

Why do Bad Things Happen?

(Even to good people).

Ed Horak

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First Thoughts

Let's begin by asking some questions. Is there someone you know to be a good person, who had something bad happen to them or their family? Maybe there was an accident, an illness, a near drowning. Why should an eleven year old girl die in the ICU, and next to her a seventy-two year old man come through an emergency heart bypass operation and live on a few more years? Or why should an innocent bystander get taken out in drunken driving accident? Unexplained personal and public tragedies, like 9/11, can undermine faith at best, and cause bitterness towards God at worst. This book will give positive answers as to why bad things happen, even to good people.

Who is 'good'?

When we ask why bad things happen to 'good' people, realize that what you and I might define as good or bad, might not coincide exactly with what God says is good or bad. For starters only God is perfectly good. Jesus said so in Luke 18:19. The rest of us fall short of His perfect standard in some way or another. When we say so and so is a good person, how come such a terrible thing happened to them we imply their level of goodness automatically earns them complete coverage. If only it was so simple.

If only God is truly good, that makes all of us flawed in some way if we are prepared to admit it. That's why we all need Jesus to save us and begin protecting us from ourselves, the devil and other flawed people, the major players in the drama of life. This is so important if we are not to blame God unfairly for what He is not responsible for.

Struggles in life are best understood by considering the interplay between God, the devil, and us. All have their own nature and way of doing things. Leave one party out of the picture, and you have an incomplete understanding of why bad things happen to good people.

Remember that being 'religious' does not necessarily make you a good person. It was 'religious' people who liked to think of themselves as good people that harassed Jesus. The Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees had good standing in the community, but were nevertheless hypocrites – saying one thing and doing another. Their own 'goodness' as it appeared to man, was no guarantee of complete protection from God who knows and sees all things as they really are.

Maybe you have heard someone say, "Brother or sister so and so was such a good person, I just don't understand why that bad thing happened to them." They may have appeared so righteous on the outside from man's standpoint, but not necessarily from God's. God makes His position on all matters clear in His Word. If we do not know or understand why bad things happen from the scripture, chances are that the devil will exploit the situation to his advantage. He will take any opportunity to question God's love, goodness and integrity.

So take some time to go through the following chapters and ask God to throw some light on why bad things happen even to 'good' people. Your relationship with God may depend on it.

Who's really in control?

When something bad happens, whether it is a personal family tragedy like a car accident or someone being diagnosed with cancer, or a national tragedy like the World Trade Center airplane crashes, people often ask questions about God's integrity. "How come an all loving, all powerful God would allow such a thing to happen?" they ask. Or maybe: "If God is sovereign, how come things like this happen?" In this chapter we look at who is really in control and what part we actually play in life's drama.

Every year hundreds of thousands of people are killed as a consequence of drunken and irresponsible driving. Also, it is estimated that millions of babies worldwide are killed through abortion each year. Who is responsible for all these tragedies?

Think of it this way. When someone dies or is injured in a drunken driving incident, does the head of that nation's Department of Transportation get blamed for the irresponsibility of the drunken law breaker? Of course not! Why then should the loving God in heaven get the blame for irresponsible people breaking His commandments? It is only because of His common grace to everyone, that more people do not get killed and maimed each day.

The big and small picture...

... what Jesus' temptations tell us.

In church circles it is popular to say when something is going wrong, that 'God is in control'. This is both true and untrue depending on the scale of things. What do I mean by 'scale of things'? Overall, God is in control. When you read the beginning and end of the Bible you see God creating everything, and it was good. At the end of the Bible, He wraps things up and it is all restored to being totally good again. This is the big picture. Yet, between the beginning and the end at a smaller scale, our scale, things go wrong all the time. We mess up, and the Bible is full of stories of God rescuing us from ourselves! The problem of sin is still being worked out in our time.

Let's take it a bit further. Remember there is another player here. Satan. Let's look at the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry.

*Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." **Luke 4:1-7***

Satan gets to the core of the control issue up to that point. He offers Jesus the kingdoms of this world if Jesus would only bow down and worship him. Could it be that he, satan was actually in control at that point and his offer a legitimate one? I think so. Jesus is undergoing a genuine temptation. He had been sent to earth to buy back or redeem mankind through His life death and resurrection, God's chosen path of submission. Yet here satan is trying to deceive Jesus into bowing His knee to him, something he had craved for so long. He was the anointed cherub seeking to exalt his throne above that of God's. Worship is the key ingredient in submission. He was using his classic 'bait and switch' tactic. Bait Jesus with what He wanted: the kingdoms of the world, but switch things when He fell to the temptation. Thank God Jesus did not fall for it and resisted him with the written word! He went on to regain all authority on earth, under the earth and in heaven, restoring order in the spiritual realm with satan on the outside looking in, stripped of his authority defeated at his own game.

Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

Colossians 2:15

Life is all about authority in four realms: heaven, the heavenlies and on earth....and under the earth. Jesus' obedience protected Him so that He could fulfill His purpose to restore creation back to God's perfect plan. God had given it to Adam in the garden, but he messed up, allowing satan to gain illegal control and use disobedient men to further his diabolical schemes. God had to establish His covenants with obedient men to restore and build His everlasting kingdom whilst satan worked with disobedient men to set up his opposing and counterfeit kingdoms, which he offered to Jesus at the wilderness temptation.

Sure the earth belongs to God. But the earth He gave to man!

*The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's;
But the earth He has given to the children of men.*

Psalms 115:16

The Dominion Mandate.

Man was to be the overseer of the earth under God in the Genesis dominion mandate.

*Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." **Genesis 1:26***

When Adam sold out his authority to satan at the fall, he set in motion all the sin and suffering that followed. Before the fall all was good. No sickness, no suffering, murder, and no strife. The record shows that things began to unravel only after Adam sinned. The source of all suffering is sin, and satan is behind all sin, not God! God is not to blame. Only God is perfectly good, and He was needed to restore goodness to that earth in Jesus. That restoration process has been in motion throughout the ages, and is still playing out today.

All authority was restored to Jesus through His obedience and sacrifice at the cross. Matthew records Jesus' declaration of authority this way:

*"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. **Matthew 28:18-20***

Authority is Delegated Back to Man.

He was in effect delegating His newly purchased authority to His disciples. They were to go in His name and enforce satan's defeat. This enforcement still takes place in our day where it is our responsibility to exercise authority over satan in all his ways. We are to use the name of Jesus to oppose sin sickness and poverty in all its forms. If we don't, who will? Only where the gospel is preached, taught, accepted and lived do people enjoy the benefits of Jesus work on the cross. God's protection, provision, forgiveness, health and peace is not automatically falling on people all around the world. It has to be received by faith.

God is building His kingdom. Our part is to pray that His kingdom comes into our sphere of influence. Jesus taught us this in what is commonly known as the Lord's prayer recorded in Matthew's Gospel Chapter Six. Our prayer must be followed by obedience to stop the illegal insurgencies of satan and his demonic cohorts. Although defeated, mopping operations are still needed. So the war continues at an individual level. We have to submit to God and resist satan. If we will not do it, not even will God override our will and do it.

*Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. **James 4:7***

Notice that the devil will flee from us! Submission to God empowers us! Some folk expect God to do what they are supposed to do. The Bible teaches that we are to exercise authority over satan whose mission as the thief is to steal, kill and destroy. He has to be resisted, otherwise he will have free course to do his dirty work and God will get the blame. Satan will take advantage of people who don't know God's nature and or way of doing things.

