

## HOW GOD OVERCAME

### Introduction

People are often heard asking the question, “How did they do that?” especially when they have seen something unusual happen. You have probably said it yourself many times. I suppose it is our natural inquisitiveness that makes us want to understand how things are done. For example, in Southern England there are a group of huge stones arranged in a circle. The name given to this site is ‘Stonehenge’. The stones weigh many tons, and what has intrigued scientists and engineers and archaeologists for years, is “How were these stones erected?” This is because these stones were assembled in this formation thousands of years ago without the aid of any of the heavy lifting machinery that we are familiar with today.

In some ways the question about ‘Stonehenge’ is not all that important, except for helping us to know about the technology that existed at that period in history. But that kind of question takes on increased importance when it is asked about the things God has done. And that is what this ‘*Sound Words*’ Study Booklet is going to deal with. We are going to approach this by looking at a number of very real problems that God has overcome. In each chapter we shall look first at teaching from the Bible, so it is important for you to have the Bible with you as you read. We will also see how God has helped a number of people alive today and overcome the very difficult problems they have faced.

We trust that this booklet will help you to realize how great God is, and enable you to trust him with renewed confidence.

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### Chapter 1 Overcoming man’s greatest problem

#### a) The problem.

Some difficulties we face in life are enormous. They seem almost insurmountable, and indeed some are. Usually these difficulties apply to only a few people. However, there is one problem that is impossible for us to overcome and which affects every one of us. I am talking about the problem of the wrong in our lives. It is what the Bible calls sin. We are all aware that we do or say or think things that we should not. We also fail very often to do the things that we should be doing. For example, it is so easy for us to say an unkind word, or to be untruthful. We can also neglect to be kind and helpful to others. The list is almost endless, and everyone in the world is troubled by this. To a greater or lesser degree, we all do wrong because we are all born with sinful hearts (see Romans 3:23; Psalm 51:5).

Sin is a major problem for us for a variety of reasons. It spoils and affects everything we do. For example, it causes rifts in our relationships with others. It is why we frequently get into trouble of one kind or another. But more important than those things is this, God hates sin! (See Proverbs 3:32; 6:16-19; 8:13; 15:8-9.) The wrong in our lives puts a barrier between God, and us so that we

cannot know God or enjoy him or have any hope of going to be with him in heaven. Sin is a terrible problem, because ultimately all our wrongdoing is against God. It is to stray from his wise and good laws that he has given us in the Bible. Therefore it brings us under God's condemnation (see Romans 5:16 & 18).

Consider the words of the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk. Habakkuk is describing God himself in this verse (Habakkuk 1:13): *"Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong."* Then think about this statement, where Isaiah is describing the great rift sin has caused between man and God (Isaiah 59:2): *"Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."* These verses emphasize the problem that our sin causes. Further, this is reinforced by the teaching of the New Testament (Romans 3:23): *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* In addition Romans 6:23 states, *"The wages of sin is death."* So we see this is not just a very serious problem, but it is one that affects every human being on the planet. We are all in the same boat, as it were. We are all guilty in God's eyes and in danger of his judgment.

#### **b) How God overcame sin.**

We need at this point to emphasize again that sin is something that is too hard for us to overcome. Jeremiah puts it quite graphically (Jeremiah 13:23): *"Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil."* None of us is able to remove the guilt from our own

lives, however hard we try or however good we aim to be. We will always be stained by the sin in our hearts and by the wrong we have already done. But this is where God comes in, because he has done something that we not only could never do ourselves, but also something that we certainly do not deserve. God himself has overcome the problem of sin!

God has done this through his own dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the best summaries of what God did is found in John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life."* This is a well-known Bible verse and what it describes is truly amazing. Indeed, the Bible teaches us that long before the beginning of time God knew that the human race would turn away from him. Yet he loved the world so much he devised the plan whereby man's sinfulness could be overcome (see 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8). What this entailed was that his own dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, would come to earth and bear the punishment that sin deserved. The Bible tells us concerning the Lord Jesus Christ that, *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* (2 Corinthians 5:21) This meant the Lord Jesus had to die, for sin's penalty is death, as we mentioned earlier. Jesus was crucified in the place of others. That was a terrible death as the wrath of God fell upon him as he bore the punishment for his people's sins. This really does teach us that God's love for sinful people is tremendous. He was prepared to sacrifice

his only Son that sinners might be forgiven, and Jesus was willing to be that sacrifice!

There are two verses in Romans 5, which describe this amazing provision that God has made. The first is verse 6, *“You see, at just the right time, when we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.”* In other words God did this when we were utterly incapable of overcoming our sinfulness because we were ‘powerless.’ And in Romans 5:8 we read, *“...God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* God did not wait until we improved ourselves or were better than others. He knew we were incapable of doing that. No! It was while we were still sinners, when we were totally unfit and unworthy, that God stepped in to overcome man’s sinfulness. It was an incredible act of his love and grace and mercy. The death of Christ **is** the only, but also the **sure** remedy for sin. And not only that, to demonstrate that Jesus really had dealt with sin completely, he was raised from the dead, and now is alive for evermore.

### **c) How we benefit from God’s work.**

The questions that remain to be answered now are these: “If God has overcome sin through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, how does an individual come to benefit from it? How do we come to enjoy God’s forgiveness personally?” The answer to these is found in the second half of John 3:16 we referred to earlier. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, **that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.**”* You see, it is when we personally put our trust in the Lord

Jesus that we receive God’s forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. And that means when humbly we acknowledge both our sinfulness and our need of God’s mercy, and ask the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us. When we truly believe in him, what we are doing is relying on what Jesus accomplished to make us right with God. And by that the Bible means his life of perfect obedience, and his sacrificial death on the cross, and his glorious resurrection from the dead. We trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, and not in anything at all that we might try to do to make us right with God. It is important to note that this is something each individual must do. No one can believe for someone else. Each one of us must come personally to the Lord Jesus Christ and trust him for the forgiveness of our own sins. It is our individual responsibility. But the wonderful thing is that when we do come to him in this way, he welcomes us with open arms, and cleanses us of our sin and gives us the gift of eternal life.

This gift of eternal life is most remarkable. We can think of it in two ways:

- i. It is a life of the highest quality, because to have eternal life is to really know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (John 17:3). That means to enjoy a relationship with God whereby he becomes our Father in heaven, with all his love and care that comes with that. And it also means to have the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Friend. It really is the richest of blessings to be able to talk with God and enjoy his fellowship and help every day of our lives. It is a

wonderful life. Indeed, Jesus called it ‘abundant life’ (John 10:10).

- ii. It is a life of the highest quantity, one that never ends. It begins now, here on earth, and continues beyond death, in heaven, with the Lord forever. It is the exact opposite of death which is the wages of sin.

### Conclusion

God really has overcome the greatest problem men and women have to face, the problem of sin. He truly is a wonderful God, and Jesus is a wonderful Saviour, who is worthy of our whole-hearted trust and love.

Have you come to trust him to deal with your sin?

If not, then you need to do so urgently. Do not delay a moment longer, but humble yourself before the Lord, and ask him to be merciful to you.

If you have already trusted him then this reminder should stimulate you to praise him again for his goodness to you. It should also do something else. If God has dealt with our biggest problem, then this should reassure us that he is able to deal with every other and lesser problem we may face as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul put it like this in Romans 8:32: “*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*” As you continue to read through this book you will discover a number of examples from both the Bible and modern day life where God has done just that. May this be a source of comfort and encouragement to you.

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## Chapter 2 Overcoming by prayer

### a) God answers prayer.

Again and again we read in the Bible that God delights to help his people by answering their prayers. Quoting from Psalm 34 Peter wrote about God (1 Peter 3:12), “*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer...*” When the true disciples of Jesus pray to God he does not ignore them, but he carefully listens in order to help them. This is why there is so much teaching on prayer in the Bible. We are repeatedly encouraged, commanded and instructed to pray. Jesus taught his disciples to pray because God was their heavenly Father, in what we now call ‘the Lord’s Prayer’ which is found in Matthew 6:9ff. Paul urged the Thessalonian believers to “*...pray continually...*” (I Thessalonians 5:17).

Once, Paul wrote to the Christian believers at Corinth about some of the difficulties he had faced, and of the importance prayer to God played in those times. His words are recorded in 2 Corinthians 1:8-11:

*“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, **as you help us by your prayers.** Then many will give*

*thanks on our behalf for the gracious favour granted us in answer to the prayers of many.”*

Paul was aware that God answers our prayers, and through them helps us overcome the great difficulties we face. You will note Paul is careful to stress that it is God who does the overcoming, and therefore the praise is given to him alone, but it is believers who have the privilege of asking for God’s help. And it is this privilege that we must engage in if we are to overcome our difficulties. Indeed James tells us that if we do not pray then we cannot expect to receive God’s help (see James 4:2).

