

# Spiritual Survival

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Probably not too many people are familiar with the name Abraham Maslow. Let's do a quick "Wikipedia moment" with Abraham. He was born in 1908; died in 1970 of a heart attack. He grew up in Brooklyn, New York. He was the first of seven children born to his Jewish parents who emigrated from Russia.

When he moved into higher education, he started out in law, but then he changed his Ph.D. and earned a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Wisconsin in 1934. During the 1950s, Mr. Maslow became one of the founders and driving forces behind the school of thought known as Humanistic Psychology. That's just a field of psychology that deals with what motivates people, what moves people to do what they do.

And his primary theory was that humanly we have certain needs that must be met in order to move onto other needs, a kind of progression that became known as A Hierarchy of Needs. And even though he never depicted it as such, his hierarchy is often presented as appearing in a pyramid form with the basic needs at the bottom and progresses to the higher needs that we have as human beings towards the peak, and it became known as Maslow's Hierarchy. Even though that theory is disputed by some, there are still a lot of people that agree there is some validity to it. You'll see his theory and ideas used often in leadership training and things like that.

But the five levels of hierarchy that he put forth in his theory went something like this. The bottom level dealt with the physiological needs: food, clothing, shelter, warmth. Those are definite needs. If you don't think it is, just talk to somebody that's homeless, a homeless man or a homeless woman. And the next, moving up the pyramid, the next level of needs after those basic needs are met, then you move onto the need for safety, security, freedom from fear and those kind of things. And then the next level, once those needs are met, you move onto belonging, love, spouse, family. The next level—and there are five levels—the fourth level is after all those things are met, then humanly we kind of move into self-esteem. In other words, we have achievement. We earn recognition and respect from other people. And the very last one at the very top of the peak is self-actualization, fulfillment, creativity and all that. If you've ever worked for a corporation, you may be familiar with this pyramid.

But the point I want to focus on, using that as an introduction, is that bottom survival level because that's what that is.

And if not met, if we're starving or freezing to death, we're not going anywhere as human beings. We're struggling to survive right there at that point. So in his hierarchy, he refers to that as the physiological needs in terms of that survival. My thesis is that

we also have needs in a spiritual sense and I hope to be able to show that as we move through here.

In fact, I've titled this:

Spiritual Survival.

And, again, my proposition is that we have basic needs that are necessary to keep us focused and on track. Literally it deals and it has to do with our spiritual survival in the long run because if those needs aren't met—and we'll talk about this a little bit as we go through here—they'll manifest themselves in a variety of issues that we'll have as members of God's Church, individually and collectively.

So, I've actually distilled this down to and I've tried to contain it in two primary needs in my little thesis there.

**The first one is that we need to always remember who's in charge.**

**The second one is that we need to have a spiritual perspective when it comes to the suffering and trials that we all face from time to time.**

I further believe that these needs have always been there. They've just never really been addressed or presented to us in the past. So, going on to that number one point of who's in charge. That has to be our starting point in any spiritual endeavor that we go into.

I remember one time when I was first being called someone very close to me was trying to convince me otherwise that God wasn't the way to go. They told me flat out that I didn't owe God anything. Everything they had they had earned on their own. They didn't need God for anything. And I knew that wasn't true at that point. I was being called. We were on fire with that first love. But I'd like to turn over to Matthew 3 beginning in verse 1. I just want to address the first part of this point because we owe God and Jesus Christ everything. Matthew 3 beginning in verse—this from the New King James:

***Matthew 3:1.*** *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,*

*2) and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"*

*3) For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD, make his paths straight.' "* (NKJV)

And he's quoting Isaiah 40.3; but down in verse 4:

*4) Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. (NKJV)*

A pretty spartan existence, but he was totally focused on his mission in life. Down in verse 5:

*5) Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him)*

*6) [to be] baptized ... (NKJV)*

Commentators will say that's a hyperbole. They're just exaggerating the amount of people that were there; but anyway you slice this, there were a lot of people coming to John to be baptized. Verse 6:

*6) and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. (NKJV)*

I heard kind of a semi-humorous—well, it is humorous—story one time. A kind of an imaginary scenario of all this taking place and it went something like this:

You have John baptizing people and here are these big crowds and in the crowd there are some manager types. So, they got to talking together and they said, "Well, we have to organize this. We have to do some screening for John and speed this process up a little bit."

Now remember this is just a story.

They set up some tables and they got some sticky labels. What they did was they would screen people coming up in the line and they would ask them, "Well, what's your sin?" And they would write it on a sticky label and slap it on their chest.

So this is the way it went: The first person comes up and he's Bob. They say, "Bob, what's your worst sin? What's the worst thing you've ever done?"

And old Bob, he says, "Well, I kind of stole some money from my boss one time."

"Embezzler!" They write on the label, slap it on the guy's chest. He moves on down the line.

The next person comes up, Mary. "Well, Mary what's your worst sin?"

"Well, I didn't like some people and I started gossiping about them. And, in fact, I told some kind of little lies that made them look even worse than they were."

"Slanderer!" They wrote on the label, slapped it on her chest, moved her on down the line.

The next person comes along. He's George.

“George, what’s your worst sin?”