We live by faith 'within' the boundaries of God's sovereignty. Jesus will come back at His return and every tear will be wiped away and all evil finally and fully banished, never to be experienced again. Till that time however, we have responsibilities to perform and boundaries not to cross.

Boundaries.

When we cross the boundaries of God's loving protection through our disobedience or ignorance and into satan's destructive realm, we become exposed to his devices. Life is not a haphazard guessing game of chance. When we obey God we can expect His covenant protection and provision. When we disobey Him, we open the door to our adversary who takes advantage of the broken chain of order and authority. When we know and obey God's covenant commands, we close the door to satan's opportunism.

As a Christian we are instructed to regularly examine ourselves to see whether we have crossed any boundaries into enemy territory.

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

1 Corinthians 11:28-31

We cross back under God's covenant covering when we examine and adjust our lives in the light of His word's demands.

Special Promises for Special People.

*As for God, His way is perfect;
The word of the LORD is proven;
He is a shield to all who trust in Him. Psalm 18:30*

It is said that God does not have favorites. This is true at one level. He pours out His common grace and love on all people equally. He loves all people with a passion, enough to send Jesus, His only begotten son, to die for all mankind (John 3:16). The Bible says that the rain falls on both the just and unjust (Matt 5:45), and God is kind even to the unthankful (Luke 6:35). The Bible even says in Psalm 145:8-9, that He is good to all. If He weren't good to all men, life for many would be even more miserable! We are all given opportunity to see Him for who He really is, change our thinking, repent and return to Him.

The problem is some folk simply do not take the opportunities given them, and continue to rebel against Him. They stubbornly hold on to their ideas, and their pride stands in the way. However those that accept Him can get in on His family protection plan. These family benefits are accessed through His promises, which must be known, believed and acted upon. Trust God and have Him as your shield.

In Chapter Five we will look at God's promises of protection so wonderfully outlined for us in Psalm 91.

Right now let's look into what God is really like, His nature. When we know His nature we will not accuse Him of anything that is against His nature.

What is God really like?

God's Nature.

A lot of people claim to know what God is like. I believe the best way we can get to know God is through His word. Your experience or mine might not be the best measurement of what God is really like or not. We cannot assume that our experiences truly reflect the goodness of God. Ignorance, disobedience tradition and neglect may serve to blur getting a clear picture of His dealings with us. We are told that Jesus was the Word made flesh, so for starters, we must look to Jesus and not our experiences, good or bad, to see what God is really like.

When you know a person's nature you know his core and his actions and reactions become predictable. For example if someone is loving, kind, gentle, even tempered and generous, when you approach them you don't expect them to shout at you in an impatient tone telling you to get out of here! Their actions are predictable. They will listen to you, answer you kindly and help you out.

When we apply this to God we know from the Bible what He is like. That is, if we take the time to read and understand His book. The word describes His nature and will through what he has done throughout many generations. The Bible stories about God's faithfulness, mercy, miraculous intervention, provision and protection all point us towards His unchanging nature. If we know how He has acted in the past we can know how He will act in the future.

Let me clarify. When God promised things in the Old Testament, they invariably came to pass, even if it took thousands of years to fulfill. For example God promised to send His people a savior. For many years it seemed that Jesus would not come. But He did come exactly on time in the prophetic timetable. Today we have the promise of His return to earth and God will deliver as He did the first time. It is therefore totally reasonable to believe that He will stand true to His promises. In this way God is predictable. To the unbelieving and ignorant, God works in mysterious ways they know nothing of, but to someone who knows God through His word, He delivers on His promises. His ways can and should be known.

Now apply this to our subject. Is God guilty of punishing people with calamity in this age of grace?

Jesus and the Age of Grace.

Consider Jesus. Jesus perfectly represents God, because He is God in the flesh.

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person,... **Hebrews 1:1-3**

God most clearly speaks to us through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus came to seek and save, not to condemn and judge us.

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

John 3:17

Jesus went everywhere preaching the good news that God was not mad at us, but loved us, and wanted us to turn away from sin and follow Him. He also healed folk everywhere, and set them free from evil oppression.

*And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. **Matthew 4:23-24***

Luke characterizes Jesus' ministry this way. Remember Jesus is giving us a perfect picture of what God is like, how He thinks, is motivated towards us, speaks, acts and reacts.

*...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. **Acts 10:38***

Of course Jesus was prepared to confront evil and hypocrisy warning men of the consequences of their continued rejection of His saving grace. We see this most notably with religious opponents: Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and the like. They rebelled against the simplicity of a loving God who came to give them the gift of life as He God lived it.

*The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. **John 10:10***

They had misinterpreted God's intentions with all the Old Testament rules and regulations. The law points out God's perfect holiness, man's imperfections, and God's solution to the problem: Jesus Christ the Messiah. Jesus bridges the seemingly impassable gulf between the perfect God and fallen man. The law was not intended by God to become a complex treadmill of religious practice, impossible to follow in every detail without ever slipping up.

This religious bunch of hypocrites set themselves up as judges of all that was going on in daily life. They even stooped on one occasion to try to catch Jesus out in a fault by dragging an adulterous woman out into the open and setting her embarrassed before Jesus' feet. Their motives were plainly impure. They cared neither for Jesus, the woman, the man nor the crowd. They were only bent on their own misguided agenda and were totally blinded to their own hypocrisy. Jesus handled the situation brilliantly. He not only exposed their hypocrisy, but revealed God's mercy and truth in one brilliant moment.

Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught

*in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." **John 8:2-12***

Mercy and Truth Kiss.

*Mercy and truth have met together;
Righteousness and peace have kissed. **Psalms 85:10***

Mercy and truth kiss in this dramatic display. God's righteous standard was upheld as Jesus commissioned the woman to 'go and sin no more'. He could have stoned her under the law. He was without sin in that group, but chose to fulfill His calling: to seek and save the lost, not condemn them. Note that his mercy should not be seen as a license for her to continue in her sin. She was to sin no more. He made that clear. What was different was that His love and forgiveness now empowered her to do what He commanded of her.

This is God's nature. He comes not to condemn, but to help us avoid the condemnation and consequences of sin.

Jesus rebukes judgmentalism.

On another occasion, Jesus rebuked His disciples for their judgmental mindset towards the Samaritans when they wanted to call down thunder / judgment on the city that rejected them. They were on the way to Jerusalem and the Samaritans knew it. They were inhospitable to the party on their journey through their territory.

Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?"

*But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village. **Luke 9:51-56***

Jesus used this insult to teach His disciples more of God's character. They were quick to return evil for evil, He was quick to forgive and move on. He had to remind them of His mission. He was not called to destroy, but to save. He has not suddenly changed in the 21st Century. He is the same as He has always been.

We live in the age of grace and mercy. God's mercy triumphs over judgment. The early disciples were warned that if they showed no mercy, they would be judged without mercy in turn.

So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James 2:12-13

Two more examples of Jesus showing God's nature.

Let's examine two more examples that show how Jesus revealed God's true nature. First, consider the case of the man born blind. Jesus was passing by and saw this man, blind from birth. His disciples philosophically ask about the cause of this man's blindness. It seems fair to say that they were not really thinking about healing him, but only about some theological nuance. Jesus set them straight declaring that neither the parents or the man were to blame through their sin for the blindness. He then proceeded to heal this man, albeit by unconventional means. His sight was miraculously restored.

*Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. **John 9:1-7***

When the disciples tried to guess at why this problem occurred, they got it wrong. Today many people try to surmise why this or that situation has happened in someone's life. Someone has an accident, breaks a leg and immediately comment is made on why it happened. We are called to fix problems, not theorize about them. Jesus immediately fixed the problem and healed the man. He is still the same today and wants you and I to be instruments of His mercy wherever we can. We are not to judge a matter before its time and not without all the information. Inevitably the enemy uses our questionings and reasoning to give God a 'bad rap' so to speak. He gets the blame very often. Some say "Oh, God's judgment must be on that person for some sin in their life." Remember we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. We don't deserve God's mercy in and of ourselves, so just be an instrument to spread it around.

Secondly, Jesus ministered to a woman bound by satan for eighteen years. He set her free while the religionists could only question and debate some irrelevant issue about the Sabbath. They had no heart of compassion, interested only in making their 'religious' point.

Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, "There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day." The Lord then answered him and said, "Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound --think of it--for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.

Luke 13:10-17

Interestingly she glorified God only after her back was straightened up, not before! Sickness, calamity or tragedy does not glorify God. He is saddened by human distress. Thankfully He sent Jesus to do something about human suffering and calls believers today to play their part in alleviating suffering as well. Note also that it was satan, who bound this woman for 18 years. He was the source of her suffering, not God. This had gone on for 18 years and she was a faithful synagogue goer – probably a good woman at that. I have heard people wonder why good churchgoers have problems. "Why did so and so get sick and die? She was such a saint. She was always at church, loved God and never did anyone any harm. Yet she got sick and died. Sad thing. Oh well I guess God..." and on they ramble while satan the author of sickness and oppression is let off the hook doing his dirty work in the darkness. No! God is the healer! His nature is good and He is the business of drawing us out of darkness into the light of His mercy and grace.

*The LORD is merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.
He will not always strive with us,
Nor will He keep His anger forever.
He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
Nor punished us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;
As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
As a father pities his children,
So the LORD pities those who fear Him.
For He knows our frame;
He remembers that we are dust. Psalm 103:8-14*

God, the expert in turning bad situations around.

But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.” Genesis 50:20

Bad things do happen to good people. Joseph is a case in point. He was a good young lad, rather cocky and somewhat unwise. He shared his dreams with his family prematurely and without much sensitivity at all. His envious brothers sold him off into slavery and Joseph then underwent 13 years of difficulty, tests and trials before being launched suddenly into his destiny as God’s man for the hour. Joseph was not responsible for his brothers evil actions, something out of his control, but he was responsible for his own attitudes, something within his control. Things turned around for Joseph just when things looked like they would never change for the better. Who knows what would have happened had Joseph given up in despair while languishing in that Egyptian prison so long ago?

In the above scripture Joseph assures his fearful brothers, now aware that he was alive and wondering whether he would punish them for their callous duplicity, that what they intended for evil, God was able to turn it around for good. Not that God engineered the tragic events over those lonely years, but rather that God was with Him and as his faith remained intact and his attitude sound through all the trials. It is not what happens to Joseph that is key here, but what happened in him. His heart was refined and his excellent spirit rose above the circumstances so that he could become a type of Jesus who withstood betrayal of the worst kind to come through for us and stand in the gap as our savior. There may be circumstances outside of your control that are harassing you, but with God’s strength, you can take control of your attitude. Attitude is sometimes the only difference between deliverance and continuing captivity.

Throughout history God has come through for people in tight spots. He is their master in turning bad things around, if we let Him. Our faith and patience keeps the door to His deliverance open. Yet God does not work in a vacuum, He needs our cooperation. He does not capriciously favor this one and holding that one down. Joseph’s humility kept him from developing a victim mentality that would have cut him off God’s mercy and grace.

In the end, after so many years of persecution and seeming delay, all things did work out for good for Joseph. His dream was fulfilled, and God extended Grace and provision to His covenant people. Joseph truly loved God, obeyed His commandments and was called according to His purposes. His story is a classic example of what Paul writes about in Romans.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

In my experience, sad to say, all too often things **do not** always work together for good for some. I know I am not in a position to be the final judge, but there are some people I know who **say** they love God, but their lifestyles do not show that they obey His commandments nor do they cooperate with His purposes. They are really off doing their own thing, in their own way at their own time. Everything they do seems to be coated with a religious veneer, but God is really peripheral to their lives.

When something bad happens, God gets the blame as they begin to question His integrity and their hearts become hardened. This is sad. When God's nature and ways are understood, and they can, He is seen to be the loving Father who pities His children while working out His divine purposes in and through us in an imperfect world full of uncertainty outside of God.

It is fair to say that in today's perilous times faith and obedience are not optional extras for some select super saints, but absolutely necessary to please God and survive this life, let alone thrive!

Does God discipline us?

Have you ever heard someone 'testify' how God used a particular sickness and / or calamity to teach them a lesson? After all, so the stories go, so and so was away from God and he broke his leg, and while lying in the hospital reflected on his life and came back to God! Sounds like a good ending, but is God in the leg breaking business or leg healing business? We need to make up our minds on this otherwise satan will exploit the ongoing confusion.

The word does teach that God, like any good father, will discipline or chasten His children.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

*"My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives."*

*If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" **Hebrews 12:3-11***

No doubt about it. God does discipline His children, but how does He do it? We cannot presume things on God. God is referred to as the 'Father of spirits' in verse nine. He corrects us in our spirits through His word and by His Holy Spirit. When we realize that the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, and not the flesh, we will better understand how He disciplines us.

*"The spirit of a man is the lamp of the LORD,
Searching all the inner depths of his heart"*
Proverbs 20:27

God first speaks to our hearts, giving us opportunities to repent. He is longsuffering and patient. However, if we refuse to listen or are dulled to His voice, He will allow us to go our own way, fall into trouble, experience pain and finally wake up to what He has been saying to us all the time.

What earthly father will go unpunished by law for breaking his child's leg in order to teach them a lesson? He would be put away for child abuse. We are taught that God is much better than any earthly

father. He does not deal with us according to our iniquities, but according to His covenant, our faith and obedience, and His promises.

*He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
Nor punished us according to our iniquities.*

Psalm 103:10

God uses His Word to chastise His children.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be

complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

The Apostle Paul brought correction and discipline to the carnal Corinthian Church by writing a hard-hitting letter, not by asking God to send an earthquake or some other disaster to judge them for their sins! The words he wrote cut deep into their hearts and brought them to repentance.

He starts out by invoking a blessing on them, identifying with them as ‘sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints!’

*Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,
To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **1 Corinthians 1:1-3***

He then goes on to speak of them as carnal, babes in Christ and still not ready to receive solid spiritual food.

*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. **1 Corinthians 3:1-3***

He considers them babies in the spirit. No wonder they were ‘messing up’. That is what babies do, because they have not yet been trained. What parent, and God is our spiritual Father, disciplines a child in a cruel way by bringing on them some calamity? No, parents train up their children with their words. Only when a child rebels against their authority is it necessary to discipline a child physically with the rod.

God, because he is the ‘Father of our spirits,’ disciplines or chastens us spiritually with His word.

The Word of God is powerful and able to do what God sends it out to do. There have been times when God has spoken a word of correction to me through what I was reading in the Bible or hearing in a sermon, and even in conversation with trusted advisors who know me best, and indeed care for me the most. It cut deep into my heart convicting me of where I was falling short, and also giving me hope and instruction of how to make things right.

Don't let anyone confuse you by commenting on some calamity that you or your loved ones have endured by saying God is judging you. He does not need to break your leg or arm in an accident to teach you something. If He did, He would be perverse, since He has already said He uses His word to bring correction into your life.