#### **b) God answered the prayers of Michael and Jennifer Cordle**

Michael and Jennifer Cordle are Christian believers who are married and have five daughters. They are involved in farming in the East of England. Michael became a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ when he attended a Christian camp over 30 years ago. It was the words of John 3:36 which made him aware of his need to trust in the Lord Jesus. That verse says, *“Whoever believes in the Son (i.e. Jesus) has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”* Hearing these words, Michael realized his need to pray to the Lord to forgive his sins and God did just that. Jennifer became a Christian believer through reading the Bible, which, like Michael, made her aware of her need of the Lord’s forgiveness. She also prayed to him, and God forgave her. And so they began to be aware that God can overcome

things that are impossible for us to deal with, and this awareness came when they prayed to him.

Becoming Christian believers did not mean that Michael and Jennifer were not going to face any more difficulties. Life has not always been easy, especially concerning the health of their children. Indeed, between their first and second child Jennifer sadly suffered a miscarriage which was a harrowing experience for her and Michael. Throughout the heartache of those days, much prayer was made to God, and he wonderfully upheld them both enabling them to overcome the great loss they felt. Some time later when their third daughter was born, she became seriously ill when she was just three weeks old. But having proved God through the previous difficulty they knew they could trust him with this one. Again through prayer, the Lord gave them great peace of mind, and in his mercy their daughter got well. He overcame the problem for them.

There is always the great danger at times of tragedy and trial to turn against God and become embittered, but for Michael and Jennifer that has not been the case. As each trial has presented itself, they have turned to the Lord in prayer, and he has wonderfully sustained and kept them.

Prayer to God is obviously a vital part of every Christian’s life, and it becomes very precious during days when we are burdened down with cares and concerns. Michael and Jennifer have proved the value of this in their own family. And there was one further time that they shared with me when prayer to God became very important in their family life. This concerned their eldest daughter who was aged

twelve at the time. A growth developed on her heel, but two operations failed to solve the problem. Although the growth was not malignant, they were told that it usually meant the amputation of the affected limb, and plans were made to remove the lower part of her leg. This was a traumatic time for them, and especially their daughter. Much prayer was made to God for healing, and their home Church held a special prayer meeting to seek the Lord for his intervention. The date of the operation was set. Significantly, Michael's sister knew the surgeon very well, and she asked him what he would do if it was his own daughter. His immediate answer was to send her to one of the best orthopaedic hospitals in the country. Michael and Jennifer arranged for their own daughter to go to this other hospital and further surgery was planned. The outcome of this operation was quite remarkable. The surgeon could find no trace of the growth on her heel at all; it had completely disappeared, and all they could see were some damaged nerve endings. God had given them a marvellous answer to prayer, and so overcame this problem that their daughter did not have to lose any part of her leg or foot. Michael told me they rejoiced greatly at God's goodness to them in answering their prayers.

Michael and Jennifer's experience reminds us that God's care for his children, which we first appreciate when we become disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, continues throughout our lives. That does not mean we will never face difficulties, because they have faced many, but it does mean we can turn to God at any time and bring all our burdens to him in prayer. And one thing God, our

heavenly Father, loves doing is to answer the prayers of his children. Michael and Jennifer Cordle have proved this, and this is a further encouragement to us to do what we read in Proverbs 3:5-6:

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”*

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### **Chapter 3 Overcoming backsliding**

#### **a) God restores backsliders.**

Life is not always plain sailing, even for the genuine Christian believer. There can often be many ups and downs in our spiritual lives. There can be times of great devotion to Christ, of fervent love for God, and a determination to obey him whatever he may ask. But there can also be times when all of that seems to have disappeared. Devotion becomes weak, love for God grows cold, a carelessness over daily living and obedience creeps in. And when that happens, the true Christian is in the state of sad spiritual decline we call backsliding.

Now we could well be tempted to think that God would completely reject such a person, and never want anything to do with them again. But in fact we would be wrong to come to that conclusion. Not that God is content when one of his children backslides, but there is an amazing compassion and patience in the heart of God, even for backsliders. In fact he is eager to welcome them back. Listen to his words recorded in the book of Hosea with

reference to the people of Israel who had fallen into a state of severe spiritual decline. First there is the Lord's call to repentance (Hosea 14:1): *"Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall!"* Clearly this is a call to the backsliders to turn from their sin and turn back to the Lord. Through this we can see that Almighty God never considers sin in his people's lives as something trivial. We cannot, and dare not, use God's kindness as an excuse to live a spiritually careless life. But it is what follows that is truly amazing. In verse 4 of the same chapter in Hosea we find God declaring this statement: *"I will heal their waywardness and heal them freely, for my anger has turned away from them."* And that word 'waywardness' means backsliding. How this statement shows us that God is indeed a God of great grace! He lavishes his love on people who are completely unworthy and undeserving. But this is the very nature of his love. It truly is wonderful. He is able to overcome the most serious of spiritual declines.

Over the years, I have noticed something else that often happens when a backslidden believer is restored to the Lord. They have a new depth to their love for God that was not there before, and so often the Lord grants them a greater usefulness in his service than anything they had previously experienced. No one else could do this. Indeed who would want to do so with someone who has let them down? But the Lord is so different. He is merciful and patient, longsuffering and kind. This is never to be used as an excuse for our backsliding, but it does tell us God is a forgiving God. Indeed, if he were not so, then no Christian

would be able to continue in the Christian life because we all fail the Lord to a lesser or greater degree. He mercifully overcomes our shortcomings and sins, and restores us again and again. A lovely example of this is his dealings with his disciple Peter, who denied he ever knew Jesus no less than three times. He did not cast Peter off, because when Peter realized what he had done he repented, weeping bitterly (Luke 22:62). The Lord restored and used his frail servant in a remarkable way in the years that followed, as you can discover for yourself by reading through the book of Acts in the New Testament.

#### **b) A modern day example.**

Someone who has been through the very experiences we have been describing is a man named Paul Muldoon. Paul is married to his wife Lynn, and they have three children, James, Morag and Sam. And Paul works in a firm of solicitors as a probate executive, which involves him in helping families sort out their affairs when a relative has died. Back in 1962, while he was in his mid teens, Paul came under a deep conviction that he was a sinner. It was while he was listening to the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ that he realized he was not right with God because he had done many wrong things. So that night he asked the Lord Jesus to forgive his sin and to be his Saviour. At first things went well, and as he continued to attend his Church and listen to the messages from the Bible, he began to grow as a Christian. One problem that had troubled him for a long time was that he used to swear

a lot, but the Lord helped him to overcome that bad habit. Indeed things looked very promising for a while.

Paul then moved home and sadly stopped attending Church and gradually thought very little about the Bible or the Lord, and he began to follow a path he knew was wrong for a Christian. He had become a backslider, and this continued for over 10 years! However, the Lord had not given up on him. God persisted to prick Paul's conscience in various ways, until eventually in 1977 he sought the help of a nearby pastor, with the result that he recommitted his life to the Lord. What he did was to tell the Lord he was sorry for slipping away from him, and neglecting him over those years, and the Lord was merciful and restored Paul back to himself. There is a verse of a children's hymn that seems to sum up Paul's experience. The hymn is 'Jesus loves me', and the particular verse says,

*“Though I forget him and wander away  
still he doth love me wherever I stray,  
back to his dear loving arms do I flee  
when I remember that Jesus loves me.”*

Ever since that time the Lord has enabled Paul to keep going in his Christian life. Indeed he has remained closer to the Lord than ever before, and now receives much more blessing from reading the Bible than he did previously. It has been a great help to him to receive regular good Bible based ministry each week at his Church, and now the Lord is using him to teach others as he works among the young people. More recently Paul has been recognized as a deacon in his Church. The Lord has truly restored his soul.

The Lord's grace to Paul Muldoon shows without a shadow of a doubt that God is indeed a merciful and loving God. He is a true heavenly Father to his children, who will never let them go, even when they wander away from him. This does not mean we can presume upon God's mercy, and use it as an excuse to do things which we know are wrong, for God will never tolerate that kind of behaviour. But it does mean that when we have failed God, and are burdened with the guilt of our failure, God is more than willing to forgive us when we truly repent and seek his forgiveness. The apostle John put it so clearly in 1 John 1:9,

*“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

If you are a Christian believer whose heart has grown cold towards the Lord who loved you enough to die for you on the cross of Calvary, then seek him afresh today. Do not delay a moment longer. Do what Paul Muldoon did, and put matters right with God and ask him to restore you to himself.

And if you have never asked the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive your sins, then do not continue in that condition. We have seen that God is merciful to all those who seek him with all their hearts.

