

Chapter 11....

LOOKING ONWARD

Life is filled with many changes. There are tragedies all around us. We hear of a friend who adopted a child with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and did not realize it until a year later. A loved one discovers that he has cancer. Parkinson's strikes a man who is still providing for his family. A child is arrested for illegal drug possession, and the parents are in a state of shock and disbelief. A spouse comes home and demands a divorce, telling of an on-going affair. A parent loses a child because of a drunk driver. A plant closes, and many are looking for work. A house burns to the ground, leaving a family homeless. A hurricane wipes away an entire community.

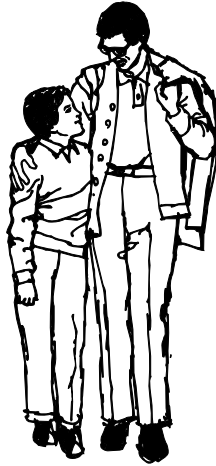
If we live long enough, we will be faced with many trials. Some trials are easier to overcome than others. Regardless of the nature of the trials, for a Christian there is always the knowledge that God cares. Peter admonishes us, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:6,7).

When life is going smoothly, Peter's words seem easy to follow. However, during times of extreme disaster, we realize what a profound statement Peter has made, and how difficult it may be to cast our cares on God.

As I look back over the time since Angie died, I realize how life will never be the same again. Yet I know in my heart that God wants me to accept what has happened and to look onward. God has blessed me in so many ways, and now that I am growing stronger, I

am able to think of the joys and happiness I have now. I can look to the future with peace in my heart and even contentment with the blessings I have.

When we were looking for a job for Joe here in Texas, one of my main concerns was finding a congregation where we could worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). I placed a call to the 12th Street church of Christ here in Shallowater, and spoke with the preacher, Don Wood. After we spoke about the local church and he answered some of my questions, I mentioned why we were moving to Shallowater. Don told me that he, too, had lost a child (Appendix B). Kyle was killed in a car accident a little over four years prior to our conversation. He said something I have never forgotten. He told me how blessed he felt to have had Kyle in his life. He said he tries not to dwell on what he has lost, but to be thankful for the time they had together.



Recovery Depends on Perspective

Our ability to overcome the trials in life depends largely on our perspective: First, on our perspective regarding our spiritual goals and plans for eternity. Second, on our perspective of life in general.

What spiritual goals do you have? Do you plan to spend an eternity in heaven with God, Jesus and saved loved ones who have gone on before you? The apostle Paul had a clear view of the future when he wrote, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). Paul underwent more trials than most of the readers of this book will ever experience. He said:

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 journeyings often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness (2 Cor. 11:24-27).

As we read about Paul's life in God's Word, we can gain strength from knowing that he overcame tremendous trials, and so can we. Paul spoke to the Christians in Colosse while he was in prison (Col. 4:18). They were among those who had been buried with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6:3-6). We read about these Colossians who had been "risen with Christ" (Col. 3:1). He told them how to overcome the temptations and trials of life: "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2).

Although this is certainly the most important facet of overcoming trials, there is more involved in our outlook on life. How do we look at this life here and now? Consider this example of my experience today, which has not been in any way close to the trial of losing a daughter – or any of the tragedies mentioned earlier. Yet it may still serve as an illustration of our general outlook on life.

No Air Conditioner

Let's be honest with ourselves – we are spoiled. I know I am for sure! And my husband reminds me of this

fact every so often. I am pampered – and I enjoy it! So what happens to our perspective when we lose one of our modern conveniences? Today our air conditioner quit working, and Texas can be very hot even in the spring (above 90 degrees today!).

While considering my plight, I began thinking how blessed I am to even **have** an air conditioner! Electricity and indoor plumbing were unknown to the apostle Paul. Many of us hear stories from our parents about how they went to the “out house” as a child.

Additionally, I am blessed in that we are able to afford to fix the air conditioner. We can even go out to eat so I don’t have to cook every meal in this heat. Yes, I am terribly spoiled.

As the heat inside the house began to climb, my thoughts went to how much cooler this house is than hell. (What an overactive mind I have!) There isn’t any air conditioning in hell. The heat won’t abate in three days, three years, three hundred years, or even for an eternity: “And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day or night” (Rev. 14:11a). The thought is mind-boggling. It brings to mind the urgency of teaching lost souls so they won’t spend an eternity in hell! “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11).

Focus on Heaven

Is it any wonder that the apostle Paul could have peace in his heart even after going through all the trials mentioned earlier – knowing that his life was focused on the goal of heaven and teaching the lost so they could go with him to heaven and avoid the fires of

hell. What are a few beatings compared to hell? Paul knew there is a judgment ahead (2 Cor. 5:10) and the most important goal in this life is to be prepared! Consider his words in 2 Cor. 4:17,18:

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

So what does no air conditioner really have to do with our perspective of life? I have two choices: (1) I can be hot, dejected, complaining and miserable – and make my husband miserable along with me, or (2) I can be thankful for what I have and accept things as they are. This applies to most of the daily situations we face, and even to the trials of life.

Yes, we need to do what we can to make things better (I did call for a repair man to come!) – but when we have done all we can, we need to accept the outcome. Remember, when facing a serious trial in life, the ultimate “repair man” is God!

The apostle Paul knew how to look at life. He wrote, “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:12,13). The verse before this has a key that we all need to remember, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be **content**” (Phil. 4:10). Have you learned to be content regardless of your situation?

