

God's Good Work In Us

Called to Become Perfect

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When I was employed, I worked for a large food service company in what is called the institutional restaurant trade. That is a trade that has to do with mass feeding. Anyone that mass feeds—hospitals, rest homes, convalescent homes, big military schools, fast food, or coffee shops. Every year this industry would have a restaurant show. They would have one in the LA Convention Center on the West Coast for one year, and then they would have one in San Francisco, and in the third year they would have one in Seattle, Washington. Then on the fourth year they would go back to McCormick Place in Chicago, which is a gigantic facility. And they would have what we termed the "national restaurant show."

I think you all would like that because they serve samples of steak, desserts, ice cream, salads and cookies. You can eat whatever you want there. They even serve alcohol, beer, and soft drinks. The one booth that they never had, but what they probably needed, was a good Alka-Seltzer booth. But we learned early on that you do not eat at the restaurant show.

But as I would go to these shows, and I really enjoyed them, I would meet people each year from the different companies and, though we did not know each other's names, we looked at the name tags and would say, "Hey, how's business?" We would chat and each year we would see the same people over and over again.

Well, every year it seemed to be pretty much the same, except for this one year when a group of salesmen all of a sudden got religion. Somehow, even though I was a salesman, I have a hard time picturing a salesman getting religion, but anyway, these people did.

This one man I knew walked up to me and said, "Are you a Christian?" His eyes were sort of glazed over. He was sort of glassy-eyed. And I said, "Well, yes I am." And he held up his right hand and his right forefinger and said,

"One way, brother." That was what he did for the seven days of the show. Every time he would see me, even across the hall with hundreds of people between us, if he saw me and he saw that I saw him, up would go the right arm and the "One way, brother."

I felt rather uneasy, a little bit scared, because I was not used to this kind of fervor and my religion was very private to me. But whatever religion they were in, this was their first love and they were excited beyond all reason. So when the year went by and I saw them again, I expected them to have a repeat of this. But, no, things were back to normal. In fact, one of the men (if I recall correctly), over bad sales figures and a bad marriage, hung himself in his garage. He took his life. But in their zest for a new way of life, they had found that it had just gone by the boards, that life was business as usual again. Their eyes were dull and they went about their routine very dully.

Now it seemed to me, as I thought about it, that their concept of how God works was false. To be sure, these men were not truly called, as we know what true calling is. But the concept they held was basically a pretty common one. "Jesus loves me. He died for my sins and somehow He lived a perfect life in my stead. So all I have to do is believe and to love others and somehow my life will be really fine and I won't have a lot of trials. Things will go well."

I know that we do not believe this way and yet, the matter of being personally called by the living God and having His truth revealed to us, and having us placed in the most special group on the face of the earth in all the world, can leave us with a feeling that we are special. Perhaps a better pair of words would be privileged and favored. And indeed we are privileged and favored. I hope we appreciate that.

For the sense I mean it in, somehow, because we have this truth, and because we know God, and we have a relationship with God, that a little bit of slack is cut for us when it comes to overcoming. In fact, just the opposite is true. We are the group that is being judged right now at this time.

Now we know this approach is incorrect, but with our Jeremiah 17:9 mind, which deceives us, and all that type of thing (I know I have one), we can begin to justify that thinking. If we are not careful, we can have an

unrealistic approach, just as these men did, to the calling that we have been given.

Is, in fact, our calling one where God would sort of wink at us if we do not obey completely? Now we know that we are the apple of God's eye, and so is He not going to show us a little extra mercy? I have a hunch that if we had any idea of how much mercy God has shown us, we would be awestruck. I guess the real question is, do we really understand that God has called us to perfect us? And as a loving, responsible Father, that is exactly what He is going to do.

Now we may have set ideas as to how we want to live our lives and what we are going to do with our lives. But, we have to understand that God's purpose for us will be accomplished in us.

There is an old saying that my aunt used to say, "Man supposes but God disposes." In other words, God is the one that makes the final judgment on what He wants done.

Philippians 1:3-6 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine [for you] making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident [being certain] of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it [He will perform it] until the day of Jesus Christ.

Now here the apostle Paul is confident to the *n*th degree in what he is saying. He is utterly convinced of the truth and he has no doubt whatsoever concerning what he has just told the Philippians. That God, who has begun a good work, or caused a good work to be started in those He called, will permanently work toward that work's completion. He will completely perform what He has begun and He will unquestionably finish what He's initiated. And *He will not fail*. It is His work.