“Well, you know I’ve been admiring my neighbor’s Corvette. And I really wish I had that. If I had my druthers, he’d have my old ratty Ford pickup and I’ve have his Corvette.”

“Coveter!” They wrote on the label, slapped on his chest.

Another person comes up. He’s Gordon.

“What’s your worst sin, Gordon?”

“Well, I cheated on my wife one time.”

“Adulterer!” They write that on the label, slap it on his chest.

And then here, getting to the point of the story, here Jesus comes along. He’s going to get baptized. Remember where he comes down to John the Baptist? And John says, “Well, I need to be baptized by you. Not the other way around.”

But anyhow, as Christ comes down the line of all these people standing there with their sins on their chests, He takes the label off. He puts it on Himself. Then He goes down into the water. And when He does, all those sins fade off of those labels.

That’s a neat little story, but it illustrates the point of how much we owe Christ. Over in 1 Peter 2 to add a little more emphasis to this. It relates a little bit to this silly story. In 1 Peter 2 verse 24, again from the New King James, it says:

**1 Peter 2:24.** *Who himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins [which began for us at baptism], might live for righteousness—by whose stripes [His] you [we] were healed. (NKJV)*

So at baptism He did take all of our sins away up to that point. They were essentially washed away in that watery grave. So, for us, for all of us that were called and that were baptized and began at that starting point, it became very personal because we established a lifelong relationship. In fact, we owe Jesus Christ everything from that point on. Our status changed from one being called to one being part now of the spiritual body of Christ, part of the ekklesia and our names were then put into the book of life. Also at that point, we became dedicated disciples of Christ.

Looking at that, what are the benefits of that new relationship that we entered into, that new status that we obtained? In Revelation it tells us ultimately we’re going to be kings and priests in God’s kingdom for a thousand years and beyond. But in the interim, Christ goes on to tell us in the interim between now and then and it’s kind of the same thing for us as he told His first disciples, that relationship is going to be a long distance

one. There is going to be a separation from the physical to the spiritual and there is a great purpose in that, a part of God's plan for mankind.

Over in John 13, we look at this every Passover. Every year we review this, but I just want to point out some things here. In verse 33 of John 13.

**John 13:33.** *Little children [Christ speaking], I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me, and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you.*

34) *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*

35) *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* (NKJV)

The point there is that he established that relationship with us and now we have a responsibility, in fact, an obligation to each other to care for each other.

Verse 36, and here's Peter.

36) *[He says] to Him, "Lord where are you going?"*

"How come I can't go with You? You know I'll follow You anywhere."

But Christ, again, He's pointing to the future. Again, He sees everything in a spiritual sense here. It goes on in verse 37. Peter never gives up—that kind of a personality.

37) *Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life [I'll die for You. I'll do anything for You]"*

38) *Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times. (NKJV)*

What He's teaching Peter here, what He's pointing out to him is "You're still physical, Peter. You might think you're going to do something, but you're not really going to do it. Reality is going to strike and you're going to react humanly." As we know from Peter's life, he needed a lot of hard lessons. He needed to be taken down a notch or two every once in a while.

But let's drop down to; let's go down to chapter 14 of John beginning in verse 1. Again, we read this every Passover. But He's talking here; He's continuing in a very futuristic sense about that relationship that we have with Him and now it is a long distance one. In John 14 verse 1:

**John 14:1.** *Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.*

2) *In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

3) *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (NKJV)*

Ultimately that is going to be where we'll be.

Looking at that word "mansions," years ago when we were in the government mode, if I can put it that way, we tried to make that say that meant offices. Well, it doesn't mean that at all. If you look in the Greek, it just means *abode*. It means *a residence*. It means He's going to prepare a home for His bride—actually a permanent residence—and that's you and me! He's preparing that.

We can see a little bit more of that, a kind of a future look at this relationship over in Ephesians 5, a very familiar part here, especially to the wives because he uses the analogy of a marriage relationship here. In Ephesians 5 beginning in verse 25:

***Ephesians 5:25.*** *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church [the ekklesia] and gave Himself for her,*  
26) *that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of ... the word,*  
(NKJV)

The Greek there for "the word" just means *every decree of God*. We're told to live by every word of God. Not to live by bread alone, but by every word of God. And it's that word, that truth, that knowledge that we grow in as we follow God. It makes the changes in us as individuals and collectively as a church.

Verse 27:

27) *That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. (NKJV)*

And he's speaking of the Church, symbolically of the Church. And that's fitting for a bride. Verse 29:

29) *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes [it] and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.*  
30) *For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. (NKJV)*

And figuratively speaking, through God's holy spirit we're joined to Him already in a sense.

I like that word there "cherishes" because if you look that up in the Greek, it means just to *keep warm*. It's a *closeness*. It's a *holding close*. It's a *tender caring love*.

One of my favorite authors is Robert Parker. He's written a couple of westerns. He has a one-on-one dialogue. You can read one of his books probably in a sitting, but anyhow he's a good author. On the dedication page of one of his novels—and don't pay any attention to, there's kind of a December holiday theme to the book. He uses Christmas here. Don't get all excited.—but anyhow on his dedication page and this is an aged couple, been together many, many years. This is, I think, a very sweet thing that he wrote to his wife in that dedication page, a very simple thing. He says, "Every Christmas gift I ever cherished was nicely wrapped as you."

