life, pure as crystal, will flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Beside the river will be planted the tree of life,

Revelation 22:2-4

In this new Jerusalem, God's servants get what Moses asked for: God's presence is continually with them and they see Him face to face. This is what Jesus meant when

He said He was going to prepare a place for us. ***“And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).***

Notice the tense of the last verb in this verse. Jesus is making a place so that we can be where He is. God wants us to enjoy Him now and to be empowered by His presence. He intends that we live with Him today, next week, and forever. This dwelling of God with man is the sole purpose of all His work throughout history. He is getting us back to the environment of His presence so we can be the men and women He designed us to be.

This transformation is to start with the church. We are to be the place where God’s presence resides all the time so people can come to us and find God. Matter of fact, it is our obligation to make a place from which the fragrance of God spills over into the community around us.

Therefore, the day is coming, and perhaps already is here, when the Church will leave the confines of our comfortable sanctuaries and will go to the cities of our nations, there to sing and worship the Lord. There will be no preaching or conversation, just to praise and worship as hundreds of people stand on street corners bringing the presence of God into our cities and neighborhoods.

Arguments and words of persuasion will have no place, because we won’t be talking to anyone except our wonderful, all-powerful God. Our attention will be focused on Him instead of the people and problems that surround us. In that hour, the power of God will take over our countries. He’ll just move in, confuse the enemy, and declare victory.

People will lay down their weapons, give up their drugs, get along with their neighbors, and be reconciled to their families without understanding what is happening to them. There’ll be no evangelists, no invitations, and no prayer lines to draw them in. They’ll just fall to their knees right where they are and cry out to God, whose presence has the power to woo them without the intervention of man.

God’s presence is the answer to all the needs of every person in our world, and His presence comes to us through praise. The needs of our families will be met if we start praising God in our homes. The problems of our cities will be solved if we fill our streets with praise and worship.

God wants the people He created to live in His presence, and in the end, He's going to get what He wants. We know this because He has promised it and He cannot lie. He's going to have His presence here on earth among His people. The question is whether we will do our part to bring His purposes to pass. The coming of His presence here, today, in our world, is dependent on our praising Him. This is what attracts God's presence, and God's presence is the source that supplies every need in our world.

- 1) Every place the enemy has taken up residence must be vacated when God enters that place.
- 2) God's presence brings:
 - * Joy, peace, and rest;
 - * His blessings, and people to help fulfill the vision He has given us;
 - * Security and deliverance from everything that causes us to be ineffective in life;
 - * Changed circumstances and victory over Satan;
 - * Wisdom and the vision to see what He is doing.
- 3) God's presence is the answer to all the needs of our world.
- 4) God's final goal is to live continually with His people, where they can see Him face to face.

05/18/22

SPIRITUAL MATURITY
Growing Up Spiritually

Lesson 12
Trusting God
Part 1

By
Dr. James E. Potts

All of us face adversity/hardship/difficulty/danger in various forms and at different times. As someone has said so well, “Life is difficult.” I would go further. I would say life is often painful. Life often hurts. Nothing in this study is intended to make light of our pain. I want to help us learn to trust God in the midst of it.

Some adversities are somewhat minimal. Some adversities are sudden and devastating. Others are chronic and persistent, such as an incurable physical disability. Even when we aren’t experiencing major heartaches, we often encounter those frustrating or anxiety-producing events that can rob us of our peace and joy.

A major part of spiritual growth is learning to trust God in such times of adversity. It is just as important to trust God as it is to obey Him. When we disobey Him, we defy His authority and despise His holiness. But when we don’t trust God, we doubt His sovereignty and question His goodness. In both cases, we cast slanders upon His character.

Yet it often seems more difficult to trust God than to obey Him. The circumstances in which we must trust God often appear irrational and mysterious. Obeying God is worked out in well-defined boundaries of His revealed will. Trusting God is worked out in an arena that has no boundaries. As Proverbs 27:1 says we ***“we do not know what a day may bring forth.”***

In order to trust God, we must always view our adverse circumstances through the eyes of faith, not of sense. And just as the faith of salvation comes through hearing the message of the gospel (Romans 10:17), so the faith to trust God in adversity comes through the Word of God alone. It is only in the Scriptures that we find an adequate view of God’s relationship to and involvement in our painful circumstances. It is only from the Scriptures applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit that we receive the grace to trust God in adversity.

In the arena of adversity, the Scriptures teach us three very important truths about God—truths we must believe if we are to trust Him in adversity. They are:

- God is completely sovereign.
- God is infinite in wisdom.
- God is perfect in love.

The Bible continually declares/states the sovereignty of God, and yet today many people, including some believers, question it. They reason this way: God is either sovereign and not good or else He is good and not sovereign. If He were both, we would not experience and see all the heartache and tragedy that occurs daily around the world.

Having decided God cannot be both sovereign and good, they choose to believe in the goodness or love of God. But Jesus said we don't have to choose between God's sovereignty and His goodness. Consider what He says about God's involvement in the destiny of a sparrow:

Matthew 10:29-31

A sparrow cannot fall to the ground apart from God's sovereign will. Regardless of how many hunters or birds of prey are after that sparrow, nothing can happen to it unless God so wills it. And then Jesus does not leave us in doubt as to His claim for us. He said, "*So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*" Basically, Jesus is saying, "*If God sovereignly controls the destiny of a sparrow, how much does He control your destiny? Therefore, don't be afraid.*"

Someone may say, "Well, it's well and good God controls the destiny of a sparrow. But what about major calamities such as the AIDS epidemic and the vast areas of famine in Africa? Is God sovereign over the major tragedies of the world?"

The Bible says yes. Over and over again, the Bible declares the sovereignty of God over both the minor and the major events of life. Here is just one example from:

Lamentations 3:37-38

This passage teaches us that neither human beings nor the impersonal forces of nature nor other physical circumstances can harm us unless God decrees it. God may decree to cause an event positively, or He may decree to allow it. But in either case, He is sovereign over it.

So, we see that God is sovereign. But what about His goodness? Consider again the words of Jesus in:

Luke 12:6-7

Notice the subtle difference between this Scripture and Matthew 10:29-31. There, Jesus speaks of the sovereignty of God. Here, in Luke, He speaks about the care of God. Not a single sparrow is forgotten by Him. The word *forgotten* here does not refer to a lapse of memory on God's part. Instead, Jesus is saying not a single sparrow is abandoned by God. Once again, Jesus does not leave us in doubt as to His application. If a single sparrow is not forgotten by God, how much more does He not forget you?

The reality of life is that it often seems that God has forgotten or abandoned us. In Psalm 13:1, David cries out, "***How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?***" And in Psalm 10:1. He prays, "***Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?***" It's as if David is saying, "God, just when I need You most, I can't find You. You've hidden Yourself."

We find a similar heart cry from the nation of Israel [called Zion in the text] in:

Isaiah 49:14-16

The two words, *forsaken* and *forgotten*, refer to a heart forsakenness and physical abandonment. This is what happens in the unbelievably cruel practice of infanticide. In Biblical times, unwanted babies were left out in the open field to be eaten by animals or die of exposure. They were physically abandoned. But, in order, for parents to do such a horrible thing, they first had to forsake the baby in their hearts. This is what Zion accuses God of doing.

But what is God's answer? He takes the closest physical bond there is—that of a mother nursing her baby—and asks, "*Can this mother abandon this child?*" Then God says, "*Though she may forget, I will not forget you.*" God says it is impossible for Him to forget us even though our circumstances may make it appear to the contrary sometimes.

So what do we do when it seems as if God has forgotten and forsaken us? We go back to what the Bible tells us about God. We can look at God through the lens of our pain, or we can look at our pain through the lens of faith. And faith always come

through reliance on the promise in our hearts against the time when we face adversity, whether large or small. There have been many times when I've had to call to mind the words of Hebrews 13:5, "*Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you,*" in my own circumstances.

We see then that God is both sovereign and good. We don't have to choose between them. But the question still remains. If God is both sovereign and good, why is there so much heartache and tragedy in the world? The answer is: *We* don't know but God does. And God is not obligated to explain it to us. Matter of fact, we probably couldn't understand if He did explain.

Consider the words of Paul in Romans 11:33: "***How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!***" Or as one translation expresses that last phrase: "***... how mysterious His methods.***" Suppose a scientist is explaining some complicated nuclear equation to a seminar of other scientists. He has it all written out on the board and is going through the equation. The other scientists can follow his logic, but a six-year-old couldn't. The scientist could explain it over and over again, but the six-year-old simply doesn't have the intellectual capacity to understand.

This is the way we are in relation to God's wisdom, only more so. The gap in understanding between the scientist and the six-year-old is huge. But it is still finite/limited. But the gap between God's ways of governing His universe and our ability to track His ways is an infinite gap. As God Himself says:

Isaiah 55:8-9

Now, the expression, "*higher than the heavens,*" may not be striking to us in the space age. But remember: God spoke those words hundreds of years before the Wright brothers flew their first airplane. At that time, "*higher than the heavens*" would have been a metaphor/image for infinity. That's the way God's ways are to our ways. They are infinitely above them.

So, if we are going to learn to trust God, we must accept the fact that we have to trust Him when we don't understand. But remember: Although we don't understand His ways, we know they are good.

Remember the three truths that the Bible teaches us about God and our adversities:

- God is completely sovereign.
- God is infinite in wisdom.

- God is perfect in love.

In other word, God in His love always wills what is best for us. In His wisdom, He always knows what is best. And in His sovereignty, He has the power to bring it about.

01/05/22

SPIRITUAL MATURITY
Growing Up Spiritually

Lesson 12
Trusting God
Part 2

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Although we may not be able to understand the way God governs His universe or why He allows specific occurrences of pain in our individual lives, He has given us an idea of the ultimate purpose for the adversities we face. In Hebrews 12:5-11, He calls it *discipline* (chasten). As used in this passage, discipline does not refer to remedial/corrective punishment, as in “I had to discipline my son.” Instead, the word has the idea of child-training—all that which goes into training a child to be a responsible adult.

In Hebrews 12, the writer uses *discipline* to refer to a specific aspect of God’s spiritual child-training—that of hardship or adversity. Hebrews 12:7 is key to understanding the purpose of adversity in our lives. The writer says, “***Endure hardship as discipline.***” All hardship of whatever kind has a disciplinary purpose for us. *There is no such thing as pain without a purpose in the life of a believer.*

This means every expression of discipline has as its intended end conformity to the likeness of Christ. It is true we cannot see the connection between the adversity and God’s purpose. It should be enough for us to know God sees the connection and the end result He intends. It is vain/hopeless to speculate as to why God has brought a particular hardship into our lives.

When we are unable to make any sense of our circumstances, we need to come back to the assurance in Hebrews 12:7— “***God is treating you as sons.***” Keep in mind, He is the One in charge of our spiritual growth. He knows exactly what and how much adversity will develop more Christlikeness in us, and He will not bring, nor allow to come into our lives, any more than is needful for His purpose.

As we have already mentioned, there are different degrees of adversity. Some are life-shattering, such as the death of a loved one or a permanently disabling injury. Some, such as a flat tire or stopped-up sink, are really only temporary annoyances.

But whether trivial or serious, all of these circumstances and events are intended by God to be means of developing more Christlike character.

Continuing in his treatment of the discipline of adversity, the author of Hebrew wrote,

Hebrews 12:9

In order to gain the most profit from the discipline of hardship, we need to submit to it. The writer reminds us that in the human family, the children respect the father who disciplines them. This, of course, may be difficult to see in families where the father disciplines for selfish reasons—out of anger and irritation—instead of out of love for the benefit of the child. In his analogy between human parental discipline and God’s discipline, the writer of Hebrews assumes a more normal father model.

The writer’s point is that if we respected our fathers’ discipline, how much more should we submit to God’s discipline? Our fathers’ discipline was at best imperfect, both in motive and in application. But God’s discipline is perfect, exactly suited to our needs.

How then do we submit to God’s discipline? ***Negativity***, it means that we do not become angry with God, or charge Him with injustice, when very difficult circumstances come into our lives. Even short-term anger toward God is sin for which we need to repent. Even though the anger may be an emotional response, it is still a charge of injustice against God. Surely that is sin.

It is even more serious when someone allows anger toward God to continue over a long period of time; months or even years. An attitude like that amounts to a grudge against God and is actually rebellion. It is certainly not submitting to our heavenly Father.

Positively, we submit to God’s discipline when we accept all hardship as coming from His loving hand for our good. This means that our primary response would be one of humble submission and trust. We should submit to God’s dealings with us, knowing there is still much in our characters that needs improving. We should trust Him, believing He is infinite in His wisdom and knows exactly the kind and extent of adversity we need to accomplish His purpose.

Submitting to God’s discipline doesn’t mean we should not pray for relief from the difficulty or should not look for sincere means to gain relief. Sometimes the end God

has in mind is to exercise our faith, so He brings us into circumstances so that we might look up to Him and see His deliverance. But strengthening our faith is an important aspect of discipline.

The main thing is our attitude. We can pray to God for relief and still be submissive to Him regarding the outcome. Jesus is our supreme example in this as He prayed the night before His crucifixion, ***“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will”*** (Matthew 26:39).

Hebrews 12:10-11

The writer of Hebrews compares the finite wisdom of human parents in disciplining children with the infinite, dependable wisdom of God. Even the best human parents can only discipline as they think best. Their judgment is imperfect; their actions are sometimes inconsistent and are often guided by the impulse of the moment. Anyone who has tried to rear children in a godly, responsible manner knows there are times when parents simply do not know what is the appropriate manner or degree of discipline for a child.

God always disciplines us for our good. He knows what is best for each of us. He doesn't have to debate with Himself over what is most suitable for us. He knows perfectly the nature and duration of adversity that will best serve His purpose to make us partakers of His holiness. He never brings more pain than is needed to accomplish His purpose. **Lamentations 3:33** says it this way, ***“For He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.”***

Hebrews 12:10— ***“God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness.”*** Notice how the writer associated our good with becoming more holy. To be more like Christ and to share in His holiness are equal expressions. That is the highest good to which the believer can seek.

This is the design of God in all of the adversity and heartache we experience in this life. From God's perspective, there is no such thing as random or chance events in our lives. All pain we experience is intended to move us closer to the goal of being holy as He is holy.

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time,” the writer to the Hebrews said. Adversity comes in many forms; serious illness or injury, death of a loved one, unemployment, disappointments, and humiliations of various kinds. All of these afflictions are painful. They have to be to accomplish their intended purpose of pruning away what

is unholy in our lives so that true holy character may be produced. We should admit the pain. We should be like the writer of Hebrews who was honest when he said the discipline of hardship is painful.

Later on, however, the discipline produces a harvest of righteousness and peace. The “harvest of righteousness” is basically the same as sharing in His holiness. Discipline is one of the chief means God uses to make us holy. The road to holiness is paved with adversity. If we want to be holy, we must expect the discipline of God through the heartaches and disappointments He brings or allows to come into our lives.

The discipline of hardship also produces peace for those who have been trained by it. The word trained used here is the same one Paul used in 1 Timothy 4:7, which he borrowed from the athletic world of that day. It is not clear whether the author of Hebrews was writing of the peace that comes with maturity in this life or the rest that comes to the believer in eternity. The truth is, both are taught in Scripture.

Paul wrote that our sufferings produce perseverance, which in turn produces character (Romans 5:3-4), and James said that the testing of our faith develops perseverance, which leads to maturity (James 1:2-4).

Our ultimate hope is not in maturity of character in this life, as valuable as that is, but in the perfection of character in eternity. The apostle John wrote, “***When He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is***” (1 John 3:2). The often-painful process of being transformed into His likeness will be over. We shall be completely conformed to the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Looking forward to that time, Paul wrote, “***I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us***” (Roman 8:18). Paul said our sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory we will experience in eternity. This is not to say our present hardships are not painful. We have already seen from Hebrews 12:11 that they are indeed painful, and we all know this is some degree from experience. We need to learn to look by faith beyond the present pain to the eternal glory that will be revealed in us. Remember, the God who disciplines us will also glorify us.

So, the discipline of adversity is given to us by God as a means of our growth. Our role in this discipline is to respond to it and to agree to whatever God may be doing, even though a particular occurrence of adversity makes no sense to us. As we do this, we will see in due time the fruit of the Spirit produced in our lives. We will grow more and more into believers God wants us to be. 01/12/22

SPIRITUAL MATURITY
Growing Up Spiritually

Lesson 13
Serving God

The goal of our spiritual growth is to become more and more like Jesus (Romans 8:29). We tend to think of this as becoming more like Him in His character, but we need to remember that Jesus came to *work*—to *do* the will of the Father. So, if we are going to become like Jesus, we also must do the work God has given us to do. Paul tells us in ***Ephesians 2:10*** that ***“we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”*** God intends for all believers to be active workers in His kingdom.

To this end God has assigned every Christian a function in the body of Christ. There are no exceptions to this; every member has a function to fulfill. Just as God assigns to each of us a function in the body of Christ, so, He equips each of us to fulfill that function.

In the New Testament this equipping is called a “gift.” *A spiritual gift is an ability given by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to perform the specific function within the body that God has assigned to each of us.* Spiritual gifts are different from natural abilities. While both gifts and abilities are endowments from God, gifts are related specifically to the function God has assigned to us in the body.

In ***Romans 12:3-8***, Paul, using the analogy of the physical body, said, ***“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so, in Christ we who are many form one body... We have different gifts, according to the grace given us”*** (verses 4-6). Notice the relationship between function and gift. We all have different functions and, different gifts that enable us to fulfill those functions.

Our gifts are always consistent with our functions. If we view the church of Jesus Christ as His *body*, then we recognize that we are members of that body, sharing together a common life in Christ and using our spiritual gifts to serve one another. If we view the church as a spiritual enterprise engaged in carrying out Christ’s Great Commission to make disciples in all nations, then we have been called by God to be a team of dedicated partners actively involved in that effort.

With that in mind, we need to consider certain basic truths or principles regarding spiritual gifts.

(1) *The purpose of all spiritual gifts is to serve others and to glorify God.* 1 Peter 4:10-11, “*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others. . . so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.*” According to Peter, there are two objectives in the use of our gifts: serving others and glorifying or praising God. He also referred to us as stewards in the use of our gifts.

When used in this sense, “steward” refers to a person who manages someone else’s property, finances, or other affairs. Our gifts are not our property to use as we please; they are a trust committed to us by God to use for others and for His glory as He directs. There is no place in the use of spiritual gifts for the seeking of recognition, fame, or self-fulfillment.

(2) *Every Christian has a gift and every gift is important.* God has given a spiritual gift to every believer in the body of Christ. Paul says, “*But the manifestation of the spirit is given to each one for the profit of all*” (1 Corinthians 12:7). It is important we acknowledge this fact because so many Christians seem to have the attitude that they do not have a gift.

1 Corinthians 12:7

Here Paul has in mind the person with the less noticeable gift comparing himself with the person with the more noticeable gift and then feeling that he has no gift at all. Paul anticipated this tendency.

1 Corinthians 12:21

We all need each other’s contribution in the body. Just as some functions in the human body are in a sense more important than others, so it is with some gifts in the body of Christ. We need to recognize each gift is necessary in the body and is important to God.

(3) *Gifts are bestowed by God.* In 1 Corinthians 12:11, Paul says, “*All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives to each one, just as He determines.*” Again, using the physical body as an analogy, Paul states in verse 18, “*God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be.*” The implication is that just as God arranged the

parts of the physical body, so He arranged us as individual parts in the body of Christ.

You possess the gifts you have because the sovereign God of the universe wanted you to be that way. He ordained a plan for your life before you were even born, and He has gifted you specifically to carry out that plan. Never belittle or criticize your gift. If you do, you are criticizing the plan of God and perhaps complaining against Him. Also, never look down on the gift of someone else. If you do, you are belittling the plan of God for that person.

God not only determines what gift (or gifts) each of us has; He also determines the measure or extent of that gift. He then holds us responsible to use our gift to its full measure. The person who has a greater measure of a certain gift has a greater responsibility for it. **Luke 12:48** says, *“to whom much is given, from him much will be required.”*

(4) Every gift is given by grace. The Greek word for a spiritual gift is *charisma*, which means “a gift of God’s grace.” Paul said, *“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us” (Romans 12:6)*. Peter said, *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10)*. None of us deserves the gift we have been given. All the gifts are given by God’s undeserved favor to us through Christ.

Paul testified that he did not deserve to be an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 3:7-8

According to this principle, the worthiest and the most unworthy of all Christians both receive their gifts on the same basis. The unworthy person surely does not deserve his gift, but neither does the worthiest. They both receive them as unmerited favors from God.

The highly gifted person should not think he is so gifted because of his hard work or his faithfulness in service to God. Also, the person who feels he has wasted a good part of his life and is therefore underserving of any spiritual gift should not despair. Paul said he received his gift despite the fact that he was the least of all God’s people. Worthy or unworthy, it makes no difference. All gifts are given by God’s grace.

(5) *All gifts must be developed and exercised.* Even though gifts are given by God's grace, it is our responsibility to develop and exercise them. Paul told Timothy *to stir up the gift of God*, and then he added, ***“Do not neglect your gift”*** (1 Timothy 1:6, 1 Timothy 4:14).

In order to exercise our spiritual gifts effectively, we must develop and use them. The effective use of our gifts does not occur without hard work on our part. Timothy already had the gift of teaching, yet Paul did not hesitate to urge him *to be diligent to present himself to God as a workman who could rightly handle the Word of Truth*.

Simply having a spiritual gift does not mean we can automatically fulfill our function in the body without diligent effort. Instead, we are responsible to develop and use the gifts God has given us.

(6) *The effective use of every gift is dependent on faith in Christ.* Although gifts are bestowed and exercise involves hard work and effort, it is also true no gift is exercised apart from faith in Christ. We cannot assume God's blessing on our efforts even though we are laboring within the bounds of the gifts He has given us. Jesus said, ***“without Me you can do nothing”*** (John 15:5).

To maintain a sincere attitude of total dependence on Christ requires consistency in two areas. On the one hand, we can be guilty of slothfulness in the development or use of our gifts under the pretext that we are “trusting in the Lord.” On the hand, we can presume on God's blessing as we attempt to use our gifts in the strength of our own abilities.

(7) *Only love will give true value to our gifts.* In any discussion of spiritual gifts, we should give careful attention to the fact that Christian love, **1 Corinthians 13**, is set right in the middle of the Bible's treatment on spiritual gifts. In the first part of chapter 13, Paul tells us that even if we possess the greatest of gifts, have the most faith, and display an amazing amount of zeal and courage yet not have love, we are nothing and we accomplish nothing.

It is not that Paul sets love over spiritual gifts or Christian zeal as if love is more important than gifts, faith, or zeal. Instead, he says it is love that gives all these other areas value and worth.

If we set our hearts only on the exercising of our gifts, the increase of our faith, and the promotion of our zeal and courage, without seeking to grow in

love, we will be as nothing and accomplish nothing. We may generate a lot of Christian activity, gain some measure of fame, and even appear to accomplish something for God. But if we have not love, it all amounts to nothing.

Notice how Paul describes love in **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**. Each description of it is in the arena of personal relationships. He talks about exercising patience and being kind to one another. He talks about love eliminating envy and boasting, rudeness and selfishness. He says that love is not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs. Paul has now moved from the subject of gifts to the subject of relationships.

What is Paul saying to us through this change in subject matter? Just this: Love must saturate and govern every aspect of our lives. Love is not to be exercised only in the use of our gifts and in the performance of our various Christian duties. Love is to be exercised in the home, at work, and in the classroom.

Love is to be exercised all the time in the most ordinary duties of life, not just when we are engaged in Christian work. The absence of love on the ordinary duties and relationships of life can undermine and destroy the effective use of our gifts.

01/19/22

Recognizing your gifts

As we commit ourselves to do God's will, we may be sure He will direct the course of our lives so that we can exercise our spiritual gifts. Throughout the course of time, it is important for us to periodically evaluate how God has directed our lives in service to others in the body of Christ. If we are to develop our gifts, we must know what they are.

Paul urged us to assess our gifts in **Romans 12:3** when he said, ***“By the grace given me I say to everyone of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”*** The context of this passage indicated that this is a call to serious assessment of our spiritual gifts. How, then, should we evaluate God's leading in our lives and recognize the gifts He has given to us for the good of the body?