Now who is it that started the work? Well we know in John 6:44 that we are told that nobody can come to Christ unless they are called by God the Father. But let us turn over to John 1 and take a look at what John says here.

John 1:6-13 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. [Now here we get to the part.] But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of [the will of] God.

In other words, God set His will to call and He did that and this is where we find ourselves now. And God is going to perfect, as Paul was saying in Philippians 1:6, that which He started. The apostle Paul in Philippians was emphatic about this.

Nothing in God's nature will call Him to abort what He started. He will continue until His effort is complete, until the day of Jesus Christ, when Jesus Christ will present us to His Father.

This language could not be more strong. It could not be more clear. God has called us and because of that calling, He will shape us, He will teach us, He will give us trials to perfect us, and He will fully develop us for the positions that He has called us to in His Kingdom. It will be done in mercy and in love for us. But it is going to be done. Again, this is the Father's job and we can be completely sure that He will perform it for His purpose and for our ultimate good.

The problem is that we do not always see that God's hand is working in our lives. Events can envelop us, we can find ourselves in serious circumstances, and situations can arrive that convince us that we are forgotten and abandoned by God. But I assure you that this is just not the fact. In fact, just the opposite is true.

Let us look at an example of this over in Job 1. Now Job was apparently a wonderful man. He was a man that we could all wish to emulate.

Job 1:1-6 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless before God [there is not one of us that could say that] and upright, and one that feared God and shunned evil. And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very great household [of servants], so that this man was the greatest of all people of the East. And his sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day [I presume that is their birthdays], and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. So it was, when the days of their feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly. [He loved God with every fiber of his being.] Now there was a day [it says here] when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.

Then of course, we have the story. "Have you noticed my servant Job and how perfect he is?" And of course Satan said, "Well why wouldn't he be perfect? You're protecting him. Look at the sheep, look at the oxen, look at the home he has. Look at everything."

Now here we can see that Job was about to be worked with, and he was the only one who did not know it. The sons of God and Satan knew it. Here we see Job, a man of impeccable character, (character that we can only hope for) who took in the poor, he fed the weak and the hungry. He sat in the gate and gave sound advice. He answered every labor dispute in a favorable way. He took care of the elderly and he never looked on a woman, whether married or single, with a wrong eye or a wrong thought. As I said, he has the character that we could only hope for. And he was greatly loved by God, who was about to perfect him, and he did not know it.

So Satan was allowed to destroy all that Job had. He took everything away and Job did not curse God. So Satan said, "Well of course he didn't. He still has his life. Hurt him and see what he does." And God said, "You may do that, you may bring illness on him, but you may not take his life."

So after all the physical was taken away and he was smitten by boils that he had to scrape from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet, and then he had to submit to the accusatory message of Bildad the Shuhite, Eliphaz the Temanite, and Zophar the Naamathite who continually accused him of having sinned, because they could not conceive that a loving God would persecute him to develop him. They could only conceive that God was persecuting him because he had committed some horrendous sin. In all of this mental and physical suffering, Job had not a clue that he was being perfected by God, who loved him very much.

Job complains to God through about thirty-eight chapters, asking Him what he has done wrong. He longs to confront God and finally, after about forty chapters, God speaks to Job, and rather than answering his questions, He convicts Job of His greatness and sovereignty. With that conviction, Job sees the great love that God has for His creation and for him, and those He has created in mankind. And Job is humbled.

Let us take a look at that because we will see the change that came in Job here.

Job 42:1-4 Then Job answered the LORD and said: "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore have I uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, 'I will question you, and shall answer Me.'

It just reads rather strongly: "I will demand of you and I will declare you unto me." But he is saying very humbly, "Please, I'm going to ask You questions about how to live and please respond to me."

Job 42:5-6 "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. [Now I get it!] Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

So Job at last had the relationship with God that God wanted Job to have, and then God wonderfully, wonderfully blessed him in verses 11-17.

Job 42:11-17 Then all his brothers, all his sisters, and all those who had his acquaintances before, came to him and ate food with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him over all the adversity that the LORD had brought upon him. Each one gave him a piece of silver and each a ring of gold. Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys. He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first Jemimah [which means "handsome is the day"], the name of the second, Keziah [which means "cassia, a fragrance of cinnamon"], and the name of the third Keren-Happuch [which means "horn of color"]. In all the land were found no women so beautiful as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them inheritance among their brothers. After this lived Job one hundred and forty years, and saw his children and grandchildren for four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days.

