

Promises For Now And Evermore

Steve Flatt

Promise for Friendship

John 15:12-17 is one of the richest and most cherished promises to be found anywhere in the Bible. It promises friendship with Jesus. Now let that sink in. We're talking about the same Jesus who put the stars throughout the universe, and who along with God, the Father, according to Colossians 1:15-20, set this earth in place and gave mankind life.

We're talking about the One that scripture calls the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, we're talking about the Supreme Being of the universe. Jesus says in John 15, "You are my friends." You talk about having friends in high places, they don't come any higher.

We're going to focus on that promise today in how rich and meaningful it is. Let's start with the idea about friendship. What is a friend? There are all kinds of definitions. Someone says a friend is someone who's coming in when everybody else is going out. Somebody said a friend is somebody who'll buy your lunch, even if they don't have an expense account. That's pretty good.

Erma Bombeck said, "A friend is somebody who won't go on a diet when you're fat." I've always liked her definition. Somebody else said, "False friends are like shadows. They're close to us when the sun shines, but in the darkness they disappear."

I remember when I was in undergraduate school, I had a psychology professor tell us that if you really had three dear close friends, you were rich beyond measure. When I heard that the first time, I kind of shrugged that off and laughed and thought what a crazy theory because I had lots of friends. But as I listened to the explanation of what real friendship is and as experience taught me those lessons, you begin to wonder: Do I have three real friends?

Do you know what a friend is? Here it is: Friends are two people who love each other. That's it. Friends are two people who deeply love each other. Now friendship is not an exclusive relationship. You can be a friend with somebody and have another relationship with them. For example, my wife

is my best friend. I love her deeply because she's my wife, but I love her deeply anyway. I share with her, and she shares with me. We're friends.

I think it's good for a parent to be a friend to a child and a child to a parent, as long as that does not prohibit that parent from carrying out the parental responsibilities. You can be a friend to the person you work for. You can be a friend to people who work under you. You see the only criteria for friendship is two people who love each other, two people who deeply love each other.

Read John 15:12-17 again, Jesus talking to his disciples said "You are my friends." But, I want to show you what is at the start of this passage and what is at the end of it.

Verse 12 says "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." Verse 17 states "This is my command: Love each other." Do you see how love is at the beginning of this business about friendship and love is at the end of it? Somebody said, "Love is the wrapping paper in which friendship comes." That's right. If somebody is my friend and I love him and he loves me, I will naturally be giving to them and they in turn will be giving to me. That's friendship. If you see a relationship where only one person is giving, it's not friendship. That's false. But if there is a mutual giving each to the other, then you've got a friend.

1. Jesus gives us friendship "You are my friends." (verse 14) What does Jesus give us in friendship? How can He make that claim? What's He done for me? How can He claim to be my friend? First of all, He has given to us, Himself.

Verse 13 says, "Greater love has no man than this, than he lay down his life for his friends." That's hard to argue with, isn't it? How on earth could I better prove my friendship to you than if I were willing to literally sacrifice my life, take it away in order to save you?

Friends often sacrifice things for another friend. We sacrifice money, we sacrifice time, we sacrifice our feelings, we may sacrifice some of our worldly goods, but very few times in history will a friend literally sacrifice a life for another friend. The most amazing thing about this is, Jesus made that sacrifice before we were his friends. In fact he made the sacrifice so that we could become his friends.

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." (Romans 5:6) He had to initiate it. We couldn't do a thing until he made that initiation. Verse 7 states a basic fact of life, "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die." You see that every now and then, somebody will die for a friend. If it's a mutually giving relationship, every now and then somebody will lay that down., "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Verse 8) The amazing thing is, Jesus died for us before we were his friends. He died for us while we were his enemies.

How can that be? Because while we were still sinners and sin by definition is enmity to God. My friend, he died so that I could become his friend. The first thing He gave us was himself.

2. He gives us knowledge and insight. "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15) Jesus is near the end of his life. The apostles and the other disciples have been following him, and to them He has been the master.

Two chapters prior to this in John 13, when Jesus came into that upper room, they were all sitting around prideful. Nobody would take a basin and wash each other's feet, as was their custom. Jesus picked up the towel and the basin, he went around and washed each of his disciples' feet to their shame. At the end of that he said, "I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master..." (John 13:16) Now that you've seen the master do this, follow my example.

He said the same thing in Matthew 10:24 talking to them, "No servant is greater than his master..." You see for three years, Jesus had these men following him basically in a master/servant relationship, but now in the last week of his life, knowing that his mission is nearing completion, He tells them and by implication tells us: I don't call you servants anymore, because you see servants don't know the master's business, but friends do.

The word "servant" there means slave. If you go back into the era and time frame in which Jesus was living and teaching, a servant or bond slave was just a living tool. Nothing was ever explained to a slave. There was no relationship between a master and a slave. You just did what you were told. There were no questions asked. Somebody said, "Do this," you just

did it. If you didn't do it, you might die. But Jesus said, that time is finishing now, because I'm sharing with you what I'm all about. I want you to know my mind, I want you to know my heart, I want you to know my plan, and I want you people to be chief in my kingdom.

Do you see that's the difference? A friend knows what another friend thinks. A friend knows what another friend wants. A friend knows what another friend feels. A friend knows what another friend's goals are. Jesus said, there was a time when you didn't understand. In fact, they did not understand as He was explaining. They wouldn't understand until a few days later, after the Resurrection, but they were nearing that point of understanding.

Now the great news is that even though we weren't with the 12, and we didn't sit at Jesus' feet physically, our friend, Jesus, has given us understanding. He has shared with us his purpose. He shared with us his plan. He shared with us his expectations. He shared with us his intent to return. He shared with us that He's made a reward on the other side, and in addition to the Word he's even given us the gift of the comforter, the Holy Spirit that he talked about in this same reference to help lead us in all truth.

Now don't misunderstand, we don't know everything. It is not the intent of God for us to have the mind of God in totality, our feeble little finite minds couldn't handle that. But the good news is, we're friends because he's not keeping us in the dark, he's given us understanding.

3. Jesus gives us status "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit---" Our friend has given us status, and he can do that because he is king.

The idea of a monarchy is an awfully difficult concept to us. We don't live in the reigns of kings. We see the pomp and circumstances associated with British royalty, but we know that's all just a figurehead. We live in an age where friendship with a high public official can sometimes be a precarious thing, because public accountability puts influence peddling and favors from friendship under great scrutiny, doesn't it? But keep in mind, Jesus didn't live under a democracy, and in that time and that place, there were no democracies around. They were unknown. People lived under monarchies and those who were friends of the king had unbelievable status. It was just different because anything the king wanted on a whim, anything the king said was law. No questions asked, so friends of the king could and would freely ask for favors, special considerations, amnesties,

appointments, and it would be given to them without question. Why? Simply because they were friends of the king.

You and I have a hard time understanding that. It didn't have to be based on any merit or on any ability. They were friends of the king. Jesus said, the great news, I've chosen you to be my friends. You didn't have any merit, you didn't have any ability, but I'm the king and I'll choose you to be my special friend.

There is no feeling quite like being chosen out from among others, is there? Because of my height, most all of you know I used to play basketball. But, I grew before I ever had any coordination. I remember when I was little boy, I wanted to play with the bigger boys because I was about their height, but I was awfully clumsy and awfully skinny. I would go down to the boy's club and want to play. They would start picking out teams. Have you ever stood in line to play in some softball or basketball game and watch them pick every other kid in the line, and you're just standing there with that head sinking lower because you were not one of the ones picked? Many a time I would go out there and they'd choose the teams and I was still left standing.

But there was one guy who was three years older than I who was a great athlete and he also lived two doors down, and was my buddy. Every now and then, he got to be captain. About the second or third pick, out of pure mercy and grace, he would say, "I'll take Flatt." Boy you talk about smile, I'd walk over there and get in line. I didn't deserve that, I didn't merit that, but you see the status was given because of friendship from the king.

4. Jesus gives us power "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit---fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." (verse 16) Isn't that great? He says, when you're my friend, you ask it in my name, and I'm going to supply those things. Now if you're a new Christian you may not understand. This is not some kind of "Carte-Blanche" for selfishness. Well great, Jesus, give me this, give me that. No, he says, what you ask in my name, "in my name" means under my authority and within the scope of my will. He says, as you become my friend and as you ask for those things you know I would love for you to have, here's the promise, I'm going to give them to you.

He gave himself, his very life. He gives us understanding that we could have from no other source. He gives us status. He lifts us up in a way that

no other human being on the face of the earth could, and he gives us power that could come in great measure from no other individual.

But what do we give him? Remember "Friendship is two people loving each other, and two people giving to each other."

