

Learning to Trust God

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The subject today is learning to trust God. The Bible is filled with examples of people who seem to have difficulty learning to trust God, and perhaps we've had our own situations and circumstances in which we had a little difficulty trusting God or wondering where He was, or why it was taking Him so long to intervene and deal with our issues. It's a serious issue; something that we need to be aware of. Learning to trust God is of course fundamental. Here we are, two weeks into the countdown to Pentecost. Seven Sabbaths shall be complete, was the instruction. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. This is the second Sabbath that we count down towards Pentecost. A lot has been made of the experience of Israel coming out of Egypt and then traveling up to Sinai where they would enter into a covenant with God. It's the season and there's a lot to be gleaned from that particular experience. There's a constant effort on our part to do the things that God wants us to do and to stay close to Him.

A couple of weeks ago, James Smyda's sermon was about the mark of the Beast and it's not a one-time phenomenon at the end of the age, but something that is continually out there. There have always been two approaches, two ways, two decisions, going all the way back to the garden. You have the tree of life—that's the mark of God, if you will, versus the tree of knowledge of good and evil—that's do your own thing, which is what Satan is forever trying to encourage us to do: Don't mind what God says, I've got more exciting things for you. We have to be careful about that, don't we? Then Mark Mickelson's sermon, given a couple weeks ago as well—God expects us to act according to His instruction: Don't add to, don't subtract from, don't veer to the left or the right; stay on the narrow path. That's important when learning how to trust God.

When we look at the experience of Israel, the liberation of Israel from Egypt is God showing Himself trustworthy and faithful. That's one of the things that God wanted to teach the children of Israel—I'm trustworthy, you can trust Me. You don't have to wring your hands, at least not excessively. We are human and we do tend to wring our hands and grind our teeth but God is teaching us to indeed trust Him.

What we see with Israel coming out of Egypt is the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham. If you will recall, we'll just bring back to memory some of the things that God had covenanted with Abraham. He says, I will make you a great nation. I will expand and multiply your descendants. Look up at the stars; if you can number the stars, your descendants will be on that order—a large number. It had to do with land and a possession as well. He said, I will give to your descendants all the land from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates. That's a big piece of real estate, and up to this point, that has not been fulfilled. It's interesting to note that with Abraham, God told Him these things would not come to pass for four hundred years. I suppose Abraham, having been told that, could pretty well figure out that he wasn't going to be there to see it. He

is the father of the faithful. He believed God and it was attributed to him for righteousness. So consider that—four hundred years and this is what’s happening. When God sent Moses and Aaron down to extract Israel out of Egypt, this was the culmination of the four hundred years. God would extract Abraham’s descendants out of the land of Egypt and take them to the Promised Land. That of course was set up in such a way that God would get the credit—they were enslaved, they were in Egypt, they had no way of liberating themselves. God set it up and provided the answer to His promises to Abraham in such a way that they would see without a doubt that it was God’s doing. They wouldn’t be taking credit for it.

The people were freed from bondage—freed from bondage to do what? Now that you’re free, are you indeed free? Now you can go about pursuing life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—what does that mean? Free to do what? Let’s turn to Exodus 19 and here we have the culmination of their journey from Egypt up to the area of Sinai where God would enter into covenant with them. They’ve made the trek and of course you have to think about what’s going through God’s mind as this is happening. He has a certain idea in mind for them, a plan for them that He wants them to accomplish. How is He going to do that? One of the primary issues is He has to teach them that He is trustworthy, that they don’t have to worry and wonder about it. He is perfectly trustworthy. In chapter 19 of Exodus, let’s notice, verse 1.

Exodus 19:1 *In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt ... (NKJV)*

They left the fifteenth day of the first month so figure fifteen days in the first month, twenty-nine or so in the second month, now we’re at forty-four days, so this is going to happen in the first week of the third month, these events that are now taking place.