And if you think about that, Christ feels the same way about us. We're His packages if you want to put it that way. And He cherishes every one of us, every one of His disciples, every one of us.

So, what's all this closeness and all that have to do with always remembering who's in charge? In Hebrews 5, and these should all be very familiar scriptures, and hopefully, you'll see how I'm tying it together. In Hebrews 5, beginning in verse 7, speaking of Christ:

**Hebrews 5:7.** *who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,*  
8) *though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.*  
9) *And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, (NKJV)*

In the past we were led to believe that the Church (not the ekklesia), a physical entity, was the author and the finisher of our salvation. It was our salvation.

And I'm not trying to be mean by bringing that up. Sometimes people will complain, "Well, what are we bringing up this old church history and all that for?" Part of my point here is because the damage that forgetting who was in charge did to the Church and to the individual. We can look out there and see the scattered Church right now and see the fruits of that. We simply lost track of who was in charge.

He points this out some more, adds more emphasis to it. In Hebrews 12, beginning verse 1:

**Hebrews 12:1.** *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by ... (NKJV)*

And it's picking up from chapter 11, the Faith Chapter.

1b) *... since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, ... (NKJV)*

And that's all those who have gone before us who have looked to God. No matter what, they looked to God. They gave their lives.

But continuing verse 1 of Hebrews 12:

*1 continued) ... let us lay aside every weight. And the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (NKJV)*

A race always has a finish line, always has a goal. It always has someone at the end of the race that's going to declare the winner, always. So that's a good analogy to what we're talking about here.

*2) looking unto Jesus, ... (NKJV)*

And that's the same one, by the way, they were looking to in chapter 11, all those people back in the Old Testament.

*2b) ... who for the joy that was set before Him [because He saw the end result] endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (NKJV)*

And that's the distance between us and Him now.

Let's go back to John 14. I'd like to go back and add some emphasis here where it needs to be put in the context of what I'm speaking about. Back in John 14 verse 1, see what Christ says here. Note His words.

**John 14:1.** *Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, [also believe] in Me. (NKJV)*

Not something else—"in Me." Verse 2:

*2) In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you [so]. (NKJV)*

Not someone else. Not something else.

*2b) ... I go to prepare a place for you.*

*3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (NKJV)*

And no human being and no humanly devised ideas can remotely do that. Just can't! It's impossible, but down in verse 6, in the context here Thomas is questioning Him, questioning Christ. He's saying, "How do we know the way? How do we get to where You're at?" Well, they can't yet because there is a purpose for staying here. Verse 6:

*6) Jesus said to him, ... (NKJV)*



And again, the emphasis:

*6b) ... "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (NKJV)*

It can't get anymore emphatic than that. It just can't.

And remember over in John 10? You may or may not turn there. Remember in John 10 where it talks about Christ being the door to the sheepfold? And the sheep know His voice and He is the Shepherd. The people in between the shepherds that we have now are just servants, if we want to use that term for a minister. They're just servants. They should just be helpers of ours. Just for the emphasis here, in John 10 beginning in verse 27:

***John 10:27.** My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28) And I [will, we can add there] give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29) My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. (NKJV)*

Again, we've heard it many, many times but no person, no organization, or anything like that should come between Christ and His disciples—us. They're not able to give salvation. They're not the answer to that salvation. It doesn't matter what they claim. You know men want a following basically. You can look around at all the scattered churches and all that. I know it's being a little sarcastic, but the egomania is in direct proportion to the size and the power of the organization as it develops, what it evolves into.

And that's why God broke that up, to scatter the church because that kind of an organization has an illegitimate hold over people. It's like a train—to use another analogy—it's like a train going down the wrong track. Well, God just derailed it.

So, what happens if we forget who's in charge? Over in Mark 8, we can see some of this. What happens if we forget? And we did, unfortunately. Things slip, but Mark 8:31 says:

***Mark 8:31.** And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32) He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. (NKJV)*

Good old Peter again.

*33) But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, ... (NKJV)*

Because they were all thinking the same thing; they were going to go along with Peter. He was kind of an “A” personality. He kind of led them in that way.

*33b) ... He rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” (NKJV)*

And that’s what happens when we focus on men as a means of salvation. Satan derails us. And that’s happened. It’s happened to many of our brethren. Verse 34:

*34) When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. (NKJV)*

“Follow Me.” I gave a sermon one time on that very phrase, follow me. And I had a friend that looked up all the citations in the New Testament, not only in the Gospels, but all the New Testament. And there are 130 times that is mentioned. I came up with about 70 some just in the four gospels. Verse 35:

*35) For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, ... (NKJV)*

And again, this is what happens when we lose track of who’s in charge or forget it or neglect it.

*35b) ... but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.  
36) For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul [his ultimate spiritual life, his eternity]?  
37) Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (NKJV)*

What do you trade for it? It’s pretty tough when it’s forgetfulness that we traded it for and lost it. Verse 38:

*38) For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, ... (NKJV)*

And boy, that hasn’t changed!

*38b) ... of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” (NKJV)*

And you can see that same idea over in Matthew 10 about verse 32, 33 where it says, “Whoever confesses Me, I’ll confess. Whoever denies Me, I’ll deny.” It’s the same idea.