What was the example here for us in all of this? We can find this back in the book of James, because God notes this and the author, James, also brought this up as an example for us to follow.

James 5:10-11 My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and of patience. [He said these are examples we should note.] Indeed, we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance [and that is the key word] of Job, and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

So Job is an example for us. It pictures never quitting in his love and his perseverance in obeying God. That is the example God wants us to take from this. All the way through Job's trial, he never gave up on God even though he did not know fully what was happening. But the end result was very positive.

I can remember when we first came into the church, my wife and I, with our three little children who slept on the mats in the first row. (Those are good memories.) Everything we heard from the ministry was absolutely true. We were all excited about Petra, the Spokesmen's Club and the special nights they had—we even did a skit one night on Petra and that type of thing. And we just laughed and had a good time, but we were thrilled with all we were hearing, as opposed to the falsehoods that we had prior to coming into the church.

When it came time for baptism, we counted the cost as best as we could, but really all we could do was to promise God that we would be faithful to Him and that we would stay with it, because we could not see down the road like nobody else can see down the road. We could not see the future. And I do not think that we really understood that it was going to be God's job to shape us and perfect us for the Kingdom of God. We thought everything was going to be going along swimmingly. We had Mr. Armstrong, we had the church, we had a family to be with, we had activities, we were right and the rest of the world did not understand yet.

In the ensuing years, we had some tests and pressures but then, Mr. Armstrong died. God convicted each of us how far we slipped (and indeed I can say for me, myself, I slipped a great deal) and He set out to perfect us in a different way by scattering the church. Everything seemed to be going along perfectly and all of a sudden we had the scattering, and we were shocked awake at the break up of the organization that seemed so much a part of us.

I could not help but think it was a little like Israel coming out of Egypt, because that is exactly what we did, Egypt being a type of sin. Israel being saved after being four hundred and thirty years a slave people and then being freed, six hundred thousand men on foot with women and children. They, too, at last thought everything was going to be going their way.

Let us turn back to Exodus 12, please, starting in verse 31.

Exodus 12:31-36 And he [Pharaoh] called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said. [He

could not wait to get rid of them.] Also take you flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also. [Bless me how? By getting out of town. He said that will really bless me.] And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." [if you do not go, the firstborn had died]. So the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders. Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

What a wonderful time this was. They were free of their taskmasters. They had gold and silver. They were being saved by their great God. But I am sure, as well, that they had no idea of what He was going to require of them. You see, He was going to make them into a peculiar people, the people of God, that would be an example to the rest of the world of righteousness and right living. To do this, it was going to require drastic changes. Their first lesson was about to come and it was not at all what they expected.

Exodus 14:1-5 Now the LORD spoke to Moses saying: "Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over by Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, 'They are bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.' Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh, and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD." [He was going to establish to them that He was God.] Now it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people; and they said, "Why have we done this?"

When I read this I could not help but think of Satan as he watched us go to, or come to, God. Why did we let them go?

Exodus 14:10-13 And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them [they could see the dust off in the distance]; and they were very afraid; and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD. Then they said to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? Is not this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone [quit pushing us for this thing] that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness." And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD."

Israel left with a high hand without any thought of trial and now, at what appeared to be their destruction at hand, God was about to test and build their faith. The sea parted, they saw their God had again come to their aid. The Egyptians were taken away and their destruction was no longer at hand. Again, their spirit soared in deep appreciation to God. And then we read in Exodus 15 where they sang and danced and praised God all the time for all He had done.

But then came the bitter waters of Marah and they rebelled again and they lost faith. On and on and on, all through the wilderness, even until they came to the Promised Land that they had waited for, and they rebelled against God again.

The generation of physical Israel that left Egypt to go into the wilderness never did make it to the Promised Land with the exception of two families—Caleb and Joshua. They never did learn to believe and have faith in God even though He continually delivered them time after time. They rebelled at what God was doing. They did not want what He was doing and they just kept reverting back to their old ways. So it was the next generation that went into the Promised Land.

Now we know the story was recorded for us. In I Corinthians 10:11, "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." The example that I want to take from this is not that they lusted or that they were idolaters, or

that they committed sexual sins, or that they tempted Christ, or that they murmured, but that it was God who was working in their lives to make something special of them. That is what we have to realize.

Turn over to Deuteronomy 8 and we will see just what God was doing. It reflects on exactly what God is doing with us today.