Paul's mind was not merely set on avoiding hell, but on looking to the goal of heaven, as he explained in Phil. 3:14,20,21:

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.... For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

Our human minds cannot comprehend the joys that await us in heaven. Paul was so busy working to bring other Christians with him to heaven, and to convert the lost, that he didn't have time to dwell on his personal difficulties. Listen to what he wrote to the Colossians:

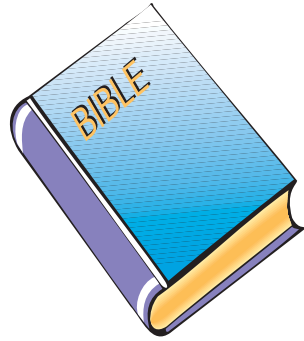
We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints [Christians]. For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel (Col. 1:3-5).

Focus on God's Word

The answer to every life problem is found in God's Word. The dilemma is that most of us don't know the Word well enough to be able to apply it when we face trials. No, the Bible does not say, "Barbara Hanna, here is what you should do to recover from the loss of

your daughter.” I must read, study, and make the proper application!

King David loved God’s Word! Read through Psalm 119 and write down all the ways David described the Word of God. Notice these verses in particular:



1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way,
who walk in the law of the Lord.

10 With my whole heart have I sought
thee: O let me not wander from thy
commandments.

11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart,
that I might not sin against thee.

16 I will delight myself in thy statutes: I
will not forget thy word.

27 Make me to understand the way of thy
precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous
works.

47 And I will delight myself in thy
commandments, which I have loved.

72 The law of thy mouth is better unto me
than thousands of gold and silver.

97 O how love I thy law! It is my
meditation all the day.

103 How sweet are thy words unto my
taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my
mouth.

105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and
a light unto my path.

115 Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will
keep the commandments of my God.

127 Therefore I love thy commandments
above gold; yea, above fine gold.

176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep;
seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy
commandments.

We can learn much from David's attitude and his deep love for God and His Word! Although we do not live by the specific commandments of the old law, the general principles expressed in the above verses still apply to us today! Compare David's statements to this New Testament passage:

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:2,3).

How sad it is to hear people say that it is not important to obey God. All we need is love. That is a total contradiction! If we love God, then we will obey His Word! Those who do not obey, do not love God.

Earn Salvation?

Whoa, you may be saying. Do you believe we can earn our salvation? Not at all. None of the above verses indicate earning salvation, but they do specify the

necessity of obeying God. So how do we reconcile God's grace with the need to obey God?

Let me give you a very simple illustration. If I were speaking before a group of ladies, and I said, "Beth Throckmorton, if you will come forward and stand beside me, I will give you the free gift of this thousand dollar bill." If Beth were to obey me and come forward, would that mean that she earned the thousand dollars? Not at all! But it was presented as a **condition**, which must be met prior to receiving the free gift.

God has given us **conditions**, which must also be met before we can receive the free gift of salvation. We must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, repent of our sins, be willing to confess Him before men (as did the Ethiopian in Acts 8) and then be baptized for the remission of sins. The gift is no less free because we meet the **conditions** set forth in the Bible (Acts 2:37-47, 8:26-39).

What about the need to obey God's Word after we are saved? James explained that we are **not** saved by faith alone. He set forth the example of Abraham, who was an obedient servant of God. Read James 2:17-26 and follow his reasoning. The devils even believe, but they certainly are not saved! More is required.

Abraham was justified by works. "Ye see then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). So did Abraham **earn** salvation? No! Do we **earn** salvation? No! But we are not God's servants if we do not serve!

So what is the difference? It is a matter of attitude. Jesus described the attitude we are to possess as God's servants in the following parable:

But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow [think] not. So likewise ye, **when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do** (Luke 17:7-10).

Focus on the Future

In addition to focusing on the spiritual aspects of your life, it is vital to plan for your life in general following the death of a loved one or any traumatic event in your life. What plans you make will depend on the trial you have undergone – or what you are living through at the present. As you read about the following three examples, consider your own life and ask yourself these questions:

- ⇒ Am I still focusing mainly on my own self and my own problems?
- ⇒ Do I need counseling?
- ⇒ Do I need medication?
- ⇒ Have I been sharing my trials with at least one good Christian friend?
- ⇒ Is there someone in the church who might be able to give me encouragement and/or advice?
- ⇒ Am I working on setting good spiritual goals for my future?

⇒ Have I planned goals for other areas of my life?

Lisa Smith, who was mentioned in the first chapter, learned in the past two years that she has one child who is autistic and an adopted child with fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). Obviously many changes have taken place in her life as a result of these discoveries.

This courageous woman had her autistic son diagnosed even before she saw a specialist. She searched the web and found reliable information to make an informed judgment. She shared her concerns with me, and after my own research, I had to agree with her. Lisa immediately sought a professional diagnosis, and was at least somewhat relieved to learn that her son is one of the milder cases and the prognosis is very good.

Since then she has studied further, spent many hours working on teaching him at home, found someone to come to her home to assist with his training, and then she and her husband have enrolled the boy in a preschool that has four slots available for autistic children at the Kansas University in Lawrence, Kansas.

