

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

Quality of being (18)

Faith builds quality of being

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, “Quality of being”, the eighteenth 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 a very difficult process. In the process of dealing with self-life, we must develop a true faith in God that is alive and real. This will enable us to build up the quality of our being.

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

We all know that quality of being is central in God's purposes and God wants us to be like Him.

He created us in His image so that we may develop a character like His and as a result, we can have deep fellowship with Him and we can work together with Him in what He desires to accomplish in His creation. One major area that we all know that is necessary in developing quality of being is our faith in God.

If we want to develop quality in our being, we know that we cannot do it on our own. There is no spiritual life in us; there is no power in ourselves that can enable us on our own to become truly good in our being. We must come to God to receive His life to transform us.

So we may think that since God has promised to give us His life, since God has promised to help us, since God has said that He will provide all that is necessary for our well-being, then if we exercise faith and believe this, would that not be enough?

Will we become righteous and good if we exercise faith in what God has said and trust Him that it will become so in our lives? In our experience, we know that this often does not lead to real transformation of our being. We believe God's promises, we trust Him, we look to Him to receive His life and yet, it does not seem to result in true transformation of our being. Why is that so?

First, we need to recognize that believing what God has said is critical, trusting in what God has promised is vital. So we need first to establish this - that this part is very important.

Mark 11: 22-24

22 And Jesus *answered saying to them, "Have faith in God.

23 "Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be *granted* him.

24 "Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you.

The Lord Jesus said, "Have faith in God" and He elaborated to explain. Have faith in God includes this aspect of believing in what God has said, not doubting in our hearts when we pray, trusting that God will bring it about. "...all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you."

So there is such a principle and it is important. Do we believe what God has said? Do we believe Him when He promises us? Can we trust His words? If we do not trust His words, if we do not believe when we pray, then very often, we will not receive what we pray for because we are not exercising faith in God.

So this passage seems rather simple. Whatever you pray, you ask, you believe and you will receive. But is it not the experience of Christians throughout the world and throughout the ages that many things that they ask, believing, yet, they do not receive? So we ask God to make us holy, to make us righteous, to make us good, but then we find that it does not seem to work. Why is that so?

A very fundamental principle that we all must constantly be conscious of is that God will never act contrary to the moral quality of His being. God will never do anything that is not morally good, that goes against the very nature of His character. So if we ask something that is morally negative, we ask for something that is not good in His sight, then we cannot expect that God will grant our request.

So whatever God says, whatever God promises, there are always conditions and it is always conditional upon it being consistent with His character. God will never do anything contrary to that. So this will help us to learn to appreciate what He means when He says certain things. The conditions are always there, but He may not always say so. But we need to remember that.

James 4: 1-3

- 1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?
- 2 You lust and do not have; *so* you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; *so* you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.
- 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

Many a time, we may pray and our prayers are not answered in the way we asked of God and we become discouraged. The apostle James tells us that there are various reasons why we may not receive what we ask. Even if you believe that God will answer your prayer and will grant you your request, it would not happen. Why?

He tells us: "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?"

He tells us that if your direction is wrong, if your desires are based on the wrong things, if you are self-centred in what you want, then this will lead to quarrels, conflicts, and you cannot develop quality of being if you proceed in this direction. The source is your pleasures that wage war in your members.

There is a conflict within you. On the one hand, you want to follow God and yet, you desire the things of this world, you want the selfish aspects that will bring pleasure to you. "You lust and do not have; *so* you commit murder." You do the things that you would rather have, what you prefer. "You are envious and cannot obtain; *so* you fight and quarrel." It is a self-centred life that leads to all these kinds of problems.

"You do not have because you do not ask." So there are times when we think we do not need God, we can obtain what we want by ourselves and then we realize that we do not get what we truly want because we do not ask of God.

And yet, when we ask we may not receive. He says, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures." So if your motive is wrong, if your spirit is not right, if you are still preoccupied with yourself and what you desire rather than what is truly good, then you will not receive because God does not want you to "spend *it* on your pleasures".

So underlying this, God wants us to understand: While it is very important for us to develop faith in God, we must recognize that there is a right kind of faith and there is a wrong kind of faith. And the apostle James tells us that basically, there is a faith that is alive and real; and there is a faith that is dead and fake – it is not a true faith. So we need to recognize the difference between the two.