Of course, if a person got drunk say, had an accident, got hurt and is now lying in hospital reflecting on their life, and God speaks to them in some way about what went wrong, it would be presumptuous to say that God brought that upon them. No, they got drunk by themselves. God was not in that! They had the accident bringing it upon themselves. The fact that a loving heavenly Father takes advantage of their belated humility, is no indication that He initiated the whole event. God uses what we give Him and when we give it. If the fellow in question had given God time earlier on, he would have stayed on track, not got drunk, and not had an accident. Everything that is needed to live a godly life is found in the word.

Good people, even Christian people, stray off the path, not completely and consistently adhering to God's ways. God will call them back to the pathway with His word, but not by bringing personal injury to their lives.

Why do 'bad' things happen?

Even good people sometimes leave the door open at night.

The Bible teaches that we have a part to play in staying under the Lord's protective covering. It is not all up to Him to automatically cover for us in every situation. He wants to, but He needs our cooperation. Why else would He give us instruction in the following?

Hidden neglect.

Very often we see things differently than God. God expected King David to live a holy life. Yet he went in to Bathsheba, committed adultery, had her husband murdered, and covered up his sin. He was all the time perceived by man to be a good king. God had to send Nathan His prophet to expose his hypocrisy. The child died, and only after David's repentance, was God's mercy poured out and Solomon their next son succeeded David as the next king. 2 Samuel 11:1-12:14, and Psalm 51, give a vivid account of the situation. David was quick to repent and still enjoyed the honor of being described as a man after God's own heart despite his obvious shortcomings. However, his sin and neglect opened the door to tragedy in his family and his dynasty had plenty of trouble after his Bathsheba transgression.

God comes to save us with a great deliverance. The new birth into His family is a unique spiritual moment that marks the beginning a great destiny. We may start well and enjoy much blessing. But God expects us to continue and finish well. We cannot afford to neglect such a great work in our lives and let the enemy get an upper hand.

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation,

Hebrews 2:1-3

In the same way that a shiny new motorcar needs continuing maintenance, our walk with the Lord must be maintained. Transgression and disobedience always has a consequence. Neglect opens the door to trouble. King David neglected to go out with his men in a season of war (2 Samuel 11:1) and fell to temptation and trouble.

Partial Obedience, Presumption and Ignorance.

Then there is partial obedience and presumption that gets us into trouble. In 2 Samuel 6:1-19 we have another example from the life of King David. He wanted to bring back the ark of God's presence. The Philistines had captured the ark. David's desire was a good thing. The problem was that as they were bringing the Ark back on a new cart pulled by oxen, a man named Uzzah stretched out his hand to steady it from toppling at one point and was instantly killed. A bad thing happened to a 'good'

person acting on the instructions of another 'good person, His king! David is confused and leaves the Ark in Obed – Edom's household which is then mightily blessed because of God's presence.

Later, David gets it right when he checks out the laws pertaining to moving the Ark. He sacrifices properly and the priests carry it on their shoulders, as they should have in the first place. No one dies this time and the Ark makes it to the tabernacle David had prepared for it. The people are blessed and celebrate, and now the focal point for their national worship is restored. The point is that David was right in wanting to bring the Ark back, but wrong in how he did it. His partial obedience mixed with presumption based on his neglect to check out the proper protocol led to trouble. As a result of ignorance or a lack of knowledge of how to do things, Uzzah perished.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

Hosea 4:6

In short, bad things happen to 'good' people often because the enemy exploits their partial obedience, presumption and ignorance. All that we need to know to survive in this life is found in the word. It is our responsibility to dig up the treasure in the word, and apply it diligently to our lives so that we might enjoy God's promised provision and protection.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

*But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; **2 Peter 1:2-10***

Notice that God's grace is multiplied to us 'in the knowledge' (v 2). We have to know His word! Also, we are given all things that pertain to life in Christ (v 3). It's ours for the taking, and when we supply the required diligence (v 5), we reach a place where need never stumble (v 11). It's possible. Jesus never did, and He showed us the way to follow and gave us the ability in the Holy Spirit to actually do it. We must imitate Him and we really do not have any valid excuses that hold water with God. Sure we can hide behind our own shortcomings, background, experience, lack of this or that, but God's word says we have all we need to walk in victory. He will always lead us in triumph in Christ. It depends on us how much in Christ we really are through prayer, worship, scripture meditation, obedience, steadfastness etc. He has played His part, are we playing our part?

Passivity.

Let's take it a bit further. We are instructed to resist the enemy. God will not do it for us. If we are passive in the face of enemy attack we will get chewed up!

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith... 1 Peter 5:8-9

You may have given your heart to Jesus and submitted to His Lordship, but you are still required to resist the enemy for yourself. Jesus has delegated His authority as the second Adam to you and given you His equipment. His Word and His Spirit are the foundation of our victory. We are expected to wear and use our armor. If you don't wear your armor and use it to resist the enemy, he will exploit your weak spots and 'bad' things will happen to 'good' people. Passivity and incompleteness give him a place to attack. His nature is to steal, kill and destroy. And that he will do, if you let him!

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. John 10:10

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Ephesians 6:11-12

Inconsistency.

Then there are those who hang out on the fringes of the Lord's will, and do not actively continue in the word of the Lord. They think that things should always work out even if they are a little in, a little out, a little up and little down. They are not consistent on their devotion; yet expect the full protection that comes from close in and consistent.

"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. John 15:9-10

Jesus abided (was consistent) in God's love and time after time was delivered from dangerous situations that threatened to cut short God's plan for His life. Our responsibility is to abide in God's love by obeying His commandments like Jesus and also avoid situations where the enemy wants to cut short God's plan for our lives.

What about curses?

*Like a flitting sparrow, like a flying swallow,
So a curse without cause shall not alight. Proverbs 26:2*

The Bible teaches that a curse cannot come on you without a cause. That is we are the one who can determine whether any curse has an effect or not. We are definitely not at the mercy of some perverse person trying to put something bad on us through a curse. They may try, but as a born again

New Testament believer on the Lord Jesus there is absolutely no reason to give in to fear that the works of the devil are more powerful than the blood of Jesus. Fear invites the enemy, faith in the Lord invokes God's shield of protection. He has commissioned angels to watch over us (Psalm 91) and demons are no match for angels. Only where people place themselves on the devils turf through disobedience, rebellion, and dabbling in the occult (horoscopes, tarot cards, Ouija boards, and the like) will the enemy have any chance.

Besides in Christ we are blessed with every spiritual blessing. It is up to us to know them, walk in them and enjoy God's deliverance from any negative words or curses spoken over us whether it be in this generation or in the past. Whom the Son sets free is free indeed.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, **Ephesians 1:3***

*Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. **John 8:36***

Also, God is in the business of turning curses into blessings. The Ammonites and Moabites hired Balaam to curse God's people, but he was not successful because God intervened and would not allow him to curse His people because He loved them.

An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of the LORD; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the congregation of the LORD forever, because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.

Nevertheless the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you.

Deuteronomy 23:3-5

Never fear when God is near. He is as near as You want Him! The Bible teaches us to draw near to God and He will draw near to us.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

James 4:8

Live close to God, and no curse can come anywhere near or have a hold on you.

And persecution for righteousness sake!

A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.

John 15:20

The Bible teaches that persecution for righteousness sake is to be expected. We do have an enemy of our souls and he is able to motivate people to persecute believers for their faith. But, thank God Jesus is with us to comfort and strengthen us in the midst of persecution.