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## Chapter 4 Overcoming our worries

### a) A precious instruction.

Repeatedly in the Bible Christian believers are commanded to take a certain course of action, and they are assured that their obedience to God's Word will bring with it certain blessings. One such example is found in Philippians 4:6-7:

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

There is the action required of us - that we should not give ourselves to self-centred worry, but instead bring all our concerns to God in prayer - and there is the certain promise that when we obey this instruction, God's peace will fill our hearts and minds and overcome the anxiety that we are all prone to feel. God assures us he will fill us with that inner tranquillity that comes from knowing we are in a

right relationship with him. The basis of this is the peace with God that the believer has because of the forgiveness of sins. The reason why so often we fail to enjoy that peace, is that we fail to pray as this command requires of us. Both prayer and thanksgiving are God's wonderful antidotes to worry, whatever difficulties or concerns we may be facing. Sometimes those difficulties can be enormous, but they never negate God's promise to us in these verses, and this makes our obedience the more urgent and the promised blessing the more precious.

### b) A very real difficulty.

In the previous chapter we looked at God's amazing patience and goodness. We thought of it in the context of the backslider. To illustrate God's mercy we considered the experience of Paul Muldoon, who discovered God's forgiveness afresh after 10 years of backsliding. When Paul was in his backslidden state he met Lynn, and eventually they were married. Lynn was not a Christian believer at all, and had no interest in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, when the Lord began to deal with Paul, and restored him from his spiritual waywardness, this had quite an effect on her. Paul started to attend a Church again, and at first Lynn was quite opposed to all this because she thought she was all right. But one day a leaflet came through the post from a local Christian Church. She read this and found it quite helpful, then threw it in the bin. But when she went to throw the rubbish out she found it again and re-read it. And she did this for about 3 months! This, along with the help of a local pastor, made her realize she

was a sinner and needed the Lord's forgiveness. She sought the Lord's mercy in prayer, repenting of her sin and putting her trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Lord saved her.

Lynn was eventually baptized and joined the Church, and at that time was given the verses from Philippians 4 that we considered at the beginning of this chapter. Paul and Lynn were now united not only in marriage but also in Christ. The difference this made to their marriage was tremendous, bringing new joys and new strength. And this was to prove vital in one difficulty that was going to affect the rest of their lives. Paul and Lynn are blessed with three children, James, Morag and Sam, and it was the birth of Sam which was going to have this marked effect on their family life. While she was waiting for the birth of Sam, these verses from Philippians 4 came to her mind again, assuring her God would help her through everything, and that she must not be anxious. This was to prove vital because Sam was born with Down's syndrome.

The news of Sam's condition was quite a shock, and meant that Paul and Lynn now faced difficulties they had never before experienced in their lives. They had chosen the name Samuel for him even before he was born, and that name means 'heard of God'. As Lynn was in the hospital she was very conscious of the Lord's presence, and she gave Sam back to the Lord, and with simple but profound trust, asked the Lord to show her how to care for him, whatever the future might hold. And right there and then in the hospital the Lord filled her with a wonderful feeling of peace, just as he had promised in those verses from

Philippians 4. This was so real, that even the nursing staff at the hospital wondered why Lynn was able to face this situation with such peace and tranquillity. The Lord was very much at work fulfilling his promise in her life.

Sam's difficulties were not over, neither were his parents', but through it all the Lord has been with them, and given them his help and his peace. Each stage of his development has brought them great joy and led to them thanking God again and again for his goodness to them through Sam.

Why any one family should be given a child like Sam is in many ways a mystery of God's providence that we do not always understand. But Paul and Lynn Muldoon have proved that the Lord has helped them every day as they have committed their needs to him. Their living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is what has seen them through. As they have brought each need to God in prayer, he has blessed them and granted them his peace.

## **Chapter 5 Overcoming hard hearts**

### **a) A penetrating observation.**

One day when Jesus was talking with his disciples, he explained how difficult it is for some people to enter the kingdom of God. On that occasion he was referring to those who have riches. He used one of his very graphic descriptions to drive the point home. It is recorded for us in Luke 18:24-25:

*“Jesus said, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go*

*through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’’ When Jesus’ disciples heard this they were astonished and cried out, “Who then can be saved?”*

For them it seemed that if it was hard for the rich in this world to receive God’s forgiveness, then it must be virtually impossible for anyone else to be rescued from their sins!

That response is quite interesting, because it is possible for the disciples of Jesus to fall into the same way of thinking today. And by that I mean that we can look at some people, and as we examine their lives, we can be tempted to conclude that they could never become true Christian believers. Perhaps, like the rich man Jesus referred to, they love their money too much and are not prepared to put God first. Or it may be their lives are in such a mess - perhaps they have been involved in crime, or gambling, or violence, or something similar - and we feel that they would never turn from that way of life to following the Lord.

I think you will agree that such thinking is to say the least pessimistic. But, if we are true to the teaching of the Bible, then we must also add that it is a view that is characterized by unbelief - which of course is a very wrong attitude to have. I say this because of the answer that Jesus gave to his disciples. When they asked, *“Who then can be saved?”*, he simply said, *“What is impossible with men is possible with God.”* The encouragement of that statement is of tremendous proportions. It means that even the most unlikely of people are not too hard for God to rescue and

bring into his kingdom. What a wonderful thing that is to know. It is so full of hope and promise. And the reason for that is that Jesus is reminding us of something we find right throughout the Bible - namely, that salvation is God’s work. No one else is able rescue another from the guilt and power and penalty of their sins. Indeed one of the Psalms puts it like this (Psalm 49:7-9):

*“No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him - the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough - that he should live on for ever and not see decay.”*

And the Lord Jesus himself declared that even if someone owned the whole world that would not be enough to pay for their salvation. He said (Matthew 16:26):

*“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

The importance of all this is that while no one on earth is able to deliver another from their sins, God can do it. He is able to do the impossible. Indeed, he is the only one who can do it. And this is why men and women and boys and girls must cry out to him to save them, or they will never be brought into God’s kingdom.

Further, no one, whatever they may have done, or however low they may have sunk into the mire of wickedness and sin, is too hard for the Lord to deliver. He is an almighty Saviour. And he does this, of course, through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, Jesus died on the cross to take

the punishment of other people's sins. He had none of his own, but his love for lost sinful men and women was so great that he bore the penalty their sins deserved instead of them. And now, all who look to him to rescue them from the wrong in their lives, receive his forgiveness. With God nothing is impossible.

If you are already a Christian believer, this is both a wonderful and most helpful truth to know about, for two reasons.

- It really helps us in our praying for the salvation of people we know who seem to have no interest in spiritual things at all. We may have prayed for them for years, and been so discouraged at their lack of response to the love of Christ, that we have despaired and thought they could never be saved. If it was up to us, that would be true. But it is not up to us. This is God's work, and therefore this gives us great encouragement to go on praying for their salvation, for he is able to save.
- It also helps us to persevere in our evangelism with a sense of anticipation that God will save the lost. It is possible with him, and so this stirs us up to go on telling others about the Lord Jesus Christ, and not to give up.

These words from the Lord Jesus Christ teach us that God is able to overcome the hardest of hearts, and that means that we can answer the question, "Is anyone too hard for the Lord?" by a resounding, "No!"

### **b) A remarkable case.**

Jean Chapman is a lady who is a living example of the irresistible power and grace of God that Jesus was referring to in those words in Luke 18:23. Jean's life is as interesting as it has been tragic. Jean is in her 70s now but we need to go back a few years to appreciate her story. Jean's father was a Methodist minister, but sadly Jean rebelled against both her parents and against God, and determined to leave home at the earliest possible opportunity. At 16 she left home, and began to train as a children's nurse, but very soon got into bad company. It was the time of the second world war, and her boyfriend of three years was shot down just a week before they were due to be married. She also discovered she was pregnant, and all of this had a devastating effect on her. The result was she turned to alcohol for a solution with disastrous consequences. She eventually gave birth to a lovely baby girl, but was in no fit state to look after her, so her own mother brought her daughter up. She re-married and had a son, but this marriage again ended in disaster, which in turn drove Jean to drink even more heavily. She regularly got through a bottle of whisky a day, and eventually lost her job, her home, and her children. Jean then spent the next 40 years living on the streets or wherever she could find shelter! To maintain her drinking habit she learned to steal, and her life was literally in a mess. Often she was just numb because of the drinking, and to cope with the cold winter nights she would drink even more. Jean had become an alcoholic.

From a human perspective Jean was a most unlikely candidate for becoming a Christian. She was very far from the Lord, and you could be excused if you thought she would always remain in that condition. However, you would be quite wrong. One day she was invited to attend her first drugs party. While travelling to her destination on a bus, the courier came and sat next to her and shared how he had himself been an alcoholic but that his life had been changed by the love of Jesus. On her return journey he was on the bus again, and spoke to her some more about God, and also gave her a leaflet and a little booklet explaining how, through the Lord Jesus Christ, God was able to change lives by forgiving our sins and setting us free from its penalty and power. Jean just ignored all of this and pushed the literature to the bottom of her bag, and promptly forgot about it.

Six months later she really reached her lowest point. She was cold and wet and miserable, and then she remembered the literature she had been given on that bus. She began to read it with a real interest and began to cry out to God to help her. She determined to go to Church, and had to borrow a dress from a friend, as her own clothes were dirty and smelly and ragged. And it was while at the Church that she was reminded of the cross of Calvary where Jesus died in the place of sinners, and with tears streaming down her face, she pleaded with God for mercy and forgiveness, and God heard her and answered. She knew immediately that the Lord had forgiven her. Her life was then radically transformed by the grace of God. Having drunk for so long it took her some 18 months to be completely 'dried out'.