The discovery of their adopted daughter's FAS was perhaps even more traumatic for Lisa and Shawn. At first they were informed that little could be done to better the situation. However, Lisa has shared with me the progress she is making, and I am convinced that Lisa will help this child tremendously. I have told Lisa that God has blessed her daughter immensely by allowing Lisa to bring her from Russia into such a loving, Christian home where she will receive the best possible training and where she has loving parents and siblings to get her through the difficult times. All of Lisa's family have learned many lessons in sharing their home and love with this child.

Now Lisa is making plans to put information on my new web site, www.joyinthemorn.com, about autism and what parents can do to help their autistic children. She is preparing packets to sell to assist parents as they teach their children.

Notice that even though Lisa might have felt overwhelmed at first, she was not overcome by the trials in her life, but with God's help she is overcoming the trials through her positive Christian response. She is moving forward and doing what she can to make the situation better and to share her knowledge with others.

Another example of looking forward is a friend of mine who was mentioned in Chapter 9. She went through a divorce after years of living with an obsessive-compulsive husband, and was having a hard time knowing how to move on with her life. She knows there can never be another husband in her life, because she did not divorce this man because of adultery. If she were to remarry, according to the Matthew 19:9, she would be living in adultery.

So what lies ahead? It is a good thing for Christians in a situation like this to seek professional help. I am not a professional, but as I mentioned earlier, she needed to quit looking back and start looking forward. Besides reaching out to encourage others, she needs to make plans for her own life. It is vital that we not turn away from the world completely, even when our pain is difficult to bear.

The Bible teaches that one must never become so wrapped up in personal problems (i.e. self-centered) so as to lose sight of a proper concern for the welfare of others. Regarding matters of opinion, Paul said, "Let no man seek his own [exclusively-BH], but every man another's wealth" (1 Cor. 10:24).

We should do “outward-oriented” actions, as Paul instructed us, “in lowliness of mind let each esteem [the] other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:3,4). Even work or labor is not to be thought of as exclusively for our own good, but that we “have to give to him that needeth” (Eph. 4:28).

As we consider how we can make the lives of others better and work toward that end, we are uplifted in return. God’s Word teaches us that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). Some people will never find inner joy because they are waiting for others to bring it to them.

In my own situation, it took a long time to be able to begin looking forward to the future. My short-term goals at first were simple things like getting through a day of keeping children in my home without crying or letting them see me upset. I worked at focusing on their needs rather than my own.

I did not teach Bible class for about four months after Angie died, as I mentioned earlier in this book. Even then it took me a while to be ready to begin publishing books again. I did not add more children to my day care for several months, until I was ready to accept more responsibility.

Now it has been nearly three years since Angie’s death, and I am trying to think more about the future with my family, church, writing and publishing. I am teaching a preschool Bible class on Wednesday nights all through the year. I have written, taught and published three books for this age level.

During this time I also published four preschool lesson books written by other authors. Three of these were written by Lisa Smith, who was mentioned earlier.

Joe and I have made many changes in our lives the past three years. He is getting ready to begin teaching at the third high school since moving to Texas, and we hope it will be his last change. This time God has granted our prayer request, and Joe will be working right here in Shallowater.

School is just beginning. Even before classes began Joe was involved with the students by working with the weight lifters and assisting with high school football, something he dearly loves! We are both hoping his new job will be more like Eudora, because he will be teaching in the community where he lives.

As always, we continue to be active in local church work. Our lives are focused on leading Christian lives and being followers of Jesus.

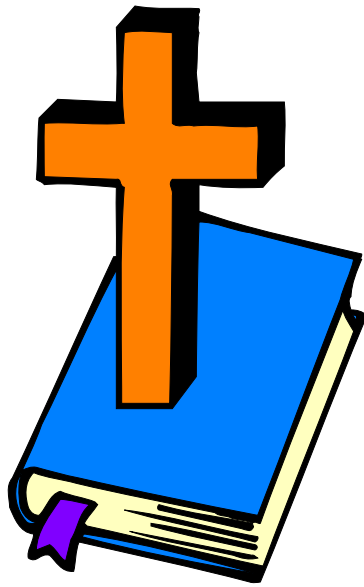
Focus on Jesus

Jesus is our perfect example. “Christ also **suffered** for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). What right do we have to think that we should live a life without ever suffering? We, who caused Jesus to suffer a cruel death on the cross (1 Peter 2:24; 3:18).

As we focus on Jesus and study His life as it is portrayed in the Bible, we will find the strength to overcome the trials of life. “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; 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” (Hebrews 12:2).

Jesus had His eyes on the joy awaiting Him in heaven with the Father. Are we keeping our eyes focused on Christ’s example? Jesus admonished His disciples:

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:24-26).



STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. List some of the terms you found in Psalm 119 for the Word of God.
2. What types of suffering did Paul describe in 2 Cor. 11:24-27?

3. What spiritual goals do you have? (This is personal and if you are in a Ladies' Bible Class, no pressure should be placed on anyone to share an answer.)
4. How does it help us to overcome the trials in life if we are focused on heaven?
5. What does 1 John 5:2,3 teach us about the need to obey God?
6. What can we learn about Abraham and Sarah by studying Hebrews 11:8-13?

7. How does the answer to question #6 go hand-in-hand with what we studied in this lesson related to James 2:17-26?
8. What conditions must we meet before we can be saved?
9. Do we earn salvation by obeying God? Could any sinful human being ever be good enough to earn salvation?