Deuteronomy 8:1 "Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers."

They were just about to enter the Promised Land. Moses was just about to die and this was a message to God's people.

Deuteronomy 8:2-5 "And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and to test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger [That does not sound like a God who would just make everything wonderful.], and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that a man shall not live by bread alone; but man shall live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you. [He did that to produce something.]

Brethren, we are blessed to understand that God operates in patterns. John Ritenbaugh has reminded us of this every so often. So we can have confidence that God is continuing to work in His patterns. Malachi 3:6 states: "For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob." Hebrews 13:8 says: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." And He is exactly that.

What was God's purpose for Israel? It was to make them a peculiar people, special to Him as an example of righteousness to the entire world. What is

God's purpose for those called at this end time? He set His mind to call so that they might be perfected to be an example of obedience, and of right, sound thinking in how they conduct themselves. They are to be prepared in this calling for the role of a son of God, and a priest and a king at the return of Jesus Christ. This is why we are called.

The reward for the nation of Israel was wonderful, physical blessings. The reward for us who have been given the Spirit of God is eternal life as a member of the God Family, and the absolutely wonderful opportunity to serve mankind and to bring them to the same reward we have been given.

Now with our reward comes a harder responsibility. A greater responsibility on the part of God in His working with us, and a greater responsibility on us in responding to the working that God is doing in our life. To whom much is given, much is expected, required.

Now the perfecting that the men had at the restaurant show was the problem that they faced. They viewed their calling as one of being saved, *not* as one of being perfected. I think that is something we truly have to realize. It should be inconceivable to us that God, who is going to give us the awesome authority as members of the God Family with unlimited power, would not work to complete us in making us in His image. That is His job. That is His responsibility. We have to understand that.

Turn over to John 15 if you would please. For some reason this reminds me of Fresno. You probably do not have any idea why that is, but it talks about vines and I used to sell to the raisin industry up there. I used to sell them eighty thousand pounds of oil or shortening every month to put on their raisins so they would not stick together. So I got to see how they dressed their vines, how they did things. It was sort of interesting.

John 15:1-2 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

So the relationship we have, as is pictured here, with Jesus Christ, is that of a vine with its branches. The vine does the nourishing of all its branches and the relationship, as it pertains to us, as we are called as the weak and the

foolish, and we are given to Jesus Christ to be raised and to be teamed up with. We are to learn to want what He wants. We are to learn to live as He lives. And it is the relationship of the weak with the strong, because when we are first called we are the weak and the base things, the relationship of the less than perfect, if you will, placed with the perfect. It is a relationship as a son with a father. It is very intimate. It is very wonderful. And it is a very close relationship. God is intimately involved in our lives.

God the Father here is pictured as a husbandman or as a vinedresser who will separate from the vine all those who give evidence, by how they conduct their lives, that they do not want to be part of His organization or of His church, that they are not united with Him. He takes them away by a variety of methods. Matthew 13 lists quite a few. The deceitfulness of riches, persecution, a reprobate mind, things of this nature.

But for those who are in close relationship, those who by evidence of serving others, by their study, by their prayer, by their care and concern for the world, just all of the good fruit possible, by their diligence and their faithfulness, He prunes.

Now, in San Joaquin Valley (I am pretty sure that the vine being referred to here is a grape vine), they cut off all of the dead wood, because the dead wood does not produce. They have big, long rows of grape vines in the vineyard and they are all suspended on wires. They have a three foot section coming up from the ground, and one runner to the left about two feet and one runner to the right about two feet. That is all there is at the beginning of the year. When they blossom, all the new fruit comes out on those two runners.

But the key here is that the dead wood does not produce, or that the non-producing wood takes so much energy to support, that the vine cannot do a good job. So the dead wood is taken away.

Just for fun, I thought I would be very technical here and I looked in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* so that I would be fully equipped on pruning here (which is not the case). Pruning, initially, is used to train a tree for the most production. (This is pertaining to trees.) It is used to form its shape so that it will be as fruitful as possible and the analogy, I think, is a good one. All trees are not shaped the same way. They are not pruned the same way, because all

trees are different. They do not receive the same type of pruning. Pruning gives strength and longevity to the young tree. But it is interesting that as the tree gets older, pruning becomes very, increasingly important.