The believers at the Church found her a bungalow, and supported and helped her in a lovely way. She had to learn how to do some of the basic things of life as she had not done them for so long, such as how to eat properly and how to cook and how to go shopping. But the Lord Jesus was now with her, and she knew he would never leave or forsake her. One of the precious things the Lord did for Jean was to reunite her with her family. Her father was still alive and was aged 99 and had prayed for her from her first days. Not only did she regain her children, but also discovered she had grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Jean knows the Lord has forgiven her, because he has blessed her so much, and she in turn is seeking to help others who are like she was to know about the love of Christ.

Jean's testimony stands as a shining example of the truth that with God all things are possible. No one is too hard for the Lord. He has indeed overcome the power of sin that once gripped her life. And God is still doing that today.

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## **Chapter 6 Overcoming spiritual weariness**

### **a) The Lord's tender care.**

On numerous occasions in the Bible the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ are described as his sheep, while the Lord himself is known as their shepherd. Indeed Jesus called himself the 'Good Shepherd' in John's Gospel chapter 10, and went on to say how he laid down his life

for his sheep. It is a lovely picture of the loving and caring relationship that exists between God and his people.

One of the most well known parts of the Bible is the book of Psalms in the Old Testament, and it is not surprising to discover that this same shepherd/sheep picture is recorded there also. One of the most well known of the Psalms is number 23, which was written by David, the shepherd boy who became the king of Israel. He wrote in very personal terms when he declared, *“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”* He knew the wonderful security that God would care for him in whatever life would bring across his path, and also that the Lord would care for him even when he died.

As that Psalm develops David uses a very interesting and also very reassuring statement. It is found in Psalm 23:3 where he writes about the Lord that, *“he restores my soul.”* It simply means that God revives and refreshes his spirit. And this is true in quite a number of different situations that the believer can face.

- It is true when we have been through a tough trial, and feel weary and cast down. We can come to the Lord and as we wait upon him, he renews our strength. We are encouraged to, *“Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.”* (Psalm 55:22)
- It is true when we have been serving the Lord, and having given out we are spiritually jaded and need our spiritual batteries to be re-charged. We read in

Isaiah 40:29, *“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.”* And it was Paul’s experience also as he tells us (2 Corinthians 4:16), *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”* The Lord is amazingly sensitive to the needs of his children, and never fails to meet our needs.

- It is true even when foolishly we go away from God and neglect him. God is merciful to come to his wayward sheep and restore us back to himself again. This really is a remarkable and tender thing for God to do, for it is we who are the ones who wander from him, yet he is the one who forgives and revives and restores us back to himself again. His grace is truly amazing. (Isaiah 57:15) *“For this is what the high and lofty One says - he who lives for ever, whose name is holy: I live in a high and holy place, **but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.**”* Such restoration includes contrition, that godly sorrow which leads to repentance. This helps us to see that we must never use God’s restoring love as an excuse for neglecting him, but when in our folly we do wander away from him, and then realize it and repent, he is merciful to restore our souls.

## b) One of his wandering sheep.

Many Christian believers have experienced this tender care and restoring love of God in their lives, and one of these is Hazel Sidwell. Hazel had gone to Church for many years but no one ever told her why Jesus died on the cross. She often asked questions about this, but no one helped her, and so she stopped attending. When she was in her twenties, she was in hospital having her appendix taken out. A family friend visited her, and invited her to her home for a meal. Eventually she went, and it was on a Sunday. There were several other guests there, and afterwards they all went to Church. It was here that Hazel began to get the answers to her questions, and she realized that Jesus died to pay the penalty of sin. She also realized she was a sinner and needed Christ's forgiveness, and came to trust him. It was so wonderful to her at the time, and amazed her that God was so kind.

However, as time went by, her life became very busy. Hazel eventually married and had two boys, but gradually over a long period of time her spiritual interest waned. It was so gradual that she did not notice what was happening to her, but in fact she was wandering away from the Lord Jesus Christ, her Shepherd. She would miss her Bible reading one day, and then began to miss attending the Church prayer meeting, until at last she stopped attending her Church altogether. And God left her in that condition for a while, but not too long. She was, after all, one of his sheep for whom he had died, and he was not going to lose her or let anyone pluck her out of his hand (John 10:27-29). The Lord began to stir her up, and she realized she was not happy and not at true peace and not right. It was at this

time that she went to a funeral, and the minister conducting the service preached the gospel so clearly that Hazel realized she had wandered far from the Lord. It was as if he was saying to her, "Come back." His love overwhelmed her, and all she could say as she came to him again, was "God, be merciful to me a sinner", and he was. The Lord forgave her and restored her, and has kept her ever since that day.

The patient love of God towards his children is a marvel to consider and even more marvellous to experience. What a caring God our heavenly Father is, and what a tender Good Shepherd the Lord Jesus Christ is to care for his sheep with such thoroughness. It is a challenge to us also to ensure that we stay close to the Lord at all times, and if we are aware that we have been wandering away from him, then to return to him immediately.

What this chapter has considered helps us to see that those who truly believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are saved for ever. To use Paul's words at the end of Romans 8, nothing is "*able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" To belong to such a Shepherd is the highest of all privileges, and that privilege is given to all who follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

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## **Chapter 7 Overcoming dissatisfaction in life**

### **a) An old problem and its solution.**

Again and again we come across people who are thoroughly dissatisfied with their life. They have tried all sorts of things to fill the aching void they feel within

themselves. Some have thrown themselves into their career, or gaining as much money as possible, or simply trying to enjoy themselves with as much entertainment as they can find. And so we could go on. And the problem is accentuated because though sometimes these things bring temporary relief, they do not last. The Bible teaches that the only way we can be truly satisfied is by having a personal relationship with Almighty God through the Lord Jesus Christ. To know God is the most wonderful experience we can ever have. To have him fill your life brings a satisfaction the world can never bring us. We were made by God and for God, and we need to enjoy him. Indeed this is what Jesus described as eternal life when he was in prayer to his Father (John 17:3):

*“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”*

The problem is, that so few people do enjoy God. They look everywhere else but to God, and then they wonder why their lives remain empty and meaningless. Now this state of affairs is not new. It is something that has existed from the time of the entrance of sin into the world as recorded in Genesis 3. Later, the prophet Jeremiah summed it up when he recorded these words spoken by God about this very dissatisfaction (Jeremiah 2:13):

*“My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”*

The Bible often uses that picture of refreshing water as a symbol of the abundant, full, and satisfying life, which is found when we trust in God alone. But you will notice that the Lord said the people had forsaken him. They had deliberately turned their backs on him. And instead, they looked to other things to bring them satisfaction. The words in Jeremiah speak of them digging their own cisterns. A cistern was an underground water store, vital for life in the hot Middle Eastern sunshine. And it is used in Jeremiah 2:13 to depict the things to which the people were turning to satisfy their desires. In actual fact they had been following idols instead of following God. And the Lord said these cisterns they had dug were useless because they were broken. They could not hold water. Though they promised satisfaction they could not provide it. But foolishly the people still turned to them rather than the Lord. This turning away from God was of course sin, and it is sin that is the primary source of the emptiness the people of Jeremiah’s day were experiencing.

I wonder if that is a picture of you. Your life is empty; you feel dissatisfied; yet you do not truly follow the Lord. You have looked elsewhere for satisfaction, but each time you thought you discovered it you found it seemed to fall through your grasp leaving you as empty as before. The fact that you have not turned to the Lord is itself sin. Therefore you need to turn to the Lord. Ask him to forgive you for neglecting him, and to give you new, eternal, and abundant life. The Lord Jesus Christ put it like this in John 10:10, *“...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”* And therefore we must look to him alone for

it. He alone is able to overcome the dissatisfaction which our sinful ways bring into our lives.

**b) A twentieth century example.**

The experience of Jennifer Boston is significant because her story fits those words from Jeremiah so well. Jennifer was not a Christian believer at all, and had no interest in God, and yet her life seemed empty. She was a music teacher, but had not come into that work through the normal channels because she had no professional qualifications nor a university degree. And it was about 10 years after she had left school that this feeling of emptiness and dissatisfaction with life began to have a strong effect on her. Although her life was very busy, and she regularly played in orchestras, with all the social activities involved in that, she felt something was missing, but was not sure what it was. She thought the way to meet this need was to do some academic study, and this she did gaining a BA degree and other qualifications. But the emptiness was still there, and every attempt to cram her waking hours with more work just left her feeling more frustrated than ever, for none of these things really satisfied her.