- A. My obedience. This is a conditional promise for Jesus said, "You are my friends, if you do what I command." When you read that at first blush, it makes you think "huh," some kind of friendship as long as you do everything I say. Sounds more like the master/servant relationship. No! No! It's not that at all. Simple fact of the matter is, we've got a friend in Jesus who is so superior, so exceedingly more knowledgeable and so exceedingly more powerful that his asking for our obedience is simply for our benefit and for our betterment.

Let me liken it this way. Suppose you had a close friend who was a jet airplane pilot, you know one of those big jumbo jet pilots. Have you ever been in the cockpit of one of those things? Switches and dials and knobs all around. Imagine he let you go in the cockpit with him for a flight, pilot and co-pilot, and you were sitting in there and he would probably tell you, at least if I'm flying in the plane I hope he would: "Don't touch any of these, okay! Just sit and watch." That's his command. "In a minute when we get up, I'll show you one you can touch, but don't you touch anything until I tell you to touch it, all right?" Remember you're privileged just to be here in the cockpit. Now if you're this man's friend and you get up in the air and you just reach over and start flipping all those dials, now what's going to happen?

You see the point is, that's not being a friend, that's being a fool! You're not his friend, you're not even your own friend if you deliberately disobey and cause that which leads to your own destruction. Jesus said, look I'm not trying to be demanding in the sense of being some kind of ruthless monarch, I just want you to obey me, it's going to be for your benefit, and that will be what you give back to me as my friend.

- B. Produce some fruit. "You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to bear fruit, fruit that will last." (verse 16) Your obedience to his will is going to bear fruit, it's just going to lead to a changed life. It's going to lead to behavior. Why would he want you to bear fruit? So that other people will be led to that same friend you have. That's the main reason fruit needs to be born in my life. That's

the reason my life needs to be changed as a Christian. That's the reason you live to a higher standard and march to the beat of a different drummer. Number one reason is, so that other people all around me will be drawn to the same friend that I have.

When you become a friend of Jesus, there's not a burden you have that you cannot take to him in prayer that he will not begin to lift as you take it to him. "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (Hebrews 2:18) How does he do that? I don't know. There are some things we don't have the capacity to understand. But Hebrews 2:18 says, if I take that which troubles me, which tempts me and place it before him, he will begin to take that burden away.

Jesus also promises us this friendship, "Therefore I command this, love one another." (verse 17) If Jesus is my friend, and I truly do love him as a friend, the beauty is that will empower me to love other people who are also his friends in a way that the world really can't understand. But you can love me as your friend because we both share the same friend. What a friend we have in Jesus. Isn't that great? What a precious promise in John 15. Amazing Grace #1164 - Steve Flatt, June 19, 1994

A Promise of Heaven

The Most Precious Promise of All

The Second Coming

This promise is still unfulfilled. Second only to salvation it is the greatest promise of all. It is the promise of Jesus Christ coming again. A promise made initially by Jesus, himself. He said to his closest disciples "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you." (John 14:1) and "if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:3)

But there will be some in the last days who will say in scoff, "Where is this Second Coming? Where is this that we've been reading about? Doesn't everything just go on like it always has? The sun comes up in the morning. The sun goes down in the evening. Where is the second coming?" (2 Peter

3:4) By the way there is a doctrine for that. It's a philosophy called "uniformitarianism." You think about it, the name says it all. Everything is uniformed. Everything just keeps happening the way it always has. Peter explains there, and says, "Just because the Lord is patient, just because he is waiting hoping that more will come to repentance, don't you think that the promise isn't there." (2 Peter 3:9)

As you go through the New Testament, you'll find promise after promise that Jesus is coming again. Among those promises you'll find certain things that help us understand it. For example, we're told that no man knows when it'll be as it will come as a thief in the night. (2 Peter 3:10)

"But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." (3:8) Two verses later, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief." That's exactly the same thing 1 Thessalonians 5:1 says, "the Lord is going to come like a thief in the night" Jesus himself said "I don't know the day or the hour, only the Father knows that." (Matthew 24:36)

One of the things I can be sure of whenever I have anybody tell me they know when Jesus is coming back again is that I'm listening to a false prophet. I hear all these things about how we're living in the last days, era or age. The last days started with the birth of the church. We've been living in the last days for 1,900 years, and the world may end tonight. Jesus may come back today, but he may also let this earth stand 1,900 more years. We simply do not know.

The other things the Bible provides are several characteristics associated with the Second Coming. Paul says, when Jesus comes back again on that great and glorious day, whenever it may be there is going to be from the Christian perspective:

1. A call from the Lord himself
2. A loud command
3. The trumpet call of God
4. The dead in Christ will rise first
5. Those Christians who are still alive on earth at that time will be caught up in the air with the Lord and the dead in Christ who have arisen. (2 Thessalonians 4:16)

Paul also gives us the unbeliever's perspective. "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels."

1. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.
2. They will be punished with an everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power. (2 Thessalonians 1:7)

Same event is described by two markedly different perceptions because that day will look quite different depending upon whether or not you are an obedient believer trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are told elsewhere in Scripture that when the Lord comes again, the heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, the earth will be laid bare, that's told to us in 2 Peter 3:10. We're told that when Jesus comes again, it's going to usher in the judgment of all humanity. That's in 2 Peter 3:7, Jude 1:7, a number of other places. So we're told a good bit about what the day of the Lord, the Second Coming of Jesus is going to be like.

For the purpose of this lesson I don't just want us to know that there is the promise of Jesus coming again, you probably already knew that. I don't just want you to know all the characteristics that are going to be associated with that day. What I want us to understand are the day-to-day implications on our lives, right now, because we have the promise of the Second Coming.

Paul deals with the second coming of Jesus and he relates it to the decisions and the attitudes that the Thessalonians needed to embrace because of the reality of that second coming. The reason Paul deals so much with the second coming of Jesus Christ in 1 Thessalonians is because his co-worker, Timothy, had gone to visit the Christians in Thessalonica. Timothy came back and reported three basic things. The Thessalonians

1. Have been persecuted
2. Are standing up well under that persecution.
3. They have been sound in doctrine.
4. They are not given away key elements of the truth.
5. They are concerned about what has happened to those Christians who have died before the Second Coming

It's that last part of Timothy's report that gives us the reason why so much about the promise of the Second Coming is in this first letter to the church at Thessalonica. The following are some nuggets from 1 Thessalonians

about the Second Coming and the context that Paul uses to show us what we need to know about day to day living.

1. Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians. (verse 2)
2. He remembers their labor, love and faith. (verse 3)
3. They were a model to all the people in Macedonia. (verse 7)
4. They turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. (verse 9)
5. They wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Do you see there at the end of verse 10 that reference to the Second Coming? Paul says in that context, he says, while you're waiting for Jesus to come again, I am glad that you've turned from idols to serve the true and the living God. Here is the first thing the promise of Jesus' Second Coming should do for each and every one of us. When it sinks in, when you and I embrace that concept not just intellectually, but right here in the heart, you change your lifestyle.

Peter was the one who gave the graphic description about how Jesus is going to come again how the heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will melt underneath the heat, and the earth will be laid bare. Do you know what he says in the next verse? "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?" (Verse 11) That's a good question. We know the end. What kind of people ought we to be? He answers his own question. He says, "You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming."

The promise of Jesus' coming again, motivates us to turn from worldly interest, worldly behavior, worldly worship, and to turn to godly interest, godly behavior, godly worship. Somebody says, "Well, wait a minute, Steve, Jesus hasn't come yet. It's been almost 2,000 years and he hasn't come so it may be another 2,000 years. Why do I need to turn to him now?"

Before that question can be answered you realize how foolish it is and how simple the answer is. If you and I surely know a basic axiom of life, it's this: The decisions you make now determine your destiny later. Isn't that right?

The decisions you make now determine your destiny later. If a student is a sophomore in high school and that student wants to go to college, that student has to make a decision right then to take a certain curriculum that

will allow him or her to be able to enroll in higher education. If a student starts college, that freshman, if he wants to be a physician one day, has to make a decision right then to engage in a certain curriculum and to do rather well in that curriculum, or he is not going to have a chance to go to medical school.

If I choose to commit a felony right now, then I'm reserving my place in the Folsom Hilton. Isn't that right? Because we want or don't want a certain destiny, we will make the appropriate choices right now. That's the way life is. The biggest of all destinies and the biggest of all choices is: If I want to meet the Lord in the air, before the fire and the brimstone, I need to make choices about my lifestyle right now.

"For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy." (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20) You may have never read those words before, or really never let them sink in. Paul said, when the Lord comes again, I'm going to receive a crown. He said, you, Thessalonians, are that crown. The Greek word for crown could be used one of two ways, sometimes they use it to refer to a symbol of royalty, you know, a crown on the head of a king or a queen, but they also use it to refer to a crown of victory, the award that an athlete would receive after winning a contest. Well, Paul is alluding to the latter.

