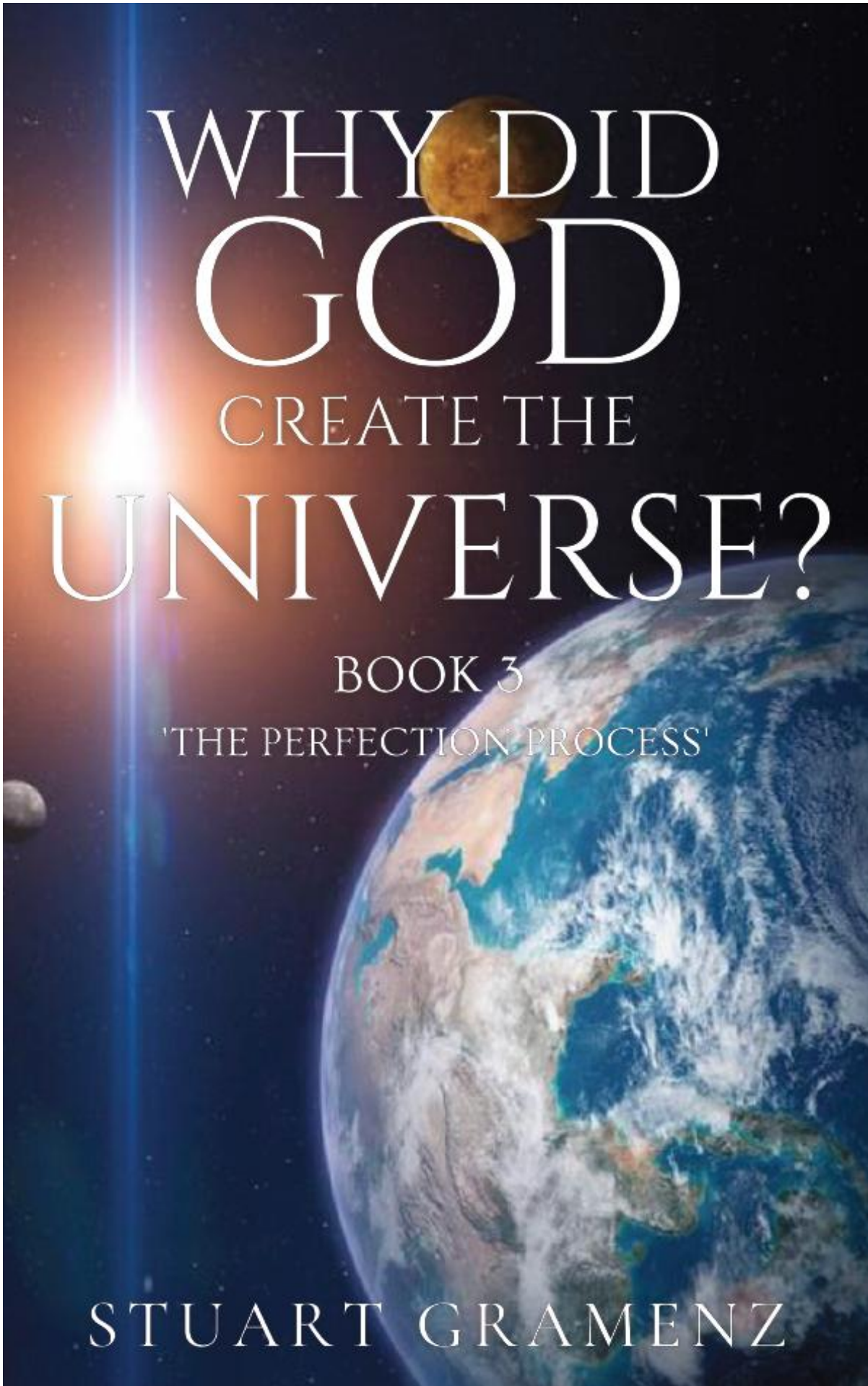




WHY DID GOD CREATE THE UNIVERSE?

BOOK 3
'THE PERFECTION PROCESS'

STUART GRAMENZ

GOD CREATE THE UNIVERSE? BOOK 3

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TRANSLATIONS USED

Much has been discussed about which of the many Bible translations has most effectively interpreted God's truths. For study, we prefer the original King James or the New King James Version. However, all translations from the original Greek were made by men and therefore have strengths and weaknesses. When seeking the most appropriate translation, our evaluation is based on catching the Spirit of what the writer intended. Translations, other than the KJV, can at times provide a greater insight into the truth; we have used these on such occasions.

BOOK 3

THE PERFECTION PROCESS

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INTRODUCTION

In Book 1 of our five-part series, we revealed the foundation of God's Master Plan for His children.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Eph. 4:11-13

As this Scripture says, God will raise believers who will to the same level of perfection as Jesus. We do not have to wait to get to heaven to achieve this. This Scripture reveals to us that the five-fold ministry is to equip us to achieve this in this age, not the next.

Jesus confirms that He expects believers to imitate Him in this age.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." John 14:12-14

"Most assuredly, he who believes in Me can become perfected imitators of Jesus in this age. Why does God want to raise a company of perfected overcoming believers?

In Book 2 of our series, we saw the rewards for overcomers.

"And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations." Rev. 2:26

"He who overcomes shall inherit all things." Rev, 21:7

We also saw that not all believers will achieve this level of maturity.

In this book, we will reveal:

- What it takes to become an overcomer.
- How believers are overcome rather than overcoming.
- How non-overcomers are being sidetracked.
- All believers will face the General Tribulation. Not all will face the Great Tribulation.
- The great falling away of believers.
- God's unconventional method of producing overcomers.
- How to achieve the standard of a Jesus imitator.
- *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind".* Would God decree something that is impossible for believers to achieve?

Chapter 1

OVERCOMERS OR OVERCOME?

Looking to the future and understanding the Lord's awesome universal plans for the saints is inspiring and exciting. However, let's now get our minds off the heavenlies and get our feet back on the ground. In our present circumstances, we need to ensure that we receive our inheritance and are part of the company of believers that will rule and reign with Him throughout eternity.

We assume that if you have read our material to this point, you desire to be an overcomer and part of the Bride of Christ. To achieve this, many believers need to upgrade their vision and expectations of themselves.

The responsibility of the five-fold ministry *is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the Church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Eph. 4:11-13 NLT*

Godly Character, not Physical Perfection

In Book 1 of this series, we explored the meaning of the word 'perfect'. used.

In Ephesians 4-13, the Greek word for 'perfect', *teleioo* (NT 5048) means "*complete, consummate in character.*"

Many believers have not grasped the truth of our Dad's Master Plan to equip us to imitate Jesus. Why? Tradition has deceived many by imposing its own interpretation of the term "perfection." As we have just shown, 'perfect' *teleioo* means "*complete, consummate in character.*" **It refers to our Godly spiritual character, not our physical perfection.** (2 Cor.12:9-10).

Scripture reveals that we receive perfected bodies when we are resurrected (Rom. 8:21-25; 1 Cor. 15:50-54). However, how do we receive Godly character?

...be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect (teleioo) will of God. Rom. 12:2

Clearly, isn't it both Scriptural and logical that we can be transformed by renewing our minds and developing our perfect Godly character ... before we receive our glorified bodies?

Obviously, in my mind, if our five-fold ministry is to equip believers to become *a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Chris*. Scripture and common sense tell me that this can and should take place in this age.

Jesus told us, "*And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect (teleioo) in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me.*" John 17:22-23

If people **in the world** are to know that believers *may be made perfect in one*, this must happen in this age, not be left exclusively to the next.

Nevertheless, others who read Ephesians 4:11-13 didn't seem to share my excitement.

In their minds, I was simply an enthusiastic baby believer who had gone off the deep end.

I soon realized that, by tradition, many believers and fivefold ministers held that this level of Christlikeness would come only after death or the rapture.

Our readers should decide if they believe these Scriptures. If not, is it possible that they have been led by tradition? Therefore, can they take time out and decide if they have inherited a way of thinking?

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. 1 Cor. 2:9-15

Practical Application

The final benchmark of *measuring up to Christ's full and complete standard* has yet to be attained. How is achieving 'the full and complete standard' outworked in practical terms?

When God speaks, His words are 'rhema' words. This means they are alive and creative, and they provide the authority and power necessary to accomplish their purpose.
So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word (rhema) of God. Rom. 10:17

Hearing God's rhema words empowered Jesus with the faith and authority to do His will. This solves the mystery regarding Jesus' incredible ministry. He only spoke or did what the Father asked or showed Him to do (John 12:49-50; 5:19-20).

Following this same pattern enables believers to imitate Him.
"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." John 14:12,14

Jesus told them. "I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there', and it would move. Nothing would be impossible." Matt. 17:20 NLT

Most believers would not even consider Matthew 17:20 possible, or they would write it off as symbolic. If symbolic, what does it symbolize? It reveals that even a miniscule rhema word from the Lord gives believers a seed of faith, empowering them to achieve the miraculous.

What enabled Peter to walk on water? He received a mustard seed rhema word from Jesus. Peter said, *"Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."* So He said, *"Come."* Matt. 14:28-29. That seed word "Come" empowered Peter to become a Jesus imitator.

Those who desire to be consummate overcomers must overcome their self-imposed restrictions on God's ability to operate through them with His mustard-seed words.

The only way to overcome further limitations **is to hear from Him moment by moment.**
Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track. Prov. 3:5-6 MSG

For most, this means moving beyond the gifts of the Spirit and lifting our present standard of hearing from Him from occasional to every occasion, in everything we say and do. The season to achieve this has arrived for the end-time believers!

Nevertheless, let's not overly spiritualize this.

You can be Spirit-led by doing everyday tasks, such as serving at your workplace or doing housework (Phil. 2:7; Col. 3:17). Furthermore, let's not take this to an irrational extreme (as some do).

God is not concerned whether you buy a red car rather than a blue one or whether you put on your left shoe before your right.

However, when it comes to issues that affect your livelihood and others' lives, He wants to keep you on track with His rhema words.

I advise you to obey only the Holy Spirit's instructions.

He will tell you where to go and what to do, and then you won't always be doing the wrong things your evil nature wants you to. Gal 5:16-17 TLB (Heb. 9:14)

Why do believers find it difficult to enter into this lifestyle and become sidetracked into legalism, depending on their own willpower... or won't power?

1. As discussed earlier in Book 1, some traditionally teach that everything God wanted to tell us is already in the Bible, thereby negating the need, personally, to be Spirit-led. However, what does the Bible teach?

"He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come." John 16:13,14

For His Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets. 1 Cor. 2:10 NLT

This means that all truth, all future events, as well as all of God's thoughts and deep secrets, are not contained in our Bible. Nevertheless, He will show and tell us what God is thinking. The Lord confirms this vital truth. *"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know." Jer. 33:3 +*

He also assures us: *If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. James 1:5 NLT*: If all wisdom is already contained in the Bible, why must we ask Him for it? We need to understand that we can be Spirit-led in two complementary ways.

This next verse reveals it can be 1. Firstly, person-to-person; or 2. Secondly, being reminded of Scriptures.

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, 1. He will teach you all things, and 2. bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you". John 14:26

We can be led (yet confined) by trying to be led exclusively by Scripture. Why confined? The Bible does not provide exact answers to every one of our personal daily challenges or to how to meet the needs of others. The Lord wants to upgrade us from traditional restrictions to a supernatural, liberating, Spirit-led life that Jesus modeled.

Furthermore, He wants you to seek an intimate friendship with Him and to love Him with all your heart, soul, and mind. You can't have that heartfelt relationship with a book.

Obviously, if we receive 'a word' that contravenes Bible principles, it is not from the Lord.

2. Some leaders entirely reject the idea of teaching on hearing God's voice, as they have encountered believers who mistakenly believed they heard from God and went off-track. With any Godly teaching, some will obey, and some will get it wrong. Do we stop teaching truth because of those who are misguided or produce counterfeits? The devil is delighted when teachers and their followers throw in the towel.

3. Other teachers provide theological information regarding the facts of the Spirit-led life. Nevertheless, they do not understand how to equip believers with practical steps to hear His voice. Their disciples are informed but not transformed.

4. In reality, many of these types of leaders have an underlying stronghold. They cannot conceive the possibility of becoming Spirit-led imitators of Christ themselves, let alone their followers.

Hence, they can defensively use excuses to avoid exposing their own faith deficit.

“You’re hopeless, you religion scholars! You took the key of knowledge, but instead of unlocking doors, you locked them. You won’t go in yourself and won’t let anyone else in either.” Luke 11:52 MSG

As a result, the loving relationship between many disciples and the Lord remains a theological supposition. At best, it is a one-way conversation between them and the Lord. Can you imagine a marriage in which a bride speaks to her husband and receives no reply?

Therefore, it’s time for a new breed of equipping leaders to emerge who, in fact, believe that *His sheep follow Him because they know His voice. John 10:4*

How can we assess if we are hearing from the Lord? God will regularly tell His kids that He loves them. A simple test: Has God told you lately that He loves you?

Nevertheless, the Lord is aware of the general apathy, ignorance, and unbelief that exists in the Church in these end times. He will allow the conditions that make it possible to imitate Christ, leading those seeking Him to a new level of faith and endurance. We need to look to the early Church for evidence of this.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

As we are aware, on the day of Pentecost, after receiving power from on high, the early Church exploded into action. Peter explained.

But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.

And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath.”

Acts 2:16-19

Revelation, Power, and Fire

When the Lord poured out His Spirit on the early Church, He revealed the mystery of the gospel and how the Holy Spirit could lead and empower believers. He provided proof through many great signs and wonders. As a result, the believers’ incredible reputation preceded them. *These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Acts 17:6*

They were instructed. *“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Luke 3:16-17*

For the believer, fire symbolizes refining or purification. The early Church was perfected or refined through the fire of tribulation/persecution.

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. James 1:2-4

What is the purpose of a trial or test? In a natural school, students take tests to ensure they are ready for a higher grade. No one enjoys a test, but there is elation and fulfillment when they pass.

The Lord desires to take believers to the surpassing grades of faith, *that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

We know that if we pass His tests, greater trust, peace, and joy will be our reward. To overcome these trials, we need to know what they will include and how to prepare ourselves for them.

THE END-TIME CHURCH

As awesome as the Spirit's move in the early church was, the Lord has an even greater outpouring planned for end-time believers.

Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God; For He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you — The former rain and the latter rain in the first month. Joel 2:23

When the Lord poured out His Spirit on the early church, they received the former rain. Incredibly, the end-time church will receive the outpouring of the Spirit with a combination of both the former and latter rains (a double empowerment).

This deluge may appear inconceivable to skeptics, but those spiritual rains will produce a harvest of empowered Jesus imitators.

A person who isn't spiritual doesn't accept the teachings of God's Spirit. He thinks they're nonsense. He can't understand them because a person must be spiritual to evaluate them.

1 Cor. 2:14 GW

The Revelation of Relationship

How do we receive this outpouring?

Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth. Hos. 6:3

Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. As already confirmed, this does not mean theological facts about Him. It speaks of being equipped by genuine five-fold ministries that provide the keys to initiating an intimate friendship with Him.

Oh, that we might know the Lord! Let us press on to know him. Hos. 6:3 NLT

As we relate to Him, He will reveal things to us, and that friendship develops.

"No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you." John 15:15

Many believers have a degree of relationship with Him but know there is a shortfall. We are to pursue an intimate knowledge of Him. In other words, once you have been equipped with the keys to be led by Him, use them to *press on* and cultivate your friendship by hearing from Him on a continuous basis.

The end-time Bride will make herself ready and be able to hear from Him moment by moment.

If you are thirsty enough for an outpouring and seek Him, He will provide it.

"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." Luke 11:9-10 (James 4:8)

You can draw closer to Him as a friend by initiating conversations, such as discussing the challenges that you are facing or other questions you may have.

However, don't just share your problems; ask for answers and expect a reply (a thought or Scripture that pops into your head). *"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."* Jer. 33:3

For those seeking assistance in precisely identifying His voice, we have a workbook titled "Up Close and Personal with Jesus." Complete this in conjunction with mentoring by a mature Christian (someone who is already hearing from God).

Completing the activations will help you get into the habit of talking to Him moment by moment and receiving revelation about how to improve and deepen your relationship.

Many have finally grasped the more profound truth of water baptism through listening to Him.... *Baptism, which means, of course, far more than the mere washing of a dirty body: it means the ability to face God with a clear conscience. 1 Peter 3:21 J.B. Phillips*

This revelation will overpower the residual shame and guilt that many believers still suffer. Thereby providing a foundation for a genuine, intimate friendship with Him.
Dear friends, if we don't feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence.

John 3:21 NLT

Hearing His voice will empower believers to accomplish His will in both His love and His power. This will then provide the solution to overcoming sin, ministering successfully to others, and living a life of peace and joy.

Live freely, animated and motivated by God's Spirit. Then you won't feed the compulsions of selfishness. Gal. 5:16 MSG

When we realize that by being Spirit-led and overcoming our sins one at a time, we will receive the full revelation that it is possible to press on and achieve the ultimate of *measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.*

This will motivate our present-day believers, who sense they are lukewarm and lethargic, to keep working on their friendship. We recommend our book "I'm Just Dying to Hear from God" for greater insight.

Apart from the outpouring of revelation of being totally Spirit-led, as with the early church, the end-time believers will also receive an equitable outpouring of tests and fiery trials. These tests will increase our dependence on Him and, in doing so, help bring us to full maturity. These trials will come in three basic stages.

STAGE 1. THE BEGINNING OF SORROWS

When Jesus was asked, *"What will be the sign of your coming at the end of the age?"* He replied: *"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."

Matt. 24:6-8

There are currently wars and rumors of wars in the world. Many have been drawn to Ezekiel 38 (the Gog and Magog War) and its possible connection with the present conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Let's assume this is possible: that revelation, or at least the fullness of this prophecy, will occur at some point in the future.

These prophecies are an entrée, a warning about the Antichrist's future rule. Other prophetic words reveal that, in all probability, a new world order (a one-world government, a one-world church movement, and a one-world financial system) will evolve.

