

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

Quality of being (13)

Developing quality of being

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, "Quality of being", the thirteenth message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

Developing quality of being that is of true and lasting value is not an easy process. There are many areas that can go wrong in our understanding and in our practical response. The Scriptures show us the right way to develop this quality.

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

In the Scriptures, we see that the way we live our lives on earth – our time during this period that God has given us on earth – is likened to running a long distance race.

Hebrews 12: 1

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

The writer is referring to living our lives on this earth and there are people who have gone before us, some of whom have run well, some of whom have exhibited positive qualities that we can learn from.

There are different degrees of quality in the different responses of people, and we can learn from different ones in different ways. But what this verse tells us is the importance of the quality of our being with regard to the way we will run this race.

How we will run this race, how we will live our lives on earth is very much dependent on the kind of quality of being that we develop during this time.

And so the writer says, “let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us”.

If we are to run this race well, then we need to deal with sin, every hindrance, encumbrance, burden that is not good for us. We are to lay them aside, we are to discard them, so that we can concentrate on this race and run well.

It is a long distance race and we must run with endurance.

So how do we run this race?

The Scriptures make it very clear throughout that a central aspect in running the race is to ensure that our heart is pure – we are not tainted by sin and there is moral quality in our being. Without this, it is not possible to run this race well.

And so, as we consider this theme of quality of our being, let us be conscious that this will significantly affect the kind of life we will live and how God will respond to us in eternity.

The apostle Paul was conscious of this when he lived his life in response to God's call: God had called him to be an apostle; God had called him to be a disciple; God had called him to be faithful to Him; and the apostle Paul recognized that he must live his life well.

1 Corinthians 9: 24-27

- 24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.
- 25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.
- 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;
- 27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

The apostle Paul was conscious that we must run well – “Run in such a way that you may win”. He says in the games, people disciplined themselves in order to win a perishable wreath, but for us there is an imperishable wreath. In the games, it is true, “all run, but only one receives the prize”.

But in this spiritual race, all of us can receive this imperishable wreath – all of us can receive the prize if we run well. And this is important for all of us to recognize, that we should help and encourage one another so that we may all win and receive the prize.

At the end of his life on earth, the apostle Paul could testify that he had properly finished the race:

2 Timothy 4: 6-8

- 6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.
7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;
8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

He was very grateful for the grace of the Lord that enabled him to live his life well, and at the end of his life, before he departed from this earth, he could say with confidence and peace of heart: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith". He looked forward to the future. There was laid up for him the crown of righteousness. It was not a perishable wreath but a crown of righteousness which the Lord would award him on that day. And he says, "not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

If there is quality in our lives, if our relationship with God is good, if we live as we should, then each one of us can and will receive the crown of righteousness. This is something that Christians who are sincere would definitely want to have: Live well, be approved by God, receive the crown of righteousness; enjoy eternity with God – a life of rich meaning and purpose.

So how can we develop true quality in our being, so that our whole life would be lived with meaning and purpose and fruitfulness, and we can fulfil God's call in our lives?

There was once a tortoise who said to a hare: "I challenge you to a race."

The hare is like a rabbit but bigger in size, with long ears and long legs, and it can run very fast, up to about 75 kilometres per hour.

Who do you think would win the race?

Why would the tortoise challenge this hare to a race?

Well, it was because this tortoise had heard from his parents that his great grandfather won a race with a hare and the great grandfather wanted to transmit this message to his descendants: "Slow and steady wins the race."

So this tortoise said to himself: "I want to experience it for myself. I have heard this story; I want to know if it is true." So he challenged the hare to the race. He said, "Yes, I will be slow and I will be steady and I will win the race."

However, the hare had also heard from his parents: his great grandfather lost the race - and why did he lose the race? Because he fell asleep, he took a nap, as a result of which the tortoise could catch up with him and win the race. And so, he wanted to pass the message to his descendants: "Fast and steady wins the race. You must be fast, but you must also be steady. Do not take a nap along the way."

And so, you know who won the race.

The hare won the race: By the time the tortoise reached the finishing line, he saw that the hare was past the finishing line and fallen asleep: because the great grandfather said, "After you have finished the race, you can sleep - but not before that." And so, that is what he did and he won the race.

The tortoise was quite disappointed.

