

Coping with Prison Torrey 1983 Conference

By Joseph Aldrich

Speaker 1: What would be the best way to introduce and they one guy said, tell the story of his graduation from Dallas, where as his class walked across the platform or whatever they do, certain of the graduates it had prepared the night before a banner which was dropped in the middle of perhaps the message which said, this is not the best the Grace of God can do. And another said, Just tell them that he's a very personable, that he's very warm, and the people who know Joe, probably the very best, who are local, said that during his Ministry for most of his life, he's always had a Ministry to other people. Pick a pagans and pick a Saint, and he's always been ministering and working with individuals and discipling that that has been one of his hallmarks. And I think that alone would make him a quality for us on this evening session. Will you join me if you haven't already? If you have, you can do it again. Welcoming Aldrich.

Aldrich: It's good to be here at this other Bible College. I had seven great years in Southern California, land of the fruits and nuts, and it's good to be up in the Northwest. I don't know what God is doing shipping all of our rain down here, but maybe it's because two prophets from the Northwest are here on Biola campus and the Lord doesn't want us to start a raging inferno, so he's dampening everything but whatever. I brought my swimming suit, my tennis clothes and everything else, hoping to get out and play a little tennis, and I'm not sure I'm going to be able to do that. When I was in Southern California, one of the things that I really missed was all of the beautiful woods, great big trees, and particularly firewood. I was raised in a family of nine kids, and the only heat that we had in the old farmhouse that we lived in was a fireplace. That was it.

So from earliest times, my memory is of my father getting up early, going down. I can hear him even now, setting a big log up on the chalk being blocked and the kindling wood going every direction.

Then you hear the paper getting squished. I'm not sure I could hear the match strike. I didn't have that good hearing. But anyway, pretty soon you'd hear the fire just cracking and popping. And so I kind of grew up being slightly a pyromaniac, which simply means I enjoy fires. We have a little place down to Oregon Coast, and I'm building a kitchen onto it, tore out a deck. And I want to tell you, I built a fire. When I burned that deck up, it just was something else. Well, when I got down to Southern California, Newport Beach, we bought a home and had one fireplace in it. Well, that's not enough. So I added two more. I added one in the den, I added one up the master bedroom and used to have the fire going with the air conditioning on just for the effect. My wife thought I was slightly crazy. The only problem is, down here, Wood's very expensive. We get at 60, 70, \$80 a chord down here. Who knows what it is now? They used to bring it to our place on those Brinks trucks. You know, they back it in the cops to be standing out there with their revolvers. And they dumped the load and go. And it was up to you to protect it.

Well, one day, Orange Grove developer decided that he was going to make more money if he sold his Orange Grove for housing development. But it was covered with Orange trees bearing trees, good trees. So he decided the easiest and cheapest way to get rid of all of that was just to put a sign in the paper free firewood, which he did. What he didn't realize is that over 2000 people would show up to cut this firewood. What he also didn't realize is that they'd show up at the wrong Orchard and cut 38 acres of somebody else's Orange Grove. And while I was cutting, a reporter came by from the local newspaper. And I had no idea I was cutting in the wrong Orange

Grove. And my little son was there and he was throwing oranges at everything that moved. And I had Orange juice splattered all over me. You couldn't help but the trees were loaded. And you'd stick your chainsaw in there. And you wouldn't try and be copacetic about it. You just go for it because everybody else was going for it. So you just strip the tree all the way down here would be this naked pole stand there, you cut it off at the bottom, throw it in your pickup truck and go on the next one. So you were sawn through oranges and everything else. There were about 600 chainsaws going all at once. You literally couldn't hear a sound. I mean, you couldn't hear yourself talk or anything.

Well, this guy comes around, starts interviewing us and takes a few pictures. And of course, the next day, I guess, whose pictures on the front page? A local pastor cutting Orange Groves in the wrong trees. Policemen came walking through. And I'm one of those kind of people who sometimes engages my mouth before I do my brain. And this time was no exception. I assumed he was there for traffic control. So I said to him, what's the problem? Cut down the wrong trees? Well, I want to assure you he shared with me a piece of his mind he could still afford to lose. And he was a little bit ticked because he was driving through the Orange Grove with a patrol car. He had these little speakers up on top and he had those speakers on wide open. Nobody could hear him. And he wasn't watching where he was driving. And he drove over a stump that pierced the oil pan on his engine and he kept on driving. He just got out of his car after his engine burned up. When I made that inane comment, well, they had these nice little Orange trees. They're about this tall. Sometimes one of the big mommy or Daddy trees, whatever, they would have died and they would replace it with one of these nice little ones with the trunk all wrapped in a pretty white tape. Since they're obviously eliminating the Orange Grove, we thought it would be

appropriate to take a few of those home with us. So we had five or six of those dug out and in the back of the truck, too. And in Newport Beach, whoever owns my old house, they probably have a lovely Orange Grove, compliments of this developer. You ever feel like someone's taken a change saw to your Orange Grove? How in the world are you able to handle pressure?