The Lord didn't warn us merely to show how clever we are by revealing what He has already prophesied. When they do emerge, what should be the reaction of believers? Are we to fearfully deliberate over wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, government control, etc.? What do debates and arguments achieve?

These prophecies cannot be stopped, as Jesus' prophecies are inevitable and unpreventable! As we have indicated, God will allow them. He will use these calamities and ordeals to draw the unsaved to seek Him and believers into a deeper relationship with Him.

The Serenity Prayer

The Serenity Prayer is commonly quoted: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

These prophecies can certainly serve as witnesses to both the saved and the unsaved, as proof of the reliability of God's Word.

Nevertheless, does an older, mature believer need further evidence of God's Word, or is there a greater consideration? What is the underlying purpose of Jesus' warning to us?

He tells us that these things are only *the beginning of sorrows*. Another translation says; *But all this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come. Matt. 24:8 NLT*

Satan's Game Plan

The devil's ploy is to sidetrack believers into speculation, debate, and division, and keep our attention exclusively on the *beginning of sorrows*. Why? It is a major distraction, diverting our attention from the reality of the next events on God's calendar.

Jesus' warning to mature believers is to alert them that when we see these 'beginnings', worse things are about to follow! We know that labor pains become more frequent and more intense. What events will increase and cause more pain?

STAGE 2. GENERAL TRIBULATION/PERSECUTION

Jesus' prophecy continues.

"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." Matt. 24:9-14

Increasing Labor Pain: *"A brother will betray his brother to death, a father will betray his own child, children will rebel against their parents and cause them to be killed."* Mark 13:12

Greater Labor Pain: *"Even those closest to you—your parents, brothers, relatives, and friends—will betray you. They will even kill some of you."* Luke 21:16 NLT

This is why the Lord gave us the Stage 1 forewarning. After seeing them come to pass, it's a final wake-up call that there will be an escalation of attacks on committed believers, resulting in martyrdom.

While we can't entirely stop the betrayals, we can certainly minimize them.

To that end, we have released our book, "Will Those Closest to You Betray You?"

From Labor Pains to Birth

Despite being aware of this, some Christians find the concept of betrayal so reprehensible that they bury their heads in the sand and say, "This could never happen in our country, and certainly not to my family or with believers who are my friends. God wouldn't allow it."

They are in denial. Not only does Jesus allow these trials, but He assures us that every country around the world will experience great labor pains of hatred and betrayal.

*"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."* Matt. 24:9-10

Those who do not accept Jesus' words are revealing that they are presently misinformed.

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Matt. 5:11-12 (John 15:20)

Regrettably, some preachers don't want to reveal the truth of this bad news, as it can affect attendance at services or online popularity. Pressure can also come from public opinion, just as it did in the Old Testament.

They tell my prophets, "Shut up-we don't want any more of your reports!" Or they say, "Don't tell us the truth; tell us nice things; tell us lies. Forget all this gloom; we've heard more than enough about your 'Holy One of Israel' and all he says." Isa. 30:10 TLB

Why doesn't God always tell us *nice things*? As revealed earlier, the labor pains of trials give birth to a company of saints who are His Bride (imitators of Jesus).

*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**.* James 1:2-4

In His Master Plan to see you *perfect and complete, lacking nothing*, He will test your faith.

General Tribulation

During the early time frames, believers will suffer *tribulation* (persecution). We shall refer to it as commonplace or General Tribulation (Matt.24.6-7)

General Tribulation has always been, and will always be, involved in the persecution of the saints.

"In the world you will have tribulation." John 16:33 (Rom.5:3; 8:35; Acts 14:22; Eph.3:13)
No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. 1 Cor. 10:12-13 NRSV

Some may be thinking, "Doesn't the Bible teach that those judged righteous will not suffer God's wrath?" That's correct. (1Thess. 1:10; Rom. 5:9). However, we must distinguish between General Tribulations (Matt.24.6-7) and the Great Tribulation (Matt.24:21).

God has a specific time for releasing His wrath. *For the great day of His wrath has come.*
Rev. 6:17

That great day occurs during the rule of the Antichrist and the Great Tribulation (Matt.24:21). The seven bowls of wrath will be poured out on unbelievers (Rev.16:1-21). We discussed this in greater detail in Book 2. These include:

- Horrible and malignant sores break out on those who worship the Antichrist.
- Being scorched with fire; men gnawing their tongues because of the horrendous pain.
- The sea becomes like blood, and everything in it dies.
- Mountains will be leveled, and islands will disappear.
- The most tremendous earthquake in history.
- Gigantic hailstones falling on mankind.

We can see that the General Tribulation and the horrific outpouring of God's wrath during the Great Tribulation are separate events in different timelines. All believers will endure General Tribulations (Matt.24:6-7), but they will not face God's wrath.

STAGE 3. GREAT TRIBULATION

After General Tribulations (Matt. 24:6-14), Jesus' warning in Matthew continues. *"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be."* Matt. 24:21 (already discussed Rev. 16:1-21)

The initial birth pains were an early warning of the coming of the Antichrist and the coming wrath of God. Jesus forewarned us that we needed to overcome the General Tribulation tests ... if we want to escape the Antichrist's rule.

"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." Luke 21:36

The overcomers will endure the trials of the General Tribulation and be counted worthy to escape increased persecution during the Antichrist's rule.

It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. Rev. 13:7

RAPTURE DECEPTION?

Many believers have been taught that the way to escape any form of tribulation is through what is commonly known as the rapture. Despite being forewarned, *"In the world you will have tribulation"*, they believe they are bulletproof and look forward to being raptured at any moment without facing the trials of the General Tribulation.

Firstly, if **all** believers are given an unconditional rapture escape ticket by faith, why would Jesus need to lay down additional qualifications on the ticket? Pray *always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass?*

Secondly, prior to the Great Tribulation, in the earlier stages of General Tribulation, Christians will be on the earth and experience persecution, amid wars, famines, pestilences, etc.

Obviously, some will not endure and will fail these tests. *"And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved."* Matt. 24:12

Only those overcomers who endure these trials will be counted worthy to escape the rule of the Antichrist. For others, *“the love of many will grow cold.”*

We can be overcomers or overcome! Those who are expecting to be raptured any day now need to meditate on Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:6-14.

He is obviously talking about believers who are persecuted and betrayed, etc., while still on the earth. In other words, they have not been raptured (discussed in Book 4 in our series).

We do believe in an escape! However, the timing of it is the issue.

Based on Jesus’ irrefutable words, any escape will occur after the General Tribulations and just before the Great Tribulation (Matt.24:21).

As we have yet to experience all the fallout of escalating General Tribulation (Matthew 24:6-14), we don’t believe in an escape at any moment.

We provide Scriptural evidence and in-depth commentary on this escape and the subsequent timing of the rapture in Book 4.

Our point is that we must be prepared for future trials prior to any escape.

HOW ARE BELIEVERS MISLED?

What causes believers to be misled and believe that they will *“be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass”* and be raptured?

Many have been taught, based on this next Scripture, that they will escape any fiery trial. *No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone.*

God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. 1 Cor. 10:13 ESV

Endurance ... not Evasion

His promise is not an unconditional insurance policy with an escape clause. Believers in Western countries are not special cases. Therefore, they cannot expect an exemption.

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. 1 Cor.10:13

It’s an instruction in endurance, but through the testing *he will also provide the way out so that you may endure it*. Please meditate on this Scripture. You will be able to endure the tests, not escape them. **It’s endurance ... not evasion.**

The Refining Process

Furthermore, many believers need continual reminding of why He allows these fiery trials to take place. They are all a part of His Master Plan!

There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine.

It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold.

So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise, glory, and honor on the day Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.

1 Peter 1:6-7 NLT

Gold is refined by heating it to around 1064 degrees Celsius (1947 degrees Fahrenheit), which is its melting point. The impurities (dross) float to the surface and are removed (Prov. 25:4).

Similarly, the intense heat of many additional trials will bring sinful impurities in our lives to the surface, where we can identify them, repent of them, and remove them. (Rev. 3:18-19)

If God's Master Plan involves raising a remnant of end-time believers who can imitate Jesus, why would He rapture them before His refining process is complete?

Therefore, we believe that the *escape* that the Lord provides happens **after** these trials are completed and before the rule of the Antichrist and the Great Tribulation.

IN THAT DAY

Therefore, isn't any teaching that claims all believers will be raptured prior to the fiery trials of the Great Tribulation deceptive? *Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first. 2 Thess. 2:3*

That day refers to the times of the coming of the Lord (2 Thess.2:1-4). Obviously, *the falling away* will happen before *that day*. The result ... *the love of many will grow cold*.

How *many* will possibly grow cold?

Perhaps the prophetic word of Zechariah in Chapter 13:1-9 can give us some insight into the fallout. In the introduction to the chapter, the prophet also refers to the time frame, *in that day* in verses 1, 2, and 4. He then continues.

"And it shall come to pass in all the land", says the Lord, "That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, This is my people; and each one will say, 'The Lord is my God'." Zech. 13:8-9 ESV

One-third – the Bride

We appreciate that some expositors believe this applies to national Israel. All the same, we need to take particular note of what happens to one-third. *"I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested."*

We have just read about the testing of the saints. +

These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. 1 Peter 1:6-7 NLT

Consequently, we believe that these two companies of believers are one and the same.

Hence, *in that day* refers to spiritual Israel (the saints) before Jesus' return. Those refined will be the end-time overcomers.

Nevertheless, we are not indicating that natural Israel will not be refined at some stage; rather, we are simply revealing that overcomers most certainly will.

Two-thirds - Cut Off and Die

In that time frame, *what do the words "cut off and die" reveal and confirm to us? For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you too will be cut off. Rom. 11:21-22 ESV*

Jesus' message to the church at Sardis may well confirm Zechariah's prophetic word.
*"I know your works. **You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.** Wake up, and strengthen what remains, and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.*
*Yet **you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments,** and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.*
The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life." Rev. 3:1-5 ESV

Deceptively, they believe they are alive or worthy. Jesus reveals the truth regarding a majority in the church who *are dead*, and a few who are worthy.

Consequently, we can see that the love of many (possibly two-thirds) will grow cold, die spiritually, and be cut off. The Scriptures in Revelation Chapter 3 indicate the carnage will be greater. Those statistics should act as a frightening warning and a wake-up call to the Body of Christ. It is little wonder that Paul also warned us: *"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."* Phil. 2:12

What should be an overcomer's response after hearing about those who have *the reputation of being alive*, but are dying?

"Wake up and strengthen what remains and is about to die."

PAN THEOLOGY?

Like many believers, I became frustrated with the many end-time theories, which evolved into debates, angry discussions, and relationship breakdowns.

As a result, to deflect or avoid any conflict, I joined the multitudes who claimed to be "Pan Theologists". Pan Theologians can avoid any arguments by simply declaring with an ironic smile, "It will all pan out in the end".

Nevertheless, I found myself in the default position of joining the ranks of the apathetic. We have an idiom in Australian jargon, "No worries, she'll be right, mate!" The translation: "I can't be bothered doing anything about the problem".

Likewise, I found my Pan Theology bred spiritual complacency.

I needed to pull my head out of the sand, discover a reason for these end-time events, and shake off my lethargic indifference.

Pan or Plan Theology?

Jesus didn't warn us with these prophecies so we can say, "She'll be right, mate!" It was His wake-up call to prepare ourselves as overcomers. Our concern is that Pan Theology will be of little use when the fiery trials begin. For many (two-thirds?), it won't be alright, mate.

We can continue with Pan Theology or replace it with Plan Theology. We have already revealed the plan. *"Wake up and strengthen what remains and is about to die."*

Overcomer or Overcome?

We must be continually motivated by understanding why God allows all these things. He is looking to provide a glorious Bride for His Son. Therefore, even though there will be a great falling away and *the love of many will grow cold*, there will be those who overcome this adversity.

“Everyone will hate you because you are committed to me. But the person who patiently endures to the end will be saved.” Matt. 10:22 GW

There will be a remnant of believers who will fulfill the greatest commandments, loving the Lord and others more than they love their own lives.

You can overcome the circumstances or be an overcomer and receive your inheritance. *Our great desire is that you will keep on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true. Then you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent. Instead, you will follow the example of those who are going to inherit God’s promises because of their faith and endurance. Heb. 6:11-12 NLT*

Eschatology or Escape-ology?

On the one hand, does your present eschatology allow trials to refine you and bring you to perfection? On the other hand, do you believe in escape-ology whereby you won’t have to endure any hardships?

MASTER PLAN OUTLINE

The Lord is aware of the general indifference, ignorance, and unbelief existing in the Church in these end-times. He will allow the conditions that will make imitators of Christ a reality.

He will pour out the revelation of His Plan to bring us to perfection, and He will allow the refining of believers through fiery tests to achieve this.

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. James 1:2-4

There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. 1 Peter 1:6-7 NLT

Grey Area Considerations

Based on this next Scripture, many have been taught that they will be raptured and escape any fiery trials.

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. 1 Cor. 10:13

His promise is not an unconditional insurance policy with an escape clause.

If God’s Master Plan involves raising imitators of Jesus, why would He rapture all of them before His refining process is complete?

Those who have not strengthened themselves through an enduring relationship with Him will cave in under the pressure of these initial birth-pain end-time events. It makes both logical and theological good sense to prepare ourselves for the fiery trials ahead.

Questions: Are you seeking a premature rapture to escape the distressing circumstances and tribulations (that God has allowed to refine you)? Alternatively, are you seeking to be equipped to be transformed into an overcomer who can endure the end-time birth pains?

Summary Chapter 1

1. The Lord desires believers to become imitators of Jesus. The only way to achieve this is to hear from Him moment by moment (in everything we say and do). To most believers, that lifestyle would appear overwhelming.

2. The Lord is aware of the general apathy, ignorance, and unbelief existing in the church in these end-times. He will allow the conditions that make imitators of Christ not only possible but real. The end-time believers will receive the outpouring of the Spirit with a combination of the former and latter rains, building intimacy and friendship with Him.

3. Conspicuously, apart from the outpouring of revelation of being totally led by Him, the end-time church will also receive an equivalent outpouring of tests and fiery trials. These tests will increase our dependence on Him and help bring us to full maturity.

4. Jesus prophesied: *“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars and there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. When we see these beginnings, we should be aware that worse things are about to follow!*

5. Jesus’ prophecy continues. ***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.*

6. Nevertheless, why would God allow this kind of persecution? There is some good news. *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.* The tests refine and produce His glorious Bride.

7. Many have been taught that they will be raptured and escape any fiery trials based on this Scripture. *God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so **that you may be able to endure it.***

8. His promise is not an unconditional insurance policy with an escape clause. Gold is refined by heating it to its melting point. The impurities float to the surface and are removed. Similarly, the incredibly intense heat from the many additional trials will cause sinful impurities (dross) in our lives to surface, be identified, repented of, and removed.

9. If God’s Master Plan involves raising imitators of Jesus, why would He rapture them before His refining process is complete? Unfortunately, those who have not developed an enduring relationship with Him will cave under the pressure of these initial end-time events.

10. The love of many (possibly two-thirds) will grow cold, spiritually die, and be cut off. The church at Sardis believed they were alive or worthy. Jesus reveals the majority in the church *are dead*, and *a few* are worthy. Those statistics should shake the Body of Christ.

Questions: Are you seeking a premature rapture to escape the distressing circumstances (God has allowed in order to refine you)? Alternatively, are you seeking to be equipped, enabling you to become an overcomer who can endure the end-time birth pains?

Chapter 2

EMPOWERING OVERCOMERS

In our previous chapter, we saw that gold is refined by heating it to its melting point. The impurities float to the surface and are removed. Similarly, the incredibly intense heat from the many additional end-time trials will cause sinful and selfish impurities in our lives to surface and be eliminated. As a result, the Lord will produce a remnant of glorious 24-carat believers.

I'M ALREADY REFINED?

Unfortunately, this process can be deceptively discarded or ignored. Many believers have developed a habit of comparing themselves to other believers and judging themselves by their own standards.

But they are only comparing themselves with each other, using themselves as the standard of measurement. How ignorant! 2 Cor. 10:12 NLT

Why ignorant? Human nature will have a believer noting all their own perceived good points and comparing them to the shortfalls they can see in others. As our goal is to become imitators of Jesus, we can only compare ourselves to Him. *Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. Eph. 5:1* Let's review just some of the impurities that may have surfaced but have not come to the attention of those who remain ignorant.

Spiritual Selfies

To develop a clear picture of your inner man, take a photographic X-ray of what goes on in your mind. It's a spiritual selfie. What would it reveal?

Self-gratification, self-justification, self-indulgence, self-interest, self-appeasement, self-opinionated, self-reliant, self-righteous, self-seeking, self-willed, self-absorbed, self-centered, self-esteem, self-preservation, self-pity, self-conceited are just some on the shortlist.

If you've evaluated that none of these apply to you, you may need to add self-deception to the list (An expanded definition of these selfies is available at the end of this chapter).

Let's examine just a few possibilities that may bring those impurities to the surface.

1. Self-Gratification

God created humans with two basic needs: to love and to be loved. Nevertheless, we need to receive the power of love to love others wholeheartedly.

How do we receive love? Three important ingredients are **acceptance, acknowledgment, and appreciation**. We call them the three A's. The lion's share of that love impartation must come from God, with a supplement from our relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

If we do not receive the empowerment of the three A's through our friendship with the Lord, our craving and hunger for them will escalate. Only one other source can help alleviate our famine. Subconsciously, we will attempt to extract the missing acceptance, acknowledgment, and appreciation from those around us.

"But all their works they do to be seen by men." Matt. 23:5 (Matt.6:1-4)

Therefore, our underlying motive for anything we do (even "good" things) can be to gain recognition, self-gratification, or self-appeasement.

Consequently, to help identify any impurities that may surface, we need to be continually checking our primary motivation for doing good deeds. In other words, “Am I doing this for me, or for them?”

Don't act out of selfish ambition or be conceited. Instead, humbly think of others as being better than yourselves. Don't be concerned only about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others. Phil. 2:3-4 GW

2. Self-Esteem

You may recall that Jesus warned the apostle Peter that the enemy would sift him to deal with his pride (Luke 22:31-34). In our minds, we may have imagined that the attack on Peter would be direct, such as sickness, persecution, beatings, etc.