Persecution can and does go beyond ugly words and attitudes. The twentieth century has had more Christians martyred for their faith than any century previously. Martyrdom is an extreme form of persecution that most Christians will probably not experience. Nevertheless, the enemy does incite extreme measures against the gospel and we cannot assume that he will simply lie down and welcome the gospel going forth without a fight.

John the Baptist, Peter and Paul were all persecuted for doing God's will. For example, John confronted King Herod's adultery and had his head chopped off. Paul did the will of God when he cast out a demon from a slave girl, yet the city of Ephesus erupted in a life-threatening riot as a result of his ministry.

Perhaps you are not called as an apostle to change whole nations and cities, but you are called to make a difference in your sphere of influence at the office, on the job, in your family, and community. Be prepared for a reaction. Position yourself close to God to enjoy His comfort when your righteousness attracts attention, and attempts are made to intimidate you into silence. Remember that God has not given you the spirit of fear or intimidation, but empowered you to boldly declare His goodness and be an agent of deliverance and change in a world desperate for disciples who will play their part and stand their ground.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God,

2 Timothy 1:7-8

We may suffer persecution for the gospel's sake, but make sure any suffering you experience is not because of ignorance, neglect or disobedience. Selah.

What happened in the Early Church?

When the early church was established after the Day of Pentecost, persecution by the threatened religious authorities reared up. The disciples were commanded not to preach in the name of Jesus and let go. So they prayed for boldness and continued in the face of this intimidation (Acts 4). Later they were arrested and put in prison for continuing to preach in Jesus name. God supernaturally delivered them from prison by an angel (Acts 5). They the authorities plotted to kill them and later in Acts Seven we have the account where Stephen, a deacon in the church was martyred for his faith. Still later Herod the King got involved in the persecution and killed James the brother of John (Acts 12). It was as if the church was caught napping in this instance. Peter was seized too because Herod saw that James death pleased the religious Jews. This time however the church in Jerusalem cried out to God to deliver Peter even though he was heavily guarded. Peter was miraculously delivered from prison. They did not want another of their leader's taken out early.

The point in this account is that prayer changes things and thwarts the enemy's plans of persecution. Do not lie down and take what he dishes out. Fight the good fight and ask God to deliver you. Get others to pray too.

Paul (previously a persecutor himself) and Silas are thrown in prison for their bold witness. Although severely beaten they praised God at midnight so loudly that the whole prison is kept awake (Acts 16). They are miraculously delivered when an earthquake shakes the prison and their chains fall off. This story should be an encouragement to us to praise God in the midst of our persecutions. Prayer changes things, so does praise!

A Word of Caution.

Some folk are quick to judge when something bad happens to someone. Jesus gives us a proper perspective on bad things.

There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Luke 13:1-5

Some judge someone else's calamity prematurely and in ignorance. They say that this or that disaster happened because so and so sinned so badly. Jesus taught this is wrong. Disaster is not a matter of the degree of sin. The Twin Towers disaster in New York was not because New York's sin was any worse than say that of San Francisco or Amsterdam in Holland for that matter. The towers were targeted by evil men for their symbolic value as was the Pentagon, not because the particular people who worked in the buildings that day were any worse than the folks down the road!

We have all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory and Jesus pointed to the repentance we all need. We need to straighten up our own lives rather than try to figure out relative evil: why such a bad thing happened to this one and not that one. When we avoid pointing the finger at our fellow travelers caught in some trouble and start praying for them, we will see the grace and mercy of God more clearly.

In church circles there are those self-righteous ones who are quick to draw a straight line between something that happens and sin in a person's life. They are quick to judge and slow to repent of their own sin. Blinded by their own opinions, they cannot see God's mercy in a bad situation.

I know of a family where one of the sons broke his leg in a sporting accident. God supernaturally orchestrated the medical attention he needed, and he was quickly taken care of and recovered fully from the incident in a short time. However, there was talk among his Christian peers that somehow he was being punished for something wrong in his life. Neither he, nor they, knew what it was that God was supposedly doing; yet the pious words were nevertheless spoken in a time of great physical pain. They brought no comfort only condemnation.

In the Emergency Room of God's dealings, He first extends His hand of mercy and healing, and then shows us the way of escape through repentance. He will not judge a situation before its time, nor should we. The church is better off being God's instrument of mercy than to sit in the seat of judgment.

Of course times will come where God will want us to love someone enough to tell them the truth that whatever a man sows that will he reap, but we need to be sure to tread softly and be sure that the situation actually does apply.

God does not make bad situations worse. The enemy kicks you when you are down, but God deals gently with you when you are hurt.

*A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench;... Isaiah 42:3*

... for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Matt 11:29

Order and discipline...

... in you life, family community city and nation.

Have you noticed that when things get out of hand in your life and in your family, things don't always go smoothly? You have to get a grip on matters and bring some order and discipline. If you don't, life seems to move from one crisis to another. This is not God's will. He is the God of order and discipline. His kingdom runs on order where He is king and there is law that ensures peace and harmony. We know that he had to deal with Lucifer's rebellion in heaven and then Adam's on earth. We are now in the final stages of God's plan of restoration where Jesus Christ has come to reestablish the law of life in its fullness. This law of life stands against the satan's law of sin and death.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1-3

Our responsibility is to walk not after the flesh but according to the Spirit. When we come under God's order and law, we are free from sin and death, and enjoy all God's covenant protection and provision.

We live in a generation that conditions us to look for and expect options to everything. In God's society there are no options to exploit. It's pray and obey, then enjoy. If we go our own way, then sooner or later we bump our heads.

We need to see submission to God's ways not as a burdensome task, but as our avenue to great reward. The power of electricity is only a blessing when it is harnessed. When properly channeled water is a blessing, but when a river floods and overflows its banks it begins to destroy. The passions and drives we have in life, only produce blessing when in subjection to God's law, order and discipline. Rebellion must be judged; otherwise it will eventually destroy everything. How do those cute little babies grow up to be destructive monsters? When they are not disciplined and trained to obey law that is given not to repress them, but to channel their energy in a positive direction.

Functioning in God's kingdom is not a matter of following a set of do's and don'ts in matters you don't understand. Where He is King there is righteousness, peace and joy.

...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17-18

True liberty is found within boundaries that restrict us from causing harm to others and which help us to focus on God, the source of all life and goodness.

Take for example a nation as a whole. A nation whose God is the Lord, is blessed because it obeys His commands and favors righteousness. Laws are enacted that promote peace, justice and order. It is the Christian's responsibility to pray for order and peace in their nation, so that the gospel can be freely preached and people's lives changed for the better. Where this does not happen, strife disorder and consequently much unnecessary suffering is the result.

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:1-4

We live in peace as a consequence of effectual fervent prayer. God watches over the land and protects it when the righteous fear Him, and obey His command to pray.

*No king is saved by the multitude of an army;
A mighty man is not delivered by great strength.
A horse is a vain hope for safety;
Neither shall it deliver any by its great strength.
Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him,
On those who hope in His mercy,
To deliver their soul from death,
And to keep them alive in famine. Psalm 33:16-19*

Cancer occurs in a human body when certain cells are out of order and functioning improperly. Bad things happen to good people when things are out of order in a marriage, household, church, even a nation.

Personal responsibility...

...the words we speak and our prayers.

In the same way that we are subject to physical laws like gravity, our lives are impacted by spiritual laws. The words we speak and the prayers we pray or don't pray, have a direct impact on our well being.

Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For

*"He who would love life
And see good days,
Let him refrain his tongue from evil,*

*And his lips from speaking deceit.
Let him turn away from evil and do good;
Let him seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
And His ears are open to their prayers;
But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil."*

1 Peter 3:8-12

God has called us as believers to inherit a blessing, not a curse. How this happens involves being careful to watch what we speak. Words have the power to move or motivate us, others and even God as we boldly ask for and declare His will in prayer.

Because life and death are in the power of the tongue, we are instructed to “refrain” our tongues from evil. Evil speaking opens up to evil living and its consequences.

*Death and life are in the power of the tongue,
And those who love it will eat its fruit. Proverbs 18:21*

The choice is ours, and if we don't speak good things and follow up with good deeds, we place ourselves in satan's domain. He responds to evil speaking and doing to manifest his will on the earth in the same way that God responds to our faith that speaks. The essence of faith is that we believe and therefore speak God's word over our lives before we see it come to pass. As we pray the will of God (His word), faith is released and this moves God to honor His promises. He always watches over His word to perform it on behalf of the faithful. Of course our point is that the faithful are faithful to do what he says, that is obey His commands. He commands us to refrain from speaking evil and follow through with corresponding righteous actions.

Bad things happen when we do not control what we speak. The Bible teaches that even though the tongue seems of little importance it holds the power to greatly impact our lives.

Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

James 3:5-6

Think of devastating forest and brush fires. They usually start with one small fire, say some careless campers neglecting to completely put out the campfire before they leave. A wind blows up some embers and the surrounding area catches fire. It spreads and later we see the devastation it wrought on the national news.

Apply this to relationships between people. Big arguments usually start over something small. The words that fly grow in intensity, and soon you have a mini war going on, if you don't get a grip on what you are saying. Marriages are ruined, cities torn apart, nations go to war, when words are not restrained. Bad things happen to good people when the tongue is not controlled.

Thank God we can break vicious cycles of evil with the power of the tongue. The tongue of the wise promotes healing. Let God bring what you speak under control.

*There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword,
But the tongue of the wise promotes health.*

Proverbs 12:18

With prayer, we are taught that it must be uttered or spoken for faith to be activated. Jesus said, "when you pray say."

"When you pray, say:

*Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us day by day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one." Luke 11:2-4*

Notice that He expects us to ask the Father to deliver us from the evil one. Protection from evil is something we invoke by the words of our mouth. It is not automatic that someone who claims to be a good Christian enjoys God's continuing protection simply because they get up and go off to work on any particular day. God is always moved by our faith, and honors His covenant promise to deliver us when we pray.

*Deliver me, O LORD, from evil men;
Preserve me from violent men,
Who plan evil things in their hearts;
They continually gather together for war.
They sharpen their tongues like a serpent;
The poison of asps is under their lips.
Selah*

*Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked;
Preserve me from violent men,
Who have purposed to make my steps stumble.
The proud have hidden a snare for me, and cords;
They have spread a net by the wayside;
They have set traps for me.
Selah*

I said to the LORD: "You are my God;

*Hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD.
O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation,
You have covered my head in the day of battle.
Do not grant, O LORD, the desires of the wicked;
Do not further his wicked scheme,
Lest they be exalted. Psalm 140:1-8*

He prays for deliverance. He does not assume it. He cries out for protection: 'Deliver me'... 'preserve me'... 'keep me'... 'hear my supplications'. We must learn to cry out in prayer for our deliverance from evil people who plot things in the heart and start to speak evil of us. David describes the evil tongue in terms of a serpent with poison. Bad things happen to good people when they do not step up and take responsibility for quenching evil before it gets to them. Pray (speak) proactively for over your life today.

God is looking out for you...
...protected in perilous times.

Psalm 91 clearly instructs us how to walk in God's protection in perilous times.

*He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress;
My God, in Him I will trust."
Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler
And from the perilous pestilence.
He shall cover you with His feathers,
And under His wings you shall take refuge;
His truth shall be your shield and buckler.
You shall not be afraid of the terror by night,
Nor of the arrow that flies by day,
Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness,
Nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.
A thousand may fall at your side,
And ten thousand at your right hand;
But it shall not come near you.
Only with your eyes shall you look,
And see the reward of the wicked.
Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge,
Even the Most High, your dwelling place,
No evil shall befall you,
Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling;
For He shall give His angels charge over you,
To keep you in all your ways.
In their hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.
You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra,
The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.
"Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him;
I will set him on high, because he has known My name.
He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble;
I will deliver him and honor him.
With long life I will satisfy him,
And show him My salvation." **Psalm 91:1-16***

We live in a day where fanatics from one side of the world can attack us using what we use on a daily basis and turn them into weapons against us. The fateful attacks on 9/11 highlight the dangers of a world filled with violence. City gang warfare, drunken drivers, deadly diseases pose a daily threat to

our well being. Most children now grow up in communities fraught with danger, violence and perversion. Who then is looking out for us? The authorities do their best, yet can only react to what has already spun out of control. Thank God, His word still works and we can look to Him to deliver us from evil as He promises.

When we walk down the highway of holiness and obedience, we are protected by angels, led of His Spirit, and enjoy the protection of praying Christian brothers and sisters. Psalm 91 outlines the responsibilities and rewards of our devotion to God.

God expects us to:

- *Dwell in the secret place* (v1) – be devoted to Him.
- *Say of the Lord* (v2) – make our confession bold.
- *Set your love* (v14) – make a quality decision to love and obey Him.
- *Know His name* (v14) – be not ignorant of all that His name stands for.
- *Call upon Him* (v15) – actively expect His promised protection.

In short, we are to draw as close to God as we know how, for it is in His presence that we enjoy His benefits.

His promises are numerous:

- *Protection and shelter* (v1) – God’s covenant promise.
- *Deliverance* (v3) – God will deliver us from whatever wants to ensnare us or attack our bodies.
- *Refuge* (v4) – Like a protective bird that spreads its wings to protect its young, God will protect us if we stay close.
- *Shielded* (v4) – Things may happen but bounce off because we are shielded in the spiritual realm.
- *Free from fears* (v5-6) – Fear attracts evil, so when we counter fear with faith, no evil can penetrate.
- *Protection in battle* (v7-8) – spiritual warfare is real. There are evil spirits bent on our destruction, yet with God we will not fall in battle to the wiles and temptations of the enemy.
- *Angelic protection and support* (v9-12) – We are promised supernatural assistance as we march forward in the name of the Lord.
- *Authority over blatant full frontal attack (lion) and subtle ones (hidden snake.)* (v13) – With God’s wisdom operating inside of us, we are assured of victory in the spiritual battles we fight.
- *Exaltation* (v14) – God will lift us up when we feel like giving up.
- *Comfort and ultimate satisfaction* (v15-16) – the outcome of a protected life is longevity and fulfillment.

Don’t be naive. We have to do what only we can do. When we obey, God steps in and does what only He can do. He is looking out for you!

Are you prepared?

What about Natural Disasters?

What about *natural* disasters, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and the like? How do we comprehend and live with things that are seemingly beyond our immediate control?

The December 2004 Tsunami off the Indonesian Coast caught the world's attention with the graphic video footage shown on TV's everywhere. Tales of tragedy and heartache were matched with unparalleled heroism. In September 2005 powerful hurricanes changed the face of life on the Gulf Coast of the United States and the city New Orleans was devastated never to be the same. Those affected included 'good' people. Then, an earthquake instantly killed tens of thousands in Pakistan.

What are we to make of all these happenings? Are they inevitable and can we escape them? Is there a connection between the spiritual and natural realms? Are we at the mercy of unpredictable natural events?

Are some other bad things going to happen? Unfortunately yes, but thank God He will be with us in times of trouble. When we stay close to Him, we come under His protective covering.