One day, his friend came to him and said, "Get a rematch. I will make sure you win the race this time." His friend was very intelligent and very capable and very crafty. So he asked him, "How can you make sure I will win the race?"

He said, "You do not worry about that; I know what to do. You will win the race. Just go and do your part. You will win the race."

And so, the tortoise said to the hare, "Let us have a rematch." The hare readily agreed happily.

And so, the tortoise moved along steadily, step by step and he reached the finishing line. And he could not see the hare anywhere around.

His friend was there and he said, "There, I told you. I will make sure you win the race." The tortoise was very happy and he walked home.

On the way back, as he was moving along the path where the race took place, he saw the hare lying on the ground in agony. He was in great pain. And the tortoise was very surprised and he asked him, "What happened to you?"

He said, "While I was running, I saw a carrot along the path. It was nice and juicy. I picked it up and I ate it. As I ran along, I saw another carrot, nice and juicy. I picked it up and I ate. After that, I felt severe pain. I have been poisoned and I am dying."

The tortoise was very sad and he told him the story: "My friend told me he would help me to win but I did not know that this is what he would do." So, he cried and he cried. He said, "Please do not die."

But the hare said, "I have been poisoned and I will die, but I do not blame you. You did not intend to kill me. But in future, do not just trust people so easily. Do not be led astray and be a party to something that is not good. You must find out first whether it is a good thing and a right thing, before you agree to it, before you do it."

Well, there are many reasons in life that can cause us not to win the race that is set before us, that would hinder us from developing true quality of being. We may win a short race, but will we win the race for our total life?

There are many pitfalls before us. There are many areas that can go wrong. We need to look to the Lord; we need to search the Scriptures. We need to be open, to be taught by the Lord, to understand how to live well.

Consider various situations that are not uncommon in Christian experience. Here, let us consider those people who do want to develop quality in their lives. What do they do, how do they approach the issue and what is the outcome?

There are those who have heard: "It is very important that you must make a good choice. You must work hard, you must strive, work very hard, then you can develop quality of being." So this person concentrates: "Yes, I want to be good. I want to follow the Lord. I will work very hard; I will strive with all my might to be good."

So each day, as he lives his life, he seeks to be kind, he seeks to be honest, he seeks to be considerate. But then, he finds it does not work. He is unkind, he is inconsiderate and he is readily attracted by the things of the world. He wants to concentrate on God but the things of the world attract him so much. He wants to find peace in his heart but there is turmoil.

He strives and he strives and he becomes more and more frustrated. He finds it a constant failure and he cries out to God, "O Lord, please help me! What is my problem?"

Well, the apostle Paul described such a state in **Romans 7: 14-24:**

Romans 7: 14-24

- 14 For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.
 15 For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate.
 16 But if I do the very thing I do not want *to do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good.
 17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.
 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not.
 19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.
 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.
 21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.
 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,
 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.
 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

The apostle Paul describes a person striving very hard to want to be good, striving to be what he ought to be. He says, “the Law is spiritual... I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good... I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man...”

So this tells us that this person in this situation recognizes that the Law of God is good – the moral direction is correct. He wants it, he wants to live like that, but then he fails. He says, “what I am doing, I do not understand. Why is it like that? I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. I do not want to do this but I am doing it, I am living in this way. Why?”

So he says, “...if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.”

So what does that mean? Is he saying, “Therefore, I am not the one who is doing it” in the sense “I am not responsible, I have not failed”? But he is not saying that. He recognizes that he is walking in the path of sin, even though he does not want to sin.

We need to recognize: not wanting to sin is not equal to not sinning. Likewise, wanting to be good is not equal to being good. This is an important principle that we need to understand.

Many people do not want to sin in the sense that they are not actively pursuing sin, but they do sin and continue to sin. Many people want to be good, they desire very much to be good, but they know in their hearts they are not good. The being has not been developed in that direction.

He says, "...we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin." "I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin" – why is that so? Who sold him into bondage to sin?

In **Romans 6**, the apostle Paul explained how it is that we sin. He tells us not to allow sin to reign in our members – do not let sin reign over us because we obey the desires of this mortal body. The apostle Paul was very conscious that we are dwelling in a body where it is very easy for us to sin. Even though we may seek to do what is right and good, we find that again and again, we fail and we do what we should not do.