However, it didn't come from his enemies as such, but from those around him who simply exposed the truth.

A servant girl came to him, saying, “You also were with Jesus of Galilee.”

Peter was identified three times as a disciple of Jesus. To protect himself, he retreated into denial. *Then he began to curse and swear, saying, “I do not know the Man!”* (Matt.26:69-74)

His repudiation and denial of the Lord exposed his weakness.

God can use those around you to speak the truth and reveal particular ‘selfies’ that control our lives. Quite often, these people are close to you: your spouse, kids, and friends.

Instead of accepting exposure as constructive criticism, human nature can take over, and, like Peter, we can become defensive and try to protect our self-esteem.

Some believers repent at the first disclosure; others may need a few reminders; and still others retreat completely into self-denial and blame-shifting.

3. Self-Preservation

Let's look at a third possible “selfie” impurity. In recent times, we have faced the COVID-19 pandemic. What was the church's reaction in general before vaccines were provided? What would their response have been like if a believer's next-door neighbor contracted the virus? Would they have considered going to them, sharing the gospel, and praying for them? Alternatively, would they be more likely to isolate themselves and avoid them?

When vaccines did appear, did that assurance of protection motivate us to seek opportunities to pray for the sick? Did our leaders see an open door and encourage the church to carry out the great commission (Mark 16:15-18)? In most cases, I believe we know the answer. The major discussion among believers was not about the unsaved and whether to pray or not. It was about **self-preservation**... “Do I get the jab or not get the jab?”

For believers who consider themselves already refined, this is just another example of the power of “a selfie”. It may be wise to review “the selfie list” and ask the Lord to provide His assessment to avoid future exposure.

You can then ask Him to convict you of the one He may want to deal with at this time, thereby side-stepping the possibility of having to be exposed openly or publicly, as was Peter.

FUTURE TRIALS

Jesus warns us of future pestilences, famines, etc.

Pandemics of advanced strains of deadly viruses are yet to be released. Scientists will probably struggle with the time required to produce effective vaccines.

Believers will need to decide if they are willing to pray for the sick (apparently unprotected). The world will see the love of the Lord and His power when those who overcome their fear pray and see others healed (Luke 10:19).

Alternatively, those overcome by fear will reveal the level of their faith and maturity. *“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends”.* John 15:12-14

The devil’s goal is to constantly remind believers that their foremost priority is looking after number one ... self-interest.

We will need to fully comprehend God’s Master Plan. Therefore, when the inevitable tests come, we know God allows them and enables us to become overcomers.

Though outwardly we are wearing out, inwardly we are renewed day by day. Our suffering is light and temporary and is producing for us an eternal glory that is greater than anything we can imagine. 2 Cor. 4:16-17 GW

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

Jesus only did what His Father told Him to do or say. As we know, the only way to achieve this was by hearing from Him moment by moment. *“He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”* John 15:5

The Greek word for “abide” is *meno* SC 3306. The Complete Word Study Dictionary translates *meno*: “to be and remain united with Him; one with Him in heart, mind and will”.

As previously discussed, that lifestyle would appear overwhelming and insurmountable to most believers. Left to our own ability and personal motivation, it is impossible.

Please consider that if any genuine believer is constantly surrounded by threats of persecution, food shortages, and pestilence, they will spontaneously seek Him and listen for His voice, moment by moment. That’s an answer to your prayer, and it’s why He will allow fiery trials to surround us. Those who don’t seek Him will be shaken, driven by fear, lose their confidence in the Lord, and they will fall away.

Because of the increased revelation and the endurance of the many tests of end times, the glory revealed in the end-time church will be greater than that of the early church.

Fear not. For thus says the Lord of hosts: “Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land.

And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory”, says the Lord of hosts. “The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine”, declares the Lord of hosts. “And in this place I will give peace”, declares the Lord of hosts.

Haggai 2:6-9

In what way will the latter house (the Church) be greater?

“I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in Me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. Yes, ask Me for anything in my name, and I will do it!” John 14:12,14

TODAY’S CHURCH

It is encouraging to be reminded of Scripture and what lies ahead. Nevertheless, hearing testimonies of modern-day believers can be very inspiring. When the COVID problem began engulfing the world, I began seeking the Lord about what I was to do. He reminded me of John G. Lake’s experience, whose testimony I had read years earlier.

John G Lake

John G. Lake was a missionary who ministered in South Africa from 1908 to 1913 during a horrific outbreak of the Bubonic Plague. He would go into houses and carry out the corpses. There were so many dead that they often had to bury them in mass graves.

Nevertheless, he feared no disease. A doctor sent for John and asked, “What have you been doing to protect yourself?”

John replied, “I believe that as long as I keep my soul in contact with the living God so that His Spirit is flowing into my soul and body, no germ will ever attach itself to me, for the Spirit of God will kill it.”

As proof, John asked the doctor to examine the foam from the lungs of a dead plague victim under a microscope. The doctor did so and found masses of living bacteria.

At John’s insistence, the doctor spread the deadly foam on Lake’s hand, and observing the results under the microscope, he was astonished to discover that all the germs died instantly. John told him, “That is the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus”.

My Story

After reading about this again, I was so inspired that I passionately sought the Lord, asking Him to take me to the same level of faith.

His reply was, “Son. I have already taken you to that level of faith!”

He then reminded me of our overseas ministry regarding leprosy.

We conducted many evangelistic crusades in India in the 1980s and witnessed cripples walking, the blind seeing, and many lepers healed. Leprosy is caused by bacteria and is believed to be contracted when a vulnerable person inhales droplets containing the bacterium. I have no doubt that after laying hands on multitudes of those leprous hands, I would have inadvertently touched my mouth and transferred the bacteria.

The Lord reminded me that we didn’t even consider the possibility of contracting leprosy. Many others in our teams prayed for lepers as we did, and over that ten-year ministry period, not one of our team members contracted the disease.

After witnessing our prayers and confirming the healings, one local, renowned, and highly qualified doctor and specialist told me he wouldn’t even touch his own mother if she had leprosy.

“Why wasn’t I concerned?” I asked the Lord. “We apparently put our team members at risk and defied all logic and common sense.” He then reminded me that His standard of sense was not common.

...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word (rhema) of God. Rom. 10:17

He continued, “When I give you My rhema word, you spontaneously receive the faith to achieve it. When I tell you what to do, I put My Name on it. The result: anything I tell you to do will be done because you can ask in My Name” (John 14:12).

That is why, John G. Lake, you, your team members, and any believer who hears My voice and obeys, I provide the faith required to overpower any natural fears and concerns.

We have an insurance policy with double indemnity. When you sense the Lord is leading you to pray for the sick, faith rises spontaneously for both their healing and your protection.

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Mark 16:15-18 (Luke 10:19)

Uncommon Sense

Are we saying that all believers are to go out and lay hands on those suffering from pandemics or plagues? No! Obviously, not all believers will have the faith impartation (trust) to achieve this.

The underlying problem is that those who have already set their spiritual compass to self-preservation mode won't even ask the Lord whether He wants them to pray. Common sense will overcome them.

We need to remind ourselves that His standard of sense is uncommon (Mark 16:18).

What is the answer to overcoming that fear? Paul declared, *I die daily. 1 Cor. 15:31*

He chose to put the interests of the Father first and overcame the power of self-interest and self-preservation.

Live freely, animated and motivated by God's Spirit. Then you won't feed the compulsions of selfishness. For there is a root of sinful self-interest in us that is at odds with a free spirit, just as the free spirit is incompatible with selfishness. These two ways of life are antithetical, so that you cannot live at times one way and at times another way according to how you feel on any given day. Gal. 5:16-17 MSG

When we make that simple decision to allow God to lead us, no matter the cost, we open the door to hearing His rhema words. We can then receive His sense ... which is not common. *Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track. Prov. 3:5-6 MSG*

Achieving Perfection

How do we meet this final benchmark of measuring up to Christ's full and complete standard? As we are aware, Jesus did only what His Father showed Him to do or say (John 12:49-50; 5:19-20).

Hearing God's rhema words empowered Jesus with the faith and authority to do His Dad's will. **The only way to do this was to hear from Him moment by moment.**

Therefore, *measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ* (or perfection) can be achieved by being entirely led by the Spirit and only doing what the Father tells us or shows us to do. **It isn't achieved by trying not to sin...** but by being obedient.

We have an adage: Christianity is not a life of the "Don't Do's"; it's a life of the "Do Do's". If you only do the "Do Do's", you won't have time or inclination for the "Don't Do's".

I advise you to obey only the Holy Spirit's instructions. He will tell you where to go and what to do, and then you won't always be doing the wrong things your evil nature wants you to.

Gal 5:16-17 TLB

For the majority, this means lifting our standard of hearing from Him from time to time, to every occasion, in everything you say, everywhere you go, and everything you do.

Nevertheless, while this may appear to be an insurmountable task, this is a gradual process. Paul admitted *I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection (teleiōmai). But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. Phil. 3:12-13 NLT*

Paul wrote this letter around A.D. 61. Our point: This great apostle was still pressing toward that level of perfection about 10 years after beginning his ministry (Rom.7:15-21).

How do we press on? Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you to seek Him for guidance in everything you say and do. What starts out as a discipline gradually becomes second nature and can develop into a habitual Spirit-led behavior pattern.

For those who put the interests of the Father first and overcome the power of self-interest and self-preservation, Jesus gives us this incredible promise.

"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works. Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!" John 14:12 NLT

THE HEAVENLY PRIZE - A KEY TO ENDURING

In our previous chapter, we saw that when trials beset us, the Lord will provide a way that enables believers to endure them (Rom.8: 23).

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing He will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. 1 Cor. 10:12-13 ESV

The Heavenly Prize

As discussed previously, the apostle Paul shared a vital motivational ingredient that empowers believers to endure. *No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Phil.3:10-14 NLT*

Like Paul, we need to allow the promise of that heavenly prize to inspire and motivate us to become Jesus' imitators. The heavenly prize has two interwoven parts.

1. An Intimate Relationship with the Lord.
2. Reigning with Him and ruling over all things.

1. YOUR INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

As we witnessed with Paul, the empowerment from your relationship with the Lord will be a major key in enduring future trials.

After World War 2, Pastor Richard Wurmbrand spent fourteen years inside a communist Romanian prison and was tortured for his commitment to Christ. In his book, "Preparing for the Underground Church", he shares a vital key to how believers can 'endure to the end'.

"I have told in the West how Christians were tied to crosses for four days and four nights. The crosses were put on the floor, and other prisoners were tortured and made to fulfill their bodily necessities upon the faces and the bodies of the crucified ones. I have since been asked: 'Which Bible verse helped and strengthened you in those circumstances?'

My answer is: 'No Bible verse was of any help'.

It is sheer cant and religious hypocrisy to say, “This Bible verse strengthens me, or that any Bible verse helps me”.

Bible verses alone are not meant to help. We knew Psalm 23 – *‘The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want; though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.’*

When you pass through suffering, you realize that it was never meant by God that Psalm 23 should strengthen you.

It is the Lord who can strengthen you, not the Psalm which speaks of Him so doing. It is not enough to have the Psalm. You must have the One about whom the Psalm speaks.

Pastors and zealous witnesses who are handling the Word as a calling from God are in danger of giving holy words more value than they really have. Holy words are only the means to arrive at the reality expressed by them.

If you are united with the Reality, the Lord Almighty, evil loses its power over you; it cannot break the Lord Almighty. If you only have the words of the Lord Almighty, you can be very easily broken.”

We encourage you to re-read and meditate on the last paragraph.

Obviously, during those fourteen years, Richard observed the difference between believers who endured and those who were “easily broken.” The solution wasn’t simply “knowing the Bible” but having an intimate relationship with the Author and hearing His words. That provided him with the foundation to endure to the end.

My Story

After reading the story of Richard Wurmbrand, the Lord made me aware of other believers presently being persecuted and tortured around the world during this time of General Tribulation. He led me to pray for those being afflicted.

One night in a dream, I saw myself as the one suffering torture and being inflicted with both agonizing physical pain and psychological trauma.

The treatment I was receiving was so horrendous, violent, and mentally excruciating that I became terror-stricken and was jolted out of my sleep in a virtual sweat.

I immediately realized that I was on the edge of being broken by my torturers.

I was disgusted with myself and my apparent inability to endure to the end. Consequently, I asked the Lord what was missing. He reminded me of the two Kingdom keys that had inspired Jesus and Paul. Both had their eyes fixed on the heavenly prize ... the eternal, intimate relationship with the Lord and ruling over all things with and through Him.

I became totally aware that my realistic but temporary suffering overpowered these keys. I had not been seeking to hear His voice, and I lost sight of where I was heading.

There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. 1 Peter 1:6-7 (1 Thess.3:2)

You will keep in perfect peace, all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!

Isa. 26:3 NLT

His reminder of these missing foundational truths empowered me with renewed faith and the realization that, by keeping my thoughts fixed on Him, I had the keys to persevere through any future fiery trials.

The Scripture, *O Death, where is your sting?* 1 Cor. 15:55, took on a new meaning and provided the initial motivation to write this book.

2. REIGNING WITH HIM

The second part of our heavenly prize is receiving our eternal inheritance of ruling over all things. All things created by God (including the planets) await the time when the saints will rule over them and bring every part of them under subjection. Populating planets obviously requires producing offspring. This will result in children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great-great-grandchildren, and so on.

Can you imagine the joy of having regular family gatherings and celebrations, both small and huge? Those deep and loving relationships will last throughout eternity.

Property, Progeny, and Perpetuity

Jesus confirms the rewards of property, progeny, and perpetuity.

Then Peter asked Jesus. "We've given up everything to follow you. What will we get?"

"Yes", Jesus replied, "and I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life. But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then". Matt. 19:27-30 NLT

It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being." Matt. 6:19-21 MSG

Jesus' Focus

Once again, Jesus is our Role Model.

Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in.

Study how He did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed — that exhilarating finish, in and with God — He could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls! Heb. 12:1-3 MSG

Thy Kingdom Come

Jesus focused on the joy that lay ahead of Him: *Because He never lost sight of where he was headed* - an eternal relationship with His Father and ruling over His inheritance in conjunction with His Dad. This provided the additional strength to endure the torture, betrayal, humiliation, and His agonizing death. *When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again.*

The word 'King-dom' comprises two words: 'king' & 'domain.' It means the king's sphere or realm over which a king reigns. It is little wonder that Jesus taught His disciples to pray habitually, "Your kingdom come." It reminded them of their inheritance: ruling the universe under the Lord's guidance (Matt. 6:10).

With an expanded vision of His universal kingdom plans, that prayer should take on renewed significance and motivation for believers.

Meditating on it and praying regularly for its fulfillment can empower you. How? Jesus *never* lost sight of where he was headed, He could put up with anything along the way. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls

Similarly, we need to reveal the apostle Paul's mindset regarding persecution, incarceration, and the death threats that he faced.

I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection.

But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing:

Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Phil. 3:10-14 NLT

The reason that Paul wanted to be a perfected overcomer was to know Him. This enabled him to hear Jesus' voice during turmoil and empowered him to die to his selfish desires. This would ensure that he would be resurrected and then share in the heavenly prize.

Paul continues: *Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. Phil. 3:15-16*

Proof of maturity is having this mindset! If there's a shortfall in your thinking, you need to pray for revelation as you meditate on Paul's words.

Taking Responsibility

Paul was so inspired by his love for the Lord and for others that he declared: *For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better.*

I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live. Phil. 1:21-24 NLT

When Paul had his eye on the heavenly prize, he didn't spend his time preaching about a premature rapture. His concern for others far outweighed any temporary benefit to him.

Shouldn't those who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture at any moment be fervently, relentlessly, and compassionately preaching the gospel to all their loved ones, friends, and contacts? If not, they need to ask themselves, "Why not?" Their reluctance can reveal that they value self-preservation more than the preservation of others.

Many believers are controlled by selfies and seek to escape the responsibility of ministering to both the saved and the unsaved.

Can't they be likened to the one-talent servant who hides his talent? (Matt. 25:24)

"So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.

For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.

And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Matt. 25:28-30

At best, as non-overcomers, they will need to be equipped by the overcomers during the Millennium. At worst, they will lose their salvation. *There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* That’s the collateral damage resulting from a pre-tribulation rapture doctrine, which teaches that believers can avoid any trials and can be taken at any moment.

Paul’s focus on the rewards of the heavenly prize helped him overcome any self-interest. *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. Rom. 8:18*

Revelation of God’s Master Plan

Our prayers and hopes for the saints are that the reality of God’s Master Plan becomes a revelation to them. Jesus ***never*** *lost sight of where he was headed - he could put up with anything along the way. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls.*

This provides a foundation that will enable believers to endure the trials already present in some churches globally, or those about to rock others.

*And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, **but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.** Heb. 6:11-12*

Muslims are willing to die for their faith based on the promises in the Koran. Surely the promise of our incredible inheritance should provide greater motivation. As a result, overcomers will overcome not only the temptations of the devil but their fear of death.

“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.” Rev.12:11

We are certainly not indicating that every believer will have to endure torture or death, but in one way or another, end-time believers will be tested during General Tribulations, which will engulf believers in these end times.

However, listening for His voice and reminding ourselves of His promises for our future will give us the courage, determination, and ability to endure with peace in our hearts.

This will enable overcomers to:

1. Have an intimate relationship with the Lord and be able to hear His personal words of encouragement.
2. Imitate His works of love and power.
3. Have the boldness to preach the gospel during opposition and persecution.
4. Know how to handle situations if our family or friends betray us.
5. Have faith and trust to believe for material needs for our family during financial crashes, food shortages, etc.
6. Have the faith to pray for those affected by pestilences, viruses, etc. (when vaccines are unavailable).
7. Discern false teachers.
8. Overcome their fear of death, knowing the great rewards that await them.
9. *If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.*

2 Tim. 2:12

THE MASTER PLAN OUTLINE

Ultimately, fulfilling His Plan for you will involve fiery tests and trials during the General Tribulations. God designs these tribulations to help you become an enduring overcomer and a part of the Bride of Christ.

