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TAX-EXEMPT

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” MARK 16:15

August 2023

FROM US TO YOU

This month’s article is “Growing In Faith.” It sounds simple on the surface. However, truly growing in faith is not as easy as it sounds. Most Christians rely on church attendance alone for the sum total of their relationship with God. Yet your church isn’t going to be with you when someone breaks into your house at two o’clock in the morning, or when you get a flat tire going fast on the expressway with traffic all around you. A good church certainly has its place. And if its teaching agrees with the Bible, it can help you grow in your relationship with God. But it can’t take the place of Christ in your heart, and the Holy Spirit in your life (Galatians 5:25)! And a good Holy Spirit filled church is hard to find, especially these days. Sadly, most churches in the last fifty years or so, have been more interested in filling up pews and collection plates, than in teaching you how to depend on God and grow in your faith.

There have been times in everyone’s life when you feel so alone and very upset. Something awful has happened, and you need a friend in which to confide. You don’t know who to trust or where to turn for comfort. It’s the kind of thing that leads people to commit suicide. Satan whispers in your ear, “no one loves you. No one cares about you. You’re all alone. All hope is gone. Your situation is not going to get any better. So what’s the point in trying? Why not just kill yourself and end all your misery? Be peaceful in your grave.” Don’t believe it! Jesus said of Satan, “...*He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies*” (John 8:44 NIV). You’re not alone. Although, at times, it feels like God is a million miles away, if you come to Him with humility and repentance, He is always available. Suicide is the worst thing you could do! It’s a quick trip to Hell, because, instead of repenting of your sin and turning to God, you chose to do it your way. Jesus wants to be your friend! He loved you enough to die in your place (Isaiah 53:1-12)! He said, “*Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*” (Matthew 11:28-30 NIV). No matter who you are or what you’ve done, if you repent of your sin to God (see Matthew 4:17), and ask Him, Jesus will accept you and forgive you (Luke 7:47, Matthew 9:12-13). And He will blot out all your sins as if they never happened, because He’s already paid for them (Romans 5:6-8). However, you must go to Him in prayer. You don’t need any other mediator. “*For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time*” (1 Timothy 2:5-6 NIV).

As the famous song says, “*What a friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry Everything to God in prayer! Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer!*”

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged— Take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful, Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer. Are we weak and heavy-laden, Cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge— Take it to the Lord in prayer. Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer! In His arms He’ll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a solace there.”

Believe us, it works! We’ll give you two examples of this in our own lives. The two of us were traveling through Virginia on the way to a family wedding. We were keeping up with the traffic around us, which was going very fast at 70 miles per hour. We were in the left lane at the time, and our van suddenly got a flat tire. As Eric fought to control the van, it seemed as though we were destined to have a horrible accident. For it was pulling toward the middle lane of traffic, which totally surrounded us. Anne shouted out “Jesus help us!” Then she looked out of the window. The traffic which had been right next to us seconds earlier was suddenly all in the distance! Eric was able to steer the van off to a grassy area on the right side. While he changed the tire Anne sat on the grass, almost breathless, praising God and thanking Him for intervening. If you want God to work in your life that way, you need to become His child through repentance, and the **second birth** (see John 3:3, 1:12-13).

During the first eighteen years of our marriage we lived in a small apartment above a store. It was in a neighborhood with high crime and gang activity. One evening, Anne was resting on the couch in our living room. Eric was asleep in the bedroom. It was hot, so we had the window open in our second bedroom turned office, which eventually became the room that we used to start this ministry. A gang of young criminals were attempting to break into our apartment through a window. It was about 2:00 AM. Little did Anne know what was going on outside. But the Lord knew! As she got up and headed for our small home office, she says, it was as if she was in some kind of trance. Anne headed for the window by the alleyway, to close it, totally oblivious to the fact that one of the burglars had already gotten his foot up on our windowsill! Then, after he noticed Anne heading toward him, he saw something that terrified him. We don’t know what God did to frighten him so much, but he looked visibly shaken and began to stutter, shouting to the man below him, “Get down, g-g-get down quick!” At only five foot three and petite, Anne was not that scary to look at. So someone far greater than us was there, and took control of what could have been a very dangerous situation. Anne calmly walked over to the window, closed and locked it, and went to bed. Then, about an hour later, Anne says she awoke up with a start as the Lord suddenly made her aware of what had happened. Anne insists it was no dream! Thank God, the Lord takes care of us even when we don’t know He’s there!

