

REFLECTIONS

Grace OPC

TRIALS

By Pastor Brian De Jong

In a moment of candor, Jesus once told his disciples that *“It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come!”* The Savior’s truth is confirmed in our experience – it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come. Each of us encounter trials as we trudge through this vale of tears.

How we respond to trials and what they do to us or for us differs widely. For some people, trials destroy even their will to live. For others, those obstacles become opportunities for growth in faith and progress in grace.

St. Augustine understood trials, and he observed God uses difficulties in the lives of human beings. In his classic book, The City of God, he says this: *“There is, too, a very great difference in the purpose served both by those events which we call adverse and those called prosperous. For the good man is neither uplifted with the good things of time, nor broken by its ills; but the wicked man, because he is corrupted by this world’s happiness, feels himself punished by its unhappiness.”*

The good man is neither unduly uplifted by the good things of time, nor is he broken by its ills. His life is on an even keel, and he does not overvalue the circumstances of this life. His eyes are fixed on heavenly things, as he considers himself a “stranger and alien” on earth.

In contrast, the wicked man is corrupted by this world’s happiness. He foolishly considers the here-and-now to be ultimately important. When circumstances are good, he is happy. If troubles

beset him, his mood is overthrown and he despairs. He feels himself a victim of circumstances, punished by the unhappiness of life.

Augustine goes on to address suffering and its effects: *“Wherefore, though good and bad men suffer alike, we must not suppose that there is no difference between the men themselves, because there is no difference in what they both suffer. For even in the likeness of the sufferings, there remains an unlikeness in the sufferers; and though exposed to the same anguish, virtue and vice are not the same thing. For as the same fire causes gold to glow brightly, and chaff to*



smoke; and under the same flail the straw is beaten small, while the grain is cleansed; and as the lees are not mixed with the oil, though squeezed out of the vat by the same pressure, so the same violence of affliction proves, purges, clarifies the good, but damns, ruins, exterminates the wicked. And thus it is that in the same affliction the wicked detest God and blaspheme, while the good pray and praise. So material a difference does it make, not what ills are suffered, but what kind of man suffers them. For, stirred up with the same movement, mud exhales a horrible stench, and ointment emits a fragrant odor.”

The same violence of affliction proves, purges, and clarifies the good man, but it damns, ruins and exterminates the wicked fellow. For instance, if a loved one dies unexpectedly, God will use that experience for good in the godly man...

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February 2013

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Mnemonics...

- *Session Meeting, 12th*
- *Stephanie Nyhof’s Bridal Shower, 15th*

A Remedy for Wandering Thoughts

Chapter 6, Sections 1-2

by Richard Steele

The Causes of Distractions, With Their Remedies

SECTION I.

SECRET ATHEISM

Atheism of the heart is that whereby the fool saith “also in his heart. There is no God;” that is, either secretly questions, or but coldly assents to the existence of God, or heartily wishes there were none at all. And it is worth observation of both these, that they are such as are obnoxious to the divine majesty by some misdemeanor. The felon wishes there were no judge at all; yet even these are forced in some pangs to acknowledge him; at some fright by thunder under some horror of conscience, or at the point of death, they are compelled to give Jehovah his due. And they also, in any sudden fright, or great extremity, usually cry to God as earnestly as others.

Atheism of the life is described, — “They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him.” Titus 1:14. Now these latter originate from the first, and the last is most visible in our distractions: for if thou didst as verily believe God present in an ordinance, as he that sits next thee, durst thou trifle so egregiously as thou dost? The minister looks at you, and you dare not talk; if you saw him that looks at you from heaven, you durst not wander: and therefore the more or less strong our belief is of God, the more or less lively are we in our applications to him. Oh the patience of God! that he can endure the worm to doubt of his existence, yea, practically to deny him, and not demonstrate himself by a thunderbolt! But the countryman’s ignorance of the first moving cause doth not nullify it: no more doth the atheist’s infidelity degrade the first mover, the Majesty of Heaven. “He that cometh unto God must believe that he is.” Hebrews 11:6.