These will create a desire and ability for you to hear God's voice moment-by-moment and abide in Him (to be and remain united with Him; one with Him in heart, mind, and will). Jesus focused on the joy that lay ahead of Him. *Because he never lost sight of where he was headed* - an eternal relationship with His Father and ruling over His inheritance in conjunction with Him.

This provided the additional strength to endure the torture, betrayal, humiliation, and His agonizing death. It is little wonder that as a reminder to Jesus' disciples of their inheritance, He taught them to pray, "Your kingdom come.", habitually.

Questions

1. If you believe in a pre-tribulation rapture at any moment, are you fervently and compassionately preaching the gospel to all your loved ones, friends, and contacts?

If not ...why not?

2. Does your present eschatology address the issues of your selfies, such as self-gratification and self-preservation? Are you receiving the inspiration and the equipping to overcome them?

3. *"I will put such faithful ones in charge of everything I own!" Matt. 24:47 TLB*

Realizing the enormity of the Lord's plan for the saints to rule the universe with Him, can you now pray "Your Kingdom come" with renewed enthusiasm?

SELFIES

This extended definition of 'selfies' was supplied by Glenise Dagwell.

Self-Gratification	Indulge, satisfy a desire, satisfaction.
Self-justification	Prove something right, good reason for something that exists or has been done.
Self-indulgence	Allowing oneself to do things you like to an excessive extent.
Self-interest	Your personal interest or advantage.
Self-appeasement	Make someone calm or less hostile.
Self-Opinionated	A high regard for one's own opinions.
Self-reliant	Reliance on our own powers & resources.
Self-righteous	Certain you are right or morally superior.
Self-seeking	Care about own welfare.
Self-willed	Determination, strength of character, single-minded, drive.
Self-absorbed	Obsessed with own interests & emotions.
Self-esteem	Obsessed with self and your affairs.
Self-preservation	Keeping self from harm, protect, defend.
Self-pity	Too much sorrow & concern for yourself & your own problems.
Self-conceited	Too much pride in yourself.
Self- Deception	The act of hiding the truth from yourself.

Summary Chapter 2

1. Many believers have developed a habit of comparing themselves to other believers and assessing themselves based on their own evaluation. Human nature will have a believer noting all their own perceived strengths and comparing them to the shortfalls they see in others.
2. Let's review just some of the impurities that, as yet, may not have come to their attention. Self-gratification, self-justification, self-indulgence, self-interest, self-appeasement, self-opinionated, self-reliant, self-righteous, self-seeking, self-willed, self-absorbed, self-centered, self-esteem, self-preservation, self-pity, self-conceited, are just some on the shortlist.
3. We are warned by Jesus of future pestilences, famines etc. Advanced strains of deadly viruses are yet to be released. Scientists will probably struggle to produce effective vaccines. Believers will need to decide if they are willing to pray for the sick (apparently unprotected).
4. The love of the Lord and His power will be revealed to the world when those who overcome their fear pray and see others healed. Alternatively, those overcome by fear will reveal the level of their faith and maturity. The devil's goal will be to constantly remind you that your major priority is looking after number one ... yourself (self-interest).
5. Two keys inspired both Jesus and Paul to overcome their fiery trials and need for self-preservation. Both had their eyes fixed on the heavenly prize, and both had that intimate relationship with the Lord. Jesus *never lost sight of where he was headed*. We can do the same by meditating on and praying, "Your Kingdom come."
6. Muslims are willing to die for their faith based on the promises in the Koran. Surely the promise of our incredible inheritance should provide even greater motivation. As a result, overcomers will overcome not only the temptations of the devil but their fear of death.
7. We are certainly not indicating that every believer will have to endure torture or death, but in one way or another, end-time believers will be tested. However, listening for His voice and maintaining your faith in His promises for your future will provide the courage, determination, and ability required to endure.
8. This will enable overcomers to:
 - Have an intimate relationship with the Lord, enabling them to hear His personal words of encouragement.
 - Imitate His works of love and power.
 - Have the boldness to preach the gospel in the midst of opposition and persecution.
 - Know how to handle situations if our family or friends betray us.
 - Have faith and trust to believe for material needs for our family during financial crashes, food shortages, etc.
 - Have the faith to pray for those affected by pestilences, viruses, etc. (when vaccines are unavailable).
 - Discern false teachers.
 - Overcome their fear of death, knowing the great rewards that await them.
 - *If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.*

Chapter 3

OVERCOMING TODAY

Earlier, we discussed what we called Jesus' General Tribulation prophecy.

"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." Matt. 24:9-12

After reading these warnings, some may have gained the impression that the tests and birth pains that will help them become overcomers still lie ahead. For many believers, those fiery trials and severe labor pains are already being experienced.

Saints have already been persecuted, jailed, and tortured since the days of Jesus. This was part of their preparation to become overcomers and to be part of the Bride.

These atrocities of the General Tribulations are being repeated today in many foreign countries daily. *No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. 1 Cor. 10:13*

Even though they may not be equally horrendous, many other believers are going through daily trials and pain, including physical, emotional, financial, and relationship problems.

They have prayed to the Lord to overcome or remove the challenges, but there are no apparent answers to their prayers. They can then fall into various categories.

1. I must not have enough faith.
2. I'm still sinning, and I must deserve it.
3. God's Word is untrustworthy.

There are multitudes in these categories. Disillusioned, many drop out of relationships with the Lord and other believers.

In the future, millions of others will join them because they cannot endure or cope with such temporary, adverse circumstances (2 Cor. 4:17).

The greater challenge is that these problems are minor in comparison to future General Tribulation tests of food shortages, more plagues, intense persecution, etc.

If you're worn out in this footrace with men, what makes you think you can race against horses? And if you can't keep your wits during times of calm, what's going to happen when troubles break loose like the Jordan in flood? Jer. 12:5 MSG

The False Prosperity Gospel

Many exasperated or worn-out believers are in survival mode and are on the edge of raising the white flag. Many have resisted or will continue to resist any teaching that requires facing and enduring additional future trials.

Why? They have a stronghold!

Despite Scriptural evidence, they hold fast to the belief that a God of love would not allow them to endure hardships like these.

This applies particularly to those influenced by what has been tagged as the Prosperity Gospel. This false prosperity gospel depicts God as someone who always extends grace and continually blesses His children materially.

This portrayal reveals to them that He is a God of love.

While there is truth regarding blessing His kids, this teaching can quickly become unbalanced. Why?

It doesn't take into consideration that in God's Master Plan, He doesn't want believers to remain little children. He wants us to grow into full maturity and become Jesus' imitators who rule and reign with Him throughout eternity.

A wise believer once said, "God loves us so much that He accepts us the way we are. Nevertheless, He loves us so much that He won't leave us the way we are".

The Genuine Prosperity Gospel

As children of God, we can expect His blessings to meet our material needs. However, the Lord has provided clear and unquestionable instructions on how we can be assured of receiving them continually.

"And don't be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don't worry about such things. These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need." Luke 12:29-31 NLT (Matt. 6:19-21)

Let's remind ourselves of the basic components of the Kingdom of God.

- Seeking His personal guidance, enabling us to become obedient overcomers.
- Seeking the heavenly prize and enduring. Enabling us to rule and reign with Him.

We are not to make our material needs our priority, nor be concerned about them. What is the key to receiving material blessings? *"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need."* That's the genuine prosperity gospel.

False 'Prosperity Gospel' Deception

The prosperity message is deceptive. It puts God's priority back to front. It has believers seeking material and temporal blessings above all else, rather than giving precedence to seek His Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is about giving, not getting (Acts 20:35).

"It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20:35 (2 Cor. 9-7)

Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. Matt. 6:21

The truth is that material and physical blessings are a consequence or a by-product of seeking His Kingdom first, not vice versa. Jesus equates those who think this way to the unsaved.

These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers. For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Rom. 14:17 NLT

Even if their 'eating and drinking' needs are met, prosperity seekers' anxious search for more blessings ensures that total peace and joy in the Holy Spirit remains elusive. Those who are motivated by self-gratification show a continual concern about their current unfavorable circumstances and pray for a quick fix to their problems.

For many, their way out of their problems is a belief in an imminent rapture.

Can we see the propensity for those with false priorities to fall away when the fiery trials of General Tribulation involving persecution, hatred, and betrayals begin?

For this reason, we have left this subject until now. Our hope is that gaining insight into God's eternal purposes for the church will bring understanding of what some may consider His unconventional ways of perfecting His saints.

Although some believers now understand God's Master Plan, because of this prosperity teaching, they may still have lingering doubts about the legitimacy of tests and trials.

Consequently, believers need to receive greater Scriptural revelation on His allowing fiery trials to perfect us. This chapter and the one following have been taken and adapted from our book, "Christian Mythbusting."

WE NEED OPPOSITION

As we seek the Kingdom using our natural and spiritual talents, opposition will inevitably follow. Having an army of Jesus imitators is a terrifying thought to the devil. Therefore, Satan will challenge any areas of ministry that God has given overcomers to achieve.

We must understand that sending believers out into ministry and receiving opposition is all part of the Lord's plan to transform each of us into great men and women of God.

For example, a wimpy anorexic-looking guy is down at the beach. He wants to talk to girls, but they take one look at him, giggle, and avoid him. He tries to join in a game of football with the guys, but no one wants him on their team.

After months of feeling sorry for himself, he commences a body-building course at the local gym.

After an assessment, his personal trainer started him on a workout regimen with a pair of small dumbbells and a supplementary diet. Within a few weeks, he progressed to larger dumbbells, and within a couple of months, he could press large weights on the bar.

Finally, after his trainer gradually increased the weights he used, he ended up with a well-toned, muscular body.

What enabled those muscles to grow? The weights! The very thing that could appear to be painful and possibly crush him was the very thing that made him.

Opposition develops strength. Without the weights being put on him, he would have remained a wimpy weakling.

Jesus' Workout!

The Spirit of God directed Jesus to have a workout in the wilderness. He had the weights put on Him by the devil, and He successfully overpowered the opposition by providing Spirit-led responses.

As a result, Jesus returned to town in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:1-14).

The Lord wants His Body, the Church, to be as strong and powerful as He is. As our Personal Trainer, Jesus has planned an individual spiritual workout program for each of us. If we avoid or sidestep His program, we will remain spiritual wimps.

Our Daily Diet

Just as eating every day is essential to our health, feeding on both the written word of God and His personal words to us is a prerequisite for our spiritual energy and power. Jesus said *"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger.. John 6:35 (Luke 6:46-47)*

By praying: “Give us this day our daily bread,” we can receive His fulfilling personal words. “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*” Matt. 4:4

Our Dumbbells

As much as God wants us to keep our natural bodies fit, building our spiritual muscles and inner man should be our major priority. *Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come.* 1 Tim. 4:8 NLT

Our inner man needs opposition, which we can use as a body-building exercise. *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age.* Eph. 6:12

Therefore, we are to work out against the devil and his team, who constantly attack, condemn, and tempt us. God uses them for His purposes and to His advantage, transforming His people from spiritual wimps into spiritual giants. The very things that can attempt to crush us are, in fact, the very things that God uses to make us. Can we see now that the devil is simply a dumbbell God uses to strengthen His Church?

COUNT IT ALL JOY???

Until I realized how God was using the problems of this world to build my spiritual body, I couldn't understand this next Scripture. It told me I was supposed to be full of joy when trouble besieged me.

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. James 1:2-4 NLT

“Consider troubles as joy?” I used to think, “This must be a misprint!”

Nevertheless, once you understand His program, you can get excited about any opposition that comes your way. **God doesn't lighten your load; He broadens your shoulders.**

Why? It's a workout! The devil attempts to kill and destroy you, but God uses his efforts to transform you into someone who is *fully developed, perfect and complete, needing nothing.*

Jam. 1-4

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. Rom. 8:28-29 ESV

BETTER THAN GOLD

This obviously does not mean that troubles and trials are pleasant. They're not!

The only way we can have inner joy is to see beyond the present challenges and realize that eventually, they benefit us. *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* 2 Cor. 4:17

I'm sure there were times when our wimpy guy was lifting those weights when the pain and pressure seemed unbearable. But he realized the course his trainer had organized would help him reach his final goal.

When he felt the incredible strain and pain of lifting those heavy weights, he pictured all those girls coming up and talking to him.

He could see the guys congratulating and back-slapping him when he scored playing football.

The vision of his destiny saw him break through the pain barrier. It's the same for a winner of a gold medal at the Olympics. They endure temporary training pain for the sake of an eventual great reward and honor.

We are being equipped for something far greater than Olympic gold.
So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold.

1 Peter 1:6 NLT

OUR TRAINER'S PROGRAM

Sometimes our wimpy friend thought his trainer expected too much of him. When he was feeling completely exhausted, his coach might say, "Come on, five extra push-ups, you can do it!" Each time he was pushed beyond what he believed was above his limit, it took him to a new level of strength.

Many times, we can feel our troubles and opposition are too overwhelming. It would seem the program is too hard, and the weight put on us is too great.

Nevertheless, God is our perfect Personal Trainer, and He knows exactly what you can handle and will continue to take you to greater levels of endurance and strength.

No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it. 1 Cor. 10:13 MSG

Because they lack comprehension, prosperity seekers only desire a trouble-free life surrounded by material blessings. Blinded, they cannot see tests and hardships as blessings.

Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you.

Instead, be very glad - for these trials make you partners with Christ in His suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.

1 Peter 4:12-13 NLT

That's why we can remind ourselves amid any apparent overwhelming circumstances. *Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.*

Like Jesus, we are to look beyond the problem to God's greater plans.

Because he (Jesus) never lost sight of where he was headed — that exhilarating finish in and with God — He could put up with anything along the way: the cross, shame, whatever.

When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

Heb. 12:1-3 MSG

EXTREME MEASURE

We have seen that to raise up that end-time group of overcomers, the Lord must deal with any areas of weakness which stand in the way of their being humbly Spirit-led.

Therefore, our Personal Trainer needs to allow “the weights” to be placed on believers so these weaknesses are strengthened.

Some of these weaknesses can be powerful strongholds that must be addressed in ways unfamiliar to many believers and could even clash with their present belief system.

A Vital Key

The initial key to hearing His voice is repentance from independence, pride, and selfishness. Why? As with Jesus, most of what He will lead us to do will be for the welfare and blessing of others.

If your mind is set exclusively on your own personal encouragement and benefits, you will miss out on the lion’s share of His guidance.

Don’t act out of selfish ambition or be conceited. Instead, humbly think of others as being better than yourselves. Don’t be concerned only about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others. Phil. 2:3-4 GW

There is nothing wrong with ambition ... for Kingdom goals. Selfish ambition is the problem. One looks to benefit others; the other for self-gratification.

How does the Lord assist us in removing our independence, selfishness, pride, etc, etc.?

- Initially, He may speak to us directly from within (by His Spirit).
- If we don’t respond to those gentle promptings, we may have to be reminded by a rhema word through reading the Bible or hearing it through other believers or teachers.
- If the problem is deep-seated and falls on deaf ears, the Lord may have to take more extreme measures.

SANCTIONED SATANIC ATTACKS?

The Lord can help us realize we are off track in various ways. Adversity in our daily lives is one way of getting our attention.

Nonetheless, He is so determined to perfect us that He can even use the enemy to cause problems in our lives in an attempt to deal with our weaknesses.

“What!” you may be thinking. “God would never allow or sanction the devil to attack believers. It’s not in His will.” Let’s see what Scripture reveals.

The Antichrist will be permitted by God to attack and defeat believers.

It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. Rev. 13:70

The church was as warned: *“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.*

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown. Rev. 2:10

Peter said, *Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator. 1 Peter 4:19*

Why does the Lord allow attacks from the enemy? Before Jesus' death, Simon Peter was about to have "the weights" put on him, which resulted in revealing his cowardice and betrayal of Jesus.

And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." Luke 22:31-32 (1 Cor. 5:4-5)

Satan asked for permission to "sift" Peter. Jesus didn't bind Satan's power or command the devil to leave him alone. Rather, He prayed for strength or faith in Peter to withstand the attack. Obviously, the Lord granted permission for Satan to sift him.

Why would the Lord allow Satan to do this to Peter?

There was a weakness in his character that needed strengthening. *On the way, Jesus told them, "Tonight all of you will desert me." Peter declared, "Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you."*

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, Peter - this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me."

"No!" Peter insisted. "Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!"

Matt. 26:31,33-35 NLT

Peter's Trainer perceived the weaknesses in his independence and pride and tried to reveal them to him ... twice. Arrogance raised its ugly head, and Peter couldn't even receive two rhema words from Jesus face-to-face. He believed that he had enough faith to handle the situation. To remove that conceit, the weakness had to reveal Peter's weakness (Matt. 26:75).

Some may wonder, "Why didn't Jesus simply rebuke the devil and tell him to leave Peter alone? Surely that would have been more gracious?" Others may have thought, "Why didn't Jesus simply forgive Peter? He called Peter a friend! Isn't that what a good friend would do?"

These are good questions! Nevertheless, Jesus chose to ignore this apparent righteous and gracious advice. Obviously, in Peter's case, the independence problem was so ingrained that it required severe correction.

As a good friend, Jesus also knew that Peter needed to think about the consequences of an inflated ego.

I trust we can see why that pride and independence had to go. It stopped Peter from hearing what the Lord was saying to him ... even face-to-face. If it hadn't been dealt with then, how many other times in the future would Peter have missed the Lord's rhema words through arrogance and self-reliance?

Therefore, the removal of Peter's handicap of pride and independence superseded a gentle but temporary and ineffective band-aid solution. Peter's Trainer saw a character flaw and then permitted the right workout to correct it.

After his trial of faith, Peter's spiritual shoulders grew. Jesus encouraged him. *"But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."* Luke 22:32

PAUL'S SATANIC MESSENGER

The apostle Paul also received a sanctioned satanic sifting.

I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." 2 Cor. 12:7-9 NLT

Many theological discussions have explored the exact problems the thorn caused. Paul lists some possibilities... *my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles.* 2 Cor. 12:10 NLT (Also 2 Cor. 11:23-28)

Missing the Point

Some of his torments may have come through human effort and others through direct satanic attack.