Now the encyclopedia listed three reasons for pruning. The first, was to permit a person spraying and harvesting. In other words, to make room to get into the tree to clean out infestations and things that are wrong with the tree. Two, to make satisfactory light exposure for most of the leaves that the tree might have health, that it might have the right light. I could not help but think of God's Word in that aspect. It is light. And third, was to provide a satisfactory balance between flowering and leaf service. The reason for that was that the tree might produce the right quantity of fruit.

Now the sense that God is getting to here in all of this is that in those He is working with He purifies them, He prunes them, He purges them. He takes away what hinders them and what slows them down in growth. He quickens them and He teaches them, and makes them more pure in their thinking and their motives and all that they do in their actions, and He encourages them to work more diligently and to be more effective.

To do this, He may have to remove some of the idols that get in their way. It may be for a time that sometimes wealth may have to go until lessons are learned. The big car, maybe the big job, and the big home. I do not know. That is up to the individual and that is up to God to see to it. Sometimes we get health problems, marriage problems, neighbor problems, work problems, and the reason we have these is that God wants us to learn to use His Word, if you will, the lessons that come from obedience to God in these very areas, that we might learn to correct them.

Now when we find ourselves in trials, the last thing we think of is that God is working with us to perfect us. We just want out. Take the trial away. But for us that are called by God, we can be sure that God the Father and Jesus Christ are on the job developing us, because they are involved in everything we do. Nothing misses their attention.

Let us take a look at this over in Hebrews 12.

Hebrews 12:5 And have you forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him."

What had been forgotten was the exhortation in Proverbs 3 which reads:

Proverbs 3:11-12 My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest [do not fight against it] His correction. [Why?] For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.

Many in the world may not think that God is a very good God, but He delights in those He called. You are favored and you are privileged.

What is being said here (just as in pruning), the correction has been given us to produce results that will eventually bring happiness to us. Correction, although we sometimes do not see it, is also the proof that God loves us very much. He says, "Don't take the correction as a trivial thing, as something light, but respond to it." Because everything that God does to us or with us is important to us.

Now God is not going to let His children wander away from Him. Some may have to go through the tribulation if they choose to push it, but I could not help but think of Psalm 119:67: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word." God has a purpose in all the affliction.

What should our response be to God in this? It is to certainly bear up under the trials, but we are to realize that God is working with us and that we are to be determined to make the necessary changes in our lives, whatever the problem dictates. We are not to become insensible to them and we are not to become discouraged.

Why does God correct and work with us? It is because of His great purpose and love for us. Some of us might think sometimes that we have too much love being bestowed upon us. But that is still alright. That is God working on us.

Hebrews 12:6-7 "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son [and every daughter in this case] whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

So if we are disciplined or changed by the correction of God, if we make the right changes, God considers us as family and deals with us as such. This does not mean that we just put up with God's correction. It means that we alter our lives because of it. And when we do, then we are considered part of God's Family.

Hebrews 12:8 But if you are without chastening, of which we all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

Bastards were usually ignored by their parents. They were not taught by them. They were not supported by them. And frankly, the father did not even want to have it known that he sired them. We do not want to be in that condition.

Hebrews 12:9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

The answer is, "you bet." What he is saying here is that we should yield much more and give respect to our heavenly Father who is absolutely perfect in His correction.

Hebrews 12:10 For they [our fathers] indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them [But there is only one reason God does it for us.], but He for our profit [Why?], that we may be partakers of His holiness.

That is His end for us. He corrects us accurately, in the right amount, and He does it so we will have victory in this life and can stand before Him.

Hebrews 12:11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Correction brings pain, which is exactly what it is intended to do, that we might consider our lives, and that we might make the changes we need to make. God is not away from pain. He will do that. But afterward, the lessons are learned, and we have peace and more perfect control over the weaknesses that plagued us.

Hebrews 12:12-13 Therefore [because of this, because of God's love for you and His purpose for you] strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

Make your changes, be encouraged by what God is doing, and do not be despondent.

I Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings [that you are going through the changes that He wants you to make], that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

You see, at that time you will look back and you will think, "It was nothing that I went through. Look at what God has given me." It will absolutely (pardon the expression) knock your socks off. I do not know whether spirit beings have socks, but they will be knocked off.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he is approved [or when he is proven], he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

This is the purpose of testing and trying. The word temptation here is just a very general word, but it can mean tempted by sin or tempted not to yield to correction. But what is being stated is that when we are tested in areas of weakness and we overcome it and prove faithful, we will be given a crown.

Now how does God view us at this time? What is His attitude toward us? How does He feel about us? Many in the world around us view God as being harsh and unfeeling, unsympathetic to our needs, and unsympathetic to our suffering.