When I toured our coal aluminum company on one occasion, I enjoy machinery, being raised on a farm and having worked with machinery most of my life. And whenever I can get near any type of power equipment with lathes and drill presses and those types of things, I always enjoy doing it. And we were going through the alcohol aluminum cabinet and we came to this one section where they were making door and window frames out of aluminum. And that little tiny die over here that was shaped like the window sill. And then down this conveyor belt came this great big they called it a pig. Doesn't look like a pig to me, but that's what they called it. It was about six inches square and maybe 10ft long. It was aluminum. And he told me that great big piece is going to go through that little tiny hole. There's no way but great big hydraulic arm came behind that piece and you'd hear the old pump starting to pump and the thing bearing down. And sure enough, pretty soon that thing came right up to the die, came out the other side. If it was 6ft long, it probably came out 100ft of window cell. And I was sitting there thinking about this, wondering how much pressure does it take to get that aluminum pig through that dye to come out looking like a window cell?

Well, the thought hit me. It takes just enough pressure to overcome the natural resistance of the material. And it hit me. How much pressure does it take for God to take me made in his image

and likeness but in need of Reformation and have me come out looking like Jesus Christ, takes just enough pressure to overcome the natural resistance of the material.

Now I want to chat with you a little bit about how to cope with prison experiences, realizing that hopefully none of you will ever be in prison, but we might. And you know, when you reflect through the New Testament and the Old Testament. It's amazing how many of God's chosen people ended up in prison. I remember hearing Bob Jones senior speak one time and he said, you know, when Paul checked in the local town, he didn't go to Hilton. He headed to jail because he knew he was going to end up there sooner or later anyway. So that's where he checked in. And we have the prison epistles.

Now, if you've ever been in Rome and seen the mammothen prison, it wasn't exactly a place you'd want to be or stay. There are lots of kinds of prisons, and I'm sure some of you this evening are prisoners of loneliness. Well, that's a tough one. We see homesick kids in Monoma. I can remember being so homesick when I was that age. At times. I remember being at a Church camp at junior high and getting in my sleeping bag and crying whatever it was sleeping bag and crying myself to sleep. Prison of loneliness. Some are probably financial prisoners. We tried to keep as many students in school of Malone as we could this last year. And my financial vice President came up to me and said, Joe, you need to know that we've got a Subaru pickup truck in Hawk. And I said, well, wait a minute, back up a minute. Paul, what are you telling me? One of these guys want to stay so bad that I've got his Subaru and Hawk? Well, financial pressures can be very real. How do you handle I'm sure there are some knowing myself at times in my life.

I'm sure there's some here this evening for prisoners of guilt. Boy, that's a tough one. Plato said, the soul will run eagerly to its judge. Guilt is the burden of an unpaid debt. Now, some are burdened down with false guilt. They're bearing things that God never intended them to bear. But it's amazing how life comes crashing in and we find ourselves confined when that flashing red light is going off on our spiritual dashboard. We're not willing to deal with it. Some of you are prisoners of physical infirmities, some of which you'll be delivered from. But I'm sure there are some here this evening. This side of glory will never be delivered from physical infirmity. Paul wasn't remember how Paul pleaded with us, Lord, three times, Lord, heal me. And here's a guy who could heal all kinds of individuals, but somehow God withheld healing. But God told him something. He said, Paul, if I can turn that prison experience of physical liability into a prism through which God's glory will shine, will you accept it? Paul said, you bet. All glory in my weakness, if it will bring glory to God.