However, we believe that many become sidetracked into a pointless discussion about identifying the exact nature of the torments. They then miss (or purposefully avoid) a major point here.

God permitted a messenger (an angel) of Satan to afflict Paul. Why was Paul given this by the Lord? Why would a loving God do such a thing to another friend?

Paul received great revelations. But a potential problem accompanied them. *So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh.* He wasn't necessarily proud ... but he had a propensity for pride and independence to creep in.

Nevertheless, Paul had the bigger picture of God's purposes for Him. He declared. *For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with Him.* Phil. 3:8-9 NLT

PRIORITY PRAYER

We believe this last statement to be Paul's priority prayer.

What do we mean by Priority Prayer?

How many of us have prayed with a knowing smile on our faces, "Lord, give me patience ... and give it to me now!"

The first part of your plea, "Give me patience", is your heartfelt God-inspired prayer.

The second part of the prayer, "Give it to me now!" is the hope that you can get it instantly. Nevertheless, why the ironic smile on our faces?

Those with any maturity know you can't name it, claim it, and expect patience ... overnight. For this prayer to be answered in full, it will take time for the fruits of long suffering, endurance, and restraint to grow, be harvested, and be instilled.

We would call the first part of our request, "Give me patience", our "Priority Prayer." Knowing it aligns with God's will, we can pray in confidence and faith. For the second part

of the prayer, “Give it to me now!”, we cannot determine how long the answer will take or how it will be resolved. Only the Lord knows (James 1:2-4).

During the process of answering that prayer, the Lord will inevitably allow you to be stretched, and, like Paul, you may, at times, cry out to the Lord for the trial to cease.

Therefore, we now have two prayers that appear to be in conflict.

God will choose to answer the heartfelt priority prayer first. His grace will be sufficient for you to endure the trials of life, and you will gradually develop the fruit of patience. In other words, it’s His timing, not ours.

PAUL’S PRIORITY PRAYER

Paul’s priority and heartfelt prayer was to have an intimate relationship with Christ.

Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. Phil. 3:8-9

The answer to that prayer could not be achieved in an instant.

Obviously, the Lord told him the source of his problem. Paul realized that if conceit and independence crept in, he would be unable to become one with the Lord. Although he was aware of the problem, the propensity for pride appears to have been deep-seated.

As it is with developing patience, it cannot be overcome overnight. Satan’s messenger was required to provide and maintain humility in Paul until it became a permanent fruit in his life.

His begging to have the thorn removed would have been short-term thinking, and it would have interfered with God’s longer-term purposes for him to overcome any propensity for pride. Therefore, for Paul’s ultimate benefit, which prayer was the best one to be answered?

His priority prayer of being one with the Lord superseded the prayer for the torment to cease. After initially begging for the thorn to be removed, Paul finally understood the beneficial, perfecting effect of suffering.

So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Cor. 12:9-10 NLT

How could he be weak but strong? Let’s solve this mystery. Those afflictions kept him humble, which in turn kept him totally dependent on the Lord.

This moment-by-moment reliance yielded personal rhema words of encouragement and direction from the Lord, enabling Him to be a strong and faithful imitator of Jesus.

All our sanctioned trials serve the same purpose!

Paul realized the importance of trials: *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.*

Phil. 3:10-11 ESV

How will we become like Jesus in His death and share His sufferings? Jesus’ Priority Prayer was to put His Dad’s wisdom above His temporary anguish.

“Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” Luke 22:42

Satan Uses People

As mentioned previously, we need to understand that Satan quite often uses human instruments to achieve his goals. How did Satan sift Peter?

He was warned that the enemy would test him.

That sifting could have been a more direct attack, such as sickness, persecution, beatings, etc.

However, as we have seen, it didn't come from his enemies as such but from those around him who simply told the truth about him. *A servant girl came to him, saying, “You also were with Jesus of Galilee.” Matt. 26:69*

Therefore, be aware that the devil may be operating through an irritating, frustrating, or discouraging person in your life, and they may be God's answer to your priority prayer. They may expose your weaknesses and provide you with an opportunity to repent of them rather than defensively condemning the person God is using to reveal your shortfall.

Prosperity Presumption

Prosperity's “Name it and claim it” teaching claims that all demonic activity can be overpowered by simply binding it or casting it out in Jesus' Name. One well-known false teacher presumptuously claimed that if Paul had the faith that he (this teacher) possessed, the apostle could have overcome Satan's messenger and avoided those trials.

Nevertheless, in that teacher's defense, believers are told that we can cast out demons in His Name (Mark 16:17; Luke 10:19).

Since faith in His Name is required to achieve this, doesn't it prove that Paul lacked faith? Inevitably, as with any false teaching, there will be partial truth.

What is the whole truth?

All faith comes from the Lord ... through hearing His personal rhema words (Rom.10:17). Our Role Model, Jesus, did only what His Dad told Him or showed Him.

When Satan asked Jesus' permission to sift Peter, He sanctioned that trial.

Jesus will only provide faith in His Name for those things which are in His will (1 John 5:14-15). Therefore, like Jesus, we can only have genuine God-imparted faith and authority ... if the Lord tells us or shows us what to do.

Presumptive Counterfeits

Obviously, if the Lord is allowing Satan to sift a believer, then commanding or begging for that testing to be removed is ineffective and will end in failure. That's not a prayer of faith; it's a presumptive counterfeit. This is why many Prosperity Gospel devotees and other ill-equipped believers have hit-or-miss prayer lives.

Those who lack revelation of God's unorthodox or unconventional method of perfecting them will continue with their trial-and-error prayers. Even when Prosperity Gospel devotees' prayers go unanswered, unlike Paul and Jesus, many don't seek a possible reason for their 'faith' failures. They deceptively ignore their lack of success and sweep it under the carpet.

Case in point: Jesus cast a demon out of a boy after His disciples failed to do so. *Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there', and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."* Matt. 17:19-21

Jesus' response was that they should seek the answer to their lack of faith through prayer and fasting. Those believers who don't seek Jesus for answers are presumptuously exceeding His will. Their future? They will either drift into greater deception or fall away because of God's apparent inconsistency and inability to back up His Word.

Gospel of the Kingdom teaching reveals Paul's great faith in understanding the Lord's greater purposes for him. Although temporarily hampered, he was still able to continue hearing the Lord's rhema words, thereby expanding his incredible faith ministry.

Unsanctioned Attacks

Obviously, not all attacks from the enemy are sanctioned by the Lord. Spirit-led believers can cast out demons in His Name. We'll deal with this in the next chapter.

TO SUFFER OR NOT TO SUFFER?

Those who have been influenced by the prosperity message have not received, or refuse to receive, the revelation of God's unconventional "workout" for His overcomers. Therefore, instead of being equipped to graduate to Christ-like perfection, they focus only on receiving the "baby" blessings in this life.

This produces immature or lukewarm believers who are incapable of seeing tests and trials as blessings and a part of His Master Plan

*Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad—for **these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering**, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world. 1 Peter 4:12-13 NLT*

- Jesus, our Role Model, was perfected through suffering. *Even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest. Heb. 5:8-9 NLT (Heb.2:10)*
- Peter said, *Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator. 1 Peter 4:19*
- Paul wanted to know Him and the fellowship of His sufferings. *Phil. 3:10*
- Timothy wrote, *If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him. 2 Tim. 2:12 KJV*
- *But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. Rom. 8:17 NLT*

However, suffering is not a long-term or permanent proposition for believers.
*So after you have suffered **a little while**, He will restore, support, and strengthen you, and He will place you on a firm foundation. 1 Peter 5:10*

As we have already mentioned, these many Scriptures contrast with the prosperity message, which claims we are not to suffer ... and that a loving God would not allow such a thing.

Calling White or Black?

We have found that most of the prosperity expounders have no explanation for either Peter's or Paul's satanic attacks and the previous Scriptures.

When questioned, many put them in the theological too-hard basket and attempt to sidetrack or change the subject (2 Tim. 3:13-14).

Even worse, these preachers take their corrupted gospel and accuse those who are going through ongoing financial hardships or afflictions of having a lack of faith. They are preaching a different Jesus (2 Cor. 11:3-4).

This is an example of calling black, white, or white, black.
How horrible it will be for those who call evil good and good evil, who turn darkness into light and light into darkness...Isa. 5:20 GW (Luke 11:52)

How many 'little children' have believed the prosperity message and have floundered when they couldn't overcome the trials through naming and claiming "blessings"?

How many now believe they don't have enough faith, God doesn't keep His word, or, as they have been misled, they no longer trust preachers?

It is little wonder that many believers' faith or confidence in the Lord has been eroded or torpedoed. *"Situations that cause people to lose their faith are certain to arise. But how horrible it will be for the person who causes someone to lose his faith!" Luke 17:1-3 GW*

For those who realize they may have possibly been led astray by the Prosperity Gospel, can we suggest our book, "Christian Mythbusting".

MASTER PLAN OUTLINE

Many genuine believers have prayed, "Lord, whatever it takes, I want to be like you". In God's mind, this is your heartfelt priority prayer. Since it is in sync with His will for us, He makes it His priority and will do all in His power to answer it, even using the enemy in the short term. Therefore, at times, enemy attacks can be an answer to your priority prayer.

Grey Area Possibilities

What has been your most recent Priority Prayer/s?

Do they need re-evaluating and upgrading?

If so, what will be your future Priority Prayer?

Summary Chapter 3

1. How does the Lord assist us in removing our independence, selfishness, pride, etc., etc.? Initially, He may speak to us by His Spirit. If we don't respond to those promptings, we may be reminded through a rhema word, reading the Bible or receiving it through other believers. If the problem is deep-seated, the Lord will have to take more extreme measures.
2. In order to deal with our weaknesses, the Lord can get our attention by using the enemy to cause adversity in our daily lives. Satan asked for permission to *sift* Peter. Jesus didn't bind Satan's power, intercede, or command the devil to leave him alone. He asked Peter to have faith to withstand the attack. Obviously, the Lord granted permission to sift him.
3. Why would the Lord allow Satan to do this to His friend Peter?
Peter's Trainer perceived his pride's weakness and tried to reveal it to him. Arrogance raised its ugly head, and Peter couldn't receive it. He believed he had enough faith to handle the situation. To remove that presumptuous conceit, the weakness had to be revealed to Peter.
4. How many of us have prayed with a wry smile on our faces, "Lord, give me patience and give it to me now!" Those with some maturity are aware that you certainly can't name it, claim it, and expect an instant result. For this prayer to be fully answered, it will take time.
5. The first part of our request, "Give me patience", is our "Priority Prayer". Knowing it is in line with God's will, we can pray in faith. For the second part of the prayer, only the Lord knows how long the answer to this prayer will take, or the way it will be resolved.
6. During the process of that prayer being answered, inevitably you will be "stretched," and you may cry out to the Lord for the trial to cease. Therefore, if two prayers are in conflict, God will choose to answer the heartfelt priority prayer. His grace will be sufficient for us as the trials of life gradually develop the fruits of patience and dependence in you.
7. Paul's great revelations created a propensity for pride to creep in. *So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh.* This was required to cultivate and maintain humility until it became a permanent fruit in his life.
8. Additionally, Paul had priority prayer. *For His sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with Him.*
9. His begging to have the thorn removed would have been short-term thinking, and a lack of humility would have interfered with God's longer-term purposes for him. His priority prayer of oneness with the Lord superseded the prayer for the torment to cease.
10. Jesus, our role model, was perfected through suffering. *Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through the things he suffered. And by being perfected in this way, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him. Heb. 5:8-10 NET*
11. "Name it and claim it" teachers take their corrupted gospel and accuse all those who are going through ongoing hardships or afflictions of having a lack of faith. This is an example of calling black, white, or white, black. ***They preach a different Jesus than the one we preach.***
- !2. What will be your future Priority Prayer

Chapter 4

BELIEVER'S SANCTIONED ATTACKS

Let's review the reason for the apostle Paul's torments from our previous chapter in a different Bible translation.

Because of the extravagance of those revelations, and so I wouldn't get a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations.

Satan's angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty!

At first I didn't think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then he told me, my grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.

Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness.

Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size — abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks.

I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.

2 Cor. 12:7-10 MSG

This level of admonishment may come into play when a believer has a deep-seated weakness, is spiritually blind, is stubborn, or has not responded to earlier, more lenient corrections from the Lord. As we also saw in the last chapter, the devil stirred up people to identify Peter as a believer, and under pressure, he denied Christ.

Paul referred to *abuse, accidents, opposition, and bad breaks*. Life's circumstances will reveal our weaknesses in one way or another. When the devil sees those failings, and with the Lord's permission, he is only too willing to jump in and add his weight to them.

When this happens, believers who don't understand God's growth principles automatically begin to plead with Him to remove any trials or begin rebuking the devil.

It's similar to the wimpy man who complains when his personal trainer wants to upgrade him from small dumbbells to heavier weights.

Remember: **God wants to broaden your shoulders, not simply lighten your load.**

BELIEVERS' PRIORITY PRAYER

We spoke earlier about our priority prayer. Most sincere Christians would have, at some stage, prayed along the lines of "Lord, whatever it takes, I want to be like You."

Perhaps unaware of the aftereffect, those who have prayed this type of prayer signed up for a spiritual body-building course. This has become their Priority Prayer!

If you have prayed a similar prayer, there will be times when natural and normal opposition in life will give you the workout you need.

Nevertheless, as with Paul and Peter, He may, temporarily or for a season, provide you with the gift of a heavyweight, a satanic messenger, to assist you in becoming a more Christ-like person (1 Peter 4:16,19; 5:10).

Remember, his method of attack often involves simply stirring up those around you.

How your Personal Trainer addresses your deficiency depends on how critical or deep-seated the particular weakness is. Your workout will perhaps cover the same shortfalls of independence and pride experienced by Paul and Peter.

Spiritual Selfies

Let's provide a further reminder of what the Lord must deal with in order to answer your priority prayer. A review: If we could photograph 'a selfie' of our own hearts, which progenies of selfishness, rejection, and independence may be revealed?

Self-gratification, self-justification, self-indulgence, self-interest, self-appeasement, self-opinionated, self-reliant, self-righteous, self-seeking, self-willed, self-absorbed, self-centered, self-esteem, self-preservation, self-pity, self-conceited, and self-deception are just some on the shortlist.

Removing many of these ingrained 'selfies' can take more than a gentle "You shouldn't be selfish!" Sunday message and altar call to see them eliminated permanently.

How many believers have responded to such altar calls, only to find that nothing alters?

TOUGH LOVE

Those who have raised their own children know when tough love is required.

If you refuse to discipline your son, it proves you don't love him; for if you love him, you will be prompt to punish him. Prov. 13:24 TLB

At the time, discipline isn't much fun. It always feels like it's going against the grain. Later, of course, it pays off handsomely, for it's the well-trained who find themselves mature in their relationship with God. Heb. 12:11 MSG

As God provides trials for our benefit, we can see them as an opportunity for great joy. *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. James 1:2-4*

We need constant reminders that trials and tests are designed to produce believers who are *perfect and complete, lacking nothing, and mature in their relationship with God*. To say otherwise goes beyond being a close counterfeit; it's out-and-out deception.

SATAN'S SPIN DOCTORING

Nevertheless, when any kind of trial eventuates, don't let the devil condemn you with disinformation such as, "Clearly, God doesn't care about you! You have no faith!" or "Obviously, He doesn't want to use you!"

No! ... just the opposite! He's answering your Priority Prayer, "Lord, whatever it takes, I want to be like you". Your heartfelt cry to be like Him supersedes your plea to have the temporary affliction removed. The Lord loves you that much; He's allowing the weights to be put on you so you can grow.

Let's put it another way. What happens if you are going through a trial and the Lord says, as He did with Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you"? If we accept His word, aren't we exhibiting the same faith as Paul?

Consequently, you reveal yourself as a person of great faith. Why? Your heartfelt Priority Prayer is being answered.

Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good. 1 Peter 4:19 NRSV

Delusions of Grandeur?

On the other hand, there may be some deluded believers who sanctimoniously claim that they are being assailed because of the great revelations they believe they receive. Realistically, they may not be under attack because of receiving great revelations.

Rather, the Lord may be attempting to draw their attention to the fact that they are full of religious pride and experiencing delusions of grandeur.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Furthermore, unforgiveness opens the door to a sanctioned attack by the enemy.

"Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart." Matt. 18:33-35 NRSV

In addition, God can use the enemy to bring an unrepentant believer back to his senses.

*In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, **that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.** 1 Cor. 5:4-5*

The Benefits of Affliction

We may also need to be reminded that Paul's messenger wasn't the first time that the Lord allowed him to be afflicted. As part of Paul's salvation plan and to get his attention, Paul became blind for three days (Acts 9:3-19). Zacharias was struck dumb because of his unbelief (Luke 1:20). Our point is that God can temporarily use the devil and his afflictions to help believers mature, rescue backsliders, discipline believers, or save sinners.

LENGTH OF THE WORKOUT?

In weightlifting contests, competitors must lift, stand firmly, and hold the weights above their heads for three seconds. Those three seconds can feel like a lifetime when they attempt to surpass their personal best (PB). They stand in agony, grimacing, resisting all the pain that's screaming at them, "It's too much! It's too much!"

When the time frame elapses and the judge's buzzer sounds, the weights are offloaded. Shouting and excitement erupt as they overcome that test. They know they have reached another milestone on their road to becoming a champion.

Blessed are those who endure when they are tested. When they pass the test, they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. James 1:12 GW

"How long will our workouts last? Three seconds would be okay", some may optimistically think. Still, we need to realize that a trial is not endless.

*There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials **for a little while.** These trials will show that your faith is genuine. 1 Peter 1:6-7 NLT*

Remember, this is an individual training program.

Paul's initial affliction of blindness lasted three days (Acts 9:3-7).