King David, who had made many mistakes—with Bathsheba, the numbering of the people of Israel and causing seventy thousand deaths, he lied, he was untrustworthy at some times—looked back on the life he had and he wrote Psalm 103. He saw God from a perspective of having had God deal with him over a long period of time. And he saw God in a way that I do not think that we stop to consider very often.

Psalm 103:1 Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me,
bless His holy name!

What he is saying here is: my heart, my mind, my powers, my affections, my deeds, everything about me bless God, or praise God is another way to put this. David is stating that his total being should be held to praising God. And then he repeats the statement again and reminds himself not to forget all the benefits that come from God. Or, putting it another way which would not be incorrect, do not forget the work that God is doing on the earth and with mankind. Everything that He does with man is for man's good. David knows that whatever works that God does with us—though at times they may be difficult to bear—it will prove to be the best in the long run. And because of this, all of mankind should be praising God, with their heart, with every fiber of their being.

Then he goes on to list the very nature and attributes of God who works with us. And I will tell you, when you read this, you almost cannot picture anyone that would be any better to work with us, to correct us, to develop us, to perfect us.

In verse 3, the first thing he mentions is that God forgives us. The very first attribute of God's nature is His desire to pardon us, and every one of us can attest to that fact, because we all deserve far more than we have gotten. He heals us, even now at this time in our life, and He has tremendous concern for us.

The second thing he lists in verse 4:

Psalm 103:4 Who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies.

The sense of it here is that He does keep you from dying from accidents and things like this. But the word destruction is indicative, in this case, of the grave. He is going to resurrect you and give you eternal life. And the phrase, "He crowns us with lovingkindness and tender mercies," the sense here is there is a dignity and a beauty and a honor that God bestows on us when He does this. This is how God feels about us.

In verse 5, He satisfies our desires with right fulfillment so that we are even encouraged and strengthened in our old age. That is the kind of God we have.

Psalm 103:6 The LORD executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.

He is on our side in every situation and He is conscious of us. He is conscious of our best interest and though we may have to be in trials for a long period of time, He will take our part and He will relieve the injustice and vindicate the cause when the time is right.

He made known His ways to Moses and to Israel, and for those of us called today we know His laws, His way of life, and we know His plan, and nobody on the earth does. God has done this for us.

Psalm 103:8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger.

He is patient, He is merciful—He has much mercy toward us.

Psalm 103:9 He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever.

He will not always strive with us and He is not one that hangs onto anger as it is toward us. And every one of us can be appreciative here:

Psalm 103:10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities.

Because if He had, I would not be speaking and you would not be listening today.

Psalm 103:11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him.

You know, when you are a little boy and you say, "Daddy, how much do you love me?" And Mom and Dad put their arms out to the side, "From this fingertip to that fingertip." And He says as high as it is above the earth, that is the kind of mercy He has toward us.

And then it says:

Psalm 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

I do not know whether you ever thought about standing before Jesus Christ and God the Father, but I have even thought about standing before my guardian angel. He has seen me do some really terrible things, really stupid things. I am going to have to stand there, and I know that all my sins, all I have done has been made evident. They have all seen these things. But yet, He removes our transgressions from us, *totally*. As far as the east is from the west—they will never be remembered. When you stand before Jesus Christ and your guardian angel, they will have no memory of the stupidity that you exhibited as a human being when you were called and on the way. They will just be thankful that you are there and that you will have made it.

And you will never have to worry about them saying, "Well, you know, back here when you did this and that, you were really dumb." That will not be there. You will be clean before God and before all that are up there.

Psalm 103:14 For He knows our frame . . .

He understands, brethren, what we go through. Our Father knows what we are made of. He knows our limits, our frailties, that we struggle under trials. He is fully conscious of this and He pities us. He extends compassion to us, and yet, He is going to complete the job for perfecting us.

Psalm 103:15-18 As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting [how ever long that is or how ever far that is, I cannot even imagine that] on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children. To such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them.

So when we are trying, God is appreciative and that mercy is extended to us.

Psalm 103:20-22 Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, you ministers of His who do His pleasure. Bless the LORD, all His works, in all places of His dominion; bless the LORD, O my soul!

You see brethren, you could not have picked a better person to perfect you than God the Father and Jesus Christ. This is the nature of God the Father and Jesus Christ who, frankly, lovingly work with us to perfect us for the Kingdom and a wonderful future for each us.

