

What God Says
about
Prosperity

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Dedicated

*To my mother
Mabel Schrieber Young
Who taught me to read from the Bible,
And instructed me to read a good amount each day,
And who set an example by doing so herself.
About twenty years later she also
Told me to read a chapter in
Proverbs each day as well.*

*At least a
Thousand blessings
Have come to me in the
More than thirty years since then
Because of the wisdom of her instruction!*

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Measuring Success

How would you measure success? If a man worked so hard that he is sick and in pain all the time and cannot eat much, but he has made \$100 million, would you say he was a success? What if his health is all right, but since he was so busy, his wife felt neglected and left him for another man, would you think he was a success? What if he's a celebrity, but his son is an alcoholic or his daughter committed suicide? What if he owns the whole town, but nobody likes him? What if he lies awake at night tossing and turning for hours and can't get much sleep?

Dave Givens drives 370 miles a day to and from work in San Jose, California. He says this job affords him the lifestyle he desires. He doesn't explain how seven hours in the car every weekday is part of that lifestyle.¹ There's a lot more to success than making money!

Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith (Proverbs 15:16).

What if one of the most popular, powerful, and richest men in the world has a happy family and lives an adventuresome life, but then he goes to hell? Really, was he a success?

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (Mark 8:36).

Do earthly blessings matter at all?

They do.

¹ *World* magazine, May 6, 2006, p. 11.

What does God say about success? You may be surprised to see that the Word of God says a good bit about earthly success *and* spiritual prosperity. Look at the list of the ways God offers to bless those who meet His conditions.

*What a happy surprise to find **so many** kinds of blessings God wants to give us—in this life!*
(See for yourself.)

Happiness

Peace

Safety

Avoiding Troubles

Pleasantness

Our Needs Met

Satisfaction

Our Desires Granted

Our Prayers Answered

Wealth

Health

Long Life

Strength

Honor

Rest and Sleep

Laughter

Confidence

Guidance

Favor with Others

A Blessed Family

Prosperity in Whatever We Do!

Spiritual Blessings, Too!
(For those who are saved)

We're justified!
We're rescued from hell!
We can have assurance of salvation!
Heaven is our home!
God is our Father!
We can have victory over sin!
We can have success in service!
We all have spiritual gifts!
All things work together for good!
The Holy Spirit lives in us to help us!
Angels are serving us!
We have authority over Satan!

Besides all these...

We can get rewards in heaven!

How would you like to be blessed in **all** of these areas? You can!

Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on **every** side (Psalm 71:21).

In the following pages you will see what God's Word says about each of these blessings and what the conditions are for each. You will see what God says, not just my opinion; many times you will see the Bible verses without any comment.

The Purpose of Blessings

Why would God bless us? Here are two purposes:

1. **God likes to bless us.**

“The Lord... hath pleasure in the prosperity of His servant”
(Psalm 35:27).

Did you see that? God enjoys it when you are prosperous! Think that one over! That'll change your outlook. It'll raise your faith. God wants to bless you! He loved you enough to give His Son! Jesus loved you enough to give His own life!

2. **God also loves the whole world and wants to bless *them through us!***

“God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us; that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations. ...God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him” (Psalm 67:1,2,7).

God forgave me and gave me eternal life so I can pass His mercy on to many others. Now, a lot of others have been saved from a lake of fire and will go to Heaven! He has given me victory so I can pass the message of victory on to many others all over the world. He has made me happy. I can make a lot of others happy.

He's blessed me financially so I can share with others in need and pass on the principles of success to many, many others in need. He's answered many of my prayers, and as I've told others what God has done for me, it has encouraged them to pray and get blessings from God.² He's made me laugh; I can make a lot of other people laugh.

God has blessed our marriage; now my wife is sharing the principles of a happy marriage with women from at least eight countries in her ladies' group. We can expect God to bless us so we can be a blessing to people all over the earth.

When God blesses us with good health and long life, we can energetically share all these mercies and blessings for a longer time with many, many others!

² See *Answers to Prayer for Our Family*, by Paul Young, Publications of Paul Young, Cape Town, South Africa.

Blessings Here and Now?

I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living (Psalm 27:13).

Must we wait until heaven for all of our blessings? No. Are all troubles for the disobedient only in hell? No.

Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner (Proverbs 11:31).

For those who obey God there are many blessings in this life on earth. There are even more curses and troubles for those who rebel. You will see that this verse has many specific applications.

But can we hope for physical blessings now in this present age?³ Yes. Paul wrote to Timothy,

³ It is true that there is more emphasis on earthly blessings in the Old Testament and more emphasis on spiritual and heavenly blessings in the New Testament. It is also true that many conditional promises of blessing (and warnings of curses) were given specifically to Israel under the Old Covenant. These are found especially in Deuteronomy. These promises and warnings are instructive to us now. They show us what God is like in His dealings with people and nations. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4). However, for this study, we will concentrate on Scriptures that apply directly to us, not just to Israel.

...Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come (1 Tim. 4:8).

Godliness will help in all areas of life; God has made a lot of promises for this life as well as promises concerning the future life. In the pages to follow you will see promises God has made for more than thirty areas in this life.

Peter quotes from the book of Psalms and shows that the promises there are for us in this age:

For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil (1 Pet. 3:10-12).

There are many blessings in Proverbs for those who obey. The wisdom of Proverbs with the blessings and warnings included are not addressed to Israel or limited to them, neither is the book of Proverbs part of the covenant God made with Israel in the wilderness. We need the book of Proverbs now; it is for us as well.

The promises are for us here and now, but not all of the blessings come immediately when we meet the conditions. “Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise” (Heb. 10:36). You don’t reap a harvest the same day you plant your field. Abraham waited many years before receiving his promised son.

The fact that there is more emphasis on earthly blessings in the Old Testament than in the New Testament does not prove that those principles no longer apply. To say so is like saying, “I learned the alphabet and learned to count when I was in the first grade, so I don’t use that stuff any more!” Of course we use letters and numbers more now, and we still use the basics we learned in the Old Testament.

We live in a world of misery, poverty, tension, disease, sin, defeat, and many other troubles that can largely be avoided by following God's Word. There are more of all these troubles now than there were in Old Testament times. More than ever, we need millions of happy, victorious, prosperous, healthy, Christians confidently going out into this messed-up, confused, hurting, condemned world, sharing the good news especially of eternal life, but also teaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), which would include Bible teaching on conditions for prosperity.

I dare you to check the claims of this book by the Word of God. See for yourself what God has promised!

I have been more and more impressed at how much God has said about blessings here and now. And I have *seen* more and more how God has prospered me as He said He would in these areas of blessing.

About 20 years ago I left another ministry to work as a full time evangelist on the road. I had almost nothing. But I knew and had experienced many of God's promises, and now I had a wider field to tell the good news. Since that time God has greatly enlarged my ministry and greatly enlarged the means to minister!

By God's mercy and according to His Word I have been experiencing the blessings mentioned in this book—happiness, peace, safety, pleasantness, seeing my needs met, even my desires, seeing prayers answered, greatly increased financial blessing, good health and energy, laughter, honor, rest and sleep, many good friends, a happy and blessed family, plus victory over sin and success in Christian service!

According as his divine power hath given unto us **all things that pertain unto life and godliness**, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue (2 Peter 1:3)!

Conditions of Blessing

Recently I heard a televangelist repeatedly assert, “God is going to bless you, no matter what!” Actually, the Bible emphasizes in many cases that there are *conditions* we must meet to get the blessings. For example, long life is promised to those who *honor their parents*. Another example of a condition for the blessing is, “He will bless them that fear the Lord, both small and great” (Ps. 115:13). You can see that most of the blessings in the pages to follow have certain conditions for their fulfillment. They are for those who fear God, who give to the poor, who ask, who trust God—there are conditions. “For Thou, Lord, wilt bless **the righteous**; with favor wilt Thou compass him as with a shield” (Ps. 5:12). How would you like to be surrounded with God’s favor? That blessing is for the righteous. See that you obey God’s commands!

I have emphasized the promises of blessings in this book, but you yourself will have to continually go through God’s Word to find the commandments and to see that you are keeping them.

It should be expected that things will go better for us if we obey, because God gives *commands for our good*. “...Keep the commands of the Lord... which I command thee for thy good” (Deut. 10:13).

Notice the blessings for those who consider the poor:

- The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.
- The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive.
- He shall be blessed upon the earth.
- God will not deliver him unto the will of his enemies.

- The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing.
- God will make all his bed in his sickness (Psalm 41:1-3).

Popular health and wealth teaching encourages you to *declare* that you will be blessed with money, new cars and houses, flying, sailing, and supernatural deliverance from all your debts. The overwhelming emphasis of the Bible is that earthly blessings come as a result of following the wisdom of God's Word—obedience.

There's more to getting the blessings than just having a bigger vision or having a good self image! Notice what the Bible conditions for blessings are.

Blessing One:

Happiness

You Can Be Happy!

There is a saying, “Christians can have joy, but happiness depends on your happenstance.” *No, the Bible tells us we can be happy, and it tells us how to be happy.* “Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he” (Prov. 16:20). “Happy is the man that findeth wisdom” (Prov. 3:13). Here are some keys to happiness from God’s Word. If you use just a few of these keys, you will be a lot happier than many, many Christians!

TRUST GOD

One key to happiness is to trust God. “Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he” (Prov. 16:20). “They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures” (Psalms 36:8). What a wonderful promise! So many Christians live in a thirsty desert of a miserable, depressed existence.

Jesus... cried, “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, ‘Out of his belly [his innermost being] shall flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37,38).

Look, if you're thirsty, He does not just give you a little spoon full. He does not give just enough for your need, a glass or two or three. He gives *rivers!* Enough to satisfy your thirst and of many, many others besides!

FEAR GOD

You might think that if you feared God, you'd be miserable. The fact is, "Happy is the man that feareth always" (Prov. 28:14).

Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord, that walketh in His ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands; happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee (Psalm 128:1,2).

Those who are careful to obey God will be happy. "He that keepeth the law, happy is he" (Prov. 29:18). Because Jesus loved righteousness and hated wickedness, God anointed Him with the oil of gladness more than He did others (Psalm 45:7).

If you've turned to the Lord to obey Him from the heart, you can expect a harvest of gladness. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart (Psalm 97:11).

HUMBLY SERVE OTHERS

Jesus got down like a lowly servant and washed His disciples' dirty feet! Then He told us we ought to do the same thing. He said, "if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17).

We often try to make ourselves happy. If we serve others, He'll see that we are happy.

PRAY AND GET ANSWERS

“Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

There is a happiness that comes in seeing our prayers answered. It’s a wonderful feeling to realize that the Almighty God has heard my own prayer and given me what I asked for! But the problem is often, “Ye have not, because ye ask not” (James 4:2).

PRAY SPECIFICALLY FOR JOY

David had the sense to look to the Lord, not to himself, not to others, to make him happy. He prayed, “Rejoice the soul of Thy servant: for unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul” (Psalm 86:4).

Pray that God will give you new life! When He does, you will rejoice in Him. “Wilt Thou not revive us again: that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?” (Psalm 85:6).

Here’s another wonderful prayer for happiness I’ve used many times since I discovered it back in the ‘70’s. “O satisfy us early with Thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days” (Psalm 90:14). We can ask God to satisfy us! Early! It is by His mercy; we can always qualify for mercy! Can we expect to rejoice and be glad *all* our days? Yes, *all* our days! If you’ve got just a little sense, you’ll start making use of this prayer today!

THANK GOD FOR WHAT YOU ALREADY HAVE!

One of the easiest and most practical ways to be happier is to consider what you already have and to thank God for those blessings! Do you have eyes? Can you hear? Can you taste your food? How’d you like to have to be fed through a tube, with no enjoyment? Do you have fingers? Toes? Arms? Legs? If you have

one or two things wrong with you, you still have 50 things right with you!

Do you have sores all over your body? Can you speak? Did you have anything to eat yesterday? Is there war in your community? Do you have the freedom to travel around?

I bet you could not list from memory one half of the articles of clothing you own. Do you have access to running water? Hot water? Electricity? A toilet? Any books? A phone? I've heard that two thirds of the people alive have never made a phone call.

Did anything good happen yesterday?

Do you have any friends? Has anybody ever helped you? Did anybody teach you to read? Did anybody ever tell you how to be saved?

Are you going to the lake of fire? Is heaven your home? Did Jesus die for your sins?

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits! (Psalm 103:2).

Sometimes when I have a lot of big blessings and one thing goes wrong, I'm so dumb that I brood over the one bad thing, when I could have been thinking about any one of the good things that I had! It was my own fault I was not happy! We have a certain amount of control over what we think about.

Whatsoever things are... lovely, whatsoever things are of good report... think on these things (Phil. 4:8).

We ought to start every morning reviewing some of our blessings and thanking God! That's the way to enter God's presence. "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving" (Psalms 100:4). The command to thank God is one of the most oft-repeated commands in the Bible.

Several years ago when I started to make a practice of thanking God every day, I started enjoying life more!

PRAISE GOD!

The most oft-repeated command in the Bible is to praise God. If you tell how great, how wise, how merciful, how loving, how powerful God is, let me tell you, you will be happier!

After I spend a few minutes thanking God, I sing a few songs of praise. If I'm still in bed I do it quietly. I don't think God wants me tormenting my wife early in the morning!

MEDITATE ON GOD'S WORD

You will be blessed, happy, if you don't take advice from the ungodly, hang around sinners, or be scornful, but instead enjoy God's Word and think it over day and night (Psalm 1:1-3).

Jeremiah lived in the most painful and dreadful of times, but he said, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jer. 15:16). Sometimes I have been depressed and burdened, but after reading and meditating a while on God's Word, the burden has lifted, and I found new courage!

BE SURE YOU ARE SAVED!

How can you be happy if you're wondering if you'll be lost forever? Doubts about your salvation will certainly ruin your happiness!

God loves us. He wants us to be saved, so He sent His Son to take our punishment by dying on the cross.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

You'll certainly be happier if you know you have eternal life! The book of 1 John was written with two related goals, fullness of joy and assurance of salvation:

- “And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” (1 John 1:4).
- “These things have I written unto you... that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13).

How can we know we have truly believed and have the assurance eternal life?

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. “He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (1 John 3:14).

There is a change in the life of a real Christian. We start to really love others; we obey God now.

And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar (1 John 2:3,4).

KEEP A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

We all know what it is like to be miserable because of a guilty conscience. After David's terrible sins he said God's hand was heavy on him, until he confessed his sin. He begged, “Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation” (Psalm 51:12).

SET YOUR HOPE ON HEAVEN

Even if you're in terrible tribulation, you can still have the joy of knowing that you will be safe forever in pleasure with the Lord and with many friends in that beautiful, heavenly city! You are "rejoicing in hope" (Rom. 12:12).

How did Jesus endure all the pain and shame of crucifixion? He looked ahead to what would follow.

Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:2).

The first century Christians, who were degraded and cast out for their faith in Christ, could happily watch people plunder their property! How? They knew that they had in heaven a better and an enduring possession (Heb. 10:32-34)!