If we want to develop quality in our being, then we have to develop the true kind of faith that is alive and real. Otherwise, we may think that we are close to God but we are not. We may think that we are developing well but actually, we are not. So we need to address this, so that we can move together with God in the right path.

James 2: 14-17

- 14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?
- 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,
- 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?
- 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.

The apostle James wants to highlight the importance of recognizing that there is such a thing as dead faith. Faith that is dead is useless. But many people are exercising this kind of faith. And so, this has to be corrected. He says, "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" Answer is: No. That faith is dead. True faith will always have works, but what is that "works"? We can look at that further later.

He then illustrates why faith without works is dead. He says: "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?"

What he is saying is that you can tell someone, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled", but if you do not do something about it, it is just words. You are just saying words but it has no value to that person. The person will still go away hungry and without clothing.

If you really care for the person, then you will accompany your words with what is helpful and necessary. There must be something that accompanies those words. It does not mean that it must always be outward physical acts immediately, but there will be a meaning that is correct, that corresponds with those words.

The same thing applies to faith. We say we believe in God, but it may be just words. "I believe" - but what does that mean? True faith is accompanied by something within us that goes with those words: "I believe. Therefore, I will follow God, I will obey Him, I will trust Him, I will live for Him." These aspects must follow.

Otherwise, it is dead faith. It is just words. We say we believe, but it has no life in it. We say, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled", but there is no life in that. There is no value in those words if the heart does not go with it in true meaning.

So the apostle James gave an example in the case of Abraham. Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness. That is true. But the apostle James explains that Abraham's faith was real - it was true and alive. Why? Because when God tested him, when God called him to sacrifice Isaac, he was prepared to do so. That preparedness was in his heart.

That is why Abraham was justified by faith. His faith was reckoned to him as righteousness because it was real faith. It was not just words. There was something within his heart that responded to God and as a result, it will be manifested in action, in the things that need to be done when the occasion arises.

So that means that faith must be accompanied by commitment: That is to say when we say we believe in God, there must be that commitment to Him for it to be true faith. Otherwise, it is dead faith.

The demons also believe and they tremble. Why? They believe that God is all-powerful; they believe that God is righteous, morally perfect. They believe that, but they are not committed to Him. They have chosen to go their own way, they have rebelled against Him and therefore, they tremble. That belief will not help them: so too for us.

We may believe that God is perfect, we can believe that the Lord Jesus died for us on the cross, we can believe that God wants to give us all the good things, but if we are not committed to Him, if we are not prepared to follow Him and live for Him, walk in His ways, it will not benefit us. We will also tremble at the Day of Judgment.

We can be comforted, we can rejoice, we can be peaceful, we can be happy only when we are prepared to live by what we believe of what is good and right.

So if we believe that God is perfect, we believe that Christ died for us then our response should be one of gratitude, one of worship, one in which we express our love for Him in the way we live each day, in the things that we do.

That is faith that is alive.

It is important for us to recognize that although James talks about outward acts in doing of things, like for example, Abraham sacrificing Isaac and Rahab the harlot hiding the Jews in her house to protect them, yet, at the heart of it, the issue is not the outward things that we do. It does not mean that if we go around trying to help people, do many things that are recognized as good things, then this is true faith.

It must first begin in the heart.

We can do many outward things without the heart accompanying it. There are many people who can give millions of dollars to charity but their motive is wrong. And that is not good in the eyes of God and in the eyes of men when we truly understand that.

For it to be good, it must first be motivated by genuine love. It must be motivated by seeking to do what is really good. That motive is critical before the act can have meaning of quality.

So it must first begin in the heart. We have to deal with that – where there is a deep response to God in the depths of our being, in what we want to become and how we want to live, and there must be the preparedness for the cost of what that means. These are aspects that we must consider and they must be real in is.

Of course, there are different degrees of this reality, different depths of quality in different people.

But we must seek the utmost to develop this to the highest that we can, because this is where life and meaning resides. It is in the heart: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” tells us that this is the heart of the issue.

Without that, we will not truly see God even if we do many things.