1 continued) *... on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai.*
2) *For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain.*
(NKJV)

They’re coming to the specific place God wanted them to be.

3) *And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel:*
4) *“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians ... (NKJV)*

Again, God gets the credit. In no way did Israel have anything to do with it other than to pack and get out of town. They did have to take the initiative and do that much at least.

4 repeated) *“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. (NKJV)*

That's always a curious analogy—I bore you on eagles' wings—which kind of brings to my mind a Boeing 747 aircraft, or something with all the necessary, modern luxuries. They walked every step of the way so clearly the reference is not to flying out of Egypt, but to having the protection a mother eagle would give to its hatchlings as she teaches them how to fly. So, *I brought you to Myself*, God says. Verse 5.

5) Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. (NKJV)

All the earth including you and me. Everything belongs to God. We don't own anything, really. It's on loan to us from God. He's happy to do that and we need to keep those things in mind as we go about our business. He says there's going to be a covenant, we're going to establish an agreement and it's going to depend on you obeying My voice and keeping My covenant. Then you will indeed be a special treasure to Me. So God is looking at making a special treasure out of this group of people that have long been slaves in a hostile environment. How is God going to do that? What does He have in mind specifically?

6) And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." (NKJV)

Israel had a choice—you can choose to be My special people or you can choose not to be My special people. That's what it comes to. There are no other options. I'm going to make a special people out of you; He describes them as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. That's what they're called to. God makes a promise to Abraham, four hundred years ago, and here He is fulfilling that promise. The descendants of Abraham really didn't have anything to say about it. God didn't ask them what they wanted to do, whether they wanted to be a nation of priests or whether they wanted to be pipe fitters or something else. He didn't give them an option. This is the way it is, you can choose to or choose not to, is essentially what He's saying. It's going to require your obedience. A kingdom of priests.

Think about it; as God is bringing this people out of Egypt, what He has in mind is rather extensive, and the influence that they would have if they would indeed yield to God is considerable. Let's turn to Deuteronomy. You remember the story; they had a difficult time obeying God and keeping the conditions they agreed to, so they ended up wandering around the desert for forty years until that rebellious generation perished. You don't want to go into the Promised Land? Okay, fine, you don't have to, you can perish in the wilderness. In Deuteronomy 4, notice what it says; this is just prior to when they actually take possession of the Promised Land and Moses is reviewing some of the events that took place.

Deuteronomy 4:1 *"Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you. (NKJV)*

Here again, finally, the time has come when the land can be possessed. It could have been possessed forty years before but they decided they didn't want to do it the way God wanted. Here it is; the moment has come.

2) You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. (NKJV)

No choices, no negotiating room with God over this particular issue. My statutes, My judgments, My commandments—if you want to live. It's a matter of life, so choose life. Dropping down to verse 5.

5) "Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me [this is Moses speaking], that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. (NKJV)

Following God's way of life—as prescribed by His statutes, His judgments and His commandments—was critical to success in this venture.

6) Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' (NKJV)

A nation that would put God first would be something to behold. The nations around would be so struck by the benefits that accrued to this nation, because of their obedience to God, that it would be truly something to behold.

*7) "For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?
8) And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? (NKJV)*

Again, to become a kingdom of priests, God was going to set them up as an example to other nations. Let's turn briefly to chapter 8 and notice: On the one hand we have a slave people—enslaved for generations—that have been brought out of Egypt, and I don't know how you would describe them. What would you expect of a slave people? On the other hand you have a people that God wants to become a special nation—a tribute to following His way, to be developed into a kingdom of priests. What do priests do? They serve God, and in this case, God is going to set up an example whereby the other nations could be influenced by the example of the descendants of Abraham, now developed into a righteous nation. That was the plan, that's what God had in mind when He brought them out of Egypt. Now chapter 8, verse 1.