What position do we who are called now hold in the sight of God?

Romans 8:14-17 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption [or it could read sonship], by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God [at this time], and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.

Now, we are considered the sons of God if we yield to Him and allow ourselves to be led by His Spirit. Then Paul points out a special relationship that has been established. We have not received the spirit of bondage or of slavery, in which we would live in fear and trembling all the time. But we have received the spirit of adoption and that should give us freedom from fear, and build courage in us because we have been adopted by the great God Himself.

My wife and I have three adopted children. Perhaps because of this, we have a little better understanding as to what it means to adopt. Many people have said, "Oh, what a wonderful thing you did." Yes, we did. But the wonderful thing was for us, because we love our kids and they contributed so much to our home. It was wonderful.

But it has given us an insight we would not have had into this area. Before a child is adopted, he does not have a home. He is just called baby something. Baby Joe, Baby Bill, Baby Alice, whatever it may be. He does not have a home. He does not have a family name or the loving care that could only come from being part of a family. He does not have training, a positive future, and he does not have an inheritance.

To a very great extent, each of us has been in this same boat. We only had a physical existence, but now God has reached down and adopted us, or called us, to take on His Family name, to share His home, to receive His training, to have a wonderful future and a marvelous inheritance. You see, brethren, all

that God has done and is doing in our lives is absolutely positive. Because of this we can now truly cry to Him, "Father," because that is exactly the relationship to us that He has placed Himself in. He is our Father.

Now God's Holy Spirit furnishes eminence to them that are His. As we grow to overcome, and work, and do the best we can to obey and show obedience to our Father and Elder Brother, then God's Spirit testifies that we are indeed taking on the nature of the one who has adopted us. This is exactly what God wants.

Because of this we are considered full heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ in all that He has inherited. Frankly, the realization of this should fill us with gratitude, and it should cause us to long to have God work with us even more and more to perfect us. We have an inheritance coming and we will discuss that in a few minutes.

God will never give us more than we can handle, because there is a difference in this adoption. In the adoption where you have a child physically here, you bring the child into your home and it is raised with the family in their environment. But with our adoption by God the Father, we are not taken out of our environment physically. We are required to take on our Father's nature while living in a world that, for the most part, is the very antitheses of what God wants. And though we occasionally have serious trials, even here for the most part, God has not placed us with continual heaviness.

It is not His purpose to make us suffer. We are supposed to have a good and a full life. He really wants us to have rich and happy lives, and for the most part, we do have those. We have homes (many of us), we have jobs, friends, marriages, children, neighbors. But you see, it is within this environment that we are supposed to apply the laws of God because that is what is going to build the godly character in our lives.

There is a proper applying of God's laws in this world that will give us the character-building tests that we are going to need. We have all had to stand up for the Sabbath if we have a job. We have all had to handle our budget if we have had to tithe. We have all had to overcome the weaknesses and the compromises we tend to want to make.

I Corinthians 10:13 tells us there is no temptation that is given to us that is not common to man, and these every day trials that all of us face, in whatever situation we are in, that is the beauty of what God is doing. It does not matter what situation we are in applying God's laws in our lives, in any set of circumstances, it will help us to build the character God wants us to have.

With each of us, brethren, God may want more from us at times, and thus He will direct us into situations that will put additional stress on us. It will require more effort to produce more growth. But again, it is always for our good.

Let us take a look back in Genesis 37 and we will look at the example of Joseph. We will look at verses 1-7, and we will just sort of paraphrase this here.

Joseph was seventeen years old. Israel loved Joseph very much, more than all of his children, because he was the son of his old age. He made him the coat of many colors. Genesis 37:4, "But when his brothers saw that their father loved Joseph, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him." And then, of course, Joseph had the dream of the sheaves that they were harvesting. His sheaves were going to stand up straight and their sheaves were all going to bow down to him. They were really incensed at this.

So here Joseph was loved more by his father and here, because of his dream and because of that love, in hatred they would have killed him. We will not read verses 18-28, but they finally sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. They took his coat. I cannot imagine what was going through Joseph's mind at this time. Here he is a boy loved by his father. He is secure in his home and all of a sudden, he is been dumped into a pit and he has been put in with people that he does not know. He has no control over his body. He is probably in bondage, in chains, and now, in Genesis 39, he is sold to Potiphar (verses 1-23).