It was at this time that Jennifer's father became ill and died, and she needed to care for her mother, who also sadly became ill and died. And it was at her mother's funeral that her friend Hazel Sidwell, whom we considered in our last chapter, was brought back to the Lord. The duty minister at this service did not know Jennifer's mother, but he said this, "I did not know this lady, but if she had been a Christian then after death she would be in heaven with the

Lord." It was this which God used to speak to her friend Hazel, and from then on Hazel began to attend Church meetings regularly on a Sunday. This made Jennifer somewhat resentful, because she wanted Hazel's time on a Sunday. But Hazel did not give in to this and continued to attend the Church, and would then speak to Jennifer about the messages she had heard from the Bible. Regularly she would challenge Jennifer about where she would go when she died, but Jennifer would try to dismiss all this from her mind. She was still working very hard at teaching and spending most Saturdays and Sundays doing administration for the school, cramming her life full with activity even though the emptiness remained in her heart.

Then Jennifer suffered a great disappointment when the job she had been doing was given to someone else. Her reaction was to let the school get on with its demands without her, and so she eased up on the work she was putting in after school hours. This meant that her Sundays were now much freer, and she began to attend the Church occasionally with her friend. But when her friend Hazel said she was going to help in a Holiday Bible Club for the children at the Church, Jennifer was extremely jealous that she was giving so much time to the Lord's work. But as the time for this event drew near she helped Hazel in the preparation of materials for this children's work. She would then take her to the meetings and began to talk to the pastor and other believers who were there, asking important spiritual questions. The last evening of this week was a family evening, and Jennifer went and listened carefully to the Bible being explained. The speaker

challenged those listening by asking them if they had accepted what Jesus had done. Had they come to believe in God? Had they asked for his forgiveness? Were they repentant for their own sins? Were they trusting in the Lord? Had they asked him for eternal life? In an instant Jennifer realized this was the very thing that was missing in her life. This was the cause of her dissatisfaction and emptiness. What was missing was the Lord himself. After asking her friend more questions about the Lord, that evening she found herself crying to the Lord in prayer to forgive her and come into her life. As she thought of the way she had ignored God for so long she felt so unworthy of his mercy, but the Lord forgave all of that and filled her heart and life. At last the emptiness and dissatisfaction was gone. The Lord had overcome it all, by dealing with the sin that caused it. Instead of being centred on herself and her own desires, she is now centred on the Lord whom she loves very deeply for all his goodness to her.

The great question is, are you like this, or is the Lord missing from your life? If he is, then you need to respond as Jennifer Boston responded and seek God's mercy and forgiveness.

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## **Chapter 8 Overcoming atheism**

### **a) The way of the fool.**

I wonder if you have ever heard someone called a fool? It is a common enough term. When people make a mistake others can often be heard to say, "You silly fool!"

In today's usage the term 'fool', although not a very nice term, does not always have any serious overtones, but in biblical days it was very serious indeed. Because of that the Bible warns us about using such a term lightly. There is one verse in the Bible which tells us why this term is a very solemn one (Psalm 14:1): "*The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'*" A person who is a fool in the Lord's eyes is someone who is morally deficient because he is an atheist. And by that we mean either someone who blatantly denies the existence of the one true God, or someone who in practical terms lives as if he did not exist. They never think about him, nor are they concerned to love or obey him. They just do not care about God. And their life shows that, as the rest of that verse from Psalm 14 goes on to say, "*They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no-one who does good.*" In other words someone whom God considers is a fool breaks his commandments that we find in the Bible without a care in the world. They live without any reference to him at all.

Now this is a very sad condition to be in, and also very wrong. God is so good to all of us. He gives us life. He sends the sunshine and the rain on all people, and so much more. And yet there are some people who never ever think to thank him, because they have dismissed God as an irrelevance. And that helps us to see why the Bible only ever uses the term 'fool' in a very serious way. The man or woman or boy or girl who lives without God at the centre of their lives is guilty of great sin, and therefore in great spiritual danger. To be in this condition is to have a very hard heart indeed.

### **b) Making a ‘fool’ wise.**

What we have just said raises the question,

*“Is it ever possible for someone who is an atheist, a fool - to use the Bible’s description - to become a Christian believer and be spiritually wise?”*

Looking at it from a human point of view we would have to conclude that was very unlikely indeed. But that would be to leave one very important factor out of our thinking, and by that I mean God himself. The Bible teaches us very clearly that with God all things are possible, as we have already seen in this booklet. So what we may find as an impossibility is not so for God.

A short while ago I met someone who brought that truth home to me in a most striking and telling way. His name is Andrew Nichols. When I spoke with Andrew he was aged 40, but we went back to the days when he left school. At that time he not only had no interest in spiritual things at all, but he actively opposed them. He was an atheist and argued with anyone who mentioned they believed in God. This continued until he was about 30, when something happened which changed his life in more ways than one. He was at his place of work, and it was lunchtime, when he became suddenly very ill with a terrific pain in his chest. A hospital was nearby so he tried to walk there, but could not make it, and stumbled into a shop to ask them to get an ambulance. He did not realize it at the time but he had suffered a massive heart attack and was at death’s door. While waiting for the ambulance a man came into the shop

and asked if they had a Bible. Andrew remembers thinking that this man must be stupid, because he thought the Bible would do him no good at all! As far as he was concerned it was a book full of myths.

Eventually he reached hospital, and the medical team worked all night to save his life. His heart stopped and had to be started by electric shock treatment, and he was unconscious for most of the time. However, in the morning when he came round a remarkable change had taken place. Not only had his life been spared but he suddenly believed that there was a God. In fact, he felt quite elated about this discovery and was glad that God was real. I asked him how this change had taken place, expecting him to say a Christian doctor or nurse had spoken to him, but it was none of those things. It was simply God himself at work in Andrew’s life. At his bedside was a Bible, the very book he had despised only hours earlier. It had been presented to the hospital by a Christian organization called ‘The Gideons’. Over the next few weeks Andrew read it avidly and discovered not only was it true, but it was a book about him! He was made to see how wrong he had been by refusing to believe in God. He knew he had despised God and blasphemed God. He realized also he had hurt many people over the years as he had opposed their belief in God. In short, he came to realize he was a sinner. The words of David expressed exactly how he believed he had treated God (Psalm 51:4): *“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.”* As he read the Bible further he discovered that God was a forgiving God, that Jesus had died to pay

the price of sin's penalty, and that without Christ he could never come into God's presence because God is holy and just. There in the hospital he prayed for forgiveness, confessing his sins, and trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ. At last he realized what a 'fool' he had been all those years, but now was so thankful that God had made him spiritually wise. God had overcome his atheism!

Andrew's story does not end there. His heart attack had done tremendous damage to his heart and he was not expected to live long. The only answer was a heart transplant, which they thought would extend his life for up to 2 more years. This news was a great shock to Andrew, but he was able to rest in the fact that his life was now in the Lord's care. After several months a donor heart became available. The operation was a success. When Andrew came round from the anaesthetic he told me he felt a sense of disappointment as he had hoped he would have been with the Lord in heaven, so certain was he now of the Lord's salvation. However, he was deeply grateful for being given yet more time to serve God on earth, and was very concerned to know if the donor had gone to heaven or to hell. Andrew's new heart actually lasted for 7 years, and since then he has had a second successful heart transplant. He is simply overwhelmed at the way God has been so merciful to him, caring and upholding him through all this trauma. And every Christian believer today is in the same caring hands of Almighty God as Andrew Nichols is, and so we can trust him absolutely.

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## **Chapter 9 Overcoming opposition to Christ**

### **a) The conversion of an enemy of the cross of Christ.**

Throughout this booklet we have seen a number of remarkable ways that God has prevailed over enormous difficulties in people's lives. We have looked at various aspects of God's character as revealed in the Bible, and then seen how these have worked out in individual incidents. It has been a very illuminating study because we have seen God's power and strength, his wisdom and knowledge, and his patience and grace displayed in a variety of ways. All these have made us aware that God is both very wonderful and very different to us.

One of the biblical passages where we see these attributes of God's character working together is Acts chapter 9. The passage records how God overcame the open hostility of Saul of Tarsus. Later on, Saul became better known by the name Paul, but when we first meet him in the Bible he was openly opposed to the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, in a previous chapter, in Acts 7, we find him minding the coats of the people who stoned to death that lovely early Christian, Stephen. And by the time we reach Acts 9 Saul began to destroy the Church, arresting and imprisoning as many Christian believers as he could get his hands on. What is of significance in his hostility is that it was because of his own religious views. He was an ardent Jew, a strict Pharisee, and he was convinced that the Lord Jesus Christ was the enemy of God, hence his determination to wipe this 'new religion', as he thought it was, off the face of the earth.

Now it would have been so easy for God to have destroyed Saul for his anti-Christian views, but he did not. Rather, God exercised great patience with this man, and then stopped him in his tracks as he was journeying to Damascus (Acts 9:3ff). There God humbled him, and he was made to realize that the Lord Jesus Christ was God's own Son, whom God had sent to be the Saviour of the world. Saul was compelled both by God's power and grace to humble himself before the Lord Jesus Christ, and to receive him as his Saviour from his own sins. God had mercy on Saul, and graciously forgave him for all his wrong opinions and actions, and transformed him into one of the most useful Christians the world has ever known. God's power, his patience, his love and his mercy are all displayed in the way he dealt with this man who was against Christ. In his love, God overcame the fierce opposition that existed in Saul's heart and mind, and changed him into a Christian believer.