The remedy of this evil is, humbly to read the scripture, which is the most clear, certain, and convincing way to work faith herein. Prayer and the Bible have convinced more than any other arguments; recommend me, then, to Moses, rather than Plato, for

the demonstration of a Deity. All that reason can suggest, might be written by an infidel; and more infidels have been convinced by reading and hearing the books of the Christians, than Christians settled by reading the books of infidels. And therefore, although holy David, Psalm 19:1, appeals to the heavens, and the host of them, as a strong argument to declare God, and so it is; for what reason but the hand of a God, can be rendered, that the planets being all of one matter, should have contrary motions, seeing things of the like matter have by nature like motion? yet, laying that topic aside, he fixes upon the law of God, verse 7, as the most perfect and sure way to demonstrate a Deity, and convert and make wise the soul. Then go to God in prayer, and beg him to touch thy heart, and open thine eyes, and thou shalt quickly see him “that is not far from every one of us.”

SECT. II.

THE CORRUPTION OF OUR NATURE

The second cause of distractions in the service of God is, the corruption of our nature; that is, of soul and body; so that our inward faculties do act on our outward senses, and they infect our inward faculties in this business. “Out of the heart proceed vain and evil thoughts.” Matthew 15:19 They are not forced out, as sparks from a flint, but come out thence of themselves, as sparks out of a furnace. View the mind, and its accident is vanity; and how can a vain mind be serious with God, without a great deal of grace. The heart’s name is deceitful, and makes a trade of deceiving and purloining in the most solemn duties; and when the ear receives the word as a lovely song, she runs after covetousness the while. “Now is she without, now in the streets, and lays in wait at every corner,” like the lewd woman. Proverbs 8:11. The eye that should be fixed on heaven, is in the ends of the earth, and gathering a straggling notion from every object. The ear, by every noise, calls off the soul from its great

Wandering Continued...

business, thus woefully the old man is bent against the new man. “The law of the members wars against the law of the mind, and leads us into captivity to the law of sin that is in the members.” Romans 7:23. When the mind itself is set in its most hearty purposes to wait on God, and offer him a faithful sacrifice, then comes in the law of the members, and either suggests within, or admits from without, some roving notions, and these lead the poor soul like that young man, “Forced with flatteries, like the ox to the slaughter, or the fool to the correction of the stocks.” Proverbs 7:21,22. And thus he that began in heaven, ends on earth, if not in hell. Thus the good he would do, he cannot perform. Wretched man, who must lead his life with such a heart!

As if a man were tied still to shoot in a warping bow; he settles himself in his right postures, aims directly at the white, but his warping bow still so carries the arrow quite beside the mark, and his skill is rendered ineffectual. So the poor upright Christian in a duty, orders his business and his heart, as well as ever he can, and aims at glorifying God, and getting good to his soul; but the corruption of his nature diverts him from his purpose. This hinders the elevation of the soul, which would fix it in God’s service, like one that hath a light heart, and a heavy body; the light heart would fly, the heavy body clips her wings, and will hardly creep. Oh! saith the soul, now will I arise, and soar into heaven; I must, I will speak with my God: my wants are pressing, my sins increase, eternity approaches; who will give me the wings of an eagle? I will never live so far from God, I will hasten away. Thus this bird of paradise takes wing, when behold the stone of her corrupt nature hangs at her leg, and weighs her down: she flutters a little, but cannot fly, because of the heart she cannot fly.

And not only dullness, but the deceitfulness of our corrupt nature furthers our distractions. For though the heart be deceitful from the beginning to the end of the year, yet her prime and most subtle sleights are showed in tire service of God; where she is put hard to it to manage for herself, and therefore useth

her finest notions and excuses to evade the presence of God and the powerful influences of the Holy Ghost. Like some cunning thief, that joins himself to the unwary traveler, and gives him pleasant company awhile, till at length he draws him out of the way, and takes his purse, before he is aware he is in a wood, and his money is gone. Even so the heart of man professes to be very willing to pray, or perform other duties, and goes with us awhile, but

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before we have proceeded twenty sentences in our work, this deceitful heart turns us aside, brings us to feed upon ashes, and binds up the faculties, that we “cannot deliver our souls, nor say. Is there not a lie in my right hand?” Isaiah 44:20. Now is it not a hell upon earth to live with such a heart, to cross a man in the midst of his greatest business, disappoint him in his highest expectations, and make him lose his labour, if not his soul?