Luke 9: 23-26

- 23 And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.
- 24 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.
- 25 "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?
- 26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and *the glory* of the Father and of the holy angels.

Christians want to follow the Lord Jesus but we have to recognize that it is a difficult path and we may not want to follow the Lord Jesus on His terms, and it is very easy for us to look for other alternative ways to follow Him. But He makes it very clear to us this is the way to follow Him: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me."

If we are not prepared to deny ourselves, we cannot follow Him. If we are not prepared to take up our cross daily, we cannot follow Him. This is the path of truly being His disciple. This is the path by which He will grant us His life, His power, His presence.

It is in that context we will know true and deep fellowship with God. But if we want an easier way, then we are not walking with Him.

The path that the Lord Jesus has called us is the path of the cross. He chose that path. How difficult it was for Him but He chose it! If we want to be His disciple, we must choose the path of the cross, we must learn to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Him.

He tells us what is the alternative: "If you wish to save your life, you will lose it. That is your alternative. If you want your own way, you want an easier way, you want other ways of doing My will, then seeking to save your life will result in your losing it. But if you lose your life for My sake, then you will save it."

When we are prepared to give up our lives to Him and follow Him, then we will receive His life and He will be formed in us.

"For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and *the glory* of the Father and of the holy angels."

Again the Lord Jesus tells us that all the glory of God that He wants to give to us, He wants to impart to us, are always conditional.

They are conditional upon our denying ourselves, taking our cross daily and following Him. Otherwise, we can gain the world and we will lose our soul.

Many people, they love God but they also love many other things that conflict with their love for God. That is why the Lord Jesus says, "You cannot serve God and Mammon."

You cannot serve God and any other thing that conflicts with your love for God. This has to be clearly established in our hearts.

So true faith includes commitment on the basis of what we believe, the preparedness to live by what we believe is good and true even when it is costly, unpleasant, painful, dangerous and very difficult.

I want now to elaborate on what this means: Faith that is alive and real.

There are two aspects of true faith that are helpful for us to be more conscious of and to ensure that they are real in us if we want to develop true quality in our being.

Simply put, we can say: It is to trust and to entrust. To trust and to entrust: true faith has both of these elements.

Entrust comes forth from the trust. But it is an important aspect for us to be conscious of and to work at. Trust refers to our recognition of God in His perfection, in His goodness, in His glory and because we recognize that, we love Him, we trust Him, we believe what He has said; we are very glad for all that He has promised us and we want all that He desires to give to us. We trust Him. What He says, we believe, we recognize and we respond because we love Him. We are prepared then to follow him.

If this is true, if this is the kind of trust that we have towards God, this will lead to our entrusting ourselves to Him: That is to say, we see that it is so meaningful to live for God that we are prepared to give up everything, to hand over to God, to live for Him and to trust Him to take care of us, to guide us, to enable us, to empower us, to lead us. We are prepared to entrust ourselves to Him.

Why is it that Christians are often so very anxious and troubled and disturbed? One major reason is that they are striving so hard to make sure that this will happen, they are so afraid that that will take place. They must work very hard to make sure that things turn out right. And they cannot be sure that they will turn out right, so they are anxious, they are worried, they are troubled. They have not learnt to properly entrust themselves to God: all that they are and all that they have.

This of course is a very major issue in Christian living. Because we do not entrust ourselves to God, we live our lives in insecurity, in fear, in anxiety; troubled, distressed. But God wants us to find peace and rest and joy and true happiness in Him. God wants us to find rest in Him, the joy of living each day.

But how does it come about?

Many people want the easy way. So they want to hold on to their lives, they want to pursue the things that they want and prefer and yet, they want God to give them peace and joy and freedom and life and meaning.

It will not work. It cannot work. God is not there just to give you whatever you like, whatever you want.

God wants to give you the very best, and the very best must include the quality of your being. You must first be prepared to discard whatever is not truly good, whatever is contrary to the will of God in order to properly receive all that He wants to give to you.

So “entrust” must arise from “trust” in that because we trust God and His goodness, we are prepared to give up everything to live for Him. And we entrust ourselves and all that we have and all that may happen to us into His hands. We are then peaceful and happy in Him.