GET THE REST GOD INTENDS YOU TO HAVE

One reason some Christians are miserable and depressed is that they are *so tired!* They're getting up early, stressed all day, and working till late. The Word of God says,

It is vain [useless] for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so He giveth His beloved sleep (Psalm 127:2).

Jesus said if you're burdened down and having a hard time, come to Him, and He will give you *rest*. His yoke is *easy*, and His burden is *light* (Matt. 11:28-30).

A few zealous Christians have ruined their health by overwork, fasting too much, or not enough sleep. The Word of God warns,

Be not righteous overmuch, neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? (Eccl. 7:16).

For many years I have taken one day off each week to rest—without feeling guilty. Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27). (If you’ll excuse me, I’m going to take a nap now.)

(I’m back.) With all these keys to happiness, we can “rejoice and be glad all our days.” Besides, if we go through all the ups and downs of life happily praising God, others will notice and turn to Him!

He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord (Ps. 40:3).

Blessing Two:

Peace

Here are three kinds of peace:

- **With God**

Peace with God comes through faith in Jesus. Regardless of what turmoil is in our mind or conscience, the blood of Jesus shed on our behalf has satisfied the anger of a holy God against us.

And having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself... And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled... (Col. 1:20,21).

- **In your heart**

Then when we trust God that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28), we will have a relaxed, peaceful heart.

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee (Isaiah 26:3).

Be careful [anxious] for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6,7).

- **In your circumstances**

We can avoid a lot of turmoil so that our surroundings are much more peaceful. Some, if not all, of the following verses are about peaceful circumstances because of living wisely. Notice the conditions of living in peace.

But the meek shall... delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).

Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace (Ps. 37:37).

Let thine heart keep My commandments: for... peace shall they add to thee (Pr. 3:1,2).

All her [wisdom's] paths are peace (Pr. 3:17).

When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even His enemies to be at peace with him (Pr. 16:7).

He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good (Pr. 16:20).

Things will go more peacefully for us when we follow the wisdom of Proverbs. Of the hundreds of wise principles in Proverbs, here's one example. "Only by pride cometh contention...." When I've swallowed my pride I've avoided a lot of arguments and fights. Things were more peaceful.

Blessing Three:

Safety

Notice how many promises God has made about safety:

I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust. Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome [deadly] pestilence. ...Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day... a thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee (Ps. 91:2,3,5,7).

But whoso hearkeneth unto me [wisdom] shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil (Pr. 1:33).

[God] preserveth the way of His saints (Pr. 2:8).

Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee (Pr. 2:11).

Keep sound wisdom... then shalt thou walk in thy way safely (Pr. 3:21,23).

Don't forsake wisdom, "and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee" (Pr. 4:6).

In multitude of counselors there is safety (Pr. 24:6).

Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe (Pr. 29:25).

[God] is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him (Pr. 30:5).

You can lose your safety if you get involved in adultery (see Prov. 7:23).

Blessing Four:

Avoiding Troubles

Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about (Ps. 32:10).

Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling (Ps. 91:9,10).

Those who run with a violent gang “lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives” (Pr. 1:10-18). The same is true “of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof” (Pr. 1:19).

Those who refuse wisdom will suffer calamity, distress, anguish, and destruction. They will call for help but will not get it (Pr. 1:24-32).

Keep sound wisdom... and thy foot shall not stumble (Pr. 3:21,23).

The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked (Pr. 3:33).

The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble” (Pr. 4:19).

Violence covereth the mouth of the wicked (Pr. 10:6).

The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him (Pr. 10:24).

The wicked shall fall by his own wickedness (Pr. 11:5).

The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness (Pr. 11:6).

The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead (Pr. 11:8).

He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind (Pr. 11:29).

The just shall come out of trouble (Pr. 12:13).

There shall no evil happen to the just: but the wicked shall be filled with mischief (Pr. 12:21).

He that hath it [the fear of the Lord] shall not be visited with evil [disaster] (Pr. 19:23).

Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles (Pr. 21:23).

A prudent man foreseeeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished (Pr. 22:3).

Thorns and snares are in the way of the forward [perverse]: he that doth deep his soul shall be far from them (Pr. 22:5).

Here is a promise the Word of God gives for those who will exalt wisdom:

When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble (Pr. 4:8,12).

The Word of God repeatedly warns us to avoid the woman who would lead us into sexual sin!

Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house: lest thou give thine honor unto others, and thy years unto the cruel: lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labours be in the house of a stranger; and thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed (Pr. 5:8-11).

Who is doomed to sudden calamity? Who will be broken without remedy? The one who sows discord:

Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy (Pr. 6:14,15).

Don't disobey. Like a wise father, God disciplines His children when they are disobedient.

For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth (Heb. 12:6).

One of the biggest troublemakers in the world is alcoholic drink! Wasted money! Thousands of deaths by murder, drunk driving, liver ailments, and other sicknesses! Broken homes! Lost jobs! After all that, the lake of fire! Drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9,10).

Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babblings? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. [Then after all this the drunkard says,] "When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again" (Pr. 23:29-35).

You can avoid all these troubles alcohol brings by avoiding alcohol. Avoid it by not even *looking* at it (Pr. 23:31).

Throughout history a good many people have come to ruin and untimely death by trying to overthrow their governments. They often thought their causes were noble. But the Word of God warns:

The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation (Rom. 13:1,2).

My son, fear thou the Lord and the king: and meddle [company] not with them that are given to change: for their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?" [that is, ruin from either God or the king] (Pr. 24:21,22).

People who want to fight the government—who do not fear the king and who want to change things—often come to disaster. (They are considered patriots and heroes by their followers, but God says not to associate with them.) God has given us fair warning.

Then those who plan trouble for others will have trouble themselves: “Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him” (Pr. 26:27). “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

Here are some other principles to keep us from disaster:

A prudent man foreseeeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished (Pr. 27:12).

He that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief (Pr. 28:14).

He that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once (Pr. 28:18).

He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy (Pr. 29:1).

Scornful men bring a city into a snare: but wise men turn away wrath (Pr. 29:8).

God says He visits “the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep My commandments” (Ex. 20:5,6). So we should recognize the sins of our fathers and renounce them so we don’t continue to reap the disastrous results. Godly men like Daniel and Nehemiah not only confessed their own sins, they also confessed the sins of their fathers.

Taking the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner can cause sickness and premature death.

For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep (1 Cor. 11:29,30).

PRAYERS TO KEEP US FROM TROUBLES

Jesus taught us to pray (daily) that we would be delivered from evil: “and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mt. 6:13). “Evil” sometimes means “sin”, sometimes “trouble.” So each day I pray that God will keep me from sin and from harm.

Jabez not only prayed for blessing, enlargement, and power, but he prayed that God would keep him from evil so that he would not suffer grief (1 Chron. 4: 10).

Sometimes people teach that it is wrong to say that disasters come because of sin. They cite Jesus' teaching in Luke 13 as proof:

There were present at that season some that told Him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, "Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?" I tell you, "Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?" I tell you, "Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:1-5).

Jesus did not say that the victims were not being punished; He said we could not assume that they were the *worst* sinners because of these disasters. Rather, these two calamities served as warnings to others who would not repent: they would suffer like that, too, Jesus said. In fact, the nation, as a whole, did not repent. Israel suffered a bloody, violent judgment at the hands of the Romans about forty years later in 70 AD.

Blessing Five:

Pleasantness

Who would not want a pleasant life? Listen to the promise of God for those who go in the way of wisdom. “Her ways are ways of pleasantness” (Pr. 3:17).

For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them [the words of the wise] within thee (Pr. 22:18).

As I have learned and followed God’s Word better I have found life getting more and more pleasant—in my spirit, in my family, and in my work.

Blessing Six:

Satisfaction

Look at what the Word of God says about satisfaction!

They [who trust God] shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures (Ps. 36:8).

I remember meditating on this verse as a young man with deep longings. Let me just say God has satisfied those longings. Oh, there are still trials and challenges, but I can say that I have been drinking of the river of pleasures for years now.

O satisfy us early with Thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days (Ps. 90:14).

I discovered this wonderful prayer about 30 years ago. It's a prayer I can pray with confidence, knowing I'm praying in the will of God. I know it's the will of God because He wrote it! I have found I can trust God to satisfy me with joy and gladness 365 days a year! I've shared this secret of satisfaction and happiness with many thousands of people over the years.

Another common sense principle to being satisfied is to *work* for what you need. “He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread” (Pr. 12:11). Don’t expect to be satisfied with good things if you’re just going to sit around watching TV or playing video games or talking!

Here are some more principles to attain satisfaction:

A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth: and the recompence of a man’s hands shall be rendered unto him (Pr. 12:14).

The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil (Pr. 19:23).

The following passage gives a key, not only to **satisfaction**, but also to **health, honor, answered prayer, and guidance!** These promises are for those who set the oppressed free, feed the hungry, take in the homeless, clothe the naked, and satisfy the desires of the afflicted (see Isa. 58:6,7).

Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward [rear guard].

Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer...

...Then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday:

And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not (Isa. 58:8-11).

Blessing Seven:

Our Needs Met

Jesus said not to worry about what to eat or drink or wear; your Father knows you need these things.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you (Mt. 6:33).

So the promise of provision of food and clothes is not for everyone, but for those who seek first God's kingdom and righteousness. Here's another promise for the righteous:

The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but He casteth away the substance of the wicked (Pr. 10:3).

Here is what the Apostle Paul promised to the Philippians who were generous:

But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

This promise is not for everyone—there are millions who do not have their needs supplied—it is for God's people who are generous like the Philippians were.

To the Corinthians, who had also been generous, he wrote:

God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work (2 Cor. 9:8).

My parents were both intelligent and well educated, but instead of living for themselves they went as independent missionaries to reach many thousands of needy, unreached people. Dad and Mom had no denomination or mission to support them. But as the six of us children grew up we could see that God always gave us what we needed, like He said He would. I never doubted that if you seek first God's kingdom, all these things would be added to you. I *saw* it.

He has done the same for Vicki, our children, and me. Money has not been much of a concern. We try to seek first His kingdom, and He has supplied our needs and more!

Blessing Eight:

Our Desires Granted

I saw in a Bible college classroom: “God has promised to supply our needs not our wants.”⁴ But He *has* made some promises about fulfilling our desires. Notice the conditions.

Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass (Ps. 37:4,5).

He will fulfill the desire of them that fear Him (Ps. 145:19).

The desire of the righteous shall be granted (Pr. 10:24).

Righteous people have righteous desires. Wrong desire is covetousness. A married man wanted another younger woman. He said God fulfills the desire of those who fear Him, so he took an additional wife! Later, he divorced the first wife. Naturally, it caused a lot of grief, confusion, and conflict for his family. If you do fear God you’ll be careful to obey, and you’ll “seek peace and pursue it” (Ps. 34:14).

⁴ As we have seen, God does not promise to meet everyone’s needs if they don’t meet His conditions. The promise, “My God shall supply all your need” was given to the Philippian church because they were so generous.

Blessing Nine:

Our Prayers Answered

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good things unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him? (Matt. 7:11)

Since Solomon asked for something good, wisdom, God was happy to give it to him, as well as riches and honor! And we are specifically invited and commanded to ask for wisdom:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him (James 1:5).

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. He got the blessing *by asking for it*. It is honorable to ask God for His help! “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it” (Ps. 81:10). Jabez asked that God would:

- Really bless him
- Enlarge his borders
- Help him (in his enlarged responsibilities)
- Keep him from evil.

And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, “Because I bare him with sorrow,” and Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying,

“Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!” And God granted him that which he requested” (1 Chron. 4:9,10).

Elisha got a huge blessing by asking for it—a double portion of the Spirit that was on Elijah! His request was huge, but not selfish. Sure, the blessing benefited him, but it brought blessing to *many others*.

Jesus is asking us the same thing He asked the blind beggar, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?”

Just recently my back got really painful. It started bothering me more than forty years ago when I was a teenager, but I’ve learned how to take care of it, so that I’ve had very little trouble with it for many years. But not long ago the pain built up for a few weeks. I didn’t know what to do! I asked God to *please help!* I lay down for a rest, and when I got up it was quite well and has been well since!

A little over a year ago I was discouraged about our marriage. Really, we’ve had such a good marriage in so many ways, I wasn’t used to this! Actually, I think it was mainly the Accuser working on me. I asked God to *help!* Out of the blue, Vicki loved me in such a wonderful way! I was thrilled! I was also very encouraged how God had answered my prayer and helped!

Three years ago I was on a preaching trip to India. For some reason the people who had invited us were not scheduling meetings. I prayed that God would thrust us into the harvest. He did! In fact, during our final week there, I preached over thirty times.

I have seen God answer my prayers for a car—when I had no money. He *gave* me one! It cost me nothing! I have seen Him heal in answer to prayer, sometimes completely apart from doctors or medicine. I have seen God give clear guidance, help me find lost

things, give sleep, stop the rain, find a parking place, help with temptation, overcome difficulties, give power in preaching, and a good many others things, in answer to prayer.

In fact, Jesus said that if we would stay with Him and keep His words in us, we could ask what we want, and He would do it!

If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you (John 15:7).

If we are obedient to God's Word, we will avoid selfish greediness, but we will boldly open our mouths wide for true blessings and for the progress of His kingdom.

We can *pray* for prosperity: "O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity!" (Ps. 118:25). Here are some more sample prayers we can pray that God will make us prosperous:

Show me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed: because Thou, Lord, hast helped me, and comforted me (Ps. 86:17).

Let, I pray Thee, Thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to Thy Word unto Thy servant. Let Thy tender mercies come unto me (Ps. 119:76,77).

Blessing Ten:

Wealth

Does the Bible make any offers of riches in this life? Yes, it does. I know that this doctrine has been abused by some Christian leaders, but let's see what the Word of God actually says.

- Happy is the man that findeth wisdom... length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand **riches** and honour (Prov. 3:13,16).
- Doth not wisdom cry...“**Riches** and honour are with me; yea, **durable riches** and righteousness... That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures” (Prov. 8:1,18,21).
- The crown of the wise is their **riches** (Prov. 14:24).
- Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an **hundredfold now in this time, houses**, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and **lands**, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29,30).

STUDIES BY ECONOMISTS

A recent study by Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist Jonathan Gruber claims that on average, a doubling of church attendance will raise a household's income by 9.1 percent.⁵

⁵ Timothy Lamer. “Worldly benefits”, *World* magazine. January 21, 2006, page 43.

Other economists agree, saying that a nation's natural resources are only a small part of its real wealth.

“Intangible assets”—strong families; a positive view of work, money, and education; institutions and laws that support property rights and free trade—form the largest component of a nation's wealth. Since religious belief affects attitudes on many of these matters, the thinking goes, it must also affect personal and societal prosperity.⁶

Two Harvard economists found a specific causal link between the belief in the afterlife and a nation's economic growth. They claimed that the fear of hell produces economic growth faster than any other religious idea.⁷

Keys to Financial Prosperity

- **Work hard.**

There are numerous tribes who have for centuries lived in poverty, disease, and filth. A big reason they are so poor (besides slavery to evil spirits, drunkenness, and sexual immorality) is laziness. The men have adopted a culture of idleness, forcing the women to do the housework, gardening, and caring for the children. Then they think it is unfair that another culture nearby is so much wealthier!