The remedy against this corruption of our nature is hard. To divert a stream is easy, but to dry up a spring is difficult; stop it here, and it breaks out there. So to divert and discharge a wandering thought is easy in comparison, but kill one viper, and there is a hundred more ready for the birth.¹We think sometimes our worldly business is the only cause of them; but the most retired

hermits prove to us that an unsanctified or half-sanctified heart can find matter enough of diversion in a naked cell. And that the corruption of the subject, as well as the bewitching nature of the object, makes us trifle in God’s worship. As Jerome tells of Hilarion, whose heart roving from God, was soundly scourged for his labour by an angel. And therefore the only cure of this is to get a “true and greater degree of sanctifying grace.”

You that have no grace, can never pray well, till your hearts be changed; a new heart can only sing this new song well. You complain that you want expressions; ah! it is impressions you want, and nothing else; if you had that sense of sin, which makes the soul ache and mourn, you would find words sufficient to express it, when you are in danger of falling into hell-fire; nor smiling at one

Wandering Concluded...

another, when God is frowning, and thundering against you. He that feels the sore torment, hath few wandering thoughts, while he is telling his grief, and seeking help. The condemned prisoner is not sleeping or trifling at the bar. Dionysius' flatterer had little regard for his music, when the naked sword hung by a hair over his bare head; neither would a poor sinner, if he were enlightened to see his guilt and danger, so commonly and senselessly trifle before God, when his matter is debating, and terms of life or death being proposed. Alas! there is no hope of your cure in this, till your fundamental disease be healed; your whole life is a long distraction from the true end and main business of life; and therefore it is important if ever you would perform a pleasing duty unto God, to get "grace whereby you may serve God acceptably;"² for without that you cannot do it.

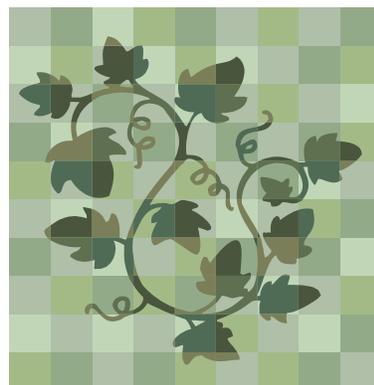
And to counterbalance that corruption of nature in you, you that have some sanctification must get more. This sweet wood cast into that bitter water, will by degrees render it more wholesome. The more sanctification, the more you will be mortified to the world, and all the vanity and business thereof; and then its thoughts and cares will not rush in with that violence upon you, but stay to speak with you at your better leisure; or if they be invading the heart, you will have more vigour of grace to expel them, and more repentance for them; you will be more lively and spiritual, and fervent in religious duties, and so have less room for these wanderings; for he that is fully engaged in his business, prevents the assault of the most importunate diversions; and a lively serious Christian runs on his errand like Elisha's servant, "If thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again;" 2 Kings 4:29; and Satan cannot fasten discourse on such a man; yea, and generally, the more holy the heart is, the fewer of these wandering thoughts; forasmuch as sanctity being his frame and element, heterogeneous bye-thoughts do put him out of his temper and so displease him, and cause some smart to the soul; and the sin that really molests a man, will hardly ever prevail over him; and finally, the more holiness you attain, the more afraid will you be to displease God. For to be amended with a little cross, to be affected with a little mercy, and to

be afraid of a little sin, are certain arguments of a great deal of grace. And therefore a holy Christian is more troubled at a vain thought in a duty, than a slight Christian is at the total neglect of a duty.