He says, "When I stand with Christ in the air at his second coming, and I see you Christians at Thessalonica joining me in the air, that is going to be my crown. That is going to be the greatest reward I ever received, that you are redeemed with me."

Here's the second implication of the Second Coming of Jesus: I want to take somebody with me. In fact, I don't just want to take somebody with me, I want to take several people with me. I want to take my whole family. I don't want anybody to be left out. I'm talking about my biological family, my physical family. I want to take my friends, I want to take every friend I know. I want to take all of you with me. I want to do something, anything to influence you to make that journey with me in the air.

The reason we have prepared this lesson is because we want to say something that will move you to obey the gospel so that you will go with us. If you've ever won someone to Christ, you know a joy that's absolutely unique. There is no greater feeling, there is no greater satisfaction. But listen to me, even that joy will pale beside the joy that you'll feel when you

join the Lord in the air and you look across the sky, and you see the face of someone that you influenced for Christ. You see knowing that there is going to be a Second Coming, tells me I need to be looking out for other people spiritually.

Paul states in chapter 3, that the Second Coming of Jesus affects our relationships. Read with me verses 12 and 13 from 1 Thessalonians 3. "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes (see there's the Second Coming) with all his holy ones." Verse 12, here's the implication: Jesus is coming again, so you make sure that your love overflows for other Christians and everybody else you contact. See, that's the main thing.

D. L. Moody once said something that I've always remembered. He said, "The main thing I've learned in my life, is that the main thing is to concentrate on the main thing." Do you know what the main thing is? If you don't, Jesus tells you. He said, the main thing is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. And the second main thing is likened to it. It is to love your neighbor as yourself. Knowing that Jesus is coming again, tells me I dare not forget those main things, how about you?

"If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, is a liar." (1 John 4:20) Is that blunt or what? I mean is that to the point? He goes on in that same verse and says, "For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen." I'll tell you something that is impossible, absolutely impossible. To love God and to have several hateful relationships with your fellow man. Do you hear that? Don't say you're doing it, because you're not. Don't claim to be a faithful Christian and have relationships full of jealousy, envy, hatred, and strife. John says, "If you can't love your brother whom you have seen, how can you love God whom you've not seen?" Paul said, in light of the Second Coming of Christ, I want to get my relationships in order. I really want to love the people around me.

"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." (Verses 13 and 14)

This was really the primary reason that Paul wrote the book of 1 Thessalonians. The Second Coming insures life beyond the grave. It's interesting that in Thessalonica they had discovered among the ruins there a stone that had this inscription. They don't know if it was a part of the building, or if it was erected over a grave, who knows? But the stone says this: "After death, no reviving. After the grave, no meeting again."

Now think about that. Those early Christians could have walked by that inscription, read it and thought is that right. After death, no reviving. After the grave, no meeting again." What about my dad, what about my mom, what about my brother and sister, what about my wife, what about the little child I put in the grave?

Paul says in chapter 4, "Because Jesus is coming back again, don't you worry about them." If a man has lived in Christ, then when he dies, he has died in Christ. Even when he's dead, he's still in Christ and when Jesus comes again, he will rise in Christ.

Romans 8:35 is one of the great questions in the Bible, "What shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Then Paul gives the answer. Nothing. "Neither death or life." (Verse 38) Just because you die doesn't mean you're out of the Lord. That same passage says, "When Jesus comes again, the dead in Christ will rise all over the world to meet him in the air." I can't wait to see that, can you? From Alaska to Argentina, from Bulgaria to Bolivia, from Chile to Chicago, from Denver to Denmark, from Edinboro to Ethiopia, and every person in Christ is going to be up in the air being changed and transformed. The question is: Will you be there? Will you be among the dead in Christ? I am, and it's going to be a beautiful place.

The doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus is not just some archaic intellectual promise that makes no difference in your life. It makes all the difference in your life. It makes a difference about every decision you make about the course of your life. It makes a difference about every relationship you have. It makes a difference about what you share with other people. And it makes a difference about how you face death, both your own and those closest to you. It is truly one of the greatest promises in the Bible. Amazing Grace #1168 -Steve Flatt, July 17, 1994

Promise for Overcoming Temptation

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

How's that for a great promise? I'm not sure offhand if I can think of a better promise anywhere in the entire Bible. It's the most universal promise I know because everyone of us is tempted, aren't we?

Let's think about temptation for a moment before we really delve into that promise and all that it means. Mark Anthony, the famous philosopher, scholar, warrior, and statesman, the one who was the suitor of Cleopatra, a man who was almost without "peer" in history. His tutor once said, "O Marcus, O colossal child, able to conquer the world, but unable to resist the temptation." I have a feeling that assessment doesn't only describe Mark Anthony, how about you?

Temptations are certain - The first thing we can say without any doubt is that temptations are certain. A temptation is a trap that's set before you by Satan. It's his lure to get you to sin.

We usually think of temptations as very negative things, because they lead us to that which is our destruction. But quite frankly, temptations are almost always packaged very, very attractively.

Do you know the difference between a trial and a temptation?

James, the half brother of Jesus, makes that clear. He says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance." (James 1:2-3) Therefore, a test (trial) is that which is allowed upon you or even sent upon you by God for your character development.

But in that same chapter down at verse 13, James says "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone."

You see temptations are sent by Satan for your devastation. Tests are sent by God for our development. Temptations are by designed for our

devastation. As long as the devil's around, there will be temptations. You know the old adage that there are two certainties, death and taxes, right? Well, there really is at least one more. There will always be temptation. No one is exempt, not the young, not the old, not the educated, not the uneducated, not male, not female, not black and not white. I don't care how many years or how closely you've walked with God you will not be immune from temptation. In fact let's debunk that myth right now.

There are a lot of people who believe the more spiritual you are the more you will begin to vindicate and abstain yourself from temptations. It's not true.

Look at the children of Israel, God's chosen people back in the days of the Exodus when Moses led them out. Look at the spiritual privileges and blessings that they had.

Paul says in verse one, "For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ." (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)

Do you see all the advantages they had? They had the cloud, they followed it. They had the food from God. They drank the water given to them by God. Paul said Christ himself was accompanying them. "Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert." (vs. 5) That's one of the great understatements in the Bible. God was only pleased with two of them out of about two million. Why? They fell victim to temptation. Temptations are certain.

Temptations are common – Though they come in different guises, Satan uses the same basic ploys on all of us.

We're told some of the temptations that the children of Israel kept falling victim to. "Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: 'The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry'." (vs. 7) Now idolatry is simply putting something in God's place, giving some object his preeminence and his status. It's true today as much as it was in the days of the Israelites. It flourished in Paul's day. It's a common temptation.

He said they fell victim to sexual immorality. Not much has changed, has it? It's a common temptation. (vs.8)

"We should not test the Lord, as some of them did" (vs. 9) It's the idea of trying to put God on the spot, playing games with him, testing his patience and taking liberties with his mercies. The children of Israel did that and oh so many people do that now.

“Do not grumble, as some of them did - and were killed by the destroying angel.” (vs. 10) That may be the greatest temptation facing believers then and now. What I'm trying to get you to see is, every temptation that Paul cited among the Israelites was present in his day 1,600 years later, and those same temptations are present right now 1,900 years after Paul. Idolatry, immorality, arrogance, discontentment; you boil it down and we, humanity, share the same basic temptations. Nothing has changed.

The Apostle John says in 1 John 2:16 that you can take all the temptations and the sins they lead to, and group them into one of three categories: (1) lust of the flesh, (2) lust of the eyes and (3) pride of life. But "No temptation has seized you (listen) except what is common to man." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Common pattern - James tells us the pattern. "Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." (1 John 1:14) The Greek word that's used there for enticed is a fishing term. It doesn't take much imagination to see the principle does it? I'm not a very good fisherman, but I understand the concept.

You take a hook, but you don't just throw the hook in the water, do you? You've got to put something out there called bait, or we even call it a lure. That's an appropriate name. You see it has to be just the right one for a bass if you're going after a bass or just the right one for a trout if you're fishing for trout. When that thing hits the water, you make it attractive, and you pull on it and you twitch it and you get the attention. Until finally so caught up by their own desire for food, the fish hits it. James says that's exactly the way it is between Satan and us. Sure enough, the devil uses the same old bait on all of us, and he keeps reeling us in.

Temptations are crafty. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! (1 Corinthians 10:12) Oh be careful, temptations are so crafty. If you think you've got some kind of spiritual status, you're

beyond all that now and you know your maturity level has taken you to a whole sphere where you don't worry about falling to temptation. Bam! You're on your way down. In fact, we're told in the Bible that pride goes before a fall. (Proverbs 16:18)

The Pharisees caught themselves in that trap. They thought they were so obedient they were beyond sin and they didn't even recognize the fact that they were wallowing in it. You never climb too high, you never run too far. Be very, very careful about throwing stones at someone else who has fallen victim to temptation, because your time might be next. Now have I scared you enough about temptation? Surely I have. It's **certain**, it's **common** and it's **crafty**. But here is the best news, and this is our promise. Temptation is conquerable. It really is.