And so, we find **Romans 6: 12**, the apostle Paul says, "Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts." You obey its lusts – it is your choice. And when you obey its lusts, sin will reign in your mortal body.

So the problem is that although we want what is good, in reality we have chosen to allow the inclinations of the body, desires, and the wrong direction to become our master. We have allowed this to take place. "Sold into bondage to sin" is one important aspect that will hinder us from finding the life of freedom.

The apostle Paul says there is something in his flesh, there is something in his body that keeps drawing him away in this wrong direction: "I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good." There is something that is pulling him in the wrong direction, even though he desires what is right.

"I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man" – he recognizes what is good; in his inner man, he knows what is the right path. He says, "I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members."

Dwelling in this body which has various inclinations in the wrong direction, it is very easy for us to become a slave of sin.

And so he cries out: "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" It is an agonising experience: wanting to be free and yet failing.

The Lord Jesus tells us: "... you have no life in yourselves."

If we strive with all our might to overcome these wrong tendencies, we want to be pure and good on our own, we will fail again and again.

There are many people who are not Christians who also recognize that it is right to be good and want to move in that direction. They seek very hard to live a righteous life; they try to do good, to pursue the right things, but deep in their hearts, they also experience the failure, the frustration, even though outwardly, they may appear to be positive and good. But the desires of their hearts, the direction of their lives, what they actually pursue, can be very contrary to what they express in words and what they may like to become.

So developing quality in our being is a very difficult process. How can we overcome this?

Some people will say, "Well, it is because he did not exercise faith. He did it on his own with all his natural ability and power. He sought to be good and so he failed. We must exercise faith in God. If we have faith in God, then we will overcome."

And so, there are those who believe: "If I were to just trust God, just tell Him 'I want to be good; make me good, I trust You,' then I will become good." Would that take place?

Some of them may experience something which seems quite positive and they may think that this will lead them in the path of quality of being.

But as they trust God and believe, they find that it does not correspond to life.

There are those people who read the Scriptures and they say, "I have died with Christ. I am risen again, I am seated in the heavenlies. Just believe that and it will be true."

So they believe: "I am seated with Christ in the heavenlies. I overcome all the powers of the enemy."

But day by day, as they live their lives, they find instead they are overcome, they fail; they are overcome by the evil one. And so, they become frustrated, they become discouraged.

Some will continue to persist that way and say, "I just have to believe harder, then it will work." And so, they may try to convince themselves and others that it is working.

Many years ago, I heard a young man saying, "I am filled with the Spirit and life is very meaningful", something along that direction.

But knowing him, I knew his life was quite different from what he was saying. He was worried, anxious, troubled. He was having difficulty working out his life but he said that because someone told him, "If you just say these things - 'Christ is the Lord of my life, I am filled with the Spirit' - you will be filled with the Spirit." So he said, "I believe."

But that belief did not work. He exercised faith but it was not working.

James 2: 14

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works?
Can that faith save him?

Here, the apostle James was saying quite clearly that faith by itself does not save. But we know that the apostle Paul tells us that we are saved by faith and not by works - we can be saved by faith alone. So it seems as if what James is saying here is very different from what the apostle Paul was saying.

But if we look at the context of what they were saying, you will realize that they are not saying anything different. They are saying the same thing but there is a difference in emphasis and context.

The apostle Paul tells us that we cannot be saved by our works. We have sinned against God, we have failed and we will continue to fail if we depend on ourselves and our own righteousness. We cannot be saved. We can be saved only by faith in what God has done for us. We can only be saved by what the Lord Jesus has done for us on the cross. There is no other way. There is no other way by which we can be saved.

We can only be saved through the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and the life that He gives to us, both in terms of forgiveness of sins as well as in terms of the power to live a life of righteousness. Having been reconciled to God through the blood of Christ, we can now be saved by His life.

But the apostle James was here referring to false faith. There are people who say they trust the Lord but they do not really trust the Lord. They say they have faith but it is not a faith accompanied by reality in their hearts. The “works” here is a reference to a practical response of the heart, the whole direction of life.

This principle can apply in varying degrees. How often do we say we trust God, but we do not really trust Him? How often do we say we love Him, but we do not really love Him?

Well, we can say it is a matter of degree. That is true; there is an aspect in which we do trust God, there is an aspect in which we do love Him. But to the degree that we do not truly love Him and trust Him, to that degree it is false, it is not real, it is not genuine, it is not deep, it is ineffective.