To encourage Saul, the Lord Jesus sent one of his disciples named Ananias to reassure him of God's love and mercy. At first Ananias was reluctant to go because Saul's previous hostility towards Christians had been so severe. But the Lord told Ananias that he was going to use Saul in a remarkable way. His words are found in Acts 9:15-16,

*“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”*

At this Ananias went to Saul, and as the years of Saul's life unfolded those words spoken about him were fulfilled in detail, as reading through the rest of the book of Acts and the books of the New Testament that he wrote, indicate.

### **b) God still overcomes people's opposition to Christ today.**

What happened to Saul of Tarsus continues to happen today, as God powerfully and graciously overcomes the anti-Christian views of men and women all over the world. One such man is Saheb who comes from India. He was brought up in a Sunni Muslim family. His family was very orthodox and he followed the various religious rituals very closely. As a young man, Saheb was not in favour of Christianity at all. He also developed a great interest in studying other religions, such as Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, because he wanted to know God and what he is like. He was spiritually thirsty, and wanted that thirst met. But his search into his own and other religions to find out who God is and what he is like brought no answers at all to his many questions, with the result that he slowly gave up that search. Instead he turned to novels and obscene books, thinking that if he gratified his own desires with these things he would at last be satisfied, but the emptiness remained in his heart.

At this time he was visiting a friend when something caught his attention. It was a beautifully bound book, and he wanted to have a copy for himself just because it looked so attractive on the outside. His friend told him he could get one free of charge by doing a simple correspondence

course. This course was a Bible correspondence course of 12 lessons that looked at subjects such as God, man and sin. Saheb studied hard and soon he received his own copy of the book he saw at his friend's house. It was the New Testament, and he started to read it. He had not gone very far through Matthew's Gospel when he was arrested by the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. He found an authority that he had not discovered in other religious books. Jesus was a person who spoke things definitely and clearly, and Saheb knew he must listen to all that Jesus said, and so he began earnestly to seek the Lord.

He then had a remarkable experience. He became very ill with a fever, and the doctor was unable to give him any relief. All medication failed. Then one evening, he had been reading how Jesus had healed a woman who had suffered from bleeding, and whom the doctors could not heal (Luke 8:43-48). So he quietly prayed and asked the Lord to make him well. Within a fraction of time his sickness was gone. This had a profound effect on him, and he began to realize something of the power and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. The very same night, the 11th December 1967, there was a terrible earthquake in Maharashtra where he was living. The tremors were quite terrifying, and his own home was badly shaken. At that instant he remembered how he had read in the New Testament that earthquakes would take place prior to the return of Jesus to the earth. And these two things occurring together the very same night made him realize Jesus was God, and that he is going to come back. He wrote to the office where he had received his Bible correspondence

course, and they shared with him how Jesus is able to do the most difficult thing of all, to forgive our sins. Saheb's heart was already prepared by God to receive this good news. His hostility to Christ had evaporated, and he humbly asked the Lord to forgive him. At last he had found the answer of his long search, and the answer was the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Saheb's life was turned around from being once against Christianity to becoming a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it was a change that God alone brought about. He had overcome the opposition that once existed in Saheb's heart. Saheb himself then became the object of the hostility of others now that he had become a Christian believer. The most difficult of all was the persecution he experienced from his own family. His mother was really angry at him, and often beat him severely. On one occasion she nearly killed him by throwing her sickle at him. Mercifully God spared his life, and he continued patiently to share the love of Christ with his family and neighbours. The result was that many of them became Christian believers too, and even his own mother accepted Christ before she died.

### **c) Some encouraging words from the Lord.**

Just before he left his disciples to go first to the cross and then to return to heaven, Jesus gave them some very wonderful and encouraging teaching. It is found in John's Gospel, especially chapters 13 to 17. Jesus knew his disciples would miss him dearly, and so he promised them that God would send the Holy Spirit to be their comforter

and helper and friend. And then, just before he prayed for them, and all others who would eventually believe in him, Jesus said something very interesting. His words are found in John 16:33,

*“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

Saheb certainly experienced something of that trouble, but he has also seen the Lord overcome the world’s hostility.

Jesus’ words are intended to give us encouragement when we face similar difficulties. In the end the opposition of men will fail, because Jesus is the ultimate victor. In the final analysis, this world, with all its hostility to Christ and his people, will be judged by him, condemned, and will perish forever. But those who have faithfully followed him will share in his triumph, and reign with Christ forever and ever (Revelation 3:21; 2 Timothy 2:12; Matthew 19:28-30). And that is tremendously encouraging if you are suffering for your faith just now. The Lord Jesus is fully aware of your trials, and he is with you in them, and by his power and grace will sustain you through them until at last you share in the glory of his eternal kingdom. And because these are his words, and not those of just anybody, we can indeed take heart, and be of good courage for his purposes will not fail.

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## Chapter 10 Overcoming faith testing trials

### a) God our helper.

It has often been the experience of Christian believers that in their deepest trials and darkest moments, they have

known the presence and help of the Lord in a very special way. And what might be considered as faith shattering trials, God overcomes in the lives of his children so that their faith is actually strengthened. He does this by drawing near to them with his encouragement, and the Psalmist wrote about it (Psalm 46:1),

*“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”*

Again and again the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ have experienced this. A good example from the Bible itself is the testimony of Paul. So often he found himself in difficulties which tested his faith to an incredible degree, and yet on each occasion the Lord came and helped him. Here are some examples.

- When Paul was on one of his missionary journeys, he came to the city of Corinth (Acts 18:1). As he shared the message of God’s forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ, some believed but many opposed him. Corinth was a very wicked city where immorality and corruption was rampant, and certainly no easy place in which to serve God. Indeed Paul later wrote to the Corinthian believers and reminded them he had been with them in much fear and trembling (1 Corinthians 2:3). In Acts 18:9 we read, *“One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no-one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”* This was such an encouragement to Paul that instead of leaving Corinth he stayed there for 18 months. God overcame any temptation that Paul may have felt to

turn away from serving him. God overcame this faith testing trial.

- Some time later when he was in Jerusalem, Paul was arrested for teaching about Jesus. The people were so angry they nearly tore him apart, so that the Roman commanding officer had to step in and rescue him. We then read in Acts 23:11, *“The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, ‘Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.’”* How this must have strengthened Paul in this life-threatening situation. Indeed, the very next day some men plotted to kill Paul, but their evil plans were discovered and frustrated, and God’s plan for Paul was fulfilled, and he went to Rome. Again God overcame.
- On the journey to Rome, he was involved in a terrible storm at sea. The sailors and soldiers on board the ship were terrified for their lives as the storm was hurricane force. And then we read in Acts 27:23 that Paul addressed his fellow travellers and said, *“Last night an angel of God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’”* And with that help from the Lord Paul went and encouraged those sailing with him. God strengthened his faith by drawing near to him.
- And then when Paul actually stood trial at Rome in front of all the Roman authorities, he wrote (2 Timothy 4:16-18), *“At my defence, no-one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.*

*But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”*

And so we can see from these few examples that the Lord was indeed a present help to Paul in his times of trouble. And how reassuring this is for all today who trust in and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. He will be with us when we face our own times of trouble, because God is the great helper of his people.

#### **b) A modern day example.**

As we have looked at some of Paul’s experiences we might conclude that he faced rather a lot of trials, and that was true, of course. Indeed, it is often the case with God’s dear children. Some in particular have to face what may seem to us as more than the normal share of difficulties, and yet the Lord never deserts any of his children who have to face such ordeals. A modern day Christian believer who is a very good example of this is Elizabeth Boast. Elizabeth is married, has two adult children, and she first trusted Christ for forgiveness over 40 years ago while she was only aged 8. She knew, even at that early age, that there was wrong in her life and so she simply prayed to God to forgive her, and he did. But throughout her life Elizabeth has had to endure a number of traumatic events that were in no uncertain terms ‘faith testing trials’. As you read Elizabeth’s story you will see how God really drew near to

her in these difficult times, just as the Psalmist declared and how Paul experienced.