Temptation is conquerable - “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

That passage tells us several things.

1. Our God is faithful. He's not going to desert you when temptation surrounds you. He's not going to let you down. He's right there where He's always been and you can count on Him. You can count on Him to do what? You can count on Him to do things that are extremely important. He will keep that temptation within limits and boundaries. Now mark that down.
 - a. As strong as they seem at times, temptations are not limitless. They are bounded by God's power. Remember they are orchestrated by Satan, they're not random. Temptations are like bait to a fish, luring us to sin. But remember that God is stronger, wiser, and ultimately going to defeat Satan. Nothing that Satan uses as a ploy against us escapes God's notice, nor does it supersede his power.
 - b. God knows the power of every temptation. He knows each person's limitations are different and the power of each and every temptation. He will not let the combination of those two things create an overload.
2. Temptation is conquerable. When I have fallen victim to temptation, and wanted to indict God for letting me fall, though it was my own choice, I go back and reread the conversation that Satan had with God

Almighty the book of Job, where God said to Satan you can test my servant Job but you go this far and no farther. You see God knew exactly what he was doing. He has limits.

So temptation is conquerable, first of all, because:

1. God will keep temptation within limits.
2. God will provide a way of escape. That is the most magnificent part of the whole promise. When I find myself surrounded by temptation, if I'll just keep my eyes open, there's a way out right there. Sometimes I've had a hard time believing that because my eyes were so focused on the temptation. Have you ever fallen victim to that?

Think about the fish analogy that James uses again. Is the problem for that fish that it is in the water or is the fish being drawn to the lure by its desire for food? Is the problem that he doesn't have a way out? He's got every way in the world out. He's got a whole lake. He's got a whole ocean. He can take off and swim in a million different directions. That's not the problem. The problem is **his attention is absolutely obsessed on the bait**. The great news is there's a way of escape every time but one must focus on the escape not the lure, the temptation.

Key defenses - What does the scripture teach us about defenses against temptation? You prepare yourself for those testing moments that Satan puts before you, don't walk in blindly, or naively.

1. Run from temptation. When you see a temptation that's sent straight from the devil, run from it, don't toy with it, don't flirt with it and don't entertain it. Just run! You're not going to be the first human being to try to whip the devil one on one. A lot of human beings have tried and nobody has ever whipped the devil one on one yet. Samson thought he was pretty strong, didn't he? He thought he was tough. He thought he could handle anything, but ask Delilah how weak he was.

Be like Joseph, who when Potiphar's wife grabbed him by the coat and said, "come and lie with me." You talk about fleeing from temptation, Joseph literally fled and left his coat right there in her hand.

2. Guard your thought life. Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." As the fountain is, so will be the stream. Quench the spark and you stop the fire. Philippians 4:8 says, "whatever is true,

whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things. The reason for that is simply this: temptation flourishes on inconsistent thinking.

In the book of James, right after he talked about the luring nature of temptations, like a bait before a fish, he says, "Don't be deceived my brothers." You see temptation is built upon the premise of deception. I've wondered how many fish have been caught out there in all those lakes. Once they're in that net and are being pulled into the boat, I wonder how many of them are thinking, I wish I hadn't swallowed that. I wonder how many people who swallowed the bait and thought as they were being reeled in, I wish I hadn't swallowed that. Eve did the same thing. How was she tempted? How did she fall? She was deceived. So guard your thought life. Don't be deceived.

3. Fall in love with the Lord. This is so critical, so fundamental. Fall in love with the Lord. Who you love, changes your desires, and desire is the key to temptation. You see it goes back to that lure. That's the key.

When I was growing up at home, my Mom wanted me along with my sisters to do the dishes. Now I'll be honest with you. I would try to find every excuse in the world not to do those dishes. Mom, you know it hurts my back because the sink is too low and all this. Then I started dating my wife-to-be. I would go over to her house and eat. After dinner she'd say, "Hon, would you help me with the dishes?" I'd say, "Oh, I'd love too."

Now what's the difference? It has nothing to do with dishes. No. I had fallen in love with the one who wanted me to do the dishes. Now it's not that I didn't love my Mom. Oh, you understand, I don't have to go into all that. You see it's the same way, when you fall in love with Jesus, you'll find your heart more firmly set on the things that he desires instead upon the things that Satan desires. The key is having the right delight.

4. Pray. If you don't see the escape when temptation is all around you, and you don't remember the promise then Pray! Right then, right there. I don't care where you are, just drop that head, get down on your knees and pray, because prayer may be your means of escape.

Abraham Lincoln once wrote, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go." If you sense that you have nowhere else to go, go there and watch God give you that way out. Prayer has a way of totally diluting until it destroys temptation. Amazing Grace Class #1162 - Steve Flatt, June 5, 1994

Promise for Overcoming Worry

Do you worry a lot? Most of us do. Most of us spend hours each week, sometimes countless hours, worrying about all of our circumstances, the environment, what's happening around us, and what's threatening to happen to us.

Erma Bombeck, one of my favorite authors, wrote "I've always worried a lot, and frankly I'm good at it. I worry about introducing a group of people and going blank when I get to my mother. I worry about a shortage of ball bearings. I worry about the world ending at midnight and getting only three hours of a 12-hour cold capsule. I worry about getting in the *Guinness Book of World Records* under "pregnancy" world's oldest recorded birth. I worry about what the dog thinks when he sees me getting out of the shower. I worry that my daughter will marry an Eskimo and set me adrift on an iceberg when I can no longer feed myself. I worry about salesladies following me into the fitting room, oil slicks, and Carol Channing going bald. And I worry about scientists discovering someday that lettuce has been fattening all along."

You know her list tops mine. But we're learning that as a nation, we are worrying ourselves sick. We're living in what the American Psychological Association has labeled the "Age of Anxiety." The American Academy of Physicians has reported that at least two-thirds of all patients who occupy hospital beds are there because of stress-related illness.

Do you know what the three best-selling prescription drugs in America are? They kind of reveal the worry and anxiety that we're going through. Number one is tagamet. Tagamet is an ulcer medication. Number two is enderol, and enderol is prescribed for hypertension. And number three is valium, and valium is a tranquilizer. Do you see that? The three best-selling drugs in America and all of them are related to anxiety and illness. Somebody said in a 1988 *Newsweek* article that stress and worry costs our

nation's economy \$150 billion annually. The sad thing is most of it is all pure folly.

One psychologist reported in a study that 80 percent of all the things that we worry about never come to pass. Of that remaining 20 percent, three-fourths of that little fraction are things that we cannot do one thing about. In effect what they are saying is, only five percent of everything that people worry about is actually things that we can't do anything about and that will actually come to pass.

How about you, do you worry? What do we worry about? Think for a moment, sometimes misery loves company. I think worry likes company also. What are the things that we universally, collectively worry about? You can lump them into three major categories.

1. Money. To some degree we all do worry about money. Some way, somehow, you have, you do, and you probably will worry about money in the future.

Now money comes in a number of packages. You may worry about money in the form of how you're going to get your mortgage paid, how you're going to pay off your second mortgage or those ever increasing credit card bills. Maybe your worry in money concerns how you're going to get your kids through college, or how you're going to have enough to be able to retire when you want to finish work.

Maybe your worry is just about how to make ends meet month to month. Many of you are going through that struggle. Perhaps you're worrying like I did the other day when I went through the grocery store checkout line. I reached in for my checkbook and realized I had already written my last check. Half the groceries were already across the scanner. I reached into my wallet and had about \$42, and as those groceries were crossing the scanner, I was saying a little prayer to the Lord, "Please, please don't let it be more than \$42." The line was four-deep behind me and all I could see me doing is taking the Folgers back to the counter saying, "I can't pay for that." Guess what? It was about 19 cents short of that. But isn't it amazing how we worry about money? God is good, isn't he?

Even people who have tons of money, they probably worry about it more than anybody. Why? Because they worry about what to do with it, how to invest it, where to put it, how much to give away. It entraps them.

I think about the rich young ruler. In the story that was told by Jesus in Matthew 17, he came to the Lord and wanted the secret to eternal life. Jesus told him, "Keep the commandments." He said, "Which commandments?" That's just like humans, isn't it? You tell me which ones to keep, let's be specific. So Jesus named a few. And he said, "Well all those I've kept." Jesus said looking into his heart, "Then go sell what you have and give to the poor." Then the Bible said, that rich young ruler went away sorrowfully, for he had many possessions.