Exercising faith will not work unless it is accompanied by works. That is something which we will consider further, the Lord willing, in the next message. But here, I want to bring across to you the difficulties involved in developing quality of being and how we can so easily go astray. There are many people who think they are exercising faith in God, believing what He has said and yet, it does not work. That is not because God’s promises are not true. They are. But it is because we have not fulfilled the conditions for it to be worked out.

Then we see those who exercise meaningful faith. They also work hard, they trust God and day by day, they seek to obey Him, they seek to understand how they should live their lives and they look to God to help them to live well. And so, we find that this group of people, they do find meaning in life, they experience God's presence, God's working, and they see God at work in their lives and they are very happy.

But then after some time, they find that they fail again. Sometimes they succeed, sometimes they fail; and this continues day after day. And they wonder: "Why is it I cannot live a life that is truly victorious all the time? Does it have to be this way - I succeed, I fail; I succeed, I fail again?" Again and again, there is a struggle and it seems to be endless.

The apostle Peter was one such person. He loved the Lord. When the Lord called him to follow Him, he left his nets and he followed the Lord. He was sincere, he was genuine, he trusted the Lord; he followed Him. He learned from the Lord, he walked with Him, and he experienced the Lord's blessings, teaching, His Presence, His guidance; and he was happy.

Let us turn to **Matthew 26: 69-75**.

Matthew 26: 69-75

- 69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean."
 70 But he denied *it* before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about."
 71 When he had gone out to the gateway, another *servant-girl* saw him and *said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."
 72 And again he denied *it* with an oath, "I do not know the man."
 73 A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Surely you too are *one* of them; for even the way you talk gives you away."
 74 Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know the man!" And immediately a rooster crowed.
 75 And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

There are various ones who may have experienced a life somewhat like this. They try very hard to be faithful to the Lord and they thought that they were. Peter was confident: "I will die with You. I will live my life for You. I will be faithful to You to the end." But then, he failed – not just one denial but three times, and if we look at the context, his denial became worse and worse.

The first time, he denied it. The second time, we are told he denied it with an oath. And the third time, he began to curse and swear. As he was being questioned, his response grew worse. At first, he just said, "I do not know." But after that, he denied it with an oath and then, he began to curse and swear. It was a very ugly response. And he was supposed to love the Lord with all his heart; he was supposed to be willing to die for Him, to be faithful to Him to the end.

Why then did he deny the Lord in this way?

So, many people going through situations like that may feel very discouraged and they may think that quality of being cannot be attained, at least not in this world.

Peter was not always like that. He did not deny the Lord in many other situations. When the Lord called him to walk to Him on the water, Peter exercised faith; he trusted the Lord and he walked on the water. So, he was victorious. He overcame the difficulty and he was able to walk with the Lord.

But then, when he saw the wind, he began to sink. He was afraid and he began to sink and he cried out to the Lord: "Lord, save me!" So the Lord said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Yes, he had faith but then, it was little faith.

How do we resolve this problem? How can we develop that kind of quality, where our faith would be really strong and we can continue with the Lord in different situations? We know that in this circumstance, Peter was afraid and because of fear, he denied the Lord. He was afraid to be associated with the Lord Jesus in that kind of situation, and so he denied Him.

Many Christians strive very hard. They seek to respond well, they seek to be faithful to God and yet, they find themselves failing again and again. What is it that can solve our problem?

Then, we find that the apostle Peter experienced the power of the Holy Spirit that enabled him to live at a higher plane.

Acts 2: 4

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

The apostle Peter, together with other disciples obeyed the Lord and they spent the time praying, waiting for the Lord to fulfil His promise that He would pour forth the Spirit upon them; they would be endowed with power from on high. And so, as they prayed, as they waited and the day of Pentecost arrived, the Holy Spirit came upon them and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And this experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit enabled Peter to speak with boldness. He was not afraid of the opposition; he was not afraid of the difficulties and dangers in that situation.

Acts 4: 19-20 tells us how the apostle Peter as well as John responded to the threats from the religious authorities.

Acts 4: 19-20

19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;

20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

He had no difficulty in this situation. We can say his life was in danger if he were to speak on behalf of God, but he was prepared for it. He was speaking boldly on behalf of God. It was victory. And Peter did many things, he performed various miracles; he preached the gospel, many people responded.