God always warns us in advance so we can prepare.

...He will tell you things to come. John 16:13

God is all knowing and therefore has foreknowledge of events good and bad, and warns us in advance of things to come through His prophetic Word and by His Spirit. Of course we must be walking in a degree of sensitivity to His voice that we actually hear what He is saying and take appropriate action. God expects us to cooperate with His plan in order to enjoy His protection. The Bible is full of examples where God warned His people of impending disastrous situations. His intention was not only to warn them, but also the world at large. The most classic one was Noah and the flood. Noah was building his boat for many years, preaching all the time warning people of the judgment to come. Life continued as normal and then suddenly the rain began to fall. There was a similar pattern with Lot and the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. Luke 17:26-30

The Bible teaches that before God does anything, He uses His spokesmen or prophets to give His people advance warning of things to come.

*Surely the Lord GOD does nothing ,
Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. Amos 3:7*

God expects us to heed His voice through His prophets. They are His spokesmen and must be taken at their word.

Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper.

2 Chronicles 20:20b

On a personal level, what some call premonitions are often God's individual warnings of things to come. You are the prophet of your own life. God wants to lead and direct you in all things. Our responsibility is to listen for and heed his voice. How often have you looked back on a situation and said, "If only I had ..." When we become sensitive to His still small voice, we avoid unnecessary difficulty.

The Big Picture: Christ's return.

A sobering picture is given by the Lord in answer to a question from his disciples concerning the time of the end. He had just prophesied that the huge temple in Jerusalem that everyone admired was to be razed to the ground. They ask when these things are going to happen? Jesus answers with an overview of the near future, and also, I believe, prophesies about the distant future. He speaks of a time when a whole series of things will begin to happen. These things are much like a gathering storm on the horizon. He actually describes them as the 'beginning of sorrows' or 'birth pangs' at the end of a woman's pregnancy.

The stage is being set for Christ's return to earth.

Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be

saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:1-14

Jesus outlines things that will happen. They are inevitable. Realize that just because He knew about them, prophesied about them and warns us through the scriptural record, this does not mean that God actually wants this distress to happen. God's will is for all men to be saved and delivered from evil.

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:9

However, He knows some will refuse His love and bring upon the world and themselves terrible consequences. The distress that the world experiences in both the natural and spiritual realms, was set in motion long ago when Adam sinned. Death followed his rebellion and all sickness, disharmony and distress was introduced into a world that had previously been declared to be good by God. After the fall, it was no longer all good, and since that time mankind has had to reckon with evil.

Thank God, Jesus has come to restore us all to God's original intended bliss in paradise. We are now witnessing before our eyes the beginning of the end of that process. Everything that can be shaken is being shaken, both literally and figuratively it seems.

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:25-29

God is obliged to consume things both in the spirit and in the natural that are dangerous to our continued existence in eternity. The earth even, has to be cleansed of all the filth that now pollutes it because of man's sin.

As an overview, the record shows that in nature there is a shaking. There is an increasing frequency and intensity of 'natural' phenomenon. The earth is right now in places ravaged by violent weather, earthquakes, lingering droughts, pestilences (AIDS), and extended famines. Nations are thrown into crisis due to natural problems that affect whole regions.

In the socio-political world at large, it appears as if the stage is set for a one world system that could produce the prophesied antichrist who will attempt to rule the world in opposition to God's ultimate plan.

Events in Israel over the last eighty years since the 1920's provide a focus for the ultimate end time clash. The world's attention frequently turns to this tiny yet immensely significant nation in the Middle East. The process of the in gathering of scattered millions of Jews, and the restoration of their land gained momentum in 1948 when modern Israel was birthed after approx 1900 years.

And Terrorism?

As far as terrorism is concerned, the dramatic increase of hideous attacks on all continents fits into the end time scenario about which we have been warned. The hatred of misguided zealots has produced immense pain and suffering for thousands. Innocents (some good people) have suffered injury and death in terrorist attacks designed to spread fear and lawlessness.

God's protection is promised in Psalm 91 when terror comes by night and destruction by day. There are many testimonies of people supernaturally protected at the time of the September 11, 2001 Twin Towers tragedy. Others describe God's deliverance in the London bombing attacks of 2005. God is in the business of warning and keeping us from calamity. Make your prayer one that places you in the right place at the right time doing the right things for the Lord.

I heard a preacher say that God is judging us.

Mankind through Adam messed up in the Garden of Eden and set in motion a spiritual dynamic of sin and death with all its evil and cursed side effects of disease and lack.

God, who is love, immediately set in motion His plan of redemption and restoration for all mankind. This plan is still being worked out in our time and will consummate with a perfectly harmonious new heaven and new earth after a final 'Great White Throne Judgment' (Rev 20:11). The question today is: where do we stand in the big picture time scale since Jesus has come and there are still bad things happening?

There is no doubt that evil should be judged. The fact is that evil has already been judged! It was judged on the cross when Jesus paid the ultimate price demanded by God's justice. His work on the cross is the hinge point of history, and everything turns on it, including what happens today. Reconciling why bad things happen depends on an understanding of the importance God attaches to Jesus dying on the cross for us.

The Bible teaches that God is the supreme judge: a supremely loving, fair and just, all knowing and all wise judge. As the one who gave His son to mankind, He now expects all men everywhere to obey His command to repent and put their trust in Jesus for their salvation and deliverance from evil.

*God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. **Acts 17:24-31***

God created the world and everything in it. That qualifies Him to be Lord of all. He made every nation to seek Him and further His purposes on the earth. He came to us in our ignorance, sending Jesus as the focal person of His salvation, and now expects all men to bow their knee to Him. He now “commands all men everywhere to repent” and it is His right to do so.

If men choose to rebel against His command, they invoke His just judgment. The Bible plainly states that He comes to mankind in love with an outstretched hand of reconciliation.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. **John 3:16-19***

The lines are clearly drawn. God invites mankind to step over into His provision and protection, His kingdom. If someone refuses His love, and continues to rebel that person stays under satan’s dominion, that person will then suffer the just condemnation as a consequence of their rebellion. They also become fair game for satan’s evil on earth and also keep themselves in line to be finally judged at the Great White Throne judgment. When God wraps it all up, and eternally confines satan and the fallen angels in a hell made for them, rebellious men who remain aligned with satan, will justly be confined with them. Rebellious men must be contained, otherwise they will pollute and corrupt the new heaven and earth again. Although men will have to be confined in hell, God actually made hell for the devil and fallen angels, not men. In fact, earth was made for men, not hell!

*Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: **Matthew 25:41***

God wants all men to be saved and live with Him eternally in a new heaven and earth that will join together under His unchallenged new order. People actually go to hell against God’s will! His desire has always been to save mankind.

*...God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. **1 Timothy 2:3-4***

God never intended for man to live with satan, agonized by the sudden, but too late, realization of their short sighted and prideful folly. He even judged sin and sickness together for Christ...

*...committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed. **1 Peter 2:23-25***

All evil was judged at the cross, and when we know this as believers, we are confident that God is not judging us anymore. We are no longer condemned and live secure in His love with a blessed anticipation of a final apportioning of rewards for the faithful (2 Cor 5:10). We are already judged righteous in Christ, and walk free from confusion about whether God is judging us or not. James teaches us that God will not tempt, test or try us with evil. Satan does that but not God!

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

*Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. **James 1:13-17***

Satan exploits fallen man's depraved sin nature, enticing people away from God with unrestrained desire or lusts. Sin is birthed after this conception and death is the final result. In contrast, any good thing on earth comes down from God. This is the way it is. Evil comes from Satan, good from God!

