

# Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

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## The TREE OF LIFE weekly teaching summary from the week ending April 05, 1998

Tree of Life 04/05/98

### The Doctrine of Suffering and Solutions.

Tree of Life for 04-05-98

In Philippians 3:12-16 Paul brings out the three different stages of spiritual growth. Paul is describing his advance through the three stages retrospectively as he expresses the viewpoint of SSE in verses nine through eleven, then SA in verses 12 through 14, and then SM in verses 15 and 16. He also points out that believers must beware of religion with all its emotional appeal, self righteousness, coercion and potential violence. The believer must come to know that he fulfills the Christian way of life by following God's command, not by striving to fulfill his own legalistic ideas of what ought to please God. We must constantly remember who's goal it is that we press forward toward. It is the goal God has laid out for our lives! Jesus Christ laid hold of His goal (i.e., strategical victory of angelic conflict) and so we are also to lay hold of our goal (i.e., tactical victory). We should also remember who's power we need to employ in order to attain that goal. So, the objective that Paul concentrates on in our passage is the same goal for which Paul and every believer was pursued and overtaken by Christ Jesus. Paul recognized a major legitimate need in his life which was to keep on pursuing the objective. That objective being to reach spiritual maturity and glorify God! And, in order to advance in the spiritual life one must be able to effectively and accurately evaluate himself.

There are two objective standards for self evaluation/analysis in the spiritual life:

**1) Perception, Metabolization, and Application of Bible doctrine, as being that which grooms the believers attitude.**

## **2) Understanding the doctrine of suffering, i.e., why you are suffering?**

Is it due to the law of volitional responsibility, divine discipline, or undeserved suffering for blessing. Suffering is a barometer of your spiritual life which exists between you and God. No one else can evaluate the sufferings of another believer.

Paul had a way of spiritually evaluating himself and it was not according to his feelings. His evaluation was based on PMA of BD and the Doctrine of Suffering. Again, the overt circumstances of life have a wide variety of causes and only you can evaluate what your suffering is all about. Two believers may experience similar disasters and in one case it may be suffering for blessing, in the other it may be divine discipline. The answer lies in one's spiritual advance or retrogression and only God and the believer are privy to that information.

Paul starts in verse 9 by informing us that knowing Christ (i.e. occupation with Christ) is one of the characteristics of SSE. Then after coming to know Christ in SSE, Paul then turns his attention to the divine power and the fellowship of His sufferings which pave the way to SA. Then finally the ultimate objective of SM, being conformed to the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ by way of undeserved suffering. The humanity of Christ persevered on the cross with the very same power that is offered to every believer today. Jesus Christ offered Himself to God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit, Hebrews 9:14, and through the problem solving device of perfect happiness (+H), Hebrews 12:2. And He did not complete His expiating work on the cross to merely save us and deliver us from hell but to go even further in offering us God's highest and best, 2Peter 3:9; Ephesians 1:2-3; 1Th 2:4. We have been elected, in Christ, to the very best that God has, 2Peter 1:11. Therefore, Paul focuses on the divine power made available to us because if you are going to advance in the Christian way of life, you will need this power to overcome the various testings at each stage of spiritual growth. Paul notes this as an aggressive action in the form of persistence in positive volition, accumulated metabolized doctrine, utilization of divine power and employment of the problem solving devices. That is how we press forward to the prize of the high call of spiritual maturity.

So, rather than be caught off guard and victimized by undeserved suffering, Paul takes an aggressive approach to adversity. Paul actually uses adversity to increase his spiritual life, which is exactly what God designed adversity for. When the believer turns to complaining and blaming others in adversity he loses the battle and Satan wins the battle.

The believer who is advancing spiritually knows God never brings on more than he can bear and does not live in fear but embraces the testings and trials that come his way. The spiritually adult believer who is advancing toward the high objective is willing to go through undeserved suffering without murmuring or complaining or justifying his position.

Paul's aggressive approach to undeserved suffering is a formula that every believer can employ:

**problem solving devices,**

**personal love for God,**

**impersonal love for all,**

**sharing the perfect happiness of God.**

He presses on knowing that God is working something great in his life through suffering for blessing. At SSE we have confidence but we still harbor illusions about ourselves. At SA those illusions fade out as we, in humility, recognize who we are in the flesh and who we really are in Christ. A believer who overestimates himself hinders his own spiritual advance whereas the believer who evaluates himself objectively perpetuates his momentum and eventually reaches SM. If you humble yourself you will be exalted by God. In humility, one regards himself in a nonemotional type thinking according to strict logical rules. Such an evaluation is conducted under the light of facts as they truly exist, not as you would like to color them as existing. The believer in SA drops the illusions and accepts the truth God reveals to him about himself. If your occupation with Christ, reliance on doctrine, and utilization of divine power enable you to take suffering in stride, you are making progress in spiritual adulthood.

The successful application of doctrine under pressure points out the efficacy of divine provisions and increases the advancing believer's personal love for God. What we feel is never the issue, it's what the word of God says that is always reality. What the word of God tells us to do is forget what lies behind and concentrate on what lies ahead: the prize of the upward call. Paul knew very well the temptation to dwell on past failures. ***He once persecuted and killed Christians!*** Not something to be proud of but also not something any longer to be considered. Paul expresses to us that part of spiritual advance is blotting out and disregarding one's past failures and pressing on to maturity as the final objective. No matter how

badly you think you have acted in the past the fact that you are alive means there is still opportunity for you to advance in God's plan to the high ground of SM.