He experienced the life of power from God – it was a life at a higher plane in his experience. It was something that he could rejoice in. He could rejoice in this path that he had experienced.

So, some people, when they experience God's power, when they find life to be victorious, they are living at a higher plane, they may then think: "Yes, I have attained it. I have developed the quality of being that I ought to have." And then they are very confident and they are very satisfied that they have developed as they should have.

But then we read **Galatians 2: 11-13**.

Galatians 2: 11-13

- 11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.
- 12 For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.
- 13 The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

This is the apostle Paul writing to the Galatian Christians and he said that he opposed the apostle Peter to his face. He confronted him "because he stood condemned". This was not because the apostle Paul was against the apostle Peter, but he had to present this objectively so that the gospel may be properly communicated. He was preaching to the Gentiles and he was telling the Gentiles that God loved all mankind; that in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek... slave nor free man – we are all one in Christ. But here, the apostle Peter behaved in a way that was contrary to this and Peter was a leader in the early church.

So the apostle Paul says, "I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision."

So this tells us that Peter recognized it was in order for him to have fellowship with the Gentiles; so he ate with the Gentiles. But when certain men from James came, Peter was afraid. He began to withdraw and hold himself aloof. He separated himself from the Gentiles because of fear of the party of the circumcision.

So fear was again a motivating factor. He denied the Lord because of fear. Now again, he is denying the Lord because of fear. The Lord wants him to associate with the Gentiles in a spirit of fellowship but because of fear, he withdrew.

Why then is this taking place? After all, did not Peter experience life at a higher plane? Did he not experience the power of the Holy Spirit? Should that not then lead to a life of consistency, of faithfulness to God, quality of being? What is the reason for this problem?

The apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians in **chapter 5 verse 7** with reference to the Galatians themselves, and he said to them:

Galatians 5: 7

You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?

"You were running well" – and this describes many Christians. We may run well for a while, but we may not continue well. Here, "running well" does not mean that they had attained to a very high quality in their lives, but they were running well, they were following the Lord, they were obedient to Him. They were walking in the path of faithfulness to the Lord but they were hindered from obeying the truth, they went astray. Something affected them and they went astray.

As we look at various of these events and situations and happenings, we can see that developing quality of being is in reality a very difficult process. And there are many people who give up. They think it is not attainable - "There is no point trying. Why be so serious? We cannot attain."

But then, remember what the apostle Paul said: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith".

The apostle Paul shows to us that it is possible to develop well and to live well. He was writing this towards the end of his earthly life and he said, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." So he is describing here a life of quality. His being was developed to a high degree, where God could say: "Good, I will give you the crown of righteousness."

The apostle Paul tells us this to encourage us that this path is attainable. He says, "there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

He is saying very clearly, "It is not just for me", because in years to come, many people may say, "It is attainable, yes but only by people like the apostle Paul - special circumstances, special enabling by God and God's special care and help. That is why he could do it."

But here, he tells us very clearly: "not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." The crown of righteousness is available to all who have loved His appearing.

The question is: What is the quality of our love for Him?

Ultimately, we need to ask ourselves: Do we truly love the Lord as He is? If we say that He is morally perfect, do we give Him the honour as is due to Him? If we say that we are prepared to follow Him, will we follow Him wherever He leads us, whatever the path may be? Or will we follow Him only under certain circumstances?

There are various Christians who may say something like this: "Yes, I can be victorious, I can live well, but do not put me in this situation. Put me in this other kind of situation like so and so is in. In that kind of situation, I will fare very well. I will be able to overcome."

If that is the way you think, it means you have failed.

If you develop well and you walk with the Lord as you should, then your life of victory should be independent of circumstances. It does not matter what the situation is. We are more than conquerors not because the situation is easy. We are more than conquerors not because the evil one is weak, not because the situation presents very little hindrances to us. We are more than conquerors through Him who loves us – we are more than conquerors because of our oneness with Him, we are more than conquerors because of the development of the quality in our being.

It is something that all of us can ponder about. As you go through life, what describes your life?