I found in my own personal Ministry that the times when the heat is the hottest, those are the times that God seems to use me most. And I'm sure that most of you, hopefully all of you, are going for gold. I read a statement by Malcolm Muggerrichs. I spoke to Jacksonville Church last Sunday in August. I went in a College room. Some of you probably attend there. And there's a statement by Malcolm Muggeridge. And I came so close to stealing it, I must admit I looked both ways. I was going to pull it off the wall. But Muggeridge was out in the desert experience kind of just taking in the barrenness and the emptiness and the lack of life in this setting. And he was reflecting on his own 80 some years. And he made the comment as he reflected back on his life that the only times of profit and growth in his entire life were times of pain and hurt. And I want to say, I don't like to read that. I have a very low pain threshold. I'm not a murderer. I'm not

someone who wants to get in there and wrestle with alliance. But, you know, sometimes it's a backhanded compliment. I think of Job is round two. Round one was the Garden of Eden. Satan won God zero in one sense. History moves along a little bit. You realize that Job is one of the patriarchs, one of the earliest books historically in the Old Testament.

Round two, the Bell rings, as it were, and God approaches Satan and says, have you seen my servant Job? And in the ensuing dialogue, Satan says to God, well, good night. You've blessed him. He's the richest man in the east. You've given him candles and all kinds of things. I'd worship you too. You'd pile all that kind of stuff on me. Anybody would, Lord, just take it all away from him. Take it all away from him, but don't take his life. And you've all read the dialogue of Job and his friends as his friends come and offer counsel, and they're trying to tell him, Job, you blew it. You did this wrong. You didn't do that. And he sits there getting smaller and smaller and smaller in his own mind. And what we need to do is to have the perspective realize that God peels back for us. For a moment, the eternal galleries as the dervishes from hell are watching this scenario, this blow by blow battle, in essence, between the forces of heaven and the forces of hell. And the angelic beings are watching. And as Jobs friends counsel, and he gets more and more discouraged.

I'm sure the fallen Angels were cheering and rooting and saying, get him. And then finally Joe's wife comes and says, Curse God and die. Sometimes we feel very alone in those prison experiences, don't we? I was preaching through Second Timothy a few years ago, came to the last section of Second Timothy, and it's one of those pastors dilemmas. What do you do with all these instructions that are here? Bring my cloak and all of these kinds of things. The book really

kind of ends with his statement in Two Timothy four, verse six. I've fought a good fight. I've finished the course. I've kept the faith. Henceforth there's laid up for me a Crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me, and not only to me, but to all those who love his appearing. And that's where the book should have ended. But I'm really delighted it didn't, because Paul would have ridden off into the sunset bigger than life. And as I struggled with some of these instructions, it suddenly hit me. The guy is writing from prison. He's just announced the fact that his death is imminent. And so as I reread the final verses again, it gave me some insights into how do you cope with prison experiences.

I'm sure, living down here in the land of Knottsbury Farm and Disneyland, that you've all enjoyed the benefits of those places. One of my favorite rides is Pirates of the Caribbean. If you remember going down this kind of little waterfall thing, you're down three or four levels and everybody is shooting at everybody, fire everywhere. And these guys are chasing the gals around the well and a few other things getting drowned in it and everything else. One scene always stands out vividly in my memory. And that's the jail scene. Remember that one? There are a couple of guys in jail, and his silly little dog sitting out there, he's wagging his tail, and this guy's got his fist through the bars just as far as he can stretch him. And in his fist he's got a great big juicy bone. And about six inches off the end of his fist sits a dog with a keychain in his mouth. Now, Frank, when you're in prison, there's one thing you want. There's a key. And I want to share with you some keys about how you can turn this pressure into a prism member in your physics classes, when you shine white light through a prism, it comes out and just displays the glory of the rainbow.

And one of the steps that each one of us needs to learn as we see Christ formed in us is how to process pressure productively, get things working for us rather than against us. And as I suggested in my seminar this morning, that successful people are people who find out how the system works, and then they get on the good side of how things work. And I think this passage helps us. Beginning in 2 Timothy 4: 8 begins with a request. And Paul, writing to his friend, pastor of the Church at Ephesus, says, Timothy, do your best to get here quickly. And that's the first clue to coping with prison experiences. And the principle is this. If you and I are learn how to process pressure productively, to turn that prison experience into a prism through which the glory of God can shine, we must communicate with God's people. And we've developed this rugged Western individualism that if we're hurting, we bite a bullet. And ride off into the sunset alone.

Now, let me remind you, Paul was not inviting Timothy to his beautifully paneled office with all of his good citizen awards hanging there. He's inviting him to a stinking Roman prison. We're not sure all the reasons why, but I would like to believe that one of the reasons why is because Paul needed Timothy. And little later on in the text, he says, Timothy, get here before winter because shipping shuts down on the Mediterranean during the winter. And he's saying, Timothy, if you don't come now, it's going to be too late because I'm going to die. And I think at least part of that request reflects the fact that Paul is saying, Timothy, I need you. God has made us mutually interdependent. The hand can't say the foot, I don't need you.