It follows, therefore, that all means be used and improved to the utmost, for the increasing of the grace of God in your hearts, there being as much duty to grow in grace as to get it; and no greater argument of sincerity, than endeavors to grow better. Turn therefore those many thoughts you spend about the truth of your grace, into all possible care to advance and increase it, so will you best clear your doubts, and in particular cure your distractions...

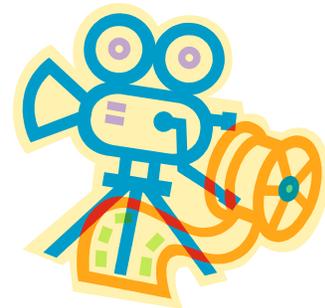
¹ As the ivy, though stump, body, and branches be cut off yet some sprigs will sprout, till the wall be pulled down. So it is with us. I never knew a beggar that wanted words to express his wants. ~ Bishop Hall.

² Lydia did then attend unto the things spoken by the Lord, but it was when he had opened her heart. Acts 16:14, 15.



Taco Supper & Movie Night

Everyone is invited to a Taco Supper & Worldview Movie Night, which will be held on Friday, February 22nd at 6:30 p.m. at Spaceport in Sheboygan (The Old Armory Building on the Sheboygan Lakefront).



Front Page Concluded

...The immediate sorrow and suffering produce a long-term positive result in the good man's life. God works it for His glory and our benefit, which produces prayer and praise.

The same cannot be said for the unbeliever. When the blow falls, the wicked man will predictably blame God. He will detest and blaspheme the Almighty for the difficulties of life.

Another author who reflected on this subject was C.S. Lewis. His insights help us to understand not only what God is doing, but how and why He is doing it. Lewis says, *"God loves us, so He makes us the gift of suffering. Through suffering, we release our hold on the toys of this world, and know our true good lies in another world. We're like blocks of stone, out of which the sculptor carves the forms of*

men. The blows of his chisel, which hurt us so much, are what make us perfect. The suffering in this world is not the failure of God's love for us; it is that love in action. For believe me, this world that seems to us so substantial is no more than the shadowlands. Real life has not begun yet."

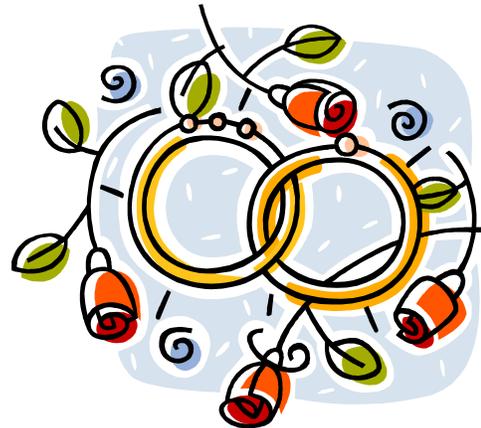
So do we enjoy trials? No, we cannot say we enjoy them. But do we hate them and the God who ordains those tests? No, for we would agree that they are an expression of His great love for us! Do we benefit from the troubles of life? Far more than the peaceful and placid days that we prefer! Let us redeem those inevitable difficulties that God sends to us – that we may glorify Him as we grow in our dependence and trust in Christ!

February Birthdays



Bridal Shower

All the ladies of the church are invited to come to Stephanie Nyhof's Bridal Shower, which will be held at the church on Friday, February 15th starting at 6:30 p.m. There is a sign up sheet on the bulletin board at church. Stephanie is registered at Bed, Bath & Beyond and Walmart.