In the Lord’s service, *Eric and Anne Kaestner*



Growing in Faith

By Anne Kaestner

Many years ago, while watching a religious crusade on television, I heard a famous evangelist use a personal anecdote to illustrate a point in his sermon. He said that he lives in a mountainous part of the country and that there are lots of snakes in the area and, one day, one of them got into his house, and it killed his family's little dog. I once had a dog of my own, a small Pomeranian that I bought when I was twenty years old. His name was Simon. One time my family, and I returned to our house to find shredded bits of newspaper scattered throughout the living room. The trail led up the staircase to the second floor. As we followed the evidence, Simon met us on the top step. His tail was wagging with joy because we were home, but his face was covered with bits of newspaper that had stuck to his fur. It was easy to see who the culprit had been! But how could we be annoyed? He had acted in innocence, for, to him, it was a game. Therefore, I'm grateful that nothing as insidious as a snake ever entered our home. Yet memories of the preacher's anecdote kept returning to my mind. The evangelist is dead now but, during his life, he followed a steady course of friendship with this world (1 John 2:15-18). It constantly amazed me! Surely he must have seen all the Biblical warnings against this. How could he not know of the danger of hobnobbing with the "stars" of Hollywood, Nashville, Washington DC, or the idols of the sports world? He even went so far as to allow his own star to be placed on Hollywood Boulevard in California! His ministry gave altar calls that brought thousands of people up for salvation. Yet the church is supposed to be the Bride of Christ. Therefore, when those who claim to love and serve Him, become friendly with the idols of this world, they are being unfaithful to Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:2)!

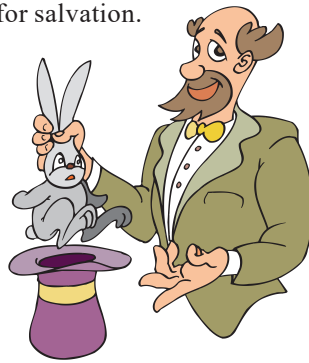
The Lord told His disciples, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men" (Matthew 5:13 NIV). In Biblical times, salt was used as a preservative for food. So Jesus was saying that when those who claim to be His bride are no longer interested in preserving the purity (see 1 Timothy 4:12) and holiness (1 Peter 1:15-15) into which they have been called, they are "...no longer good for anything..." Jesus was warning the church that some of the Lord's sheep have wandered off of the "straight and narrow" (Matthew 7:13-14) and have no desire to return. Therefore, the devil has been able to lure them away from the Good Shepherd who gave His life to save them (John 10:14-15) from the fires of eternal Hell (Revelation 21:8). Remember what Paul told the church in Ephesus, "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30 NIV). The Lord's sheep become easy prey for the wolves (Matthew 7:15-16) when they allow their affection for Christ to be compromised by the distractions of this world! The devil knows just how to trap shallow Christians. First he twists scripture around to make it seem as if they can sin against God and still get to Heaven (Jude 1:3-4). Then he tempts them with whatever their particular weakness may be, and baits his trap with "...all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life..." (1 John 2:16 KJV). The Apostle John is warning believers that if we cling to the things of this world, we will perish with it (1 John 2:17)! Because in these last days, before the Lord's return, there are those in the church who are "treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them" (2 Timothy 3:4-5 NIV). They are not following the true Christ. They are following

the spirit that leads up to the Antichrist (1 John 2:18)!

Now how do you avoid going astray? You live by faith! Remember the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 3:5. He said that counterfeit Christians (Galatians 1:6-7, 2 Corinthians 11:4, and 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10) have a "form of godliness" however, they deny the Power of God. Those of you who are familiar with my writings know how often I've warned the church against getting involved in psychology. That's because it is not built on the Word of God. It is built on the wisdom of men. Consider Paul's words to the Corinthian church. He said, "... my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:4-5 ASV). People think that psychiatry and psychology began with Sigmund Freud, but the roots of it go back a lot further than that. They go all the way back to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, who were Greeks, as were the citizens of Corinth in Paul's day! Corinth was a cosmopolitan city. The Greeks thought of themselves as great philosophers and writers. They worshiped the material world, especially education and aesthetic pursuits. Even the word "aesthetic" in part comes from the Greek word αἰσθητικός (or aisthētikós). Beauty and grace wasn't just a perception to them, it became a goddess named Aphrodite. The Greeks lived in a culture filled with gods and goddesses of their own making (Psalm 96:4-5, Romans 1:18-

32). As a result, Paul had a difficult time trying to convey to them that the Christian faith is not compatible with the idols and sorcery of this world! He told them "do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? ...What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God... Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you..." (2 Corinthians 6:14-18 NIV).