That's a tough thing for us to grasp because particularly as men, our number one fear is the fear of failing. That's the number one neurosis that cripples a man. A woman's number one fear, by

the way, is the fear of being used and abandoned. That's her number one. If you ladies didn't know that, let me tell you now that's what research indicates. The number one fear that haunts a woman is the fear of being used and abandoned. What about for a man's failure? And I find that women can discuss quite freely some of the struggles in their pilgrimage. For men, it's very difficult somehow we want to convince people that we have our children by immaculate conception, that we never have problems, we never have struggles, and that's just not true.

Yeah, there's some different kinds of people illustrated here. Demas illustrates the kind of a person who could come, but he wouldn't. For Demas. He's saying, Timothy, I want you to get here quickly because Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me. And there are certainly people within the body of Christ who have taken themselves out of effective Christian service because they've sold out to this world. And Paul says, Timothy, I need you to come. There was a guy who could come, but he won't because he sold out. In another earlier epistle, Paul calls him a faithful fellow worker. But here's a guy who sold out to the world system wasn't available. There are a lot of demons in the body of Christ today where there's an individual who's hurting, who needs someone to be there, to be supportive, to be caring, to be loving, just to be there, have a good time, other priorities. You know, there's joy in serving Jesus.

And I want to tell you, one of the greatest experiences in life is nurturing a soul to the point of regeneration and having spiritual kids. But it takes time, takes energy. With my wife and I are in seminary, we made a commitment that we wouldn't live in the Cemetery housing. So we lived in a high class red light district, and we learned a lot about life. I used to have to get my gun out and go and break up fights, call the police. I don't know how many people I arrested, clean up blood

and do that on a few occasions. And my own life threatened a couple of times. But we made a commitment to take a couple out to dinner every week for seven years. And we seldom broke that commitment. We made a commitment before the Lord that our friends were to come out of the non-Christian community. And, you know, the exciting thing is sitting up a lot of nights crying with some of these people. And that was the only appropriate thing to do. Being there, taking them with us, going with them, sharing our lives. We saw Christ formed in many of them. It's that openness, letting them see that we're not perfect. The Bible doesn't say to let our perfection be made. No one does. It says, let our progress. Progress implies we haven't arrived.

I like to ask people sometimes I won't ask you to indicate whether it's true or not, but I'll ask the question, how many of you feel more corrupt today than when you trusted Christ? And if you feel more corrupt today than when you trusted Christ, you're making healthy spiritual growth. I did not say you are more corrupt. You see, most of us think that all we need is a choir robe and a little spiritual deodorant. We're ready for glory. God just kind of had to work us over a little bit. We have no understanding of Holiness. We have little understanding of depravity. And when we read a word like Jeremiah's word, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, we say, well, that's not my heart. And yet you see some of the most Godly men in scripture. Isaiah, for example, in Isaiah six, has given a glimpse of the Holiness of God, and he finds himself flat on his face, crying out, Where is me? I'm undone. I'm a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.

Then you take John the above, an Apostle in the Book of Revelation. And again, he's given a glimpse of the Holiness of God and comes to a similar conclusion. And that's all the more reason

why we need each other to stimulate each other on to love and good works, to hold each other accountable, to grow and to develop and to mature. But there are some who aren't available. Then he illustrates some who would come, but they can't. Demas could come, but he wouldn't. Christians has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Here's a couple of guys involved in Ministry, and they're not available at this point to meet Paul's needs. Now we have to remember, too, that sometimes we're hurting. Some people may be seemingly indifferent, but they may be so involved in other people's lives that they really don't have time. But then I'm excited because it illustrates that there was one who could come and did. Only Luke is with me. I think it's so gracious of our Lord to say no to Paul's request. I won't heal you. But he says, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a physician as your traveling companion.

Isn't that just like God? Sometimes he has to say no. And aren't you glad he doesn't answer all your prayers? I sure am. Sometimes he says no, but he understands. Here's Luke. And what an incredible testimony. Only Luke is with me. And I'd ask you the question. Do you have a Luke? All through my high school days, my College days, my seminary days are always a couple of other guys that I met with every week. One group we met twice a day for two years to pray together, to share our lives together, to try and be as open as we possibly could, open to feedback and open to self-disclosure. Because maturity is always a return to reality about yourself. The mature individual wants to know what the facts are. And he realizes that he has blind spots.