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. (NKJV)*

What we have taking place with Israel at this juncture is the fulfillment of the promises God made through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

2) And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, [notice] to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. (NKJV)

If you're going to be a special nation, one that catches the attention of your neighbors, if you're going to be a kingdom of priests, then your heart must be properly oriented—you must be humble, you must demonstrate to God that you are willing to do it.

3) So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. (NKJV)

This is what God had in mind. Let's recall briefly how God went about teaching the Israelites that He could be trusted. We don't really trust God or look to God in quite the same way as when we're under duress—when the way ahead is trauma and difficulty and conflict and chaos—and under those conditions, the way forward is not apparent, and perhaps even at every turn it's blocked, so that it just seems to be beyond our control. What do we do under those circumstances? God placed Israel into a series of situations as they traversed up to Sinai to demonstrate what their attitude should be—you're in a tough situation, and when you're in a tough situation you come to Me about it, and I will help you through it.

You remember the situation at the Red Sea; they didn't much more than get out of Ramses and they come to the Red Sea, and you've probably been there—we've all had our Red Sea events in our lives, when the way ahead is not immediately obvious and we can feel the vibration of the chariots closing in on us, whatever form the chariots may take in our particular situation—we've all had our situations where we felt like we were being pursued by charioteers and there was no obvious way of escape. What did Moses say to do?

Stand still, and see the salvation and the deliverance of God. So through Moses, God opened up the Red Sea, and they walked on dry land and stood there, and watched the destruction of the army of Egypt. Quite a miraculous intervention. Then they didn't get too far into the wilderness when they came to Mara and the waters were bitter. So what did they say? Let's go back to the Red Sea. That was their complaint to God after they faced their life and death situation, after the Egyptians bore down on them looking for revenge; their attitude was, let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians. They thought it was actually easier to do it the Egyptians' way than to do it God's way. Really?

Have you ever thought that? Have you ever thought God has led you to this position and it isn't what you bargained for? Bear in mind you don't have any bargaining chips from God—you can choose either to do what He has for you or not. You can choose that. The fact is, in my own experience, God has never forced me to do anything, but He did make it apparent on a couple of occasions where I knew it was better for me if I did it His way.

Here they are at Mara next, bitter waters, where they murmured against Moses, what shall we drink? You brought us out here in the desert to die of thirst. God instructs Moses to toss this tree limb in the water to sweeten it up. Again, a lesson to them that you can trust God. Things may seem difficult, God will intervene for you if you just let Him. Brethren, we have to be taught the same things, we have to learn to trust God. Whenever things are going along nicely, then fine, we don't have to worry about it, do we? Then they come to the situation with the manna—what shall we eat? They said, oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in Egypt. Really? Is that what you wanted? It would have been better to die in Egypt, just kill us all—we would rather just all die in Egypt than come out here and die of starvation in the desert. God brings the manna in spite of their bad attitude. Again, are we being influenced? Are we coming to understand that God is indeed trustworthy, that we can rely on Him?

They come to Rephidim and are thirsty again—*Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst!* Really? In spite of all these trials, God is trying to teach them. Look, we've only got fifty days here, and I'm going to ask you to enter into a covenant now. There are some basic things about Me you need to know. Yes, there are difficulties in this world—there are—but we can learn to trust God and He will see us through. What happens is, the trial comes and it not only demonstrates God's character and His ability to intervene, and His desire to provide guidance, but it's also useful for—what?—for exposing our current state of mind and heart, our human nature; nothing like a trial for that where things aren't going well—for whatever reason you're not getting enough sleep, there's something amiss all the time, you're under the gun and it can be any number of things: financial issues, health issues, nothing like a sick child to really turn a household on its ear and cause all manner of complications. So our trials come in various forms, but the trials are useful.