Although no pat formula can be given, there are several suggestions that may be helpful in assessing our gifts. First, we must be sure we are committed to doing the will of God that He has ordained for us. We may also say a commitment to do whatever God wants us to do is necessary in determining what our gifts are.

Notice now, this willingness is a willingness to do God's will and a willingness to fulfill our function in the body. It is not a willingness to find out something about ourselves—that is, to find out what our gifts are. Instead, it is a willingness to do whatever God has appointed us to do in the body of Christ.

Assuming you have already committed yourself to doing the will of God, consider then how He has led you. *What* has He given you to do, and, also of equal importance, what has He not given you to do? *What* service in the body have you tried in which you have experienced His blessings on your efforts? *What* things have you tried in which you have not experienced His blessing? *What* opportunities have in some way been closed to you?

Consider also your natural abilities. While natural abilities are not the same as spiritual gifts, it is true spiritual gifts build on some of our abilities. Natural abilities are not always a sure indicator of gifts. Many natural abilities in music and various skills have been buried because the person was called by God to develop another endeavor/work.

Perhaps the most crucial and telling criteria for assessing your gift is the confirmation from other believers. The exercising of your spiritual gift should result in ministry and blessing to others. They can tell if you have ministered to them. If you have, they will let you know, either by words of appreciation and encouragement or by requests for you to minister to them again.

Whatever your gifts are, you may be sure that when you exercise them you will find joy and fulfillment as you share with others in the body the gifts God has given you.

01/26/2022

THE NAMES OF GOD

El Elyon

(God Most High, Creator and Possessor of Heaven and Earth)

By

Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 1

The fourteenth chapter of Genesis describes the first war ever recorded in human history. A group of kings declared war on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and then looted them, capturing the people and locked up all their wealth, food and supplies (vs. 11). During this invasion, ***“They took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son, who dwelt in Sodom”*** (vs. 12).

The Bible tells us that Abram had 318 “trained servants” (vs. 14). Abram was determined to recover Lot and his family, so he led his servants in hot pursuit of the army. After traveling 140 miles, they finally overtook the invaders. They defeated the enemy. Abram ended up rescuing all of the captives, the citizens, including Lot, and recovering all of Sodom and Gomorrah’s goods.

I cannot help wondering: Why did God allow Abram to save Sodom and Gomorrah? After all, God knew that they soon were to be judged. Why not tell Abram to rescue only Lot and his family, and let the wicked Sodomites be taken captive? It could be that God used Abram to prevent Satan from getting ahead of His divine judgment. No doubt the devil knew that God planned to destroy Sodom. Satan may have hoped that, as prisoners in other countries, the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah would spread their perverted lifestyle to other heathen nations. The devil would have had an army of “missionaries” spreading moral decay throughout the then-known world.

But God stopped Satan in his tracks. He used Abram to bring back all the people of Sodom and Gomorrah to face His divine judgment. By doing so, God was quarantining them. Now He could burn out the disease from their dreadful society and stop it from spreading.

Upon his victorious return from the battle, Abram was met by two kings of Sodom. First, as Abram approached the city of Salem, which means “peaceful” and is generally identified as the ancient city of Jerusalem, the king came out to meet him. This king was named Melchizedek, and the Bible refers to this mysterious figure in

only three verses. The first, Genesis 14:18, describes him as both “king of Salem” and “priest of the most high God.” This dual description of king and priest alerts us to Melchizedek’s role as a type of Christ Himself. The second reference in Scripture to the king of Salem was written one thousand years after his meeting with Abram. Speaking prophetically of the Messiah, King David states: ***“Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek”*** (Psalm 110:4).

Then the third reference one thousand years after that, the writer of Hebrews confirms that this ancient king’s priesthood does indeed represent Jesus’ eternal priesthood: ***“Thou [Jesus] art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec”*** (Hebrews 7:17).

After his meeting with Melchizedek, Abram was addressed by the king of Sodom. This king ran from the battlefield as the armies succeeded. As the king saw Abram coming back in victory, he offered to him all the spoils of battle. The king told Abram, ***“Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself”*** (Gen. 14:21). Notice now, here was godly Abram, leading home all the freed captives of Sodom and Gomorrah. At that point, I believe, the devil filled Sodom’s king with a spirit of jealousy.

Understand now, the goods that Sodom’s king offered Abram were more than just a wagonload of groceries. These were the spoils/loot of two prosperous cities. Yet Abram refuses the offer without hesitation. He told the king, ***“I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich”*** (Gen. 14:22-23). Basically, Abram was saying, *“You can have the people and all the riches. I’m taking Lot and his family with me.”*

Facing These Two Kings in Our Lives

When we believers give our hearts to Jesus, we win a great battle. We defeat the powers of hell, robbing Satan of the loot he took from us when he ruled our lives. But afterwards, as we are glowing with spiritual victory and freedom, just down the road, two “kings” are waiting on us—symbolized by the same two kings who were waiting for Abram.

Abram faced as strong a temptation as any human being has ever experienced. Before him was an offer of riches, material goods and fame. His response to the king’s offer was a quick and clear no. Why? Because what mattered most to Abram was preserving God’s reputation. He was telling the king of Sodom, “I’m returning all of

these things to you—the people, the riches, everything. My Lord owns them all anyway. If He decides to make me wealthy, so be it. But I don't want you to be able to brag that you made me rich.”

Where did Abram get such detachment from this world and at the same time reject the devil's offer? Abram received his strength from a fresh revelation of who God is. You see, Melchizedek had opened Abram's eyes to an amazing vision of God's character: ***“He [Melchizedek] blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand”*** (Gen. 14:19-20).

Embedded in this verse is a name for Jehovah God: *El Elyon*. It means, literally, ***“God Most High, creator and possessor of heaven and earth.”*** Melchizedek was declaring to Abram, “Your Lord is not just the greatest of all the gods. He is the creator of the entire universe. Everything in it belongs to Him—all wealth, cattle, possessions. He is in control of everything you see around you.”

This name, *El Elyon*, provided Abram with a new discovery about the Lord. He had known God as the Lord who called him out of the land of Ur, but not as Lord Most High, creator and possessor of all things. Now Abram was convinced that God had everything under control.

With this new understanding of who God was, Abram had the power and faith to face any temptation. Abram saw Sodom's goods as trivial. He scoffed at the king's offer: “You offer me trinkets, when my God owns the universe. The Lord alone is my supply, all I will ever need. *El Elyon* has made me an offer I cannot refuse.”

Every devoted believer has discovered the Lord as his Savior from sin. Yet have we also discovered Him as *El Elyon*—God Most High, creator and possessor of all things? Have we begun to see Him with new eyes as Abram did? Are we convinced that He holds our entire lives and well-being in His hands?

Hebrews tells us that our Lord never changes—that He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Are you persuaded that God is in absolute control over all things in your own life? Are you able to face the storms, tests and trials in your life, calmly testifying, “My God, *El Elyon*, has everything under control”? Do you trust His power to help you resist every temptation the devil throws at you? Can you trust that if God has created a new heart in you, He also has the power to create in you a hunger and thirst to know Him more intimately?

We obtain this kind of power only by laying hold of the revelation that our God is *El Elyon*. In contemporary terms, this revelation means, “God is boss of everything. That means there are no accidents in my life—no such things as fate, happenstance or luck, either good or bad. Every step I take is ordered by the Lord. Everything in my life—matter of fact, everything in this universe—is under His control. His Word tells me that Satan cannot tempt me any more than I can bear. My boss is always faithful to show me the way of escape.”

Abrams Revelation Brings a Challenge

Armed with this new discovery about God, Abram took the opportunity to challenge the Lord about a promise made years earlier: “***Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed; and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir***” (Gen. 15:3). It is as if Abram were saying, “Lord, I know You are *El Elyon*, creator and possessor of all things. So, where is my promised child? You said I would be the father of many nations. Yet here I am, still childless after all these years.”

God wanted Abram to hold fast to his faith. He responded by entering into covenant with Abram, making an oath to him that sealed His promise of a son (vs. 18). For some reason, though, Abram’s faith did begin to waver. You know the story: After so many years of trying, Abram’s wife, Sarai, seemed unable to bear children. So, she offered her handmaid, Hagar, to Abram sire a son.

At that point Abram took matters into his own hands. He impregnated the handmaid, who bore a son, Ishmael. Abram was 86 years old when Ishmael was born. He hoped the boy would provide the seed God had promised. But in the Lord’s eyes, this child was not the one because he was not the child of faith and promise.

More years passed and there was no sign that Sarai would ever bear a child. Abram and Sarai just kept getting older. By the time Ishmael turned 13, Abram was 99 years old. He must have been on the verge of losing all hope that God’s promises would ever be fulfilled. Once again, his faith was being tried.

I believe Scripture is making a point here for everyone who has chosen to follow Jesus. It is saying that God uses our crisis—the most difficult, trying times in our lives—to give us hopeful revelations of who He is. Each revelation is like a separate ray of light reflecting from a diamond: It reveals a different aspect of our Lord’s nature, giving us fresh views of His character and power toward us. These revelations shine especially brightly during our times of darkness. Those are the most effective times for Him to reveal to us His ability and desire to deliver us.

As Abram faced this ongoing personal crisis, the Lord decided once again to give His servant a fresh revelation of Himself. He wanted Abram to be fully persuaded of His faithfulness.

08/03/22

THE NAMES OF GOD

El Shaddai

God All Powerful and All-Sufficient

Jehovah Jireh

The Lord Who Sees and Who Provides

By

Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 2

Scriptures says, ***“When Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect” (Genesis 17:1).*** The Hebrew phrase for ***“Almighty God”*** here is ***El Shaddai***. The literal meaning of this name is ***“God, all-powerful and all-sufficient.”***

God was speaking very personally to His servant here saying, ***“Abram, you already know I have power over every condition in your life. I have convinced you that I am in control of all things—that there are no accidents in your life, no situations that are merely fate or luck. I am the head, the chief, the boss of all creation, and My word is eternal. Now I am going to tell you something else about My nature that you need to understand to continue in faith.***

I am not only in control of all things, but I always keep My word. No obstacle can keep My word from coming to pass. I am not bound by the laws of nature or tied down by any man. I can do anything at any time. There are no mountains too high for Me, no valleys too low, no rivers or oceans too wide. When I say something is going to be done, it is already done. Nothing can stop My promise. I am El Shaddai—all-powerful, all-sufficient keeper of My promises. I guarantee My word.”

God saw that Abram was focusing on all the impossibilities of his situation. Abram simply could not see past his age, his dried-up body and Sarai’s dead womb. So, the Lord revealed Himself to Abram specifically as the God who gives life to the dead. He opened Abram’s eyes to the part of His nature that performs the impossible.

Once Abram received this revelation, he believed God was who He claimed to be. Abram ***“was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform”*** (Romans 4:20-21). This godly man knew that God could not lie. The Lord had sworn to make him a father of all nations; surely God would do what He said He would do.

Abram’s new found faith eventually brought forth the child Isaac, the promised heir. It also brought Abram his new name, *Abraham*, ***“father of a multitude.”*** Now Abraham and his Lord were united in a special realm of faith. Abraham had also discovered the secret to walking uprightly before God. Here is the secret to a godly walk: We are to receive—to acknowledge, believe, embrace and act upon—the revelation God gives us of who He is. That is the secret, plain and simple. We are able to walk uprightly before the Lord, but not because we have willpower, knowledge or even a covenant promise in hand. We walk uprightly because we are fully persuaded that *El Shaddai* will keep His promises to us.

The evidence of such faith is a restful heart. If your soul is not at rest, you are not living in faith. If you believe God is who He says He is, and that He is faithful to do what He has promised to do, then you do not have to worry in the world. Faith is being confident that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose (see Romans 8:28).

God had given Abraham the following covenant promise: ***“I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward”*** (Genesis 15:1). This is known as the Abrahamic covenant. The Lord vowed to Abraham, ***“None of your enemies can harm you. I will always be faithful to deliver you, no matter what your circumstances. I will personally be your reward. You are eternally Mine, Abraham. I am going to maintain you, protect you and keep you to Myself.”***

Why were these promises so important to Abraham? This man lived in a brutal and wicked society. His neighbors led wild, degenerate lives. God declared that their ***“cup of iniquity”*** was filling up and they would come under judgment. Abraham believed what God said: that he was safe from all harm because the Lord was all-sufficient to keep His servant victorious over every evil.

Have you discovered your *El Shaddai*, all-sufficient God? It is time for you to stop focusing on your own weaknesses, powerlessness and failures. Instead, believe God’s promises to you. He has pledged to keep you, teach you, put His fear in you, cause you to walk in His ways, give you His Holy Spirit and blot out all your sins

and replace them with His loving kindness. Will you rest in the promise that He will be all-sufficient for you?

Abraham enjoyed a season of peace and quiet with his son of faith, Isaac. The boy's name means "laughter" and, indeed, this miracle child was the joy of Abraham's seasoned age. Yet, when Isaac was a young man, the Lord called on Abraham for a supreme act of obedience. God told Abraham, ***"Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of"*** (Genesis 22:2).

When Abraham heard this word, he immediately began splitting wood for the trip. Then he gathered Isaac, two servants and a donkey and set out for Mt. Moriah. The mountain was some fifty or sixty miles away and it would have taken them about three days to get there. You can be sure that Abraham had plenty of time to think along the way. This had to have been the most trying, anguished time of his life!

In his mind, his son was already dead. Abraham himself was now nearly 130 years old, and Isaac was about 30. He had watched his son grow into manhood—laughing with him, hugging him and teaching him the ways of the Lord. Now, after years of childlessness and waiting for God's promise to be fulfilled, he was being asked to give up the one thing dearest to his heart.

God's instruction to Abraham had to be as confusing as it was anguishing. Abraham knew Isaac was the promised seed through whom nations would come. This was the son he and Sarah had waited to have for so long, the one who would provide the very lineage of the Messiah.

Nevertheless, Abraham gave up his son in full faith. Notice now, he made the journey without once questioning God on the matter. Can you imagine the strength this required? Remember now, Abraham was a human being just like us, with similar feelings and weaknesses. Yet, he made a difficult decision to obey the Lord, based only on faith. Where did Abraham get the faith to obey such a hard task?

It came directly from the revelation of God's name. Abraham reminded himself, *"My Lord has told me He is the creator of all things, and I believe Him. So, even if I sacrifice my son, I know God has the power to raise him up. I am convinced of His resurrection power."*

When Abraham arrived at the foot of Mt. Moriah, he instructed his two servants to stay behind while he and Isaac went to make sacrifice. Even at this point, Abraham demonstrated great faith. Abraham made his way up the mountain, carrying the sacrificial knife and the burning censer. Isaac walked behind him carrying the wood and, at one point, Isaac spoke up: ***“Isaac spoke to Abraham his father, and said, my father: and he said, here am I, my son. And he said, I see the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so both of them went up together”*** (vs. 7-8).

In many ways this scene represents the event of the cross. Isaac, the sacrificial son, carried wood up a hill, just as God’s own Son, Jesus, would do. Abraham willingly offered up his son as a sacrifice for sin, just as the heavenly Father would do. Also, during the three days’ journey Abraham considered his son as already being dead. Yet, when it was finished, Isaac came from the trip as if he had been raised from the dead. This indicates the three days Jesus was dead before God raised Him up.

One may wonder, “Why would the Lord demand a human sacrifice, when the Old Testament tells us He hated that practice?” God was birthing a church, a nation of faith, through this event. This whole situation was crucial in showing later generations that animal sacrifice could not atone for human sin. One day, there would have to be a human sacrifice, one that was holy and pure, and it would involve someone willing to lay down His life for all humankind. Abraham’s journey was an illustrated sermon about the Messiah. It pointed to the future sacrifice made by Jesus Christ for the sins of the world.

When they finally arrived at the top of the mountain, Abraham prepared to kill his son. As he tied Isaac up and laid him on the altar, the son must have been some what willing. Understand now, Isaac was an adult and his seasoned father could never have wrestled him down. For this reason, I believe that Isaac acted in faith as well. His father had taught him the covenant as he grew up, and Isaac had also learned the revelation of God’s names. As a result, Isaac must have believed in the Lord’s all-sufficiency as well.

What is the point of this scene for believers who read it today? It is this: Almost all new discoveries of God—all fresh revelations of His Person, nature and character—are tied to some crisis, some intense human experience.

As I stated earlier that we often discover more of our loving Father’s nature during our difficult times. It was during Sodom’s crisis that God revealed Himself to Abra-

ham as *El Elyon*—God Most High, creator and possessor of all things. Likewise, it was during Abraham’s own crisis of doubt that God revealed His name as *El Shaddai*—God all-powerful and all-sufficiency.

Now, God was leading Abraham into the greatest crisis any human being could ever experience—the sacrifice of his own child. Yet, out of this crisis Abraham would receive the greatest revelation he could ever know about the heavenly Father. As the time came for Abraham to raise the knife, he was already walking in mature faith. He could face this test of obedience now, because he trusted in the revelations God had given him. In each case, he had received God’s Word and mixed it with faith, taking its truth to heart.

By this time, he had taken the power of each of God’s names in his life. And now, as Abraham stood over his son, he was ready to obey God perfectly. He remembered the Lord’s revelation of Himself as *El Elyon*, creator of all things. Also, Abraham believed in *El Shaddai*—God all-sufficient, the One who keeps His word. The Lord had already assured him, “*I have given you a son, Abraham, and you are going to see entire nations come out of him.*” Abraham was acting on a faith founded solely on God’s revealed promises.

Now, this godly man lifted the knife. He was ready to thrust it through the heart of his beloved son. Then suddenly, he was stopped by a voice from heaven:

Genesis 22:11-14

The whole time that Abraham was preparing to slay his son, God had a sacrificial animal ready nearby. The Lord must have supernaturally given that ram an appetite, causing it to wander up on the hillside. As he was grazing, his horns got tangled in a bush. Here was a glorious new discovery of God’s nature. He revealed Himself to Abraham as *Jehovah Jireh*, “*the Lord sees.*” In contemporary terms, this phrase translates as “God will see to it.” It is a name that speaks of provision.

Jehovah Jireh, the provider: Even before we call out to Him, our God answers. Long before we are even born, He is at work forming and shaping the circumstances of our lives. The name *Jehovah Jireh* also has another meaning: “*God is showing us.*” In other words, our Lord will reveal to us everything we need to obey Him. He will see to it that we are provided with all power, strength and resolve to do whatever He commands.

When God gives a promise and swears to see it fulfilled, there can be no possibility of failure. Therefore, it was not possible for Abraham to fail. Why? God was going to supply His servant with all the faith he needed. The God who revealed Himself as *“He who will see to it”* made sure that Abraham had everything he needed to obey His command.

God has made a covenant with us also. He said He will cause us to obey Him, and He will endow/gift us with all the power we need to walk uprightly before Him. Because He has promised this, I believe He will do it. His very existence hinges on fulfilling these promises. It is as if He says, *“I am Jehovah Jireh, and if I don’t keep My word, My throne will collapse. I will cease to exist, and the universe will dissolve. Everything will end.”*

The Lord assures us, *“I have committed all that I am to keep you by My grace.”*

08/10/22

THE NAMES OF GOD

Jehovah Rophi
The Lord Who Heals You

Jehovah Makkeh
The Lord Who Smites

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 3

At the Red Sea, Israel witnessed God’s destruction of the Egyptian army. The Israelites rejoiced in this victory, playing their instruments, dancing and singing: ***“The LORD. . . hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea” (Exodus 15:1)***. Immediately after this miraculous deliverance, Israel began a journey into the desert toward the Promised Land. In three days’ time, they covered some forty miles—yet they quickly realize they had been going in circles.

To their disappointment, they had only traveled about twelve miles from where they had started. To make matters worse, the Israelites ***“found no water” (verse 22)***. Forty miles in the desert was more than enough time to use up their water supply they had brought with them. In three days, they went from the heights of praise to the depths of despair.

They found some water but it was bitter. Scripture says, ***“When they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore, the name of it was called Marah” (verse 23)***. How did God’s people respond? ***“The people murmured against Moses, saying, what shall we drink?” (verse 24)***. The same people who, just days earlier, had rejoiced in the Lord’s glory were now murmuring and complaining against Him.

These people had seen God perform miracles on their behalf in Egypt. First, the Lord supernaturally protected them while He devastated Egypt with plagues. Then, as the Israelites made their way toward the wilderness, God delivered them with the greatest miracle ever witnessed by man: opening a dry road through the middle of the Red Sea, with giant waves piled on either side by strong winds.

God's people had been absolutely defenseless against the powerful Egyptians, but they escaped Egypt successfully and survived without a single casualty. How could any Israelite ever doubt God again after witnessing such a miracle? Here is how: As the Israelites grew thirsty in the desert, they forgot all about God's awesome miracles on their behalf. Because they forgot, it took them less than three days to begin to doubt Him.

This is true of many believers today. Many of us have experienced miraculous wonders of God's delivering power. But then we struggle with doubt over whether or not He cares about us anymore. We know too little of our heavenly Father's character!

This is why so many believers rush all over the world looking for signs, miracles and deliverance. They are trying to get to know God through supernatural works and wonders. But nobody truly gets to know the Lord that way. The apostle Paul tells us in no uncertain terms that faith does not come through witnessing supernatural works or miracles, but through God's Word: "***Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God***" (Romans 10:17). We discover who God is by seeing and believing for ourselves who He claims to be—and this occurs most often as God meets us in our trials.

Where Was God?

Why did God lead the Israelites to the waters of bitterness at Marah? Why did He not provide fresh water? Considering that He took control of an entire sea of water for them, it should have been easy for Him to change the waters at Marah? All He had to do was speak, and these waters would have been purified before the Israelites ever arrived. Why did He not do that?

I submit to you that the Lord brought His people to Marah in order to deal with them. He was about to begin building His wilderness church. But He could not begin that work because the camp was filled with a deadly disease that infected virtually everyone. What was that disease? The Hebrew root word for *Marah* means "corruption of bitterness." A spirit of bitterness had spread throughout Israel and it had to be dealt with.

The Lord simply could not lead His people another step unless this deadly disease was dealt with. So, the first place He took them was to this pool of bitterness. Why? Because He wanted to use the bitter waters of Marah as a mirror for the people's hearts. As they looked into the poisonous pool, they saw a reflection of their own bitter souls.

They must have been totally confused, trying to figure out why God’s blessing and favor had disappeared from them so quickly. They may even have tried to worship the Lord, but they probably could not muster up the spirit to do it. They were unable to quench their thirst, physically or spiritually, no matter how hard they tried. This is what bitterness does to people. It brings confusion, a sense of God’s disfavor and not being able to worship. That is the message behind this story about Israel. God is trying to warn us about the consequences of a heart fill with bitterness.

It's a great possibility that the “corruption of bitterness” in Israel began back in Egypt soon after God first sent Moses to them. When Moses arrived, the Israelites’ hopes were suddenly renewed. Here was a man who claimed to be sent by the Lord, and he backed up his claims by working supernatural signs and wonders. They had spent years in bondage, then, when Moses spoke of God’s deliverance, ***“the people believed: and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that He had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped”*** (Exodus 4:31).

But the Israelites were not delivered right away. Matter of fact, their plight grew even worse. The Egyptian taskmasters’ whips came down on their backs harder than before. Pharaoh decided he would no longer supply them with the straw they needed to meet the quota of bricks. Then he increased their quotas.

You can imagine the Israelites’ disappointment, both with God and with Moses. The Bible tells us, ***“They met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way, as they came forth from Pharaoh: and they said unto them, The LORD look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our Savior to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us”*** (Exodus 5:20-21).

Now, years later, the Lord dealt with the murmuring, complaining, bitter Israelites. God had given these people undeniable miracles of deliverance. Yet, ever since their experience in Egypt—all through the supernatural plagues and miraculous parting of the Red Sea—the Israelites held on to doubt, fear and unbelief. First, they did not believe Moses, the Lord’s servant. Then they constantly questioned whether or not God was with them, behaving at every turn as if He had forsaken them.

The Israelites’ deep disappointment with the Lord was symbolized by the tiny golden idols they hid in their tents. Scripture tells us that they carried their idols with them through every miracle of deliverance. So, what did God do about their idolatry? Did He chastise them or threaten to wipe them out? No, not at this time. Instead, He re-

sponded by giving His people a fresh revelation of His loving nature toward them. When they got to Marah, God directed Moses to cut down a tree and throw it into the bitter waters. Then Scripture says, ***“When he had cast [it] into the waters, the waters were made sweet”*** (Exodus 15:25).