There has been so much talk in the church about the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4-11), and the love of God that the church has become unbalanced in its faith. Yes, our Creator, God, is the very essence of love (1 John 4:8 NIV), and He has given His children (John 1:12-13) great gifts (Luke 11:11-13), if they truly love and serve Him. However, the fear of God is hardly ever discussed anymore. And God expects us to not only love (Mark 12:30) and obey Him (John 14:15), but also to fear and respect Him (Revelation 14:7), for He is Holy, Holy, Holy! Christians today speak of God as if He were the tooth fairy or Santa Claus! Everything has been twisted around, by that great twister, Satan, so that believers no longer concern themselves with finding the will of God, but in looking for ways to get God to do **their** will! The problem is a lack of faith! Yes, I know that we have all been hearing a great deal about the so-called faith ministries of today. Some churches have big signs outside saying "come expect a miracle," as if God is going to perform a magic act like a magician pulls a rabbit out of a hat! People, God doesn't exist to entertain us! And when miracles and spiritual gifts are stressed continually in the body of Christ, it is the equivalent of feeding a baby nothing but candy! Now we all like sweet things for desert, but we simply can't live on them all the time. Nutritionists often talk about us having a balanced diet. Well, we also need a balanced faith! And I believe that it is because so many Biblical doctrines have been blown up out of all proportion and others have been shrunk down to the fine print at the bottom of the page that Christians have been getting spiritually sick! You cannot live on a steady diet of candy day in and day out without becoming ill. The same thing



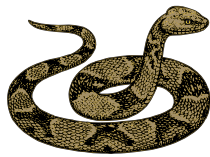
is true with a candy coated Gospel! It is through the painful experiences that we have, while living for God, that we grow in our faith, and it brings forth good fruit (Luke 3:9). You will never understand the reason for your problems when you are in the middle of them. It isn't until after God brings you **through** the crisis, and you see the result, that you are able to gain some perspective and comprehend why the Lord allowed it to happen. But what the false prophets do is to teach you to rely on human or occult powers rather than trusting God! And they are making Christianity look so bad to the world, as a result of their arrogance, violence, and hatred, that instead of drawing the world toward Jesus, they are pushing it away! Therefore, those who need salvation the most (see Matthew 9:12-13), associate Jesus Christ with such hypocrisy, vengeance, and judgment that they think of Him as their enemy instead of their salvation! (See Luke 5:31-32.)

Therefore, no matter whether someone calls himself a Christian or not, if his faith is not solidly built on the Rock of God (1 Corinthians 10:4), he will be "...like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash" (Matthew 7:26-27 NIV). The man who puts this world first, and thinks that he can find a little corner of his life for the Lord is not living for Him at all. Whether he realizes it or not, he is trusting in his own righteousness (Luke 18:9-14), instead of yielding to the Holy Spirit and living by the righteousness of Christ! Christians often wonder why God isn't answering their prayers. But what they fail to understand is that He has answered them. Like Balaam (Numbers 22:5 through 24:25, 31:8), they just refuse to accept His answer! Nevertheless, God always warns people about their sin, and encourages them to repent before it is too late (Jonah 3:1-10). He even warned the evangelist mentioned earlier. Yet I never realized the significance of the anecdote until one Sunday morning years ago, when I awoke feeling the Presence of God. My mind had been flooded with emotion, even as I had been asleep, and I knew that the Lord had a purpose in revealing to me the meaning behind the event. It was to warn those He loves! You see, too many Christians are trying to fight God's enemies for Him, instead of hiding behind Him, and allowing the Holy Spirit to fight our battles for us (2 Chronicles 20:15). They are also working at a disadvantage because while they are strongly opposing one demonic stronghold, such as abortion or gay rights, they are promoting another, such as professional sports or the idols of Hollywood. Christians who act this way are not leaning on God (Deuteronomy 33:27) and trusting Him. They are taking matters into their own hands and depending instead on human wisdom (Proverbs 3:5-7). Therefore, they are acting like that little dog who thought that he could kill the serpent! He knew that the snake wasn't supposed to be in his house. He probably went up to it barking and making a big noise. Perhaps he even tried to bite the snake. But the snake bit him first! Christians who try to fight God's battles instead of humbling themselves before Him are just deceiving themselves (Luke 18:10-14). They may make a lot of noise and think that they can intimidate the serpent, but, just as surely as Eve was deceived by the snake (Genesis 3:1-6 and 2 Corinthians 11:3-4), they too, are being deceived. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against ...the **spiritual** forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12 NIV). In other words, it's not people who are the problem. It's high ranking demon spirits who work under the authority of the god of this world, Satan (Luke 4:5-8)! This is why we must **remain** in Christ!