It was kind of a hard thing to do but I couldn’t find anybody else to do it when my dad died. So, I didn’t the service for him. And as his son that was a little hard to do, but anyhow he was a WWII veteran. And the veterans came and did part of the service for him. They did Taps. They gave a little speech and everything.

I kind of remember the words of one of the really old soldiers that got up and gave this little speech. He says, "Everyone sitting here, we owe our freedom not to the politicians, not to the lawyers and the lawmakers, but to the veteran." He was just pointing out the real source of why we have the freedoms that we have.

It's kind of the same with us when it comes to looking at the real source for salvation. We owe everything to Christ, His sacrifice. We can't ever deny Him being in Church and being the head of the Church. No one, anyone or anything can replace that. And if we do forget that, if we do allow something to replace that—like unfortunately many of us did in the past and I could certainly take some fault for doing that myself—we won't survive spiritually. We just won't. So, just drawing on some of those lessons from the past and I won't belabor that because that really does upset some people, but we shouldn't forget it. We have a fundamental need to always remember who's in charge.

Next point, number two is that we need to have a spiritual perspective about suffering and trials.

I was kind of inspired by James' sermon at the Feast, if you remember that. If you weren't there and you get that DVD, maybe take a look at that. He pointed out the physical blessings of the Old Testament. And he pointed out the difference between the Old and the New Covenant in regards to God's holy spirit being given, salvation. That was not offered to man back then. There was no spiritual salvation offered at all to man. The Old Covenant was simply a promise of physical blessings for obedience. That's all it was.

Now, let's look at that a little bit over in Deuteronomy 28. James went there. So, I'll kind of skip through this. It adds the emphasis to the physical blessings for Ancient Israel because that's all they had in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 28 beginning in verse 1:

***Deuteronomy 28:1.*** "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, ... (NKJV)

And Moses was just an instrument there.

- 1b) ... that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth.*
- 2) And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God.*
- 3) "Blessed you [will] be in the city, ... blessed you [will] be in the country.*
- 4) "Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and offspring ... (NKJV)*

All the wealth, the economy of those days, they would be greatly blessed in.

5) *"Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.*

6) *Blessed shall you be when you come in ... and go out. (NKJV)*

You won't have to fear all the time. You won't have to be apprehensive. A lot of places now, we kind of worry about wandering outside at night depending on where we might live.

Then verse 7 talks about your enemies, defeating your enemies before you. Verse 8:

8) *"The LORD will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand [to do], and He will bless you in [every way in] the land [that He's] ... giving you. (NKJV)*

9) *"The LORD will establish you as holy people to Himself, ... if you keep [His] commandments ... (NKJV)*

... it says farther down in the verse.

9b) *... and walk in His ways. (NKJV)*

... the very last part of that verse.

Then it points out something important here in verse 10.

10) *Then all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. (NKJV)*

You're going to be a model nation. Even for us today, every once in a while we have people still try to preach to other people, but the best thing we can do is be a good example. That's a good part of the responsibility that we have following Christ, being Christians.

And then just skipping down over verse 11, where it talks about God will grant increase in everything. Down in verse 12:

12) *The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, ... (NKJV)*

You're going to have rain. You're going to have an abundant sunshine, perfect weather and all that.

12b) *... bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. (NKJV)*

It doesn't fit today!

*13) And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, ... (NKJV)*

Verse 14:

*14) So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them. (NKJV)*

Well, we know that they did. They often fell into idolatry. And if we look at the rest of chapter 28 and even going over into Leviticus 26, it describes the curses and everything that would befall the nation if they disobeyed God, as a result of that.

But the point there again is that obedience always resulted in physical blessing.

In fact, they were continuous, a whole string of blessings that God would provide for that obedience.

And what James pointed out in his sermon at the Feast was the difference in the Old Covenant and now is that we are not promised physical blessings for obedience. We're just not. That's kind of shocking when you think about that from the way we used to obey things and do things and listen to the people that were trying to tell us what we needed to be doing. But there are no blessing or cursing chapters in the New Testament at all. It doesn't even allude to it.

And you have to remember that, yes, God does bless us. Certainly He does in the New Covenant, in the New Testament. However, as James pointed out, in the New Covenant it paints an entirely different picture. Not the health and wealth gospel that sometimes we were led to believe in the past. But what the New Testament, as James pointed out I thought very well in his sermon at the Feast, was that instead of receiving physical blessings for the obedience, we can expect to face trials, adversity, persecution—in spite of our obedience.

I can remember years ago. I had a good friend in the Church. He was just shocked every time a little hiccup came along. He had some kind of a problem. He would go into "Woe is me" mode, and he'd say, "God's trying to teach me something. And I really messed up and I just can't see it yet. I know God's just going to keep working with me. And pretty soon I'll see it and this trial will go away. And I'll be blessed again."

Well, that's really not the way this works. James pointed out in his sermon that there is a whole thread running through the scriptures that that is not the case. We don't necessarily get blessed for obedience at all. Sometimes we get in trouble. There is cause and effect and sometimes we get in trouble for that. We cause our own problems, but we can expect things to befall us that we might not expect.