We see once more that God comes to us in our crises and failures, bringing us into a new discovery of who He is and giving us another revelation of His loving kindness. It is at Marah that we discover ***Jehovah Rophi***—*“the Lord who heals you.”* The root word for *heal* here means “to fix or mend.” God told Israel,

Exodus 15:26

The Lord is telling His people here, *“I am a God who wants to heal your diseases. I am not inclined to cast you aside. My heart is to mend you completely—body, soul and spirit. I want you to know this about My character toward you—that I am your healer.”*

What Do You Need to Be Healed Of?

Maybe you are bitter at God for allowing a trial to drag on longer than you thought you could bear. Or perhaps you are angry at society, or at certain individuals. Maybe you have an unforgiving spirit toward someone who has hurt you. The truth is, if you allow bitterness to grow, you surely will take it to your grave. Matter of fact, it will be attached to you as stand before the judgment seat of Christ, because Jesus’ commands are clear: There is no place for bitterness in the believer’s life.

What is the more important healing to receive—physical or spiritual? What is the point of being healed of bodily sickness—diabetes, cancer, heart disease—if we hang on to our spiritual sickness—bitterness, resentment and pride?

It does not matter what your condition is. God’s nature is not to cut you off. He is telling you, *“Yes, I am Jehovah God, high and holy. But I am also **Jehovah Rophi**, and I want to heal and mend you. I know you’re mad at Me. Your heart has been full of bitterness toward Me for a long time. You don’t want to voice it, but deep down you think, Why did God allow this to happen to me?”*

“I want you to realize that I know where your bitterness comes from. I am coming to you now in your bitter condition. You have said you cannot let go of your bitterness. You see it bringing strife into your life. It is ruining your marriage, your family. I want to pluck that bitterness out of you and heal you, so you don’t have to carry it another day. Then I want you to enter into peace and joy I am offering to you.”

*“Right now, I am revealing something to you about My nature. I am **Jehovah Rophi**, your healer and mender, and My heart is aching to resolve your problem of bitterness. I want you back in My loving arms, full of My comfort.”*

Even if you harbor bitterness in your heart, you are still the Lord’s possession, and He is offering you total healing. He has revealed Himself to you as **Jehovah Rophi** --your healer and mender—and He is waiting for you to trust Him. He wants to restore you to a clear conscience, to good physical health and to His divine peace and favor. He stands waiting for you, wanting to forgive you, cleanse you and give you a new heart. Your physical healing is included in His promises, but the healing of your spirit must come first.

Scripture warns us not to reject God’s offer of healing:

Hebrews 10:26-27

In other word, if we reject His offer of healing after we have received the knowledge of **Jehovah Rophi**, we have to face His fiery indignation. Listen to this powerful warning: **“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrew 12:14)**. God’s Word makes it clear: If you refuse to make peace with someone by holding onto bitterness against that person, you have no chance of seeing the Lord.

The God Who Smites

If you hold onto bitterness, there finally comes a time when God has to quarantine you. He still loves you, but He cannot allow your disease to contaminate His children around you. This kind of crisis reveals something else about God’s nature: He is also **Jehovah Makkeh**, *“the God who smites.”*

Jehovah Makkeh says to us, *“I’ve got to discipline you in order to correct your ways. Otherwise, you are headed for tragedy. If you hold onto your bitterness, your life will start to unravel. Everything will go wrong. You will descend into utter confusion. Your home life will become chaotic. All relationships will begin to sour and you will think everyone is against you. You will end up losing everything.”*

God does not want to lose any of His children. When we turn down **Jehovah Rophi’s** wonderful offer, there remains no other way to healing. His only option is to become **Jehovah Makkeh**, *the God who disciplines His children*. This is the aspect of His nature that refuses to let us go. God revealed this aspect of His character to the Israelites after they had ignored His many merciful warnings.

God eventually smote the Israelites by sending them into captivity in Babylon. He took away their joy and peace and brought shame and confusion upon them. Yet the whole time He was after one thing—repentance. His wanted to pardon and restore His beloved people.

Ezekiel 39:26-27

God was basically saying, “*When you know Me as **Jehovah Makkeh**—the God who smites to heal—then you will know deliverance, victory and restoration. I will smite you with discipline, to draw out your rebellion like poison from the wound.*”

Unless you allow **Jehovah Rophi** to heal any bitterness in your heart, you cannot grow as a believer. If God were to heal you of some physical illness without healing the disease in your soul, He would be blessing and condoning sin. He would be providing you with new strength to indulge your bitterness. If you reject God’s glorious revelation as your healer—if you shrug off His offer, refusing to be mended—you will be given over to your sin.

No matter what caused resentment in your heart, God desires to heal your hurting soul. It is time for you to turn to **Jehovah Rophi**. Get the process started by praying, “Lord, I have carried this bitterness for too long. Now I know it is time for me to be delivered. I want to be free.”

He will take it the rest of the way. His Holy Spirit will bring you into a peace you have never known, filling you with singing, shouting joy. You will sleep as you have not slept in ages, because you will be back in God’s favor. He will begin to work new things in your life, bringing you renewed hope—because you chose to know Him as **Jehovah Rophi**.

08/17/22

THE NAMES OF GOD

Jehovah Nissi
The Lord Our Banner

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 4

Amalek was the first nation to declare war on Israel. In turn, Amalek was the first nation that God declared war upon. Exodus describes the Lord's declaration against Amalek in the following passage:

Exodus 17:8-16

Two verses in this passage grab my attention; both appear at the end of the passage: ***“The LORD said unto Moses . . . I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. . . The LORD hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation”*** (vs. 14, 16). As I read this passage, I struggled to accept what God was saying. The Lord was declaring permanent war on a particular nation. How could that be?

Who was this nation of Amalek? What was it about these people that caused the God of the universe to go on record as saying, *“I am going to do battle against you from generation to generation, and I am going to make sure you are utterly destroyed, so that your memory is erase from history?”*

No doubt, this conflict had to do with more than just a local physical battle. It involved more than Moses standing on a hill with his arms in the air while Joshua led the troops in battle. We are told that Israel won this particular battle, but as we read about the people of Amalek it seems there is a deeper meaning to this passage. Yes, Israel's ongoing conflict with Amalek represents a spiritual war still being fought today. This war involves every believer.

The Amalekites were the descendants of Amalek—the grandson of Esau, who was Jacob's twin brother. We know Esau as the man who despised the holy things of God by selling his birthright for a meal of stew (Genesis 25:34). The Bible says that God despised Esau because of his wickedness:

Malachi 1:3-4

As we read of God's wrath toward this nation, we need to keep in mind that the Lord has always been full of grace and mercy. Scripture tells us that He is the same yesterday, today and forever—that His nature and character never change. Therefore, God was as merciful in the Old Testament as He is in the New. Our Lord is, and always has been, a God of love and mercy. Yet, His states clearly here: "*My indignation will burn against this nation forever.*"

What is really happening here? I believe that God is speaking of none other than Satan and his demonic powers. Understand now, Amalek is a biblical representation of the devil's hostility toward Christ and His Body on earth. This war continues today because Satan has never ceased his efforts to stop God's eternal purposes.

Amalek represents the devil—the enemy of the Lord, whose "hand is against the throne of God." Right up until the time of Jesus' birth, Satan put his hand against God's throne by trying to destroy the lineage that would give birth to the promised Christ. The enemy did everything he possibly could to wipe out God's people.

At this very moment, Satan's warfare continues against God's seed—the Church of Jesus Christ. The devil is out to destroy anyone who inherits eternal life through the promise of the Messiah. That is why he has aimed his weapons at everyone who calls himself after Jesus' name. Therefore, the war God declared against Amalek is an everlasting conflict.

Here in Exodus 17, the enemy was readying himself to engage in another attack. Satan saw Israel headed for Canaan, the Promised Land where God would settle His people. The devil knew the prophecies concerning this land. He was fully aware that this physical, geographical nation of Israel would be the place from which the Messiah would come. He knew a lineage would emerge from it—a woman giving birth to a daughter, that daughter giving birth to another daughter, and so on, until finally a descended daughter would give birth to the Christ Child. The devil was determined to do everything in his power to stop this lineage from coming to pass.

The spirit of Satan instigated and waged war on Israel for one purpose—to annihilate the seed of Abraham through which the devil's own destroyer would come. The devil was not really warring against Israel but against God Himself. As has been stated, his hand was against the throne of God. Satan was never after the Jewish people, but after the Christ whom the Jewish nation would give birth to. Therefore, this was much more than a flesh-and-blood war; it was a war between heaven and hell.

Exodus 17 is not the last we hear of the Amalekites. We see them next in Numbers 14. At that point, God told Israel to return to the wilderness. He refused to lead her to the Promised Land because of her continual sin of unbelief. He told the Israelites in no uncertain terms, *“I will take your children into the land of promise, but you are not going in. You are going back to the wilderness where you will experience forty more years of despair”* (Romans 14:34).

Then, during this time of weakness for the Israelites, when the people realized their sin and decided too late to try to head into the Promised Land, *“The Amalekites came down. . . and smote them, and discomfited them”* (Numbers 14:45). The Amalekites kept rising up. We hear of them again four hundred years later, when Saul was king over Israel. God gave Saul specific instructions through the prophet Samuel, **(1 Samuel 15:3)**.

God was telling Saul, *“I want you to kill every man, woman and child of Amalek. I want you to destroy everything they own. Amalek is the sworn enemy of God, the one set on destroying the seed. You must wipe them out completely.”* Saul won the battle against Amalek, but in direct disobedience to God’s command, he spared King Agag and kept the best spoils from battle. When the prophet Samuel saw what Saul had done, he was grieved beyond words. He took matters into his own hands, personally picking up a sword and hacking King Agag to death. Yet, even after this beating, a remnant of Amalek survived to rise up once again.

The book of First Samuel describes an Amalekite attack on David. While David and his men were out with the Philistines, the Amalekites invaded their home village of Ziklag. The enemy raiders burned the town to the ground, took all the goods and kidnapped the families. When David and his men returned and saw what had happened, they went after the Amalekites and overtook them. They won the battle, recovering their families and everything that had been stolen from them. But once again, a remnant; four hundred young Amalekites men escaped.

The spirit that possessed the Amalekites continued to torment God’s people. Even though Amalek had few surviving descendants, an Amalekite spirit had spread around the world. Peter reminds us, *“Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5:8). Then, Paul tells us, *“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come”* (1 Corinthians 10:11). And: *“Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted”* (1 Corinthians 10:6).

Paul is saying that all of these things—the wars, battles and conflicts—happened to Israel for our instruction. Scripture has recorded them to warn us about the spiritual battles we face. We learn important New Testament truths about Christ by studying the Old Testament aspects of Jehovah’s nature. So, what are these lessons we are to learn? What is the Holy Spirit saying to us?

We Face Amalek Daily

The primary lesson is that we are engaged in the same ongoing spiritual battle. Paul writes, ***“We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12)***. Amalek’s first attacks were a type of guerrilla warfare in the wilderness. They blindsided the Israelites at their points of weakness with quick sneak attacks. They sent soldiers to sneak up on Israel from behind while they were traveling. That way they could quietly kill off the old, weak and sickly who could not keep up with the others.

Finally, Moses told Joshua, ***“Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek” (Exodus 17:9)***. Joshua quickly put together a army of men with very little battle experience. These were shepherds and brick makers, not soldiers. They had few weapons or shields, and no chariots. Their enemy had all these things, plus years of training. For sure, the odds were against Israel.

Just Keep Swinging

This is our second lesson: When the enemy comes against us like a flood, what does God tell His people to do? ***“Go in faith and fight, no matter what the odds.”*** Our options during such times are clear: We can either trust God’s Spirit to raise up a banner on our behalf, or we can surrender to unbelief, giving in to the enemy and becoming his slaves. That is the reaction of many believers today. They give up, thinking they just cannot handle the conflict anymore. Yet, our Lord clearly tells us, ***“I want you to fight the good fight of faith.”***

Notice the men Joshua was leading into war. These men were not only inexperienced—they were the most messed-up bunch of soldiers you could find. Shortly before, these same men had been ready to stone Moses because they had run out of water. They accused him of bringing them out of Egypt to kill them and their families. Then they accused God of abandoning them, saying, ***“Is the LORD among us, or not?” (Exodus 17:7)***. Listen, how can you go into battle for the Lord if you don’t believe God is with you?

This crew was made up of murmuring, unbelieving, miserable complainers. They wavered constantly between weak faith and unbelief. Understand now, the Lord had every right to destroy these ungrateful people or simply abandon them. Then He could have raised up another, more faithful people, but He did nothing of the sort. Instead, He appointed these men as His army and told them, *“Go fight.”*

Today we are often no better than the Israelites were. We murmur/mumble and complain. We see God supplying our needs and blessing our lives, but when a crisis comes, we panic, crying out, *“Where is God? Why is He letting me go through this?”* We may talk about how our faith is growing, sing God’s praises in church and raise our hands in worship. But the moment the enemy comes against us, we fall apart. This is a testimony of grace that God uses such weak, unworthy people to be soldiers in His army, and He makes us more than conquerors against our enemy.

Remember Our Intercessor

As Joshua led these men into battle with the Amalekites, Moses led Aaron and Hur up a hill overlooking the battlefield. Moses stood up in full view of the fighting below, holding up a wooden rod (**Exodus 17:11**). Most commentaries suggest Moses’ raised hands represent intercession and prayer. In other words, as long as he raised his hands, he was interceding—and as long as he interceded, the battle went in Israel’s favor.

So, another lesson here is about our need for prayer and intercession in doing battle against Satan. When the disciples were unable to cast out a demon, Christ told them, *“This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting”* (**Matthew 17:21**). Another meaning in this passage goes beyond the subject of our own prayer lives. This story is about Jesus—about the power and victory of His cross and about intercession He makes for us in glory.

As we see Moses standing at the top of the hill, holding up the rod, we see another prophesy of Christ. This was a picture of Jesus on the cross at Calvary—looking down upon humanity and observing the great conflict being waged by Satan against His body. Whenever the Israelites looked up and saw Moses holding the rod, the battle turned in their favor. This points to Jesus’ day, when Christ said, *“I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me”* (**John 12:32**).

Finally, the rod that Moses held up provided the Israelites with a supernatural surge of power. That power led them to victory over the Amalekites. As we have noted, Israel’s victory over Amalek was not complete at this point. Some of the Amalekites

escaped to regroup and attack Israel again. But this entire passage suggests the image of Christ to come, when the victory over Satan would be complete.

Moses built an altar there and called it **Jehovah Nissi**—Hebrew for “*the Lord my banner, the Lord my ending* (Exodus 17:15). This meant, basically, “*We have won the battle here today, and we cannot forget that we are victorious because we serve Jehovah Nissi—the Lord, our banner. This victory had nothing to do with our strength or ability or any great works we promised to do for God. We did nothing to earn the Lord’s favor today. God Himself is our banner—and our victory is totally the work of His hand.*”

Lessons from the Prophets

In the passage from Exodus 17:15-16 that we read at the beginning of this lesson, Moses tied the revelation of **Jehovah Nissi’s** name to every succeeding generation: “***Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi: for he said, because the LORD hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation***” (Exodus 17:15-16).

Two things stand out in this passage: First, the revelation of **Jehovah Nissi’s** name has to do with the spiritual warfare God declared against Amalek. Second, this warfare will continue from generation to generation. From Abraham onward, in both the Old and New Testament, **Jehovah Nissi, the Lord our banner**, is declared. The prophets and righteous servants looked forward to His coming, saying, “*This is the one who will be our banner.*”

Paul looked back to Him saying, “*Everything in the Old Testament is about Jesus. Every battle, every conflict, every war we read about here gives us another revelation of who He is.*”

Isaiah 11:1-4

The rod of Jesse whom Isaiah mentions is Jesus, who is called “the son of David.” Isaiah was declaring Christ to be the banner whom the world would rally under. Jesus Himself told the disciples, “***Your forefathers longed to see all the things you see Me doing. They saw Me only in shadow, but you see Me in reality***” (Matthew 13:17).

Our forefathers did not receive the promise, but they did embrace its future fulfillment by faith. Hebrews tells us, “***These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and em-***

braced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth” (Hebrews 11:13). Jesus alone provides us with victory over Amalek and with sweet rest and peace.

Fighting the Good Fight

It appears that Moses is telling today’s Church of Jesus Christ, “***Jehovah Nissi*** delivered us from the demonic power of Amalek, and as long as the spirit of Amalek continues to rage against God’s people, ***Jehovah Nissi*** will be your banner. He will cover you through every future generation, down to the very end of time. Always look, therefore, to ***Jehovah Nissi***. This is our secret to victory—the revelation of our Lord’s nature toward us.”

You may wonder, “*Didn’t Jesus end the battle with His victory on the cross? Wasn’t His victory total and complete? Since He was raised up by the Spirit’s resurrection power, breaking the bonds of death. When He ascended to heaven, He was beyond the devil’s reach forever. The victory was, is and forever will be Christ’s. Doesn’t that mean the battle should be over?*”

Yes, Jesus’ victory on the cross was complete, total and absolute. But we, His Church, are still in a battle. While Jesus sits victoriously as Head in heaven at the right hand of the Father, beyond Satan’s reach, we remain His Body here on earth. The New Testament states that we face a roaring lion who seeks to devour us. Therefore we are still engaged in warfare.

We have to battle daily with the principalities and powers of darkness—because the devil wars against Christ in us. This is why Paul instructs us to take up our spiritual weapons by putting on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6). We are to fight the good fight of faith against the enemy who is still alive and at work on earth. The victory Jesus won becomes our own as we resist the devil by faith.

Let’s Get Personal

Is Amalek attacking you right now? Are you experiencing some kind of spiritual warfare? Are you battling a temptation or desire? Is your enemy trying to pull you into loving pleasure more than you love God? Are you plagued by guilt, fear or condemnation? Is your marriage or family under attack? Are you sensing the enemy’s tactics against you in job or career? Has he come against you personally with depression, weariness or a strange, mysterious restlessness?

It is very important for you to have a true biblical understanding of what is going on in your life right now. You are in the midst of warfare, whether you want to be or

not. Once you adopt this biblical view of warfare, your perspective on everything will change. First, you must understand that the devil is not mad at you personally. Basically, his battle is not with you. His hand is set against the throne of God. When Satan comes against you like a flood, he is not just trying to get you to become a thief or alcoholic or selfish heathen. That is not his real goal in trying to hurt you. He is attacking you for one reason: because you are Christ's heritage—and it is that holy seed he is after.

Understand now, Satan is still in a war against Christ. Since he knows that he lost his battle against Jesus on earth, he now tries to hurt Him through His Church. That is the only way Satan expects ever to win against the throne of God—by wiping out all of Christ's seed from the earth. The devil believes that if he can destroy every believer, he can still overcome. That is why he seduces and tempts your sinful nature—because you have come under the banner of Christ. So, yes, you are in a battle, but it is not your battle. It is a battle between the devil and the throne of God.

Satan has one simple strategy against you in this battle: He wants to convince you to give up on Jesus. That is why he tries to scare you, to cause you to faint in your faith—so you will not trust Christ and desert Him. He wants to make you run from the battle, to leave the Lord's army and stop being His representative on earth. This is how the enemy plans to destroy the seed—by killing off Christ's army, one soldier at a time. It is a tragedy that many believers have already deserted Jesus.

That is Satan's primary purpose in his battle against you: to totally discourage you. He wants to get you focused on the awfulness of your sin, persuaded you are powerless to resist temptation and convinced that God has left you alone so that you will no longer look to Christ's victory on the cross.

This is why God gave us this word:

Deuteronomy 20:3-4

King David always knew that the battle was not his. He knew it rested completely in God's hands. That is why he could stand without fear as he faced the giant Goliath. David said, ***“The battle isn't mine—it's the Lord's. You have not defied me, Goliath—you have defied the living God. You have put your hand against His throne. And now you have to face Him on the battlefield”*** (1 Samuel 17:36, 47).

A Banner of Saving Grace

Jehovah Nissi—Christ my banner—means He is the captain of my salvation. Because of the revelation of the name ***Jehovah Nissi***, we can declare the following:

I am kept by the rod upon the hill and the blood that was shed there. I am also kept by my Lord's intercession for me at the right hand of the Father. He has wiped out every one of my sins—crushing them and removing them from my life completely.

*Also, I have the promise of His blood purging every sin I will ever commit. All I have to do is come to the rod—repent and look upon Christ and His victory on the cross. As long as I live, I have His complete forgiveness. As long as I trust in the power of His blood, I am empowered by the Holy Ghost. ***Jehovah Nissi*** is Christ my intercessor.*

The prophet we see standing on the hill with his hands raised up is our risen Christ. His banner over us is intercession. Right now, He stands before the very throne of God, pleading our case.

The name ***Jehovah Nissi*** means two important things in my life:

1. *The cross.* This is something Jesus has already done for me. In all my present battles, I am able to look to His victory in the cross. He has made provision to cover me forever in His blood, canceling out all my present sins whenever I repent and cry out to Him.
2. *Intercession.* This is something Jesus does for me now. My banner is seated at the right hand of the Father, acting as my High Priest and intercessor. When He sat down there, He did so to pray for me. I trust fully in the power and effectiveness of His prayers for me.

It does not matter what your spiritual battle is—it rests in the Lord's hands. He wants you to place that battle completely under His blood. Then remind yourself, and the devil, that ***Jehovah Nissi*** is praying for you. Jesus told us that He prayed for His disciples, and those prayers protected every one of His followers while He was on earth (John 17:9, 12).

If our Lord's prayers prevailed while He was on earth, how much more will His prayers be effective for us in glory? He has already assured us, "*None of My children will be lost.*" Who can condemn you? What enemy can separate you from the love of Christ? There is none. You are victorious—because ***Jehovah Nissi*** is praying for you.

Be careful, then, not to use the Lord's love and grace to excuse sin. He is now praying for you to turn from all your iniquities and enter the reality of His power over the dominion of sin. He has promised to infuse you with the power of the Holy Ghost to live an overcoming life.

08/24/22
08/31/22

THE NAMES OF GOD

Jehovah Tsebaoth
The Lord of Hosts

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 5

Those who declare war on their sin and unbelief may find that the Lord has reserved for them a powerful revelation. These believers have decided they are going to the Promised Land, no matter what it costs them. They are willing to do battle with anything that stands between them and the fullness of God's covenant promises.

Joshua was just such a believer. He was determined with all his heart, soul, mind and strength to go the distance with God. This man was born into a generation of compromise, bitterness and rebellion. Yet Joshua stepped out from among his peers and set a standard of his own. Joshua said, "I will do what is necessary to bring down all strongholds that stand between me and total victory."

Here is what the Lord showed this believer:

Joshua 5:13-15

In this scene, the Lord revealed Himself to Joshua as ***Jehovah Tsebaoth***—the Lord of hosts. As He stood before His humble servant, He had a sword and He commanded an army of angels, heavenly soldiers who stood ready to take up the fight for Israel.

Joshua represents a holy remnant who are living in this last hour. Like him, these lovers of Jesus are determined to go all the way with the Lord. Their hearts' sole cry is to walk in holiness, worthy of Christ. They yearn to be free of every false thing, every stronghold of iniquity, every dominion of besetting sins. They refuse to allow anything in their lives that might drag them from that determination. They want nothing of the greed, fame and pleasures of this world. Like Joshua, they have crossed a line. They have left behind the world and its temptingness, once and for all. They are passing over the Jordan to follow the Lord into the fullness of His covenant promises.

Joshua was the leader of a new generation in Israel. The previous generation ended up dying in the wilderness because of their unbelief. Those miserable people lived under a curse until every last one of them died. But this hungry new Joshua Company began to seek God. They were ready to declare war on anything that stood in the way of their entering into the fullness of the land God had promised them.

God reveals Himself as the Lord of hosts only to those who set their hearts and minds to walk before Him in purity. He does not give this revelation to people who only want their sins forgiven and to make it to heaven someday. The lukewarm, the half-hearted and the worldly believer will never know *Jehovah Tsebaioth*.

Sadly, a majority of believers today are not even aware of their need for *Jehovah Tsebaioth*. This is because they are not doing battle, not seeking victory, not moving forward in their walk with Christ. Instead, they have made peace with the sins that grip them. Why would the Lord send His heavenly army to help believers who are not even willing to take up the fight?