Over the years, the Lord has brought me through many troubled waters, and, at times, I felt as if I was drowning spiritually. Nevertheless, during all the lonely, painful years of my youth, although I didn't know it at the time, God was preparing a foundation in my heart

that would be there to support me no matter how great the torrent or how high the tide (2 Samuel 22:17-19). It was built of solid Rock (2 Samuel 22:2-3, Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:4-9)! Therefore, when everything around me felt as if it was falling apart, I knew where to go for help (Psalms 18:2). Now, retrospectively, I know that during those awful years when it felt as if God had abandoned me, He was there all the time! He was the unseen arms of protection that watched over me when Satan loomed nearby. He was my platform of strength in an ocean of sharks. And, most importantly of all, He was the gentle Spirit who taught me, through many tears and much heartache, that He **alone** must be my strength! (See Jeremiah 17:5-8.) It would have been easier, from my perspective, if God had simply given me all the wisdom and faith that I needed for this ministry right away. How wonderful it would have been if I could have received it like a pill that is swallowed with large gulps of water. We live in an instant society, instant breakfast drinks, microwave ovens, TV dinners, satellite communication. We're not used to receiving what we need one drop at a time. We want to be able to turn on the faucet and let the water pour out. Nevertheless, our Creator is very patient! If He could give us all the knowledge and faith that we need in one tiny, painless dose, He would do so. But it's just not that simple! For He is dealing with rebellious human nature.

I remember once hearing an audio tape of a sermon in which the minister explained that after one of his services a man had gone up to talk with him. He said, "I came to Christ several months ago, after hearing one of your sermons, and I became Born Again (John 3:3). But ever since that happened my life has been in shambles. My work has suffered, and now I'm having trouble accomplishing simple tasks that I used to give to my assistants. What happened?" The minister replied, "The Lord has told me to tell you that everything that has happened to you has been a part of His plan for your life. It is God who has orchestrated your business problems and is allowing you to fail at things that used to come to you easily." The man was shocked. As with the seed that fell on rocky places (Matthew 13:20-21), many people fall away from the God during the trials and tests of faith (Matthew 13:20-21). Yet notice one aspect of this. The preacher told the man that God had caused the problems in his life. That fits right in with scripture. For Jesus told us that troubles and persecution enter our lives "...because of the **Word**..." (Matthew 13:21 NIV). The Word of God is Jesus Christ! (See John 1:1-14 and Revelation 19:13.) I can identify with that man because I know how painful it is when God does His weeding! That's because He wants to isolate us from everything that will become a stumbling block in our Christian walk, even family members (Matthew 10:37-38) and friends. On one occasion, when Jesus went to visit two sisters, Mary and Martha, Mary "...sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to Him and asked, 'Lord, don't You care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!' 'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her'" (Luke 10:39-42 NIV). Martha was worried about preparing food for Jesus, but Mary was more interested in the Bread of Life (John 6:48-51 and Matthew 4:4) that Jesus was giving to her. At that time in her life, Martha's heart was symbolized by thorny ground (see Matthew 13:7). She was putting the needs of the flesh ahead of her spiritual needs because that is the way she was raised. Women took care of the house and the cooking. However, Jesus was trying to tell Martha that all of these responsibilities that so consumed her life, were **obstacles** that were coming between her and God. Jesus wanted His Spirit to live in **(Continued on Page 4)**



Presence



Martha's heart, and to produce fruit for God (Matthew 3:8, 7:19, Romans 7:4). The fruit of God's spirit is **faith**. All Christian virtues (Galatians 5:22-23) stem from it! *"But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful"* (Mark 4:19 NIV. Also, see Luke 21:34).

During the years that the Lord was preparing me for this work, one of my most painful experiences was learning that God's standard of success is not the same as that of this world! But what I didn't know at the time, and couldn't even imagine, was the extent of God's plans for my life. However, before He could grow any good fruit in me, the Lord had to make me a miserable failure in this world (see 1 Corinthians 1:27)! I was struggling to support myself at the time, but, like the man mentioned earlier, everything went wrong! I had been indoctrinated by television shows, and the movies to accept the world's idea of happiness. Screenwriters who had total control over the outcome of their scripts, would use fictional characters in situation comedies to portray worldly success, and how to achieve it. I was looking for role models and examples to follow. It looked so easy on television. Yet when I tried to live my life the same way, the outcome was very different! Retrospectively, I now know that I had been following a worldly path that was leading me away from the "straight and narrow" (Matthew 7:13-14) and salvation.