- **Trial number one.**

Her first ordeal came the night before her twelfth birthday. For several weeks before, her mother had been sharing her faith with a neighbour and seeking to help her to know the Lord. There was a special meeting in the Church that night and Elizabeth was asked to go and see if this lady would like to come. When she knocked on the lady's door, her dog, who was a bull terrier, decided Elizabeth was an unwelcome guest and attacked her. The animal severely bit both her arms and legs, and Elizabeth knew that once the dog's jaws locked she would not be able to get him off. The lady tried frantically to get the dog off Elizabeth, but to no avail. So there in the garden Elizabeth prayed to God to help her to get free, and also told him that she knew if this was the time for her to die she knew she would go to be with him in heaven! That was remarkable faith from a 12 year old - faith that triumphed when tested. In his goodness, the Lord intervened and the dog released her. She was taken to hospital, but the damage the dog had inflicted was horrendous, and the nerves in one of her arms had been severed and the surgery available at that time was unable to repair the damage. In the meantime, the lady who owned the dog was brought to trust the Lord for herself because of the way she had heard Elizabeth pray while being attacked. Much prayer was made for Elizabeth by her Church, and she was sent to the London Hospital and placed under the care of an

eminent surgeon named Professor Seddon, who was himself a Christian believer. He was going to operate on her arm, and the night before the surgery was due to be done, and knowing that much prayer was being made, Professor Seddon examined Elizabeth again and was sure he saw some tiny movement in her thumb. Knowing the power of God, he decided to postpone the operation, and in the event it never took place. She was in London for 3 weeks and at the end of the third week he was convinced that prayer was being answered. It took a great deal of physiotherapy to get her arm back to full use again, but it was undoubtedly "*a pure miracle*", to use Elizabeth's own words. What is so encouraging from Elizabeth's experience is that if ever there was a time when she could have felt God had deserted her it was while that dog was tearing away at her flesh. But God overcame any temptation she may have felt to think like that. God really is an ever-present help when any of his children face trouble. He really is the Saviour and Friend of his people

- **Trial number two.**

We jump several years now to some time after Elizabeth was married. Her first child was due, with all the excitement and preparation that is normally involved. Sadly, the little girl died at birth and it was a terrible shock. Elizabeth grieved very much at this loss. Her faith was being tested yet again. But Elizabeth and her husband trusted God through it all. Eventually the Lord gave them two children, and since then their daughter

Alison has also sadly lost her first baby. Elizabeth's response to this was to say, "*Who better to help someone through a situation like that, than someone who has already been there.*" Even in this she sees the good hand of the Lord. When asked if she felt God had deserted her, or felt bitter against him for having to go through such an ordeal, Elizabeth said it has been the opposite. The Lord has been very, very near to her and helped her through. She has had to rely on him more and more, and throughout he has dealt with her in a loving and caring way, and she has been aware of his presence very much indeed. Instead of weakening her faith the Lord has used this trial and strengthened it.

- **Trial number three.**

A few years ago at Christmas time, while decorating her home for the festivities, Elizabeth had a nasty fall. In the process she went right through a glass fish tank and gashed her left leg very deeply. The injury was so severe that there was the real possibility she would lose her leg altogether. In addition to the very deep cut which took 37 stitches to close, she also contracted an infection from a fungus that the fish were carrying, and it was over 8 months before everything cleared up. But again the Lord drew near to help her. She received many visits and much support from the other Christian believers in her local Church, who also helped to look after her family back home. The Lord's presence was so real that she never ever felt alone. He was indeed that ever-present help in trouble, and when her faith was

tested yet again the Lord helped her and overcame the trial.

How good it is to know that every Christian believer can trust and rely on the Lord with real assurance, because whatever our difficulties and trials, he is the God who overcomes these and helps his people through them. This does not mean that we will not have to face difficulties, nor that our faith will not be tested, because these things come to all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. But what is so significant is that we will never face them alone, and therefore we can depend on the Lord completely.

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## **Chapter 11 Overcoming an addiction**

### **a) A growing problem.**

I am sure you have often noticed how something that starts off very small can become very large. I suppose one example we are all familiar with is a seed. It is frequently very tiny yet can grow into a much bigger plant or tree. When I was a small boy, during the wintertime it often snowed where I lived. And one of the delights of the children was to see who could make the largest snowball. And the best way to achieve this was to make a small snowball in your hands, then simply roll it over the snow on the ground. As you pushed it along, it picked up more snow until sometimes it was well over a metre in diameter. Indeed, its increase in size was only limited by the strength of the children who were pushing it around.

The reason for starting this chapter in this way is that this same principle is true in a very important area of our lives.

And in addition, it can have disastrous effects, as we shall see. On a number of occasions in the Bible, this is applied to the increase of wickedness and evil in our lives. Significantly, Paul teaches that this is a characteristic of the very days we live in. When writing his second letter to Timothy he described the last days to him. In the Bible, the term ‘last days’ refers to that period between Christ’s first coming and his return to earth. For example, on the day of Pentecost Peter explained that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which occurred that day was the fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy about the last days (Acts 2:16). So the last days commenced then and continue through the present time. Now Paul wrote about these days like this (2 Timothy 3:13),

*“...evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”*

And earlier he advised Timothy to (2 Timothy 2:16),

*“Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.”*

In other words, sin, when it is unchecked, is something that will increase from seemingly small beginnings to very serious consequences.

Here are two notable examples from the Bible itself.

- i. You may recall how one of the godliest kings Israel ever had was king David. In 1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22 he is described as a man after God’s own heart. Yet one night, while he was walking on the roof of his house he saw a beautiful woman bathing. What he should have

done was to turn his eyes away immediately and go indoors. But sadly he did not. That simple, small look resulted in him committing adultery with the woman, whose name was Bathsheba, the eventual murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite, and the death of the child that resulted from his illicit relationship (2 Samuel 11 & 12). If only David had turned his eyes away, but he did not, and that first small lustful look resulted in this catalogue of terrible events. Sin, if left unchecked, will grow and grow.

- ii. Another example, and really the most tragic and dreadful of all, was the life of one of the twelve disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. I am referring of course to Judas Iscariot. What privileges this man enjoyed being in the company of the Saviour for all those years of his public ministry. He saw all those miracles, and heard all his wonderful teaching. And he was given the high trust of being the treasurer of this band of Jesus’ closest followers. Yet what are we told about Judas? He loved money. At first he began to help himself to what was in their money bag. When Jesus was anointed by Mary with a very expensive perfume, John records in John 12:5 that Judas spoke out against this. *“Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages”*, retorted Judas. But John then adds this comment, *“He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.”* If only Judas had stopped when he was tempted to do that the

very first time, but he did not. And where did this lead him? It led him to commit the most heinous crime. He betrayed the Lord Jesus Christ in order to get 30 pieces of silver for himself! And we find those details in Matthew 26:14-16.

We can see from these examples what a terrible thing sin is. It is very powerful and will only seek to pull us further and further away from God and down into the mire of wickedness. The only remedy for it is that we turn to God in a radical and thorough repentance and place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ alone is able to break sin's power and cleanse us from its guilt. Failure here will result in our lives growing further and further away from the Lord.

**b) A telling example.**

To illustrate both sin's ability to increase and God's ability to break sin's power, I want to share with you what happened to a man named David Crouch, who comes from England. We must go back to the year 1945 when David was aged 9. His father had just returned from fighting in the second world war, and it was on a particular Saturday when there was a very famous horse race being held. A great deal of money was gambled on this race, and David's father drew up a list of the horses and asked David to pick the winner by closing his eyes and putting a pin in the piece of paper with the list on. The horse nearest to the pin would be David's choice. In the event the horse David selected was a rank outsider and the family dismissed it

completely. Later that day when the race took place it was David's choice that actually won!

Now you might think that was a harmless activity, but in fact it was the beginning of a very long, sad, downward trend in David's life. He was convinced, even at that early age, that he had some gift to choose winning horses, and his family encouraged him. But he was soon to discover he had no gift at all. Soon he was spending any pocket money he was given on gambling, even while still at school, even though this was illegal. Sadly his gambling became like a disease. It was compulsive, and he had become addicted. He was not alone in this, for his brother followed the same sad path. When David started work his wages were often gone within hours, wasted on gambling. And this lasted for years. When his brother reached the age of 34 his life was in such a mess with gambling debts that he tragically committed suicide, but even this did not dampen David's compulsion to gamble. Often his entire earnings were wasted on this sinful activity. It was an obsession, and the desired one big win never came.

Although David never went to Church, he had been taught to pray from childhood, and he was convinced there was a God, but he understood very little about him. When he was in trouble with his gambling he would sometimes pray for help, but then forgot about God altogether. Until one day a work colleague who was a Christian began to help him. David was involved in the trade union movement and also was a Communist and frequently got into trouble at work. But his colleague, also a union shop steward, would frequently help, and in the process used to talk with David

about the Lord and how Jesus could break him free from his addiction and forgive his past.

It was 1973 and by now David's life was in a mess. His gambling and interest in the communist party just did not answer his real needs. His friend at work invited him to attend his Church on a Sunday. David did not want to go, but because this colleague had been so helpful he felt obliged to accept this invitation. What touched David was the warmth and love he received from the other believers at the Church. And as he listened to the gospel message he came to realize not only that he was a sinner but that the Lord Jesus Christ had died for his sins so that he could be forgiven. He struggled against trusting the Lord, but such was the power and grace of God he could not hold back, and was compelled to seek the Saviour's mercy. The words of John 3:16 were a special blessing to him at that time.