God's judgment therefore has nothing to do with bringing evil upon people floods, famine, disasters, plagues etc, but everything to do with separating out good and evil and meting out proper sentence or confinement. We have the chance now in this life to affect the later life. The choices we make for God now, are profitable in this life and in the next.

...godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

1 Timothy 4:8

If we judge ourselves as instructed by Paul in his letter to the Corinthian church, we avoid bad things: we don't die before our time and are even kept healthy!

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

1 Corinthians 11:28-32

God gives us the opportunity to fully appreciate what He has done for us, and live in the light of that. When we discern His body, and judge ourselves in the light of His Word, we avoid unnecessary bad things like early death and sickness. That's the potential. Sure, many people don't enjoy the fullness of a sanctified life, but the promise is still there nevertheless! The Lord's disciplines His children through His word not through circumstance. Bad things happen when evil people are free to perpetrate their evil, and when good people disobey God's commands and come over into bad territory.

When the believer continually looks to the Lord for His deliverance, He will be plucked out of the net (traps) the enemy has set for his destruction.

My eyes are ever toward the LORD,

For He shall pluck my feet out of the net. Psalm 25:15

In short, I am not of the opinion that God judges the world today with things like sickness and natural disasters like hurricanes, tsunamis and earthquakes. I do believe however, that the earth groans, shakes and suffers under a curse, and is waiting for a time when God through His people is fully revealed in His restoring glory.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Romans 8:18-22

Suffering still exists today because we live on an earth that is not yet redeemed, and is cursed because of Adam's original sin. This world contains evil men that still persecute and attack the followers of Christ. Believers who either don't know their covenant, or mistakenly think their incomplete obedience will somehow keep them free from reaping the consequences, are open to harm just like anybody else.

God is not guilty!

In the court of heaven, who can find God guilty of anything evil? He is above doing wrong, Jesus proved that. In order to trust Him for His deliverance we must stand steadfast on the knowledge that He has provided a way of escape from every evil. Despite what the world has to say, the Lord's ways are perfect. He is not guilty.

Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair? When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies. Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive. Because he considers and turns away from all the transgressions which he committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

Ezekiel 18:25-28

Even, the New Testament records that God is the giver of good and perfect gifts, not bad and imperfect ones.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. James 1:17

Honey from the Rock

*Oh, that My people would listen to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways!
I would soon subdue their enemies,
And turn My hand against their adversaries.
The haters of the LORD would pretend submission to Him,
But their fate would endure forever.
He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat;
And with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you.*

Psalm 81:13-16

The cry of the Father's heart is heard in this passage. First, He calls his own people to listen to Him and walk in His ways. Many Christians follow Him from a distance and get picked off by the enemy as they lag behind. Yet God's will stands firm. His desire is to subdue our enemies, yet He requires our cooperation. We must walk in His ways. Even those pretenders, who don't really follow Him, would enjoy God's goodness: wheat and honey, symbols of His provision and satisfying sweetness.

God loves people. He created us for His pleasure, and is saddened when we rebel against Him. He yearns to show us His ways, so that His goodness can turn us closer and closer to Him. In this life since the fall He knows there will be trials and difficulties, yet He wants to satisfy us with 'honey from the rock'. Here are some pointers that will show us how to live with sweetness even in difficult times. The land of milk and honey may still have some giants in it, but God wants to subdue them and drive them out from before you.

Honey from the rock.

When faced with a hard situation, always look for the honey! Don't lose your focus on God when faced with difficulty. Avoid thinking, talking and praying (complaining) the problem. So many Christians are turned away from the Lord and get swamped by circumstances. The secret of finding honey in a hard place is to refuse to let the cares and anxieties of the world settle on you. Think on God's promises, think the solution, and avoid dwelling on the problem.

Find the suitable promise and meditate on that. For every problem and hard question in life there is a Bible promise and solution. It's your job to search it out and apply it as you speak change in to the situation, whether it be sickness, relational distress or financial lack. God is waiting on you to make a move towards Him in fresh devotion despite any difficulty.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not

that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. James 1:2-8

Patience works with faith to bring about deliverance. You need both. But be sure to adopt the right attitude. You have to 'count it all joy'. Not because you have a problem, but because God is there with you to see you through and out! If you need wisdom as to how to apply the word you know, ask God without wavering. It will come if you don't doubt. Move only when you know what to do, otherwise you could find yourself making a wrong move and thus make the situation even worse. The devil is sure to knock you around then and lie to you that God does not really care. Look for the way of escape, it will become clear if you don't panic and start doubting God's integrity.

Paul and Silas get honey from the Rock in Prison!

Paul and Silas found honey in a hard place. They landed up in trouble for faithfully serving God. Sometimes that persecution happens. There are evil people in the world! Yet look at their response to their distress. They praised God! Not for the bad place they had found themselves in, but because they knew the power of deliverance through praise. God is found in the place of praise for He inhabits the praises of His people. Paul and Silas may have been in prison, but they were not going to let prison get in them. They kept the despair out through prayer and praise. They found honey in the rock that dark night. Their deliverance soon followed as an earthquake hit the place. Some have joked that maybe God was tapping His feet to the music of their hearts as they sang. After all, the earth is His footstool and if He taps His foot a little, it's fair to say that things are going to shake!

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.
Acts 16:25-26

Little by little.

Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land.
Exodus 23:30

Little by little: gain dominion, consolidate, settle into that place of victory, and then take more territory again! You don't want to take two steps forward and three back as the enemy organizes a backlash against you. Establish yourself in an area in your life, and never go back on it. Then move on to the next thing the Lord has for you. He will direct your steps and guide you. Don't be discouraged by the time it takes. Keep laying hold of the life He made available to you in Christ. Keep going forward and take the ground that belongs to you step by step.

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession... 1 Timothy 6:12

The good things God has begun to do in your life, will grow and grow as you trust Him more and more.

He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;...

Philippians 1:6

He will order your thinking and the steps you need to take. You don't have to create your future; it's already created for you in the mind of God. What you have to do is hear His voice and follow in His footsteps. Cast your cares on the Lord, consecrate your future to Him, and continue to see Him sustain you with honey from the rock!

If you have never accepted Jesus as your Lord.

God has made it possible for you to get into right relationship with Him.

He sent His Son Jesus into the world to live, die and rise again from the dead so that you could be forgiven of your sins, live a life that pleases Him, and joined to Him forever in heaven when you die.

God expects you to **acknowledge** your need for His forgiveness, **believe** that He raised Jesus from the dead, and be prepared to **confess** Jesus as Lord before witnesses in the world you live in.

Accept His free gift of eternal life today. Turn away from your sinful past, wholeheartedly put your trust in Him today. Pray this prayer out loud from your heart, you will be giving your life back to him, and He will love, protect and provide for you all the days of your life.

Dear God in heaven,

*I accept that I need your forgiveness for my sin.
I repent and acknowledge that I cannot save myself.
I believe that you raised your only begotten son Jesus from the dead.
I ask you to come into my heart right now and be my Lord.
I confess you Jesus as the Lord (master) of my life.
I promise to serve you all my days.*

Thank you for saving me. I am now your child, accepted into your family.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Friend,

Now that you have prayed this prayer, get into a good Bible believing church that focuses on Jesus and His word, read your Bible starting with the gospel of John in the New Testament, and tell someone that you have accepted Jesus as Your Lord. Pray to your new heavenly Father every day, and look to God to help you in every area of your life.

God bless you.