My heart yearned for the peace and joy of Christ, but He seemed to be a million miles away, and I felt so alone. So I struggled along the best I could, trying to survive and to prove to myself, and my family that I could be successful. Nevertheless, the Lord had definite plans for my life that sharply conflicted with the course I had set for myself. But, long before He could construct, in me, a tabernacle fit for His Spirit, and ready for His calling, He had a lot of demolition work to do! For first He would have to knock down the temple in my heart that I had built for myself! Then, He had the task of hauling away the garbage that was left, the debris of my life that was shattered and scattered on the landscape of my soul. All the dreams and hopes that I'd built had to be decimated. For God knew that I would not be fit for His Heavenly orchard until every weed in my life had been painstakingly plucked up by the roots and thrown out with the garbage.

I was single and living alone in an apartment on Staten Island. At the beginning things seemed to be going quite well. I had just started a new job in midtown, and my daily commute on the ferry got me to work much faster and cheaper than my previous railroad commute had been when I had lived with my parents. And I no longer had to share a bedroom with my little sister! I didn't make much money, and the apartment I had rented was more expensive than I had anticipated when I signed the lease. That's because my electric heating bill was much higher than I had expected. So I was just barely able to afford it. My job was important to me because it represented my independence, my ability to support myself.

At the beginning everything seemed to fall into place. I had found a job in the city and, since I wanted to do well in the business world, I worked hard. But no matter what job I took, or who I worked for, something would always happen to prevent my success. I would either leave my job due to office politics, or financial trouble that caused a sudden lay-off, or for some other reason. For instance, when I worked at one company in midtown Manhattan (NYC), my boss wanted me to take a night school class at the New York Institute of Credit. And he persuaded the Personnel Depart-

ment to pay for it. True to form, I had only been attending classes for a few weeks when I suddenly caught **mononucleosis**! For three months I was so sick that I spent most of my time in bed! To make matters worse, I was totally supporting myself and so there was no one to nurse me back to good health. I had to have my groceries delivered to my apartment because I was too sick to go shopping. Sometimes I'd pick up some milk or a few necessities on the way home from my doctor's appointments. Thank God, I received disability insurance that helped a bit. But not only did I feel lousy physically, but I was also worried about losing my job! It got back to me, through a co-worker, that my company wasn't thrilled about having to pay for a night school class I was too sick to take! At times, I felt so vulnerable, and it seemed that I had such little control over my life, that I just wanted to pull the covers over my head and shut out the world. But the world wouldn't go away! I needed to pay my rent. However, not only did I lack the money, but my checking account was in Manhattan near my job, and I lived on Staten Island! Yet despite everything, God protected me and took care of me through it all. In this case, I was surprised one day when I received some bank checks in the mail. They were sent to me by one of my credit card companies so that I could write a check at times when it was not possible to use my plastic card. A few days later, another one of my credit card companies did the same thing. God's timing is always perfect! After three months I was finally well enough to return to work, only to learn that I had been laid off. At one time I had no money to buy food, and I was hungry. But about nine months earlier I had purchased some expensive, thinly sliced steaks from a

small butcher shop. They had been wrapped individually. Yet when I ate my first meal from the steak, it tasted strange to me. So I didn't bother eating the rest of the steaks. I had just left them in my freezer for all those months. Nevertheless, I was finally so hungry that I cooked one of them. To my surprise, it was delicious! Now I know that God had orchestrated that whole situation so that the meat would be available for me when I needed it!

Although those months seemed so wasted and unproductive to me back then, now I praise God for them! For as a result of that experience, and the Lord's faithful protection of me when I had no one else to look to, He had planted a seed of faith in my heart that became the root from which much fruit would grow! It is our **natural** human instinct to want to rely on this carnal realm for our needs. *"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Corinthians 2:14 KJV). God does not want His children to be natural humans. He wants to **transform** us into the image of His dear Son (see Romans 8:29). Therefore, He wants us to rely, not on the natural realm, but on His supernatural Power! You see, before God can fill us totally full with His Spirit, He first has to make room by getting rid of the clutter and garbage of that old carnal nature that is taking up the space that He wants to occupy. For we are to be holy vessels (1 Peter 1:15-16) dedicated to God. However, the Lord is not going to accept the god of this world (see Ephesians 2:22), Satan, as a roommate! Therefore, the Holy Spirit won't move into your life completely until the previous occupant has been thrown out! And it is through the awful experiences of life that God breaks us down, little by little, day after day, year after year. For He cannot give us a new nature in Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:17) until our old, stubborn self-will has been shattered completely, and He alone becomes our strength. Then, when we finally see the fruit it brings, we are able to say, as I say gladly, it was worth it all!