Laziness and love of sleep will bring poverty and want (Pr. 6:11). You'll see this principle repeated often.

He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich (Pr. 10:4).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat (Pr. 13:4).

In all labour there is profit, but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury (Pr. 14:23).

Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger (Pr. 19:15).

The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing (Pr. 20:4).

Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread (Pr. 20:13).

The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want (Pr. 21:5).

Poverty will come suddenly on those who love sleep, according to Pr. 24:34.

Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds... and thou shalt have... enough... (Pr. 27:23-27).

He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough (Pr. 28:19).

- **Give generously to those in need.**

I remember as a young evangelist I drove 300 miles one winter to preach. The pastor and his wife put me up in their nice home. A missionary family came through, and the pastor let them stay in a Sunday school room. I thought about giving them some money, but didn't. The next evening as I was driving back home the van broke down. I spent the night in the van. I was very cold! I thought of how I had not shared with that missionary family. The

bill for the repair was about 50 percent more than what I had considered giving to that family.

The next time I went to that area to preach, I stayed with another couple in Christian work who had some needs. I gave them the same amount I had thought about giving the missionaries before. That week someone gave me 50 percent more than I had given! Also the car had no breakdowns.

Is there any connection between giving and blessing, between withholding and cursing? There is. Look at the Word of God:

Honour the Lord with substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine (Pr. 3:9,10).

There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet [fit],⁸ but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal [generous] soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself (Pr. 11:24,25).

He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again (Pr. 19:17).

Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard (Pr. 21:13).

He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor (Pr. 22:9).

⁸ The statement, “there is that withholdeth more than is meet [fit]” implies that withholding some is fitting. Some Christians in their zeal would have you think that anything more than a box to sit on and a mat for a bed is not true discipleship. The Word of God tempers this view with, “In the house of the righteous is much treasure” (Pr. 15:6).

He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor (Pr. 28:8).

He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse (Pr. 28:27).

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again (Lk. 6:38).

He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully (2 Cor. 9:6).

Sometimes these promises are abused. Some “ministry” will claim that if you give to them God will give you one hundred times as much back! I had a friend tell me that if that televangelist really believed that claim, the televangelist would be sending money to him! If the televangelist would give to his needy viewers, God could give him one hundred times as much as he gave away—if all those claims were true!

Sometimes Christians are pressured to pledge more than they have, to pledge “in faith.” The Word of God answers this abuse:

For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not (2 Cor. 8:12).

But all the abuses in the world cannot nullify the promises of God. God will do what He has said He will do. “Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4).

- **Put God’s work first.**

The prophet Haggai told why the people were in need: they were fixing up their own nice houses while God's house was in ruins. All their efforts at making money amounted to putting their wages into a bag with holes.

Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, "Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes."

Thus saith the Lord of hosts, "Consider your ways.

Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified," saith the Lord.

"Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why?" saith the Lord of hosts. "Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.

Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.

And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands (Hag. 1:4-11).

When the people heard this rebuke, they feared God and began to work on the house of the Lord. Then God challenged them to notice how that so far, they had been cursed, "but from this day will I bless you" (Hag. 2:19).

The prophet Malachi told why Israel was cursed when they could have been blessed.

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, “Wherein have we robbed Thee?” In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation.

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it (Mal. 3:8-10).

- **Don’t give to the rich.**

Some organizations ask the poor for money to finance their “ministries.” Yet leaders in these organizations sometimes live in luxury. “He that giveth to the rich shall surely come to want” (Pr. 22:16). The poor should not feel guilty for not giving to the rich.

- **Obey God’s Word.**

Notice what the Word of God says about financial prosperity in connection with obedience.

Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in His commandments... Wealth and riches shall be in his house... (Ps. 112:1,3).

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom... in her [wisdom’s] left hand [are] riches... (Pr. 3:13,16).

Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction (Pr. 13:18).

The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just (Pr. 13:22).

In the house of the righteous is much treasure (Pr. 15:6).

By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches... (Pr. 22:4).

He that oppreseth the poor to increase his riches... shall surely come to want (Pr. 22:16).

Through wisdom is an house builded... and by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches (Pr. 24:3,4).

- **Avoid extravagance.**

Some poor people remain trapped in poverty because they are so wasteful; they're not satisfied to enjoy simple things. If you only have a few cents, don't buy a Coke; drink water (and it doesn't have to be chilled bottled water!) I've bought nice looking, dependable used cars for a fraction of the cost of new cars, saving ten or fifteen thousand dollars!

He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich (Pr. 21:17).

There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up (Pr. 21:20).

- **Avoid borrowing.**

The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender (Pr. 22:7).

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another (Rom. 13:8).

- **Don't be surety, that is, don't promise someone you'll pay the debts he may incur.**

You may think that promising to pay the debts someone may have is a brotherly, loving thing to do. God says:

Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts. If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee? (Pr. 22:26).

- **Avoid immoral women.**

Besides ruining your marriage and family, besides the risk of numerous diseases, besides boarding the express train for hell, using prostitutes is a stupid waste of money!

Remove thy way far from her... Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth (Pr. 5:8,9).

He that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance (Pr. 29:3).

- **Marry a virtuous woman.**

A woman can be a financial asset or a burden. The virtuous woman in Proverbs is a financial blessing to her husband.

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil [no lack of gain]. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life (Pr. 31:11,12).

There are other reasons why people are rich besides hard work, generosity, good sense, and obedience to God. Many rich people were born into rich families: "House and riches are the inheritance of fathers" (Pr. 19:14). Then some are rich because they have been lucky:

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift... nor yet riches to men of understanding... but time and chance happeneth to them all (Ec. 9:11).

Some have a gift for making money. Giving is listed as a spiritual gift (Rom. 12:8). It would seem to follow that the one who has a gift for giving also has a gift for getting, so he can give.

Warnings about Riches

Someone said, "I've been poor and happy, and I've been rich and happy. Rich and happy is better!" Maybe so, but there are dangers.

What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul (Mark 8:36).

Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth (Luke 12:15).

Don't overestimate the value of wealth: "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall" (Pr. 11:28). "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit" (Pr. 18:11). Riches won't do any good when God punishes sin: "Riches profit not in the day of wrath" (Pr. 11:4).

Don't hurry to be rich. "He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent" (Pr. 28:20). "He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him" (Pr. 28:22). In fact, don't try to be rich.

Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven (Pr. 23:5).

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do

not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is there will your heart be also (Mt. 6:19-21).

Having too much is dangerous. Here's a Bible prayer we should pray:

Give me neither poverty nor riches... lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, "Who is the Lord?" or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain (Pr. 30:7-9).

Jesus said that it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God (Luke 18:25).

He is a fool who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:20,21). Demas forsook Paul and the missionary work, because he "loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10).

We are commanded to kill covetousness "which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5). Some televangelists have exaggerated and abused Bible teaching on prosperity. They not only appeal to covetousness in others, but are guilty of this idolatry themselves. They promise extravagant blessings on those who support *their* lavish life styles.

And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not (2 Pet. 2:3).

Some people get money dishonestly, but it doesn't help them; it will shorten their life.

The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death" (Pr. 21:6).

One example of getting treasures by a lying tongue is the fact that beggars often make up lies so you'll think they are in desperate need.

Those who are never satisfied are like a leech or bloodsucker; they are as greedy as the grave (Pr. 30:15,16). Be content with what you have (Heb. 13:5).

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all [kinds of] evil (1 Tim. 6:8-10).

The deceitfulness of riches chokes the effect of the Word of God in our hearts (Mt. 13:22).

The fact is, we must choose between God and wealth for a master.

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other ye cannot serve God and mammon (Mt. 6:24).

Some people have wicked minds and lives and suppose that godliness is a way of financial gain. Believers are commanded to separate from such people (1 Tim. 6:5). I've seen beggars go from church to church or Christian to Christian, saying what the Christians want to hear, in order to get donations, while the beggars continue in lying, stealing, drugs, and alcohol. Also, I wonder how many people who attend churches that emphasize financial prosperity go there because they suppose that godliness is a means of financial gain.

Christians who do have riches should be careful not to be conceited or to trust in their uncertain riches, but in God, Who gives those riches for us to enjoy and to share generously. That's the way to be ready for the future (1Tim. 6:17-19).

Blessing Eleven:

Health

Is there a link between obedience and health? There is. Look at the Word of God.

Fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel [or, *body*], and marrow to thy bones (Pr. 3:7,8).

Attend to my words... for they are health to all their flesh (Pr. 4:22).

Sometimes the link between health and godliness is obvious. Millions are dying of AIDS, which is caused largely by sexual sins. If AIDS activists and governments are serious about the huge health threat, they can attack the obvious root of the plague, sexual sin.

Remove thy way far from [the immoral woman]... lest... thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed (Pr. 5:8-11).

Don't even let your heart indulge in sexual sin: "Let not thine heart decline to her ways" (Pr. 7:25). Jesus said that whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart (Mt. 5:28).

Instead, enjoy sex properly—with your own wife:

Rejoice with the wife of thy youth. ...Let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love (Pr. 5:18,19).

Another obvious health threat is alcoholic drink. A huge number of hospital beds are occupied by alcoholics. What does the Bible say? Avoid alcohol; don't even look at it. Who has wounds without cause?

They that tarry long at the wine.... Look not thou upon the wine when it is red [alcoholic], when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright (Pr. 23:29-31).

Sometimes the link between obedience and health is not so obvious, but still real. A Christian man recently was wondering aloud why he should be sick so often, when he doesn't use tobacco, he's never used alcohol or lived a wild life of sexual sin. In fact the reason I hired him was that he had a reputation for being honest! However, in the course of our conversation he revealed a very complaining attitude. He said winter is too cold, summer is too hot, and it is too rainy. Actually, Cape Town has some of the nicest weather in the world! And there is far less rain than many parts of the world. Then he complained about how frustrated he is with the low speed limits. (They're fairly normal, actually faster than many other places.) He says he pays five to six thousand rand (nearly \$1000) a year in traffic fines! He kept telling me how stressed he was.

I told him, "A tranquil heart is the life of the flesh." God showed how serious the sin of complaining is: He sent a fire that burned some complainers to death (Num. 11:1). Another time God sent fiery snakes to destroy the complainers (Num. 21:6).

A sound [tranquil] heart is the life of the flesh [body], but envy the rottenness of the bones (Pr. 14:30).

The famous physician, S. I. McMillen, in his best selling book, *None of These Diseases*, reported that:

Two thirds of the patients who went to a physician had symptoms caused or aggravated by mental stress.⁹

A study at one hospital revealed, through personal interviews with patients suffering from mucous colitis, that resentment was the most prominent personality characteristic, occurring in ninety-six per cent of the victims.¹⁰

So a huge number of sicknesses could be eased or even avoided by obeying such commands as “let the peace of God rule in your hearts” or “rejoice evermore” or “be content with such things as ye have” or “let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger... be put away from you.”

PUSHING TOO HARD

Other godly people in their zeal habitually stay up late and rise up early. They study long hours. They fast too much, neglect the body, and wear themselves out. God’s Word gives us fair warning:

Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? (Ec. 7:16).

Moses’ father-in-law came to see him and saw how Moses sat to judge the people from morning to evening.

⁹ S. I. McMillen, M.D., *None of These Diseases*, p. 58, Fleming H. Revell Co., Old Tappan, N.J., 1963.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 68.

His father-in-law said, “The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone.”

Moses took this advice and set capable, God-fearing men over the people, and Moses handled the hard cases (Ex. 18:13-26).

Parents and pastors can wear themselves out by not delegating responsibilities to their children and to their members and by failing to train them to help with the work.

The famous missionary to India, Amy Carmichael, had a reputation for always rushing about in dedication to her good work. One day she fell into a pit. She spent the rest of her life as an invalid. Twenty years! Several years after her accident she advised a fellow worker:

Go gently. Don't do as I know I did.... Don't work each day till you are unable to do one minute more. Don't. Leave a margin.¹¹

The Word of God warns: “He that hasteth with his feet sinneth” (Pr. 19:2). The very next verse tells what we are prone to do when we are in a hurry and get ourselves into a mess: “The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord” (Pr. 19:3). We blame God for our trouble, when it's our own fault.

John Wesley was an example of “a tranquil heart is the life of the flesh.” He did a huge amount of work, yet maintained a calm spirit. His preaching took him 250,000 miles on horseback, walking, and by ship! He wrote, edited, and translated over 200

¹¹ Sam Wellman, *Amy Carmichael A Life Abandoned to God*, p. 190, Barbour Books. Uhrichville, OH, 1998.

works!¹² At seventy-one he said he had the “same strength as I did thirty years ago... my sight is considerably better now... I have none of the infirmities of old age, and have lost several I had in youth.” Then at seventy-four, he wrote his secret, “I never undertake any more work that I can go through with perfect calmness of spirit.” *At eighty he was still preaching twice a day:*

Always cheerful, always happy, always hard at work, flying with all the sprightliness of youth... preaching twice every day....¹³

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine (Pr. 17:22).

UNFORGIVENESS

A person may appear godly and dedicated but secretly harbor a grudge. Refusing to forgive others is a serious sin that takes its toll in our health.

The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh (Pr. 11:17).

Jesus warned that if we do not sincerely forgive everyone (!) the Heavenly Father will deliver us to the tormentors (Mt. 18:34,35).

CHEER UP!

With all the sin and ungodliness in the church and in society and corruption in the government, it is easy for a sincere Christian to get a bitter attitude! Here’s a verse that can help our health:

¹² John H. Armstrong, *Five Great Evangelists*, p.117, Christian Focus Publications, Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, IV20 1TW, Great Britain.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 119.

O satisfy us early with Thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days (Ps. 90:14),

because...

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones (Pr. 17:22).

EXERCISE

If bodily exercise profited a little (1 Tim. 4:8) in the time of Paul when their work was more strenuous and they usually had to walk when they went anywhere, bodily exercise would profit even more now in this sedentary age.

REST

One thing that has helped my health a lot is the practice of taking one day off—to rest—each week. Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man (Mk. 2:27). I have less sickness now at nearly 60 than I did at the age of 23. As a young man I thought the way to serve God properly was to burn the candle at both ends.

It was a liberating truth to see that it is vain, or useless, to rise up early, to sit up late, for so He gives His beloved sleep (Ps. 127:2). I have a friend who was a supervisor in a small ACE school. He was burdened down and stressed out. As he unloaded his problems on me I shared this verse with him:

Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so He giveth His beloved sleep (Ps. 127:1,2).

He began to relax and trust God to work through him. Jesus lifted his load. Even his students noticed a big difference. He has related that story to me several times over the past 25 years. Now he is the administrator of a Christian school many times larger than that little school. First, though, he had to learn to relax and not push so hard.

HEALING

The verse, “I am the Lord that healeth thee” is sometimes quoted to promote the idea that anyone can have healing from the Lord—regardless of behavior. The passage actually teaches the opposite: God’s promise of protection from diseases was conditioned on Israel’s obedience, and God explicitly said that *He* brought diseases on the disobedient.

If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee (Ex. 15:26).

Prayer and confession of sin lead to healing according to James 5:14-16:

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

There is a lot of prayer for the sick in church at prayer meetings (with little effect), but not much confession of sin! Confessing sin is too embarrassing.