Are you satisfied that you are living your life in a manner that you yourself are satisfied it is a meaningful life – a life of victory, of peace, of joy as it ought to be – or are there various aspects you yourself recognize ought not to be? And do you believe that they can be corrected? Do you believe that you can live a life of freedom, a life of joy, a life of victory in all kinds of situations?

How can that be possible? What do the Scriptures say with regard to this path of freedom, of life with God that is meaningful and steady and ultimately, will lead to a deep fellowship with God, both on earth as well as in eternity?

If we want to live our lives well and we want to fulfil God's call in our lives, we must seek to understand how we can effectively develop quality of being. This is critical. We need to understand how we can properly and effectively develop quality of being.

But that is not enough. Understanding how we can develop is not enough. We will not become strong just because we understand how to be strong. We will not be strong just because we want to be strong.

We must be willing to take whatever steps that are necessary, however difficult they may be and however long it may take. Are you prepared for this? If your answer is "No", then you will not be able to develop that kind of quality. That is the Scriptural teaching.

Developing that kind of quality of being requires everything from us. We cannot lay down conditions of what we want and what we do not want. It must be on God's terms; it must be according to His ways; it must be by His power and by His life.

If we do not choose that way, we will not succeed. We may have a bit of taste of the power, we may have some experience of victory, we may at times feel very peaceful and happy, but it will not be consistent, it will not be deep, it will not be lasting. Deep in our hearts, there will be dissatisfaction, trouble, distress, turmoil, frustration, discouragement.

Is it possible for us to be free from all this?

The answer is clearly, "Yes". It has to be because God is a good God. He is perfectly good and so, He desires to give us the very best. He wants us to be like that, to be like Him.

And God is a God of wisdom. He knows how to help us in the best way and so, He has made all the provisions necessary for us to develop. He knows each one of us in our own situations and God being wise, He will use all that He has to help us in that direction.

And God is all powerful; He is sovereign. In all areas of life that do not require our moral choice, God has the power to arrange, to modify, to change situations. He can cause Nebuchadnezzar to lose his kingdom instantly; He can install a new king if He wants to.

You may find your situation very difficult, your work situation frustrating and impossible. Do you think that God can change it immediately if He wants to? Certainly!

You find your family situation unbearable. Is it not possible for God to change the situation so that it is very manageable? Of course He can.

But why does He not do that?

God in His wisdom is concentrating on the development of the quality of our being. He is not concentrating on giving you an easier life so that you can overcome.

Ask a little boy to jump over a hurdle that is two inches high and he will gladly do it a hundred times with no problem. Ask him to jump over a hurdle at one foot or thirty centimetres and he may hit the bar again and again.

But if he were to work hard and to train, he would in time be able to jump over, not just one foot but two feet and as he does so, and he grows taller, he can jump three feet. God wants us to develop and grow but if all the time, your bar is at two inches, your legs will not be strong, you will not be exerting yourself; you will not be growing well.

Spiritually, God is giving us the best way for us to develop but it can be difficult, painful, discouraging if we are not looking at Him.

If we are not identified with what He is doing, if we do not properly trust Him, if we are not prepared to follow Him, then of course life can be very miserable. We can be tempted and drawn into easy and easier ways of living but as we do that, our being will degenerate in quality.

The Lord willing, in the next message, we will seek to consider some aspects of the Scriptural teaching as to how God wants to help us to develop quality of being and how it is possible to develop.

In the meantime, you can search the Scriptures, ponder over this and consider for yourself what you think is the solution.

Well, the tortoise and the hare may help us to understand that too as we consider the sequel to the story in the next message.

Let us look to the Lord to help us understand how it is possible and very meaningful for us to walk with Him, learn from Him: Life is exciting and very meaningful if only we will keep close to Him, look to Him, walk with Him and trust Him.

It is because God Himself took a very, very difficult path that it is possible for us to develop quality in our being.

If God had not decided on the path of the cross, it would not have been possible for us to develop that quality.

But God chose a very, very difficult path in order to make it possible for us.

Will we be prepared to choose that path to follow Him?

That is something that each one of us will have to consider and to answer for ourselves because that is a choice that only you can make.

No one else can make it for you and God cannot make it for you.

So then, let us come before the Lord and ask Him to help us ponder over our lives, ask Him to search our hearts, help us to understand so that we can face honestly the quality of our lives, the quality of our being and look to Him to help us to be transformed to become what we ought to be.