When I first went to Mariners Church, the first board meetings I shared this morning in my session, the first board meeting, I asked those men. I said, After I've been here six months, I'd like you men to meet in a private session. And I want you to evaluate my preaching, my

teaching, my reputation, my marriage, my family, anything and everything. Boy, what an experience. But I think that contribute more to my growth than probably anything else I ever did. I met with about four or five groups of men every week. And, boy, these guys would hold me accountable. I couldn't believe it. I went to speak to the Glenn one time Navigator headquarters for a week. And I took my wife along with me on that trip. And they were asking me, well, what can we be praying for you about? I said, Well, I get myself involved in these conferences, and I get involved with people, and I tend to neglect my wife. I'd like you to pray about that. And they said, well, we'd be happy to pray about that. But what do you intend to do about it? I said, Well, I'll spend some time with. Well, how much time? Well, a couple of hours a day. All right. I got five long distance phone calls during that week. Now, these are laymen. I'm their pastor, you know? The Revanized. Simonized Sanitized, whatever I was. And they're calling me on the telephone. They're saying, Well, Joe, how's it doing? It's just going great, and the Lord's blessing, his word and so forth.

That's not what we called about. Are you spending time with your wife? We need to take the risk of allowing others to be God's instrument to move us on toward Christ likeness. It's a great verse. Second Corinthians, seven, six. That kind of changed the direction of my Ministry, Frank. It's a rather mundane little verse just tucked in there, I think, because the Holy Spirit needed some more copy to fill out the page. No, I don't really believe that. But you read the verse and you almost think that it just says, God comforted me by the coming of Titus one day. The impact of that hit me. A whole bunch of gods comfort doesn't come directly from Him. He channels it through other people. But suppose I'm not open to those other people. A lot of God's rebuke doesn't come directly from Him, but certainly much of it does. We need to get beyond the

printer's ink to the Prince of Peace regularly. But God divinely takes people out of his tool chest and we become instruments for Noble purposes, and he uses us as surgical tools in the lives of other people. If a brother is overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual restore him.

Please turn the tape two for the continuation of this session.

But God divinely takes people out of his tool chest and we become instruments for Noble purposes, and he uses us as surgical tools in the lives of other people. If a brother is overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual restore him got to be open to that communication with God's people. There's a second principle in here that just gets me higher in the kite. Now here's the scene. Paul's dying. He knows he's going to go see Nero and it's all over. He's rotten in this little prison cell and look what he says. Last part of verse eleven. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my Ministry. And I say, your Ministry, Paul, you got to be kidding. You're checking out of this place. You're dying. You're still thinking about Ministry. That's right. And that's one of the keys to turning whatever prison you're facing into a prison through which God's glory can generate. You're never out of the Ministry. It's always too soon to quit. And the principle is this continuation in God's purposes.

I think of my little grandmother. Didn't weigh £96 dripping weight wet, and she lived to be almost 100 years of age and stayed in our home for many years after grandfather died. Never went beyond the 6th grade, raised a very godly family, and she was all crippled up with arthritis, and I'm sure she was suffering from the prison of loneliness. She was the last leaf on her tree, and I used to go in the little room we added on the house for Grandma regularly. We all did. And

she'd be sitting in there day after day, crippled up with arthritis, could hardly see big magnifying glass in her hands, little Afghan wrapped around her shoulder, and she'd be rocking there. Had used Christmas cards that she'd collect from all kinds of people around the Northwest, boxes of them. Then she'd get these little gum stickers that had birds and flowers and Bible verses on them, and she'd lick those things and she'd stick them over the signatures. Then she'd box these things up and she'd ship them away to Africa to be given away to the little African children out in the Bush for memorizing Scripture verses. Well, it doesn't mean a lot to us, but you know, one of those little kids, you open up all that sparkle and glitter and so forth. And all the time she was doing that, she was praying for missions in Africa 20 some years, day after day after day.

Well, I want to tell you something, friend. She knew something about hanging in there. She knew something about continuing until God took her last breath. And I sort of suspect when I get to heaven, she's going to be running the place. I imagine she's telling the Lord what to do. Now wait a minute. You sit here, not there. That was my grandmother.

And how important it is that we realize that, boy, when the pressure is hot, we hang in there. That's when you're most powerful. I think our most effective time in terms of reaching our neighborhoods, some of the neighborhoods we lived in is when we had some real health problems. My little guy was in the hospital for three months, totally paralyzed. Thought we lose in the first week. Well, we opened up our whole web to the non-Christians, and we didn't try to act like it didn't hurt. Oh, it hurts. But we allowed them to Minister to us, to bring over meals, to babysit. And in that context of pressure, the glory of God was able to shine.