Chapter 12....

REACHING OUT

A little over two and a half years after Angie died, Joe and I received another shocking call. One of my day care children – one of Joe's students from Eudora – had been killed in a motorcycle accident. Chad Taylor was only 26 years old, and had just gotten married a few days earlier.

Chad's mother, Janet, was the one mentioned in the first chapter of this book as being the person who called all of my day care parents to let them know what was taking place the day Angie died. Not only that, but Janet also was the go-between in assisting us as we tried to let people in Eudora know about the funeral arrangements. Janet explained to people why we could not go through a memorial service in Eudora after the funeral in Arizona and burial in Texas. (Joe said he simply could not face one more service, and I was in Arizona helping Eric pack.)

When we knew the exact plans for Angie's funeral, Janet said, "I'm coming. You need one of your friends from Eudora." She had heard that some of the guys were coming for Joe, and she wanted me to be sure to have a lady there. She spent the night at Eric's home and went with me to the funeral. She helped me in my time of need.

Repaying Kindness

Now Joe and I were ready (emotionally) to repay the kindness shown to us and return to Eudora to provide comfort to the Taylor family. At first I didn't know how well we could handle the funeral. It had been long

enough since our own loss that we should be prepared, but fears temporarily entered my mind. Would I break down? Would I have a panic attack? Although the doubt remained, I did think I would make it through without any major problems. I asked a few friends to pray, and prayers were requested at the Wednesday night Bible class.

As soon as we got to Eudora, and my arms lovingly hugged each member of the Taylor family, I knew this was the right thing to do. They all told us how much it meant to them that we had come. Many in their extended family and the town of Eudora told us how glad they were that we came to support the Taylors.

We didn't have a lot of time to talk to them privately, but they knew we were there. They knew that we have been recovering and finding happiness in our lives in spite of our painful loss. Although it was hard for them to comprehend at the time, they recognized us as living proof of our reassurance that "It will get better."

To Tiffany, Chad's sister, I had to mention that my brother died when he was 19 and I was only 23. She knew me as a happy and well-adjusted wife, mother and day care provider. I survived. She will, too.

Our Progress

One of the main things I learned during our trip was how much Joe and I have healed. Yes, the news of the death, the trip, and the funeral all brought back memories of our own loss. But we were not overwhelmed. We cried and grieved with all the others who had been Chad's friends. We remembered the dark night of our own experience. But we did not return to the dark night. Now that we are stronger, we are able

to share what we have learned about overcoming such a tragedy and going on with life.

No, we are not experts. We are not trained professionals. We are just regular people who hurt like everyone else. But since we have been able to go on with our lives, we have the ability to share with those who are hurting and hopefully show them some of the things that helped us, which may also help them.

After we returned home, I kept in touch with Janet mainly through e-mails. The great thing about that type of communication is that you don't have to be available at the same time. One person can type a message at midnight, and the other one may reply the following morning.

When the numbness began to wear off, Janet wrote to me about many of the same things Joe and I experienced when we lost Angie. I was able to share with her, and help her see that it is normal to be unable to concentrate and read. Though it is possible to reach a point where one has "no more power to weep" (1 Sam. 30:4), crying every day may be part of the grieving process for some. One Christian man had told me that he cried every day for a year (not all day, though) after his daughter died in a car accident.

"Mothers' Talk"

Shortly after we moved to Shallowater, Cindy Wood told me we needed to have a "Mothers' Talk" and share what we have gone through. When she came to my new home, she opened her heart to me. Cindy described the pain of learning about Kyle's death and much about the long road to recovery (see Appendix B). It had been nearly a year since Angie's accident,

and I was able to communicate willingly, telling her about my loss.

About a month after we moved, the day of Angie's death was approaching and I was distraught. Cindy came to me and brought a small Willow Tree® creation called "Heart and Soul," which depicts two women sitting and talking to each other. She told me it reminded her of what I had said about Angie and me being so close and sharing our innermost thoughts with each other. Cindy knew the one-year "anniversary" of the death of a child is very painful, and she wanted to provide what comfort she could.

We have spoken together other times about our losses, and she has been kind enough to allow me to write about the grief she and Don went through when Kyle died. The same summer we moved to Shallowater, another couple that lost a son moved here and began worshiping with us, too. Cindy and I both believe God's providence brought us all together.

How to Reach Out

How you will be able to reach out to others depends largely upon what type of trial you have undergone. In the last chapter you read how Lisa Smith is preparing packets to sell to assist parents of autistic children. Not only did her learning benefit her son, but now it will also benefit hundreds and maybe thousands of autistic children. If you know parents who have learned that a child is autistic, tell them about the web site:

www.joyinthemorn.com

If you are the parent of a handicapped child, you may be using all of your energy to care for his or her needs.

However, if there is a time when you are able to reach out, there will be many other parents who are in need of encouragement. Think of what helped you most, and then try to return this to others. Consider what you wished others would do for you, and then do it for them.

Cancer survivors are afforded many wonderful opportunities to be part of fundraisers and efforts to teach those who have recently been diagnosed with cancer. If you are unaware of what you can do, contact your doctor or the hospital for advice. The same is probably true of many other serious illnesses.

Troubled teenagers and children are a special challenge. When you have successfully driven through the storm, and back into clear skies, open your heart to other parents who can use the same advice, which brought you through safely.