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him, will not perish but have everlasting life.”*

The change the Lord brought to David's life was dramatic. The next morning he went to the newsagent's where he normally picked up his gambling newspaper, and cancelled it! The desire to gamble was gone. He was indeed a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Lord had forgiven and transformed his life. God overcame his addiction.

David's testimony is like that of so many we have included in this booklet, that nothing is too hard for the Lord. And

the power and love of the Lord Jesus Christ is so strong that he can set men and women free from sin's guilt and power. Jesus himself, the Son of God, said in John 8:34 and following,

*“I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. **So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**”*

The Lord set David Crouch free from his addiction to sinful gambling, and therefore it is to the Lord Jesus Christ we must come if we are to experience the freedom from sin in our own lives.

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## **Chapter 12 GOD ULTIMATELY OVERCOMES ALL THINGS**

### **a) A most reassuring truth.**

Christian believers down the centuries have taken great comfort and encouragement from the fact that God is in control of everything. Indeed, Christian believers can go further and say that God is at work for their good in everything that happens to them. Again and again the Bible teaches us that God's will is irresistible, and no one and no thing is able to prevent him fulfilling his purposes for his children. All that happens comes under the umbrella of his sovereign control.

A Bible passage that illustrates this is Ephesians 1. Paul encouraged the Ephesian believers by reminding them that they had been wonderfully rescued from their sins, and that

it was because God had planned it all (Ephesians 1:11-12):

*“In him (that is, in the Lord Jesus Christ) we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.”*

The ultimate reason why anyone becomes a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ is because God planned it. It was by his choice. But also take special note of the words, *“him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will...”* for they are very significant. Paul was completely confident that God’s will is absolutely sure, and that God is **always** working out his purposes in **everything**..

Now these are staggering truths for us to grasp, and in many ways they are beyond our full comprehension. But if you are a Christian believer you can say with the same confidence that God is working out the purpose of his will in all the events of your own life. And there is a tremendous security for the believer in that, especially when we do not understand everything that is happening in our lives, because we can rest secure that God knows, and we can trust everything to his loving care.

#### **b) A genuine difficulty.**

A huge problem that arises whenever we think seriously about God’s sovereignty and control of our lives, is what about those times when things appear to be going wrong? Those times when you have had to go through severe trial

and pain and distress - where is God in all of that? Is he still in control?

The answers to such questions cannot be given lightly, because they are serious matters. The trials that some believers have to endure are extremely heavy, as we have seen from those we have included in this booklet. So to give a glib or flippant answer is insufficient. We also must be very careful not to act in a careless and dismissive way, as if other people’s sufferings do not matter. That would both increase the burdens they are already carrying, and also ignore what God has revealed about this in the Bible itself. So how do we begin to answer these kinds of questions?

#### **c) An important starting place.**

We must start by looking at some of the clear statements of Scripture. Any careful reading of the Bible will indicate quite strongly that God never ever gives up his control of the universe. He is always at work and is always fulfilling his plans, as we have seen from Ephesians 1:11 that we noted above. And that, therefore, applies to days of blessing as well as days of burden, to joys and sorrows, in sickness and health, in poverty or plenty. God is always the great King - the King of kings in fact, who is always in ultimate control, even if it may appear otherwise to our way of thinking. Consider this selection of the many Bible passages which declare this truth about God:-

Psalm 22:28: *“...dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.”*

Psalm 66:7: ***“He rules for ever by his power, his eyes watch the nations - let not the rebellious rise up against him.”***

Psalm 103:19: ***“The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.”***

Isaiah 40:10: ***“See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, his arm rules for him.”***

1 Timothy 1:17: ***“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”***

1 Timothy 6:15: ***“..God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords...”***

Revelation 15:3: ***“Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages.”***

Revelation 19:6: ***“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.”***

Indeed, we have only to read the opening chapters of the book of Job to realize that even the devil himself cannot do anything to us without God’s permission. God never abdicates his throne, and never will. He always ensures that his purposes are fulfilled.

#### **d) Applying this to our difficulties.**

This still leaves us with the questions such as, “Why do Christian believers go through trials? What is God doing with us at such times?” To start with, we need to consider some of the great statements we find in Romans 8:28-30:

***“v28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. v29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. v30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”***

Here we have one of the clearest statements in all the Bible of God’s great purposes for his people. I want to draw your attention to three things in particular from those words.

#### *i. God’s purpose. v28*

God’s overriding plan for Christian believers is that whatever happens to us, whatever we have to endure, whatever burdens we have to carry, he intends it all to do us good. God’s intention is not that these things should harm us, but rather they will be used by him to fulfil his plan for our profit.

#### *ii. Christ likeness. v29*

God’s intention is to make us more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ, so that the lovely characteristics of our Saviour will be produced in us. For that to happen our old sinful ways and habits have to be taken away, and replaced by the qualities we see in Jesus. And one of the ways God uses trials and burdens in this, is that they often make us aware of our sinfulness, with the result that we repent and want to be more obedient to God, as Jesus was. And so the

beauty of Jesus is produced in us. Any greater good we cannot imagine, and this therefore is a delightful thought to sustain us in our trials.

*iii. Glory. v30*

God intends to bring us to glory, to paradise, to heaven. Indeed it is so certain that Paul wrote as if it has already happened. He says, “...*those he justified, he also glorified.*” And you can see that he has written that in the past tense. It is so sure that he writes as if it is already our experience. In other words, this is something over which there is no doubt, no uncertainty, no question. It will happen. And that is an incredible blessing that God has assured us of, and a real comfort in our trials. It means a day is coming when they will trouble us no more.

Putting these three things together helps us to answer our question, ‘where is the Lord when we go through trial?’ The fact is, he is right there in the middle of it all. And more than that, he is using it all to bring good to us, to produce that Christ-likeness in our lives, and take us further along the road that leads to heaven. So we can rest secure in these great facts, that even our trials are intended by God to bring his blessing to our lives.

**e) A Biblical example.**

A lovely example of this from the Bible is Joseph, whose life is recorded in the Old Testament book of Genesis. You may remember that his brothers absolutely despised him. The very sight of him caused their hatred to boil up, to the extent that they intended to kill him (Genesis 37). In the event they sold him into slavery instead, and some traders

took him down to Egypt. Then they lied to their father Jacob by saying a fierce animal must have killed him. These were certainly not things that were good in themselves, but we must remember that Romans 8:28 tells us not that all things are good, but that “...*in all things God works for the good of those who love him.*” His sovereignty is such that he even uses such bad experiences eventually to work for our good. But at this precise juncture in Joseph’s life, to human reasoning it looked as if God was not at work at all.

Indeed, things seemed to go from bad to worse for Joseph. Down in Egypt his sufferings did not end, because he was falsely accused of immorality (Genesis 39), and imprisoned for over two years! It seemed as if he was suffering one thing after another, and that must have been very hard for him. But then, with the passing of time, Joseph was promoted to being the second in command over all Egypt next to the Pharaoh! This was because God had revealed to Joseph there would be 7 years of plenty when food could be stored, followed by 7 years of famine (Genesis 41). During that famine, Joseph’s brothers were sent by their father to get food from Egypt, and in the end they were reconciled to their brother (Genesis 42-45). Indeed, their father Jacob came to spend his last days with the son he had thought had been dead for many years (Genesis 46-47).

When Joseph’s father Jacob died, his brothers feared that he might take revenge on them, but Joseph viewed the situation very differently. He calmed their fears with these words in Genesis 50:20:

*“You intended to harm me, **but God intended it for good** to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”*

He had no doubt whatsoever that God was at work in all his trials for his own good and the good of others. Those dark days in the Egyptian prison were all part of God’s plan, and as he looked back years later it was wonderfully clear to him that God had been in control all the time. Indeed, we can say that if God had not been at work then Joseph and his brothers would have died in that famine, and many of the people in Egypt and the surrounding nations. God really did work everything out for good in Joseph’s life.

### **Conclusion**

What is so important for us to grasp is that God is the same today. He has not changed, neither have his purposes failed nor his plans been altered. And it is this which gives us the security we so desperately need. If we are truly God’s children, if we do indeed love and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, then God is working in every detail of our lives for our good. God’s sovereignty really is comforting and reassuring. So often we do not understand our circumstances, but how good to be able to rest in the fact that God does, and nothing can stop him working in our lives.

As we close this chapter and this booklet, let me remind you again, that the great God of heaven, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is at work in all the world, and especially in the lives of his children to make

everything work together for our good. If you are utterly perplexed about your own burdens, remember that God knows exactly what he is doing with your life and mine. So let us come to him afresh and cast our burdens on him, because he does care for us. He is a great God and his heart is filled with love for all who follow his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And, as we have seen, this is because he is **‘the God who overcomes’**. He even overcomes those experiences of life that are hard and difficult and which we might term as ‘bad’, and he uses them to bring great good to all who trust in and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. And he will one day bring us to heaven, because **he ultimately overcomes all things.**

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