

DON'T WASTE TROUBLE; USE IT !

Trouble is our servant, not our master - don't pray it away; use it !

The first natural reaction to trouble is to ask God to take it away, immediately. How many desperate, tear stained hours of pleading have been spent before God, blaming the devil for our troubles and quoting bible verses, holding God to His "promises". Many teeter on the brink of losing faith when no answer comes and when the trouble still seems as virulent as ever. In our humanity we are so impatient, so self centered and so presumptive. We want **immediate** results, we want our pain and inconvenience relieved first, and we **presume** that God is there at our beck and call just because our favorite bible verses seem to indicate we have a right to expect healing, protection and prosperity, without a lot of anxious waiting.

God has never been in a hurry. With Him a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. Though this universe that He has created is kept with minute and precise timing, to the millisecond, and seasons come and go, and planets follow perfectly defined orbits, nevertheless the passing of millenniums and the erosion of mountains and of deserts, over the ages, have proceeded without any anxious clock watching on His part. God views it all from the wide perspective of the passing of the ages - we see it only from our fleeting life span of a hand full of years. He sent us into this world on a prescribed mission and it is during this brief sojourn that we must be fashioned and made ready for the work of the kingdom and the ages to come.

There is so little "time" in which this "workmanship" (Eph.2:10) takes place that troubles, trials and chastisement seem to pile up on us, and we are never totally free of "tutors and governors" (Gal.4:2). He chastens and corrects us because He loves us. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son that He receiveth" (Heb.12:6). He **allows** us to suffer with Him so that we can reign and rule with Him. (2 Tim.2:12).

Perhaps it can be said that if the God of all patience is ever in a hurry, it is when He is transforming us into sons during our exceedingly short life span. So much has to take place, so many changes are needed to renew our hearts and minds, and some of us learn so very slowly.

The harder and more impure the metal, the hotter the furnace. Though He tests us and tries us in the furnace of life's troubles He does not abandon us there nor leave us to languish in desperate hope, nor does He take us **around** the furnace of trouble; He walks with us **through** the furnace (Dan.3:25). In our tearful hours, in our fearful hours, in our time of fading hope, when we think we are alone, He is there in the midst of the crisis, walking beside us giving us His strength, and when the time comes (and it always does) to leave that furnace He gives us a revelation of the reason for the time of testing - and we mature. Each test brings us nearer to the day when we hear "well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things I will make you ruler over many things" (Matt.25:21).

Our natural instinct is to protect ourselves, and we have been taught by the wisdom of the world that if we don't look after #1 no one else will. Some of our preachers have majored in positive thinking and self assertion and have evolved the motto: "If it's to be, it's up to me". We are encouraged by them to take control of our lives and make things happen. Success (usually evaluated in financial terms) becomes a

hallmark and a badge to be worn with pride in both secular and religious worlds - to the degree that it is almost impossible for these advocates and their students to ever give their lives, and the consequences of life, into the hands of God without question or condition. *"...children, how squeamish it is for those who have confidence in money to be entering into the kingdom of God! Easier it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be entering into the kingdom of God" (Matt 10:25,26 Concordant Literal)*

"It is a fearful ('awesome') thing to fall into the hands of the Living God" (Heb.10:31)
"...let me fall now into the hand of the Lord; for very great are His mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man." (1 Chron. 21:13). It is even more fearful to trust our future to our own hands, as is expressed in the following statement:

O God, thou living God, let me fall into Thy hands; it is only in Thy hands I can be perfectly safe. I know that to fall into Thy hands is indeed a fearful thing; I know that is the beginning of all my fears, for it is the beginning of all my responsibilities. In Thy hands I shall learn the awfulness of my spiritual being, in Thy hands I shall learn how little it has fulfilled its destiny. Nevertheless it is in Thy hands alone that I would be; the fear that comes from contact with Thee is indeed the beginning of wisdom. There would be no penalty to me so great as to fall out of Thy hands, to be out of Thy hands is to be dead. There is a pain with Thee, which is not found without Thee. But it is the pain of love, which is the pain of life Divine. Translate me into that life. Lift me into union with thine own divine being. Raise me into fellowship with that power of that love which is the power of Thy suffering. Take me into Thy hands and hold me in Thy fear. Let me learn in Thy life how solemn is my own. Let me see in Thy glory how poor is my own... -unquote (author unknown). 1Chron.21:13; Prov.14:26,27; Eccl.12:13; Phil. 3:10

A "successful" Christian life is not necessarily one that is totally free of trouble, where every prayer is answered to our satisfaction and we are able financially to indulge in comfortable living and give generously to every good cause. The word "success", from God's point of view, usually means something totally different than that which is found in Webster's dictionary, or even in the commonly accepted vocabulary of the success oriented preachers of the modern electronic and printed media.

Joseph, who endured the treachery of his brethren, the guile and seduction of the pharaoh's wife and wrongful imprisonment, was, from God's point of view, a success !

The three Hebrew children who refused to bow to the king's heathen wishes and were cast into a fiery furnace for disobeying the king, were a success !

Daniel who was thrown into a den of hungry lions because he prayed to God three times a day, was a success !