If we're looking to Jesus Christ as solely our head, the one in charge, following in His footsteps, here is what scripture says is going to happen. It will happen. In John 15, again used at the Passover and read at the Passover. And somehow we left this out of the context of our lives. Somehow we did that in the past. I appreciate James bringing this up and pointing that out, but in John 15 beginning in verse 18, here is what Christ said.

**John 15:18.** *"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. (NKJV)*

And that word just means *ill will*. It means *the spirit of persecution*. That's what that word means. Verse 19:

*19) If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (NKJV)*

And it tells us in a little bit why that is. Verse 20:

*20) Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they [hated and] persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.*

*21) But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.*

*22) If I had not come and spoken to them, ... (NKJV)*

Here's the reason:

*22b) ... they would have no sin, ... (NKJV)*

In general, the world is kind of in a state of spiritual denial. They don't want to recognize that all their problems are spiritual in nature. We used to talk about that, but that is true. It's really painful to look at that.

Finishing verse 22:

*22 continued) ... but now they have no excuse for their sin. (NKJV)*

If you take any kind of a moral stance because of your Christian beliefs, our humanistic culture is going to resist you. They don't like God and they don't want anyone representing Him telling them or even demonstrating by example that what they might be doing is wrong. That sheds too much light on them. "Get those Ten Commandments out of my courthouse. It might offend somebody." That's kind of the approach and the attitude that the world has.

Over in Matthew 5, again a little bit more of this and we've kind of read over this through the years. This is back in the Beatitudes. In Matthew 5 and verse 9, it begins to talk about the peacemakers, which is what Christ wants us to be.

**Matthew 5:9.** *Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God.  
10) Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, ... (NKJV)*

And that word "righteousness" just means that *you're in a right relationship, you're doing things right with God.* That's what that means.

10b) ... *for theirs is [going to be, you can add] the kingdom of heaven [the peacemakers].*  
11) *Blessed are you when ... (NKJV)*

It doesn't say "if." It says "when."

11b) ... *when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. (NKJV)*

There is a lot more bad-mouthing against Christians than there is good-mouthing. Godly morals are in the dirt. As a group of people we don't need to be reminded of that, but sometimes that persecution happens to us because of what we believe.

I'm remembering one time on a job interview, I knew the people that were interviewing me. In fact, the gentleman that interviewed me used to be one of my co-workers when I worked as a craftsman. He knew me and when I interviewed for the job, he wanted to give me a job. I was between jobs. I wasn't worried about it, but I interviewed for this job and he wanted to hire me.

And I didn't hear anything, didn't hear anything. Sometimes it goes like that so you don't worry too much about it. And then I heard that they hired somebody else. As it turned out, the guy that knew me found out that I didn't work on Saturday, that I kept the Sabbath. So, that's the reason they didn't hire me. Now, he couldn't say that because I could have done something nasty like taken him to court or something like that. I wouldn't have done that anyway. But what they did, they hired another individual. He was an alcoholic. So that didn't turn out very well for them in the long run. I think he died at kind of an early age.

That's just what happens if you take a stance, stand firm on your beliefs. You will be persecuted one way or another. It's happened to me many times, to us many times.

Verse 12 of Matthew 5, Christ says:

12) *Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted [and you can add, many times killed] the prophets who were before you. (NKJV)*

Over in 2 Timothy, Paul in talking to Timothy, brought this same thing out. 2 Timothy 3.

Did we just miss these verses yeas ago? We always taught, “Well, if we did this, this, and that, everything would be really hunky-dory in our lives. If we just go along smoothly and first thing you know, zip! We’d be in God’s kingdom, be changed to a spirit being, be in God’s kingdom. Live happily ever after.”

2 Timothy 3:10, Paul to Timothy:

**2 Timothy 3:10.** *But have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, 11) persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. (NKJV)*

Verse 12, an important one with what we’re talking about:

*12) Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (NKJV)*

Again no maybe, no equivocation there. So, we’ve established the fact that according to Scripture, suffering, persecution, and trials, etc. are going to happen. And we’re just naïve if we think otherwise. Here are some other scriptures that James referenced along this line. 1 Peter 4, going back to 1 Peter.

I don’t know if gullibility is a sin, but I think in a lot of ways we suffered from it in the past. People, I don’t know about you, but it’s kind of my nature to trust people. I think in a sense we did that, but we learned some lessons too. Hopefully, all of us that survived that have learned some lessons, hard lessons.

In 1 Peter 4 beginning in verse 12, Peter is saying this. Christ said it. Paul said it. Peter is now saying it.

**1 Peter 4:12.** *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange happened to you; (NKJV)*

“What’s going on? I’m having a bad time. Woe is me!” Verse 13:

*13) but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. (NKJV)*

There’s going to be an outcome. And Paul to the Philippians over in Philippians 1:29-30:

**Philippians 1:29.** *For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,*



30) *having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me. (NKJV)*

And also Paul again in Romans 8, something that we seem to have skimmed over in the past, in Romans 8 beginning down in verse 35, Paul to the Romans:

**Romans 8:35.** *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (NKJV)*

And if you had to go through all of those, we'd say that you "ran the gauntlet" spiritually. Verse 36:

36) *As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."*

Paul is quoting Psalm 44:22 where the psalmist is referencing there, back in that Psalm, an afflicted Israel. They were suffering. Verse 37:

37) *Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. (NKJV)*

That phrase "more than conquerors" just means *that we're going to gain an ultimate victory*. Look that up in the Greek. Verse 38:

38) *For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor powers, ... (NKJV)*

And that could be spiritual also, evil spirits.