Just before Moses died, he received a supernatural vision of the Lord. In this vision, he saw God riding “*upon the heaven in thy help, and his excellency on the sky*” (**Deuteronomy 33:26**). Joshua’s vision was a clearer picture of this image of the Lord, who was leading an army, a host of heavenly beings waiting to receive their next assignment.

I believe the revelation Joshua received of *Jehovah Tsebaioth* is meant for every devoted lover of Jesus today. Right now, hosts of heavenly beings are riding through the heavens on our behalf, waiting to receive their next assignment to fight for us. They are stationed all over the world—a troop here, a battalion there. They are the unseen forces of heaven, fighting against principalities and powers of darkness.

To every lover of Jesus: We had better believe that we need God’s heavenly hosts of fighting on our behalf. We cannot battle hell’s forces with any amount of human strength. Like the hungry young believers in Joshua’s day, the Joshua Company of this last hour cannot move forward into God’s promised victory without experiencing four things. These four things are required of everyone who would lay hold fully of God’s covenant promises.

Requirements for Victory

1) We have to Cross the Jordan.

“The priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over” (Joshua 3:17).

The Jordan River has great significance in the life of every believer. Like Israel, we come to our own Jordan crossings when we tire of the dead, dry Christianity we see all around us. When we grow weary of the backslidden condition of the church—sick of the worldliness, unbelief and idolatry running rampant in churches that grieve God’s Spirit—we have reached the Jordan.

When we are totally disgusted with the wilderness of old religious systems, we have reached the Jordan. When the Holy Spirit has stirred our hearts, and we realize that we will never be satisfied with the kind of life led by our carnal, pleasure-seeking society, we have reached the Jordan. If, as we turn inward to examine our own spiritual conditions we are troubled by what we see there also, then we have truly reached the Jordan.

If you have set your heart to follow the Jordan Company to the bank of the Jordan? If you have, then you must face this fact: You have come to a place of death. When you cross the Jordan, you undergo a death to this world and everything in it. Make no mistake about it: Crossing the Jordan is a declaration of war. You are committing to do battle with every sin that stands between you and God’s fullness.

When the Israelites crossed the Jordan toward the Promised Land, they went on the offensive/aggressive. They knew that as soon as they got to the other side, they would be in enemy territory. When they arrived, word spread quickly among the enemies. The word was, “their God is once again doing wonders in their midst, and they were determined to take the region.

Up to this time, the city of Jericho had its gates open for trade. People came and went as they pleased, unafraid of the Israelites’ presence on the wilderness side of the Jordan. The Canaanites laughed at the Israelites. But the moment Israel crossed the river, everything changed. The people of Canaan sensed something serious going on with God’s people for Israel’s presence was now totally intimidating.

The enemy knows when you are committed. James tells us, ***“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).*** When the enemy sees you coming at him, marching boldly on the offensive/aggressive, he will retreat in fear and shut the gates behind him, just as he did at Jericho.

Maybe you have lived with a besetting sin for years. Over time, the devil will have used that one weakness to build up a stronghold in your soul. He will have done his best to build walls around that area of your heart—walls to keep out the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Year after year, those walls grow thicker and stronger. Now there is simply no way you can humanly cast out such a stronghold. You need divine, unseen power to work away on those walls for you. You need *Jehovah Tsebaioth* to do the supernatural work of tearing them down.

That work begins the moment you stand up and declare war on your sin. You have to see your habits as a spiritual battlefield. Your Jordan is simply a decision you make to victory over the devil—a decision to surrender to God. This leads us to the second requirement of everyone who would go on to obtain God’s promised victory.

2) We Have to Face the Sharp Knife of Circumcision.

When the Israelites got to the other side of the Jordan, it was anything but heaven for them. At first, Joshua’s fresh young warriors probably thought they were in heaven. After all, they had finally made it into the Promised Land.

Yet while these soldiers may have been pumping themselves up, Joshua sat by himself, quietly sharpening knives. He knew that excitement alone was not going to win any war. There would be a time to shout, but now was not the time. First these men had to face the knife of circumcision.

Joshua 5:2-3

Why would God require these men to be circumcised at this time? What was this scene all about? Simply put, circumcision is an outward act that signifies something taking place in the heart. ***“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked” (Deuteronomy 10:16). “Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter” (Romans 2:29).***

These soldiers’ circumcisions at Gilgal involved cutting flesh, but they also illustrated a spiritual commitment. We know this from Moses’ speech to Israel before he died. He spoke to them about undergoing this rite:

Deuteronomy 30:5-6

The circumcision of Israel’s soldiers here had to do with spiritual warfare. It signified the end of all confidence in the flesh. God knew these men’s hearts were full of excitement. He saw them chomping at the bit to tear down the satanic stronghold of

Jericho, but the Lord commanded Joshua to put the knife to all of their self-confidence. They were to cut off all trust in their human strength. What was God teaching His people here? He wanted them to see how completely powerless they were in the flesh. He wanted their impotence to sink deeply into their hearts, to convince them they could be saved only by faith in Him. God intentionally brought them to this place of utter weakness, because He wanted to prove Himself strong on their behalf.

If enemy scouts had spied on Israel at that moment, they would have seen the Israelites lying scattered about in absolute weakness. Once again, Israel's enemies could have attacked them and put an end to the entire war. Why didn't they? Why didn't the devil move in at that moment and destroy Israel in their weakened condition?

I believe that he was not allowed to, because heaven's unseen forces were at work protecting God's people. If the Lord had opened the Israelites' eyes, they would have seen fierce spiritual activity going on around them: fiery horses racing over the hills and angels influencing kings and leaders. These heavenly beings were battling down principalities and putting fear into people's hearts all across the land. Through it all God wanted to prove to Israel that He alone was their defense.

Only after the Israelites were circumcised were they ready to go to battle. They no longer had confidence in themselves. As their bodies were being healed physically, their spirits were being calmed by God's Spirit. Now they were ready to listen to the Lord.

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3) We Have to Experience the Passover.

The Israelites had crossed the Jordan, declaring war on their stronghold. They had been circumcised, swearing off all confidence in their flesh. Now they had to experience the Passover. ***“The children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho” (Joshua 5:10).***

God instituted the Passover celebration in Exodus 12 as a security measure for Israel. It was meant to protect them against destruction. First, a lamb was to be slain, and its blood was to be sprinkled over their doorposts (Exodus 12:7, 13). Passover was an annual observance. It was to be held during the month Israel had come out of Egypt, and on the fourteenth day of that month.

Interestingly, on the day the Israelites recovered from their circumcision at Gilgal, it was the fourteenth day of that first month. Just as they were about to do battle against the stronghold in their Promised Land, the day came to celebrate the Passover. How perfect God's timing is! I believe this passage shows us that the Lord has set a day and time for everything in our lives. It all takes place under His heavenly gaze and His divine control.

That evening the Israelites offered the Passover sacrifice. They built an altar and brought forth an unblemished lamb to be slain. First, the animal's blood was drained into a vessel. Then a high priest dipped hyssop into the blood and used it to sprinkle the blood over the people. Finally, the lamb's carcass was consumed by fire on the altar.

Joshua knew this new generation had ears to hear the voice of the Lord. They had crossed the Jordan and declared war, and now they were ready to go all the way to obtain God's promises. But there was something remaining in their hearts that the Lord wanted to deal with. The people he was leading now still had serious problems. They were bent on backsliding, always falling back into unbelief. Joshua knew he could not lead the people into battle this way. There was only one hope for them. They had to come to the blood of the lamb, the Lord would cover their sins and look upon them as purged from all iniquity. Thank God for the blood of the perfect Lamb who was slain for us!

After the Israelites observed the Passover, they were secured by the blood of the lamb. They no longer had to carry the condemnation of their sin. The Israelites could now enter into spiritual warfare knowing their heavenly King saw no iniquity in them. Likewise, this is the only way we can go against our Jericho strongholds—by laying our sins on the Lamb. If we do not, we are already defeated.

The Joshua Company was now over the Jordan—circumcised, secured by the blood and anchored in God's forgiving grace. They were beaming with confidence in the Lord, able to move forward with no condemnation. This brought them to the fourth requirement.

4) We Have to Face the Walled City of Jericho.

Every one of us has his own Jericho. I am talking about a walled-up stronghold that hinders us from moving forward into fullness in Christ. In almost every case, this stronghold is a besting sin—a habit, a character weakness that has become engraved in us, surrounded by a secure wall. Your Jericho may be pride, fear of man, an out-of-control temper or bitterness. No matter what it is, if you have not let God deal

with it you can be sure it is keeping you back from the wonderful things He has prepared for you.

We may be tempted to think, *I don't have any strongholds in my life. I'm not holding onto a besetting sin.* Yet, look at the words of the apostle John: ***"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us"*** (John 1:8, 10). We all have our Jericho's, and we are greatly deceived if we sit around congratulating ourselves, believing we do not have any strongholds that we need to be delivered from.

Actually, believers generally acknowledge their Jericho's but many refuse to declare war. Instead, they give up the battle. There are serious consequences to living co-existing with Jericho. We see a demonstration of this in Numbers 13-14 when the twelve Israelite spies under Moses' leadership came back from spying out the land.

These men had just visited Jericho and were amazed by the city's walls. The mere sight of the city's high, thick walls was enough to send the Israelite spies back to their camp discouraged. The Scripture says that most of these men brought back an evil report to Israel: ***"The cities are walled, and very great. . . We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we"*** (Numbers 13:28, 31).

When the Israelites heard this news, they lost heart. They refused to go up against Jericho and its walled fortress. What were the consequences of their refusal? The Lord told them:

"Surely, they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it. . . as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. . . in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die. And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land, even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the LORD" (Numbers 14:23, 28-29, 35-37).

This is what happens to everyone who refuses to declare war on a besetting sin. If we try to coexist with a Jericho in our lives, we will bring down spiritual death on ourselves. Here is the key to all victory. You have crossed the Jordan, you have been circumcised, you have been blood-secured—yet you still face an overwhelming battle. This warfare is totally beyond your strength and ability. So, the Lord comes

to you with a powerful assurance: You have to see that this battle is not yours, but Mine. I am committed to do all the fighting you.

The devil had infiltrated Jericho years before the Israelites arrived, making sure it was fortified by his own unseen powers. He was fully aware of God's promise to give the land to Israel. So, he directed his demonic forces to dig into the city with every imaginable arrangement.

Jericho becomes engrained/rooted in you by the devil's unseen forces. This does not mean you are demon-possessed. It simply means there is one stronghold left, one hidden place in your heart where sin has dug in and refused to let go. You cannot enter into the Lord's fullness until that stronghold comes down. It has to be dealt with. But you have no power to do battle against it. Only the Lord's unseen army can conquer this stronghold. On your own, you could plan for years without ever coming up with an effective plan.

Many believers today become overwhelmed as they try to confront their strongholds. When they see their Jericho's standing before them, they panic. Soon the enemy has beaten them back into the wilderness. He has convinced them they have to remain helpless until they die. The ***Jehovah Tsebaioth*** appears to them with these words of reassurance: *"You do not have to fear this enemy. Just come under the blood. I will cover you with all manner of divine protection. Keep walking and talking with Me, for I will be doing battle for you. You have to know that the forces of **Jehovah Tsebaioth** are always at work on your behalf."*

As Israel kept moving toward Jericho, a whirlwind of activity took place in the unseen world. Princes of glory did battle with the principalities of hell. Each day, as the Israelites marched around Jericho, heavenly forces were at work undermining the city's walls. God's hosts loosened every brick and weakened the foundations.

During the whole week they marched, they never saw any evidence that God was at work. They just did their marching every day and went back to camp at night. Not once during that week, did they see any visible results of a heavenly host's works on their behalf. Then the seventh day came. In obedience to God's command, the Israelites blew their trumpets—and Jericho's walls came tumbling down. Understand that it was not the Israelites' shouting that brought down those walls. It was the host of Jehovah pushing them down with supernatural power.

Bringing Down the Walls

What about the enemy's stronghold in your life? Have you lived for years with a habitual sin you despise, never gaining victory over it? It is time to declare war on your Jericho. Give up all hope of ever overcoming it by your own strength and will-power. Instead, bow down to the power of the Holy Ghost. Give your sword to God and trust in His covenant promise to defeat all your enemies. You will discover ***Jehovah Tsebaioth***, the Lord of hosts. You will see Him go to work for you. Your part is to keep moving forward in faith and obedience. Do not faint or allow yourself to despair. Just be faithful to keep walking on with Jesus.

He is the captain of the Lord's hosts and He is faithful to take down your stronghold. He gave Israel specific directions for battle and He will give you directions for your path as well. You can trust Him to direct His hosts of angels to do His bidding on your behalf.

It is easy to get discouraged in our battle against Jericho if we do not see results right away. We have to remember Israel's example at Jericho. Those lovers of God could not see the battle going on in the heavenlies. But in the unseen world, God's army was winning victory after victory. On the seventh day, that great host pushed down the walls, crushing all of Jericho's resistance. They put every evil defender to flight.

Likewise, you may not see immediate results. Yet, while you are walking with Jesus, moving forward in faith, fully persuaded that you are secured by the blood—your Lord's hosts are waging war for you. They are doing battle against the demonic principality that has rooted itself as a stronghold in your life. You can be assured; your Jericho is coming down. ***Jehovah Tsebaioth***, the Lord of hosts, is at work for you. So, just keep walking, keep moving on. Your day of total victory is soon to come.

09/14/22

THE NAMES OF GOD

Jehovah Shalom
The Lord Our Peace

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 6

God declared through Hosea, “***My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge***” (**Hosea 4:6**). The implication here is powerful. God is telling us that having an intimate knowledge of His nature and character, as revealed through His names, is a powerful shield against Satan’s attacks.

This brings us to another of our Lord’s names: ***Jehovah Shalom***. We find this name mentioned in the book of Judges. Here, the Lord revealed Himself to Gideon in the form of an angel.

Judges 6:22-24

What does this name, ***Jehovah Shalom***, mean exactly? *Shalom* is one of the most meaningful expressions in the Hebrew language. To this day, the word is held dear in the hearts of Jews everywhere. As a noun, the Hebrew word *shalom* means “completeness, health and welfare.” It implies being whole, in harmony with God and man, having wholesome relationships. It also indicates a state of being at ease—not restless, having peace both inwardly and outwardly, being at rest both spiritually and emotionally.

What does this particular name of God have to do with each of us and with the church today? What is the Lord trying to say to His people through this name, ***Jehovah Shalom***? Every time God revealed a characteristic of His nature to someone, that person was in a time of crisis, as we have seen. The revelation always came when God’s servant needed a fresh vision of the Lord to see him through. Each time, God brought forth a specific aspect of His nature to instill in His servant the faith needed to accomplish His eternal purpose.

The revelation of ***Jehovah Shalom*** was given to one such man in crisis—Gideon. We will see that the only way Gideon could have received such a revelation was through the Holy Ghost—and it changed Gideon’s life.

An Angelic Visitation

In His great mercy, the Lord sent a warning to Israel. Out of nowhere an angel appeared to God's people at Bochim, delivering an awesome rebuke.

Judges 2:1-2

This was a strict warning to a compromised nation, yet it was also meant for every generation to come, including the church today, upon whom the ends of the world have come. The Lord is giving us the same kind of warning.

When the Israelites heard this disapproving word, they were convicted to the point of tears. The Bible tells us, ***“It came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim”*** (Judges 2:4-5). The name *Bochim* means “a place of weeping and wailing.”

I believe the Israelites' tears were real. The people felt awful about their sin, and they expressed their anguish openly. Yet, sadly, their conviction was short-lived. Scripture says they still did not let go of their idols. They may have been good weepers, but none of them brought their idols to the altar to be destroyed. They thought they could go forth in service to the Lord while holding on to their filthy idols.

The book of Judges is one of the saddest, most tragic chapters in the history of God's people. Consider the last verse of this Old Testament book. ***“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes”*** (Judges 21:25). That is where it all ended—with each of God's people doing what he thought was right for himself. Everyone was able to give an excuse for his own sin and evil behavior. Few were deeply convicted by God's Word.

Yet, this book of Judges is more than the tragic history of the backsliding nation of Israel. It is also the story of our times, reflecting a church filled with believers who refuse to forsake their secret sins. In His great mercy, God is always faithful to send prophets to warn His people. Today the Lord is sending us His holy watchmen—preachers, teachers, evangelists—with warnings to heed His Word.

The Bible warns that if we continue to hold onto our secret sins, we will eventually forsake God and be given over to our lusts. Our Lord may deal with us patiently month after month, year after year. He may send us compassionate warnings through His faithful messengers. But, if we refuse to heed His Word, we will drift away from Him completely. We will finally become a helpless target before our enemy.

This is what happened to Israel. The Bible tells us,

Judges 2:12-15

Time after time, it was the same old story. The Israelites always promised to obey, but their words had no substance. They were never able totally to overcome their enemies or enjoy a lasting victory. They never allowed the preaching and teaching they heard to penetrate their hearts. They never allowed the true fear of God to take root. They ended up being easy targets for their enemies. For seven years, Israel paid a terrible price for her sins. Judges 6 describes an awful situation in Israel.

Judges 6:1-6

Disobedience Brings Discipline

At harvest time every year, Israel was invaded by the Midianites. These enemies knew exactly when Israel's fields and vineyards became ripe and when cattle gave birth. For seven straight years they drifted to Israel's borders on their camels, camped just beyond the outskirts and waited. Then, when the time was right, they swooped down on Israel like locusts. They went through the fields, taking everything in sight.

The Israelites could not understand why they were harassed year after year. How could God allow their enemies to plunder them? After all, they had enjoyed forty years of prosperity under the prophetess Deborah. Why could they not stand up to the Midianites now? What had brought Israel to such a shameful level of cowardice? Wasn't God on their side, working on their behalf? If He was, why did they have to live on continual fear and poverty? For years they had to hide in caves for protection. They held prayer meetings in those caves, crying out to God.

Let me point out here that not all trouble is a result of sin. As the psalmist writes, ***"Many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Psalm 34:19)***. Now notice the second half of this verse: ***"But the LORD delivers him out of them all."*** According to God's Word, our Lord, in His time, delivers His righteous servants out of their afflictions. They do not have to live in constant fear. They may undergo seasons of affliction, but the Lord is forever present to reassure them and deliver them. Eventually, night turns to day.

This was not the case with Israel. They had to endure constant stress because of their continual idolatry. They acted holy before God, offering up prayers of weeping and intercession. But as soon as their prayer meetings ended, they sneaked off to kneel

before their altars of Baal. Matter of fact, throughout those seven years of raid from the Midianites, Gideon's father, Joash, kept an altar to Baal in his backyard.

Why would any Israelite do such a thing? He did so because, like the other Israelites, he was jealous of the prosperity the Midianites enjoyed. The Israelites reasoned, "Our enemies are prospering. They have our fruit and provisions. Their god provides them with everything while we sit here starving." So, the Lord's people became hypocrites, two-faced worshipers. They gave lip service to Jehovah while paying tribute to another god.

At the height of Israel's poverty, God sent another prophet to expose His people's sin. He wanted to show them exactly why they were distressed and needy. Scripture describes the scene this way:

Judges 6:7-10

Who was the unnamed prophet who delivered this word? Scripture makes it clear: This stranger was the Lord Himself. Often in the Old Testament, Christ is called "the angel of the Lord." In this passage, we see the stranger referred to that way: "***There came an angel of the LORD . . . and the angel of the LORD appeared to him [Gideon]***" (Judges 6:11-12). Then, just a few verses down, we see this angelic figure referred to as the Lord: "***The LORD said unto him [Gideon], Peace be unto thee; fear not***" (verse 23).

When the unnamed prophet appeared on the scene, Gideon and his family were among the poorest of Israel's poor. They were living off the handfuls of grain Gideon brought home from a hidden threshing floor. Gideon was trying to eke (make ends meet) out a living by scavenging any leftover wheat he could find. Now, as the angel of the Lord appeared, He said to Gideon: "***The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour***" (verse 12).

Notice now, God was speaking to a man who, like every other Israelite, had sat by and done nothing for seven years. In all the years the Midianites attacked Israel, Gideon had shown not one bit of evidence of valor. He had not even protested his father's pagan altar. Like everyone else, Gideon had lived in fear and bondage.

Yet now the Lord was instructing this man, "***Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?***" (verse 14). What "might" was the Lord talking about here? Where in this story do we read of any infusion of strength or power into Gideon? Did something supernatural happen

during this exchange so that Gideon's doubt and fear were transformed into might? Or was he supposed to claim some divine vigor by faith?

Scripture indicates that there was a definite transfer of power into him, an infusion of might from the Holy Ghost. We find a clue to this divine infusion in verse 14, which begins, "***The LORD looked upon him.***" The Hebrew verb for *looked* in this verse is the same verb used in Genesis 32:30 when Jacob wrestled with the Lord. That verse reads, "***Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.***" Jacob was basically saying, "God looked me right in the face."

What was the outcome of Jacob's face-to-face encounter with the Lord? Scripture tells us, "***As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed***" (Genesis 32:28). Evidently, a transfer of power took place when Jesus looked Jacob in the eye. With this single gesture from the Lord, Jacob received an infusion of supernatural strength that prepared him to face any opponent.

The book of Judges is telling us that Gideon had direct communion with God through this kind of face-to-face encounter. You might ask, "How could this be? Doesn't the Bible say it's impossible for any human being to see God and live?" You are absolutely right.

09/21/22

The apostle John writes, "***No man hath seen God at any time***" (1 John 4:12). He qualifies his statement with this verse: "***No man hath seen God at any time; [but] the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him***" (John 1:18). In other words, "Jesus has manifested the Father to us. We see the essence of the Father when we look Christ, the Son."

John writes elsewhere, "***The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we behold his glory, the glory as the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth***" (John 1:14). He adds that, long before Jesus' birth, Christ "***was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not***" (verse 10).

Scripture makes it clear: Over the centuries, people stood face to face with the mediator, Jesus Christ, and were changed by the experience. Jacob saw Him at Peniel, Moses on the mountaintop and Daniel in the pagan land of Babylon. Here in Judges, as Gideon communed with the Lord face to face, he also was infused with a transforming power.

It was a power that would provide Israel with deliverance. The Israelites had not obtained the Promised Land through any power, authority or ability of their own. They received everything through their face-to-face encounters with the Lord. Every blessing had come to them not by pow-er, nor by might, but by the glory of God’s countenance (features).

Recognizing God as Our Source

This supernatural transfer of power totally transformed Gideon. In the blink of an eye, he turned from a coward into a mighty warrior. Yet, Gideon still had no idea he was dealing with the Lord. This passage implies that he treated Christ almost as casually as he would treat any other human being. Matter of fact, Gideon asked the stranger to prove He was from the Lord. He demanded, ***“If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me” (Judges 6:17)***. It is as if Gideon were saying to Jesus, *“If You have truly been sent from God, then do something that convinces me You are actually who You say You are.”*

Gideon also tried to strike a sort of deal with the Lord. He said to Him, ***“I’d like you to sit down and share a meal with me. So, I’m going into the kitchen now to prepare the food. Please, do me a favor and wait here until I bring it out”*** (see verses 17-18). What Gideon did was, he actually put God on hold! Yet the Lord responded with grace, saying, ***“I will tarry until thou come again”*** (verse 18).

After a while Gideon returned with the food—a lamb, unleavened bread and both. Yet before he could set the meal on the table, the Lord instructed him to place the food on a nearby stone. Then He directed Gideon to pour the broth over it all. Gideon did as he was told, and the Lord promptly lifted His staff and touched the food with it. Suddenly fire shot out of the rock and consumed the entire meal. Then, in an instant, the Lord disappeared as quickly as He had come.

Gideon was dumbfounded. The Bible says, ***“When Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! For because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face”*** (Judges 6:22). Why was Gideon so shaken? Suddenly, the truth exploded in Gideon’s soul. He realized, *“Oh, no—this was God almighty I just encountered, and I dealt with Him casually the whole time. I treated Him as if He were mortal, just like me.”*

Gideon knew this was serious business. That is why he cried, ***“Alas, O Lord GOD.”*** The word *alas* here is an exclamation of sorrow, regret and grief, with an apprehension of danger.

Sadly, Gideon's casual attitude toward almighty God can be found in churches today. Too often Christians conceive of the Lord as someone just like themselves: a buddy, a friend. This image of God is one reason why there is such widespread permissiveness in the church today. Casual Christians have no vision of a holy God, so, they have no motivation for destroying their sinful habits.