God is testing them, that's why He took them out into the wilderness, it said in Deuteronomy 8—to humble you. Let you get a little hungry, a little thirsty. Who are you going to trust? Will you trust God or will you just sit around and complain? Israel went through these various things and I try to put myself in God's head—what are You trying to teach these people, what do You want to teach these people? If you're going to make a kingdom of priests out of them, we've got to do something. We have to educate them from where they sit as slaves to where you're going to have them be a shining light to the nations around them and a kingdom of priests. What's He doing with us? That was then. What about now? Is it any different today, after so many years for us? We're called out of this world—a type of slavery, a type of bondage to sin, because the only alternative to going God's way is to go the devil's way in one form or another. The devil's way comes disguised in various forms and shapes, some of it quite pleasant—I'll

give you all kinds of goodies if you'll go my way rather than go God's way. Remember how the devil tempted Jesus when he tried to get Him to worship him? The devil tempted Him with all kinds of goodies that were available in this world. Of course, Jesus had the good sense to send him packing. You and I have to have the good sense to send the devil packing as well, because you will get your opportunities to make your choices as we go along.

Let's turn to Revelation 5—familiar territory, of course. What's God's plan for you and me? Is it any different than His plan for Israel? As they came out of Egypt, we also have come out of bondage to slavery thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His shed blood. We've been redeemed, been purchased. We have to remember that—we don't own ourselves. Think of the old adolescent comeback: It's my body, I'll do as I please; it's my life, I'll do as I please. Actually, you shouldn't take that approach because a lot of people get banged up and beat up learning that lesson.

Rick Railston has given us two sermons on Bible study; last time he talked about the importance of context and we'll try to illustrate the point here. Oftentimes we'll turn to Revelation 5:10—let's read verse 10.

Revelation 5:10 *And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.*” (NKJV)

God is still looking to make a kingdom of priests to Himself for His service. That has not changed. It's interesting to back up a little bit, to just pick a single verse out of some chapter, in a book somewhere in the Bible, and just look to that one verse and try to comprehend the whole story, but there's a lot going on in these particular verses. Chapter 4 and chapter 5 of Revelation are a front-row seat to the throne room of God. There's a lot of activity taking place here, and it's important for us to back off and see what the context is in this statement that is made. We go back to chapter 4, verse 8.

Revelation 4:8 *The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!”* (NKJV)

This is God the Father.

9) *Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever,*

10) *the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying ...* (NKJV)

Alright, so you have four living creatures, twenty-four elders, and you can see their attitude of abject worship before the throne of God—before God Himself. Notice the message here:

11) *“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You [this is the Father they’re speaking to, we’ll verify that here in a moment] created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.”* (NKJV)

They cast their crowns before God and say this. This is the message. There are twenty-eight of them all together. Then in chapter 5,

Revelation 5:1 *And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.*

2) *Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?”*

3) *And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.*

4) *So I wept much ...* (NKJV)

John must really have wanted to know—his curiosity was such that he wept at learning that there was nobody worthy to open the scroll and tell us what the secret was.

4 continued) *... because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.*

5) *But one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.”* (NKJV)

Who is this Lion of the tribe of Judah—the Root of David? We know this is Jesus Christ he’s talking about.

6) *And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.* (NKJV)

Interesting. Here’s the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world. Here in this vision that John sees, of the throne room of God, here He is, as a Lamb, having been slain—it’s obvious that He has been slain. He’s described as having seven horns and seven eyes and the eyes are the seven spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. That’s an interesting concept; I don’t have much insight I can give you on just exactly what they’re doing out there, but there it is nevertheless. Here’s the one, Jesus Christ.

8) *Now when He had taken the scroll [this would be the Lamb appeared as slain, this would be Jesus], the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.* (NKJV)

Sometimes you think your prayers aren’t being answered—maybe they’re being collected in the bowls in the very throne room of heaven, waiting for the appropriate day.

I don't know the full answer to that, but somebody's prayers are in those bowls. So, here is the scene, and now you have the statement that we read in verse 10 about being kings and priests to our God, and it's in the context of a song that's being sung by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. A choir of sorts at the very throne of God and here's what they're singing.