From all that I have sought to understand all these years, I see no other way. If we want to be truly happy and peaceful in the right sense, in the good sense, this is the only way.

We have faith in God. What kind of faith is it?

Ensure that it is the right kind of faith, and you will find that peace and that freedom and the happiness.

Otherwise, there will be turmoil, conflict, distress in your heart and this will go on day after day, and it will have its effects on your daily life.

The Lord Jesus was very conscious of this. That is why when large crowds were following Him, the Lord Jesus told them to count the cost if they wanted to be His disciples.

Luke 14: 25-33

- 25 Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them,
 26 "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.
 27 "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.
 28 "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?
 29 "Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him,
 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'
 31 "Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand *men* to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand?
 32 "Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.
 33 "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

This aspect of “cannot be My disciple” is repeated. The Lord Jesus wants to stress this. If you truly want to be His disciple, you must understand this. We want to follow Him, we want to be His disciples, but often, we do not take heed to what He has said. Of course, we know that there are different qualities of discipleship. The Lord Jesus is talking about what ought to be, what a true disciple is. A true disciple must follow these aspects that He has mentioned.

I want to start with **verse 33** because it says here: "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."

As far as I can tell from various other translations, it is generally translated as: "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all that he has." The word “possessions” is one form of possibility in translation, but the literal meaning basically means: “what is there, what you have, what a person has”. So, “give up all his own possessions” can be translated literally as: “give up or say goodbye to all that he himself has”. I see this is more likely to be the meaning and is consistent with the whole flow of the passage.

Notice, **verse 33** says: "So then..." "So then..." tells us the Lord Jesus is basically summarising what He said before: "So then..." And "So then..." does not concentrate on possessions. He is talking about everything: "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up or say goodbye to all that he himself has."

So what is it that we have? Everything!

Earlier on, He says: "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." He is saying: "All the things that are so precious to you – your family, your brothers, sisters, wife, children and yourself – if you do not learn to hate it in the right way, you cannot be My disciple."

Of course, we know that the Lord wants us to love our father, mother, brother, sister and also to love ourselves in the right way. So here, He is not asking us to hate in the sense of a negative attitude towards others. He is saying: "You must learn to recognize what is of true value. Your love for Me must be such that all other loves and concerns may appear like hate in comparison."

You do not really treasure these things when they conflict with what is precious to the Lord. Your love for Him must surpass all other relationships, and it includes your own life.

Whatever in your life that contradicts and conflicts with the character of Christ and what is in His heart and what is good, you must reject. In that sense, you hate: Hate your life in this world – you hate whatever goes against what is really good whether in yourself or in others; the principle is the same. Likewise, you love what is good, whether in yourself or in others. When you see something that is good in others, you should love it, appreciate it; likewise in yourself.

So the Lord Jesus tells us that we must learn this: Give up, say goodbye to all other things – cling on to Him to be His disciple.

“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple”: that applies to everything – every area of our lives, every moment that we live, we must learn to carry our own cross, that is, we reject everything that is contrary to what is good, pleasing, before God. We have to deal with the self-life at its very roots, at its deepest level.

And the Lord Jesus knows that this is a very difficult path. That is why He goes on to say: “Calculate the cost... sit down and consider...” It is very easy for people to say, “Yes, I love the Lord. I will follow Him wherever He leads me – the highest mountain, the deepest sea.” There are many people who say things like that to their lovers, and they say that to God too, but they may not realize what it means in actual working out. Do we mean what we say? When we say that we will follow Him, do we mean it? Many people who say that, when tested, straightaway reject it.

So the Lord says: “Calculate the cost. Consider carefully. Do you mean it? Sit down and consider. Will you be able to complete it? Is this what you want? Are you prepared for the cost of it? If you are not prepared for it, take time, consider further before you express it in that way. But if you mean it, then say it, choose it.” So it is critical that we must choose this path.

So He says: “So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up or say goodbye to all that he himself has.” It includes everything. Our heart and everything else must be completely His. This is what God is looking for: those whose heart is completely His. It is in that context that God can work in our lives, that God can be pleased to dwell in us, that all the glory of God, the power of God, the majesty of God, the meaning that comes from Him can be ours; we can experience that.