The roller coaster continues. Potiphar is in charge of the prison system for Egypt. He is thrust into a strange life, but he is blessed by God in all that he does. He rises in Potiphar's family and pretty soon he is in charge of all that

Potiphar has. He can go to town, he can make business deals, he can control servants. He is growing. He is constantly learning about Egypt, and he is being taught.

All of a sudden Potiphar's wife decides she wants to take him to bed and Joseph does the right thing. He does not forsake God and he does not dishonor the master that has employed him. He flees, and now the wife says he tried to rape her.

So Potiphar, who probably knew his wife, but who probably did not want to have to live with her arguments and probably did not want to lose face, put Joseph in jail. So he goes again from the top, right back down to the bottom, in prison. Now he is in jail, but again, God is with him. (Genesis 40 verses 1-23.)

After a while, after being in prison for a period, two men are put in his charge—the butler and the baker. Both have dreams and Joseph explains their dreams. The baker is going to lose his head, but the butler will be restored being Pharaoh's cup bearer.

In verse 14 of Genesis 40, he tells the butler:

Genesis 40:14 "But remember me when it is be well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house."

He says, "I don't deserve to be here, so bring me out." So the butler leaves and you can almost picture Joseph—the butler's going to tell the Pharaoh. The first week goes by, the second week. Two years go by and he is still in prison. He knows that God is working with him. Two more years pass and then God, with His perfect timing, put a dream in Pharaoh's mind. Seven cows that are fat, seven cows that are lean, seven ears of corn that are fat, seven ears of corn that are lean. The lean cows and the lean ears eat up all of the crop.

We read in Genesis 41 that Pharaoh told the dream and said who can tell me what this dream is? And, of course, the butler said, "I forgot my promises to Joseph." He said, "There's a man in prison who revealed the dream that I

had." So Pharaoh sends for him and Joseph explains to him what was taking place in the land and what would take place.

Genesis 41:37-44 So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God? [And what he was trying to find was somebody to administer in the land during the time of plenty and of famine.] Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you." And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. And he made him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, "Bow the knee!" So he set him over all the land of Egypt.

You see brethren, this is exactly what is going to happen to us. One day, Joseph went from being a slave in prison to be the second ruler in all the land. That is simply the purpose that God has for us.

You know when it says in I Corinthians 15:52, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed." We, too, will go from trial and tribulation, and careful teachings by God, to rulership just as Joseph did, except at that time, we will be spirit beings. We, too, will be ruling over the land. This is what the trials, this is what the perfecting is all about.

Now, based on this as we draw to a conclusion here, what should our attitude be toward having God work with us?

Proverbs 30:1-2 The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, his utterance. This man declared to Ithiel—Ithiel and Ucal: Surely I am more stupid than any man, and do not have the understanding of a man.

I think you will find, as we go through this, that he was not stupid by our standards. In fact, you will find out that he was just about like Job when he came to his senses. He was not considered stupid, but he was measuring himself against God.

Proverbs 30:3-4 I neither learned wisdom nor have the knowledge of the Holy One [meaning God]. Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name, if you know?

He knows the awesome working of God and he says, "Who can understand all that God does?" He realizes that our thoughts are not God's thoughts and God's thoughts are not our thoughts and this is why he calls himself stupid, dull, or brutish.

Proverbs 30:5-8 Every word of God is pure [it is tried, it is perfectly pure]; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar. Two things I request [and this is where we come in] of You (deprive me not before I die) [Do not let me die without learning what I should do or what I should be. This is the sense of it.]: Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with food You allotted to me.

You see, Agur was wise enough to understand that he could not perfect himself. Maybe some today think we can perfect ourselves by keeping every law exactly, and this and that, but we cannot do it. God's thoughts are far above our thoughts, and Agur realized this. He knew he could not perfect himself. And he knew he could not see himself as God did. So he said, "Father, God, please give me the food that you prescribe for me. Give me what I need to have to be in the Kingdom of God." This is what our attitude should be.

Proverbs 30:9 Lest I be full and deny You, and say, "Who is the LORD [forget who You are]?" Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.

You see, we have all been called. We are God's Family. We are adopted by Him. We carry God's name. So he said, "Feed me with what is proper for me." In other words, he is saying, "Perfect me that I might be able to take advantage of the adoption that you have given me and that I might stand before you in the Kingdom of God."

Now brethren, the men that I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon did not have the understanding that we have been given. Their blush of love faded when the going got tough, because they did not understand that it is God's duty to work with us and to perfect us. But *we* can be confident of this very thing—that He who has begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.