Often, when sickness comes people turn immediately to a doctor instead of turning to the Lord.

Asa... was diseased in his feet... yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians (2 Chron. 16:12).

Does that mean that going to a doctor is a mark of unbelief? No. Turn first to the Lord, and see if there is any sin that must be forsaken. Remember, though, that Jesus Himself said that sick people need a physician. “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (Mt. 9:12). It may be a sign of unbelief to refuse to go to a doctor: you don’t believe what Jesus said.

Blessing Twelve:

Long Life

Notice how *many* warnings there are of premature death for sinful living and how *many* promises of long life there are for wise, obedient living!

But Thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction; bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days... (Ps. 55:23).

I've preached hundreds of times to gangsters and often hear of guys in their teens and twenties dying violently.

For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it (Pr. 2:21,22).

Let thine heart keep My commandments: for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee (Pr. 3:1,2).

[Wisdom] is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her (Pr. 3:18).

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom... length of days is in her right hand (Pr. 3:13,16).

Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many (Pr. 4:10).

Keep [instruction]; for she is thy life (Pr. 4:13).

[The words of wisdom] are life unto those that find them (Pr. 4:22).

[The adulteress has] cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death (Pr. 7:26,27).

Her guests are in the depths of hell (Pr. 9:18).

But he that sinneth against me [wisdom] wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death (Pr. 8:36).

For by me [wisdom] thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased (Pr. 9:11).

Righteousness delivereth from death (Pr. 10:2).

The fear of the Lord prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened (Pr. 10:27).

Righteousness delivereth from death (Pr. 11:4).

As righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death (Pr. 11:19).

He that hateth reproof shall die (Pr. 15:10).

He that despiseth his ways [is careless of his ways] shall die (Pr. 19:16).

The fear of the Lord tendeth to life (Pr. 19:23).

He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life... (Pr. 21:21).

By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life (Pr. 22:4).

He that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit... (Pr. 28:17).

Do you see *how many times* God says long life comes with obedience and fearing God. If we fear God and carefully seek to obey Him, we will prolong our lives, and we will be able to help many, many others.

In this chapter I have, to a large extent, just given the principles stated in Scripture of long life for those who fear God. I have not spelled out the particulars of wisdom and fearing God. You'll have to search the Scriptures continually, especially Proverbs, to be able to know and follow what wisdom would require for all the situations of life. It's not enough to generally love Jesus and want to please Him. You need to follow specifically what He has said. This fact explains why a good many godly people have not lived a very long life. Though the person was generally godly, in one area he was ignorant or careless of a specific principle or command.

King Josiah's early death illustrates the fact that a very godly person can commit one sin that cuts his life short. Notice how godly he was.

And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him (2 Kings 23:25).

But Josiah wanted to fight against Necho king of Egypt even though he was warned by the word of God not to do so (2 Chron. 35:21,22). Josiah was killed at the age of thirty-nine.

A promising young lady we knew was killed suddenly when she drove her pickup truck into a tree. She'd had an effective

ministry, but on this occasion she was driving too fast. We must live in the fear of God *always*, and “submit... to every ordinance of man” (1 Pet. 2:13). Breaking the speed limit one time could contribute to a premature death.

It is not enough to get saved and think that God would not let anything bad happen to us. He has given us many commands for our good, and if we neglect them we suffer for it. Don't think that sexual sin, drugs, and drunkenness are the only sins that harm your health. We are to walk circumspectly (Eph. 5:15), that is, watch out on all sides. There are dangers from many areas, and God has given many commands for our protection.

I wonder which diseases follow the various kinds of sins. I wonder how many ailments we would avoid by happily praising God. The command to praise God is the most oft repeated command in the Bible. The command to thank God is near the top. Obeying these two commands will dispel a lot of stress—when we remind ourselves of God's wonder and grace and of all the things He has done for us. Remember, “A tranquil heart is the life of the flesh” and “a merry heart doeth good like a medicine.” We are more relaxed when we trust Him. There's no telling what bodily harm comes to our body when we rebel against God by disobeying the God-ordained authorities (parents, husbands, pastors, and civil laws.)

Notice a summary of some of the commands found in the little book of Colossians. If we keep them we are doing ourselves a favor: when we kill the desires of fornication, uncleanness, improper affection, sinful lust, and covetousness (see Col. 3:5), or when we get rid of anger, temper, malice, abusive speech, filthy talk, and lying (Col. 3:8,9). Let's decide to live in a merciful attitude, in kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, putting up with each other, and forgiving each other as Christ forgave us (Col. 3:12,13). To sum it up, love (vs. 14)! “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts” (vs. 15). Go through the day singing songs and hymns and spiritual songs from your heart to the Lord (vs. 16). Do everything in the name of the Lord, that is, set out to

please the Lord in everything (vs. 17). And whatever you do, do your best, as to the Lord (vs. 23).

One factor in longevity that is often overlooked by modern medicine on one hand, as well as by nutritionists on the other, is that covetousness or unfulfilled desire cuts your life short.

He that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days (Pr. 28:16).

So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof (Pr. 1:19).

Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh it is a tree of life (Pr. 13:12).

A sound [tranquil] heart is the life of the flesh, but envy the rottenness of the bones (Pr. 14:30).

The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour (Pr. 21:25).

This morning as our family read this passage, that unfulfilled desire leads to premature death, I told our children, “If you want something, work for it; or else be content without it.” Five times the Word of God reveals that being unsatisfied will kill you! See the five verses just quoted.

Sometimes prosperity preachers teach people to want more things, bigger and better things, to not be satisfied with what they have. But look at what God’s Word says:

But godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Tim. 6:6).

And having food and raiment let us be therewith content (1 Tim. 6:8).

Be content with such things as ye have (Heb. 13:5).

Remember, greediness for gain takes away a person's life (Pr. 1:19), and he who hates covetousness prolongs his days (Pr. 28:16).

We have seen that taking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner can cause sickness and premature death (1 Cor. 11:30).

God promised (twice in the Old Testament and once in the New Testament) long life for those who honor their parents.

Honor thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth (Eph. 6:2,3 also Ex. 20:12 and Dt. 5:16).

Let's consider some ways to honor parents:

1. **Obey quickly and cheerfully.** My dad taught us that slow obedience is disobedience. Obeying with a bad attitude is not honoring to parents either.
2. **Help them even if they don't make you do it.** Don't be so lazy and selfish that you don't help around the house and keep things clean! A lot of kids don't know the difference between the word *mom* and the word *slave!*
3. **Give them something nice.** You could make them something, buy them something, or pick them some flowers from your neighbor's garden. **J**
4. **Don't talk back or complain.**

5. **Don't talk bad about them... even if it's true.** In some extreme cases the pastor or the police may need to be told, but generally you don't need to blab your parents' faults. Noah's son Ham brought a curse on his descendants when he pointed out the nakedness of his drunken father. His brothers honored their father by covering up his shameful condition. If Dad does something wrong or if Mom does something stupid, here's a good rule: *Keep your big mouth shut!*
6. **Don't raise your voice or tell them what to do.** They may have to raise their voice at you; it's not your place to raise your voice at them! They tell you what to do. You don't tell them what to do!
7. **Pray for them.**
8. **Thank them.** Our parents have done hundreds of nice things for us, and it's a low down, immoral thing to be ungrateful. When is the last time you wrote a letter thanking your parents for all the things you could think of that they have done for you?
9. **Brag about them.** Hey, guys, my dad lifted 1450 pounds with his legs when he was in college! Yes, and there are things you can brag about your dad and your mom, too.
10. **Take care of them, especially when they are old.** Jesus taught us in Matthew 15 and Mark 7 that honoring parents includes providing for them.

When you were a baby you use to scream and holler and wake up Mom and Dad. One of them (probably Mom) would come see what the problem was. You had made a big stinking mess. She cleaned you up and went back to bed. After a while you made another big uproar. She got up again. You had made another big stinking mess! Now don't be shocked. You've done that hundreds of times.

Yes, and there may come a time when Dad and Mom cannot take care of themselves so well. Then whose job is it to take care of your mom and your dad? Yours.

Here are some ways to honor your parents. If you'll pay attention and honor your parents, you'll live longer and things will go better for you. God promised.

When troubles do come it is right and proper for me to question if I brought this on myself by my sin or foolishness: a curse does not come without a cause (Pr. 26:2). Just because I do not know of any fault does not mean I'm without fault. In fact, a sin of ignorance can be so serious as to lead to death. Twice the Lord says, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Pr. 14:12 & 16:25). The Lord says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). Let's continually study God's Word to seek to understand His commands more and to obey Him better.

I had a friend named Mex, who is in heaven now. He had lived a wicked life until he was 58. Then he had a stroke and was at the point of death when he called on God to save him. God not only saved him, He healed him. Mex used to help out around our church. His health was fragile then, but he found this verse and prayed it: "O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more" (Ps. 39:13). God gave him several more useful years of service.

Blessing Thirteen:

Strength

A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength (Pr. 24:5).

I'm not sure what all is included in the strength mentioned here, but I want it, and I intend to get it! I will get it if I follow Biblical wisdom.

Blessing Fourteen:

Honor

We all want to be honored but may feel guilty about it. The desire for honor is not a bad desire. As you will see, more than twenty times God offers honor for those who meet His conditions. He warns of shame and dishonor to those who do not.

Them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed (1 Sam. 2:30).

The Word of God reveals that the honor of a good reputation is a thing to be greatly desired:

A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold (Pr. 22:1).

Heeding the instruction of parents will bring “an ornament of grace unto thy head and chains [of honor] about thy neck” (Pr. 1:8,9).

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom... in her left hand [is] ...honor (Pr. 3:13,16).

The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools (Pr. 3:35).

Exalt [wisdom], and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honor, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee (Pr. 4:8,9).

Remove thy way far from [the immoral woman], and come not nigh the door of her house: lest thou give thine honor unto others (Pr. 5:8,9).

If you commit adultery, you will get “a wound and dishonor,” and your “reproach shall not be wiped away” (Pr. 6:33). If you commit adultery you will be forgiven if you repent, but don’t be surprised if people always remember you for your immorality. God has given fair warning; your “reproach shall not be wiped away.”

The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot (Pr. 10:7).

When pride cometh, then cometh shame (Pr. 11:2).

The fool shall be servant to the wise of heart (Pr. 11:29).

A man shall be commended according to his wisdom: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised (Pr. 12:8).

The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute [*or*, subject to task work] (Pr. 12:24).

...Shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honored (Pr. 13:18).

A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren (Pr. 17:2).

He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth... honor (Pr. 21:21).

By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honor, and life (Pr. 22:4).

Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean [obscure] men (Pr. 22:29).

Honor comes to those who humble themselves. “A man’s pride shall bring him low: but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit” (Pr. 29:23). Jesus said to take the lowest place at a celebration. Then your host will ask you to go up higher, and you will have honor from those present.

For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 14:11).

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time (1 Pet. 5:6).

Don’t tell other people’s secrets. If you do, you will be put to shame, and your infamy will not turn away (Pr. 25:9,10).

Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honored (Pr. 27:18).

Notice how many times the Word of God says the virtuous woman will be honored.

Strength and honor are her clothing...
Her children arise up, and call her blessed;
Her husband also, and he praiseth her.
Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.
...A woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.
...Let her own works praise her... (Pr. 31:25-31).

Blessing Fifteen:

Rest and Sleep

If you keep wisdom, you will lie down, and your sleep will be sweet (Pr. 3:21,24). Some very wealthy people do not have this very desirable blessing—a good night of sweet sleep!

The sleep of the labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep (Eccl. 5:12).

It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so He giveth His beloved sleep (Ps. 127:2).

However, the Word of God warns against sleeping too much.

Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread (Pr. 20:13).

[Jesus] said unto them, “Why sleep ye? Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation” (Luke 22:46).

Blessing Sixteen:

Laughter

When Vicki and I were first getting acquainted we were discussing what we wanted in marriage. One thing she said was, “I want to laugh a lot.” We’re married now and do laugh a lot. So do our children. If you spent a few weeks at our house, you’d hear a lot of laughter around our table. Laughter is a blessing! “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine” (Pr. 17:22).

When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing (Ps. 126:1,2).

Let’s call on God to “turn again our captivity” (Ps. 126:4) so our mouth will be filled with laughter!

Blessing Seventeen:

Confidence

The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion (Pr. 28:1).

When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid [if you keep sound wisdom] for the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken (Pr. 3:21,24,26).

I can say that following Jesus over the years has increased my confidence in a number of areas: with God, with individuals, and before crowds. I have seen how God will keep His promises even when the situation looks bad.

As a young man I wanted to obey the Great Commission and make disciples, but over and over I chickened out! I noticed a prayer I could pray in Acts 4:29. When the disciples were threatened, they prayed:

And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy Word....

God answered their prayer for boldness, and He has answered mine.

As I've meditated on God's Word, especially His promises, my confidence has increased. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

Here are some of my favorite promises that I meditate on:

He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water (John 7:38).

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father (John 14:12).

Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples (John 15:8).

God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us... that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations (Ps. 67:1,2).

Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it (Ps. 81:10).

...Say continually, "Let the Lord be magnified, which hath pleasure in the prosperity of His servant" (Psalm 35:27).

Ask, and it shall be given you.... For every one that asketh receiveth.... If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him? (Mt. 7:7,8,11).

And being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform (Rom. 4:21).

Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable (Heb. 11:11,12).

Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested (1 Chron. 4:10).

David's mighty men challenge me to do great feats for God's kingdom—in the face of difficulties and opposition! One of these men of faith fought and killed *eight hundred* of the enemies of God's people *on one occasion!* I would love to make 800 genuine disciples in one day!

Perhaps more than anyone else, Elisha has encouraged my faith to open my mouth *wide*. He is the one who asked for a *double portion*, not just of any man of God, but of *Elijah!* And God was pleased to give him a double portion, and to record it in the Bible for our encouragement.

These are some of the passages that have encouraged me the most, particularly in the area of trusting God to make me a blessing to *many* others, to do great exploits for God.

But the people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits. And they that understand among the people shall instruct many (Dan. 11:32,33).

Blessing Eighteen:

Guidance

I was so encouraged as a young Christian to see and know that God was guiding me! Especially when things were out of my control!

Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will He teach sinners in the way. The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way.... What man is he that feareth the Lord? Him shall he teach in the way that He shall choose (Ps. 25:8,9,12).

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths (Pr. 3:5,6).

A Christian worker once told me he was never sure he was in God's will. How sad! We can not only trust God to guide us, but to guide us *clearly*! This verse has encouraged me often to trust God for *plain* guidance:

Teach me Thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path (Ps. 27:11).

Guidance is getting clearer and clearer as I'm growing older: "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Pr. 4:18).

THE BIBLE

How does God guide us? He has told us what to do in the Bible. I counted over seven hundred commands, just in the New

Testament. The fact that you're doing what God says is a major way you are guided. In addition the Bible gives a lot of principles and examples to guide us.

For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light (Pr. 6:23).

The integrity of the upright shall guide them (Pr. 11:3).

The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way (Pr. 11:5).