My little daughter was in a body cast for six months from her chin to her ankles. And no question in my mind that God brought that along, not for her, but for me. Amazing how when God wants to get our attention, he touches someone that's closest to us. And I can remember praying. I remember Ruthie and me myself praying, Lord, when my little guy just about didn't make it, we say, hey, he's yours. We've had six great years with him. We don't want you to take him. But if that's what you decide to do, we'll worship you. We'll praise you. It's in that brokenness that the music of the gospel sounds.

So if you're praying, Lord, use me. God says, I can only use a broken individual in love service. Only wounded soldiers can serve. You know the problem? We don't want God to love us. Very few Christians really want God to love them. We want God to be kind to us. And God is saying, I want to make you a masterpiece to hang in my Gallery for all eternity. We say, oh, no, Lord, I just want to be a thumbnail sketch. Pull away that pilot knife. God says, no, I love you.

The difference between kindness and love is kindness does not want its object to suffer. And kindness works to remove suffering at whatever cost. For example, you have a little puppy. It's not house broken. Well, puppies, puddle, now you got a really important choice to make. If that little puppy is going to continue to live in your house, you're either going to adapt to its pattern and let it puddle all over your rugs. Or you're going to say this, hey, Hound, remember what it's like to live in the wild. I'm offering you the potential of a life, of an existence far beyond anything that is natural to you. But if you're going to be part of the master's household, you're going to have to adjust to the boundary conditions of the master's character. And I'm going to have to insist that you learn how to control yourself, even if it means I've got to Swatch or

whatever else you have to go through to train the crazy thing. And that's what God says. He says, Look, I love you. And one of the lessons that you and I have to learn is to live within the boundary conditions of his character. And he comes along and he gets that pallet knife out. Boy, he cuts. What an important principle to continue to hang in there when the pressure is on.

Third Way comes to us. Verse 13 illustrated here that Paul is not teaching this, but it's illustrated here. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with carpets of Troy, as in my Scrolls, especially the parchments. And I want to believe he's talking about God's Word. And I could say to him, well, wait a minute, what in the world you want the parchments for? My goodness, you wrote most of the New Testaments. There's a principle. If you and I are going to successfully cope with prison experiences, we must commune with God through his word. And I know my own struggles in this area because we tend to say, Well, Lord, when I finally get things under control and I get my schedule worked out, my class was taken care of. Then all I have time. Friends will never have time. It will never be convenient for you to be about the business of being in God's book. Because the evil one, if no one else will make sure that it's never convenient, it's a matter of priority.

Now, when I was a youngster, my father used to milk the cows, and he'd take a great big stand and he'd set it in the gutter, kind of like a pulpit, very much like this, a little bit shorter because the cows have a little lower wheel base. And on that he's more Bible. And all the time he was milking the cows, he'd be sitting there reading his Bible. Well, my brother found out first that if he developed hay fever, he wouldn't have to milk the cows. He was a year older, so he said, he slicked me on that one. So he got out of it. So it became my dubious privilege to have to get up

morning at night and milk those cows. Well, every morning I'd put that stand in the gutter and I'd read five or six chapters every night for ten years now. A lot of that. You'd say it was like water going through a sip. That's right. I didn't retain a lot of it. But I'll tell you what, when you pour water through a sieve, it gets cleaner. The entrance of thy word giveth light. Thy word is a lamp under my feet and a light under my paths.

Wherewithal shall young man cleanse his way? By taking heed there too? According to thy word, thy word of thy hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee. Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of the sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law that he meditate day and night, and he'll be like a tree planted by the Rivers of water. His leaf also shall not withering whatsoever he do, it will prosper.

See, our actions are always controlled by our currently dominant thoughts, and our actions are always building momentum towards success or failure. And that's why God wants the control of our thought processes. Our minds have to be renewed. Every thought needs to be brought into captivity to Christ so that we build momentum towards success based on God's terms.

Communion with God through His Word it's amazing how it always comes back to the basics. And sometimes when I felt my life being a little bit flat, I've got a spiritual flat tire for a period of time. You wonder, what seminar can I go to next? Whose notebook can I read? The red one, the golden, the blue one. The Lord always kind of brings you back to the basics, doesn't it? Hey, how about this time with me? You ever considered that God gets so lonely that sometimes he hurts because we neglect him?