The church in Smyrna was given an exact time for their suffering.
Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.
 Rev. 2:10

On the other hand, we aren't given an exact time frame for the attacks of Paul's satanic messenger, but those persecutions and sufferings did eventually cease.
Paul rented a place to live for two full years and welcomed everyone who came to him. He spread the message about God's kingdom and taught very boldly about the Lord Jesus Christ. No one stopped him. Acts 28:30-31 GW

Exposing the Weakness

What is the key to the length of a workout? In Peter's case, it was realizing he was full of pride and independence (Previously, he had ignored the Lord's warning).
Immediately, a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly. Matt.26:75

His tears were a sign of his Godly sorrow and repentance.
 As painful as the suffering was, Peter withstood the sifting, and his faith did not fail through the test. Consequently, he came out a more Christ-like man. Jesus answered his prayer. Like Peter, all Jesus' disciples claimed they would not deny Him (Matt. 26:35).
 Nevertheless, after Jesus' arrest, they too abandoned Him (Matt. 26:56). Once Peter was rehabilitated, it was his responsibility to restore them, just as he had been restored.
When you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren. Luke 22:32

Similarly, the Lord revealed the source of Paul's problem, enabling him to understand what was going on. Consequently, it empowered him to continue his work patiently and humbly despite the opposition (1 Peter 4:19). Just as Jesus revealed Peter and Paul's weaknesses to them, He wants to disclose believers' areas of weakness to them.

Why? The whole purpose of a test is to bring about repentance and change. Obviously, if you are unaware of your shortcomings, how can you repent of them?

So, knowing the Lord wants to reveal your weakness, ask Him for the source of the problem. The trial can end once you identify the weakness, repent of it, and overcome it (1 Cor. 10:13).

Please be aware that the cause of this kind of trial is your own shortfall. He then answers your heartfelt prayer to do God's will.
Let no one say when passing through trial, "My temptation is from God"; for God is incapable of being tempted to do evil, and He Himself tempts no one.
But when a man is tempted, it is his own passions that carry him away and serve as a bait.
 James 1:13-14 Weymouth

Don't ever use spin doctoring and try to blame God (or others) for your trial. In general, we all have a propensity to be independent, proud, or selfish.

Take responsibility for your problem and work out your own salvation with His help and His prayers.

In other words, no weaknesses ... no need for a trial.

My Story

Over the past thirty years, I have not received an influenza vaccine nor caught the flu. I have prayed for many lepers and diseased people in India and elsewhere, with no ill effects.

When COVID struck, I was reticent to receive an injection due to my past resilience to catching diseases of any kind.

However, after prayer, and to my surprise, the Lord led me to receive the initial COVID vaccinations. At that time, overseas travel was prohibited without immunization. I surmised that receiving a shot would let me keep flying.

I was COVID-free for over two years until I exhibited mild symptoms, and to my surprise, I tested positive. I prayed for healing, expecting an instant result. Nevertheless, my symptoms continued throughout my isolation period, and a lingering and aggravating cough persisted.

I realized the possibility that my Priority Prayer was being answered and the Lord was dealing with “a selfie”, conceivably an air of pride and superiority. I prayed, “Lord, concerning any possible arrogance gained through my former resistance to disease, I repent of it”.

Nevertheless, my irritating, continual cough was incessant, and I barely got more than a few hours of sleep each night. I checked with a doctor and then friends affected by COVID and was informed that this longer-term effect was relatively normal and was to be expected. Expected or not, I believed that I had uncovered the root cause, thereby allowing me to pray “In Jesus’ Name” with authority and receive healing.

However, another issue was clearly at play.

The Lord revealed to me that, as much as He wanted to do notable things through me, He needed to impart greater truths in me to enable me to become an imitator of Jesus.

His Compassion

Consequently, I sought the Lord again and asked Him where I had missed His guidance. He immediately reminded me of my Priority Prayer, “Lord, whatever it takes, I want to be like You”.

“Do you believe that you have the same level of love for people that I have?” He gently inquired. I immediately realized my shortfall.

He continued, “There are people worldwide suffering far worse and for far longer periods than you are. You have experienced just a small taste of what others are enduring. You see the news reports, but do they release not just sympathy (feeling sorry for them) but empathy (knowing and sensing a portion of the suffering and pain that they are encountering).”

I realized that the only way to really know what it was like to be in their shoes was to experience some suffering myself.

“Son,” He explained, “Your Priority Prayer is being answered on two fronts. Firstly, the suffering you are experiencing is building your endurance to withstand the tests that still lie ahead.

Secondly, I am building a new level of **My** compassion in you, empowering you to be motivated by My love, not just a sense of duty”.

He then led me to this Scripture.

He comforts us whenever we suffer. That is why whenever other people suffer, we are able to comfort them by using the same comfort we have received from God. 2 Cor. 1:4 GW

Apart from drawing us closer to the Lord as a friend, suffering also helps perfect us and creates a loving, empathetic, and compassionate heart by allowing us to identify with others' afflictions.

Finally, His words revealed to me the depth of change that He still expected of me.

He is coming for saints without spot or blemish.

Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you.

Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world. 1 Peter 4:12-13 NLT (Php.3:7-11)

SATAN ON A LEASH

Satanic trials or any tests can be used to either:

- Take you to a new level of trust.
- Reveal a character flaw that will hinder you from becoming a Jesus imitator.

Whatever the purpose, the Lord is simply using the enemy to help refine you and help you become an overcomer. Always remember that God is in control, and He has Satan on a leash, as He did with Simon Peter: *"Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat."* Luke 22:31

Satan had to ask Jesus for permission before he could put the weights on Peter.

No trial has overtaken you that is not faced by others.

And God is faithful: He will not let you be tried beyond what you are able to bear, but with the trial will also provide a way out so that you may be able to endure it. 1 Cor. 10:13 ESV

Our Lord is the perfect weightlifting Judge. He has His finger on the buzzer and knows.

- Exactly what weights you can bear.
- The length of time you are capable of handling it.

You are not on your own. He's right there with you (in you), desiring that you pass any test. As He did with Peter, He allows the test and prays for you that your faith will not fail. *So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you. 1 Peter 4:19 NLT*

If you do happen to falter earlier than you should ... you need to repent. As He did with Peter, He will then give you another opportunity to reach that higher level of faith.

GODLY WISDOM

Even though Paul was having the satanic weights put on him, it didn't stop him from continuing his ministry. In fact, the weights empowered his ministry. How? Because his pride was being held in check, he declared, *My power works best in weakness. 2 Cor. 12:9*

The weakness caused by the attack compelled him to seek the Lord and depend totally on Him. As a result, He could hear His voice.

It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become. 2 Cor. 12:9 MSG

How many of us have thrown in the towel when our prayers against constant attacks apparently went unanswered? We may have wrongly evaluated whether we were offside with God or weak in faith. On one hand, Paul was free to cast demons out of others, yet on the other hand, he couldn't remove Satan's messenger afflicting him.

In natural thinking, the facts would make this seem ridiculous. Let's turn this around to its true perspective. The truth is that God was achieving two things at once.

Firstly, Paul's intimate relationship with Him was expanded. Secondly, using him to extend His kingdom through his renewed dependence on the Lord; *I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.*

Isn't this incredible wisdom from the Lord? He can use the devil to perfect you while empowering you to destroy the devil's works by fully depending on Him.

The twofold effects are answers to your prayers!

AUTHORIZED OR UNAUTHORIZED?

Obviously, not all attacks from the enemy are in the Lord's will and therefore are unauthorized. How, then, can we tell whether an enemy attack is authorized by Jesus? There are two basic methods. 1. Spirit-led Guidance. 2. Hit and Miss.

1. Spirit-led Guidance

"I shall give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth [forbid to be done], shall have been already bound [forbidden to be done] in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth [permit to be done], shall have already been loosed in heaven [permitted to be done]." Matt.16:13 Wuest

In other words, every time you bind or loose, it must have God's (heaven's) prior authorization on it to be successful (1 John 5:14). We are instructed to cast out demons (not whenever we choose to), but "In My Name".

Using the name "Jesus" is not a mystical password that guarantees instantaneous results. *And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. Acts 3:16 ESV*

How do we receive *faith that is through Jesus*? *Rom 10:17*
So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word (rhema) of God.

Jesus only puts His Name to the things that He wants done (i.e. they are loosed in heaven).

Therefore, you need to be assured that your prayer has His approval.

Otherwise, as Paul found out, that demon might be there providing salvation in another area, such as removing a selfie.

The obvious solution is to seek the Lord in every situation.
Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own.
Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track. Don't assume that you know it all. Prov. 3:5-7 MSG

Ask if the attack is authorized. Expect a simple "Yes" or "No" answer.

2. Hit and Miss

However, if you are still learning to hear the Lord's voice, emotions can be deceiving, so what do you do? Based on our experience, most enemy attacks are unauthorized.

Therefore, if you find yourself being satanically attacked, most of Satan's assaults are in this category. Your first reaction may be to try to bind it or beg the Lord to take it away, as Paul did.

If the attack stops, you know you were dealing with an unauthorized or unjustified attack by the enemy. However, if the attack continues, consider that the Lord may be dealing with your pride, independence, selfies, unforgiveness, etc., or enhancing your ability to endure.

To clarify the situation, simply ask Him to reveal the problem. You may receive the answer from a more mature believer who can hear from the Lord. If He reveals it, repent of it. If not, there may be additional considerations.

Additional Guidance

1. As mentioned, in our experience, in most cases, you will be dealing with these unauthorized or unjustified attacks. Whether the prayer is for yourself or others, the principle involved remains the same.

"And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons."

Mark 16:17

2. At times, the Lord may not lead you to cast the devil out but to simply resist him. *Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7*

As we submit to God (ask Him for an answer),

He will give us a rhema word to fend off the enemy's attacks.

This can be in a word, just as God gave Jesus in the wilderness.

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'". Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him. Matt. 4:4,11

3. Remember, the Lord knows what each of us can handle; therefore, He usually deals with our weaknesses or our 'selfies' one at a time.

During trials, the enemy can bombard you with guilt and shame and possibly remind you of other sins that are not being dealt with at that juncture.

Once the 'selfie' being dealt with is identified, do not let the enemy sidetrack you into concern over other deficiencies and put you under unwarranted condemnation.

Simply tell Satan, "I'm aware of my other weaknesses. They are on my Dad's and my bucket list. They too will be dealt with ... one by one"

.

The enemy may need a few reminders to resist, but he will flee!

4. There may be other situations when you have to endure, and like Paul, His grace will be sufficient.

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Eph. 6:13

One of the vital pieces of the armor of God is the helmet, which protects your mind.

Like Paul, we are not to be distracted from any task or ministry that He has given us to do at that time.

THE TIMING OF TESTS

Through God's dealings with Israel, today's Church can gain understanding (1 Cor. 10:11). *Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands.*

Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Deut. 8:2-5 NLT

Because of Israel's rebellion and unbelief, they could not enter the Promised Land, and they spent the next forty years in the wilderness. It was a life, but well short of the destiny God had planned for them. All who lacked faith died, and the Lord waited for a new generation to rise up (Num.14:26-38).

However, this new generation grew up surrounded by an environment of negativity and unbelief. Where do you think this new army gained the faith to take the Land? Isn't it conceivable that Joshua and Caleb (who believed His promise) equipped and inspired them to believe God's promise?

They then led this new generation, and they began taking the Promised Land.

For Christians, the wilderness speaks of a spiritually dry place. Many believers are unfulfilled, frustrated, and disillusioned, wondering why the things they believed God promised now seem like a mirage.

Consider: if they are disillusioned, they must have been living under an illusion in the first place. However, God is feeding us His end-time manna revelation of His Master Plan.

We are to live not by trying to obey only the Scriptures but *by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*. The magnitude of this revelation *was previously unknown to you and your ancestors* (i.e., many former church teachers; Gal.5:16).

Therefore, most of those dry saints haven't received all the truths and benefits of the mystery of the Gospel of the Kingdom. They can now become a new generation, equipped to rise up and become overcomers.

WHEN?

Furthermore, many believers have lost heart because the promises and prophecies of worldwide revival among church members and the unsaved have not yet come to pass. Some time ago, I was feeling incredibly frustrated and asked the Lord. "You came to see people saved.

Why aren't we seeing large numbers of people being saved here in Australia, as we saw in India? Where are the great and numerous signs and wonders that I have witnessed elsewhere?"

"Couldn't I tell you to go to the city morgue tomorrow?" the Lord answered.

"Yes". I replied, intrigued by the statement.

"Couldn't I direct you to take TV Current Affairs crews with you?"

“Yes, Lord”. I said enthusiastically, becoming extremely interested in where this conversation was heading.

“Couldn’t I give you a rhema word and empower you to raise many dead people?

Couldn’t it all be caught on camera and have it confirmed by doctors?”

Now very excited, I replied, “Of course you could, Lord”.

“Why don’t I give you a word to do that?” He challenged.

Now totally bewildered, I spluttered out, “I don’t know”.

The Lord explained that if all He wanted was to get everyone to witness His power, He could do many more mighty works. He could impress the whole world in a single day or moment. Isn’t it self-evident that there’s a bigger picture here ... His Master Plan?

The Joshua and Caleb Generation

Firstly, we must also consider that Joshua and Caleb couldn’t have entered and taken the Promised Land alone. The Lord required an army. Likewise, many more overcomers are yet to be added to His end-time army; *the laborers are few*. Consequently, we are working to His timetable ... not ours (Isa. 55:8).

Producing a Joshua-and-Caleb level of overcomers is not an overnight process. Many start out on the right path, but unfortunately, many also buckle under the pressure of trials.

You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the narrow gate. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it. Matt. 7:13-14 (John 14:6)

Through His workout program, He’s still slowly refining Joshuas and Calebs, who are overcoming life’s difficult trials, to play their part in God’s Master Plan. The relatively *few* believers who can see the narrow gate are still being gradually transformed through trials, enabling them to fully enter into and come under His Kingdom rule (the Spirit-led life).

Secondly, what would happen to all the new converts if there were an outpouring of great signs and wonders presently? They would go into the many churches that, in the main, have shown they lack the desire or ability to equip believers to become imitators of Jesus.

For those baby believers, the combination of not understanding the reason for fiery trials and their inability to endure them would result in spiritual carnage (as revealed in Book 1 of this series).

We are already witnessing that when the road becomes even a little difficult, being inadequately equipped at best produces weak and defenseless believers and, at worst, leads others to fall away. What will happen down the road when the trials become fiery?

... if you’re worn out in this footrace with men, what makes you think you can race against horses? Jer. 12:5 MSG

The restored company of ‘Joshua and Caleb’s five-fold ministry’ is presently being raised. The outpouring of former and latter rains of the Spirit can be released as soon as the network is prepared.

Why? This five-fold ministry will reveal the mystery of the gospel of the kingdom and equip this new generation to imitate Jesus (Matt. 24:14).

God is able to accomplish an incredible number of things in a short time, as He did with Jesus over a three-and-a-half-year period. John 21:25 tells us that *Jesus also did many other things*.

If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written.

The same results can be achieved through Jesus' imitators (John 14:12).

Furthermore, it took only twelve disciples to initiate a revolution that turned the world upside down.

Three Camps

- There is a generation of believers who are yet to hear the mystery of the gospel of the Kingdom. Nevertheless, for many, the cares of this life and self-gratification will be preferred to working out their salvation through a personal relationship with the Lord.
- Alternatively, there is a new generation rising, who, after hearing about God's Master Plan, will be inspired to die daily and develop that intimate relationship with Him.
- There are already spiritual Joshuas and Calebs who believe these promises and are looking forward to entering that land. They are presently modeling, inspiring, and equipping others in the Church to become fivefold imitators of Jesus (Eph. 4:11-13).

PRESUMPTIVE TEACHING

Why are we saying all of this? Let's remind ourselves that many Christians have been taught about our absolute and unconditional authority over the power of the enemy and that they can receive anything by using the name of Jesus Christ. +

However, in many instances, they have prayed and strongly rebuked the enemy, only to find the opposition ongoing and the promises not eventuating.

What conclusion would they reach? Clearly, they would have to deduce that they did not have enough faith or that God's Word is inconsistent. Once they are unsure about God and His Word, it can have a flow-on effect in other areas. Therefore, they become indecisive, and their ability to express heartfelt faith in other areas is compromised.

When you ask for something, don't have any doubts. A person who has doubts is like a wave that is blown by the wind and tossed by the sea. A person who has doubts shouldn't expect to receive anything from the Lord.

A person who has doubts is thinking about two different things at the same time and can't make up his mind about anything. James 1:6-8 GW

Go Cold or Grow Cold?

Many believers are aware of Jesus' words *the love of many will grow cold*. However, their immediate thought is, "That could never happen to me". The Scripture does not say their love will **go** cold; it says it will **grow** cold. Falling away is a process.

The first stage is becoming lukewarm or hanging on in survival mode. That cooling-off period slowly and continually increases. Finally, believers become cold, critical, and indifferent (Heb.2:1).

Some readers may recognize the frosty, even frigid, apathy and indifference that have invaded their original fervor for the Lord.

Consequently, it is vital that they and other saints warm up to the fact that the Lord's refining can come through various trials of life or through the enemy himself.

If they seek Him, He will reveal the cause of the problem, pray for them, and help them defrost their hearts.

MASTER PLAN OUTLINE

As an answer to our Priority Prayer, "Lord, whatever it takes, I want to be like You", satanic power may be allowed to come into play just as it was with Peter and Paul.

If resistant satanic power afflicts you and, despite prayer, continues, it means the Lord is revealing a weakness that He wants overpowered.

The devil's accusation will be: "You have no faith!" No! ... Just the opposite! God is answering your priority prayer.

Your heartfelt cry to be like Him supersedes your plea to have the temporary affliction removed. Therefore, you reveal yourself as a person of great faith. Your heartfelt priority prayer is being answered; *so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.*

Grey Area Considerations

Those who can't comprehend the Lord's wisdom in allowing attacks will fall into two camps.

Accusers: Those who will charge those under attack as having no faith. The condemned will believe those indictments and retreat into shame and further unbelief.

Believers: They will be able to discern whether the attack is sanctioned or unsanctioned and the reason attacks are permitted and will be able to hear from the Lord.

"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know." Jer. 33:3

Question: Using the apostle Paul as our example, have you been equipped to discern which enemy attacks are sanctioned and which are not?