But that is the only way. God cannot compromise that. He cannot do it any other way. If there were any other way, the Lord Jesus would not have to go through the cross. If there were any other way, He would definitely have chosen other ways rather than the cross.

It is because of our self-centredness, it is because of our sins that the Lord Jesus had to die on the cross, to suffer for us. And if we do not deal with this seriously, how can we become like Him, how can we be transformed? There is no other way.

I want now to consider with you a very beautiful picture that illustrates this kind of reality in faith. Let us turn to **Daniel 3: 13-18**.

Daniel 3: 13-18

- 13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king.
- 14 Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?"
- 15 "Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, *very well*. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?"
- 16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter.
- 17 "If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king.
- 18 "But *even* if *He does* not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

It is a very beautiful picture of quality faith. It tells us what faith ought to be. This is the kind of faith that God is looking for.

The three friends of Daniel believed in God, they had faith in God, and this faith was real and alive. We see they expressed their confidence in God: "our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king." This is confidence: faith.

They trusted God. They knew that God was almighty; they knew that they belonged to God; they knew that God cared for them, God would take care of them; and God has the power to save them, to deliver them from the furnace of blazing fire. They believed it, not just in their heads. It was a life of commitment to that reality. They were going to be thrown into the furnace of blazing fire and yet, they could still say that. This was not just an intellectual exercise, in writing poetry, or an essay. It was death facing them right there and then. But they said, "...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us".

And they stood their ground: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter." Why? "What you are asking us to do is ridiculous. We do not need to answer you. What you are asking is against all the principles of righteousness and goodness. We do not need to answer you. We are not obliged to give an answer to you, but this is our declaration: We believe in God and we take our stand with Him." So: "He will deliver us out of your hand, O king." There is that trust in God.

And then, they go on to express: "But *even* if *He does* not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." What does that mean?

That means they had committed themselves to God. They would not budge from there. They would never compromise their stand, whatever the consequence. That is, they had already entrusted themselves to God, they had offered themselves to God and they laid their lives in the hands of God, that God would take care of them and God would do to them as He saw fit.

Some words are in italics. The words "*even*" and "*He does*" are in italics, so if we do not read the words in italics, it means: "But if not".

“...if not...” – that means: “If it does not take place, if God does not deliver us for whatever reason, if we are not delivered, whatever the reason may be...” “if not, we are not going to serve your gods”: That means they were committed to what was good and righteous. Their loyalty to God and commitment to God and His moral being and character was steadfast and would not change.

So they were prepared to offer up their lives to God, whatever may be the consequence, whatever may be the outcome. Even if they were to be burnt alive in the furnace of fire, they would still not worship the golden image, they would not serve the gods of Nebuchadnezzar because they knew that that was wrong and they should not do it.

So we see that the three friends of Daniel trusted God and they entrusted themselves to God whatever the situation might be and whatever the consequences might be.

If we want to develop quality of being, we must understand and appreciate this kind of faith. Do we because of danger, difficulties and problems, withdraw from our commitment to God? Do we modify, change, compromise because the path is too difficult? Or will we persevere, whatever the cost, whatever it means?

I have been very encouraged each time I read this passage. How wonderful it is to live like that: to trust God and to entrust ourselves to Him so that no matter what happens, our heart is peaceful because we are doing the right thing; our hearts are filled with joy because we are in fellowship with God; we can look forward to the future whatever may come because we are moving in the right direction.

So if we say we believe God, then we must consider: What does that mean in our daily lives?

Do we trust God in our daily situations of life? Do we pray to Him on the basis of who He is? Or do we just calculate based on what we can do by ourselves, we just think in terms of human ways and what the world can do and offer us? Or do we follow Him and trust Him to lead us, to guide us, to enable us?

Even in situations that seem so very unlikely or even at times may seem impossible, God wants us to learn to walk by faith and not by sight, to learn to trust Him and to behold Him who is invisible, seeing Him who is invisible.

And He wants us to learn to entrust ourselves to Him: That is to say, we may pray to God to help us in this situation in this way and we believe that He can and He will if it is truly the best way, but if God has a better way, we are pleased with it, we rejoice in it, we are prepared to submit to Him. So, "...if not..." we will still follow Him.