I spent a whole summer on the lookout by myself in the Forest Service, 13, 14 miles back in my pack. And I want to tell you, when you go three and four weeks at a time without seeing another human being, you understand what God said when he said to Adam, It's not good that man should be alone. I was engaged during that time too. Probably was good that I was loved. But, you know, God feels lonely too. He's created us for fellowship with him. He doesn't have to have it, but he delights in it.

Final principle. And this one is just absolutely incredible illustrated for us. Verses 16 through 18 let me read it to you. My first offense, no one came to my support. Everyone deserted me. But may it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the Lions mouth. And look at the confidence in this verse. Here's a guy facing death. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly Kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen. Here's the principle.

If you and I are going to be able to successfully cope with prison experiences, we must have confidence that God sovereignty. Confidence in his sovereignty. There'll be two things that will erode our confidence in God. One are the attacks of those on the outside. Notice what he says previously. Alexander the Coppersmith did me a great deal of harm, and I'm going to get him now. The Lord will repay him. And friend, there will always be a Burr under your divine saddle blanket. There will always be an Alexander the Copper Smith. You can just count on it. And you and I are either going to waste a whole lot of our emotional and spiritual energy trying to repay

them, trying to get them back, or we're going to trust God's sovereignty and say, hey, I'll let him take care of them. God can do a whole lot better job than you and I can. And we can't afford to dissipate our emotional and spiritual energy by focusing on vindication. God needs to do that.

But that's not the deepest pain that we feel. We can expect that we're going to face the oppression of those on the outside. But I'll tell you what, when you're wounded in the house of your friends, that's a deep hurt. And notice what Paul is saying. At my first defense, no one came to my support. I don't know about you. I'd be a little bit ticked if I had given my life, turn my back on my position in the Sanhedrin and had my people declare me a curse word. And I'd gone to prison many times, had been beaten, had been left for dead, had been shipwrecked. And I finally come before Nero and not a Christian stands up and has enough courage to show up there with me. What does Paul say? Let it not be held against them. Why can't he say that? Because for the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength.

If I had written the scenario to end Paul's life, I want to tell you it would have been a Cecil to Mill special. Nero would have captured the Apostle. He would have had him in prison. Posters would have gone up all over the city of Rome. Paul's going to get his come Sunday afternoon, 12:00 sharp, we have some preliminary warm ups feeding 100 Christians to the Lions. Paul's going to get it. It'd be headlines in all the local newspapers. Nero is going to make a personal appearance. He's going to sit in his own box seat. And there's going to be a showdown between this man, who claims that Jesus Christ is curios Lord, and Nero, who the Romans worship, is curious. And the TV cameras would feature this several weeks in advance. 60 Minutes would do a special on the Apostle Paul. And this thing would be built up and built up. And finally, the day

would come, and the throngs, the multitudes would pack into that Coliseum in Rome, and they'd have their preliminary exercise, and they'd waste 100 or so Christians. And finally, the trumpets would blow and the crowd would hush, and Paul would be let out to the center of the ring, a Roman soldier chained to each side. And Nero would stand up and point his bony finger at the Apostle Paul.

And he'd say, Paul, you claim that Jesus Christ is curious. There's only one curiosity, Caesar.

And he'd say, I'll give you one last opportunity. If you'll take the cup of wine held in the hand of that guard and pour it out in worship of me, I'll spare your life. And I can just see that little runt.

Paul turn his nose up at Nero and point his bony finger right back at his face and say, Listen,

Nero, there's only one curiosity, the Lord Jesus Christ. And I've served him all these years, and I

won't deny him that. And with contempt, Nero would say. Wait with him, and it'll leave him in

the center of the arenas. Head over to the gates to release the wild animals. And about that time,

over the walls we come, the Christians. They just pack the place till there's not room to let the

Lions lose. And finally, one of them would take the leadership, quiet the crowd, and he'd point

his finger at Nero and say, Nero, if you so much as lay a hand on the Apostle Paul, we will

personally tear you in pieces and feed you to the Lions. And about that time, down past a

Goodyear blimp would come the chariots of God. And they'd land on that infield, and that crowd

would be cleared. And Paul would snub his nose at Nero, walk out into that chariot right off into

the sunset. And I want to tell you something, friend. If anybody deserved to go out of life this

way, the Apostle Paul did. And here he is, rotten in a prison, knowing he's going to die.