CHASTENING

God has guided me through chastening. About twenty years ago I was doing something I told myself was all right. After God gave me a few whacks I quit! (I won't tell you how He whacked me, or what I was doing.) After some chastening I learned my lesson and started having a more peaceful time!

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby (Heb. 12:11).

When pain or troubles come I try to see if it is my fault. Often it is. That is not to say that our troubles are always chastening, but it is always right to check that we are not disobeying some commands. Pain can nudge us back to careful obedience.

King David and his people decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant on an ox cart to Jerusalem. They meant well. But when the oxen stumbled and Uzzah reached out to steady the ark, God struck him dead. They learned their lesson: they checked the law and found that only the Kohathites were allowed to carry the ark.

It is possible to have a clear conscience and yet be in disobedience to God's commands.

WISE COUNSEL

One of the ways God guides us is through godly counsel. We'd be foolish to neglect it.

Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish (Pr. 12:1).

He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding (Pr. 15:32).

Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out (Pr. 20:5).

Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him (Pr.26:12).

PROPHECY

When Saul was anointed king of Israel, Samuel prophesied a long series of events that would happen shortly by which Saul could know that Samuel's other prophecies about Saul were real. Notice all the details of the prophecy that were to be fulfilled:

When thou art departed from me today, then thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulcher in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say unto thee, The asses which thou wentest to seek are found: and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son.

Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine:

And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread; which thou shalt receive of their hands.

After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy:

And the spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man.

And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee.

And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and show thee what thou shalt do.

And it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart: and all those signs came to pass that day (1 Sam. 10:2-9).

Another time a prophet instructed a fellow prophet to do something contrary to God's commandment. The prophet who heeded this so called prophecy was soon killed by a lion! You don't just swallow every prophecy people make. Take prophecies seriously, but *check* them. If a prediction proves false or the prophecy contradicts God's Word, reject it.

Despise not prophesyings.¹⁴ Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. (1 Thes. 5:20,21).

CIRCUMSTANCES AND COMMON SENSE

Did you notice that after many specific prophecies in the above passage, Samuel told Saul,

And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee (1 Sam. 10:7).

I think that many times after we have prayed for wisdom and guidance, we should do as occasion serves us, use common sense; God is guiding us.

A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps (Pr. 16:9).

However, the fact that circumstances open up for us is no proof that we are doing God's will. Jonah found circumstances to suit his own plan. He conveniently found a ship going the opposite way from God's will, and he boarded it in disobedience to God's command. He had plenty of time to meditate on the fact that obeying is better—first in the terrible storm, then for three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish!

¹⁴ Have prophecies ceased? 1 Corinthians 13:8 says they would but does not say explicitly when it would happen. Revelation 11 speaks of two prophets who will prophesy 1260 days working miracles, killed by the Antichrist, resurrected, and called up to heaven. Since these two prophets have not yet appeared, prophecy must not have ceased yet.

DREAMS

Many times God has guided His people by dreams. Five times God used dreams as guidance just in the Christmas story found in Matthew 1 and 2, once with the wise men and four times with Joseph.

Most people have the sense to know that not all dreams are guidance from God.

In the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God (Ec. 5:7).

VISIONS

God guided Peter and many others by visions. Peter was reluctant to go preach to the Gentiles. He was willing to do so after he saw a vision three times of a sheet let down from heaven with all sorts of animals in it and heard the voice, “What God has cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10).

However, the fact that we see a supernatural vision does not mean that it came from God. Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time and offered to give it all to Jesus if Jesus would worship Satan. We also see from this Scripture that having a vision from Satan does not mean you are in sin.

FLEECES

Sometimes people ask God to give them a sign of His will—if such and such a thing happens they’ll take that as a sign that it’s the will of God. This is called putting out a fleece. When Gideon was hesitant to go fight the huge army of Midian, he asked God to give him a sign through a fleece. God, in His mercy, did so twice (Judges 6:36-40).

ANGELS

Many times God has sent angels to guide His people.

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? (Heb. 1:14).

One of the ways they minister is guidance. God guided Philip by an angel. Philip probably would not have guessed that God wanted him to leave a highly successful evangelistic campaign. Everyone was turning to the Lord as they saw the many signs and wonders Philip did. So God sent an angel to send Philip out into the desert to the Ethiopian eunuch so he could be saved and carry the gospel back to Ethiopia (Acts 8).

THE HOLY SPIRIT

After the angel had told Philip to go down to the desert and Philip obeyed, the Spirit told him to join himself to the chariot of the Ethiopian official.

AUTHORITIES

A very common way we know the will of God is by what our authorities tell us to do. Notice these five authorities and what God commands about them:

Children obey your parents in all things (Col. 3:20).

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing (Eph. 5:22-24).

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ (Eph. 6:5).

Obeys them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account (Heb. 13:17).

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake (1 Pet. 2:13).

Are there limits to obeying these authorities? Is there *ever* a time you disobey the law, your husband, or your parents? Yes, when *God* sets the limits. The Bible gives examples of disobeying the authority when obeying would mean disobeying God. It was right to disobey Nebuchadnezzar when he said to worship the image. It was right to pray when King Darius said not to. The Jewish leaders said, "Don't preach." Jesus said, "Preach." The apostles said we ought to obey God rather than men.

LOTS

God guided people through lots in the Old and New Testaments. God commanded Israel to divide their inheritance by lots (Joshua 13:6); so the casting of lots was God's method of determining where each tribe would live (Acts 1:19). Even the heathen sailors used lots to find that Jonah was the guilty person responsible for their danger in the storm. In the New Testament the eleven apostles found a replacement for Judas through prayer and casting lots. The Word of God specifically says that the outcome of casting lots is of God:

The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord (Pr. 16:33).¹⁵

Never in the Epistles is there a suggestion that casting lots is no longer valid or that God has lost control in the casting of lots.

PEACE

Peace is often mentioned as a form of guidance, “I have peace that this is the right thing to do.” Actually the Bible gives us a double warning about thinking everything is all right because you have peace, that is, because it seems right.

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death (Pr. 14:12).

There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death (Pr. 16:25).

¹⁵ I have found the will of God by the use of lots many times in minor things and in major decisions of life, but I follow these four principles:

1. I do not cast lots when God has already shown His will.
2. I pray (as the apostles did in Acts 1) that God will show His will.
3. I do not force an answer. I do not use just one coin and say, “Heads I do this; tails I do that.” Don’t say, “Heads I’ll date Marie, tails I’ll date Susan.” It *has* to land on heads or tails, but it may not be God’s will for you to date Marie or Susan. So I often use three coins. Three heads means *yes*; three tails means *no*. Then, statistically, there would be only one chance in eight that the answer is *yes*, and one in eight that it would be *no*, with six chances in eight that there will be neither *yes* nor *no*. I leave space for God not to answer by that method.
4. If I get an answer, I follow it. I do not ask again. God answered Balaam, and Balaam did not like the answer, so he asked again. Then God gave Balaam the answer he wanted, and Balaam almost got himself killed (Num 2:9-33).

So if someone is confident he is right, that is no sign of God's guidance. He may be so mistaken as to be headed for death. Millions of Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and members of other false religions are confident they are right, but have completely missed the Bible way of salvation.

It has been so gratifying to see how God has guided me in things I could not have known or guessed to be the best way. It has also been neat to see how God has guided me in an individual way, unique to me and my situation!

Blessing Nineteen:

Favor with Others

The desire to be liked and accepted is universal and basic. It is a good desire, but often abused.

A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold (Pr. 22:1).

The Bible tells us how to find favor with others. Keep mercy and truth, “...so shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man” (Pr. 3:3,4).

When a man’s ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him (Pr. 16:7).

When the people repented at the preaching of Peter, they were baptized and continued in God’s Word, “having favour with all the people” (Acts 2:47).

When Daniel had purposed to obey God’s Word by not defiling himself “God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs” (Daniel 1:9).

In both of these cases (Acts 2 and Daniel 1) where God gave favor, there was also persecution. There are two principles at work at the same time: “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ

Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12), and “When a man’s ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.” Christians, in their stand for the truth, may sometimes invite persecution by a proud or unkind attitude and a bad reputation, or they can keep persecution to a minimum by kindness, a soft answer, humility, and a good reputation.

It has been very satisfying to have so many people in a lot of places who love and respect me! What God said about favor with others has proved to be true!

Blessing Twenty:

Prosperity in Whatever We Do

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful,

But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper (Ps. 1:1-3).

I intend to meet those **conditions**:

- not taking the advice of the ungodly
- not hanging around sinners
- not being scornful
- enjoying God's Word
- thinking it over day and night

I expect to be getting the **promise**:

- to be fruitful
- to prosper in whatever I do!

When Daniel, as a captive in Babylon, purposed to obey God's Word, God blessed him with better health (Dan. 2:15), better grades so that he did ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers (Dan. 2:17-20), and God blessed him socially so that his master liked him (Dan. 2:9).

When I was 17 I surrendered myself to the Lord at a Christian camp. The following school year I did better in my grades than ever, I did much better in sports, and I did better socially, as well.

Blessing Twenty-One:

A Blessed Family

On of the greatest blessings on earth is to have a happy family who love God and love you! My wife is loyal, affectionate, and such a blessing to me! At this moment she is teaching ladies from about eight countries how to love and help their husbands.¹⁶ She herself is a good example! My children all love me, and all of them who are old enough to be saved seem to be following Jesus.

There are some *family* blessings you can expect if you fear God, if you walk in His ways:

Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in His ways.

For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.

Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.

Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord....

¹⁶ I'm hearing reports from the women who are following these principles that they are happier and are enjoying sexual pleasure more with their husbands. That's a real kind of prosperity!

Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel (Ps. 128:1-4,6).

Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.

His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed.

Wealth and riches shall be in his house (Ps. 112:1-3).

The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish (Pr. 14:11).

THE BLESSING OF A GOOD WIFE

Before I was married I was enjoying a lot of God's blessings, and I was happy. But when I married Vicki, *she made a happy man happier!*

A good wife is basic in having a happy family. **J** In the beginning God said that it is not good for a man to be alone,¹⁷ so He made woman to be a help, fit for the man. If a man fears God, God is happy to bless him with a good wife.¹⁸

House and riches are the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife is from the Lord (Pr. 19:14).

¹⁷ It is true, as Jesus said, that some, for the sake of God's kingdom, have not married (Mt. 19:11,12). They can be happy and successful, too. Some people have the gift to be married; some have the gift to be single (1 Cor. 7:7).

¹⁸ If you are already unhappily married, stay with your spouse and learn to make the best of it. "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (Mk. 10:11,12).

Proverbs 31 shows what this virtuous woman is like: trustworthy, ambitious, diligent, kind—one who fears God. The trait most emphasized is diligence.

The Word of God gives us an example of how to obtain this kind of woman—pray. God clearly guided Abraham’s servant, in answer to prayer, to the woman of God’s choice for Isaac (Gen. 24). It turns out she was kind, hard working, a virgin, and beautiful!

THE BLESSING OF CHILDREN

God’s Word shows us that children are a *blessing*.

Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb in His reward.

As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.

Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate (Ps. 127:3-5).

We see that children are:

- An inheritance from God
- A reward
- Like arrows in the hand of a warrior. (Whether we like it or not, we are in a deadly spiritual battle. Having many well-trained children who serve God can be a big advantage in expanding Christ’s Kingdom and repulsing Satan’s kingdom.)
- If you have a lot of children, a quiver full, you are blessed.

Obed-edom had eight sons “for God blessed him” (1 Chron. 26:5). “And God gave Heman fourteen sons and three daughters” who all served God (1 Chron. 25:5,6).

Then why are children such a burden, a hassle?! They're not, if they are properly corrected.

Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul (Pr. 29:17).

Instead, of such a stressful burden, children can *give rest* rather than take your rest. They can be a delight instead of a drain! They must be trained, and they can be trained.

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Pr. 22:6).

Children can be trained to live right so that they will not depart from the right way. A man whose children are disobedient is not qualified to be a pastor. He should have "faithful children not accused of riot or unruly" (Titus 1:6).

For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? (1Tim. 3:5).

Even deacons must rule their children and their own houses well (1 Tim. 3:12). Ruling our children well can be done, and if our kids turn out bad it is our own shame: "a companion of riotous men shameth his father" (Pr. 28:7).

In Old Testament and more recent times some of the false gods have demanded of their followers the sacrifice of their children in order to get prosperity. A good many modern Christians sacrifice their children and families for financial prosperity, too! They are so anxious to succeed that they fail to provide the love and training God's Word requires. Their children are lost and go to hell.

To train our children properly, we must first get God's Word into our own hearts; then we teach God's Word to our children.

Whatever is in the heart comes out the mouth in our conversation. We'll talk about God's ways, not just in the formal teaching sessions, but throughout the day.

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up (Deut. 6:6,7).

The command is to teach them *diligently*. We have no right to cede that responsibility to the Sunday school or the Christian school. If they help, fine, but it is still my responsibility to diligently teach my own children to obey the Word of God. The Great Commission is to teach them to *obey* all that Christ has commanded (Matt. 28:20). There's a lot of difference between teaching them what the Bible says and teaching them to *obey* what it says! Teaching them to obey will require discipline.

Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell (Pr. 23:13,14).

The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame (Pr. 29:15).

Setting a good example is important, but it is not enough. Living a godly life does not insure godly children. David was repeatedly called a man after God's own heart. He wrote most of the Psalms, showing his close walk with God. Yet in the area of disciplining his children, he failed. Two of his sons, Absalom and Adonijah, died prematurely for their pride and rebellion. David did not displease his son Adonijah at any time (1 Kings 1:6). (My dad, to his credit, did not mind displeasing me!)

Eli seems to have been godly, but God reprovved him for not restraining his wicked sons. Eli's failure to discipline his sons

brought not just a curse on those two wicked men, but a *permanent curse on Eli's descendants* (1 Sam. 2:22-34 & 3:11-14)!

On the other hand, parents who beat their children, yet live a wicked life themselves, cannot expect their discipline to work. “He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail” (Pr. 22:8).

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye (Matt. 7:5).

Another key to the success or failure of our children (or ourselves) is the choice of companions. “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed” (Pr. 13:20). Bad companions corrupt good morals (1 Cor. 15:33). As a father, I must provide godly companionship for my children and shield them from bad companions. I don't intend to send my children to a school where they will be in the midst of bad companions. God holds me accountable for how they turn out.

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief... (Heb. 13:17).

But I want more than just a happy family; I want my children to grow up to do great things for God's kingdom! And God gave a promise for that!

Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in His commandments.

His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed (Ps. 112:1,2).

Well-trained children are not only a blessing, but one of the greatest blessings. The old Apostle John said, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 4).

We were all born into a mixture of good and bad situations brought on by our ancestors. Many people are wealthy because their forbears were hardworking and thrifty. Many were led to salvation because their parents lived godly lives and taught them the Word of God. Many children have inherited troubles because their parents were drunkards.

David’s sins of adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband resulted in short range and long range disasters for his family. Listen to the prophecy of Nathan to David:

Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.

Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house... the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die (2 Sam. 12:9-14).