38b) *... nor things present nor things to come,*  
39) *nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NKJV)*

We don't like to think of suffering as normal. We just don't like that at all, but there are so many scriptures that clearly state it's required of us. It's part of the conversion process as James pointed out.

And we not only have to go through it, we have to endure it patiently as we'll go on to see here. And let's notice a few scriptures here, Romans 8. Let's back up to verse 16 while we're here.

**Romans 8:16.** *The spirit [itself] bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. (NKJV)*

There is a spiritual connection there, a circuit. Even though Christ is at a long distance, there's still a connection there. Verse 17:

*17) and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (NKJV)*

Over in 1 Peter 2, a little bit more, 1 Peter 2 down in verse 19, Peter says:

**1 Peter 2:19.** *For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.*

*20) For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good .... (NKJV)*

It just means you did the right thing; you were duty bound as a Christian to do what you did.

*20b) ... and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.*

*21) for to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: (NKJV)*

There's that pesky word "follow" again. We have to stay on that road following, that narrow path following Christ. Again, a hundred plus times, it tells us that.

Over to the Thessalonians, over in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, kind of breaking in on the context here, Paul is telling them in the first part of the verses there:

**2 Thessalonians 1:3.** *We are bound to thank God always for you, ... (NKJV)*

He's mentioning their faith and their growth and their love toward one another, but going down in verse 4 of 2 Thessalonians 1:

*4) so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,*

*5) which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God [and there's a reason], that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer, (NKJV)*

And again, that's a very futuristic statement about our ultimate goal, our ultimate destiny.

Back in 1 Thessalonians 3. Here's something going on with the Thessalonians because Paul is kind of concerned. If you look and study the context here, Paul is concerned about their faith being shaken by what has been happening to him and the other apostles. The laborers, the people that work together, they were persecuted almost everywhere they went. But he was worried about it shaking their faith because of that and the things that were happening to themselves.

Dropping down in 1 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 2, so Paul:

**1 Thessalonians 3:2.** *and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, (NKJV)*

Verse 3 says why.

*3) that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; (NKJV)*

And that word in the Greek just means *pressure from the persecution, the trials, whatever they're going through, the troubles they're going through.*

*3b) ... for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.*

*4) For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. (NKJV)*

You've seen it. You've been a witness to it.

*5) For this reason, when I could no longer [stand it] endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter ... (NKJV)*

And Satan is always there.

*5b) ... had tempted you,*

Satan is always in the picture because God uses him in many, many ways to test us and to give us the trials. God allows him to do that.

*5 continued) ... and our labor might be in vain. (NKJV)*

And the whole point there is that Paul just worried about the things that were going on with them that they would get rattled and quit. And a lot of times when do we become the most depressed and discouraged? When we're in a trial, when we have trouble, if we can't see past that and work our way through that.

So again, we can see from these scriptures that enduring suffering is a fundamental requirement for us. It's part of the conversion process. It's part of the covenant we entered into at baptism when we made that contract to follow Christ for the rest of our lives.

But again the question comes up, "Why does God require humans to suffer that He calls into His Family?" It's not because He enjoys seeing us suffer. It's because suffering plays a vital role in our development as Christians. It just does if we think about that. It's part of the process. It's absolutely vital to our Christian growth, our development. In 1 Peter 1, dropping down to verse 6:

**1 Peter 1:6.** *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, (NKJV)*

And it is grievous sometimes. Verse 7:

*7) that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, (NKJV)*

When He comes back, when He returns.

*8) Whom having not seen, you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, (NKJV)*

There will be an end to it.

We were kind of kidding before a baptism saying, "Well, at baptism you know you're standing on a threshold. You're being called. Now, you're being given a little boot in the rear end by Christ down that path you need to follow. And He's telling you, 'I know you're going to fall off one side or the other along that path, but I'm going to be there and help you. And by the way, I'll be there at the other end when you get there.'"

Let's go over to James 1. Again there is a purpose for all of it. God is using all of it. James 1 verse 2:

**James 1:2.** *My brethren, count it all joy ... (NKJV)*

How many times have we read this and kind of cried "Joy? What do you mean joy?"

*2b) ... when you fall into various trials,  
3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.  
4) But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (NKJV)*

Down in verse 12:

*12) Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved [tested], he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (NKJV)*

And remember speaking to the Church at Smyrna over in Revelation 2 where it says,

**Revelation 2:10.** *Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil ... (NKJV)*

And again God uses him in this to achieve His purposes.

*10b) ... is about to throw some of you into prison, ... (NKJV)*

It sounds like suffering to me. And there is a reason God allows it. Continuing verse 10 of Revelation 2:

*10 continued) ... that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days ....*

If you want to, translate to “ten years.” It could be longer. I’m not sure but generally that’s a year for a day.