Instead, they end up coexisting with their sin. This leads directly to the kind of tragic end Judges describes: Everyone does what is right in his own eyes. When the Lord's true identity became clear to Gideon, his eyes were opened to truth. He remembered the message of the unnamed prophet and suddenly he was filled with the righteous fear of God.

Gideon did not have the peace to go forward until he acknowledged that he was dealing with a righteous, holy God. The revelation of *Jehovah Shalom*—the Lord our peace—was given to Gideon only after he cried, “*Alas, O Lord GOD.*” He was confessing, “*Oh, Lord, I regret, grieve, sorrow and repent that I did not acknowledge You as almighty God.*”

Then, in the exact moment Gideon recognized and honored the God he was dealing with, the Lord revealed Himself as *Jehovah Shalom*. “*The LORD said unto him, Peace be unto you; fear not: you shall not die*” (Judges 6:23). God was saying to Gideon, “I am *Jehovah Shalom*—the Lord, your peace.” At that point, the Bible says, “*Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovah Shalom*” (verse 24).

Receiving Shalom

Shalom cannot be earned. Nor is it given to everyone who claims to be a Christian. Multitudes of regular church members do not have *shalom*. Like the people of Israel, many believers have experienced only short seasons of peace between their long periods of distress.

They often quote the words of the Lord: “*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*” (John 14:27). “*Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means*” (2 Thess. 3:16). Yet, as the book of Judges shows, it is impossible to receive the Lord's *shalom* until we deal with God according to His various attributes.

How can we honor the Lord as God Most High unless we deal with Him as He really is? We know He is *omnipresent*, everywhere at once. He is *omniscient*, all knowing.

He is also *omnipotent*, all powerful. Also, He is merciful, kind, patient, longsuffering, compassionate, full of love and grace. He is all of these—yet He is much more. God is also holy, just, pure, unchangeable, a despiser of sin and no respecter of persons.

Many Christians in this current generation have no revelation of the almighty God with whom we have to deal with. They do not know the God of Acts, who slew two members of a Spirit-filled church because they lied to the Holy Ghost. They have ignored the God who refuses to forgive those who do not forgive others. They do not believe in the God who said that He will judge mercilessly all who refuse to show mercy to their brothers/sisters. Here is a God, Paul says, whose wrath ***“is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18).***

I believe some of us, if not all us, as we look back over our lives, we remember the many times of trouble, distress and restlessness. We see now that during those times we had no power to stand against the enemy as we should have. We now understand why we didn't have God's peace sometimes, even though we had a genuine love for the Lord.

Matter of fact, there were moments when we did not see the Lord as holy God. We ignored all the Scriptures about His wrath and justice. Instead, we focused only on those passages having to do with His love and mercy. We were unknowingly rejecting God in favor of what we thought He should be like.

In those times of distress, the Lord was urging us to deal with certain strongholds in our lives, such as anger and temper. But we were not willing to face those things. We did not want to deal with them righteously. Now, like Gideon, we look back on those times and cry out, *“Oh, Lord—we took You for granted. If only we had understood Your holiness, Your justice, Your righteousness and Your wrath against sin!”*

How dare we continue sinning so casually in God's presence? How dare we sit in His house singing, praising and appearing to be righteous, when all along we are gossiping, slandering our brothers and sisters? How dare we live double lives, unafraid of God's wrath and discipline? If only we knew whom we were dealing with, we would cry out as Gideon did, ***“Alas, my Lord and my God. Woe is me—I am sinning before the holy righteous judge of all men.”***

We will never receive the Lord's *shalom* until we realize, “This is serious business! This is God almighty we are dealing with, creator and sustainer of the universe. We

cannot continue taking Him for granted—we cannot live with our sin as if He is deaf and blind.

Jehovah Shalom—A Gideon Revelation

Do you tremble at God’s Word? Are you ready to obey everything it says? If so, you will receive the revelation of ***Jehovah Shalom***. He will come to you personally as ***“the Lord, your peace,”*** filling your spirit with supernatural strength against every enemy. You cannot earn this kind of peace; it is gift from God. Nor can you work it up. It comes to you only when you recognize and honor the One you live before: almighty God, holy and righteous.

When Gideon received the revelation of ***Jehovah Shalom***, he must have been comforted by this thought: *“He is truly God almighty—high, holy and righteous, but He just came to me in mercy! Yes, He is holy—but this holy God made the first move toward me. He took the initiative. He came to me in my doubt, laziness and disobedience. He had every right to cast me aside. But He offered me power, might and clear direction instead. The Lord came to deliver me, not to damn me.”*

That is what the Christianity is all about. Jesus came to you in your sin, and that ought to bring hope, joy and peace to your heart. He had every right to cast you aside. But He came to you speaking deliverance, empowerment, courage and valor instead.

Make no mistake: The Lord did not choose Gideon because He saw something great in him. No, it was as a gift that He revealed Himself to Gideon as ***Jehovah Shalom***. Today the Lord makes this same offer to us. He is telling us, just as He told Gideon: ***“I am about to send you forth to do battle against your enemy. Don’t worry—I am going to send you out with My peace filling your heart.”***

Our response should be like Gideon’s: *“The Lord says I am a person of courage and valor, and I know He is a holy God who cannot lie. So, no matter how I feel—regardless of discouragement or past sin—I am going to trust what my Lord has said to me. He has commanded me to go, so, I will go.”*

Now you can go forward with ***Jehovah Shalom***—the Lord, your peace—because He has given Himself to you.

THE NAMES OF GOD

Jehovah Tsidkenu *The Lord Our Righteousness*

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 7

Many believers today share the same concept of righteousness. As we understand it, being righteous means having a combination of the following characteristics: uprightness, morality, kindness, good conduct, avoidance of evil and fleshly temptations.

We all know believers who have these characteristics. They are faithful to the Lord's work and to fellowshiping with His people. These people are kind, considerate, gentle and soft-spoken. They never gossip or speak against others. Instead, they say only good things about people, including those who wrong them.

But there is a serious problem with thinking of righteousness in this way. Understand now, you can possess all of these qualities—you can do every good thing and look upright in every way—and still be unrighteous in God's eyes. All of these traits can be the result of pride and the kind of hard work that focuses on self. We can attain all the human graces and still fall miserably short of righteousness in God's eyes.

I have met many non-believers, who are very good people. They are meek, kind and loving. They will do basically anything to help anyone, yet they are not righteous at all, by God's definition. Sadly, the same is true of many believers. They are dedicated servants who pray diligently, read their Bibles often, give their entire lives to ministering to the poor and the needy—but they know little of being righteous by biblical standards.

Very few people have a true understanding of righteousness. They miss the importance this Scripture:

Jeremiah 23:5-6

Understanding ***Jehovah Tsidkenu***—*the Lord our righteousness* is absolutely crucial to the Church's survival in these last days. As I see what is happening and coming

to the world, believers are going to need the very righteousness of God Himself to make it through. I believe we are going to see an apostasy (desertion or departure from one's faith) like the Church has never known—a falling away more widespread than anything we could imagine. Hell is going to spill over its borders with unspeakable evil. Pleasure-madness will overwhelm our children.

If the Church is going to survive the coming moral landslide, we are going to need proper revelation of the righteousness from God's point of view. We are going to have to know how to obtain His righteousness. If we do not grasp this revelation of *Jehovah Tsidkenu*—if we do not understand the Lord our righteousness—we are going to be swept away with the rest of the world.

God gave the prophet Jeremiah a revelation of *Jehovah Tsidkenu* during a time of crisis similar to the one we face today. Jeremiah lived during the reign of King Josiah. Josiah was a righteous king, a man who walked humbly before the Lord. One hundred years before Josiah's ascension to the throne of Judah, the sister nation of Israel had been taken captive. During that time, God had hoped Judah would learn from Israel's mistakes, but the people of Judah refused to look at their own sin.

The Bible says that Judah became so corrupt, God finally could not endure it any longer. In His eyes, the nation's wound was beyond curing: ***“There was no remedy” (2 Chronicles 36:16)***. These people lived under the Old Covenant, which required perfect obedience. So, when Josiah took the throne, the godly king tried to bring about righteousness in Judah by imposing moral standards on the people. He did this through government decrees and military enforcement. Under Josiah's leadership, a revival (revitalization, renewal, restoration) took place in Judah. Idols came down, evil was wiped out and the people's conversations focused on the Lord and His work.

But this revival was an outward one only. There was not a genuine change in the hearts of the people. It was a shallow revival, full of good works and appearances but without true repentance. The people of Judah observed the law and cleaned up their society—but their hearts were not in it. When Josiah died in battle, within a year the people were indulging in idolatry like the nation had never seen.

Jeremiah was overwhelmed by what he saw taking place among God's people. The prophet cried:

Jeremiah 23:10

Even Judah's priests and prophets had become corrupt. In turn, they corrupted God's house: "***For both prophet and priest are profane; yea, in my house have I found their wickedness***" (verse 11). These religious leaders should have been warning the people about God's judgment for sin. They should have been faithfully pointing out the difference between the holy and the un-holy.

But instead, they comforted the people in their sins. Jeremiah listened in disbelief as these false teachers preached peace and prosperity to evildoers, encouraging them in their backsliding.

Jeremiah 23:17

Judah's condition became so awful that God compared them to Sodom and Gomorrah, two cities He had wiped off the map.

Jeremiah 23:12-14

Jeremiah could only weep as he saw Judah totally overrun by immorality. At the time Jeremiah was prophesying judgment, Judah enjoyed about forty years of prosperity. The Lord had honored King Josiah's attempts to bring revival to the land.

At that point, Jeremiah received a heavenly revelation of a future Jerusalem. According to the prophet, this holy city would be ruled by a righteous Branch from the seed of David.

Jeremiah 23:5

Jeremiah adds that this Branch would save His people, causing them to live in peace.

Jeremiah 23:6

In the midst of a crisis of sin and despair, God gave Jeremiah a fresh revelation of His character—*the Lord our righteousness*.

So, what does this mean for us, in practical terms? What is this righteousness He is the Lord of—and how are we to know and understand Jesus in this role?

Grace: From Theory to Reality

You are probably already convinced that every bit of your righteousness comes to you from God, through Jesus' work on the cross. You may think of your righteousness as being of faith, and not of works or law. You may even forswear trying to work out a righteousness of your own. Yet as much as we believe these truths, we often fail to live them out in our daily lives. They have not become a reality to us in the ways that God has intended. Simply put, our lives need to be revolutionized by a revelation of *Jehovah Tsidkenu*. Only as we lay hold of God's concept of righteousness by faith will it become reality.

The apostle Paul confirms this truth, He writes, ***“Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe”*** (Romans 3:21-22).

Paul is telling us, in essence, “We are living under a New Testament revelation. It is the revelation of a righteousness that comes from God and not from man. The Lord chose to disclose this revelation to His Old Testament prophets. Every one of them testified of a righteousness to come, which would not be of the law. They said a Messiah was coming to bestow this righteousness on man, rather than man trying to earn it by his own merits. Clearly, the prophets were foreseeing Christ's day.”

By its very nature, the Old Covenant points to the revelation of *Jehovah Tsidekenu, the Lord our righteousness*. You see, the law was actually designed to show man the weakness of his flesh. It demanded perfect obedience. Under the law, man had to strive until he came to the point that he died to his flesh. At that point, the work of the law was complete, and the need for *Jehovah Tsidkenu, the Lord our righteousness*.

Coals from the Altar

Isaiah was another witness. He wrote, ***“Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory”*** (Isaiah 45:24-25). How did Isaiah receive this revelation of *Jehovah Tsiskenu, the Lord our righteousness*? It came to him the hard way—through a deep, trying personal experience.

In the first five chapters of Isaiah, we see the prophet preaching faithfully and walking closely with the Lord. By every indication, Isaiah sought God's righteousness with all his heart. Yet the Lord gave this godly prophet an incredible vision that changed his entire view of righteousness.

In this vivid revelation, Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on His throne, high and holy, lifted up above everything in heaven. The vision was filled with God’s holiness and glory, that even the heavenly seraphim surrounding the throne had to cover their eyes and bow in humility. They cried in otherworldly voices, “**Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts**” (Isaiah 6:3). The scene was so heavy with God’s holy presence that it drove Isaiah to his knees. He fell face-down, unable to see anything except his own sinfulness. This godly prophet found himself crying, “**Woe is me! For I am undone**” (verse 5). The Hebrew meaning of this phrase is, “I have failed—I perish.”

Isaiah then makes an incredible statement. He says, “**I am a man of unclean lips**” (verse 5). Isaiah had been preaching, prophesying—delivering a pure word from heaven with convicting power. Yet now he was so mesmerized by what he witnessed, he called his own word unclean. Isaiah, among all the godliest of all the Lord’s servants, was saying, “I can’t be holy, I can’t be righteous. I will never be able to attain that. I have done the best I could—yet, at the end of it all, I have discovered I’m nothing. After all my preaching, all my seeking and searching. I am absolutely undone by the Lord’s righteousness. I see clearly now, there is no good thing in me.”

Isaiah realized that there was no way he could ever attain true righteousness on his own. Even if he could, it would never stand in the light of God’s holiness. It became clear to Isaiah that he would never be accepted in the Lord’s eyes unless God Himself took the initiative. The Lord had to come to him in his dead condition and do the work of purging and cleansing him.

God did just that. He directed an angel to take a pair of tongs and remove a live coal from the fiery altar, which represented Christ’s sacrifice. The angel then laid the coal on Isaiah’s tongue, saying, “**Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thing iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged**” (Isaiah 6:7). Now, Isaiah was acceptable. He was purged and purified, and he could stand before the Lord. He was able to worship along with the seraphim, singing, “**Holy, holy, holy is the righteous Lord.**” God’s message to Isaiah, and to every believer today, is clear: We attain true righteousness only by turning to **Jehovah Tsidkenu** to provide it.

Isaiah’s justification came by no other means than his words of confession: “**Woe is me—I am undone.**” He speaks for all of us when he says, “In my own strength and ability, I am helpless, unable. I can never make myself righteous. Instead, the Lord has purged me by His own blood—He made me righteous by placing that hot coal on my tongue. He did it all for me. I have been purified by His actions, not mine. All I did was tell Him that I am hopeless, lifeless; a dead man without Him.”

The Call of Jehovah Tsidkenu

We have already seen what God revealed to Isaiah about attaining true righteousness. Now, in ***Jeremiah 23:6***, God declared once and for all: ***“In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”***

The Lord was saying, “The day is coming when I will send My Righteous One as a Savior to all who accept Him. He is going to secure a people through His own sacrifice. They will know Him as ***Jehovah Tsidkenu, the Lord our righteousness.***” The moment God revealed Himself as ***Jehovah Tsidkenu***, He declared His total contempt for every kind of righteousness attempted by flesh.

Here in this single verse, proclaimed hundreds of years before the Messiah would appear. God was declaring it is deadly sin for us to try to establish a righteousness of our own. In other words, He was saying, “You must lie down and renounce every effort to be holy through your own strength and abilities. Your Savior alone, the coming Messiah, will be your righteousness.”

Even though this is revealed to us in God’s Word, we still resist embracing it. We simply do not want to believe there is no good thing in us. We cannot bring ourselves to accept that, in our flesh, we are helpless, undependable and inclined to commit the vilest of sins. One writer said, “Self-righteousness is the last idol that is rooted out of the heart.”

We may testify, “My righteousness is as filthy rags.” Yet we often refuse to submit totally to the Lord’s righteousness. Even when we are convinced that we have surrendered, we tend to backslide into our old ways of trying to please God by our own efforts and strength. The truth is, we can never know true righteousness until we give up hope of ever finding anything good in ourselves that we can bring to the Lord.

The righteousness of God is a gift, one that must be credited to us. It comes unearned, undeserved and unmerited. Yes, the Lord must initiate the process by which we receive His righteousness. Then after giving us a desire to be righteous, He must come to us carrying cleansing fire from His altar, to purge us and make us holy in His sight. We become candidates for this gift of righteousness only when we admit with true conviction, “Woe is me—I have failed. I am helpless, Lord, finished, undone. Without You, I am a dead man.”

10/05/22

What Does God Consider True Righteousness?

In several New Testament passages, Paul gives us some insight into God's definition of righteousness. Each time, Paul speaks of God crediting His own righteousness to Abraham:

- ***“Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3).***
- ***“Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness” (4:9).***
- ***“Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Galatians 3:6).***

Each of these verses refers to one thing that Abraham did to attain true righteousness: He *believed*. Finally, Paul provides the Lord's definition of righteousness:

Romans 4:20-22

The Bible is making it clear: Righteousness is believing the promises of God, being fully persuaded that He will keep His word. Unrighteousness is unbelief, doubting God will do what He promised, and trying to do it ourselves.

Paul explains,

Romans 4:4-5

Jesus Himself settles this matter of believing God for our righteousness: ***“This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent” (John 6:29).***

Well, you may say, “But what about the issue of personal obedience? Aren't we supposed to deny ourselves and reject the world? Aren't we commanded to forsake all lusts of the flesh? What about taking up our crosses? Doesn't the Bible say we are to surrender ourselves continually to the Lord, seeking a life that's pleasing to Him?”

The truth is, none of these things is possible unless we are fully persuaded that God will keep His covenant promises to us. It all comes down to trusting in His Word. Matter of fact, our acceptance does not depend on any of these things. We are accepted by God only because we are in Christ. God accepts only one person, Jesus—and, in turn, we are accepted because we believe in His finished work for us on the cross.

Listen—read your Bible through in a year from a sense of duty. Pray for hours each day. God to church every time the doors are open for worship. Be good, and do good.

But I need to tell you, ***“Without faith it is impossible to please Him”*** (Hebrews 11:6).

Abraham demonstrated the righteousness that is of faith when he willingly obeyed God’s command to sacrifice his own son. The Lord watched as Abraham raised a knife to kill his son. He heard the cry of faith in Abraham’s heart: “Lord, You promised that this son would be my heir. You said Isaac would be the child of promise who would father entire nations. So, I am fully persuaded that as soon as I kill my boy, You are going to raise him from the dead. I know Your word cannot fail, God. I believe You are able to fulfill everything You have promised to me.”

God responded by saying, ***“That is the righteousness that is of faith, not of works. Abraham is My definition of a righteous man.”***

David was also a righteous man by God’s definition. Paul writes:

Romans 4:6-8

David knew that he possessed a blessedness that was not of himself. He realized he was forgiven and accepted before the heavenly Father only because he trusted in God’s righteousness.

All He Wants Is Trust

God’s only demand of His people has been, ***“Believe My word. Trust in My promises. Have faith that I will do the impossible for you.”*** We may accept this as a doctrine of our faith and as a proper theology. But in practical terms, many of us still believe that God expects more from us than faith. Deep down, we tell ourselves that we do not pray enough, give enough or sacrifice enough. We think God expects us to be more diligent, more disciplined and more faithful.

Something inside us keeps insisting, “I can’t be righteous before the Lord without more effort, more pain, more struggle.” So, our flesh jumps in and tries to help God make us righteous. Yet, all along, the only thing God has asked of us is simply to trust Him to do what He has already promised.

Understand now, this is the very kind of unbelief that kept Israel out of the Promised Land. The Israelites’ sin was not just idolatry or adultery. It was unbelief—their lack of faith in God to do for them what He had promised.

Over time, you will find yourself weighed down by a burden of condemnation. We think that our lives will never measure up to the standard we see in others, but this self-condemnation is the result of judging righteousness by outward appearances. The truth is, some people who lead lives of sacrifice remain sinful in God's eyes. Why? They never fully trusted that He would be their righteousness. Instead, they relied on their own works and goodness.

God's Word leaves no doubt that the Lord considered His servant David to be a righteous man. Yet if we were to judge David's life by the way we judge our own, we would not think of him as righteous at all. He committed adultery, covered it up, murdered the man whose wife he slept with, then lied about it all (even to a prophet of the Lord). But David had a repentant heart and, most of all, he did not trust in his own righteousness but in *Jehovah Tsidkenu, the Lord, our righteousness*.

David cried, ***“Judge me, O Lord my God, according to Your righteousness; and let them not rejoice over me. . . my tongue shall speak of Your righteousness and of Your praise all the day long”*** (Psalm 35:24, 28).

Maybe you are like David. You have lost all confidence in your own strength. You are convinced that there is nothing good in you; you see that all you have to present to Him are your struggles and failures. You realize that, unless He accounts to you His righteousness, you are doomed.

So, you have turned everything over into the Lord's hands. You are trusting Him, casting all your cares upon Him. You believe in His promises to keep you, protect you and cause you to walk uprightly before Him. You may not have arrived yet, but you know it is not your job to make that happen—it's the Lord's. You know that somehow, by His Spirit working in you, He is going to get you there.

God does not want your home, your car, your savings or the rest of your possessions. All He wants is your faith—your strong belief in His Word. You may be tempted to look at another person as being more spiritual than you. But that person could actually be struggling hard to keep up an appearance of righteousness. As God looks at you, He has declared you to as being a righteous man or woman. Why? Because you have admitted your helplessness and you have trusted in the Lord to give you, His righteousness.

You may claim, “I believe this. I have faith in the God who resurrected Jesus.” But the question is, do you trust Him when you are against the wall, or do you dig in to fight it out? Will you decide to believe that the Lord can resurrect your troubled mar-

riage? Do you believe He can bring to life a spiritually dead relative? Do you believe He can deliver you from a harmful habit? Do you believe He can erase your sinful past and restore to you the fullness of life you have lost?

Do you believe that God can take a vessel who is weak, foolish, uneducated—someone despised and looked down upon—and make that person useful in His Kingdom, confounding others who seem wise and mighty? When everything looks hopeless—when you are in an impossible situation with no resources and no hope before you—do you believe God will be your ***Jehovah Jireh***, seeing to your need? Do you believe He is committed to keeping His covenant promises to you—and that if even one of His words failed, the heavens would melt and the universe collapse?

Waiting for God—Patiently

Scripture shows us why so many Christians give up believing in the Lord’s righteousness and go back to trying to establish their own. They may have plenty of faith, but they do not have the patience required to wait on God to fulfill His promises. Yes, Abraham’s faith made him righteous in God’s eyes. But Abraham also had to learn patience. Why? He was required to wait a quarter of a century before God fulfilled His word to him.

Understand, that Abraham did not possess this patience right away. You remember some of his sinful actions during the long years of dryness before God’s promise came. When Abraham agreed with his wife to try and produce their promised son through another woman, that was not an act of faith. Instead, it was a shortcut around faith brought on by fleshly impatience. Eventually, God brought Abraham to a place of faith where he inherited the promise, but it happened only after he acquired patience.

Our need for patience is repeated throughout the book of Hebrews:

- ***“For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself. . . and so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise” (Hebrews 6:13-15)***
- ***“Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Hebrews 6:12).***
- ***“For you have need of patience, that after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promises” (Hebrews 10:36).***

God has given us many covenant promises—to break every bond of sin, to empower us to defeat all dominion of sin, to give us a new heart, to cleanse and sanctify us

and conform us to the very image of Christ. His Word assures us, “[He] is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24).

God does all of these things for us in His time, according to His divine schedule. He has no deadlines pushing Him, and He ignores all demands for an instant cure-all. True faith demands that we wait patiently on our Lord. Our response to Him should be, “Lord, I believe You are true to Your word. By the power of Your Spirit within me, I am going to wait patiently until You bring these things to pass in my life. My part is to remain in faith, waiting on You.”

You may endure trials and temptations, and you may hear horrible lies whispered to you by Satan. At times, you may fail. Matter of fact, you may wonder if you will ever reach the goal. As you are enduring all of these afflictions, simply hold onto faith with patience. Trust that God is at work, keeping His words, being your **Jehovah Tsidkenu**. Even if you do not feel righteous, believe Him and He will look upon you as righteous. He has sworn by oath, “**By faith, you will receive the promise.**”

Your flesh may try to rush in and help. It may urge you to turn back to the Old Covenant system of works to try to establish your own righteousness. You may be afraid that you are too much of a mess and that you have to do something so that God will not be offended. But what you must do is to stand firm, declaring, “Lord, I trust only You. My flesh is pulling at me, but I believe that You will bring me back to faith. You have said that You are able to present me faultless before You, and I believe You. I serve **Jehovah Tsidkenu—the Lord my righteousness.**”

10/12/22

THE NAMES OF GOD

Jehovah Shammah *The Lord Is There*

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 8

The prophet Ezekiel (chapter 10) describes a terrifying vision he was given by the Lord. In this supernatural vision, Ezekiel saw God’s glory departing from both the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. As the Lord’s glory departed, awful judgments began to fall—on the Temple, the city and all of Judah. For many years the prophet had been warning about the coming judgment. Now, as the terrifying vision was revealed to him, Ezekiel knew without a doubt that he was seeing the prophesied judgments begin to fall.