Do you know why he walked away sorrowfully? It was not because he really had many possessions, but because his possessions possessed him. He fell into the devil's oldest trap of thinking that what he had, made him what he was. So when you fall into that trap - you worry your little head off about money. We do worry about it, don't we? Sure we do.

2. The Future - We worry about our future. We worry about what's going to happen around the corner, particularly physically. We worry about our health, sickness, and death. Those things don't usually fall under the money worries, because quite frankly, money can't touch them. Money might buy medical care or a few vitamins, but frankly this is another whole realm that causes us anxiety. We worry about getting sick, or old, or useless.

I heard a story about that was kind of cute about President Bush in the last days of the campaign when he was running against Bill Clinton. He was in California visiting a retirement center, a nursing home, and he was shaking every hand he could. There was a little lady in a wheelchair, he bent down on one knee, took her hand on the wheelchair and patted it, then looked at her in the eye and said, "Ma'am, do you know who I am?" She looked up at him, paused a second, and she said, "Well no honey, but if you go over to that desk, they can tell you."

You know we laugh about that and think it's cute. The truth of the matter is, down deep in our souls we worry about the day that we can no longer take care of ourselves. We worry about the day when I might not even know myself or know you. If I had a quarter for every time somebody has said to me, "Oh, I pray I never have to go to a nursing home," I could retire today.

We worry about hearing the words, "You've got cancer." We worry about an airplane crashing when we're on it. We worry like old Fred Sanford about having the big one. We worry about our futures.

3. People You Love - I catch myself more than worrying about money today or worrying about what's going to happen to me; I worry about the people I love. I worry about my Mom, who is now widowed, how she is doing, what she's thinking and what her future is. I worry about my wife if everything is going along fine with her. I worry about my precious children. I think about them every day while they're off at school. I think about my oldest boy, Ethan, and I wonder what kind of peer associations he's forming. I wonder if anybody is teasing him. I wonder if he's learning proper values. I wonder if somebody is tempting him with drugs. I worry that he'll begin to like girls. Then I begin to worry that he won't like girls. My point is worry just keeps you in turmoil. Then my little son, Lee, I go through all that with him at his age and my daughter, Rachel, sometimes it's hard not to worry about other people. I'll confess that to you.

Now have I pretty well hit the nail on the head? Don't you worry about those same things? Don't you worry about money-related things? Don't you worry about your future? Don't you worry about other people?

Now what do we do about all that? Well, the great news is, God's got a magnificent promise. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:25-33)

The first word that catches my attention there is that word, "Therefore." Do you see it? By the way, whenever you're studying the Bible or anything else and you see the word, "therefore," you pay close attention to the context because there's a reason that it is "there-for." Why? Because it is telling you this is a conclusion reached by something just said. Isn't that right? Something has just been said, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry..."

That makes me want to go back to verse 24. What is it that he just said? Some people think it's totally unrelated, but it's the secret to overcoming worry. "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." One of the older translations says, "You cannot serve both God and mammon." By the way folks, there is the secret to overcoming worry. That's the reason in the next breath Jesus could say, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry..." All you've got to do is choose not just with your head, but deep within the pit and confines of your heart, who your Master is. That's right.

If you really commit your life to the Lord Jesus Christ and God, the Father, you have overcome the barrier for worry. If you find yourself a worryaholic, you need to check your heart and ask, "Have I really committed my life to where I'm trusting in Him?" You're either going to serve money and all the things money can buy or God. When you serve the reason you want money, stocks and material things, it is because they give you the illusion of control. It's the idea that if I had those things, I don't have to worry about things, I can control them. But it's an illusion, it's a mirage.

The truth of the matter is: if you're going to serve mammon, you'll find yourself worrying all the time. Because mammon keeps slipping through your fingers, and mammon keeps causing you to worry. But the Almighty God said "I will rest you in the security of my bosom." Let me tell you something if you've not learned it by now. Control is a silly illusion.

The key reason we worry is because we want to control things. I want to control everything! I want to my future, the economy and even the future of other people. Let's get real here. There's precious little in this world that I control. The only things I really control are my own choices. That's the truth. I don't even control the outcome of those choices, not all of them. Some, but sometimes I make a choice and things happen as a result of that choice I never even saw. If I think I've got to control everybody else, how they think, what happens to them, what they do, every sense that's flowing around me, and control everything in my home life, I am desolate.

Do you think you control? Jesus said, you think you control something, make a planet. That's silly we can't make a planet. Okay, just make it snow but nobody can do that. Then grow another inch. Do you see what he said? "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?" Go ahead,

just grow an inch. You cannot even control that. You can't control the number of hairs on your head, unless you go buy one to put on your head.

Do you see the point? If I will acknowledge God as my master, that is the key to the antidote for worry. The key word in Christianity is the word, "submission" being able to say, "God, you are God, and Lord, you are Lord." Even if the economy is like a roller coaster or that new car I've been saving for got a dent the first week I owned it or even if the doctor walks in and tells me, "Steve, you have cancer." Lord, what I know is you love me, and Lord what I know is you will take care of me not only through this life but even to the other side. With all my futile attempts at control, Lord I surrender. Worry tries to take the control from God and put it in our own hands. That's really what causes us to worry.

The Promise

1. It is irreverent. "For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them." (verse 32) It's irreverent to think that God won't take care of us.

2. It is irrelevant. "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (verse 27) I can't add an hour to my life by worrying about it. In fact, I'll probably shorten my life by an hour by worrying about it. It's irrelevant. Why take the time? Remember what we said at the start of the lesson? Ninety-five percent of the things we worry about either never happen or we couldn't control anyway.

3. It is irresponsible. "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'" (verse 31) That's just an irresponsible action. God's going to take care of that.

4. It is irritating. "If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" (verse 30) Do you see the irritation in Jesus' voice? If God takes care of the grass of the field, which is going to be thrown into the oven, won't he take care of you? O you of little faith are irritating to God.

Well what is the promise? I've been all around it. We've talked about the antidote and the characteristics of worry, but what is the promise? The promise is in verse 33. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well." That's it. The Lord must be your Master, not mammon, not things I want to control. You're my

Master and I'm going to seek you. I know that when I seek you Lord anything that I really need you're going to provide. I realize because we're packaged in flesh it's a hard thing for us to see. But one of these days, when we are robed in immortality and we have that incorruptible we may say, "God, that promise was as true and solid as anything ever has been. You really did provide anything I really needed." That's the truth. That's the promise for overcoming worry. So let's you and I seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and let him take care of the rest.

Adapted from Amazing Grace #1165 - Steve Flatt, June 26, 1994

A Promise for Salvation

This promise makes the others pale in comparison, the promise of salvation, deliverance from sin, freedom from its bondage, release from its guilt, salvation from eternal damnation and to see that replaced with eternal life.

Every now and then, you and I get so tangled up with the here and now that we really forget that we are pilgrims on our way to a greater place. But in those moments when we don't forget, we realize that above everything else salvation is what I need and salvation is what I desire. So the promise in 1 John 5:13 is especially meaningful. "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

I was in my mid-20's when I read that seriously for the first time, and it literally made my head jerk. I got to that verse and thought, what? John, the apostle, has written something here so that I can know that I'm saved because more than anything else in the world, I want the promise and the assurance of salvation. Do you know what I did that day? I went back and started all over again, and I read very slowly and very carefully to see those things that he had written so that I can know I'm saved.

Do you want the promise of salvation? Let's see facts he wrote.

1. You're a sinner. John says, if you want to embrace the promise of salvation and know you're saved, understand first of all that. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1:8) You're a sinner, I'm a sinner, everybody I know who reaches the adult years has chosen to sin, not born in sin, but chosen the path of sin.

He reminds us. "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives." (1:10) You see the problem, my sin. My sin separates me from an all righteous and an all holy God who has never sinned, who will never sin, and who cannot by his very nature abide with sin in his presence. That's a real problem, isn't it? I'm a sinner, you're a sinner, and we serve a God who will not live with any sin. That's why Romans 3:23 says, "...all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory..." And Romans 6:23, three chapters later, says, "The wages of that sin is death." That's our problem.

Do you know one of the great misconceptions that we have in our country? George Gallup reveals it every time he does a religious poll about heaven. He'll ask people who believe in a heaven, "do you believe you are going to heaven". Most of America says, yes. He then asked "Well, why do you believe you're going to heaven?" The typical response is: Because I think I'm as good as everybody else. But that's not the question. The problem doesn't deal with how good you are, or how good you may not be. Your goodness is not the issue. It's your badness that's the issue. Though you may be awfully good, you're still bad because you are still a sinner and the one sin that you first committed was enough to tarnish you to keep you out of presence of God for eternity. Do you understand that?

Sometimes we focus on our goodness. That would be like lining all of the American population up on the coast of California and saying, "On command, we're going to all jump in the Pacific Ocean, without food, without a rowboat, without a life jacket, without any aid of any kind and swim to Hawaii." Now how many are going to make it? That's what I thought. I'm not either.