If you have the ability to write about your experience, do so. Even if it is only a short article of encouragement in a church publication, you may provide a map to guide other parents through their tough times. If you are not a writer, share the books that helped you with others who could likewise benefit, either directly or by placing copies in the church library.

Grief Counseling

If you benefited from grief counseling, consider being a speaker or panelist for another group. Sophie's dad, Eric, met his wife when she was a panelist in a session he was attending. They became friends and after several months they started dating.

Connie is now Sophie's mother, which might never have happened, had Connie not chosen to reach out to

others. After all, did not the Lord promise if we put first things first in doing His will that such blessings will follow (Matt. 6:33)?

Although I did not desire to be part of a similar group, I do know that many have benefited greatly when they have found the right situation to meet their needs. If you are able, consider being the leader of a grief-counseling group.

Doing for Others

The manner in which you reach out to others does not necessarily need to be directly related to the trial you have undergone. I had a unique opportunity to provide part-time care for a baby who was living with his grandparents. The grandfather had to have surgery. I kept the baby several nights, and took him to day care the following morning.

Because I had experience with home day care, this family felt very comfortable leaving the baby with me. He did not need to be shuffled back and forth between several volunteers who could only provide assistance for one night. I was able to give him consistency and security during an uncertain time.

So how did this help me as I was continuing to recover from my own loss? When we can offer love to those who need it, love is returned. This is especially true when we are offering a lifeline to fellow Christians in their time of need. As we show love in this manner, we are obeying God's Word, which teaches us:

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

Be a Barnabas

When we moved to Shallowater and began worshiping with the 12th Street church of Christ, I found that they prepare a meal most weeks for visitors. It was a great blessing to us when we were here looking for a place to live. At the meal the grandfather I spoke of in the previous section was one of the Christians in the Barnabas group providing the meal that Sunday. He and my husband were talking, and Joe asked if he knew if there were any older women in the congregation who might be interested in playing games with my mother once we moved here. Little did we know that this man's mother would become one of my mother's best friends! She and her daughter play games with Mom and me about once a week, and the three of them often play games without me. It has been a blessing to Mom because she is unable to drive.

After we lived here a few months, I became part of a Barnabas group, and now I fix food once a month for those who visit. Even if there are no visitors, it is a good opportunity to visit with fellow Christians and get to know them better while we share the meal. The elders in their wisdom have encouraged members to be part of one of the groups.

Who Was Barnabas?

Barnabas is mentioned as being a liberal giver when the church was established. The church began on the day of Pentecost, which is described in Acts 1 and 2. Jews had come from various places and many remained in Jerusalem following their conversion. They were in need. The church cared for their needs:

Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of

lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, the son of consolation) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:34-36).

Because Barnabas was well respected in the church, he was able to speak out on behalf of Saul (the apostle Paul). When Saul came to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples, some were afraid of him. After all, he had persecuted Christians prior to his conversion! Barnabas told the apostles of Saul's conversion, and they listened and accepted what Barnabas told them. Because of this, Saul was able to speak boldly and teach the Truth. (Study Acts 9:1-29.)

As the church spread, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to Antioch. There he helped convert many (Acts 11:22-24). Barnabas was a good mission worker as is described in Acts 13 and 14. When a conflict of opinion arose between Paul and Barnabas, neither one allowed their mission work to suffer (Acts 15:36-41).

In April of 2000, the *Four State Gospel News* published my article, "A Modern Barnabas." As you read it, judge whether or not anyone would consider you to be like Barnabas:

To look at him, you would see a "regular guy." Muscles showing he's not afraid of hard work. This modern Barnabas knows how to laugh with a friend, but is not ashamed to share his pain (Rom 12:15).

Many years ago a Christian family was in serious financial straits. The local church of Christ held out a helping hand, giving food and paying bills. The father was out of work, and the situation did not improve. More assistance was needed, and furnished (Gal 6:10).

After a time, there were some Christians who felt enough charity had been proffered. A few Christians relieved their distress for an additional time. Even so, the family eventually came to the point of facing foreclosure on their home.

Barnabas stepped forward. No, he was not a man of great wealth, just great love. Barnabas never grew weary in well doing (Gal. 6:9). He would juggle his own bills, stretch the dollars as far as he could, and give until his pockets were turned inside out.

Many years later, I received a letter from one of the daughters of the family who had been assisted by Barnabas. In it she told of completing her Bachelor's Degree, and beginning graduate work. She married a Christian and is going into a helping profession.

The daughter wrote that her father and mother were both gainfully employed, and doing well. One sibling was in college. Another married a Christian and was doing mission work in the United States, teaching lost souls about Christ and His church.

Without Barnabas' self-sacrificing attitude, the family might have become discouraged and fallen away. How many souls will be saved eternally because Barnabas cared enough to go the second, and third, and fourth mile with this family?

We may not be able to give as much as this "modern Barnabas," but we can all find ways to reach out to those in need if we are willing servants of God.

A Modern Dorcas

Dorcas is another Bible example of one who reached out to those in need. When she died, the Christians sent for Peter to come. When he arrived, the widows showed him the "coats and garments which Dorcas made" for them. Peter prayed and God brought Dorcas back to life again (Acts 9:36-42).