King Rehoboam lost most of his kingdom, largely because of his father Solomon’s sin. But Rehoboam kept some of the kingdom because of his grandfather David’s godliness. So our choices affect our own condition, and they affect those who follow us. Hosea says repeatedly that curses come on the children because of the sin of the parents:

1. “I will bereave them” of children.
2. “Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.”
3. “I will slay even the beloved fruit of their womb” (Hosea 9:12,14,16).

God says He visits “the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me” (Ex. 20:5).

On the other hand, godly living will bring blessings on our descendants.

The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him (Pr. 20:7).

The seed of the righteous shall be delivered (Pr. 11:21).

What man is he that feareth the Lord? ...His seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:12,13).

I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread... his seed is blessed (Ps. 37:25,26).

I was impressed as a young man when I sat in class and heard Robertson McQuilkin say he never saw his dad commit a sin!¹⁹ I was impressed then; I am more impressed now. His dad, Robert C. McQuilkin, had not only taught victorious living, he had lived it. No wonder his children grew up to serve God as missionaries and accomplish great things for God’s kingdom!

Another factor that affects whether or not our children serve God is whether we have seen God’s mighty working. Twice the Bible says that after Joshua died, Israel served the Lord all the days of the elders who had seen all the great works of the Lord (Joshua 24:31 and Judges 22:7). My children will be more apt to follow me in serving God if I have *seen* God’s mighty works myself. I don’t want to be guilty of hindering God’s mighty works by my unbelief.

¹⁹ The dad died when Robertson, the son, was in his twenties, so it was not a case of the dad dying when the son was too young to notice any faults.

And He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief (Matt. 13:58).

Here is a good prayer for us to pray: “Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy glory unto their children” (Ps. 90:16).

When I was growing up, my brothers and sisters and I not only heard our parents talk about great works in Bible times, we heard them talk about God’s mighty works for them—healings, wonderful provision and other answers to prayer. We saw these works of God ourselves. It wasn’t hard for us to believe that God would take care of us.

Now, my wife and children and I have seen many wonderful works in answer to prayer, too. That fact will make it easier for my children and their children to live for God.

When we have obeyed God and He blesses our homes more than other homes, here’s a caution: we must beware of pride. “The Lord will destroy the house of the proud” (Pr. 15:25).

Blessing Twenty-Two:

National Blessings

Another huge factor in the blessings anyone enjoys or misses is the nation in which he lives. God blesses the nation that obeys Him. He does not limit this promise to Israel.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord (Ps. 33:12).²⁰

Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people (Pr. 14:34).

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule the people mourn (Pr. 29:2).

Jeremiah was a godly man, but his people had for generations rejected God's Word. After many, many warnings, judgment came. Jeremiah suffered, too. He cried to God: "Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgot prosperity" (Lam. 3:17). This godly man suffered because of the sins of his nation.

²⁰ It does not say, "Blessed is the nation that treats every religion as equally valid." Any nation should admit that God is the Lord and try to obey His commands without apology. The USA and others have overreacted to the bloody religious persecutions of European governments of the past.

Our prosperity in some areas depends partly on the godliness of our nation.

During the Reformation many godly Christians were persecuted and slaughtered. But the countries that were most influenced by these godly Christians, England, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, and the United States, soon became some of the most prosperous and powerful countries on earth.

Of course, no nation has obeyed God perfectly, but as the nations obey God in varying degrees and in various areas they will be blessed. Japan is not a Christian country, but they do follow the Biblical principle of diligence. So they are one of the most financially prosperous nations on earth. They have had a fairly stable culture, never defeated in war for more than two thousand years, until World War II. They honor their parents (to the extreme of ancestor worship.) Remember the two promises for those who honor their parents? It will be well with them, and they will live long on the earth.

The Muslim countries of Africa are quite anti Christian. But they are stricter on sexual purity than the more “Christianized” countries of Africa where over twenty million have already died of AIDS. When governments and societies are so sexually permissive everyone suffers. How? Most of those millions who die of AIDS are between the ages of 20 and 50, those who should be producing and taking care of the old, young, and disabled. Instead, they must be cared for. The entire economy suffers.

I heard a Christian leader from India tell why his country is such a poor country—their false religion. He said rats eat enough grain each year to fill a train about three thousand miles long! Yet because of their belief in reincarnation, they will not kill the rats!

In recent years South Africa has gone from a land where people were rarely bothered by crime to a society where almost anybody can tell how he or someone in his family was robbed,

threatened, or worse. Recently the government rejected God's command to execute murderers.²¹ Now there are several times as many innocent people murdered a year as there were when murderers were executed. Everyone is at risk, even the godly, because of the sins of the leaders.

²¹ In Gen. 9:6 God instituted the death penalty for murder, not just for Israel, but for all mankind. God commanded Noah and his descendants (that's everybody in the world), "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man." God has never annulled capital punishment; in fact, He further established it in the New Testament. In Rom. 13 He said that the governmental powers are the ministers of God, to execute wrath on those who do evil, and they don't bear the sword in vain.

*In addition to all these keys to earthly blessings, we have **even greater spiritual blessings** when we turn to Jesus for salvation.*

Blessing Twenty-Three:

We're justified!

Justified means declared righteousness. Since Jesus took our sin and its punishment, we receive His righteousness and the blessings that go with it!

For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

We did not deserve to be declared righteous; we did not earn it. Justification is by faith.

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness (Rom. 4:5).

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness (Gal. 3:6).

So in spite of our sins, the holy God can accept us and bless us, because His Son took our punishment! It's a wonderful thing to be able to approach this holy God without dread, knowing the rightful punishment for my sins has already been expended on His Son!

Blessing Twenty-Four:

We're rescued from hell!

What good would all the earthly blessings be if we still had to go to everlasting fire!

For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? (Mark 8:36).

Jesus told about a rich man who was really blessed—materially. At his gate was a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores, wishing he could eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. The beggar was certainly missing earthly blessings!

But he died and was carried by the angels to the joy and honor and pleasure of heaven—forever. The rich man also died and found himself in the torment of hell fire. He could not even have a drop of water on his tongue! He is there forever!

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that eternal life is, by far, the most important blessing to get!

How can we have eternal life?

Even though we have sinned and broken God's law, there is good news! Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Jesus, by His death on the cross, has paid the complete penalty for our sins, so that He has provided everlasting life as a *free gift!*

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

We have all gone our own way, in selfish rebellion to God. Now God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (Is. 55:7).

Blessing Twenty-Five

We can have assurance of salvation!

If you doubt your salvation you can be awfully miserable—even if you're actually saved! You can be prosperous in many ways and respected by many. But if you're wondering if you're lost, the other blessings seem hollow!

How can you have true assurance? You believe God's promises. You turn from your way to Jesus for mercy. Then you can tell that your faith is real when you start obeying Him. "Repent and turn to God, and do works meet [fit] for repentance" (Acts 26:20). So if we believe on Jesus, there will be a change—works fit for repentance.

That is not to say that we are sinless now: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). But there is a change, enough of a change that the Holy Spirit says it this way:

And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, "I know Him," and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar... (1 John 2:3,4).

The Holy Spirit says the same thing again with slightly different words:

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death (1 John 3:14).

Blessing Twenty-Six: Heaven is our home!

Last night I heard a man preaching on the blessings we can have in this life. He said that the Kingdom is now, that Jesus never promised us Heaven. *Bad mistake!* It is true that God wants to bless us now in many ways, and His kingdom is in us now, but our main hope is the future kingdom! We are commanded to set our hope completely on the grace that is to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:13).

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. ...When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory (Col. 3:2,4).

There is a grave danger that we will set our affection on the earthly blessings God gives us.

Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:20).

What is heaven like? The Bible gives us a little description, but the words of the Queen of Sheba are appropriate here. She was an extremely wealthy queen, used to luxury and splendor, but when she heard of the magnificence of King Solomon she did not believe it could be that magnificent.

When she saw it herself, she was overwhelmed! She said, "It was a true report that I heard, but I did not believe it until I had seen it! But the half was not told me!"

God's Word gives us a true report about the heavenly kingdom, but even the wealthiest and most blessed children of God will be astounded at the wonder of heaven and will be able to say, "*The half was never told!*"

I've been looking forward to heaven for a long time, but now I'm looking forward to it more—I have a little girl there! Last year

our youngest child, Cherish, got sick one Saturday night. We took her to the hospital. When I laid her down in the hospital, I saw she was not breathing!

I called her, “Cherish!”

She gasped a little. I called out for the doctors to give her some oxygen! In a little while seven doctors and nurses were frantically working over our little girl. They shooed us out to another room. In about 20 minutes one of the ladies came and told us they could not get our daughter to breathe. I felt so helpless!

We cried a lot that night! We’ve cried a lot of times since then! Yeah, but do you think she’s crying, up in heaven? She’s having more fun and pleasure than you’ve ever had! “In Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right there are pleasures for evermore” (Ps. 16:11).

Different people used to say that Cherish was the happiest child they had ever seen. She’s happier still, now: “fullness of joy...pleasures for evermore!”

In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:2,3).

It’s not a dark and dreary city. Jesus said, “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father!” (Matt. 13:43). Some famous people perform on the stage under the spot lights. In heaven you won’t need a spot light; you’ll be brighter than the spot light yourself! “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun!”

Cherish used to like to climb on things. Now she can climb up in the tree of life or on the high walls in the golden city—no

danger of falling or getting hurt now. She also liked horses. She may be out horseback riding right now! Revelation 19 speaks of white horses in heaven! Heaven will be all beautifully fixed up like a bride adorned for her husband!

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem; coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new (Rev. 21:1-5).

Cherish can play with her grandparents, my parents, that she had never seen, and her Aunt Faith, as well as many others, that she knows well by now.

Here's another nice thing about heaven: in heaven you will be at *home*! We've all been to big, fancy places here on earth, sometimes so fancy you're not even allowed to touch anything. Then you go back home. It's not so fancy, not so big, maybe not so clean! But you can relax and be yourself! You're at home! When you get to heaven everybody will like you and welcome you. You will be at home!

Do you know the last thing our little girl said? I had no idea this would be the last thing I would hear her say in this life. She had been to the medical centre for a few hours already, and had been a good girl. She didn't even cry when the doctor stuck a thing in her arm to give her fluids. But now we had to go to the children's hospital. When we drove into the parking lot, she said, "I want to go home!"

She did go home! A better home! Not just better—the Bible says, "**far better!!**"

When I get to heaven I expect Cherish will welcome me home at the gate. She used to welcome me at the gate when I drove home. She'd come running up to the car, and I would get out and give her a kiss and pick her up high in the air. (I'm 6 feet 10 inches tall.) She was not afraid of heights. Sometimes she'd run off and say, "You can't catch me!" And she'd hide. I knew where she was, but I pretended I didn't. I'd look in the wrong places, and she'd giggle because I couldn't find her.

When I meet her in heaven, if she runs off to hide, she'll know a lot of places to hide that I don't know about yet. But I don't think she will. I think she'll be happy to show me all the beautiful sights and all the exciting things going on. I used to carry her around and show her things and explain what things were. Now she can show me all around. She knows a lot about heaven that I don't know yet!

While death is certainly unpleasant, it brings us to our greatest blessings yet! Years ago Evangelist John R. Rice was kidnapped and threatened for his Bible preaching against liquor: drinking it, making it, and selling it. They stuck a gun in his stomach and said, "If you don't quit preaching like this, we're gonna shoot you!"

He said, "You can't scare me with heaven!"

Blessing Twenty-Seven:

God is our Father!

Even before we get to heaven, we have certain rights and privileges unbelievers cannot enjoy, because God is our Father.

But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name (John 1:12).

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26).

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba [Daddy], Father.

The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ... (Rom. 8:14-17).

Years ago we used to have family recreation together. Dad would call us together for basketball, soccer, volley ball, or other games. Sometimes all eight in our family played together. Two other boys named Jim and Lyn sometimes played with us. When the games were over, Jim and Lyn knew it was time to go home, but another guy would just hang around. He'd walk right into our house without even knocking. When it was meal time he'd sit down and help himself. As far as I can remember, he never asked! As far as I can remember, we never invited him! His name was Joseph.

Sometimes Joseph would come to our house late at night, go right upstairs, and go to bed. We'd find him there the next morning! Jim and Lyn never did that. But there was a key difference. Joseph is my brother.

Well, no wonder Joseph walked right in without knocking! No wonder he felt free to sit down to dinner without asking. No wonder we never invited him. No wonder he just went upstairs and made himself at home. He had rights and privileges Jim and Lyn did not have.

Yes, and if you're a child of God you have special rights and privileges others don't have, too! God is your father!

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God (1 John 3:1)!

Blessing Twenty-Eight:

We can have victory over sin!

Besides forgiveness, we can have *victory* over sin. We don't have to live in continual defeat by temptation and sin: sinning, confessing, getting forgiveness, sinning, confessing, getting forgiveness, sinning... with no hope of much victory over temptation. Christ has set us free! When we realize this fact, we live in victory.

Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

...Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

For he that is dead is freed from sin (Rom. 6:1,2,6,7).

We have been set free from sin! Many Christians live in defeat because they do not know that we are already set free. When we count on that fact, we live in victory.

Imagine a prisoner on a road work crew. The governor signs his pardon, but the prisoner has not heard. He'll continue working like he's been doing for years. He'll jump up and work when he hears the officer's orders. But when he's assured he's been pardoned, he'll walk away free.

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed (John 8:36).

Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:18).

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32).

So when we realize that Christ has already set us free, we live in victory! It was such a liberating thing for me as a young man to see that fact in Scripture! I could—and did live in victory!

But when we are defeated by sin, we cannot say, “I couldn’t help it!” God has provided victory and will not let us be tempted more than we can take. One day I was cleaning out the garage and had to move some heavy stuff. Our daughter was three, and our son was one. Do you think I made my little girl try to carry something bigger than she was? That would not be reasonable. It wouldn’t be fair. Do you think I told my little boy to carry a load of 30 kg? He couldn’t even walk, yet! That wouldn’t be fair! That wouldn’t be reasonable! We cannot say that any command of God is unfair or unreasonable.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:13).

God has given us many commands, but not one is unreasonable or unfair. He has not left us helpless and unable to do His commands.

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Phil. 4:13).

Blessing Twenty-Nine:

We can have success in Christian service!

It is a huge success to be a blessing to others! I've listed a good many valuable earthly blessings God brings to those who meet His conditions. But to accomplish something for eternity is so much bigger and better—to help in the great goal of saving people from the power of darkness and ushering them into God's kingdom! We can be successful in the BIG ISSUES! Jesus did not choose us to be failures in serving Him!

Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain... (John 15:16).

It is not just a selfish desire to want to win many to Christ; it would honor God to bring forth much fruit! Jesus said, "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit" (John 15:8). And He promised to send the Holy Spirit to give us the power to witness effectively.

But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

The early church was filled with power! When they witnessed, the hearers were cut to the heart (Acts 2:37; 5:33 &

7:54). Three thousand people repented and were baptized in one day! And those three thousand *continued* in the true doctrine and fellowship and prayers! These converts loved each other so much they shared all they had. The community was awed. The believers happily praised God, and more were saved daily (Acts 2:41-47). *The power in the early church was evident.*

Power in witnessing comes from the Spirit of God. “They were all filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:4). While all Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9), not all Christians are filled with the Spirit: the Word of God commands us, “Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). Jesus said,

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him? (Lk. 11:13).