9) *"You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,*
10) *and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."* (NKJV)

God will have His kingdom of priests. Nothing has changed in this regard. There are other parts to the story of course but God set out to have a kingdom of priests, He will have one. He will have a group of people, serving as His servants, as priests in His kingdom and we have the option to participate in that. Sometimes we're strangers and pilgrims and sojourners and all. I'll admit without blushing too much, I've been a reluctant sojourner from time to time. We don't really have many options. We have the option of choosing to be what God desires us to be or not. I trust then that we've all chosen to be a part of it. Yes, let's do it—let's do it God's way because that's what He desires. That's our option.

11) *Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands ...* (NKJV)

Wow, lots of activity going on around the throne of God. God is still developing his kingdom of priests. By the way, God gives us opportunities to practice. Have you ever thought about that? If you're going to be a priest—if you're in training to become a priest of the Almighty God, what is He doing to train you? He put Israel through the paces in the wilderness to teach them to trust Him. So, there will be trials, brethren—we will be tested.

The purpose is to teach that God can be trusted. We have to recognize that. The way forward for us sometimes can be pretty murky. It's not altogether clear. We come up to the Red Sea, the way forward is blocked—at every turn, it seems—and the chariots are bearing down on us. We all have our various trials and tests. It would be unfair for me to stand up and say, once you commit to God, everything is a bed of roses right on through to the Second Coming and the resurrection. Experience would tell us otherwise. There will be tests, there will be trials.

You can read the examples in scripture, example after example from beginning to end, and the nature of your trial may be something akin to the Red Sea. There's no way forward, there's trouble in every degree, from every angle. We learn to trust God. You might be about to be thrown into the fiery furnace for not worshipping Nebuchadnezzar's image—whatever form the image might be in your personal

circumstances. We will have our trials. Usually the trials are financial issues, those are big ones; health issues—somebody is desperately ill or chronically ill; sometimes it's persecution—you do your level best to do God's will, and somebody is on your back, criticizing you for it or causing trouble. Sometimes there's family disorder of one sort or another. Families are broken up because of death or divorce or something of that nature, and it just seems like there are insurmountable difficulties. How do we deal with those sorts of things? Does God have something specific in mind? Is He training us and preparing us for something larger? I think we have to acknowledge, yes, He is. If you're faced with being tossed into the lions' den for failure to pay up, sometimes that happens—we get tossed into the lions' den. We have to learn to trust God. These are the times we must truly trust God. Again, it reveals our true nature.

When we face that really difficult situation and we don't know exactly how to get out of it, how to deal with it, then God is leading us. We can learn to trust God but we have limited negotiating power when we're dealing with God. God has a plan and a purpose that He's working out, and He has included you and me and our choices—will we cooperate with Him and achieve that purpose, or are we going to drag our feet and complain every step of the way? You know how that goes; it doesn't lead to particularly good circumstances. We have to face the logical difficulties or the logical circumstances that God puts us through and learn from them. He does want us to learn to trust Him so He's going to put us in situations where we have to trust Him. There's no other way. What do you think of that? Is God mean and nasty for doing that? He could make it easy, but He can't, really, if He's going to achieve His purpose. If He was going to convert Ancient Israel into a nation of priests to serve Him, to be an example to the other nations, He was going to have to require certain things of them. Same thing for us. There is a way and we've got to get ourselves in harmony with it.

However, there are times when it appears that God has abandoned us. Have you ever felt that way? I pray and I cry out to God and where is He when I need Him? Let's turn to Matthew 26—there's a lot to be learned from studying Jesus' example in these matters because He came as a human being, to experience what it is to be a human being. God didn't know personally what it was to be a human being so Jesus became flesh, dwelled among us, so we can learn a great deal from His example.

In Matthew 26, we are approaching the time, the hour has come, they are keeping the Passover here, and Jesus will be arrested and will face a very serious situation, obviously, which is going to require His death.