This vision began with a chariot almost hard to describe. This chariot had “wheels within wheels” and was drawn by legions of cherubim. No doubt, the wings of the cherubim provided the physical force that moved the chariot. It was a sight to behold, a supernatural chariot supported by winged creatures from heaven.

As the chariot came down from heaven, Ezekiel saw in it a figure sitting upon a throne. The figure was as bright as a sapphire, the prophet says. We can safely assume this figure was none other than the Lord. The New Testament tells us that Jesus is the brightness and brilliance of the Father’s glory. So, if we compare Ezekiel’s description to other passages in the Old Testament in which the Lord appeared, we can be sure this brilliant figure was Christ.

Ezekiel saw the cherubim chariot hovering over the Temple. Ezekiel was alarmed, yet he knew exactly why God was removing His glory. He had seen with his own eyes all the awful things that God’s people had done, both in the Temple and throughout the land.

Ezekiel watched as the heavenly chariot literally picked up the glory of God, removed it from the holy place and carried it to the Temple door (10:4). God’s glory was on the move. Scripture describes one final blast of God’s glory. ***“The sound of the cherubim’s wings was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of the Almighty God when he speaks”*** (verse 5).

How did God's people react to this display of supernatural power? No one even noticed. The priests and people went about their business, performing all their rituals and activities. This happened because these people were unable to recognize the departure of God's glory in their midst. They had become so blinded by their selfish, sinful habits that they did not realize His presence was about to leave them.

In spite of Ezekiel's warnings over the years, the people of Judah had fallen away from God. The nation was full of idol worship, rebellion and wickedness. The people had given themselves over to all kinds of sinful practices. The priests had allowed false prophets in to infiltrate the Temple, and these false guides filled the people's minds with empty hopes of peace and prosperity. Ezekiel tried to warn the people about the consequences of their evil practices, but they dismissed him, mocking his words and continuing to indulge themselves.

Judah's blinded condition show us that it is possible for God's people to lose the Lord's presence and not realize it. They can be deceived by their own sin. They do not realize that God's glory has already departed from them. His presence is no longer in their lives, because they have refused to give up their disobedience.

This was not the first time such deception had fallen upon God's people. Scripture says that when God's presence left Samson, he did not realize what had happened (Judges 16:20). Samson indulged himself, never thinking he would reap any consequences.

Ezekiel grieved as God finally lifted His glory from Judah's midst. As God's glory hovered at the Temple door, Ezekiel saw it moving once again.

Ezekiel 10:18-19

The cherubim mounted in an upward surge that seemed to lift God's glory up from the Temple. Next, these angelic beings rose and held the glory above the city, suspended in the sky above the people. This hovering, hesitating image suggests the Lord was reluctant to leave.

Nobody stepped forward to stand in the gap. So, God lifted His glory and removed it from Judah. ***“The glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city”*** (Ezekiel 11:23). (The mountain Ezekiel describes here was the Mount of Olives).

How did the people respond once God's glory left them? You might think that the priests would have shut down the Temple and ceased all religious activities. You might think they would have called for a day of mourning and repentance as a result of what had happened. But the Temple doors did not close—not at all. Everything continued just as it always had. Once again, the priests and people went about doing all the things they usually did.

These sinful people could now be much more comfortable about indulging their sin. They had been miserable whenever the Lord's glory was present among them, because it constantly exposed their sin. Now that God's glory was out of the way, conviction was gone. They did not care at all that the Lord had removed Himself from their midst.

A Second Vision (Ezekiel 40)

Fourteen years into the Babylonian captivity, Ezekiel received another amazing vision. By this time the spirits of both Israel and Judah were totally broken. God's people had been in captivity for fourteen years. As they slaved by the rivers of Babylon, they wept as they remembered the glory of Zion. They no longer had anything to sing about. There was nothing in their lives that they wanted to praise God for, so, they hung their harps on the willows. They finally faced the fact that God had removed His glory from them years before because they had defiled His house with idolatry and sin.

The revelation given to Ezekiel at this time was even more amazing than the first. The Holy Spirit took the prophet to a high mountain that overlooked Jerusalem and all of Judah. There God showed Ezekiel another city—one the Lord would build in the future. This city would be glorious beyond all imagination. This vision was a revelation of a great and majestic new Temple. The magnificent structure would be the permanent Temple to which God's glory would return, never to leave again. As the Lord unfolded the revelation of this Temple to Ezekiel, He gave the prophet minute details of its entire construction. It took Ezekiel nine chapters just to outline it (Chapters 40-48).

Ezekiel was not seeing a literal temple. There is no evidence anywhere in Ezekiel's writings to suggest this temple was intended to be an actual building. Ezekiel was seeing the heavenly Jerusalem. He was describing a holy city coming down out of heaven, which the New Testament calls the Church of Jesus Christ. Ezekiel was being given a vision of the New Jerusalem. This vision of Christ's Church is similar to a city described in:

Psalm 46:4-5

The Jews may once again rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, but God's glory will not be in it unless Christ is there. This is the true Temple—the Body consisting of every born-again believer, a tabernacle that could not possibly be made with human hands. Paul echoes this in his letters to the Corinthians. He says God's Temple is embodied in our physical beings: ***“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). “For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said, I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (2 Corinthians 6:16).***

What can we learn from Ezekiel's vision? I believe the Lord wants us to understand two things.

First: A Revelation

The prophet envisioned the glory of God returning and a revelation of ***Jehovah Shammah*** coming forth. Ezekiel writes:

Ezekiel 44:4

This new Temple was a huge structure, filled from one end to the other with the Lord's brilliant glory. When Ezekiel laid eyes on it, he fell on his face. I believe the various rooms that make up this glorious Temple could represent the various peoples of the world. Ezekiel was seeing all the races becoming one under the roof of God's house. He writes, ***“The name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there” (Ezekiel 48:35).***

The literal Hebrew words for this phrase is ***Jehovah Shammah***. Ezekiel was saying, “These people will be known by God's presence in them and upon them. It will be said of this Temple ‘*God is there. The presence of the Lord is with them.*’”

Secondly: A Guardianship

The Lord told Ezekiel to guard the gates to this new house, in which the glory of God would now abide. We have already read of all the awful things the people brought into the Temple during the old order. The result was that both ministers and lay people polluted God's house with corrupt worship. Now the Lord was putting a stop to all of that. He told Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 44:9

God was instructing the prophet, “Ezekiel, I have set guards over these Temple gates. No corrupt leader or ungodly person will enter. No one who has an uncircumcised heart can be permitted into My holy place. I am going to have a holy Body inhabiting My last-days Church. I will not allow any polluters to corrupt this house. No one with an unclean heart can stand and minister before Me.” 10/19/22

What does this mean for us in these last days? It means Satan will not be allowed to invade the holy Temple where God’s glory dwells. The Lord has proclaimed that His pastors and believers will be full of His glory. He will not allow any ungodly, unclean person to minister in this new Temple. He told Ezekiel, “***They shall not come near unto me, to do the office of priest unto me, nor come near to any of my holy things, in the most holy place***” (Ezekiel 44:13).

There is only one Church our Lord recognizes. His true Temple—His holy sanctuary, where His glory abides—consists of a righteous ministry and a faithful, God—hungry people. This is not the visible, structured church system. Instead, this Church is made up of a body here, a body there—in Africa, India, China, the United States and other nations. In these holy houses, the uncircumcised in heart are not allowed to minister, and they never will be. Instead, God has a people who are righteous before Him and who will remain so until Jesus comes. What is the name of this Church? It is known as “*The Lord is there*”—the Church of ***Jehovah Shammah***.

A New Order of Priests

Ezekiel tells us that the ministers in the glorious new Temple will consist of an entirely new order. He describes this new priesthood by first telling us what the old order was like. God says through the prophet:

Ezekiel 44:10-13

In this passage the Lord outlines all the abominations of the old order. They may continue with their rituals and programs, but God swears that they will not be ministering to Him, nor will they “come near Him.” Then He begins to describe the new Temple priesthood who will lead and serve His people:

Ezekiel 44:15-16

The Hebrew name *Zadok* means “right” or “righteous.” Ezekiel is referring here to a man named Zadok who served as priest during King David’s reign. This righteous man never wavered in his faithfulness to David or the Lord. He stood by the king and by God’s Word through thick and thin. It did not matter whether David was rein-

ing powerfully from Israel's throne or fleeing the holy city to escape an uprising led by his rebellious son Absalom. Zadok always remained loyal to David because he knew the king was the Lord's anointed.

Because Zadok remained faithful through everything, he came to represent a ministry distinguished by its faithfulness to the Lord. Zadok was a prime example of a true minister of God—separated from this world, shut in with the Lord, consistently hearing from heaven. Such a minister recognizes his main work is prayer: seeking God daily, communing constantly with the Holy Spirit and ministering to Jesus. Also, this kind of minister cannot be bought at any price. While other ministers chase after every religious fad, this shepherd remains faithful to the Lord and to his priestly service in the Temple.

This is the Zadok priesthood, and the Lord has many Zadokites in His Temple service today. You will not find these shepherds preaching out of selfish motivation. These ministers come to the pulpit straight from their secret closets of prayer. They are faithful to stand before the Lord before they ever stand before the congregation.

They spend precious hours in the Lord's presence until they are saturated with a message that has been burned into their souls. When they rise from God's presence, they are able to speak straight to the people's hearts, and their messages get down to where people live because they have come directly from God's throne.

The Lord says of the Zadok priesthood, "The ministers will enter My sanctuary and stand before Me. They shall come near to My table and minister to Me. They shall keep My charge. I will be faithful to lead and direct them, and I will give them My word for My people."

The Zadok Calling Is for Every Believer

In the new, last-days' sanctuary, members of the Zadok priesthood know that their central work is to minister to the Lord. This ministry includes every lover of Jesus who desires to walk in righteousness. We see the "priesthood of believers" echoed throughout the books of the New Testament.

Peter writes: "***You also, as lively stones, are. . . an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. . . But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should shew forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light***" (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

You may not have ministerial credentials from any church body. You may never have been to seminary. You may never have preached a sermon. But you are just as called and ordained to serve in the Zadok priesthood as the most well-known preacher or evangelist. Both Testaments make it abundantly clear: Each of us is to hold the office of priest and to perform a priest's duties.

How do we do this? You do it by ministering primarily unto the Lord. You offer up sacrifices to Him—sacrifices of praise, of service, of turning over to Him all your heart, soul, and mind and strength. He has called you to be part of His royal priesthood; therefore, you are to minister to others only after you have ministered to Him.

This means you are not to show up to God's house each week empty and dry, hoping some message from the preacher will fire you up. No, you are to come prepared to minister to the Lord with a heart of praise. To do that, you need to be shut up with Him often—in your home, on your job, everywhere. You have been set apart as His minister—a faithful Zadok priest who calls on His name regularly, trusting fully in His righteousness and not your own.

Unless you are a priest in this Zadok ministry—unless you stand before God's table daily, ministering to Him—you cannot be a member of the Church of ***Jehovah Shammah***. You may spend all your time supporting church activities and meeting others' needs. But unless you are a Zadok priest in every aspect of your life, all those other activities amount to nothing.

To be a member of God's true Church, you must be known by the name of ***Jehovah Shammah***. The majority of believers spend their time involved in good religious activities—prayer groups, Bible studies, outreach ministries—and that is all very commendable. But many of these same believers spend little—if any—time ministering to the Lord in the secret closet of prayer.

The Lord's presence simply cannot be faked. This is true whether it applies to an individual's life or to a church body. When I speak of God's presence, I am not talking about some kind of spiritual aura that mystically surrounds a person or that “comes down” in church worship. I am talking about the result of a simple but powerful walk of faith. Whether that is manifested in a believer's life or in an entire congregation, it causes people to take note. They say to themselves, “*This person has been with Jesus or This congregation truly believes what it preaches.*”

Here is the point: It takes much more than a righteous Zadok pastor to produce a ***Jehovah Shammah*** church. It takes a righteous people who spend time with God. If

a stranger comes out of worship and says, “I felt the presence of Jesus there,” you can be sure it was not just because of the preaching or worship. It was because a righteous Zadok congregation had entered God’s house, and the Lord’s glory was abiding in their midst.

Every true shepherd of the Lord wants people to walk out of the church saying, “Surely the Lord is in this place.” Yet, this ought to be the burden not just of the pastor, but of every Zadok priest in the house. It can happen only if the pews, people who come to God’s house after they have been with Jesus at home. No church can be more alive than the people who attend it. Dead believers make for dead churches.

A Special Fruit of the Lord’s Presence

Ezekiel says that when God’s glory is present, His people will be taught to discern between what is holy and what is unholy. As the Lord revealed His vision of the new Temple. He told Ezekiel: ***“They shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean”*** (Ezekiel 44:23). Whenever a body of godly servants seek to minister to the Lord, God gives them wyes to see what is of the Spirit and what is of the flesh. They recognize the difference between the holy and profane.

So, what does the name ***Jehovah Shammah*** mean to us today? It means that others should be able to say of us, “I see Christ in that person.” We can no longer try to fake God’s presence in our lives. Others will simply know if He is present when they come in contact with us. They may not know exactly what they are sensing—but their hearts will tell them, “That person is filled with Jesus.”

10/26/22

THE NAMES OF GOD

Jehovah Rohi
The Lord My Shepherd

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 9

We are all familiar with the Twenty-third Psalm. Its message of comfort is well known even among non-believers. This well-known psalm was written by King David, and its most famous passage is in the opening verse: ***“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”***

The Hebrew word David uses for *want* in this verse indicates “lack.” David is saying, “I shall not lack anything.” When we combine this meaning with the first part of the verse, we find that David is saying, “The Lord leads, guides and nourishes me. Because of that, I have no lack.”

In this brief verse David gives us yet another reflection of the Lord’s character and nature. The literal Hebrew translation of the first part of this verse is ***Jehovah Rohi***. It means *“the Lord is my shepherd.”* David continues to develop this idea of the Lord as a shepherd throughout the rest of the psalm. In the next verse he writes, ***“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters”*** (Psalm 23:2).

As we read this verse, we often picture a flock of sheep moving about in a calm and peaceful pasture of green grass. Or we see them as they lie about napping peacefully on a lush green carpet of grass. Over their head, the sun is shining brightly. On the hillside we see leafy trees as they sway gently in the breeze, and down below there’s a pool of clear water.

The whole scene seems so pleasant, peaceful and carefree. Not a creature in sight has a care in the world. Why? Because sitting on the plush grass on the hillside, overlooking all that goes on below, is a shepherd. This shepherd is a picture of calm. He gazes out at his flock every-now-and-then, to make sure all is well. The shepherd does not hear a single cry or sigh from the peaceful fold in his care. Instead, he sees below him a satisfied flock of rested sheep, who are enjoying their peaceful surroundings.

But something is wrong with this picture—namely that life is nothing like this image of relaxing and peaceful existence. Could it be that this peaceful picture is not the image David intended to put forth in Psalm 23? With that in mind, I want to paint for you another picture of the sheepfold David describes here. Yes, sheep are lying about in green grass besides still waters. But according to Isaiah, this flock includes lambs that are frail, weak and unsteady. Some are barely able to walk. Others are in deep pain. A few pregnant. Still others have to nurse their restless young.

Isaiah writes, ***“He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young”*** (Isaiah 40:11).

Isaiah is speaking here of Christ, our ***Jehovah Rohi***. Our Lord Jesus is our shepherd. He came to tend not just healthy, strong sheep but also those who are sick, broken, diseased and weak.

God condemned Israel’s ministers because they did not fulfill this role for the sheep under their care. It was so important in the Lord’s eyes that He voiced His displeasure through every major prophet:

Ezekiel 34:4

Ezekiel 34:6

Jeremiah 50:6

Isaiah 53:6

Note the last verse. When Isaiah says we all have gone astray, he is talking about all of us—every person who belongs in the Lord’s sheepfold. Every sheep in the shepherd’s fold has gone astray. Yet each of us is still in the fold because our gracious, merciful and loving Shepherd has come after us and found us.

Just look around at yourself and all the sheep you know in the Church of Jesus Christ? What do you see? Are you all lying down in green pastures, drinking pure cool water? Are you all perfectly contented, healthy, happy, peaceful?

I don’t think so! You have in your midst baby believers who keep stumbling and falling. At times you wonder if they are ever going to be strong enough to walk straight. Others are forced to carry their young. Their offspring are not yet born again

and walking on their own. Many times, these sincere believers are reduced to tears because of their young one's straying. Others among us are sick and diseased. They have drunk polluted water from the well of some false teacher. Still others are hobbling around, wounded by life's hardships. Some have a crippled, bleeding leg that their shepherd had to pull out of a lion's mouth. Others were crippled by evil habits and desires.

All of these sick, broken sheep have been brought back to the fold by the Shepherd Himself. Some were so maimed, disabled, hurt and disoriented that Jesus had to put them on His shoulders and carry them all the way back to the flock. This is the role of our great Shepherd. Several passages of Scripture describe this wonderful trait of our Lord even more clearly:

Ezekiel 34:11-12

Ezekiel 34:14-15

In these verses we see an image repeated from Psalm 23.

Ezekiel 34:16, 22-23

Once again, God speaks clearly about setting up one true Shepherd to watch over His people. He is referring to Christ. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who promises to feed His flock.

The Hebrew phrase for *maketh* in Psalm 23: means, basically, to “induce” or “compel.” In other words, the Shepherd compels His sheep—that is, He makes them—to lie down. The literal meaning of this verse is, “He interrupts me to make me lie down.”

Many in the flock of Christ today are ready to lie down. These sheep are sick, diseased, weary, fainting—and they know it. They are stained with mud, wounded, bleeding and hurting. They are in such bad shape that the Shepherd Himself has to recover them. After He carries them back, He instructs them to lie down, and they obey happily.

When David writes, **“He restoreth my soul” (Psalm 23:3)**, he is speaking of healing and restoration. He is describing a flock bruised and battered sheep lying in a green valley. Whenever we are sick and hurting, bruised and wounded, our Shepherd Jesus carries us to a place where we can be healed. There, in the valley of His love, He

operates on us. He binds up the wounded, strengthens the weak, brings health to the sick and renews the frail.

Sometimes it is not easy for our Shepherd to make us “lie down.” Often our flesh resists. We do not want to submit totally to the Lord and be utterly dependent on His mercy and love. Instead, we tell ourselves that we have to tough it out, to sweat out our own failings and weaknesses. Rather than turning to Him by faith and resting in His power and grace, we limp off to some secluded place to lick our wounds and try to recover on our own.

As we lie there in our own dark place, we try to figure everything out. We wonder how we ever could have gotten so muddy and become so wounded. We ask ourselves how we ever got to this place to begin with. How was the enemy able to bruise me so badly? What got me into this awful mess? I’ve got to do something to pull myself out.

Everyone of us has had these kinds of thoughts. But the truth is that we will never figure it out. This is exactly what David wants to address in Psalm 23. He is describing a Shepherd who comes after us, dwells in our midst and causes us to lie down while we depend on Him for healing and cleansing.

Jehovah Rohi is not some passive/inactive shepherd. He is not a hireling—someone who just provides food and guidance. He does not just point us toward the grassy pasture and pools of water and say, “There’s what you need. Go and get it.” Nor does He turn a blind eye to our needs. He does not walk the other way when He hears our cries for help and sees us in trouble. No, He knows every pain we endure, every tear we shed and every hurt we feel. He knows when we are too weary to go another step. He knows just how much we can take. Most of all, He knows how to rescue us and bring us to a place of healing.

Our Shepherd will not allow us to steal away to some secret place where we try to nurse our own wounds. He knows we will bleed to death that way. He comes to take us back, holding us close to His bosom, carrying us through every dark place, leading us back to the green valley where His sheep lies. He tells us, “Lay aside all your fleshly dreams and schemes. Just lie down in My grace now. Do it in faith. This is a time for you to be restored.”

What would you do if you were a part of a flock where the sheep smiled all day long? Could you handle going to a church where nobody ever cried or experienced pain? What if you lived among people who were never sick, never in need, never

tempted, never depressed, never downcast or discouraged? If you were mixed in with that kind of flock, you would be a complete misfit, a black sheep. You would be miserable because your life is not like that at all.

You get downcast at times. You go through periods of discouragement. You have experienced times of great confusion. Yes, you do have God's peace, but you don't go around with a fake grin on your face. Why? Because you have been through the trials of life do not exactly make you pleased. You have been up on the mountaintops and down in the valleys. You have been through times of testing, trial and sorrow, and on many occasions, God has had to come after you. He has had to pick you up, bind up your wounds and give you a bath.

David asked, "*Thou art the God of my strength: why dost thou cast me off? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?*" (Psalm 43:2). This man could not help wondering why he faced such trouble from his enemies. Yet, David identifies what his trouble was: "This is an oppression of the enemy." Every time you set out to do something you believe will impact eternity, the devil is going to come in like a flood and attempt to overwhelm you.

Then, at other times, you experience physical and mental oppression for no apparent reason. This is what David was going through when he wrote this verse. He had been assaulted by something unexplainable, some oppression of soul that had no clear origin. He had no idea why it was happening. That is why he asked God why he felt so cast off. Something unexplainable had overcome him, and he had no idea what to do about it.

Maybe you have been through this. You woke up one day with a cloud of depression hovering over you. You had no idea where it came from or why it fell upon you. You examined your heart but you could not get to the bottom of what you were going through or why. I believe every true follower of Jesus faces this ordeal. We know David was a true man of God, yet he was unable to explain the sudden despair that flooded his soul.

But David had a caring, loving Shepherd. Each time David was battered and wounded, *Jehovah Rohi* went after him, picked him up and carried him to a quiet place of rest. Then the Lord made David to lie down so his soul could be restored. God had to keep doing this with David throughout his lifetime. God's sheep are no different today. Time after time our Shepherd comes after us, fetches us and takes us to a place of rest. He continually makes us lie down for a time of healing and restoration. Yet, somehow, we easily move away from the Lord's rest. We do not always hold

to the truths we learn about His grace and peace, and soon we find ourselves wandering and straying all over again. We fail to realize that the Lord's rest is like the food we eat daily to nourish our bodies: We have to accept that being shepherded by God is a process that He must take us through many times during the course of our Christian walk.

The Lord says in *Exodus 29:45*, ***"I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God."*** The Hebrew word for *dwell* is *shekinah*, meaning "to abide" or "to settle down beside." This word implies more than a passing presence. It implies a permanent one—a presence that never leaves. In other words, the *shekinah* glory of God is not a brief inscription that disappears from our hearts like invisible ink. It is something God inscribes permanently on our souls. It is His very near and eternal presence.

Our Shepherd offers to come to us in the midst of our pain and depressed condition, and to sit by our side. He promises to bind up our wounds and strengthen the parts of us that have become sick and diseased. That is the *shekinah* glory of God! The abiding, everlasting presence of the Lord.

Jehovah Rohi Knows His Sheep

Scripture tells us more about our one true Shepherd:

- Jesus states, ***"I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine"*** (John 10:14).
- Paul writes, ***"The Lord knows them that are His"*** (2 Timothy 2:19).
- Christ declares, ***"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand"*** (John 10:27-28).

Simply put, our great Shepherd knows who His sheep are. David was familiar with this aspect of the Lord's character because he had experienced it personally. Throughout the Psalms, we read:

- ***"For He knows our frame"*** (Psalm 103:14).
- ***"For He knows the secrets of the heart"*** (Psalm 44:21).
- ***"The LORD knows the thoughts of man"*** (Psalm 94:11).

David was saying, “The Lord knows what I’m really like, deep down.” David realized that God knew how his heart often strayed from the Shepherd’s divine love and rest, and yet God still loved him.