But you know we could argue about how far we're going to make it. Some of you might not get even over your head before you drown because you're dangerous in a bathtub. Some of you are pretty good swimmers, maybe you could go a quarter of a mile, maybe you could go a half-mile. I think I could go the better part of a mile if the waves aren't too bad. Some Olympic swimmers might go 50 miles, maybe more, but I'll tell you what's going to happen to every one of us. We're going to drown. Whether you're 50 miles off shore, or 50 feet off shore, you're going to be dead as a doornail, because the issue is not how good a swimmer you are. The point is the chasm is too great. That's the point about my sin. You and I think we're good. If we had any glimpse of the chasm between little minute, vile humanity and the God who created the Universe, we would bow in shame and say like Isaiah "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of

unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." (Isaiah 6:5) The apostle John makes sure we know that we are a sinner.

2. Jesus Christ is the answer to sin. "I write this to you so that you will not sin." (1 John 2:1) Why? Because sin is to our own detriment. "But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 2:1-2)

Some of the older translations say, "The propitiation, atoning sacrifice, for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world." That's the best news you will ever hear, if you've never heard it, most of you have. But even if you have, it's the best news you'll ever hear.

You and I, when we stand before the judgment seat of God, the Father, have one who is our "advocate." That was a Greek term for defense attorney. The other day I went into a courtroom and I saw a defense attorney standing beside the defendant. Suddenly in my mind I thought of the picture of Jesus standing by me as I stand before the Father's throne.

The good news is, He said, He is the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice. The Greek root means, "to deflect," to deflect wrath. It was sometimes used in another form to refer to an instrument like a shield that would deflect the blows from swords and spears, from opposing soldiers. Do you see the point? When Jesus hung on that cross, all of the wrath of God that is aimed toward sin because he hates sin, hit that cross and Jesus deflected it from you and from me. And that's why he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Let's all understand that the key to salvation is Jesus Christ. That is the power of salvation. The apostle said, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven among men wherein we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) Do you want to know what that name is? It's the name Jesus.

Matthew 1:21, the heralding of Jesus' upcoming birth says, "give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." 1 Corinthians 15:22 says, "For as in Adam all men die, so in Christ all will be made alive." The great news is, when Jesus came out of that grave on the third day, that tomb was left empty. The bondage and the power of sin and damnation were left right there. It was broken by Jesus Christ, our atoning

sacrifice. Fact number one is I'm a sinner. Fact number two is Jesus Christ is the answer. What else does John tell us about the knowledge of salvation?

3. Claiming that salvation - "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well." (1 John 5:1) That's part of the answer.

"This is the one who came by water and blood---Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For these are three that testify: The Spirit, the water, and the blood; and the three are in agreement." (verse 6) Now that may sound a little confusing to you at first, but let's sort that out.

First of all, accepting the salvation that Jesus offers begins with the belief that he is who he said he was. God came in the flesh, the Son of God, that's what verse one of chapter 5 said. Make no mistake about it. That belief is the foundation for the eternal life that Jesus offers. You can do anything else you want, you can repent, you can be baptized, but if you do not believe in your heart that Jesus is God's son, you do not have the foundation for coming to him. But with that belief, there is the concept of repentance. Now quite frankly in this brief epistle, John has no direct reference to repentance, but I'm certain that his readers knew of it and it flows throughout the New Testament.

John the Baptist, the forerunner and the proclaimer of Jesus, came preaching a message of repentance as a prerequisite for forgiveness. Do you remember the day the church began in Acts 2? Peter stood up on behalf of all the apostles and preached about this man, Jesus. He closed by saying, "This man, Jesus, whom you crucified, God hath made him both Lord and Christ." And those who heard those words were pricked in their hearts, and they said, "Brothers what shall we do?" Peter said "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." (Acts 2:38)

In Acts 20:21, Paul while in Ephesus said "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."

So a belief is necessary in repentance. The culmination of the faith response of accepting Jesus into your life is baptism. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

This is the one who came by water and blood-Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.” (1 John 5:5-6) The language is almost poetic, it may be confusing. But do you see how he says the three testify: the spirit, the water, and the blood. And before that, he says, "When Jesus came, he didn't come with water only."

Now if you know something about your Bible, you know that when John, the baptizer, came as a forerunner, he said, I come only with water, but there's one who comes after me who baptizes with water and with the Spirit. Who was he talking about? He was talking about Jesus. That's who he was proclaiming. Sure enough Jesus did come with water and after his sacrifice He poured out the Holy Spirit upon all mankind and it's all possible because of the blood he shed on that cross. Do you see why those three, the Spirit, the blood, and the water, testify together?

The point of that metaphor in 1 John 5:6-8, is because of the blood that was shed on Calvary. When you and I are baptized in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of our sins, we are reenacting the very burial and resurrection of Jesus. At that time we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit along with the forgiveness of our sins and all three of those testify together. It's beautiful. Some people don't understand it, but that's how John and the rest of the New Testament writers tell us we come to the Lord Jesus Christ and accept the salvation he offers.

4. God adopts us as children. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1) When we come to Christ in obedience to the gospel, we are adopted as children. Galatians 4:7 says the same thing, so does the Ephesian letter.

5. He gives us his Spirit. "We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit." (1 John 4:13) He says the same thing in 1 John 3:24 "Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us." "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19) "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26-27) He "bears fruit in our lives" (Galatians 5:22-23) He works to help conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. (Romans 8:29)

What happens when one comes to Christ? What happens when one obeys the gospel? John says He gives you the Spirit to live within you to help you in your walk with the Lord.

6. Our lives change. Our lives change after coming to Christ and receiving forgiveness and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- a. First, we don't yield to sin with the same frequency that we did before becoming a Christian. "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him." (1 John 3:6)

Does that mean we're perfect people after we come to the Lord? No, remember "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives." (1 John 1:8-10) That was written to people who are already Christians. We do sin, but because we serve a different Lord and Master and because we have the gift of the Holy Spirit living inside us, helping us in our prayer life and in our walk to conform more like Jesus, we are different people. We don't fall victim to the same temptations. We don't long for the ways of the world and the ways of the flesh. No, we are changing day by day, growing closer and seeking after the things that God wants us to seek.

- b. It makes a difference in how we treat our fellow man. The Spirit does that in our lives. "We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen." (1 John 4:19-20)

Not only do we go away from the world values and following the way of Jesus, we are just going to treat our fellow man the way God wants us to do.

Summary

Let's go back to the original promise. It's the promise that you can know you're saved. Somebody may say, "Well, how can I know I'm saved?" It's not a hard thing.

1. You're a sinner. That's not a hard thing for most of us to know.
2. Jesus Christ is the answer through his atoning sacrifice.
3. Accept Jesus Christ as my Savior by believing, repenting, being willing to confess, and experience that new birth in baptism where the Spirit, and the water, and the blood, all testify in agreement to Jesus.
4. Is the Spirit of God bearing fruit in my life? I can sense that by whether my longings are to follow the devil in the world, or whether day by day it just seems to become a more natural thing to follow God's way. I can test it by how I'm treating each one of you every day. Am I loving you like a brother or am I trying to exploit and abuse you or ignore you?

I've heard people say, "I don't believe you can know you're saved." John says you can. Somebody says, "Oh, but it's complicated." No it's not. You've either accepted Jesus Christ, or you haven't. You've either obeyed the gospel or you haven't. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to examine one's own life and to say, "I'm either walking by the Spirit, or I'm not." It's not up to me to judge you and it's not up to you to judge me. But it's up to you to judge you.

The whole summary of this lesson is. "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." It's not all that hard, but the promise is sure. Do you have the Son of God in your life? (John 5:11-12)

Adapted from Amazing Grace #1166, Steve Flatt, July 3, 1994

A Promise for Strength

How strong are you? That's a pretty ambiguous question, isn't it? In fact you need more criteria and other questions answered before you can ever answer.

Do you mean in how many pounds can one bench press? Or, how many miles one can run without giving out. Maybe it doesn't deal with physical exertion. How much pain can one tolerate and retain consciousness? Are

you talking about how many pressures in your life you can bear at any one time?

In one sense the question, how strong are you, is too broad a question to answer. But in another sense, it's a very easy question to answer. The answer is: not very strong.

I don't really care what criteria you're talking about. If you're talking about pounds to be lifted, about miles to be run, pain to be endured, hardships or burdens to be born, the best of us are not very strong.

Now when we act like we are or when we say we are strong, it's either our pride coming out, or else we're making those statements in light of or in comparison to some other people. I may say I'm stronger than he is, I'm stronger than she is or I may say I'm stronger than most of the people I know in a particular criteria. But let's get real.