Matthew 26:36 *Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there."*

37) And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. (NKJV)

Have you ever been sorrowful and deeply distressed for whatever reason? Some of these things are just life in general, some of these things maybe God orchestrated.

Certainly this is orchestrated, this is planned out, prophesied well in advance that Jesus would have to face these issues. He's deeply distressed, sorrowful.

38) *Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."* (NKJV)

Think of your own situation. I suspect we'll all, at some point, be put into a situation just like this. Not that we're going to be crucified, necessarily. Whatever the nature of the trial, we'll be faced with something that is beyond our capability to deal with. Maybe it is indeed a matter of life and death. We all know that we're not going to live forever but it's really a shock when the diagnosis comes down that you're suffering with something that could be the end. Why am I surprised when the doctor says, the evidence is you're afflicted with such and such a condition and if we don't do something about it, you could be faced with the end. We all face our situations. Jesus Himself was exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.

39) *He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying ...* (NKJV)

When you fall on your face, praying, you're helpless. You're not standing up strong and powerful, you have fallen, prostrate, in front of the Father, pleading for intervention.

39 continued) ... *"O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me;* (NKJV)

You may face circumstances just like this, in conditions conducive to your own situation. It won't be exactly the same as what Jesus faced but you might be faced with the same sorrowful condition—exceedingly sorrowful—a difficult proposition. You might cry out to God, I'd like this to pass from me. (Don't we, most of the time?) Whatever the trial is, whatever it is we're facing, whatever hardship we may face. If it's a health issue we want to be healed now, not next month, not next year.

39 repeated) ... *if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me* [whatever the trial, whatever the circumstance]; *nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.*" (NKJV)

It is impossible to put a value on developing the ability to discern the will of God and just submit yourself to it. Without that, the possibility of our achieving what God has in store for us is just not there. Jesus was desirous to avoid all of it—He's going to be arrested, tortured, scourged, mocked, criticized and ridiculed, and eventually nailed to a stake. He's going to die. He would just as soon not have to do that, obviously. But He says, nevertheless, Your will be done.

40) *Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?"*

41) *Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*" (NKJV)

Have you ever faced that situation? You desire to do the will of God and yet the flesh is so impossibly weak. He went and prayed a second time; now notice verse 42.

42) Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." (NKJV)

There are times when we pray for God's intervention, when we ask God to relieve us of this, that, or the other trial or difficulty that we face, and there are times when He does. What happens if He doesn't relieve it? What happens if He says, in this case, I'm sorry, you have to drink the bitter cup? Have you ever had to face the bitter cup and drink it? You face that situation that you don't want to see happen, whatever it is. We all will have those conditions or situations that we wrestle with, where God comes in our path and we have to respond. The spirit is willing, the flesh is weak—oh yes. Thy Kingdom come, when we can rid ourselves of the flesh. If this cup cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done. There are those occasions when we just simply have to drink the cup, as bitter as it may be. You remember the story, in chapter 27; now Jesus is nailed to the stake, verse 45.

Matthew 27:45 *Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.*

46) And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying ... "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (NKJV)

Did God forsake Jesus? Has God ever forsaken you? Have you ever thought that He had? Here's the situation: God has told us in these instructions, I will never leave you nor forsake you. But there may be an occasion when it will be required of you to drink the bitter cup, whatever that might be. God knows when that time has come and when you must do that. Then we, in trusting God, take the bitter cup. Fortunately, every day is not drinking the bitter cup, but there are times. Where is God when I need Him? God is right where He always is, very much involved, directing and guiding. It's not that God or Jesus cannot directly or personally intervene. Think about this for a moment. This whole matter of becoming priests in God's kingdom, serving in God's coming kingdom, we need practice. My experience has been—whether I'm talking with other people about their experience or my own personal experience—we ask God to intervene, to comfort us, to provide a miracle, to provide assistance, and do you know what God oftentimes does? He'll dispatch a human being. Think about that for a minute. If we're going to be priests, do we not have to practice, do we not have to go about the process of learning how to be a priest, to intervene for others? In Romans 8, we're instructed concerning the spirit of God and how it works in us. Paul is writing to the Romans and he says, in verse 9,

Romans 8:9 *But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. (NKJV)*

So both are involved—spirit of God, spirit of Christ.