By his own admission David was a man whose iniquities piled up so high that they went over his head. As he shouldered the long list of his trespasses, David said it became a burden too heavy for him to carry (Psalm 38:4). This does not sound like healthy, strong and obedient sheep. David writes:

Psalm 38:5-10

This was the cry of a troubled man. As David acknowledged, “***My sins are not hid from thee***” (Psalm 69:5). But God’s knowledge was not limited to David’s evil thoughts, foolishness and evil tendencies. The Lord also knew that His servant had a tender, contrite heart. God knows all of our frailties, weaknesses, jealousies, doubts and failings. He sees our heart and He know that, like David, we will not hide our sins from Him. Instead, we will confess them to our Shepherd.

The Valley of the Shadow of Death

If you have not experienced the dark, confusing times David faced, keep on living. If you have never been to the same dry place where David found himself? If you have never thought that the reason everything was going wrong in your life was because God was mad at you? If not, you could very well be living in some kind of spiritual la-la land!

At times during my many years of walking with the Lord I have thought my faith was unshakable. I have been convinced I would always trust the Lord, no matter what. But then I would be hit with a time of deep testing, and soon the old doubts would begin to creep up on me.

Even Jesus experienced this dark night of the soul. For a brief moment at Gethsemane, and later on the cross, an awful thought crossed His mind: “Why, Father? What have I done? Why do I feel You have turned Your face from Me? How long will You hide?”

In Psalm 119, after writing 175 “spiritually correct” verses praising God’s Word and faithfulness, David makes a surprising admission. After praising God’s Word, David concludes Psalm 119 with this verse: “***I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant***” (verse 176). David is saying, “Please, Lord, seek me out, the way a shepherd searches for a lost sheep. In spite of all my biblical knowledge, preaching and

long history with You, somehow, I have strayed from Your love. I have lost the rest I once had in You. All my plans have failed, and now I realize that I am totally helpless. Come to me, Father. Seek me out in this awful, dark place. I cannot find You on my own. You must find me. I still believe Your word is true.”

David knew he had strayed from God’s rest. He knew the Lord’s love should have been inscribed on his heart during his previous times of trouble. But now, once again, he had forgotten about God’s love for him. So, he cried out to the Lord, begging Him to seek out His lost servant. The Shepherd came after David once again and, as David heard his name called, he was comforted. He realized, “My Shepherd knows me by name.” David found himself being led down the hill into the green valley.

When he reached the green pasture below, *Jehovah Rohi* spoke peace to his soul. Now David testifies once more: ***“I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me” (Psalm 13:5-6). “I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of His holy hill. I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about” (Psalm 3:4-6).***

It's important to note here that David’s circumstances had not changed. Matter of fact, Scripture says the enemies who troubled David had only increased (Psalm 3:1). But David had been restored to God’s love. Now, he could say, ***“Salvation belongs unto the LORD” (Psalm 3:8)***. He testified, “No more self-made plans. No more sleepless nights, trying to figure things out. I welcome His open arms toward me, and I am going to lie down in His rest. I am going to sleep peacefully in His unconditional love for me.”

Jehovah Rohi Is Your Shepherd, Too

David knew that *Jehovah Rohi* was his Shepherd—and the Lord is also Shepherd over every hurting, despairing sheep who has been wounded by the world. Our great Shepherd loves every sheep who has gone astray because of testing, trials, hurts and wounds. We should never accuse our Shepherd of abandoning us. He still walks beside us and watches over us at all times.

Maybe you are fighting a losing battle right now, against some kind of temptation. You may be battling a pornography addiction, homosexuality, alcoholism, adultery, materialism or an unruly tongue. Whatever your struggle is, you have determined not to run away from the Lord. I urge you: Do not give in to despair. Every true follower of Jesus eventually goes through what you are experiencing. It does not matter

what your temptation may be; we all face the reality of indwelling sin, and yet, we have a Shepherd who loves us and comes after us.

The worst thing you can do right now is stop turning to the Lord. Do not stop going to His house and having fellowship with other believers. Do not turn to the world's solutions. Jesus tells all of us, "Follow Me." If you will keep acknowledging Him and following Him up the hillside, He will eventually lead you down the other side, to the green valley of healing and restoration.

Keep yourself in a repentant, sin-resistant attitude. Believe that soon you will find yourself in the rest that God's love provides. Your Shepherd knows everything about you, including your darkest places—and He still loves you. He knows where the green pastures are and He is going to lead you to them. He will come after you and call you by name. When you answer, He will assure you that He is with you.

Maybe you are a devoted believer who has known and experienced the deeper things of God. You may be a veteran of intense spiritual warfare. You may have ministered to others mightily in the Lord. You may have received deep revelations of God that others have not. Yet, right now, you are going through a dark night of the soul that no one could ever imagine. Nobody can relate to the pain you face every day, the endless anguish you are enduring. Maybe this is by far the most terrible trial you have ever experienced.

Your testing may become even more unexplainable, but you need to know that no matter what you are going through the Holy Spirit wants to reveal to you ***Jehovah Rohi***—*the Lord, your Shepherd*. He wants to inscribe His love on your heart. Matter of fact, everything you are going through is meant to bring you into the confidence that He loves you.

Jesus assured us, "***I will never leave you nor forsake you,***" and our heavenly Father, ***Jehovah Rohi***, *the Lord our Shepherd*—has revealed Himself to us in Psalm 23. He tells us, "I know you by name, and I know what you are going through. Come, lie down in My grace and love. Don't try to figure out everything. Just accept My love for you and rest in my loving arms."

Our circumstance may not change, but we can trust our Shepherd to lead us into the green valley. It does not matter how hard our enemies press in on us. The Lord has proven His love to us time after time.

11/02/22 & 11/09/22

THE NAMES OF GOD

Immanuel
God with Us

Rev. Kenneth Brown
Felicitator

Lesson 10

As a believer you have most likely heard biblical teaching on the subject of spiritual warfare. Most such teaching centers on Paul's exhortation to the church in **Ephesians 6:12**: ***"We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."***

This spiritual warfare and all warfare began in Genesis 3. In the Garden of Eden, Satan had just finished tempting Eve. He deceived her into eating the fruit from the forbidden tree, and in that very hour God declared war on the devil. He told Satan in so many words: ***"Because thou hast done this. . . I will put enmity between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"*** (Genesis 3:14-15).

God was putting Satan on notice. As Scripture later showed, He was saying, "You have tempted to destroy My handiwork. I decree, therefore, that one day a Child will come forth, that from a woman to be My ruler, and this Child will be your enemy. You are going to injure His foot, and you will think you have defeated Him. But afterward, He will plant His foot on your head and crush it. He is going to destroy all your power and authority. He is going to defeat you completely, destroying your kingdom of darkness."

This news probably sent Satan into a panic. Satan is not all-knowing. He could not possibly know whom God was speaking of when He referred to this seed. The devil knew of Christ before he fell from heaven. Satan was Lucifer then, a part of the heavenly councils of God. So, he knew the only begotten Son of the Father. But once the devil was cast out of heaven, he was no longer privy to God's plans. He knew nothing of the incarnation that was to come.

Now, as the Lord declared war, Satan had no way of knowing exactly what was going to happen. He did not know who the coming Child would be, who His mother

would be or when she would deliver Him. Satan probably trembled when Eve gave birth to Cain, her firstborn. Eve, no doubt, believed Cain was the promised seed, because she announced, ***“I have gotten a man from the LORD” (Genesis 4:1).***

Satan must have felt the same panic every time a righteous man came on the scene. What did he think when Enoch appeared, someone who was said to walk with God? Enoch lived for 365 years, preaching righteousness all of his days. The devil must have lived in fear with every passing year of this godly man’s life wondering if Enoch was his destroyer. No doubt Satan was relieved when Enoch suddenly disappeared, taken up to heaven by the Lord Himself.

He was probably relieved when he saw Noah get drunk. In both cases Satan could breathe a sigh of relief. Then Abraham came on the scene. Abraham was the son of an idol worshiper, but something was obviously special about this man. When God instructed him to pull up stakes and travel to a far country, Abraham obeyed immediately. Later, when Abraham came to Bethel, he built an altar to the Lord. After that Satan probably kept close watch on Abraham’s movements, eyeballing his every step.

The devil might have gloated when Abraham’s wife, Sarah, was taken into Pharaoh’s harem. He probably did his best to see that Sarah was defiled in the harem but God protected her supernaturally. The devil might have been temporarily relieved when he heard Abraham telling half-truths to protect himself. Satan had to be relieved even more so when Abraham’s concubine gave birth to Ishmael. Ishmael’s name means “God will hear”—but he still was not the seed.

Satan saw Isaac and many other righteous men come and go over the years. Finally, Moses prophesied that a man would come in the last days who would be like himself. At that point Satan knew his destroyer’s arrival was marked for a date further into the future. As each of the prophets spoke of the coming Messiah, the devil took note of their words.

It Is Not Our Fight

Our spiritual warfare has never been about human life. It has always been a war between our heavenly Father and the devil. Ever since God declared war on Satan, prophesying that the holy seed was coming to destroy him, the devil has waged war to try to destroy that seed.

In Genesis 17 God promised to give Abraham a seed in his old age and to multiply that seed. God made a covenant with Abraham and his seed, saying, “I’m going to

give you a son, Abraham, and I'm going to make an everlasting covenant with your son. I promise that this son will be the father of many nations." God also said to Sarah, ***"I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee"*** (Genesis 17:7).

Isaac, Abraham's son, would not be the prophesied seed. But the seed—Satan's destroyer would come through Isaac's seed, from the seed of Abraham. We are aware that the devil knows the Scriptures. He twisted them as he quoted them to Jesus, tempting the Lord in the wilderness. No doubt the enemy knew from Old Testament prophecies that the Messiah would come to earth by way of a woman's womb. He knew that eventually this Messiah would rise up to save humankind and crush his power. But the question remained: Which woman would the Child come from, and where and when would He come?

The devil learned some more clues when he heard God's promises to David. As Nathan prophesied to David, the picture became clear:

2 Samuel 7:5, 11-14

Nathan was prophesying that God would send His own Son, Jesus, to set up His eternal Kingdom, and this Son would be the seed to Abraham, the lion of the tribe of Judah. According to Nathan's prophecy, the house that God's seed would establish would last forever.

After Nathan's prophesy, the devil probably figured he was getting closer to uncovering the identity of the seed. Since the chosen Child, God's Son, would reign as a lion out of Judah, Satan turned his focus to that region and tribe. He wanted to kill the seed, to drive it from the face of the earth before it could destroy him. He wanted to kill Judah's king and set up his own ruler so that he could inhabit a human pawn, ruling over the tribe to monitor its every movement.

The seventh chapter of Isaiah reveals one of Satan's attempts to implement his evil plot against Judah. In one swoop, the devil tried to invade Jerusalem, destroy Judah's king and set up his own man on the throne. This chapter describes a very real war, but it also reveals a powerful foreshadowing of the spiritual warfare we face today.

Satan prompted two evil kings to attack Judah. These two kings were named Rezin and Pekah, pagan men who ***"went up toward Jerusalem to war against it"*** (Isaiah 7:1). Rezin and Pekah determined to join forces to ***"go up against Judah, and vex***

it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal” (Isaiah 7:6).

Judah’s king at the time was Ahaz, an evil man. Satan was frightened of Ahaz just the same, because he was from David’s lineage. The devil decided that this man had to be killed; otherwise, his lineage would produce the destroying seed to come. So, Satan went on the attack. He was convinced that he could use Rezin and Pekah to march into Jerusalem, take Ahaz captive and put his own king on Judah’s throne.

We know that Jerusalem, God’s holy city, is a representation of the Church. It represents the Kingdom of God in our hearts where King Jesus sits on the throne, ruling and reigning in us. In this scene in Isaiah 7 we are seeing a picture of satanic attack on the enthroned Christ in our hearts. Under the devil’s direction, Rezin and Pekah mounted a massive attack against Judah. They overtook a nearby city called Elath. Then the two kings spread their armies out over the land, overflowing the nation’s cities. By the time of chapter 7, they had already taken a major portion of Judah.

At first glance it appears that God Himself directed the two pagan kings’ attack against Judah. Scripture says, ***“The LORD began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah” (2 Kings 15:37).*** This verse does not mean that God literally directed these evil men. It simply means that He did not stop Satan in his plans. Make no mistake, the Lord knew exactly what the devil had in mind. But He also knew that Satan’s scheme was going to be in vain.

Satan wanted to destroy not only Ahaz, but also the women and children of Judah. He wanted to wipe out even the slightest chance that the seed of Abraham might come to power. The man whom Satan intended to put on King David’s throne was called “the son of Tabeal.” In Hebrew, this name means “almighty idol, deity.”

After most of Judah had been taken, Rezin and Pekah met outside Jerusalem, regrouping in order to launch a massive strike against the city of God. Jerusalem’s leaders trembled when they learned that a large army was standing by to wage war against them. But God had already made an ironclad promise to His servant David: ***“The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne” (Psalm 132:11).***

The Lord was telling David, “There will always be one of your seed, one of your sons, on the throne.” It is clear to us today that God was speaking of the Kingdom to come through Jesus. Christ Himself, the seed of David, would occupy that throne.

But now the house of David was in total panic, God’s Spirit came upon Isaiah to bring forth a word to King Ahaz. The Lord told Isaiah, “Go to Ahaz at the upper gate. You will find him inspecting the city’s water supply. I want you to give him this message: ‘Ahaz, you see the armies coming upon you. They have a plan to set up their own king in the midst of Jerusalem. But you are not to panic. The Lord says: Their schemes will never come to pass.’”

Isaiah 7:4-7

Isaiah found Ahaz just where the Lord had told him. The king was inspecting the water channel outside Jerusalem’s walls to make sure nothing disturbed the city’s drinking supply when the enemy arrived. Here we see a picture of a man trusting totally in his flesh. Ahaz had already sent a delegation to Assyria’s king to try to hire his army to save Jerusalem.

Ahaz had paid a price, in silver and gold, to try to get a defense against the two kings. God had prophesied to Isaiah, “These two kings are like troublemakers. They may look fierce, red-hot and flaming, but I have taken the fire out of them. Now they are nothing but smoke. Their plan against you isn’t going to work, Ahaz. Just be quiet, be still and trust in Me.”

Isaiah told Ahaz that he had nothing to fear. But Isaiah also gave Ahaz a clear warning from the Lord; ***“If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established” (Isaiah 7:9)***. The prophet explained to the faithless king, “The house of David and his seed are going to be established by faith alone. You have to believe God will be true to His covenant oath.” Isaiah knew that throughout the whole war Ahaz had been trusting in the flesh. He was fully aware that the king had relied on his armies and on his own skill and wit in putting together a deal with Assyria.

Here we see two distant ways in which God’s people believe they will be delivered from Satan and his snares. First, there is the way Isaiah encouraged Ahaz: “Believe, and surely you will be established.” This is the way of faith, the way of trusting in the promises of God. But there is also the way Ahaz went at first—turning to the power of the flesh—the way of human ability.

Maybe Satan’s tactics have brought such intense spiritual warfare upon you that you have become ensnared by a sinful habit. No matter how hard you have prayed you have not been able to find victory. So, now you are sending your flesh out to do battle with the enemy. You are trying to force a change by relying on your own human strength. It will never work. Why? Because God is not interested in giving you

victory over a single sin. The Lord is after more in your life than just one bad habit. This is not just a one-time battle; God sees the ongoing spiritual warfare your enemy constantly brings against you. He wants to give you a victory that will establish you for the long term. He wants to be able to say more than, “I once had this sin in my life but now I’ve overcome it.” Instead, He wants you to be so totally established in your faith that absolutely nothing can destroy Christ’s rule in your heart. That way, when the enemy comes against you smoking like the fires from hell, you will not have to waver like a tree in the wind.

This is just what God wanted to do for King Ahaz and the nation of Judah. Even though Ahaz was a wicked king and the people were disobedient and half-asleep on their faith, God still protected them. The reason God kept pressing Ahaz was because He still loved him. Though this king was far from the Lord, God would not stop in trying to persuade him to turn aside from his ways of flesh and put his trust in God.

11/16/22

A Sign from Heaven

The Lord urged Ahaz, “***Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above***” (Isaiah 7:11). The Lord was extending an unbelievable invitation to Judah’s wicked king. He was saying to Ahaz, “Your faith is weak so, I want you to ask Me for a sign—any sign, miracle or wonder, from heaven down to hell. I want to do a wondrous work for you to birth true faith in your heart.”

You may be shocked that God would make such an offer to any human. Didn’t Jesus say only an evil generation seeks after a sign? Didn’t He say there was just one sign—Himself? Yes, Jesus did say that, and Christ was the very sign God wanted to show Ahaz. The Lord wanted to reveal His saving, delivering power through miraculous work of His own faithfulness. As we look closer, we see that this passage is all about Jesus.

But Ahaz refused to ask God for such a work. Why? He had already committed to trusting in his own wisdom, and he tried to disguise his fleshly decision as one of godliness. “***Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD***” (Isaiah 7:12). The wicked king was saying, “I refuse to tempt God. I would never ask Him for a supernatural sign. That wouldn’t be holy.” Ahaz had put on a robe of self-righteousness.

How did the Lord answer Ahaz? He told him, “***Therefore the LORD Himself shall give you a sign***” (Isaiah 7:14). God said, “So, you won’t ask for a sign? Well, I’m going to give you one anyway.” Here was the sign from the Lord: “***Behold, a virgin***

shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (verse 14). The name *Immanuel* means “*God with us.*”

It was obvious to both Isaiah and Ahaz that this prophecy had nothing to do with Judah’s present battle. The word God delivered here was about an event that would be fulfilled sometime in the future. Why would God give Ahaz a sign that had nothing to do with the war before him? What about this present war, our present danger? What possible good could this prophecy be to us right now?”

I believe God was assuring the sin-blinded king that if Jerusalem still existed in the future, then the battle before him now could not be the end of Judah. God was giving His people then—as well as His Church today—a very clear message: “Is your faith so weak that you cannot believe Me for this present battle? I am going to tell you something that will build up your faith for every battle, now and in the future. There is coming to earth an *Immanuel*, ‘*God with us.*’

I want you to know that Judah will still be standing in the future. If I have promised that your nation will still be here when *Immanuel* arrives years from now, then you do not need to worry about this present battle. You are safe, Ahaz. I am telling you: In the future *Immanuel* is going to sit on the throne you are sitting on now, ruling and reigning. This is the throne of David. And I am not going to allow anyone to harm it.”

“Therefore, Ahaz, the battle you see before you is not the real battle. It is just a minor scuffle. Satan will never prevail over Judah. He is not going to set up his throne in Jerusalem. I won’t allow it. So, I have already declared this war to be over before it has even begun.” And so, it was. God blew away those two approaching powers. His message through it all was simple: “If you will trust Me, you will never be in any danger. I am going to make sure the throne is established. Lean on Me, instead of on the strength of your flesh.”

A War to End All Wars

In the days of Isaiah, the final war was still a long way off, not to begin until the prophesied virgin gave birth to a son whose name was *Immanuel*. Matthew echoes Isaiah’s prophecy of *Immanuel*, the Child to come: “***Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God is with us***” (Matthew 1:23). This passage also names the child: “***She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins***” (verse 21). *Immanuel’s* name is Jesus, meaning in full, “*Jesus is God with us.*”

When that seed, the Christ, arrived, there was no mistaking the event. Satan could not possibly have missed the time, place or arrival of the promised Child, Jesus. There could be no question about it because it was announced from the very heavens. Angels proclaimed it from the skies: “*He has come!*” Wise men came from a distance to see Him. Shepherds gathered from the hills to worship Him—and He was named *Immanuel*.

At this point Satan knew his warfare was no longer just a skirmish. Now he knew exactly who the chosen Child was: Jesus. Yet God protected the Christ Child from the enemy. He hid him away in Egypt, where Satan did not know His whereabouts. I remind you; the devil is not omniscient (all-knowing). The only thing he knew was what was revealed in Scripture, that the promised Child would come out of Bethlehem.

After Christ arrived, Satan used Herod to slaughter every male baby in the area, hoping that the promised Child was among them. The devil then spent 33 years trying to kill Jesus. When the Lord was about to begin His public ministry. Satan tried to destroy Him by urging Him to jump from the roof of the Temple. Throughout His life, our Lord was faced continually with the enemy’s attempts to kill Him.

Finally, at the cross, the powers of hell thought of their hour of triumph had come. When Jesus died, all of hell must have had a celebration. Satan and his demonic powers were probably convinced, “He is dead now. We finally killed Him! That’s it, the end of the battle! So much for the seed. We’ve won!” But three days later, bless His name! Jesus rose from the grave; the seed was alive and well.

That must have been a surprise to Satan. Just as God foretold in the Garden of Eden, the devil had only succeeded in bruising Jesus’ heel. The poison had not worked after all, and now the seed had returned, His heel totally crushing Satan’s power. King Jesus was now on the throne. Christ, the seed of David, had defeated Satan once and for all, and today we look forward to the day when God will cast the enemy into a lake of fire for good, to be tormented forever.

How Does This Affect Us Today?

Christ is in glory, safely removed from all harm, yet we are still here on earth, engaged in spiritual warfare with the devil and his principalities and powers. What does it mean, exactly, that Jesus has defeated Satan and given us the victory?

When we talk about the devil being defeated, we are referring to his goal of destroying the seed. The enemy cannot touch Jesus now because Christ sits at the right hand

of the Father in glory, beyond Satan's reach. That battle is over, finished. The enemy can never reach his ultimate goal of destroying Christ, the seed. All the prophecies from throughout the centuries have been fulfilled, and Satan has lost the war. In this sense, Jesus has taken away all of the devil's power.

We are also the seed of God. Everyone who has crowned—accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior in his heart and mind is Christ's own body—still here on earth. When Jesus ascended to glory, Satan declared war on His earthly seed. So, the enemy is waging war once again; only now the battle is for the hearts of God's people. The devil's strategy has not changed. He is still attempting to march into the New Jerusalem—that is, into our hearts—to unseat Christ Himself as ruler over our lives.

The book of Revelation tells us that Satan sent a flood after the people of Judah (represented as a pregnant woman, because they gave birth to Jesus) in order to destroy them. We see the same thing happening all around us today. A flood of iniquity has been poured out on the earth in an effort to destroy the seed. Make no mistake: Hellish principalities are still waging war. The enemy we face today have but one goal and one desire: to kill the Church, Christ's beloved Bride. Their intent is this: "I am going to destroy Christ's Body here on earth, one by one. I am going to poison His heel and bruise it."

Nowhere to Hide

Have you crowned Jesus as Lord and King of your body, soul and spirit? Does Jesus sit on the throne of your heart? Does He rule your life as head, directing your every action and decision? If so, the gangs of hell have marked you as a target for warfare. As surely as Satan came against Judah, he will also come against you. He will throw at you all the weapons in his arsenal—temptations, trials, despair, discouragement. He will attack you for one reason: He wants to weaken your faith and trust in ***Immanuel***. His goal is to get you to drift away from the Lordship of Christ.

Right now, you may find yourself standing in satanic floodwaters up to your neck. Maybe you have been splashing frantically, doing your best just to keep from drowning, but afraid you soon may go under. That is exactly what happened to Judah in the book of Isaiah. Here is what the prophet cried out:

Isaiah 8:7-10

Isaiah's words apply just as well to the Church of Jesus Christ today. The prophet is telling us, "Let Satan and all his demonic forces make their plans. Let them hold

meetings and consultations. All their plots and schemes are going to fail. They can never overthrow Christ from the throne of His Church.”

Even as we consider hell’s war councils against us, we have to remember what Isaiah prophesied: ***“The enemy shall be broken and his weapons destroyed. The Lord will smash him into pieces. All of his counsel, plans and assignments will fail. Jesus Christ shall never be dethroned. If you will simply believe, you shall be established”*** (Isaiah 7:4-7).

These warriors walk into the council room with their heads hanging. They have been beaten, scarred, crushed, and they are licking their wounds. Their weapons have been taken from them, broken and destroyed. All their plots have been brought to nothing.

God’s desire is to have a people who will trust Him with all their trials, temptations and victories. He wants them to be totally established by their faith in Him. Even wicked Ahaz and the people of Judah were delivered and rescued from their war. Because they trusted in their own flesh, they were eventually disciplined. Yet, by grace alone, God faithfully preserved the Davidic throne of wicked Ahaz. He even preserved backslidden Judah because He had made a covenant with their fathers.