The Holy Spirit is a *gift*, not earned, not deserved. Jesus showed this fact clearly when He offered and gave the Holy Spirit to a woman who had been so immoral that she had had five husbands and was living with another man who was not her husband.

Jesus answered and said unto her, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee ‘Give me to drink;’ thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water” (John 4:10).

The woman evidently believed Jesus. Now she had such power that with just a simple witness many others believed on Jesus.

And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did (John 4:39).

What is this “living water” Jesus offered her? John 7:37-39 explains:

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”

(But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive....)

So if we turn to Jesus in our needs, He not only satisfies our thirst, He blesses us enough for many others also. He does not just give a few drops, not just a glass or two, but *rivers* of living water—the fullness of the Holy Spirit!

The evidence of the fullness of the Holy Spirit is power in witnessing according to Acts 1:8. Sometimes the evidence is obvious, many people publicly turning from sin to Jesus. Often the Holy Spirit works in secret. I’ve had people come to me years after I’d spoken to them, telling me how God’s Spirit convicted them or encouraged them. I had seen no evidence at the time. We just rely on Jesus’ promise. He does what He says He’ll do.

Jesus gave another amazing promise—that we could do the *same works Jesus did... and even greater works!!*

Verily, verily I say unto you, “He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father (John 14:12).

Of course, the greatest work Jesus came to do was to save sinners. Imagine, winning more people than Jesus did when He was here! But He said we’d be able to do the same works and even greater works than He did—if we would believe Him!

This wicked, confused, lost world needs hundreds of thousands of Christians who will believe Jesus to do greater works through them, to bring many millions to Jesus and eternal life!

I can remember a time when I was not only defeated in my own life and too timid to witness, but I was also a bad example and leading others astray! Jesus has not only helped me in my own need, he has blessed me enough to bring His mercy and salvation to many others also!

God has given me several enjoyable ministries! God has given me some art ability, so I do chalk drawing along with my preaching. I have seen many thousands of public professions of repentance and faith in hundreds of public and Christian schools around the world. I have seen God at work in many kinds of churches where we minister. God has also used our books, DVDs, and TV broadcasts to bring His mercy and blessing to many, many others! This week I'm supposed to fly to Kenya to conduct a leadership conference. And I'm having a happy time with my family as I train them to serve the Lord together!

God has showed His mercy through me. He can use someone who was a fake, someone who was weak and defeated, to bring mercy, salvation, and victory to many others. God's Spirit is a gift, not deserved, not earned.

And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse... so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing (Zechariah 8:13).

Blessing Thirty:

We all have spiritual gifts!

Another wonderful blessing God has given each Christian is a spiritual gift. Each person has his own role, his own God given ability, and all the others in the church need him! Just as the foot needs the eye, and the eye needs the foot, you need others, and they need you. We need those who have the gift of teaching. (The ability to teach is primarily a gift, not primarily learned at university.) We need those who have the gift of healing. We need those with the gift of wisdom.

It's great to be needed. It's a tremendous thing to get to do what you're good at, what you enjoy doing, and what counts for eternity!

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:7-10).

God knows what's best for each person. We shouldn't feel deprived if we do not have this gift or that gift.

But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will (1 Cor. 12:11).

As each member of the human body needs each other member, so each member of the body of Christ needs each of the other members.

For the body is not one member, but many.

If the foot shall say, "Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body." Is it therefore not of the body?

And if the ear shall say, "Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body;" is it therefore not of the body?

If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him (1 Cor. 12:14-18).

So don't get bent out of shape if you don't have the gift of tongues, or prophecy, or healing. Find out what you can do, and do it, and realize you are needed by all the others. If you have a need, don't be too proud to go to the person God has blessed with the gift to meet that need.

Last week someone asked if I needed prayer for any sickness. At first I did not think of any sickness. I'm pretty healthy. Then I remembered my low blood sugar, hypoglycemia. For many years I've had to avoid sugar, eat more protein, eat more often, and get more rest. I thought: *I'm not sure I have faith for God to heal me of this, but I don't want to be too proud to ask for prayer.* The man prayed, and I am remarkably better! I've needed about an hour

less sleep each night. An hour more to accomplish things each day is a big improvement! That man had a gift that met my need. We need each other.

Some gifts are more exciting than others. It's exciting to see someone healed suddenly or see some other miracle! Those gifts are good, but they're not the greatest. God has set some in the church:

First apostles,
secondarily prophets,
thirdly teachers,
after that miracles,
then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of
tongues (1 Cor. 12:28).

Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and numerous others in the Old Testament worked many miracles. John the Baptist had a reputation that he "did no miracle" (John 10:41). But John was greater than any of those miracle workers, Jesus said (Mt. 11:11). The fact that someone works great miracles does not mean he's greater than others. It does not even prove he's a Christian.

Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works?"

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity (Mt. 7:21-23).

Blessing Thirty-One:

All things are working together for good!

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

When we recognize this fact, we'll go through all the ups and downs of life more calm and relaxed. We know that whatever happens, good or bad, God will work it all for our good!

I recently had to go to Kenya to teach a leadership seminar. With the three boxes of books I was bringing, my suitcase, and my chalk art equipment, the overweight would cost about \$500 extra! When I arrived at the airport there was a huge crowd waiting in line! After an hour I could see I would not even get to the first counter before flight time. It looked like I'd even miss this flight and the next flight and the meetings in a large church in Nairobi. People were getting frustrated and desperate. I figured I'd better relax and trust God.

When I finally got to the front of the line, it was past time for the flight, but they made the plane wait. Then the clerk weighed my luggage and saw that it was way over weight. Now I would have to go find the pay place and come back and get my bags checked. Others behind me were impatient to go. So to save time the clerk just tore up my ticket and gave me a new one with no

overweight charge! So all the chaos and stress worked together to save me about \$500!

We've all had things happen to us that we did not like! Later though, we can often see how the bad things brought us blessings. We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.

Last year we had the deepest grief we've ever had. Our little girl, Cherish, died! Along with the pain and loss, we were plagued with questions, wondering if her death was the result of something we did, or something we failed to do! I did not know the answers to all those questions, but I knew that Satan is the accuser of the brethren (Rev 12:10). "False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not" (Ps. 35:11).

Though I still do not have the answers to all those questions, I *know* that all things are working together for our good! I could see some of these blessings almost immediately:

- Of course heaven is even better than a happy home on earth for Cherish!
- Vicki and I are obeying the command better to set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth. We're looking forward to heaven more, now!
- Her death touched the hearts of many others to serve God with whatever time they have left.
- Her death helped open the hearts of many, many to make a public profession of repentance and faith.
- There was a great outpouring of love from many to us, and many others began to pray for us and our ministry.
- We have been able to help and encourage others who have been bereaved.
- I think our family is closer, now.

We may not quickly see any blessings that come from some disasters, but we still know that all things work together for good to those that love God. God's Word says so.

I've given two personal examples of how all things work together for good to them that love God. Now let me give one that involves many millions of people.

In 1949 the Communists conquered China, the most populous country on earth. There followed one of the bloodiest persecutions in history. The missionaries were driven out. In fact, the godless Marxist regime tried to destroy all religion. Christians were mocked, tortured, starved, imprisoned, killed, pressured to betray their own families, and the children were stolen from their parents and brainwashed. Many turned away from the faith. It is estimated that just during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), 20 million Chinese lost their lives. It looked like one of the worst things to ever befall the church!

But all things work together for good to those who love God. God used His own enemies to promote His kingdom.

1. The persecution purified the church. Since many nominal Christians could not endure, to a large extent only true Christians remained.
2. The real Christians, in their desperation, turned to God for help. He showed His power in answered prayers and miracles!
3. The church lost its foreign flavor; it became truly Chinese. The Communists had driven the missionaries out. Now, in many cases, the only Christians the Chinese knew were Chinese Christians who loved each other and knew the power of God. Millions turned to Jesus.
4. Some of the greatest obstacles to the Christian faith in China were now crippled by the persecution—Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.
5. The Communists discredited themselves with their failure to bring the promised prosperity. They

especially discredited themselves with the horror of the Cultural Revolution bringing massive suffering and economic chaos. They further disgraced themselves by the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989. They created a spiritual vacuum that the Christians began to fill!

6. The government standardized and simplified the language which before had so many confusing dialects. Now Chinese evangelists and Bibles and other Christian literature can be understood all across the vast country.
7. The roads were greatly improved so that evangelists can travel much faster all across the nation.

It is said that the three million who called themselves Protestant Christians in 1949, who were purged down to a fraction of that number, by 2001 had multiplied to 76 million Gospel believing Christians!²²

Even in the most horrible catastrophes, still “we know that **all** things work together for good to them that love God.”

²² Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World, 21st Century Edition*, p. 160,161, Paternoster Lifestyle, 2001.

Blessing Thirty-Two:

The Holy Spirit lives in us to help us!

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.

...Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth (John 16:7,13).

Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his (Rom. 8:9).

The word *Comforter* here means *one called alongside to help*. There's no telling how many ways the Holy Spirit helps us!

Blessing Thirty-Three:

Angels are serving us!

The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them (Ps. 34:7).

Gene Wisheart and his daughter, Danette, both told me this story. (I've known them since 1974 when I first preached at Venture of Faith Camp, an Independent Baptist youth camp in Georgia.) Her 18 month old son Micah was on the back bumper of her friend's minivan as she left Danette's house. Of course, she did not see him. His back was to the rear door, and he had nothing to hold on to. His older sister told her horrified mother that the minivan had driven off with little Micah on it! Danette told her daughter to pray as she herself hurried off in her car after Micah. She was afraid she would see the child's body on the highway! When she got to her friend's place a mile or two away, she saw little Micah in the front seat of the minivan as they were coming back out of the friend's driveway.

Danette's friend told her what happened. As she was driving home some workmen saw the child sitting on the back bumper of the minivan and got into their van, and—afraid they would run over the little boy if he fell off the back of the minivan—pulled up alongside her and shouted, “Lady, don't you know you've got a baby on your bumper?!”

She eased to a stop. Micah was safe! They figured God must have sent an angel to protect him. Jesus said something about angels for children.²³ So she asked Micah if he saw anything.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“What did you see?”

“A big boy.” (He calls boys *little boys*, and he calls men *big boys*.)

“Did he say anything?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“What did he say?”

“I holds children.”

A few days later Micah said to his mom, “You know what that big boy’s name is?”

“No, did he tell you?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“What did he say?”

“I forgot.”

For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. (Ps. 91:11,12).

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? (Heb. 1:14).

The Bible shows us how angels help us. The angel of the Lord encouraged Hagar. Angels carried messages to God’s people. They warned Lot to flee before they destroyed Sodom. An angel helped find a wife for Isaac (though the angel kept out of sight). The angel of God gave Jacob a new name, Israel, and blessed him after they had wrestled all night. Jacob said the angel of the Lord kept him from disasters. They encouraged him. An angel came to kill the greedy prophet, Balaam. (The prophet did not see the angel at first, though the donkey did.) The angel of the Lord

²³ “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven” (Mt. 18:10).

drove out the Canaanites and later killed 185 000 Assyrians in one night! An angel chastised Israel by killing 70 000 after David had numbered them. An angel instructed Gideon and instructed the parents of Samson. An angel fed Elijah. David prayed that the angel would chase and persecute his enemies. An angel delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace and Daniel from the lion's den.

An angel guided Mary, Joseph, Zacharias, the shepherds, and the wise men. Angels carried the spirit of Lazarus to heaven. An angel helped Jesus at His temptation and again in the Garden of Gethsemane. An angel moved the stone from the tomb and spoke to the women and the apostles after the resurrection.

An angel spoke to Philip, Cornelius, Peter, and Paul. An angel set the apostles free from prison at least twice. An angel killed Herod, who had just killed James.

Angels are not usually seen. They often said, "Fear not" when they were seen. They are not always recognized when they are seen. We are told to show love to strangers, because some have entertained angels unawares (Heb. 13:2).

Blessing Thirty-Four:

We have authority over Satan!

And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name.

And He said unto them, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.

"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

"Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Lk. 10:17-20).

The Enemy wants to destroy our health. Jesus went around "healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:38). One lady was bowed together by a spirit of infirmity, bound by Satan for eighteen years, until Jesus loosed her (Lk. 13:11-16).

Satan opposes us in other ways. He is constantly stirring up discord among God's people and trying to discourage us, hinder us, and tempt us.

As you have probably noticed, we are in a big struggle, a war. The enemies we struggle against are not primarily other people.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12).

I have found it immensely helpful to pray against the enemy. Prayers against the enemy found in Psalms have encouraged my faith. They are inspired prayers; God wrote them. I can pray these prayers with the confidence that I am *praying in the will of God!*

Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me.

....Let them be turned back and brought to confusion that devise my hurt (Ps. 35:1,4).

Years ago, my sister asked me to come help minister to a woman who had signs of demon possession. She was moaning and tormented and didn't respond much to reasoning. I prayed, quoting from the imprecatory Psalm 68, "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered" (Ps. 68:1). I didn't know what else to do. Besides, I had to go back to the job my dad had assigned me of laying carpet in the church.

I found out later that shortly after I left, the lady went to bed and rested peacefully. It reminded me of the time when the Apostle Paul rebuked the spirit of divination in the fortune teller; the demon came out *the same hour*.

To exercise authority over the enemy is a big step toward enjoying and using the blessings God gives. Satan seeks to steal our blessings.

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly (John 10:10).

One of the things I pray for each day is that God will put the enemy to shame and confusion in our family and wherever I am ministering that day.

Often we have blessings and don't even know it. We cannot benefit properly if we do not know what is rightfully ours. We will not exercise our authority over the enemy or have victory over sin or enjoy some of these other spiritual blessings unless we know the *facts*.

I heard of two young men who bought tickets to cross the Atlantic on a ship. They didn't want to waste their money, so they would not eat in the ship's fancy dining room. After days of cheese and crackers they finally gave in and ate in the dining room. It was so good! But they could not find the place to pay for their sumptuous meal, so they asked someone.

He said, "What do you mean, 'Where do we pay?' It's like all the other meals; the price was included in your ticket!"

Jesus purchased a lot of blessings, rights, and privileges that come with our salvation. They will not do us much good until we know about them and believe what God has said about them.

Blessing Thirty-Five:

We can get rewards in Heaven!

Last week I got an angry letter from a pastor sharply accusing me because I had pointed out what the Bible says about some issues—nothing personal. There were about seven falsehoods about me in his letter. However, the falsehoods gave me some encouragement, because Jesus said:

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven (Mt. 5:11,12).

This pastor has ensured that I will have more reward in heaven! I'm sure that was not his purpose! **J**

Another way we can get treasure in heaven is by giving to those in need and using our money for God's kingdom instead of our own selfish wants.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Mt. 6:19-21).

Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Lk. 12:33,34).

A third thing we will be rewarded for at the Lord's return will be our works for Him.

And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be (Rev. 22:12).

These verses reveal that we will be rewarded

- as we suffer for Jesus' sake
- as we use our money for His kingdom
- as we work for Him.

All the earthly blessings are good and valuable, but these heavenly rewards are the eternal blessings—perpetual prosperity!