10) *And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

11) *But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (NKJV)*

If the Spirit of God dwells in you, then when God dispatches a human being in whom His Spirit dwells, is God not Himself going to the aid of the individual? You may be called on to assist in any number of ways. It might just come to your attention—some little thing; it doesn't have to be much. If God actually dwells in us, He doesn't run off and hide somewhere while we're in trouble. He may send and dispatch another human being—another individual—who possesses the Spirit of God, dwelling in him or her, and then He sends that person to your aid. It's the same as God coming. God lives in us. It's God doing the work, wouldn't you say? Can we extrapolate that out and say when God dispatches one of his servants, it is God Himself seeing to it, understanding the situation and then pursuing it?

Think about that—am I content to be trained as a servant of God, as a priest in the Kingdom of God? What does God expect of me in that role? It isn't just about me, it isn't just about you. It's about how I can be of assistance to God in His work, now, and then later in a much greater way when the Kingdom of God is in full force. It's a marvelous thing to contemplate. We sometimes are a little sheepish about what God requires of us, about the magnitude of what God is preparing us for, of what He's called us to. Let's turn to chapter 12 and notice some of the things that we might be called upon to do. Again, this business of life, as God has called us, is serious. We're being prepared for something far greater but we're expected to practice now.

Romans 12:1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (NKJV)*

Living sacrifices. We don't qualify to be a dead sacrifice. You had to be without spot and without blemish. We are living sacrifices, being transformed now.

2) *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (NKJV)*

What is the will of God, for you, for me? What is He trying to do with us? How is He using our day-to-day experiences to prepare us for what is ahead?

3) *For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. (NKJV)*

That was one of the primary reasons for God bringing Israel through the desert, through the wilderness, to teach them proper humility—their proper place relative to God. It's not unusual to think that that would be a lesson that God is teaching us today.

4) *For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,*

5) *so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*

6) *Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them:* (NKJV)

Gifts are given to us. We are expected to put our gifts to work, whatever the gift is.

6 continued) *... if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;* (NKJV)

Ministry—service—we're all called to that.

7) *... let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching;*

8) *he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.* (NKJV)

So what are we doing here? We're developing the qualities of a priest of the Most High God. Then in verse 9, notice it almost reads like a shopping list.

9) *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.* (NKJV)

You'll have opportunity—will you not?—to face and abhor the evil; to turn away from it and to cling to what is good.

10) *Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;* (NKJV)

What do you think? Is God preparing us for something? Is He giving us opportunities to put these things into practice?

11) *not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;* (NKJV)

Once again, what does a priest do? A priest serves the people God calls, not lacking in diligence. As I get older, it's a whole lot more difficult to be diligent just by virtue of the fact that the youthful energy, the youthful exuberance, is waning.

12) *rejoicing in hope ...* (NKJV)

Much of what God has promised, we haven't received yet. It isn't ours yet, we haven't yet benefited from it but we can look forward to it as Abraham and others did.

12 continued) ... *patient in tribulation* ... (NKJV)

You know what that tells me? There will be tribulation. God won't always relieve it immediately. Learn to trust God. What lessons can I learn through this business?

12 continued) ... *continuing steadfastly in prayer*; (NKJV)

Sometimes it doesn't appear that prayer is doing much good because you don't see immediate results. Like I say, maybe there are those personages at the throne of God, collecting your prayers in a bowl against the time when they will be answered—I don't know the answer to that.

13) *distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality*. (NKJV)

What are we reading here? We could almost take a look at this and say, this is going to describe life in God's Kingdom, once He gets it all set up, and won't that be wonderful. We're being called upon to begin practicing those things now. We're in training, folks. We're going to be priests in the Kingdom of God—servants, if you will.