The apostle Paul prayed three times for the thorn in the flesh to be removed. Did he pray in faith? Did he ask, believing? We are not told but the likelihood would be he did. He prayed in faith. He was a man of faith, so likely he would have asked God to remove the thorn in the flesh in faith, believing that God could and would do so. But then the thorn in the flesh was not removed. Does it mean that his faith was not good? No, not at all!

His faith was always subjected to the principle of entrusting himself to God, that ultimately, he would leave it to God's discretion and wisdom and sovereignty to do whatever He saw to be the best. But he prayed according to his understanding at that point of time of what would be good, and if that were the best thing, God would have done so. God had the power to do so and Paul believed it.

The Lord told him: "My grace is sufficient for you. This thorn in the flesh serves a purpose at this point of time." When Paul recognized it, there was no rebellion, there was no disappointment, there was no crying. He said, "Most gladly therefore, I will rejoice."

He was glad because his purpose, his commitment, his desire was to do the will of God. It was not to remove the thorn in the flesh. That was not his objective. His objective was to glorify the Lord in his life. Whether by life or by death, he wanted to magnify the Lord Jesus in his body. And so to him, whether the thorn in the flesh was there or not was not his primary concern. He prayed for it to be removed because in his understanding, that would be helpful. But when the Lord showed that there was something better, yes, he would do so.

But for most of us, it is the other way round. God wants us to do something; we recognize it, but because it is too difficult, too painful, too dangerous, too problematic, we choose an easier way. And that is what will lead to a degeneration of our being. We must face these things properly so that all that God has promised to us can be properly received and real in us.

The apostle Paul practised this in his own life. He trusted God and he entrusted himself to God and he lived well for God.

2 Timothy 1: 8-12

- 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,
- 9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,
- 10 but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,
- 11 for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.
- 12 For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.

The apostle Paul went through much suffering because he was called to be a preacher, an apostle and a teacher, to follow the Lord, to serve Him, to represent Him, to do His work. In the midst of that, he had to suffer. He says, "For this reason I also suffer these things" and he called upon Timothy to join him in this path, to walk in the same way, to have the same spirit, to be prepared to go through these things for the Lord.

He says, "I... suffer" but he says, "I am not ashamed". It was not something he regretted. It was something so meaningful to him. "...for I know whom I have believed" – He trusted the Lord, he had faith in Him; he knew whom he believed. And he says: "I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day." He trusted the Lord and because he trusted the Lord, he entrusted to the Lord.

"What I have entrusted to Him until that day" – What did he entrust to the Lord? In the context of Paul's life, it must be reasonably obvious he entrusted everything to the Lord: His whole life, his whole work, his everything.

The Lord Jesus said we must say goodbye to, we must give up, all that we have for Him. This is what the apostle Paul chose to do. He said, "I count all things as rubbish" because he wanted to gain Christ, he wanted to follow Him, he wanted to know Him, he wanted to be transformed to be like Him.

As you ponder over the life of the apostle Paul, there is so much you can appreciate of this principle in his life.

But I now want to conclude with: How does this apply to all of us today? What does it mean to us? What can we consider that can be helpful for our daily application?

Romans 8: 28-32

- 28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.
29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;
30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.
31 What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us?
32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

This is a very beautiful passage and a very encouraging passage for all of us. But if you recall, you may notice that very often, people quote from this passage only selected parts. For example, they will say, “we know that God causes all things to work together for good” and they apply it to themselves straightaway. “God will cause all things to work together for good”. And then they may say, “If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”

Isn't this so encouraging? God is for us, who can be against us? He did not spare His own Son; He will give us all things. So we can be comforted, we can have confidence as we go through life. And so, many Christians take comfort in this.

Does God intend us to take comfort in these verses? Certainly, He wants us to be so encouraged by what is written here.

But we must recognize the conditions that are present in this passage. God does not just sovereignly take care of us, give us all the things that we want no matter what happens. It is not like that. Otherwise, how can there be so much of failure in Christian living, so much of God's wrath and anger at sin. It is because we have not fulfilled the conditions.

So we read and we notice, we are told, “we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God”.