After all these wonderful promises, it's no wonder the psalmist exclaimed, "I have rejoiced in Thy testimonies as much as in all riches," and "I rejoice at Thy Word, as one that findeth great spoil" (Ps. 119:14,162)!

Prosperity in Perspective

LIVING IN A WORLD THAT IS CURSED

In the beginning God created a beautiful paradise on earth. So why is the world in such a mess now? Adam and Eve brought a curse on themselves and on us by their disobedience.

Unto the woman [God] said, “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee”.

And unto Adam He said, “Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:16-19).

In this world there is no way to avoid all the pain, trouble, and death that has resulted from the sin of Adam and Eve and others.

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:22,23).

Does the fact that we live in a sin cursed world mean we cannot have any blessings? No, the reason we need all these promises so much is that we *are* living in a sin cursed world.

PREDICTING PROSPERITY

Be cautious about predicting prosperity or disaster for a person or a nation.

In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him (Ec. 7:14).

Ever since I was a boy, 50 years ago, I have heard Christian leaders predict soon-to-come judgments on the world or the nation or some individual. They saw sin, and they thought they knew the mind of God about the timing of the judgment. In many cases they were wrong.

On the other hand, the psalmist thought that since things were going well for him at the moment, they would always go well. He found he was wrong.

Lord, by Thy favour Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled. I cried unto Thee, O Lord.

[God did hear him.] Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me

with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto Thee for ever (Ps. 30:7,8,11,12).

PROSPERITY AND GREATNESS

Of course, we should not think that prosperity indicates faith or righteousness. It is common in life and in Scripture that the ungodly prosper. Nor should we think that the Christians who appear to have accomplished the most in God's kingdom, or who are the most famous or influential are really the greatest. Jesus said, "Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Mt. 19:30).

DANGERS OF PROSPERITY

The prosperity of fools shall destroy them (Pr. 1:32).

Some of the severest judgments have come on "prosperous" people. The Flood came on a people so prosperous that some people of that time lived to be nine hundred years old! (See Gen. 5.)²⁴ Fire fell from heaven on the "prosperous" city of Sodom, which was characterized by "pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness" (Ez. 16:49).

There are great dangers in prosperity: pride, self-sufficiency, lukewarmness, and forgetting the God who gave the blessings. God warned Moses:

²⁴ Coal deposits indicate far more vegetation before the Flood, and petroleum deposits indicate far more animal life. Fossils indicate that conditions were so favorable before the Flood that many species grew to be much larger than the same species do now.

For when I shall have brought them into the land which I swear unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant (Dt. 31:20).

Sure enough, the book of Judges shows how that over and over when things went well, Israel would forget God and serve other gods. Then when they were in trouble they would cry out to God, who would raise up a judge and drive out the enemy. So now they had peace and prosperity. But then they would forget God again.

Two lessons:

1. In prosperity there is a great danger of turning away from God.
2. Sometimes trouble, even severe trouble, may be the best thing for us—if it helps us turn back to God.

Just before the terrible Babylon captivity God said to Judah, “I spake unto thee in thy prosperity, but thou sadist, ‘I will not hear.’” (Jer. 22:21).

Paul said he had a thorn in the flesh to keep him from pride because he was blessed so much:

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

And He said unto me, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

Notice Paul's reaction!

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

To avoid the pitfalls of prosperity, we must continually review God's commandments to obey them, especially the command to thank God for our blessings. Thanksgiving is one of the best ways to stay close to God.

Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you (1 Sam. 12:24).

Another safeguard is this prayer, "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on Thee" (Ps. 25:21).

Notice what the Lord said to the physically prosperous church of Laodicea. He was sick of their lukewarmness; they made Him feel like vomiting (Rev. 3:16).

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent (Rev. 3:17-19).

Notice also what the Lord said to the church of Smyrna, that was about to go through a time of tribulation, “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich)... (Rev. 2:9).

BLESSINGS FROM TROUBLES

We should recognize that some hardship and lack may be good for us. “It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth” (Lam. 3:27). If God humbles us, that’s good.

Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that He might humble thee, and that He might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end (Deut. 8:16).

Often our suffering helps us to be more effective in reaching others who are suffering. We understand what they face, and we can share with them the blessings God has given us.

And whether we be afflicted it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation (2 Cor. 1:6).

Since the death of our little girl, I have been able to help a good many people who have lost their loved ones with the same help God gave me.

If we have been in pain, we are more likely to be sensitive to those in pain. Ezekiel said, “I sat where they sat” (Ez. 3:15). If we have been defeated, we can relate to those who are defeated. But when we have experienced deliverance and victory we can share the good news of deliverance and victory with confidence. If we have been poor and have now been blessed with some wealth, we can do three things. We can relate to those who are poor, we can share our wealth with them, and we can share the Bible principles of prosperity that have helped us!

It seems that poverty has made many people more receptive to the Gospel.

Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him? (James 2:5).

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the ... base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen... (1 Cor. 1:26-28).

Some of the Christians who are suffering most in poverty and persecution are also seeing more conversions than most wealthy Christians. This is especially true in China and Sudan. “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

SUFFERING OF THE GODLY

It has often been the lot of God’s people to suffer persecution, even from Old Testament times. You don’t have to read very far in the Old Testament to find the righteous suffering persecution: Abel was murdered for his righteousness.²⁵

The Psalmist said, “Yea, for Thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter” (Ps. 44:22). It was not always because of their sin that they suffered. “All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant” (Ps. 44:17).

Job is another clear example of an Old Testament saint who suffered—not for any disobedience. He “was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil” (Job 1:1). Actually,

²⁵ 1 John 3:12 shows that Abel was killed for his righteousness.

Job is first an example of blessings issuing from obedience. He was rich, honored, at peace, blessed with ten children, and enjoying life. God really blessed him:

His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household: so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east (Job 1:3).

Then the book of Job introduces a new factor—the Enemy.

God bragged to Satan about how good Job was.

Satan said, “I bet he’ll curse You if You take away all those blessings.”

“It’s a bet!” God said, in effect.

So Satan, with God’s permission, took away all those blessings, even his children, and then ruined Job’s health.

Job did not understand! Neither did his friends. They were wrong to say his suffering was for his sin. In the end God vindicated Job and blessed him with twice as much as he had before!

I hope that if Satan is allowed to attack me, I’ll still love God. As Job said, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). God is worthy of our love, regardless of how we’re doing. In the end He’ll really bless us, as He did Job!

PEOPLE OF FAITH WHO SUFFERED

We cannot say that the saints who suffered torture and poverty did not have faith. Hebrews 11, the faith chapter, tells us the heroes of faith:

Were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:

And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;

(Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

And these all... obtained a good report through faith... (Heb. 11:35-39).

There never has been a time since the fall that anyone has escaped all sickness, trouble, and death. In fact, Jesus warned of a time of great tribulation worse than any time in all history. Whoever is here on earth then²⁶ will need to meet the conditions for blessings more than ever!

JOSEPH

We can see several principles relating to prosperity during persecution from the life of Joseph. He suffered persecution from his brothers and he was imprisoned because of the lies of Potiphar's wife. But through it all God blessed him.

And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man.... And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and

²⁶ Rev. 7:9-14 shows that there will be a great multitude of believers from all nations on earth during the Great Tribulation. They are in heaven, but they "came out of great tribulation" (vs. 14).

that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand (Gen. 39:2,3).

The Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field (Gen. 39:5).

[Even in prison] The Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper (Gen. 39:23).

Notice:

- God blessed this godly young man.²⁷
- God blessed those associated with him.
- The blessing coexisted with persecution.
- When bad things did happen to Joseph, God was bringing good out of it—for him and many others:

Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive (Gen. 50:20).

So we can relax in the knowledge that if terrible things do happen to us, “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28).

SUFFERING ON THE FRONT LINES

If Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice is too great
(Pioneer missionary to Africa, C. T. Studd).

Sometimes God's servants, in carrying the Gospel into Satan's territory, know that they will suffer. Here are some of Paul's sufferings:

²⁷ Joseph did not get this blessing because he was under the Mosaic covenant; he lived before Moses.

In stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

...In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness... (2 Cor. 11:24-27).

For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world....

Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place....

...We are made as the filth of the world... (1 Cor. 4:9,11,13).

But he still said:

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18).

Make no mistake about it, there are terms of discipleship—we must forsake all, we must put Jesus ahead of family and friends. We serve Him even if we don't have a house or a bed—and Jesus deserves this kind of sacrifice! If we have not surrendered all to Jesus, we are not even His disciples (Lk. 14:33)! But if we do leave all these earthly blessings for the kingdom of God, we will “receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting” (Lk. 18:30).

CAUTION

Jesus commanded, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Mt. 6:19,20). In our desire to prosper we must guard against covetousness! “Covetousness... is idolatry” (Col. 3:5).

THE PROMISES FULFILLED

But are all these principles, especially in Proverbs, certainties, or just guesses? They are *certainties!*

Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, that I might make thee know the **certainty** of the words of truth (Pr. 22:20,21).

If these statements in Proverbs are *certainties*, such as “happy is the man that findeth wisdom... length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor, her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace”—why did Jesus die so young, and why was He despised and rejected of men, and why did He not have a home or a place to lay His head? These proverbs *are* certainties, but there are other Bible principles that are also in force.

Let me illustrate with an airplane. Gravity is always pulling things to the earth. That’s a certainty. Does that mean an airplane can never leave the ground? No, while gravity *is* pulling down on the airplane, the thrust of the engine with the lift of the wings overcomes gravity and gets the airplane off the ground. Gravity is a certainty, but it is not the only principle at work.

So while there are principles that help toward financial blessing and principles that aid health and longer life, there are also other factors, such as persecution. Currently, China, North Korea, and Sudan are areas where the godly suffer especially,

losing wealth, health, and even life—because of their obedience. These opposing principles operated even in the Old Testament, as we have seen.

But even in *these* countries God’s promises are still at work! In communist China “at least 30 Christians... are CEOs of major Chinese companies.”²⁸ Where bribery is common in other companies, these Christian executives are known for honesty and paying their taxes. They no longer have mistresses or try to win contracts by offering prostitutes to customers. They have a reputation for treating workers fairly and kindly. In such cases, not only are the companies prospering, but many workers are becoming Christians. These Christians work well whether they are supervised or not and serve the customers better—and that impresses even the communist government officials.²⁹

There are places on earth where the Bible principles of honesty, generosity, and hard work have been applied for centuries. There is tremendous wealth there now that even the wicked and lazy are enjoying. On the other hand, there are many places where for centuries they have lived in bondage to demons, in filth, laziness, drunkenness, and sexual perversion. Naturally, almost everyone suffers from the poverty, sickness, and splintered families that have resulted.

The Bible speaks often of God judging a land because of the sins of its people:

He turneth... a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein (Ps. 107:33,34).

When a person in such a country turns to Jesus, all the national ills are not immediately fixed. God never said they would be. Even a godly, hardworking Christian in this situation is at a financial disadvantage compared to the one living in a

²⁸Marvin Olasky, “Wildfire”, *World* magazine. June 24, 2006, page 20.

²⁹ *Ibid*, page 20, 21.

country with a godly heritage. But these principles still work! They are *certainties*, for the individual, for the family, for the community, and for the nation.

And it is for these people, especially, that I have written this book. This book is for everyone, but especially those who have grown up in poverty and trouble that can largely be corrected. Take these principles to heart and carefully obey all the Lord's commands. You will reverse the curses and begin to see the blessings that will follow, on yourself, on your children, and on your nation!

Even when you start out at a disadvantage, you can still get ahead, if you follow God's Word!

A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren (Prov. 17:2).

A servant is born into a disadvantaged family, but he works hard, he honors his master, he is kind, he's dependable. In due time, he has authority over the foolish son who has squandered his advantages in life. The servant is not only honored to be put in charge, he is blessed financially; he has part of the inheritance.

MY OWN TESTIMONY

All these promises of blessings being fulfilled for me remind me of what Joshua as an old man told the elders of Israel.

And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and all our souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof (Josh. 23:14).

I can say with the Psalmist, “Thou hast dealt well with Thy servant, O Lord, according unto Thy Word” (Ps. 119:65). I too, have seen and experienced these twenty-two earthly blessings, and have gotten these spiritual blessings by God’s mercy like He said.

When I was a young man my mother told me to read a chapter in Proverbs every day along with my other Bible reading. I’ve been doing that for over thirty years ³⁰ (missing a few times). Of course it’s been an inconvenience hundreds of times. But anyone who would follow Jesus must deny himself daily. As everyone knows, it is often inconvenient, at the moment, to obey God’s Word. However, I’ve found *many* blessings for those who go in the way of wisdom found in Proverbs.

I have not only found these blessings in Scripture, I have experienced and enjoyed them! I had a happy childhood, largely because my parents lived godly lives. They sought first God’s kingdom, and God gave us what we needed and more. As I started to follow the Lord more wholeheartedly, life got better for me. I was happier, more peaceful, and more successful in God’s service. As a young man I found I could enjoy the victory God has provided. I saw from Scripture and from experience that we have authority over Satan. It was a wonderful, intimate thing to see God guiding *me*! I have seen God answer prayer many, many times.³¹

Then about twenty years ago God clearly led me out of my previous ministry into full time evangelism on the road. I left with almost nothing.

³⁰In Eph. 6:1 and Col. 3:20 children are commanded to obey their parents. The word *children* does not necessarily mean minors in English or in the Greek word translated *children* in these two passages. Sometimes the word *children* refers to fully grown offspring. We see in Jeremiah 35 the story of the Rechabites, how God blessed those who obeyed their parents, even though the children were adults and away from home.

³¹ Paul Young, *Answers to Prayers for Our Family*, Publications of Paul Young, Cape Town, South Africa.

But God immediately provided friends, food, and lodging. Many doors of ministry opened. I was enjoying life more and more. Within three years I owned my own home, all paid for! God led me to an extremely good deal! The house was simple but nice and in a beautiful, convenient setting.

I was busier than ever preaching to thousands a month. I was loving life! Without my asking for anything or seeking money, God provided more and more each year. I soon met Vicki and we had a happy, interesting courtship and marriage! I was happy before, but Vicki made a happy man happier—the enjoyment of friends, of traveling, and of serving God multiplied—sharing it all with Vicki! Then came the joy of our baby daughter! Then the joy of a son, and another, and another daughter! Life was more interesting, with more joys! More trials and lessons, too, but still, more fun!

Moving to Africa brought new opportunities, new excitement, new victories, increased fruitfulness! God has increased our blessings in many areas, physical and spiritual. We're trying to use them all for His kingdom, and enjoying them at the same time.

I feel like Jacob, who said twenty years after leaving home:

I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands (Gen. 32:10).

I left home 20 years ago with almost nothing, and now I have more than I ever dreamed of having! I am able to serve in several interesting, fruitful, wide-reaching ministries. Also I'm enjoying all these additional spiritual blessings and can share them with many others!

God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us; Selah.

That Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations.

God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him (Psalm 67:1,2,7).

Say continually, "Let the Lord be magnified, which hath pleasure in the prosperity of His servant" (Psalm 35:27).

Other Publications of Paul Young

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A Happy Home!

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