14) *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse*. (NKJV)

That's not the American mentality. If someone persecutes you, we send in the marines to get even. God doesn't want you to do that. The example of Christ is, He's willing to lay down His life for everybody. There are those occasions when we will be persecuted. Bless and do not curse; that must be our response to persecution.

15) *Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep*. (NKJV)

We have those occasions in our fellowship—not necessarily only in our fellowship, in the neighborhood, or wherever we are in a situation—to rejoice with those who are rejoicing, or to encourage those who for whatever reason are weeping.

16) *Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion*. (NKJV)

Do not be wise in your own opinion. Be humble. This seems to be a theme that is visited regularly in the word of God. Be humble. Don't think too highly of yourself.

17) *Repay no one evil for evil*. (NKJV)

What does that tell you? Will there not be an occasion where you will be subject to evil? That's what it says. He's telling you how to respond—it's not God's world yet. It's the way of Cain that predominates in the world. The sons of disobedience have the preeminence in this world. We will face evil; here's how to deal with it: Don't repay evil for evil.

17 continued) ... *Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.* (NKJV)

There is some good out there. Not every day is a horrible misery—of course not. God created us with five senses and didn't apologize for it. There are things about life we can surely enjoy, and should.

18) *If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.* (NKJV)

If you have a persnickety neighbor—one who is not happy with anything you do—do what you can to live peaceably.

19) *Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath;* (NKJV)

When Paul goes through these things and he's sharing these things with the Romans, I suspect that the Romans have experienced some of these things already. They've been subject to evil, they've had to deal with it; they've had to face evil and know how to respond to it. We certainly don't have the military might, the firepower, to resist evil in that way. We just must trust God.

19 repeated) ... *do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.* (NKJV)

A lot of the things that are going to be repaid—people have gone to their graves, generations have passed and there was no repayment—but oh yes, the time is coming, God is going to set it all straight. Can we be patient and wait for God?

20) *Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."*

21) *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* (NKJV)

That's how we're going to go about it. Brethren, we have plenty of things to work on. God is consistent throughout history. He is in the process of molding us and shaping us into something far beyond what we can comprehend. We're going to be kings and priests or a kingdom of priests in the Kingdom of God? Really? We've been given a tremendous opportunity and we've been called upon to put those principles into practice even now, and in so doing, we prepare the way. We demonstrate to God, we can trust You, and we do trust Him. Really, that's the best place to be.

You have the situation with the peace that passes all understanding. Do you ever think about that for a bit? What is the peace that is understandable? What is the peace that the world offers us? What did Jesus say? Remember at the Passover, He said, My peace I give you, not as the world gives you. How does the world offer peace to us? Isn't it usually about material things and about feeling good and possessing your desires now? What peace did Jesus give us? When is the peace that surpasses all

understanding actually experienced? Is it not when things are the most chaotic, the most conflicted and the most difficult?

In those situations when you can see beyond the current moment and recognize what God is doing, that's where the peace that surpasses all understanding comes from. Trusting thoroughly and completely in God's will, that He is going to see it through to a positive end. You have examples in the book of Hebrews where it talks about people who lived by faith and overcame all kinds of things, and then you have those who were persecuted and were martyred for the sake of God's way. We don't know exactly what's ahead for us in every detail but I think the principles we know. God is in the process of preparing us for something far greater, in a way making us the instruments of His will, and this life is about coming into submission to God's will, learning to trust God. That's what we're here to do.

Brethren, as we go on, let's look forward with a positive outlook, looking to God to guide us and direct us and lead us through the difficult times. Let's rejoice together that we've been called to understand the plan and purpose of God and that we can even now come under His government and His benefits. I encourage you, as we continue the process, let's be a part of God's plan and submit willingly to it, and in so doing we will reap the benefits that He has promised us.