In light of all the pounds that could be lifted, miles to be run, pain to endure in a lifetime or burdens that need to be born, none of us are very strong. In fact we are not strong enough to get out of this world alive. Let "Father-Time" work on you a few days and he'll show you just how "un-strong" you are. I need the strength of God to make it through life.

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:28-31)

It's so beautiful in its entirety, I hate to try and break it down and dissect it but there are four key facets.

1. **Who God is.** There was a little girl one time who was scared of going into a room because it was dark, and that was where her bed was, she needed to sleep there. Her parents finally told her, they said, "Now look honey, don't you be afraid to go in that room because God's there, and he won't leave you alone." Well finally that gave her enough courage to slip into that dark room and to crawl up into bed. But she thought about that

promise a little bit, and she said, "God, if you are here, don't say anything because it will scare me to death." It would me too, wouldn't it you?

What about God? Who is God? Isaiah, the prophet, tells us, the three omni (meaning all or completely) characteristics of God:

a. "The Lord is the everlasting God." (verse 28) That tells us that he's omnipresent with respect to time. There's never been a time when he wasn't. There will never be a time when he isn't. In fact, time is absolutely nothing to God. He's not bound by it, he doesn't even measure things by it, and you and I can't even begin to comprehend that because everything we do is measured by time. God doesn't deal with time. God said, "I am that I am. I always have been, and I always will be."

Next the verse says, "He is the Creator of the ends of the earth..." There's never been a place that he wasn't. He put it there. There's never been a place that he isn't. Our God is omnipresent. He is everywhere. You don't leave his presence.

b. He is omnipotent. He is all powerful. Not only did he create the ends of the earth, but "He will not grow tired or weary..." His strength, his power, his energy, all of those things are absolutely limitless.

c. He is omniscient. He knows absolutely everything "...and his understanding no one can fathom." Put simply, he knows it all. He knows everything. Nothing gets by him. He is absolutely all-wise.

You and I are most ill-equipped to embrace the concept of God. Like Moses, I so desperately want to look on his face. But also just like Moses, I have nowhere near a fraction of the capacity to do that.

The greatest thing about heaven in my humble estimation is that Christians are going to look on the face of God. I'm not all that excited about the street of gold. Oh, I might want to see it especially when Revelation said it would be as "transparent as glass" or the gates made out of pearl, but they are only figurative expressions to show the grandeur of Heaven. I am excited about the reunion I'll have with loved ones and saints who've gone on before, that grand reunion of all the redeemed.

The thing I want most of all from heaven is to be able to look on the face of God Almighty. You and I here cannot mentally embrace him, he is completely sovereign. He is transcendent. He is beyond comprehension. In fact, have you ever noticed in Scripture, the reaction of people who somehow were given that gift just to take a glimpse of God one way or the other?

God told Moses "You can't look on my face and live. I'm just going to put you there on the rock and let you view the back side." When Moses went up on the mountain and received the law, the Ten Commandments, he came down without seeing God face to face. But God spoke to him and when he came down from the mountain, his face was so radiant, everybody was afraid of him. He put a veil on because his presence literally glowed.

When Job was in the presence of God, and God was asking him questions face to face, Job bowed down on his face and said, "I am unworthy, how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth." (Job 40:4)

"I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound. Decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled." (Habakkuk 3:16) When Isaiah glanced into the throne room, instead of saying, "Hallelujah, isn't it great to see God." He said, "Woe to me! ... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips." (Isaiah 6:5) John, the apostle, said "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead." (Revelation 1:17) There's nothing I want more than to see the face of God, but if I were to look upon it, it would kill me.

What I'm trying to get across is that we've got a God who is far beyond our comprehension. J. B. Phillips wrote a book many years ago entitled Your God is Too Small, and the title says it all. I want to tell you something about your view of God. It's too small. You say, you don't even know how I view God. I don't care how you view God, it's too small. Take your view of God and multiply it a million times, it's still too small. What Isaiah wants to make sure that we understand is, if we are going to embrace this promise for strength, we need to understand that we have a God who is able to back it up.

2. **Who we are.** The second facet of the promise is trying to understand who we are. That's easier to do. "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak." (Isaiah 40:29). Do you see those two "w" words that describe us: weary and weak. That's who we are.

“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall.” The prophet wants to make sure that the young men who hear these words or read these words understand that principle. Do you know why he wanted to make sure of that? Because young men think they are invincible, and so do young women.

When I was between 18 and 25 years old my whole life was in front of me. Every now and then, one of my friends would have an accident, somebody would die, but that wasn't going to happen to me. I was invincible, and I was strong. Oh but God has a way of teaching us, doesn't he? I'm grateful that I've learned a lesson.

I was reminded of it the other day because I'm a runner. Let me rephrase that. I'm a very part-time runner. I hadn't run in about three weeks, and I began to feel a little guilty because my waistband began to get a little tight and my caloric intake was getting a little large. I decided I would catch up all in one day. I took out one afternoon and decided to run 5.2 miles. I walked 2.6 of it. I languished on that sofa grasping for breath for the next five hours. I thought back, there was a day when I could run five miles and come home and be ready to play basketball. That day is gone. We are weak and weary people. Don't let your pride tell you otherwise.

All right, we've got a God who's bigger, broader, stronger, more powerful and wiser than we can imagine. We are just weak and weary people.

3. Lord will renew your strength. "Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength." Now the word, "wait," doesn't mean idleness. It doesn't mean just sitting around saying, "Okay God, zap me, hit me!" Don't misunderstand, there is a time to just “be still and know that I am God”. There's a time in all our frenzy and rat race when we do need to just be quiet and let God speak to us, meditate upon him, read his word, and pray to him. That's not really the context here.

The idea here is to wait upon the Lord which would be something like a cabinet member waiting upon the President of the United States. What does it mean to wait upon him? It means to serve him, to tend to him, to help him. A better illustration would be a "waiter," in a fine restaurant. What does a waiter at a really nice restaurant do? Well if you're at his table, he is so focused on you, he is tending to you.

About a year ago, I took my wife out on our anniversary to this really, really nice restaurant. It set me back a bundle to be honest. It was a nicer

place than we're accustomed to taking the family. In fact the kids didn't go with us. I was amazed because I couldn't get my water a half inch down, fingers were being snapped, and that water was refilled. I bet he refilled my water 20 times that night. When I spilled some bread crumbs in front of me, all of a sudden here he was with a little knife scraping it all off into a little plate. He picked my napkin up and put it right there over my lap. If I ever just so much as looked up he was waiting on me, total attention. Now listen, when I sense my weariness, my weakness, and my strength zapping, what do I do? I wait upon the Lord. My total attention is given to him. He is my focus. If I will wait upon him like that fellow waited upon me, he will "renew my strength."

I find that people who grow weary, discouraged and tired do one or two things generally, and I'm talking about Christian people. One thing is they forget God. Some Christians just forget him. They worry so much about their own zapped strength, their own apathy, and their own trials that they put God on a shelf and try to fix all this themselves. The other people in the midst of weariness, trial and zapping of strength begin to focus upon the Lord. They really focus upon the Lord asking Him to "renew me," and He does.

4. **What God does.** "The Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." (verse 31)

I love the illustration of the eagle, the most majestic of all birds, the one that soars higher than any others. It's not the first time God used that analogy. In Exodus 19:4, he was talking to the children of Israel who were now about to wander. He said, "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you out on eagles' wings..."

Part of the reason is for protection against prey. But part of the reason is because to assist in teaching an eaglet, a baby eagle, to fly. When the time comes for the little eagle chick to fly, it is nestled out of the nest and begins to free fall to see if those wings are ready to work. The mother eagle is peering with intent and an accurate eye. If her little eaglet can't begin to fly, the mother eagle swoops down and flies underneath and catches it on her back. If she can't get it on her back, she gets it with her beak and soars up again.

Folks, that's what our God does for us. When I wait upon him in my weariness and my weakness, he will watch me with that keen eye and as

he sees me fall, he will swoop under me. "They shall mount up with wings as eagles" not because I'm strong, but because I've got a God who put the stars in their place, and who loved me enough to die for me.

I know you know the old song. "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and grief's to bear! What a privilege to carry, everything to God in prayer!" Listen to the third verse. "Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer. Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer? In his arms he'll take and shield thee, thou wilt find a solace there." That's true. That's the promise. That is indeed one of those precious promises that get us through this life. Adapted from Amazing Grace #1167 - Steve Flatt, July 10, 1994

Promise for Understanding

The promise "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28) is the one of the best known, best loved.

That passage is a security for us in a time of storm. It's a passage that we turn to when we're in turmoil, or in tragedy. It's a passage we look at when we're wondering why we just don't understand. It takes our "why" and it turns it into "who." It takes our question and it turns us to the one who will always provide an answer. It's a promise for understanding.