Today there are many who follow the pattern of love and good works set by Dorcas. Years ago I assisted the women of the Eudora church of Christ as we made pajamas for a Christian children's home. Although I'm certainly no seamstress, I did what little I could. We all had an enjoyable time of fellowship while serving God. The children were delighted to receive the final creations.

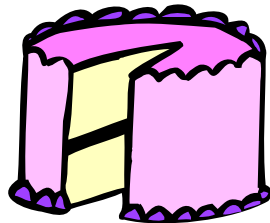
There are many occasions on which we may be able to provide food, such as:

- Taking food when a family member is ill or hospitalized.
- Baking cookies for shut-ins.
- Preparing a dish for a funeral meal.

- Delivering a meal to the home of a grieving family.
- Welcoming a neighbor with a pie or cake and an invitation to worship services.
- Inviting a visiting preacher for a home cooked meal.
- Asking a new family home after services for refreshments and time to get acquainted.

We may never realize how instrumental our acts of kindness are in the conversion of lost souls or the encouragement of those who are already saved. I am reminded of an illustration I provided for a Ladies' Bible Class one time. I told of a woman who worshiped in the same congregation with me, and I had a hard time with her attitude. As a result, I did not feel warm toward her, and I did not like my negative attitude! So I baked her a cake. The lady warmed up to me, and although we were never close, we did become friendlier toward each other.

Many years later I heard about a joke that was lovingly shared between two of the participants of the Ladies' Bible Class. When someone was unkind to one of the women, she would tell the other one, "Well, I guess I better go bake her a cake."



Regardless of the trials we have faced or are facing presently, may we all remember these words of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, spoken to His followers:

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick: and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let

your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and **glorify your Father which is in heaven** (Matt. 5:14-16).

Although this verse has been used twice previously, I want to again emphasize the fact that our good works must be done to glorify God, not ourselves. It is a truism that the lives of Christians are the only Bible some people read. Will our lives lead them to truly study God's Word?

We must not allow personal sorrows to paralyze us to the point of failing to glorify our heavenly Father by loving benevolent acts to others. When the time of mourning his father was concluded, Joseph went about completing previous commitments and serving God (Gen. 50:4-26). Upon the death of his son, King David similarly gave up his grief and pleading with God to start his duties afresh (2 Sam. 12:15-23).

No doubt, the Lord is the greatest example of what one can and should do in the midst of tremendous personal pain and distress (cf. John 19:26,27). Let us follow the admonition given in 1 Peter 2:21, "For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should **follow his steps.**"

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to Galatians 6:10, are Christians only to offer assistance to other Christians?
2. Check out other versions of the Bible or use study aids to discover other meanings for the name Barnabas besides “son of consolation” as it is interpreted in the KJV. Why is his name so significant?
3. What did Barnabas do to help Christians in need? (Acts 4:32-37)

4. Why did Saul need Barnabas to speak for him to the apostles in Acts 9:26-29? Prior to his conversion, what had Saul done to Christians? (Acts 9:1-3)
5. Study Acts 11:23-26 and explain why Barnabas was sent to Antioch, how he exhorted them, and what the result was.
6. How did Paul and Barnabas settle their disagreement in Acts 15:36-41? What can we learn from their attitude regarding matters of opinion?

7. What type of person was Dorcas? Was she selfish or altruistic? (Acts 9:36-42)
8. How do you think your friends and fellow Christians would react if you died today? (This is a thought question, and group discussion is not required if you are in a classroom setting.)
9. Consider your personal talents. How can you better use them to serve God? (In a classroom setting, those who are willing may share.)

10. What is another meaning of the word “provoke” in Heb. 10:24, and how may we positively provoke one another?

11. If you are recovering from a trial or great sorrow, how will you benefit from following the examples of Barnabas and Dorcas?

12. Besides **doing** the good work, why is our **attitude** so very important if we want to let our light shine **so God may be glorified**? (Matthew 5:14-16 and Luke 17:7-10) Compare yourself to Joseph, David and Jesus.

Chapter 13....

JOY IN THE MORNING

The journey from the darkest night to the joy of the morning has been long and fraught with setbacks along the way. In some ways, the journey continues, but now the sunrise is in sight. Many of the heavy burdens have been set aside. The road is smoother now.

As I began working on this chapter, Mother's Day was only a few days away. It was the third one without Angie. I knew there would be no cheery phone call. No special gift to show her love. So why am I including this in the last chapter, the one where I am showing that you can overcome your sorrow?

Because I want your eyes to be open to the knowledge that "Joy in the Morning" is not about having a happy feeling 100% of the time. It isn't an absence of all pain. It is the realization that in spite of the trials we suffer in this life, there can be joy in our hearts!

Jesus realistically pointed out to His followers that "in the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33) and that they would be sorrowful at His death by crucifixion (John 16:20). Yet He promised them, "but your sorrow shall be **turned into joy**" (John 16:20). He illustrated this by teaching, "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world" (John 16:21). Peace can triumph regardless of what we face along the road when we recognize that Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33).

Purpose for Living

Joy comes from knowing that God put us here for a purpose and that we are striving to fulfill that purpose! We are here to serve Him. The more we serve, the more joy and peace we have in our hearts. Study these passages about joy, and consider your own life.

Gal. 5:22,23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance [self-control]; against such there is no law.”

Phil. 1:3,4, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy.”

Heb. 12:2, “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; 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.”