*10 continued) ... Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life. (NKJV)*

There is a little bit more here over in 2 Corinthians. Paul says something very important. He brings it out a little bit more about this suffering we’re called to. In 2 Corinthians 1, it’s kind of awkward in verses 5 through 7 of chapter 1 in the King James and the New King James. They use the word “consolation,” but I’d like to read from the Amplified. It’s a little better. It’s a little clearer. In 2 Corinthians 1 beginning in verse 5, again this is from the Amplified.

**2 Corinthians 1:5.** *For just as Christ’s sufferings fall to our lot [and they do] [as they overflow upon His disciples, and we share and experience them] abundantly, so through Christ comfort ... (AMP)*

And that’s what “consolation” means—a little awkward in the King James. It just means *comfort and encouragement*.

*5b) ... is also [shared and experienced] abundantly by us.*

*6) But if we are troubled (afflicted and distressed), it is for your comfort ... and ... salvation; and if we are comforted, ... it is for your comfort (... and encouragement), which works [in you] when you patiently endure the same evils (misfortunes ... [and all that]) that we also suffer and undergo. (AMP)*

What Paul is saying in all those words is that it happens to all of us! You can take comfort in the spiritual value that’s going to come from that experience, but we hardly ever see that when we’re having troubles, when we’re having trials especially when we’re sick or when we’re hurting, in pain. And it goes on in verse 7. It talks about:

*7) And our hope for you ... is ever unwavering (assured and unshaken); for we know that just as you share ... (AMP)*

... in our sufferings and all the troubles. And the brethren many times knew about, just like we do now, about when we share the prayer requests that we share in the suffering. In a sense, we share in those sufferings. And we can give comfort and encouragement to those brethren that are suffering.

But going down to verse 9, it's interesting in the context here of what he points out. Verse 9 says:

*9) Indeed, we felt within ourselves that we had received the [very] sentence of death, ... (AMP)*

But here's an important statement. It's something that we can learn a lesson here too.

*9b) ... but that was to keep us from trusting in and depending on ourselves instead of on God Who raises the dead. (AMP)*

Wow! Do you mean there was some spiritual value to a near death experience? That's what Paul's saying. It happened to them repeatedly. Then he goes on to say that he was rescued out of that. Christ rescued him out of that every time because He had a purpose for him until the end of his life.

So again, just to stress the point: it's important for us to remember that the suffering we're required to endure is considered sharing in Christ's suffering. And it's something that we have to go through.

And we have to think about how did Christ suffer. How did He suffer? Well, He suffered through no fault of His own. Sometimes I think I've heard in the past that He did that for an example for us. Well, if you read the context there, He did it because He wanted to *fulfill all righteousness*. That's why He did that. He didn't need to be baptized because of His sins because He didn't have any, but He did it *to fulfill all righteousness*. So He allowed John to baptize Him. He lived a perfect life.

But carnally, as human beings, sometimes we'll suffer because of the things we do. We make bad decisions. But the whole point I'm trying make here is that we're required to suffer unjustly just as Christ did.

Remember back there in 1 Peter where it said *"If you're beaten for your faults, you take it patiently. When you do good if you suffer, that's commendable before God."* We read those scriptures. So, it's inescapable that persecution, trials and suffering are expected of us. And it's not only that, but we're expected to endure that. We need to live through them.

I'm a project guy. I think a lot of people are. I get excited when I'm working on something. I'll dream up a project and if it's complicated enough, I can get to the point where I do drawings and all that. I find that very therapeutic—to work on a project, even in a hobby. You know I'm a golfer and I'll build a lot of my own clubs and that's a project for me to turn out my own clubs. But, do you know? I think in about a million-fold way, God is a project person. And His projects are you and me. That's His project. That's what He's working on.

Remember that scripture over in John where it talks about Christ knew His sheep? It says right there in the context that the Father gave us to Him. I don't think Christ ever looks at that and says, "Well, that person's too fat or that person's too skinny. Or that person's the wrong color, or that person's got too many problems. I don't want them." He never says that. He takes us on. He doesn't care about the outward appearances. His project is the heart—the change from the inside out. That's Christ's passion and His project. That's what He's working on.

Sometimes if I'm working on a project and it's long enough, I'll kind of give myself a little milestone. Well, I'll finish this, that, that and that. That's what the trials and the persecutions, everything we're going through, those steps are the milestones in our lives as we're being prepared for God's kingdom.

Over in 1 Corinthians 3, and this has been mentioned many times. The whole context there is talking about polarizing around men. They are instruments, should be helpers to lay the foundation, not instruments of salvation. They're just helpers, but in verse 11 of 1 Corinthians 3, it says:

**1 Corinthians 3:11.** *For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (NKJV)*

You can't change the structure of God's plan. You can't change that. No one can.

*12) Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, ... (NKJV)*

That descending order from valuable to worthless, the gold to the straw, verse 13:

*13) each one's work will become clear; for the Day ... (NKJV)*

And that's the day when Christ returns to judge all of us, everyone's work, the way we've conducted our lives.

*13b) ... will declare it, because it will be revealed [or tested] by fire; (NKJV)*

Again, we have to be refined by that process. That's part of our conversion process.