Summary Chapter 4

1. When a believer has a deep weakness, such as being blind, stubborn, or having not responded to previous, more lenient corrections from the Lord, Satanic power may be allowed to intervene, just as it was with Peter and Paul. The devil is always seeking the Lord's permission to act. The devil is essentially a tool God uses to strengthen believers.
2. The devil stirred people to identify Peter as a believer, and he denied Christ. Paul referred to *abuse, accidents, opposition, and bad breaks*. Life's circumstances will reveal our weaknesses in one way or another.
3. Believers who do not understand God's growth principles begin to plead with God to remove any trials or begin rebuking the devil. It's like the wimpy man who complains when his personal trainer wants to upgrade him from dumbbells to heavier weights. God wants to broaden your shoulders, not simply lighten your load.
4. The majority of sincere Christians would have, at some stage, prayed along the lines of, "Lord, whatever it takes, I want to be like You". Aware of it or not, those who prayed this priority prayer signed up for a spiritual body-building course.
5. How your Personal Trainer will deal with you will depend on how critical the particular weakness is. Your workout may involve your pride, independence, or selfishness. Regardless, His grace (undeserved favor) is sufficient to get you through it.
6. Why are tests allowed? That you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. *My dear child, don't shrug off God's discipline, but don't be crushed by it either. It's the child he loves that he disciplines; the child he embraces, he also corrects.*
7. Devil's Accusation: "You have no faith!" No! ... Just the opposite! God is answering your priority prayer: "Lord, whatever it takes, I want to be like you." Your heartfelt cry to be like Him supersedes your plea to have the temporary affliction removed. Therefore, you reveal yourself as a person of great faith. Your heartfelt priority prayer is being answered.
8. The Lord revealed Paul's and Peter's weaknesses to them. Once the weakness is repented of and overcome, the trial can be concluded. For many, conceit or unforgiveness can be the cause. Humility is the answer to ending many trials.
9. The Lord knows what each of us can handle. Therefore, He usually deals with our 'selfies' or weaknesses one at a time. During trials, the enemy will bombard you with guilt and shame and possibly remind you of other sins that are not being dealt with at that juncture.
10. Once the selfie being dealt with is identified, do not let the enemy sidetrack you into concern over other deficiencies and put you under condemnation. Simply tell Satan, "I'm aware of my other weaknesses. They are on my Dad's and my bucket list, and they too will be dealt with ... one by one". The enemy may need a couple of reminders, but he will flee!
11. Even though Paul was having the weights put on him, it didn't stop him from continuing his ministry. It improved his ministry; *My power works best in weakness*. Many of us have thrown in the towel when our prayers against constant attacks apparently go unanswered. We may have wrongly evaluated that we were offside with God.

Chapter 5

ACCOMPLISHING THE BRIDE'S PERFECTION Part 1

In Book 1, we discussed the level of perfection that a remnant of believers will achieve in this age. These believers will be part of the end-time Bride of Christ.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. Eph. 5:25-28 (Rev.19:7-8)

What level of glory will the end-time Bride of Christ achieve?

Not having spot or wrinkle ... holy and without blemish.

Jesus is described as *a lamb without blemish and without spot. 1 Peter 1:19*

As these Scriptures reveal, she will also achieve a Christlike level of glory.

Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. Matt. 5:45

Jesus Was Perfected?

How does this transformation take place in a down-to-earth or practical manner? Let's remove some of the mystery. Jesus, our Role Model, shows us how to become perfected. I know many believers would disagree with that statement, since they know Jesus was and is perfect. Nevertheless, many believers have not comprehended that although Jesus was perfect, when He came in the flesh as a man, He needed to be perfected.

If you are skeptical or unconvinced, please meditate on the following Scripture.

*(Jesus) who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet **He learned obedience** by the things which He suffered. And **having been perfected**, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. Heb. 5:7-9 (Heb.2:10)*

In God's eyes, Jesus was perfect but not perfected. Why? Unlike His former existence, Jesus was born a mortal man and faced the same tests of the flesh we experience. *Therefore, in all things, He had to be made like His brethren. Heb. 2:17*

Godly Character, not Physical Perfection

How do we achieve a glorious level and become the end-time Bride in this age? Please remember in Ephesians 4-13, the Greek word for 'perfect,' *teleioo* (NT 5048), means "*complete, consummate in character.*"

As it was in Book 1, many believers have not grasped the truth of our Dad's Master Plan to equip us to imitate Jesus. Why?

Tradition has deceived many by imposing its own interpretation of the term "perfection."

As we have just shown in Eph 4:13 'perfect' *teleioo* means "*complete, consummate in character.*" It refers to our Godly **spiritual** character, not our physical perfection.

Scripture reveals that we receive glorified, perfected bodies when we are resurrected (Rom. 8:21-25; 1 Cor. 15:50-54). However, how do we receive Godly character?

...be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect (teleioo) will of God. Rom. 12:2

Clearly, isn't it both Scriptural and logical that we can be transformed by renewing our minds and developing our perfect Godly spiritual character ... before we receive our glorified bodies?

Remember that, Paul, this should be the goal for every five-fold ministry to remember *Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, **that we may present every man perfect** (teleioo) in Christ Jesus. Col. 1:28*

*Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, **that you may stand perfect (teleioo) and complete in all the will of God.***

Please remember Jesus told us, *"And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect (teleioo) in one, and **that the world may know that You have sent Me.**" John 17:22-23*

If people **in the world** are to know that believers *may be made perfect in one*, this must happen in this age, not be left exclusively to the next.

Therefore, don't these many Scriptures prove that at least a remnant of perfect believers will be made *complete, consummate in character* in these end times on earth, not after they die or are raptured?

Jesus had to learn obedience as a mortal man by doing what the Father asked (even though it was sometimes abhorrent). As a result of preaching the gospel, He endured beatings, rejection, humiliation, and betrayal.

Commensurate with Jesus, both Peter and Paul were allowed to be sifted and buffeted by Satan in order for them to become imitators of Him.

However, the cross required an unprecedented level of commitment from Jesus. *He offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death. "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."*

Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Luke 22:42-44

Being crucified in itself was horrific. Moreover, Jesus suffered for our sins and took upon Himself the judgment that we deserved. His Father poured out His punishment on His only Son (1 Peter 2:24). *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Matt. 27:46*

Just the thought of His intimate relationship with His Dad being severed was so abhorrent that He sweated drops of blood. This was His most significant test. *He faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. Heb. 4:15-16 NLT*

We need to note that there was a part of Jesus that understandably did not want to be relationally separated from His Dad. *"Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me"*. However, Jesus did not give this speculation a second thought. He had already heard from His Father and instantaneously responded, *nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."*

Spiritual Blackmail

For believers, thoughts opposing God's will inevitably besiege us. As with Jesus, having conflicting thoughts about His will is not a sin. Surrendering to them is. However, in an attempt to ensnare you with shame and guilt, the devil will blackmail you with false accusations that you are sinning because of the thoughts that invade your mind. You can and will have sinful thoughts, but like Jesus, you don't have to give them a second thought.

Perfection is attained by conquering that first sinful thought by not giving it a second thought. You can replace your second thought with immediately asking Jesus what He wants you to do and obeying.

Choosing to replace that second thought is how you can *be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God is - what is good and acceptable and perfect. Rom 12:2 NRSV*

The Greek word for 'transform' is *metamorphóō*, the source of the word metamorphosis.

Transforming your mind is a metamorphic process (from a caterpillar to a butterfly), and it takes time (2 Cor. 3:18).

Nevertheless, success is possible for those who commit themselves. *So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.*

Gal.5:16 NLT

The Power of Love

However, another dynamic ingredient will help renew the mind. What empowering force enabled Jesus to overcome any desire to sin? The power of love!

He was consumed, possessed, and compelled by the first and greatest commandment.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Matt. 22:37-38

Obviously, loving His Father with every part of His being enabled Jesus to overpower the temptations of disobedience. Therefore, we have two vital truths here.

1. All these tests of His love for His Dad were a prerequisite to *having been perfected*.
2. Sin can be overcome through perfect love.

The Perfected Saints

God will oversee an exceptional Bride company of end-time saints who will measure *up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Eph.4:13*

Therefore, these saints will need the same comparable and indispensable requirements to reach full perfection. Amid detestable circumstances, they will need to be empowered to emerge as glorious overcomers, obedient to His voice, and to reach the same level of love and faithfulness that Christ revealed.

For some, the situation may be like the conditions Jesus faced when He had to lay down His life. Apart from facing increasing famines, pestilences, etc., the saints will be persecuted and tortured, with relatives and friends falling away, betraying, and even killing some of them (Matt.10:21; 24:9-10).

Martyrs?

Those who may consider this level of commitment not applicable to them need to remember that the Lord tells us we will be His witnesses. The Greek word for "witness" is *martus* (NT 3144), which means "martyr".

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses (martyrs) to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

In those testing times, they will need the empowerment to be able to cry out:

“Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” Luke 22:42

Furthermore, consider Jesus’ words.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.

This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.” John:21:18-19

When Jesus says, *“Follow Me,”* He means follow His example of being prepared to lay down our lives for others (Phil. 3:10). *But those who obey God’s word truly show how completely they love Him.*

That is how we know we are living in Him. Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did. 1 John 2:5-6 NLT

Therefore, to become imitators of Jesus, it’s vital that His level of love is imparted to believers. Are we saying that all believers will be martyrs? Of course not!

However, when you have decided that you are prepared to die daily for the Lord, you conquer the fear of death. You will also overcome being plagued with stress, fear, and trepidation. Hence, a new level of boldness that will empower you.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. 1 John 4:18-19

Scripture confirms that the end-time Bride will achieve this level of commitment and perfect love. *But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death. Rev. 12:11 NRSV (Rev.2:9)*

PERFECTED LOVE – THE TIMELINE

Clearly, the Lord desires to produce saints who are entirely perfected in their love for God ... to the same measure as Jesus. Most Bible commentators would agree that God’s Master Plan includes the production of a perfected company of believers.

However, traditional church teaching solves the problem by assuming that ultimate and complete sinlessness will be achieved only instantaneously when the Lord returns, raptures the church, and we receive a glorious new body (Phil. 3:20-21).

This may be the case for all those believers who have endured and are now with the Lord. However, we are not referring to the members of the Bride who have died or will die before Jesus’ return.

A Unique Timeframe

Firstly, we must recognize that we live in a unique time in church history and that an unprecedented company of believers will be produced. Jesus is coming for a living, end-time Bride.

She will already be like Him, glorious and without spot or blemish. *His wife has made herself ready* as the perfect love partner **before** His return ... not after it (Rev.19:7-8).

Secondly, the Bible doesn't tell us to be transformed by the renewal of our bodies.

Is sin some kind of physical disease that will be expunged when we receive a new body? In other words, is sin (disobedience) some kind of virus that is born and emanates from our bodies ... or alternatively, is sin birthed in our minds?

Just meditate for a minute and consider where the following works of the flesh originate. *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. Gal.5:19-21 ESV*

Therefore, isn't sin conceived in our minds and then propagated, causing sin in both our thought life and our bodies? Let's explore just one example.

"But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Matt.5:28

The same principle applies to other physical desires or yearnings e.g., hunger and thirst, as exemplified by Jesus (Luke 4:1-4).

James confirms this process. *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. James 1:14-15

If the root or source of the works of the flesh is in our minds, then won't total sinlessness require a complete, perfected renewal of the mind? That is why we have already been instructed to be transformed by the renewal of our minds... not a renewed body.

How do we renew our minds ... by willpower or won't power? Obviously not; otherwise, it becomes a work of the flesh, and we work under legalism. We are to be led by the Spirit! *Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Gal. 5:16 ESV*

Mind Renewal or a Spiritual Lobotomy?

Traditional thinking solves the sin problem through a belief that when we get to heaven, any thoughts of disobedience will be erased by a brain transplant or some kind of supernatural lobotomy.

While the suggestion of a spiritual lobotomy may sound irrational or even outrageous, we can find no better analogy to expose this line of thought for achieving complete and instantaneous obedience.

However, we can't ignore the fact that Jesus is coming for a Bride who is **already holy and without blemish. Eph. 5:28**

Therefore, in this age, transformation of this magnitude could be achieved by God through:

1. As suggested, a spiritual lobotomy that permanently removes our will to sin.
2. The addition of further revelation from the Spirit that transforms our minds.

A supernatural lobotomy would undoubtedly resolve the sin problem, but is it in God's nature and will? We must remember that God created the saints with an in-built eternal gift ... freedom of choice. Why would the Lord give us that?

Perfect Love Requires Free Will

As discussed previously, the evidence of one's love is always dependent on having free will. The fact that a person can choose to be either loyal or disloyal indicates their level of devotion to Him. Freedom of choice is a fundamental principle of the Kingdom.

If our free will is compromised or erased, we simply become brainwashed robots who are programmed to chant, "I love You Lord, I love You, Lord."

The Lord wants genuine loving children, and He will not force believers into robotic behavior. The only force that He will release ... is His love.

Consider Jesus, perfected and empowered by a force that enabled Him to conquer any inclination to sin.

That force, the power of love, consumed, possessed, and compelled Him as He lived out the first and greatest commandment.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Matt. 22:37-38

Obviously, loving God with every part of His being enabled Jesus to overcome the temptation to disobey.

Jesus was tempted, *Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me.* However, Jesus' love for His Dad overpowered that enticement, and He didn't give it a second thought ... *nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.*

This ultimate level of love is the answer to the saints achieving and maintaining sinlessness both now and throughout eternity.

My Story

There have been numerous instances when the Spirit has guided me, and I've faltered in my obedience. My admission acknowledges the struggle we all share in pursuing flawless obedience. It's a journey we're on together.

What is the root cause of my and other believers' inability to respond positively? Like me, others have tried to be obedient out of duty (legalism) rather than being fully motivated by an all-encompassing, wholehearted love for Him.

Perhaps many also hold a traditional belief that obeying this commandment with the same level of commitment as Jesus is beyond them ... or any believer.

However, any doubters or skeptics bound by traditional teaching need to ask themselves this question:

If God commands, *"You shall love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind"*, **would He decree something that is impossible for believers to achieve?**

God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?

Num. 23:19 NLT

Through traditional beliefs, how many believers duplicated the actions of the hypocritical Pharisees? ... *making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."* Mark 7:13

Consequently, if this is the first and greatest commandment and the foundational principle of becoming an imitator of Jesus, God will also provide a way to accomplish it.

The Lord knows our shortfall in the love department. To overpower that deficiency, He will raise an end-time company of saints who will conquer any disobedience through the power of perfected love. In practical terms, how will He ultimately accomplish this?

REVELATION FROM ON HIGH

Through the prophet Joel's words, the early church received the promise of an outpouring of God's Spirit.

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh." Joel 2:28

This word was confirmed on the Day of Pentecost.

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams." Acts 2:17

As we have previously disclosed, this outpouring was not simply about gaining power. It transformed and empowered the church by revealing that the Spirit could lead it internally. Signs and wonders confirmed this revelation.

Similarly, at the end of the end times, God will again pour out His Spirit and transform the church through new revelation.

The Lord symbolically uses rain to refer to these transformative outpourings. The initial outpouring on the Day of Pentecost was referred to as the former rain.

"For He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you - The former rain, and the latter rain in the first month." Joel 2:23

Joel assures us that just as the early Church received the transforming former rain, believers will receive another transforming outpouring of the Spirit. However, this time it will be with a combination of both the former and latter rains (a double deluge).

The church will receive the transforming revelation of the depth of God's love for us, and it will be confirmed by the miraculous.

The Timing of the Rains

Most importantly, when will we experience this outpouring, and does it align with other end-time events?

*Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, **for the coming of the Lord is at hand.***

James 5:7-8

This deluge, eagerly anticipated by the end-time church, will be poured out at the end of the end times. The Lord will pour out the full revelation of the truth of reconciliation, revealing the depth of His love.

Although we may know this reconciliation theologically, many will be honest enough to admit that a secret or underlying apprehension remains about their ability to achieve it. In other words, if you came face to face with Jesus, could you look Him in the eye without a trace of shame or guilt? Just think about that for a moment

If we don't feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. John 3:21 NLT

Establish Our Hearts.

James instructs us, *establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand*. How do we establish our hearts? We are to prepare ourselves to receive this outpouring by faith.

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. 1 Cor. 2:14-15

Jeremiah prophesied the reality of this future revelation:

*"Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me **with their whole heart**." Jer. 24:7*

In this end-time era, the revelation of His awesome love will be released, and those seeking Him shall *return to Me with their whole heart*. This wholehearted love will dissipate all doubt and fill us with reassurance, confidence, and boldness (Heb. 10:19-23).

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 1 John 3:2-3

The Greek word for *revealed* is *phaneroo* SC 5319, The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament meaning: "To make apparent, manifest, known, shown openly".

Similarly, the word *see* is, *optanomai* SC 3700. "To see, perceive with the eyes, to look at, implying not only the mere act of seeing but also the actual perception of what one sees".

His rhema words will reveal the fullness of God's love for us and what Jesus has achieved through His sacrifice.

We can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus.

Heb. 10:19 NLT: Hence, we can boldly enter the Most Holy Place now by faith ... now.

Transformation not Information

Many believers have, to some degree, comprehended these facts theologically.

Nevertheless, *when He is revealed, we shall be like Him*. Jesus loved the Lord with all His heart, mind, and soul. The outpouring of the rain of revelation empowered the early church.

Similarly, the end-time church will be empowered by the rain of revelation and *come to know the reality of God's love in its depth*. It will not be simply information but a transformation.

The eye-opening realization of the enormity of His love for us will produce a metamorphic transformation, empowering believers to *love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind*.

This, along with keeping their eyes on the heavenly prize of ruling with Him, can motivate them to overcome the dominance of sin and endure persecution, fear of death, etc., just as Jesus demonstrated.

*There is no fear in love; **but perfect love casts out fear**, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.*

1 John 4:18-19

As it was with Jesus, each believer will be tested by accumulating General Tribulations to see if their love for the Lord, with all their heart, mind, and soul, is genuine.

Have you prepared your heart for this great outpouring?

Further confirmation of this outpouring of revelation will be revealed in Book 5 of our series, Chapters 1 and 2, “The Feast of Tabernacles Fulfillment”.