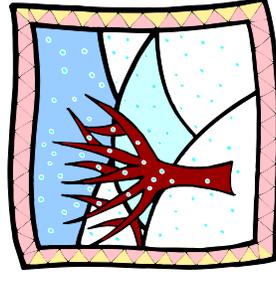




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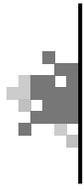
*Showing forth the
excellencies of
Jesus Christ*

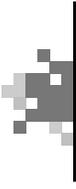


Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
3	4 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.	5	6 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.	7	8 Men's Retreat at Greenlake Conference Center	9 Men's Retreat at Greenlake Conference Center
10 Missions Sunday <i>Meadowview Manor, 3:00 p.m.</i> Joint Worship Service, 6:00 p.m.	11 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m. <i>Theology Class, 3:30 p.m.</i>	12 Session Meeting, 6:30 p.m.	13 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.	14	15 Stephanie Nyhof's Bridal Shower, 6:30 p.m.	16
17	18 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m. <i>Pine Haven Study, 1:30 p.m.</i>	19	20 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.	21	22 Taco Supper & WV Movie Night at Spaceport in Sheboygan (the old Armory) 6:30 p.m.	23
24 Lord's Supper (p.m.)	25 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m. <i>Pine Haven Study, 1:30 p.m.</i> Theology Class, 3:30 p.m.	26	27 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.	28		

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Rejoicing in the Thank Offering

Sausage & Wild Rice Soup

- ★ 1 large onion, chopped
- ★ 1 large carrot, shredded
- ★ 1 large celery rib, chopped
- ★ 1/4 cup of butter or stick margarine
- ★ 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- ★ 8 cups chicken broth
- ★ 3 cups cooked wild rice
- ★ 1 pound of mild Italian sausage
- ★ 1/4 tsp. salt
- ★ 1/4 tsp. pepper
- ★ 1 cup evaporated milk or half and half

In a large saucepan, sauté the onion, carrot, and celery in butter until tender. Stir in flour until blended.

Gradually add broth.

Stir in rice, sausage, salt & pepper. Bring to a boil over medium heat; cook and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened. Stir in milk; cook 3-5 minutes longer.

You can also substitute chicken for the sausage.

Sara and Elizabeth TenPas



“The eyes
of all look
to You,
And You give
them their food
in due time.
You open
Your hand
And satisfy
the desire of
every living
thing.”



Showing forth the excellencies of Jesus Christ

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Spurgeon Corner

*“And these are ancient things.”
(1 Chronicles 4:22)*

Yet not so **ancient** as those precious things which are the delight of our souls. Let us for a moment recount them, telling them over as misers count their gold. *The sovereign choice* of the Father, by which he elected us unto eternal life, or ever the earth was, is a matter of vast **antiquity**, since no date can be conceived for it by the mind of man. We were chosen from before the foundations of the world. *Everlasting love* went with the choice, for it was not a bare act of divine will by which we were set apart, but the divine affections were concerned. The Father loved us in and from the beginning. Here is a theme for daily contemplation. *The eternal purpose* to redeem us from our foreseen ruin, to cleanse and sanctify us, and at last to glorify us, was of infinite **antiquity**, and runs side by side with immutable love and absolute sovereignty. *The covenant* is always described as being everlasting, and Jesus, the second party in it, had his goings forth of old; he struck hands in sacred suretyship long ere the first of the stars began to shine, and it was in him that the elect were ordained unto eternal life. Thus in the divine purpose a most blessed covenant union was established between the Son of God and his elect people, which will remain as the foundation of their safety when time shall be no more. Is it not well to be conversant with these **ancient** things? Is it not shameful that they should be so much neglected and even rejected by the bulk of professors? If they knew more of their own sin, would they not be more ready to adore distinguishing grace? Let us both admire and adore tonight, as we sing—

“A monument of grace,
A sinner saved by blood;
The streams of love I trace
Up to the Fountain, God;
And in his sacred bosom see
Eternal thoughts of Love to me.”

Evening, February 2, Morning & Evening, by C. H. Spurgeon



Nursing Home Ministry

Everyone is encouraged to come to Meadowview Manor Nursing Home (3613 South 13th Street in Sheboygan) on Sunday, February 10th for a short service that will start at 3:00 p.m. There will be a time for singing with the residents, Pastor Brian will

give a message, and afterwards there will be an opportunity to visit with residents. Come encourage others through this ministry!