And we don't need to be surprised or overwhelmed. And it's not an "if" it happens, but "when" it does happen. It's tough to think about. Paul was pretty confident of this whole process. He says over in Philippians 1:6 from the Holman Bible, Paul first of all is giving thanks to the Philippians for their conduct, for their progress, for their growth. But in verse 6 of Philippians 1, he says:

**Philippians 1:6.** *I am sure of this, ... (HCSB)*

He's confident. The King James says he "trusted" or "relied on," confident.

6b) ... that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (HCSB)

It can't get any plainer than that.

There is a poem that lends itself to this process of completion, because the poem goes like this; the title of it is "There's a Reason for Everything." And I'll quote the poem now.

Our Father knows what's best for us  
So why should we complain?  
We always want the sunshine  
But He knows there must be rain.

We love the sound of laughter  
And the merriment of cheer,  
But our hearts would lose their tenderness  
If we never shed a tear.

Our Father tests us often  
With suffering and with sorrow.  
He tests us not to punish us  
But to help us meet tomorrow.

For growing trees are strengthened  
When they withstand the storm.  
And the sharp cut of the chisel  
Gives the marble grace and form.

God never hurts us needlessly  
And He never wastes our pain  
For every loss He sends to us  
Is followed by rich gain.

And when we count the blessing  
That He has sent  
We will find no cause for murmuring  
And no time to lament.

For our Father loves His children  
And to Him all things are plain.  
So He never sends us pleasure  
When the soul's deep need is pain.

So whenever we're troubled  
And when everything goes wrong,  
It's just God working in us



To make our spirits strong.

To build our faith and that's what happens. God wants godly character from us. That's not built by accident. It just doesn't happen. We don't get it by osmosis, by being at a certain place or with certain people or anything like that.

So, the suffering is a refining process. It produces the qualities that God wants to see in us, that Christ wants to see in us that we can never achieve on our own.

Here are a few bullets about suffering and trials. The first bullet is that:

- **Suffering highlights the fact we're frail human beings.**

We're weak physical human beings. And when we suffer, we're forced to focus on that weakness. We learn that there is no remedy within us. That's what's pointed out in that scripture that Paul talked about. We can't fix it ourselves a lot of times. Job learned that the hard way.

Someone said one time, "It's hard to be really proud and haughty whenever you're hurting and whenever you're in pain." Another person I know said something. He talked about fighting with cancer. He says, "Pain can be humbling. It can slap the smart-aleckness right out of us when we're suffering. It can open our hearts to greater vistas, help us to grow."

- **Unless we're really stubborn and self-willed, when we're suffering we turn to God.**

We want to draw closer to God. Atheists say suffering proves there is no God. Well, we know better than that. When we're hurting sometimes without respite, we're just hurting. It just goes on and on and on. David kind of identified with that. And I'll just read Psalm 18:4 where David said:

**Psalm 18:4.** *The pangs of death surrounded me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid.*

*5) The sorrows of Sheol ... (NKJV)*

That just means *the grave*.

*5b) ... surrounded me, the snares of death confronted me.*

*6) In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears. (NKJV)*

So God knows when we're suffering. He knows it every time and He knows the extent of it. He knows the extent of the pain, everything. Except when he sinned, David ran to God when He was in trouble.

- **Suffering can change our whole perspective of what's valuable and what's not.**

Friends and family really become precious whenever we're in trouble. We can just see the worth of things.

I read that Christopher Reeves, who played Superman in the movies and was later paralyzed in a horse accident I think, said in interviews that being paralyzed changed his whole perspective of life. It changed his whole perspective.

- **Suffering teaches us compassion for others.**

We learn that lesson from Christ. Remember over in Hebrews 2:18? It says:

**Hebrews 2:18.** *For in that He himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (NKJV)*

And some things we just can't learn any other way.

One commentator said about sympathy, "It has been said the difference between sympathy and empathy" (both are from Greek words actually from pathos) "is in the former instance one feels with." You can kind of relate to the things that someone is suffering from, but in empathy, you're almost able to get inside the person, the friend or whoever it might be who suffers because you've been there. That's how you learn that. It's the only way you can get to that point and to that depth.

So that's just a short list of some of the lessons suffering teaches us and it puts a little bit of emphasis on why we need to not give up. God has a purpose for it all and He'll be there for us on the other side. We just need to keep it in proper perspective.

Proverbs 24 says that *"If we faint in the day of adversity, our strength [or our faith] is small."* It hasn't had a chance to grow. Remember the parable of the sower in Matthew 13? *"But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word ... receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while."* Why? *For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles."* He just gives up—shallow conversion, never grew.

So spiritual survival is part of our conversion process. God hasn't called us in vain. He's started something in us. He plans on finishing it. He doesn't have any qualms at all about us making it. He's sure we're going to do that.

And there are a whole lot of things that we should be doing in our lives. My proposition is if we remember these two basic needs we talked about, it will help us survive spiritually for the days ahead. And here are those points again: (1) never forget who is the head of the ekklesia, who's in charge, focusing on Him—never anything or anyone else; and (2) having the right perspective of sufferings and trials we're all faced with

from time to time. We just are, can't get out of it. And remember there will be another side. One way or another we're going to finish. We're going to come out of that trial. It may be after death, but one way or another Jesus Christ is going to be waiting there. And, hopefully, He will say, "Well done, you survived."