James 1:2,3, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations [various trials]; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”

1 Pet. 4:12,13, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”

1 John 1:3,4, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”

1 John 1:4, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”

Did you notice the key element in the joy described in these passages? Joy is found in leading a faithful Christian life. Joy also comes from teaching others and seeing them serving God.

How do we get past the point where we are looking inward toward the trials we are facing? How do we stop focusing on the pain of losing a loved one? What brings us to the point of viewing the sunrise?

Count Your Blessings

Those who are leading faithful Christian lives can find joy by serving God and counting the many blessings God gives to His children. Let me share a few of my blessings with you.

- ⇒ I am a child of the King.
- ⇒ God hears and answers my prayers because I am trying to please Him.
- ⇒ My husband is a faithful Christian. I rejoice in hearing him lead prayers during worship.
- ⇒ Joe and I have been accepted as part of the family by both of Sophie’s parents and the extended family.
- ⇒ Joe and I are thankful that our son, Mike, is still alive and part of our family. Some parents have lost more than one child in an accident.

- ⇒ My granddaughter has two Christian parents who are raising her to serve God.
- ⇒ Many Christian friends care about Joe and me and what we have undergone.
- ⇒ Because we moved, I was able to quit doing day care and have more time to help Mom in her later years.
- ⇒ Now I also have more time to write and publish books written by other Christians.
- ⇒ Hanna Publications is doing better financially, and I am hopeful that I will be able to continue writing and publishing for many years.
- ⇒ God has blessed me with good health, and I am trying to use my time to serve Him.
- ⇒ God is helping me find joy through writing this book!

Make your own list of blessings. Naturally I could have written many more, but these are a few thoughts to get your thinking started. No matter what trials you have faced, or are facing right now, you know God has blessed you if you are busy serving Him!

Blessings From Unusual Sources

Blessings often come to us from unusual and unsuspected sources. Let me tell you about one example in my own life.

About a year after we moved here, I introduced myself to a young man holding a toddler named Hannah. I

told him I would remember her name because it is the same as my last name.

Later his wife told me about Hannah's name. She (Hannah's mother) had been a student in the school here when Angie was a teacher in Shallowater, but she didn't know her well because Angie had taught those with learning problems.

Years later she read in the paper about Angie's tragic accident and death. Many in the community were talking about what a special person Angie was and how she helped her students in so many ways. This woman had always liked the name Hannah, and decided to give her soon to be born daughter that name partly because of Angie's godly life. The students all knew her as Miss Hanna.

Now Hannah is two and a half, and such a delightful child. She is a joy to have in my preschool Bible class on Wednesday nights. When she sees me, Hannah's eyes light up and she smiles at me. Often she comes running and gives me a huge hug.

During worship one time, Hannah looked back from about three rows in front of me and said, "There's Miss Barbara! Hi, Miss Barbara." Of course they tried to shush her, but I loved it! If I had not chosen to serve God by teaching the preschool class, I would not have experienced the joy of her love for me.

Like Hannah

Although not directly linked to the above story, I want to share with you how Angie was like Hannah in the Bible. Angie had been unable to give birth to a child. Eric allowed her to go to a fertility specialist. They discovered some problems, and gave her medication,

but it was still uncertain as to whether or not she could conceive.

Eric and Angie prayed and fasted for a child. Angie had to take shots in her abdomen, and they were very painful. It seemed that nothing had worked, and the treatments were over. They thought they might eventually consider adoption. But a month later, Angie conceived.

After Sophie was born, the teenage girls were having special classes. One lesson was on Hannah, and the teacher knew about Angie's and Eric's prayers and God's answer. She asked Angie to come to class and "be Hannah," for the girls. Angie told the class about the way she and Eric prayed and fasted for a baby. She took Sophie to show the girls God's answer. Although they had already seen Sophie, she and Angie were a visual application of the lesson.

The blessing of our daughter's faithfulness to God (cf. 3 John 4), and God's answer to her prayers, is now a blessing to Joe and me. Our son is not married, so Sophie and her siblings may be the only grandchildren we will ever have. And we know that we are very blessed to be included as the grandparents of Sophie's new baby brother, Barrett!

Mother's Day

Earlier I mentioned that I had started writing this chapter before Mother's Day. This section is being written after Mother's Day, and I want to share a special blessing, which has increased the joy in my heart.

Eric and Connie invited us to their home to visit on Saturday afternoon. They wanted to share some plans

they have made for the future. While we were there, Connie brought in a gift and card for me. The Mothers' Day card was one for "Mom," which truly warmed my heart. That alone would have been reason to rejoice!

They also gave a very meaningful gift of two pendants. You've probably seen something similar many times – shaped like a boy and a girl – mine had Barrett's and Sophie's birthstones. Now my cup was full and overflowing.

Love Returned

Love was returned to me because I have always shown Eric and Connie that I love them both. Joe and I try to be positive and encouraging. Yes, it was very hard the first time we heard Sophie call Connie "Mom." But Connie's love for Sophie has blessed us so much, and we can't help but love her for her tender and loving attitude toward Sophie, as well as the firm discipline she provides.

After we moved to Shallowater and Eric moved here with Sophie – and a few months went by – I told Eric I thought he should feel free to date if there were anyone he would like to spend time with. It had been over a year since Angie died. As I mentioned earlier, Eric had met Connie at a grief counseling class, and had come to know and respect her. Eventually they began spending time together, and they realized how much they cared for each other. I'm sure Eric also had in his mind the importance of finding a good mother for Sophie.