Everybody's deserved. Why do you think he could say, Let it not be held against him? You want

to know why? When he was a young man persecuting the Church, a Church seized a man named

Steven, and they dragged him outside the town, and they throw him down on a heap and picked up stones to throw them at him, but they couldn't throw very well with their jackets on.

So they handed him to a fellow named Saul of Tarshis. And he held them, and he observed the first Christian martyr die. And just before Steven died, as you remember, he looked up to heaven and he pleaded with God, Father, forgive him. They don't know what they're doing. And I think God so indelibly burned that into his mind that here he comes, abandoned by his friends. Don't hold it against them. Well, I don't know what prisons you're experiencing, but I want to suggest to you tonight, on the planes of hesitation, bleach the bones of countless million who, at the verge of victory, sat down and waited and waiting, died when the heat turned up. That's when the glory shines the brightest. And that's when you and I need to learn to communicate with God's people. When we're hurting, we need to continue in God's purposes. Don't throw in the towel. We need Communion with God through his word. The Lord is my shepherd. He restores my soul, boy. And it needs it regularly. Doesn't Mindshare that then we need an unshakeable confidence in the character of God, so that as we're struggling with problems, we don't sit around and take our own spiritual and emotional pulse.

We don't sit in our little spiritual bathtub and bite our fingernails. We always flee to the character of God. He's not fail one person for 1 second of all eternity, and you're not going to be the first. Psalm 95, it says, God loath that generation, talking about the generation that wouldn't believe the report of Jacob and Caleb. And he swore in his wrath that they would never enter into his rest. Why? Because they dared to ask the question, Is the Lord among us or isn't it? What an

insult to a God who has committed himself irrevocably to us and friend, his call is irrevocable. You and I will be like Jesus Christ someday.

During the Second World War, in a Nazi concentration camp there's a Catholic priest who really knew and loved the Lord, he was having quite a significant Ministry with these desperate people. And he saw pain and suffering every day during this horrible experience. And one day, the guards came and grabbed hold of a man and started to drag him out of the compound toward the death Chambers. And as you and I would expect, he started plating and screaming and crying out desperately, don't take my life and don't separate me from my family.

This Catholic priest was watching this, and he said, don't take him, take me. And they did. They knew that he'd been having a significant Ministry in the lives of these people. This was the final showdown. This was the Super Bowl of the gods. And they were going to demonstrate once and for all that when this man's life was on the line, we'd see the stop of which he was made. So they dug a great big pit in the middle of this prison compound, threw this Catholic priest into the compound and left him there to die. And they thought, well, we'll let these prisoners see a man of the cloth die, we'll find out how valid his faith is. Well, they did. And until the moment this man died, he sang hymns of praise and worship. He turned that prison into a prism through which God's glory could shine. There's a young man observing all of this. It was not a believer. And when he saw the Catholic priest giving his life for this man and observed him dying, deserted, he committed his life to Jesus Christ. He went into the priesthood and now is a Cardinal in the Polish Catholic Church.

You never know now who will be observing as you cope with those prison experiences, friends are going to be there can't make an end run around that this world isn't our home. We don't belong, we're strangers and pilgrims here we don't fit. We never will be fulfilled and satisfied until we see him face to face. And so we have a choice to make. And that choice is this the surrender, the exchange of all that we are for what God has declared to be important. And if you and I are willing in our lives to come to that point Where we exchange our very lives for what God has declared to be important, we'll smile through our tears. Paul could say none of this suffering, this present suffering is anything to be compared to the glory that's going to be that's going to follow. None of the suffering of the present moment is joyous, but it's grievous, but afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of right relationships with God. That's what righteousness is being in right relationship with God, with man. I trust you count it all joy when pressure comes and you learn how to process it productively.

Let's pray, father, thank you for the wonder of your love? Thank you, father, that you care enough to schedule surgery? Thank you that you love us, Lord, thanks that underneath Are those everlasting arms? Thank you that like a shepherd you pick us up carry us in your poison? Lord, we are aware that those that wait on the Lord will renew their strength? They'll Mount up with wings as Eagles? They'll run and not be weary? They'll walk and not faint? Lord, feel around the rim of each heart tonight for those concerns and those fears that are there? And, father, we pray that the bomb of Gilead Would be applied? And that each one could leave here encouraged? Each one could say Amen? Each one could say thank you, Lord, that I'm important to you and that you've committed yourself irrevocably to me? Forgive me for ever asking if you're among us

or not? Instead, I want to praise your presence and respond to that presence in my life with praise and Thanksgiving and obedience we pray this in Christ's name.