Will not the Lord also preserve the throne He has set up in the hearts of His righteous people? Will not He also keep His covenant oath with those who love and trust Him? We alone can cast Jesus from the throne of our hearts by willfully turning from Him.

We are to trust in ***Immanuel***, *“God with us.”* No matter what temptation, trial or fiery weapon from hell you may face, you can rest assured in His faithful hands. He has made an oath to His people. He will be faithful to keep it.

11/30/23

THE NAMES OF GOD

Forgiveness *The God Who Pardons*

By
Dr. James E. Potts

Lesson 11

How is the Lord different from all the other gods worshipped throughout the world? We do know that our God is above all others, set apart in every way, but one characteristic that distinguishes Him from every other god is this: He is *the God who pardons*.

Scripture reveals our Lord as the God who forgives, the only God who has the power to pardon sin:

Micah 7:18-19

Many other witnesses confirmed this. Look at the words of Nehemiah, Moses and David.

Nehemiah declared, ***“Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not”*** (Nehemiah 9:17). The people Nehemiah was referring to were the disobedient Israelites. The Lord did not forsake His people even when they rebelled against His Word.

On Mount Sinai, Moses asked the Lord for a revelation of His glory. He was not allowed to see God’s face, but the Lord did reveal Himself to Moses through a proclamation of His name. Scripture says, ***“The LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD”*** (Exodus 34:5).

The name God reveal to Moses was this: ***“The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgressions and sin”*** (verses 6-7). Here was the name that God wanted His children to know Him by. The Lord was saying, *“If you want to know who I am, and what I am all about, this is it. Here is My glory—that I forgive all sin, iniquity and transgression. You ask for a revelation of My nature? Here is how I want you to know Me.”*

David gave us the same Hebrew description of God. He wrote, ***“For thou, LORD, art good, and ready to forgive; plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee” (Psalm 86:5)***. David called God good, ready to forgive and overflowing with mercy. He wrote these words out of his own difficult personal experience. After sinning against the Lord, David sank into a deep depression. He was gripped with fear because of his iniquity. He spent many days when he actually gave up all hope of living. In the Psalms he described the experience as being ***“in the depths.”*** Finally, out of despair, David cried to the Lord: ***“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. . . If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O LORD, who shall stand? (Psalm 130:1, 3)***.

Throughout the testimony of these men—Nehemiah, Moses and David—we see three confirming revelations of the forgiving nature of our God. Nehemiah proclaimed the Lord’s forgiveness through a prophetic revelation. Moses described it through a revelation given by the Lord Himself. David wrote of God. David wrote of God’s mercy and forgiveness through his own personal experience with it.

The Comfort of God’s Pardon

Looking at David, he was like many Christians today. He was a faithful, devoted believer. He served the Lord gladly. But at one point he fell into grievous sin. Afterward he had a sense that God was marking down his iniquities. To *mark iniquities* means to hold or reserve our failures so that eventually we have to face God’s wrath and punishment for them. David could not escape the nagging feeling that the Lord was keeping a close record of each one of his transgressions.

David knew that he would never survive such judgment. Basically, he said, “God, if You are going to judge me by the law, I don’t stand a chance. I have failed on every point of it. If You are keeping a record of my failures—stockpiling them so, I have to face them at the judgment—I will never make it. I have no hope. I’m already condemned. If You mark our iniquities, Lord, who can stand? Who can be saved, since we all have sinned? All of us are condemned.”

Suddenly, the Holy Spirit brought David out of the depths of his despair. How did He do this? He gave David a revelation of who God is. David declared, ***“But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared” (Psalm 130:4)***. Where had David’s despair come from? It came from the thought that God was mad at him. He was convinced that the Lord was against him because he had failed, sinned and committed grievous acts. But the revelation God gave David was, ***“You will find forgiveness with Me, so that I may be feared.”***

What does this last phrase, *that thou mayest be feared* (verse 4), mean? Simply this: The fear of God does not come from thinking that there are swords hanging over our heads waiting to crush us when we stumble or fall. True fear of God comes from knowing that we can serve Him in peace because our sins have been blotted out. It is to worship Him for His loving kindness and readiness to forgive.

David was saying, “Lord, I was ready to faint because of my sins. I was on the brink of giving up, but You revealed Your forgiving love to me. Before, I thought You were marking my sins. Now, all I can see is You forgiving my sins and blotting them out. Finally, I can go back to worshiping You. I can serve You again. I can obey You with honor and godly fear.”

Discovering the Lord as a God who forgives is the only way out of the despair that is brought on by guilt and condemnation. Here is the key to obtaining relief: We are to believe with all our beings that our Lord is a God who forgives our sins. This is the only power that can quiet a guilty, accusing conscience.

Most Christians are persuaded that they know all about God’s forgiveness, yet too few believers live in the power and enjoyment of this amazing gift. They may know about forgiveness doctrinally and be able to quote all the major passages concerning it, but they do not enjoy God’s forgiveness as an ongoing, daily part of their Christian walk. Why?

In spite of all we have been taught about God’s mercy—about the victory of the cross, being ransomed by Christ’s blood and being freely accepted by grace alone—most of us still live with uncertainty. Many believers have a nagging sense of God’s displeasure. Their consciences are in constant uproar. They are able to teach about God’s grace, preach about God grace and sing about God’s grace, but they never fully enjoy it. What they see in the Bible about the Lord’s forgiveness simply is not realized in their hearts.

Such believers have not entered into what Paul calls the *“blessedness”* of knowing that your sins are not imputed/charged against you (**Galatians 4:15**). This blessedness comes as a peace that settles our souls because we know that we have nothing to fear on Judgment Day. No matter how we may feel, or what lies the devil may throw at us, we are confident that there is nothing in God’s books against us.

When the enemy comes at you with lies, filling you with fear and driving you to despair, what do you do? How are you able to combat/fight him? The only way to deal with guilt and condemnation is to be armed with true biblical understanding of for-

giveness. This kind of understanding is especially needed in these last days as Satan's temptations become even heavier. This generation is going to experience attacks from hell that are more powerful than at any other time in history. These temptations will only get worse, but God's grace and forgiveness is more than equal.

Why do many believers never enjoy the peace and rest found in forgiveness? Why have they never laid hold of that "blessedness" Paul refers to? Why do they continue to strive, always filled with fear and condemnation? Why can they never seem to escape their depression and despair?

It because their consciences are thundering/rumbling inside them. Every time they sin, they come under a cloud of fear that rumbles the law at them. Whenever we fail God's law, our consciences pronounce wrath and anger upon our souls. That is their purpose. If you have seared your conscience, it will excuse you, but the conscience of a spiritual person will do what God Himself designed it to do.

The conscience has two mandates/orders from God: to condemn both sin and the sinner. First, the Lord has entrusted the conscience to condemn sin. The conscience is faithful to expose to us the deceitfulness of sin. It shows us how awful sin is, and it shows us that God cannot stand sin—any sin. It sees what the mirror of the law shows.

Second, God has entrusted the conscience to condemn the one who sins. If you have sinned—disobeyed God's law and broken His commandments—your conscience brings condemnation on you. It informs you that there will be a time when you must give an account.

This is why we feel condemned when we sin: Our consciences condemn us on every point where we break God's law. The conscience knows nothing of forgiveness. It has not been instructed to do that work in our lives. If you ask your conscience to tell you about forgiveness, it would answer, "That's not my job. God has instructed me to expose to you the wickedness of your sin and to condemn you for committing it.

That's all. My job is to come when you sin and disturb your peace. I am supposed to tell you that what you have done is serious and will ruin you. I am to remind you constantly that God hates sin and that He is going to judge it. My job is to show you that you won't get away with your sin. God sees everything that you do in secret, and He will make you give an account for it."

The conscience will not move to the left or right on any point of the law. It tells us the truth about God's commandments: "Do this and live. If you fail, you will die." The conscience is like a soldier. It has a post, with strict orders to man that post, and it will not swerve from its duty. If we are honest, we all recognize the work of our conscience in our lives.

My conscience is only doing what it has been assigned by God to do. It is condemning me for my iniquity, putting guilt on me for having committed the sin. It is whipping up condemnation in me because I am guilty of disobeying God's Word and breaking His law. All of this is meant to produce in me a knowledge of my need for pardon and restoration. Even the God mandated animal sacrifices in the Old Testament could not quiet the conscience. God's people were never delivered from the "conscience of sins" (Hebrew 10:2). The conscience still had dominion to condemn both sin and the sinner.

Under the New Covenant the blood of Christ did what no other blood sacrifice could do. At the cross, with the very first drop of Jesus' blood, the fountain of God's forgiveness opened. Out of Calvary came the cleansing, sanctifying blood that every follower of Christ has trusted in for two thousand years. At the cross Jesus' blood stripped the conscience of its rights and duties to condemn me as a sinner. So, now, because of God's forgiveness, my conscience no longer has that mandate in my life.

Your conscience has greater authority than ever to reveal to you your sin's wickedness. The difference is that, while your conscience can remind you of your sin, it can no longer condemn you. You are now under the blood of Jesus Christ. Your conscience can no longer make you tremble. It cannot put any condemnation on you.

The conscience does not want to let go. It will try to keep condemning you, but Christ's blood has all power to quiet it. His cleansing blood tells the conscience, "I'm what you have been waiting for. You are hearing from your captain now, so stop condemning. The war is over on this particular battlefield."

When the devil reminds you of a past sin you may still feel condemned about it. When this happens, you have to turn to your conscience and say, "Be quiet. I am under the blood for that sin. I repented of it and it cannot be brought up to me again. If I ever commit that sin again, I want you to show me just how ugly it is—but you can no longer condemn me for it. God's Word says there is no condemnation toward anyone who is in Christ Jesus and who walks after the Spirit. I am forgiven by the blood of my Savior. I have trusted in His name—in the God who pardons. I realize

that you, my conscience, are constantly aware of sin's power, but I am now free from your power to condemn me." 12/07/22

There Is No Forgiveness Without Repentance

People who are unrepentant have never experienced a genuine soul shaking by God's living Word. Nor have they listened to the voice of their consciences. They are not allowed to point out their sins. Instead, they try to get forgiveness without ever facing their sins. They never see how vile and wicked their sins are. As a result, they end up thinking of God as being like themselves. He is like a wobbling old man who overlooks the sins of those who just do their best.

You can see the error of these people's ways revealed in their lives. They have no desire to do battle with their sins. They are never moved to give up their sins, and they have no desire or hunger to become like Jesus. They do not want to do any soul searching. They do not want to be troubled by their sins or deeply convicted over them. All they want is immunity from hell, so, they have choked off the convicting work of the Holy Spirit who works in tandem with the conscience.

The Bible states that such people convince themselves, "I have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my own heart." Scripture also describes them as "***turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness***" (Jude 4).

Show me a believer who is not deeply convicted by his sins, and I will show you someone who knows nothing about true biblical forgiveness. You never find this person digging deeply into God's Word. He is never drawn toward the closet of prayer. Instead, he is cozy with the world and he does not show any kind of deep desire for Jesus.

How God's Forgiving Name Was Revealed

All of the blood sacrifices in the Old Testament were meant to teach God's people about the Lord's forgiving nature. Each of these sacrifices had to do with *propitiation* and *atonement*—which both mean "forgiveness." No animal sacrifice could take away a person's sin and offer total pardon, but these sacrifices did foreshadow a future redemption.

Every offering pointed to the Lamb of God who would come as a sacrifice to take away the sins of the world. At God's appointed time His own Son, Jesus, gave His life as an offering. Afterward the people of God stood under Christ as their banner of forgiveness.

Leviticus 16 shows us one of the most solemn of all the sacrifices in Israel: the sin offering. God had instituted this event with the intent to explain to His people something of His nature and character. The entire ceremony was about His readiness and willingness to forgive.

For this occasion, God called together all the tribes of Israel to gather before the tabernacle. Then two goats were brought out in front of the gathering. These animals were presented to the Lord at the door of the congregation as an offering for sin. One of the goats was to be sacrificed on the altar and the other was to serve as the scapegoat that would carry away the people's sins.

As the first goat was led to the outer court to be sacrificed, the second goat was held outside by an able-bodied man. After sacrificing the first goat, the high priest approached the second goat and laid his hands on it. Scripture describes the scene this way:

Leviticus 16:20-22

Picture this. All of Israel stood watching as the high priest placed his hands on the goat's head and began confessing the people's sins. When the priest finished praying, the man who held the goat then led the animal away toward the outside of the camp. At this point God's people are standing on both sides, making a way for the goat to come through. They watch solemnly/seriously as the animal is led out of their midst.

Finally, it crossed the boundary of the camp. Then the man leads it over a hill and into the distance, far beyond the people's sight. It is being taken into a deserted land, to a deep canyon with no way out for the goat. That way the animal will never come back and haunt God's people by causing them to remember their sins. (This illustrates the word that Micah spoke to God's people: ***"Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea"*** (Micah 7:19). Can you imagine what happened next? The people must have shouted as the goat disappears over the hill: "There go our sins! There go our sins!")

What joy there must have been among God's people on that day! Understand now, the Lord Himself instituted this ceremony. His people were bound by His commandment to observe it. So, for the next four thousand years the Lord spoke a clear message through these sacrifices: *"I am the God who forgives all sin."* He was declaring to the whole world, as well to His people: *"I am forgiveness, and when I forgive you I remove your sins from My sight forever."*

Notice now, the two goats in this ceremony represent our Lord Jesus. He came both as the perfect sacrifice and as our scapegoat—offering His life in exchange for ours and taking away all our sins. The Bible tells us that God laid on His own Son’s head the guilt of all our sins: ***“The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).***

Do you doubt God’s forgiveness? If so, you need to have your own solemn assembly. When the enemy comes at you with condemnation and guilt over some past sin, go to your secret closet of prayer. Then place yourself in the awesome scene that took place in Israel.

Imagine, if you will, yourself standing in the crowd, watching the two goats at the door of God’s house. You see one goat being led inside to be sacrificed. Then you see the high priest laying his hands on the head of the other goat. You listen as the priest confesses your sins over the scapegoat.

Picture the man leading the goat away. Watch as they cross beyond the camp and slowly disappear. Then, as they fade from your sight, shout, “There go my sins! There go my sins!” Let the truth sink in: “My sins are gone forever. They can never be used against me again, and they can never come back to haunt me. The Lord has removed them from my life forever.”

The Lamb of God has taken all of your sins upon Himself and His sacrifice for you is good once and for all:

Hebrews 9:12-14

Proof of This Forgiveness is His Name

Think about it: What kind of God would our Lord be if He commanded a sinful people to humble themselves and repent, but then left them waiting at the altar? If the Lord called us to repent when there was no way out for us—no deliverance from our guilt and shame—He would not be a just, loving God. The very repentance to which He calls us implies forgiveness. Wherever there is repentance, forgiveness has to be found. His call for us to repent is proof, therefore, that He forgives. Otherwise, the Gospel would be a lie. We must believe that God forgives us when we repent. Matter of fact, no repentance is acceptable to Him unless it is accompanied by faith in His forgiveness.

Many believers have confessed their sins without ever receiving an understanding of forgiveness. They have been convicted of their sins, they have confessed them,

wept over them. They have asked God to deliver them from their sins, and in some cases, they have even made restitution for them. But they have never received a sense of God's pardon for their iniquities. They go through the motions of life, but they have already given up hope. They may repent with tears; they may be truly sorry for their sins, naming and confessing every transgression/wrongdoing, even making restitution as far as is humanly possible. But if they have not trusted in God's forgiveness, all their acts of repentance are in vain.

You may think that you cannot be forgiven because of the awfulness of your sin. Perhaps you are convinced that your trespasses have been too deep and numerous for God to pardon. Let me remind you that God's call for us to repent is proof that He forgives. He cannot deceive. God does not give up even on the worst of sinners. His Word says that He is not willing for anyone to perish—not one person. He calls you to repentance. He wants you to know Him by His name—*the God who pardons*—because He wants to heal you and set you free.

Also, God's pardon has a supernatural effect. When you come to Him in true repentance, believing He will forgive you, He will fill your heart with love for Him and a hatred for sin. You will never want to go back to your habit again. At times you may be tempted by it, but God's forgiveness will build strength into you day by day.

Would He Deprive His Own Children?

The Lord has revealed Himself to the ungodly as a God who pardons. Why would He deny that revelation to His own children? We must realize that God offers us terms of reconciliation that He did not even offer to fallen angels. Those creatures had been holy, pure, obedient worshipers of God, but when they fell into sin, they were not offered any way of escape. ***“God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (2 Peter 2:4).***

To all who know the Lord, He offers more than terms of reconciliation; He seeks to give us full forgiveness and peace. The same Lord against whom we have sinned—whose commandments we have broken, whose name we have dishonored, whose love we have trampled—comes to us in mercy urging us to be reconciled.

Forgiveness Is on God's Terms

We may know and accept God's terms of reconciliation, but our flesh can still want to make payment for our sins, somehow, to try to pacify God's anger. “How should I come before the Lord to be reconciled? Should I bow before Him? Should I offer

Him sacrifices of some kind? Can I pay for my sin with great self-denial? What can I do to make God happy with me?”

We see this attitude in Naaman, a captain in the Syrian army. Naaman had contacted leprosy. When this good man ran out of medical hope, God told him that he could still be healed. The Lord’s only term, His one condition, was this: **“Go and wash in Jordan . . .and thou shalt be clean” (2 Kings 5:10)**. These were not terms Naaman wanted to hear. Scripture says that he became angry **“and went away in a rage” (v. 12)**. Naaman was saying, “I don’t like God’s terms. How could this be so simple? I have been deceived somehow. I want my own terms.”

But Naaman’s servants challenged him, saying, **“If God had told you to do some great thing, you would have done it in a heartbeat. You wouldn’t hesitate to do something big, something sacrificial, something powerful in your own strength. Now God tells you to do one simple thing to receive your healing, and you refuse?” (Verse 13)**.

Many believers are like Naaman. They have set their own terms for healing and cleansing. They do not want to come to the Lord on His simple, uncomplicated terms. They will not accept that they are simply to repent, return to the Lord and believe Him for forgiveness.

Like Naaman, we are convinced that God needs some great thing from us before we can be cleansed and forgiven. We tell ourselves that we need to offer days of fasting, giving to the poor and reading the Bible all the way through. We think we can compensate for our failures, but God has set the only acceptable terms and those terms are simple and uncomplicated.

By repenting, we return to God’s rest, but first we have to believe in His forgiveness. Why do we not throw ourselves immediately on His mercy, lay hold of the New Covenant and trust in His promise of Holy Ghost power to overcome sin’s dominion? It is because we do not truly trust in His name—***the God who pardons***.

The God who forgives will never forsake you. If you return to Him, He will reveal Himself to you. Jesus told us that He came **“in My Father’s name” (John 5:43)**. We know the Father’s name as forgiveness—***the God who pardons***. His pardon in your life depends on your belief in His name—***the God who forgives***.

12/14/22

THE NAMES OF GOD

By

Dr. James E. Potts

Introduction

Many books have been written about the names of God. Most of these are scholarly works, exploring the deepest theological meanings behind each of God's names. They are in-depth, covering the 23 compound names of God in Scripture, as well as the more than forty compound names of Jehovah.

In this study we will not be covering every name of God. Nor will we study every theological distinction of the names we cover. The purpose of this study has to do with obtaining a heart-knowledge of God's names. The idea is to have a personal revelation of His names for our daily walk with Him.

Each of God's names reveals a defining quality of His nature and character. As you search the Scriptures, you discover that God revealed these names to His people only as they needed them—in their moments of deepest crisis. This is how I want to learn my Lord's nature also: to understand His heart toward us in our most desperate times. So, I have chosen to explore the names of God that relate to my own times of testing and crisis.

Simply put, this study of the names of God is for weary or hurting believers who need assurance and hope in their times of trial. I believe, that includes every devoted servant of Jesus Christ! The Scripture makes it clear that, because of our commitment to the Lord, we are going to be put through the fire of testing. That is the very reason God revealed His names to His people in the first place: to bring them encouragement, hope and life.

Why is it important for us to know these names of God? Here are just two reasons the Bible gives us. ***First***, various psalms tell us that we receive God's deliverance through knowing His name. ***“Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth”*** (Psalm 124:8). ***“I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the LORD. . . I was brought low, and He helped me”*** (Psalm 116:3-4, 6).

Second, Isaiah writes that God keeps us close when we trust in His name. ***“Who is among you that fear the LORD, that obey the voice of his servant, that walks in darkness, and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God” (Isaiah 50:10).***

In reality, God refers to Himself by only one name. In the Bible, He calls Himself the great I AM. ***“God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exodus 3:14).***

What does the Lord mean by saying His name is I AM? He is telling us that He is the everlasting One—the true God, with no beginning and no end. He always was, He is right now and He always will be. As He explained to Moses, ***“I AM whatever you need, at any point in your life. That is My nature—to be for you whatever you need at any given time. My name is I AM—and I want My people to remember it.”***

Although “I AM” is the only name God gave for Himself, the ancient Hebrews also referred to Him by several other names in order to help describe His nature and character. These names are expressions of who our Lord is and what He is like.

It is important to note that we can know someone’s name without having any clear idea of who that person is or what he is like. This is true with God also. We can memorize all of the Lord’s various names, and yet still have only the vaguest idea of who He truly is. I believe this is why He revealed His names to the Israelites during their trials and crises. He wanted them to learn every facet of His loving nature toward them, and He used difficult situations as the best way to impress truth on their hearts.

Is this not how our children get to know us? If someone were to ask my sons, “Who is your father and what is he like?”, I would be somewhat sad if all either could give were the basics: “His name is James Potts. He lives in Douglasville and pastors a church in Villa Rica. When growing up, he put a roof over my head and always put food on the table. He took care of me well.”

This says nothing about my relationship with them. Even if they were to add, “He’s also a good father,” it would not capture what I hope I am in my relationship to them. I hope that I have been a good father to them over the years—rejoicing over them in love, being patient with their ups and downs, available to them at all times, offering counsel and meeting their needs. Like any loving father, I want my relationship with my sons to go beyond fulfilling my duties. Matter of fact, I want them to know me mostly by my caring heart toward them.

At times we are asked by nonbelievers, “You say you know God. Tell me, who is He and what’s He like?” All some believers can answer is, “He’s the great I AM. He rules over heaven an earth and He sits on His throne in glory.” They have nothing to say about our heavenly Father’s loving relationship with us.

When my sons were growing up, I never had to lecture them about what I am like. I never had to say, “I’m your father—I’m patient, kind, full of mercy and loving kindness toward you. I’m tenderhearted over you, ready to forgive you at all times.” They would have laughed at me if I stood up at the dinner table and made such a proclamation like that. Why?

Because my sons learned about my love for them during their crisis experiences. They saw my love toward them when they were embarrassed, hurt by life or in need of forgiveness. Now, as they are grown, they are getting to know me through a whole new set of experiences. They are learning even more about me by my attitudes and actions toward them in this new time of need in their lives.

So, it is with us in getting to know our heavenly Father. From the time of Adam down through the cross of Christ, the Lord gave His people ever-increasing revelations of His character. He did not do this simply by proclaiming who He is. He did not try to reveal Himself by announcing to Abraham or Moses: “The following names describe My nature: *El Elyon (Ely-OWN)*, *El Shaddai*, *Jehovah Jireh*, *Jehovah Rophi*, *Jehovah Makkeh*, *Jehovah Nissi*, *Jehovah Tsebaioth (Se-baw-OT)*, *Jehovah Shalom*, *Jehovah Tsidkenu (Sid-KAY-noo)*, *Jehovah Shammah (SHAW-mah)*, *etc.* Now go and learn these, and you will discover who I am.”

These Hebrew expressions do describe the wondrous glories and provisions that are wrapped up in our Lord’s character, but God revealed these aspects of His nature by actually doing for His people what He proclaimed Himself to be. Time and again He saw His children’s need, foresaw the enemy’s strategy against them and intervened supernaturally on their behalf.

As we go forward in this study of the names of God, I urge you to get to know your heavenly Father slowly and purposefully, on a heart-to-heart level. You do not need to memorize all of these holy names in their Hebrew forms. For example, you may not even remember God’s name *Jehovah Tsabaioth (Se-baw-OT)*—just remember that He is the Lord of Hosts. Get to know the English meanings of His names and remember them.

In this study of the names of God, ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of the many ways God has been there for you during your times of need. Ask the Spirit to build in you a true heart-knowledge of I AM—the God who is everything you need.

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