When Eric told us he was planning to marry Connie, Joe said, "Well, you did such a good job the first time [choosing Angie], I'm sure you will do a good job this

time, too.” I told Eric that there is neither male nor female in heaven, so the two women won’t be fighting over him. We both laughed and the moment was lighter as a result. It must have been difficult for Eric to go to Angie’s parents and explain that he had found a new person to love and marry. Joe and I both felt grateful to have a son-in-law who considers our feelings even though Angie is gone.

When Eric brought Connie to our house to meet us just a few days before they were to be married, I gave her a mother-daughter figurine and wrote Connie and Sophie on the bottom. I wrote Connie a letter, and one of the things I explained to her was that since Angie died I have been calling her “Mommie Angie” to Sophie. I did this because I thought someday Sophie would have another mother. Now she has “Mommie Connie,” I explained. I wanted her to know that she has a place in our hearts, as well as in Eric’s heart, and that we are happy that Sophie loves her.

We can know actions such as these are pleasing to God when we compare this type of response to that of John the Baptist when he was preparing the way for Christ, without jealousy or rancor (Matt. 11:10; John 3:28-30). This is a Christian principle to be followed even when we are in deep emotional pain and when we must make godly adjustments to new situations.

After the wedding Eric and Connie never pressured Sophie, but before long she was calling Connie “Mom.” Many times I have thought about how glad I am that when I was raising Angie, I taught her about the value of finding a Christian man to marry. Losing her would have been so much harder had she married a man who was not saved. In one of the letters Angie wrote to me, she mentioned that it was her goal from a child to marry a Christian man, have his children and raise them to love God, too.

Result of Choices

Whether or not we find joy in our lives depends at least partly upon the choices we make. No, making good choices does not allow us to avoid all pain and suffering in this life. However, the decisions we make certainly impact on how we handle the stormy crises of life when they strike our peaceful lives.

Do you remember an Old Testament leader who emphasized the need to make a good choice? After the death of Moses, Joshua was chosen to lead the Israelites. He led them into the Promised Land and through many difficult times. His faith remained strong. Shortly before his death, Joshua challenged the Israelites, saying:

Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, **choose you this day whom ye will serve;** whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: **but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord** (Joshua 24:14,15).

Joshua's life was full of choices. When Moses sent him to spy out the land, he was one of only two who gave a good report. Ten spies spoke negatively of their ability to overcome the strong people who lived in Canaan. They described them as "giants" and cautioned, "We were in our own sight as grasshoppers" (Numbers 13:27-29, 31-33).

When the people listened to the ten negative spies, Joshua and Caleb “rent their clothes,” (Num. 14:6) as a sign of their dismay and extreme sorrow at the bad report. Refusing to revel in gloom, despair and abject pessimism, they urged the Israelites to choose to follow God and have faith in His power, saying:

If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us; fear them not (Num. 14:8,9).

The people made a bad choice. They listened to the ten negative spies. As a result, God said that all of the Israelites twenty and older would die in the wilderness, except for Joshua and Caleb. They were blessed because they chose to serve God!

Regardless of the trials we face, each of us has a choice to make. We can be like Joshua and Caleb and continue to serve God. We can trust and obey God.

Joy in the Morning

Only when we determine to **serve the Lord** regardless of what trials we face in life, will we find that...

.... weeping may endure for a night, but
joy cometh in the morning (Psalm 30:5).

Your night may be short or long. Hold fast to God's unchanging hand, and He will bring you to **joy in the morning**.

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Use this page to list some of the many blessings you have, regardless of what trials you are facing. Ponder the wonderful song, "Count Your Blessings."

2. What does Hebrews 12:2 teach us about Christ's focus when He was facing the trial of dying on the cross? Does this verse mean that Jesus was unaware of His future mental and physical anguish (Matt. 26:39,42,44,45; 16:21)?
3. What does 1 Peter 4:12,13 teach us about the focus we should have as we face trials?
4. What can we learn about the value of bringing souls to Christ as we study 1 John 1:3,4? Also consider Psalm 51:12,13 and 126:5,6.

5. Read Prov. 22:6 and discuss some of the areas in which we must properly train our children if we want to reap the benefits in future years. How do the choices we make about child rearing impact our lives in the future; especially when facing or encountering sad times?

6. Explain why it is very important for parents to pray for the parents who are raising their own children's future spouses.

7. Read Matt. 5:45 and describe some of the blessings that are here for all humans, saved or unsaved (like food).

8. Which blessings are available only to those who are saved, as we read in Eph. 1:3? (Cf. Rom. 8:26-28.)

9. Read about Hannah's desire to have a baby and God's answer to her prayer in 1 Samuel 1 and 2. What did Hannah promise to God in 1 Sam. 1:11? Did she keep her vow?

10. Tell about God's answer and what Hannah did as is recorded in 1 Sam. 1:20-28 and 2:19. The Israelites were greatly blessed by the life of Samuel, one of God's prophets.
11. How can God be glorified when Christians are undergoing trials? Read 1 Peter 4:11-19, and comment on how this relates to our suffering in this life.
12. Read 1 Peter 5:6-11 and explain how you can grow stronger as you continually strive to submit to God, regardless of what trials you face in life. (Cf. 2 Tim. 2:3,4 and 2 Cor. 12:7-10.)