Recalling past failures only serves to cultivate bitterness, self-pity, and a guilt complex which further induces involvement in Satan's cosmic system. This is a powerful weapon in Satan's hand. He accomplishes such spiritual atrocities by judging believers and causing them to dwell on past failures. He does not do this himself but uses other believers to do so. James 3:6 informs us that Satan judges people by controlling the tongues of the believers and unbelievers in his cosmic system. He uses them in an attempt to cause positive believers to enter into mental attitude sins, etc. The thought that needs to be closely adhered to is the fact that we are engaged in spiritual warfare! The angelic conflict is not some far-fetched spiritual theory but an ever present reality in the believer's life. And just as physical war in the human realm is not pretty, spiritual warfare is just as messy. The believer needs to appropriate, on a daily basis, the knowledge that his existence does not revolve around his marriage and children, or job, etc., and making everything comfortable, but revolves around the spiritual war ensuing around him. Man is not here to have a nice, tidy, comfortable, and safe life. Man is here to execute God's plan, to reach the ultimate objective of spiritual maturity and glorify God as His witness in the appeal trial of Satan (which is why mankind was created) in this angelic conflict. So, get over what this world system projects your way concerning "**why**" you are here! Why you are here is to engage in an invisible war and this requires knowledge and power... divine knowledge and divine power!

All war presupposes human weakness, and seeks to exploit it. If you are advancing spiritually you can count on opposition from the enemy. You can also count on undeserved suffering as a gift from your faithful Father. Against the enemy we need to stand firm, but in the face of undeserved suffering we need to take the offensive and forge forward, not allowing the pressure to distract us from our final objective but to advance us along. If the spiritual life entailed only light, breezy days of comfort what greatness would be extrapolated from it? Only major engagements involving all one's force lead to major successes and only great victories pave the way for great results. Wherever a great and positive goal exists a great battle is not only the most natural but also the best means of attaining it. Shrinking from a major decision by evading such a battle carries its own punishment. If you fail in testing you will only have to go through it

again and again. Failure can come by neglect to even approach the pressures which are gifted to us in the spiritual life.

As the scale of battle grows so does the number of additional circumstances that are decided by it. In each stage of spiritual growth, the testing ground grows more intense to induce an even further stage of growth but the believer also possesses more power to endure and overcome those pressures. These pressures in the spiritual realm create victory which in turn creates more pressures. God's plan at reaching SM is quite exciting if viewed in the proper attitude.

When Paul commands us in Philippians 3:15 to "**have this attitude**", he is referring to a dynamic and powerful mental attitude which is especially needed in SM at evidence testing! Paul is saying let the mature believers keep on thinking a certain way, which refers to an action that began in the past and continues into the present. At each stage of undeserved suffering you have more power. But, Paul still warns that the mature believer never arrives at a stage of invisibility and needs to think differently than he does at some points. At which points, God will reveal the need for a change in thinking to the believer. Everyone has an area of weakness, everyone! So don't think you have out-grown your area of weakness. You cannot approach SM and evidence testing with a cocky attitude of thinking more highly of yourself. Any manifestation of arrogance brings failure. Courage and good decisions come by thinking without emotion and without arrogance. Emotion is where many fail testing and most then continue down the road to becoming a loser because they did not face their arrogance. It doesn't matter what stage of spiritual growth you are at, you can flunk any test associated with suffering for blessing.

How does God reveal to you when you are right and when you are wrong? He reveals His truth through the perception, metabolization, and application of accurately and faithfully taught BD from your pastor-teacher. Although the provision is made for failure, the purpose of momentum testing is not failure but success. In every generation there will be a certain number of positive believers who will continue their momentum until they attain SM. This is a very small and special group of believers. Unfortunately most believers fall out of rank and become casualties in the angelic conflict. So how does the believer continue to advance in rank? By the following ways

- 1) Residence, function, and momentum in predestination.
- 2) Consistent and prompt use of rebound to avoid prolonged residence in Satan's cosmic system. Without immediate use of rebound, ground will be

lost.

3) Avoidance of discouragement by any failure or set back in any category of suffering for blessing.

4) Consistent use of the **PSD** of spiritual adulthood which are different than those of spiritual childhood.

5) Unrelenting **PMA of BD** while not letting anyone take you away.

If you are making the right decisions you will progress and be victorious in the angelic conflict. Spiritual warfare will come into dramatic focus at spiritual maturity. SM puts the believer in the position for the most significant and beneficial of all suffering for blessing, evidence testing which glorifies God to the maximum! This is when God says to Satan **"Have you considered my servant, \_\_\_\_\_?", Job 1:8 (insert your name, if you dare)** That is the ultimate goal in the spiritual life and not until this happens does true living begin.

What is your purpose here on earth? Well, your purpose is not to lay down arms or call a truce to make nice-nice with other Christians. Your purpose does not lie in being thought well of by others. Your purpose on earth is to be thought well of by God, for whose glory you were created! All else is fleeting and vain. Only those few focused believers who are enormously intent on attaining the ultimate objective of SM will aggressively forge forward and join the ranks of the likes of the apostle Paul in glorifying God before all angels! Now that's a purpose!

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[Return to list of trees](#)

[Return to main page](#)

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