MASTER PLAN OUTLINE

In these end times, by revealing the mystery of the gospel of the kingdom, the Lord will restore a remnant of believers who measure up to the complete standard of Christ.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” Matt. 22:37-38

For those who have ears to hear, the eye-opening revelation of the enormity of His love for us will produce a transformative change, empowering a believer to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

*“Then I’ll give them a heart to know Me ..., for they shall return to Me **with their whole heart.**”* In turn, it will empower us to overcome sin's dominance and endure persecution, fear of death, and other hardships, just as Jesus demonstrated. We can find more information in Books 4 and 5,

Questions:

- Do you sense a shortfall regarding the command? *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”*
- Do you try to be obedient out of a sense of duty rather than being motivated by an all-encompassing, wholehearted love for Him?
- *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Gal. 5:18.* In other words, any works that are not led by the Spirit are carried out by law. Are you operating under law or legalism?
- Which of the following two options will you trust to resolve any personal shortfalls? Further revelation of His love, renewing our minds? Doing nothing and hoping that you will eventually receive a supernatural lobotomy or a brain transplant?

Summary Chapter 5

1. How do the saints achieve perfection and sinlessness in a down-to-earth or practical sense? Jesus, our Role Model, is a shining example of how to become perfected. Although Jesus was perfect, He needed to be perfected by obeying every command from His Dad.
2. Just the thought of being separated relationally from His Father was so abhorrent that He sweated drops of blood. This was His greatest test... which He passed. *"Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."*
3. What empowering force enabled Jesus to overcome any desire to sin? The power of love! He was consumed, possessed, and compelled by the first and greatest commandment. *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."*
4. Obviously, loving God with every part of His being enabled Jesus to overpower the temptations of being disobedient. Surely this level of love is the answer to achieving and maintaining sinlessness. We have two vital truths. Sin can be overcome through perfect love. All the tests of His love for His Dad were a prerequisite to His being perfected.
5. The early Church was promised that they would receive power from on high, and on the Day of Pentecost, God poured out His Spirit (the former rain, Acts 2:16-17). The end-time Church will receive the outpouring of the Spirit with a combination of both the former and latter rains (a double deluge).
6. We will receive this outpouring at the end of the end-times. *Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. James 5:7-8*
7. He will pour out the revelation of the complete truth of reconciliation, which will transform us and show us we can come to Him face-to-face without a trace of shame or guilt.
8. The eye-opening realization of His love for us will produce a metamorphic transformation of our minds and enable His Bride to love the Lord with all of their hearts, souls, and minds. *"Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me **with their whole heart.**" Jer. 24:7*
9. Most Bible commentators will agree that God's Master Plan includes producing a sinless company of believers. Traditional Church teaching solves the problem with an assumption that ultimate and complete sinlessness will somehow be achieved instantaneously when we receive a glorious new body. E.g., a spiritual lobotomy.
10. We have been instructed to *be transformed by the renewal* of our minds. Therefore, is sin born in our minds and then propagated, causing both mental and bodily sin? Therefore, we can be transformed by either one or two procedures: mind renewal or mind removal.
 - The addition of further revelation, renewing our minds.
 - A spiritual lobotomy that eliminates our desire to sin.
 - If God commands, *"You **shall** love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind"*, would He decree something that is impossible for believers to achieve?

Chapter 6

ACCOMPLISHING THE BRIDE'S PERFECTION Part 2

In our previous chapter, we saw that the Lord will perfect His Bride at the end of this age. We have also seen that the process of perfection can be summed up in three words: Awareness, Acquisition, and Accomplishment (the three A's). The Holy Spirit reveals a truth (the "A-ha" moment). A believer acquires it by faith and finally accomplishes it fully. It then becomes second nature. It is *transformed by the renewing of your mind*, not achieved through a spiritual lobotomy.

Aware of the Revelation

To initiate this perfection, the five-fold ministry will provide an emphatic prophetic call and an awareness that the church should return to the greatest commandments.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind," and "your neighbor as yourself." Luke 10:27

The mystery of the Gospel of the Kingdom will reveal God's ultimate way to achieve it. *Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Gal. 5:16 (Heb. 9:14)*

Those prophetic messages have already begun for today's saints, calling them to lead a Spirit-led life. Nevertheless, we will see that this awesome day does not come without a commitment.

The early church was told. *"Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." Luke 24:49*

Knowing God's promise for them to receive power from on high, they were of one accord in mind and purpose. (Acts 2:1).

They were set on seeking the Lord for that outpouring of the Spirit. In a similar pattern, after the prophetic calls for a more profound love commitment to the Lord, end-time believers will do more than wait around incoherently and haphazardly. They will be of one mind and purpose to acquire this power *from on high* to achieve it

Acquiring the Revelation

Those who have ears to hear will be convicted of their deficit in the love department. To receive the former and latter rains and become imitators of Jesus, a desire to fast and pray will be born in them. Those who seek Him will receive that outpouring. (Heb. 9:28)

Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth. Hos. 6:3

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. James 5:7-8

Some are aware that the Lord's coming is at hand and are already pursuing a more profound friendship with Him.

They receive the initial refreshing from the former rain through that personal relationship and are already moving from glory to glory.

Many more saints, convicted by the ongoing prophetic calls and the accumulating General Tribulations, will be led to fast and seek to hear from the Lord.

Furthermore, because of this escalating tribulation, multitudes of the unsaved will also be open to hearing the mystery of the gospel of the kingdom. (Matt.24:6-8)

They will be open to receive the final and ultimate transforming revelation of reconciliation that will be poured out. (Zech. 10:1).

If believers do not seek the Lord and press in to get to know Him, isn't it conceivable that they will not receive this revelation ... and its extraordinary benefits?

We are not to sit and hope that things will pan out. The Bridegroom is coming for an end-time Bride without spot or blemish, and she will make herself ready (Rev.19:7).

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. James 4:8

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 1 John 3:2-3

*Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, **strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish:** and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.*

2 Peter 3:14-15 NRSV

Some will identify their shortfall and cry out to Him; others who do not have ears to hear will not. We have already seen that Zechariah's warning could apply.

That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it: I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested.

Zech. 13:8-9 ESV

The *one-third* who heed the prophetic trumpet calls will be able to obey the greatest commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Empowered by love, they will pass the refining tests of relatives and friends who fall away, betray, persecute, and even kill some of them (Matt. 24:9-10).

THE ACCOMPLISHMENT REWARDS

Let's look at the actual process of transforming the saints. As we know, believers can receive revelation and faith, enabling them to be born again. *For by grace you have been saved **through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.** Eph: 2:8*

Similarly, as we seek Him, God seeds the saints with a personal revelation of His love and will, empowering them to die daily and obey in abhorrent situations.

Each act of obedience adds another level of glory. They move from glory to glory, closer and closer to Jesus' standard of glory.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Rom. 12:2

The three-part combination of being transformed by obedience through the power of love, enduring the fiery tests, and keeping their eyes on the heavenly prize of ruling with Him will produce the glorious Bride. *A threefold cord is not quickly broken. Eccl. 4:12*

Nevertheless, if we follow Jesus' example, we need to realize the enormity and awesomeness of God's love that will be poured out on us.

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. 1 Cor. 10:12-13

Let's explore how our love for God is reciprocated when we choose to obey and trust Him in times of testing. When Jesus was told by His Father that He was to lay down His life for us, what was the result?

"Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done". Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him." Luke 22:42-43

When Jesus committed Himself to doing His Dad's will, an angel visited Him (which would be encouraging enough). However, the angel also ministered to and strengthened Him. When the saints endure fiery trials, a commitment to Him will ensure that He will *provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it*.

The 'Peace Bubble'

Let's look at the example of Stephen being stoned while preaching to an enraged crowd.

But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God". But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.

Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him.

And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit".

And falling to his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them". And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Acts 7:55-60 ESV

As the crowd was stoning Stephen, he was obviously enveloped in what we have dubbed 'a bubble of peace.' After receiving a heavenly vision, he was not focused on his own well-being. Empowered by being *full of the Holy Spirit* and the love of God, all Stephen could think of was the welfare of those who were stoning him. *"Lord, do not hold this sin against them"*. This was God's way of enabling Stephen to endure it.

My Story

While ministering in India, I took the students from our ministry school on practical equipping by conducting evangelistic crusades in local villages. At one of these outreaches, a crippled man was healed in full view of the entire village. The story went through the area, and the crowds doubled the next night.

One of our students testified about his polio healing. A group of fanatical Hindus (who were planted in the meeting) screamed abuse, claimed he was offending their gods, and attacked him. This initiated a total riot.

Approximately thirty religious terrorists began destroying our equipment and lighting. They besieged our vehicle and smashed the windows. The villagers fled, screaming in terror.

The surging radicals then turned their attention to the remaining students and forced them back against a wall.

A complete and inexplicable ‘bubble of peace’ came over me. It was as if everything was surreal and moving in slow motion. Spontaneously, I jumped in front of a few of our students and raised my arms horizontally, attempting to protect them.

Nevertheless, many of our students were punched or hit by metal chairs that were thrown at us. Finally, our attackers, pleased with their efforts to sabotage the meeting, marched down the road chanting in victory.

However, neither one of our students nor I received so much as a scratch. Encouraged by His gracious protection, we continued to preach. The villagers gradually emerged from their homes, and we saw many who had been saved and healed.

It was my first encounter with that “peace bubble”, and the Lord reminded me that I had an experience comparable to that of Stephen. That same tranquility engulfed me on two other occasions in ministry overseas when my life came under threat. This peace is an additional reward for those who choose to trust and obey Him.

You will keep in perfect peace, all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!

Isa. 26:3 NLT

I now know the reality of His promise.

God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. 1 Cor. 10:12-13

THE DEPARTED SAINTS?

We have talked exclusively about the end-time Bride receiving this revelation of His enormous love. Some may be thinking, “What happens to the rest of the believers who have already died (or will die) before receiving this revelation?”

Jesus' twelve apostles are a part of His Bride (Rev. 21:9-11, 14) along with a multitude of saints. Paul said, ***And you became imitators (mimetes) of us and of the Lord.***

He also instructed us, *Imitate (mimetes) me, just as I also imitate Christ.*

Many saints became overcomers, and others became non-overcomers.

*Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, **that we may present every man perfect (teleioo) in Christ Jesus.** Col. 1:28*

*Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, **that you may stand perfect (teleioo) and complete in all the will of God.***

However, what happens to His Bride and non-overcomers

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

1 John 3:2

At first glance, it can appear that when the non-overcomers first see Jesus face-to-face, there will be either a spiritual lobotomy or a brain transplant. The result ... instantaneous holiness!

Let's review: The Greek word for “revealed” is *phaneroo* SC 5319, The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament meaning: “To make apparent, manifest, known, shown openly”.

Similarly, the word ‘see’ is, *optanomai* SC 3700. “To see, perceive with the eyes, to look at, implying not only the mere act of seeing but also the actual perception of what one sees”.

Therefore, can we consider that when we first look at Jesus, there will not be an instantaneous brain transplant?

He needs to be revealed (or made known to us). Only then will we perceive or have a revelation of who He is. Obviously, our first sighting of Him will bring about some initial mind renewal, but it's only the elementary stage of knowing Him intimately.

When I first met my wife, Mary, I perceived certain things about her. Nevertheless, many other aspects of her makeup remained hidden until I got to know her.

How did I get to see or discover her many hidden attributes? Obviously, they evolved through our ongoing relationship.

Even after over forty years of marriage, I am still learning more about her. Furthermore, knowing Mary as I do now has given me greater love for her than I had when we were first married.

In our eternal intimate relationship with the Lord, how much will we really know about Him when we first see Him? The reality is ... very little (in comparison to the bigger picture). *"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."* Isa. 55:7

The Party Parable

At children's parties, many parents organize a candy hunt. Mums and dads hide various kinds of sweets around the yard or home. Some are in easily accessible spots, while others are tucked away in more secluded locations. Squeals of delight fill the air as the kids discover the rewards. Finding the sweets in well-concealed spots adds excitement and satisfaction.

Similarly, can we consider that God has planned a sweet relationship with Him that will continue to expand and flourish as we get to know Him? These hidden truths will gradually be divulged as our relationship with Him grows. In the next age, Jesus will spend 1000 years revealing Himself to believers (Rev.21: 24).

Paul's prayer for the saints will have been more fully fulfilled.
*And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, **though it is too great to understand fully**. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. Eph. 3:18-19 NLT (Rom.11:33)*

As His love for us *is too great to understand fully*, like children at a party, we will experience the delight, excitement, and pleasure of gradually discovering His hidden attributes. The evolving revelation of *how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is* will continue through the Millennium and beyond.

Therefore, believers can look forward to an eternity of continually discovering the concealed aspects of His nature and personality.

As Buzz Lightyear put it, "To infinity and beyond".

The Living Apathetic Saints

Some may think, "If that is the case and I'll eventually experience God's love, why not just take it easy and wait till I die or hang around until I'm raptured?"

This concept has gained widespread acceptance and popularity among believers worldwide. Consequently, it remains a test and challenge for those living in these end times. We are deeply concerned that this apathetic or indifferent mindset corrupts and subverts these warnings.

...we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. **And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself**, just as He is pure. 1 John 3:2-3
 But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, **strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish.** 2 Peter 3:13-14 NRSV

Alternatively:

*"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; **repent and do the first works**, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent."* Rev. 2:4

The Collateral Damage

Why did God provide us with these no-nonsense and solemn warnings? We are living in unprecedented times! We must never forget that we are either in or on the brink of the end of the end times. In His Master Plan, the Lord is raising a unique company of believers to the level of a *perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.* Eph. 4:13

Today's believers have the privilege and opportunity to be among these perfected first-fruit saints. A lukewarm believer, who doesn't *strive to be found by Him at peace without spot or blemish*, through a relationship with Jesus, will face three possible consequences.

1. They will not be a part of His glorious end-time Bride but will become wedding guests.
 2. As we will discover in our next Book, at best, those who remain unworthy non-overcomers will face the rule of the Antichrist (Luke 21:34-36).
 3. The worst-case scenario: During the refining tests of accumulating General Tribulation, they can backslide, fall away, and won't see Him.
- "Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."* Matt. 24:12-13 NLT

WORKS OR WORKS?

We have already been told that *while you are waiting for these things, **strive to be found by Him.** And everyone who has this hope in Him **purifies himself.***

To those who lack understanding of the Spirit-led life, striving can sound like works of the flesh. As with any truth, the enemy can distort the reality of the Spirit-led life.

We already know that if our work is motivated by our need for acknowledgment, acceptance, and appreciation from others, God sees it as self-serving.

"But all their works they do to be seen by men." Matt. 23:5 (Matt. 6:1-4)

The devil can then spin this and tell us that God rejects all works and they are repulsive. *When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags.* Isa. 64:6 NLT

Those who believe this can then use it as an excuse for human nature to take control and to be complacent: "I don't want to get into works!" They can then be led down the pathway to apathy, lethargy, or indifference. How is it possible that a believer *purifies himself*?

We need to open our eyes to God's entire counsel. On one hand, **our works** are repulsive to God. On the other hand, there are the **Father's works** commissioned by Him.

Jesus declared: “*If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me.*” John 10:37
 “... *though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.*” John 10:38 (John 14:12; Matt. 16:27)

How do we define good works?

Jesus only did what His Dad told Him or showed Him to do. He was totally Spirit-led.
 Therefore, we can do *our* works *to be seen by men* ... or the Father’s Spirit-led works.

Your Decision is Imperative

Regardless, Paul tells us. *But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection.* 1 Cor. 9:27

Once again, this can sound like a work of the flesh. However, Paul’s declaration is the second and vital part of the Spirit-led life.

But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. Rom. 7:23-25 NLT

If Jesus Christ is the answer, how, in a down-to-earth way, is this feasible?

As Paul was Spirit-led, he would have asked the Lord for the solution to any problem. Once he heard from Jesus, he then decided to *discipline my body*, obey that Word, and walk in the Spirit.

Therefore, like Paul, we still have the choice of crucifying the flesh (‘our selfies’) and obeying or disobeying the Spirit.

Jesus demonstrated the same principle of obedience. “*Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.*” Luke 22:42 (Luke 4:1-14)

Paul also explains that being led and being obedient are separate entities that work in cooperation or partnership.

*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling; for it is **God who works in you** both to will and to do for His good pleasure.* Phil. 2:12-13

We cannot dismiss the many other Scriptures warning believers about the need to, **strive to be found by Him** through an intimate relationship with Him.

Summary Chapter 6

1. The process of perfection can be incorporated into three words: Awareness, Acquisition, and Accomplishment (The three A's). The Holy Spirit reveals a truth (the "A Hah" moment). A believer acquires it by faith and finally accomplishes it fully. It then becomes second nature. Perfection is not achieved through lobotomy or a brain transplant
2. *Therefore, be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*
3. *Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, **strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish:** and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.* If believers do not seek the Lord and strive to know Him, isn't it conceivable that they will not receive this revelation ... and its extraordinary benefits?
4. Some will identify their shortfall and cry out to Him; others who do not have ears to hear will not. We have already seen that Zechariah's warning may apply. *That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it: I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested.*
5. The *one-third* who heed the prophetic trumpet calls will be able to obey the greatest commandment: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."* Empowered by love, they will pass the refining tests of relatives and friends falling away, betraying, persecuting, and killing them.
6. Let's explore how our love for God is reciprocated when we decide to obey and trust Him in testing circumstances. When the saints endure fiery trials, a commitment to Him will ensure that He will *provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.*
7. As the crowd was stoning Stephen, he was enveloped in 'a bubble of peace.' After receiving a heavenly vision, he was not focused on his own well-being. Empowered by the love of God, Stephen could only consider the welfare of those killing him. *"Lord, do not hold this sin against them"*. This was God's way of enabling Stephen to endure his martyrdom.
8. In our eternal intimate relationship with the Lord, how much will we really know about Him when we first see Him? The reality is ... very little (in comparison to the bigger picture). *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.*
9. In the next age, after Jesus spends 1000 years revealing Himself to believers, Paul's prayer for the saints will have received a greater level of fulfillment. *And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, **though it is too great to understand fully.** Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.*
10. The evolving revelation of how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is will continue to transform us through the Millennium and beyond. E.g. a kids' candy hunt.

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