“...those who love God” is the condition. If you do not truly love God, you cannot then say, “I know that God causes all things to work together for good for me.” It will not be true. If you love yourself more than God, if you love the world rather than God, you cannot find comfort in this verse. You will be mistaken.

So you have to ensure first that you truly love God and you love God for who He is. You love God for His character, for His moral perfection. You do not love God just because He can give you this and give you that. Your concentration is on the meaningfulness of the being of God and so you love Him.

Yes, there are those who say, “He predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son, and He will also justify us, He will glorify us. So don’t worry. We will be glorified; God will do it.”

But again, if you look at the context, **verse 29** says, “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined” .

It is not that God just predestined because He simply wanted to call certain people and glorify them. No - “For those whom He foreknew”: That is to say, God saw your heart, God saw the direction of your heart. He saw what you want in your life, He saw what you are prepared to be committed to, He saw that you truly love Him. On that basis, He predestined: “whom He foreknew, He also predestined” .

And “He... predestined” - the meaning here has to do with how God will work in your life in the sense of **verse 28**: God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God. That is, as God sees your heart, that you truly want to follow Him, you want to love Him, God will arrange all things in your life, so that they will all work together for your good.

God wants to bring about something very good and meaningful, but He looks at your heart: Do you love Him? Are you prepared to deny yourself? Are you prepared to give up yourself for Him?

If you are not, then it will not apply in this way because He foreknows the whole direction of your heart, what are you working at. He sees that and He is going to work in relation to that.

So if you truly are committed to this path, God will predestine in working out all things to bring about your good. So He will justify, He will glorify. So that is the outcome.

The glory that is in us is the result of God working in our hearts, in our lives, because we have chosen to follow Him. Because we trust Him and we entrust ourselves to Him, God will bring it about.

That is why Paul says he has the confidence that God will keep what he has entrusted to Him: God will work in his life, God will bring about something very beautiful.

And this is what God wants to do with each one of us. He wants to bring about something very beautiful, but are we prepared to fulfil the conditions?

So the final two verses are meant to help us appreciate that if we fulfil the conditions, this will be true: If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

If we believe this, will we be worried? Will we be anxious? Will we be troubled? Will we be in turmoil? No. We can be very peaceful, we can be very happy each moment. Even though the situation is difficult, even though there is pain, even though there are complexities and perplexities in life, we can have peace, freedom and joy.

And this is the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace. God wants us to have this in our hearts, but we must learn to develop quality faith: faith that is alive and real – true faith.

So we trust God to bring about a meaningful situation and outcome when we truly love Him and entrust ourselves to Him – He will then work in our lives according to His perfect will. If we offer, if we present our body to God as a living sacrifice, then God will work in us such that we will prove the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

God will work in us but we must present, first present ourselves, then present our bodies to Him as a living sacrifice. In everything that we do, we are accountable to this aspect of our commitment.

Are we truly living for Him? Or are there many things that we do based on what we think, what we like, what we want, or what people will respect, what people will praise us for? If we do that, then God cannot fulfil His will in us. We need to be renewed in our minds, not to be conformed to the world: Follow God's ways, then we will see the glory developed and manifested.

So if we want to live our lives well and fulfil God's call in our lives, we must develop faith that is alive and real in our trusting God and entrusting ourselves fully to Him because we love Him and are truly committed to Him and His perfect will. As we develop this kind of faith, this will build the quality of our being. We will be transformed to become more and more like the Lord Jesus. We will follow Him and His life will become incorporated in us; we will become partakers of the divine nature, the fruit of the Spirit will be manifested in us.

Let us then, as we come before the Lord, ask Him to help us to understand what these things mean.

God cares of for us, He loves us so much, He wants to give us the very best, but there are conditions.

Let us not be afraid of the conditions. Let us look at the conditions carefully, properly, and know that they can be fulfilled and God will help us to fulfil those conditions, and as we do so, then all that God wants to give to us can be received, experienced and become part of us.

Let us ask Him to help us so that we will learn to respond well to Him and find true joy and peace and meaning in Him.

Let us thank Him for what He has done for us through the cross and let us ponder over the meaning of the cross as it applies to us.

Are we prepared to follow the Lord Jesus, take up our cross daily and follow Him?