"For we know." Underline those words. "We know." There's the promise for understanding. Even when things happen that hurt us, level us, or leave us absolutely clueless as to why they ever came about. "And we know that in all things God." Right after that little prepositional phrase, "works" That's the key to the whole verse. We're going to look at it in some detail but that's the key. It's not what you know, it is who you know.

The key to understanding in life is knowing God and trusting Him. That's the key. It's not how much you know, it's not how much you understand, it's not what your IQ is. The brightest among us don't have the ability to understand the depths, the mysteries and the difficulties of life. We just don't have that within us.

I'm a little amused that in two verses prior to Romans 8:28, Paul says, "In the same way...we do not know what we ought to pray for." That's the truth isn't it? I know some things for which I need to pray, but there are so many needs in my life, there is so many circumstances going around me, that I don't even begin to understand, I need God to help me pray. I don't even know what to pray for, that's how ignorant I am. That's how ignorant you are.

Thomas Edison said back in 1926, "We don't know one 1/millionth of one percent of all that's happening around us." Every day is bearing that statement out to be even truer. With each new discovery that we're making in science, we're finding how little we know.

Have you read about the "Black Hole" they found in the universe? Billions of light years from now, we can't even comprehend one light year, but we're talking about billions of light years. I don't understand that hole, but you know what they say about it? They say it is a hole that is sucking in, not just matter, but energy. That the pull of gravity is so strong, that even light cannot escape. Can you imagine that? They say that the pull of gravity is so strong in that black hole, that if you take the entire earth and everything that's on it, and have that same pull of gravity it would shrink the earth down to the size of a marble. I can't even begin to relate to that. I don't understand. But, the point is the power of understanding doesn't have to be within us, the good news is the power of understanding is within the God who made that black hole and made everything else around us.

The promise we had from Jesus in John 8:32 is, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Who's going to show us that truth? God is going to show us that truth.

So many things the Bible says Christians know with confidence. We know that we have passed from death into life. How do you know that? I know it because God's made sure that I was told that, and I trust him. We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him. How do I know that? I know that because of what I know about God.

Paul said, "For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that I've committed unto him against that day." (2 Timothy 1:12) You see by faith in God, He will give us understanding.

Romans 8:28-29 tells us that our understanding will come from confidence and certain things about God. I want to share three of them with you from the text.

1. I can better understand what is going on around me because of my confidence in his providence. "For we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him..." The providence of God is his ability to sustain and to guide destiny. He can do that because everything that happens in this world is either permitted or planned by God. Have you ever thought about that? Did you notice the word, "all?" "All things work together for good." Why? Because everything that happens in this world is either permitted or planned by God. Now that doesn't mean that everything that happens is a direct cause from God. He's not some great puppeteer pulling strings. A lot of things happen on this earth that are evil, that are orchestrated by Satan, but for the time being those things are being permitted by God.

He is the Creator of the heavens of the earth. The world exists by the word of his power. Isaiah 40:28 says, "...The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom." He's God. Everything is watched by his eye, everything is considered by his mind, everything is ultimately under his control. He sees, he knows, he cares, and he works, that's the providence of God.

Remember the old story about the lady who came to the door in response to the Gallup Poll petitioner, and after knocking on her door, she came just ragged looking and all unkempt. He said, "Ma'am, we're conducting a poll on what you think the greatest problem in America is, ignorance or apathy?" And she said, "I don't know, and I don't care," and slammed the door in his face.

I've got great news for you. We've got a God who knows, we've got a God who cares, and we've got a God who works. Everything, everything in this world is either permitted or planned by the great, good, gracious, giving, and glorious God Almighty. That by the way is why Paul could say in other places in his writings, "In everything give thanks." Everything? EVERYTHING? Yes, in everything give thanks. Why? Because it's all right here. That's why he could say, "Rejoice in the Lord always." You mean even when I'm down, even when bad things happen...Yes, always. Why? Because it's not outside the scope of his providence.

That's why he could say in Romans 8:28, "God works all things together for good." If you were to keep reading down in Romans 8 near the very end about verse 35, 36 and 37, he said, there's some horrible things out there. There's death, famine, tribulation, and persecution; yes, God will even work those things together for good. The first thing we're confident in is God's providence.

2. Be confident in God's perspective. To me the key word in the whole text is the word, "together." The Bible doesn't say that all things are good. It says that, "God works all things good and bad things together," for a good outcome.

Hey, there are a lot of things that aren't good. Temptations aren't good. I don't enjoy temptations or succumbing to temptations. James 1 tells us that temptations come from the devil, they don't come from God. But God can use temptations to actually draw us closer to him. Pain is not pleasant, is it? But God can use pain to reestablish humility and dependence upon him. Failure hurts. I'm not real fond of failure, but God can use it in such a way to help us re-look at our priorities. While we may not see it, we've got to understand that God has a better and fuller perspective on our lives.

Let me give you two illustrations of how God acts in that role. The first thing I think of is air traffic controllers, the guys in the control tower. All of these pilots are out there in their plane wanting to come in and land. Some are wanting to take off. The air traffic controller has to tell them which runway is cleared for landing and what the coordinates are for entry. He gives them the timing, he gives them the route, he alerts them about field conditions. If every pilot wanted to come in on their own you would have thousands of people dying. They would say, "Well, this looks like the best way to me." Wham! Whoosh! Crash! What I want you to see is that God is in the control tower of the airfield of your life. You may think this is the best way, and he says, "No, I want you to circle again." You say, "Why?" He says, "Don't ask why, just circle, I'll tell you when to come in."

I'll give you an even better illustration. He's the baker of your life. I'm not a baker. I'm not a cook. I love some of the products of good bakers. For example, I love German chocolate cake. I don't know anything about the ingredients, proportions or the baking temperature. The only thing I have to know is how to use a fork. But, see God is the baker of my life. He knows exactly the right ingredients.

By the way, I do know just a little bit about baking a German chocolate cake. If you were to taste any of those ingredients individually, they're not real good are they? Did you ever taste a big tablespoon full of flour? Do you want that? Is that good? Yuck! How about some of the salt? Just put salt in it. No! The sugar, it's pretty good, but it's not all that good, especially compared to the final product. What about that raw egg? How would you like to choke that down? You see the ingredients by themselves are not good at all, but the baker of our life, stirs them up in exactly the right proportion. But that's not all he does. Then he puts them under heat. He puts them under heat for just the right amount of time. The great news today is, God knows the ingredients, He knows how much heat we need and for how long. That's his magnificent perspective.

I'm confident in his providence, and I'm confident in his perspective, but there's one other thing that's really even more important than those two.

3. Be confident in his purpose. Look at verse 28 again, we quote it all the time, "For we know that in all things God works for good for those who love him..." but look at the rest of it, "...who have been called according to his purpose." Wait a minute. What is his purpose for us? What's God purpose for you? What's God's purpose for me? This is where too many of us stop reading but keep reading, verse 29, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son..." There, right there, do you see that? That is God's purpose for us.

His purpose for you is to **be conformed in the image of his Son**, Jesus. That is God's supreme purpose for me. God's supreme purpose for me is not to believe, repent, confess, and be baptized. That is the means, a vital means, but it's not my purpose. God's purpose for me is not to assemble together. That's the sustenance, but that's not my purpose. God's purpose for me is not to win another lost soul, that's my mission, but that's not my purpose. God's purpose for me is not to go to heaven, that is my reward, but that is not my purpose. What's my purpose? He tells me. **His supreme purpose for me is to be like Jesus.** That by the way is the best quick answer I know when somebody asks you this question, "Why do bad things happen to God's children?" Do you know the answer? Because we need to be like Jesus.

Do you know what that reminds me of? 1 Peter 2:21 "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." How many of you want to suffer? I don't either. How many of you want to be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ? I've got bad news for you, it goes with the territory. We cannot be conformed into the image of Jesus unless we also suffer.

Christians really should have a sign across their chest's that says, "Construction Underway." God is working on us and he's working around us to make us more like Jesus. Do you see his promise? I'm not going to understand everything that happens to me. Sometimes I'm not going to understand it at all. I'll be so confused that I'll fall on my knees and beg for understanding. But I can understand that the God who loves me enough to die for me and has a providence, a perspective and a purpose for all of it. Now that leaves me with one last thing. What do I need to do?

4. Love Him. This text has one key responsibility. Look at it again. "...We know that in all things God works for the good of..." What does it say? "...those who love him..." This is a promise for people who love God. It's not a promise for every human being. It's not a promise for the unbeliever. Sadly, it's not a promise for those who only believe. It's a promise for those who love the Lord.

If I want understanding, what do I need to do? I don't have to worry so much about working things out. I don't have to worry a lot about figuring things out, that's God's responsibility. Here's my responsibility. My responsibility is to love God more. The more I love God, the better I'll understand. I don't know how, but that's the promise, and it works. Adapted from Amazing Grace #1163 - Steve Flatt, June 12, 1994