Peter and John and other apostles disobeyed the law repeatedly by preaching the gospel of Christ and in the process were jailed and beaten on several occasions. In God's eyes they were a success !

Stephen, *"full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people"*, and the hierarchy of the synagogues suborned false witnesses to speak against Stephen and to accuse him of blasphemy (Acts 6:14) and after Stephen at length (Acts 7:1-60) recounted the history of Israel and its failings, its backsliding and eventually its betrayal and murder of Jesus Christ, he looked up into heaven *"and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. ...they cried out with a loud voice...ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city and stoned him...and they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus*

receive my spirit... he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:55-60). He was stoned to death. He was a success !

Paul endured stoning, beating, imprisonment, whipping, hunger, thirst, deprivation, treachery by his brethren, a thorn in the flesh, and at the end execution. He too, according to God's dictionary, was a success !

Uncounted thousands (millions?) of martyrs have been stoned, sawn asunder, slain with the sword, burned at the stake, starved to death, thrown to lions and tortured to death. Even in our generation many have made the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of Christ. They all were a success !

However, dying physically for Christ is not the only proof of "martyrdom" and "success". It can sometimes be more difficult to live for Him then to die for Him. A successful life for Christ requires "dying daily", total commitment and abandonment to God, leaving the results and the consequences to the will of God as we take our place in the overall Plan Of The Ages. Dying physically for Him, at the end, may take only a few moments of anguish and pain, whereas "living" for Him can be a life long struggle of pain, privation, sorrow and loneliness.

Loneliness has been the lot of many of God's people, set aside in a corner, in the back side of the desert, in a bed of wracking pain, troubles and trials : known only to them and their God and to those to whom these saints of God ministered during their life time of pain. Their very life was a sermon, a ministry, and many a book or an hymn has come out of such a life of trouble and testing and has been a lasting memorial and blessing, ministering long after death took the saint home. These all are and were a success !

Trouble and tribulation ("threshing") are not outside the pale and the common experience of spiritual Christians. Spirituality and consecration are not a guarantee of immunity from trouble. Just the opposite is true. Usually the process of reaching the place of consecration only makes one a fit candidate for tribulation and 'threshing'.

Sometimes it seems the more one seeks God, and the closer one gets to God, the hotter the furnace becomes. Could the reason be that "Our God is a consuming Fire" and the closer we get to God the closer we get to the "fire"? The threshing floor of our experience in God is "thoroughly purged", the chaff is burned up and the golden grain that cannot burn is gently gathered into His garner (Matt 3:10-12). Fire burns extraneous chaff, it burns dross from the gold, and consumes our treasures of wood, hay, and stubble. Fire is corrective, purgative, and ultimately final. All that is combustible vanishes in the "flame" and is no more. It leaves behind only the non-perishable things which, when it comes to fire, are really very few in number. Only a few things outlast fire with any lasting value. Fire is the determining factor as to what has value and what does not. "Our God is a consuming fire" : He does not destroy us (i.e. what we ARE in Christ). He destroys only extraneous things, that which we have accumulated and that clings to us from our close association with the world and the pursuit of its finite treasures.

And this whole process hurts ! There is no spiritual Novocain, no ether that will put us to sleep, or numb us, during the trip through the fire. God intends to teach us; and we learn by serious participation, hands-on, on-the-job training. He is making sons that will be fit for serious work in the kingdom, performing tasks that will require experience, patience ("tribulation worketh patience"), wisdom and knowledge that are acquired during the furnace experience of our life's sojourn.

Trouble is our friend. It is the crucial part of our classroom curriculum; it is the sandpaper in the hands of The Carpenter; the fire that bakes the clay in The Potter's kiln. It drives us to God. Without it we are aimless, footloose playboys of the universe; of no intrinsic value to the Kingdom.

Trouble comes in many guises. It does not always meet us head on. We do not always see it coming - hardly ever, in fact. Sometimes we pray for 'good things' to happen and as we begin to see answers to our prayers, and we enthusiastically thank God for answered prayer, and snuggle down into the comfort of the good feeling and the prospects of 'a better life' we let all our friends know what a good God we have and how He has answered our prayers. A mountain top experience! A time of rejoicing. The future looks so bright! The Sunday morning service was fantastic. The worship meeting and song service was glorious.

On Monday trouble knocked on the back door. From that point on everything went down hill - from a human viewpoint. The humiliation of falling from the mountain top to the valley below is an experience that only the participants can later (sometimes much later) relate with true feeling and understanding. It can take a long time to realize, in the midst of the pain and confusion, that the God of the mountain top is also the God of the valley, and that more is learned and accomplished, more quickly, in the valley experience than on the mountain top. Plowing, sowing, and harvesting are done in the valley. The mountain top experience is usually brief at best, and from that lofty position God allows us only momentary glimpses of glory lest we, like Paul said in 2 Cor.12, be carried away by our glorying in revelations and visions and lose sight of Him who alone is worthy of our glorying ('Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me' Jer.9:24). Paul continued, 'And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of the adversary to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.' (2 Cor.12:7).

Humanly speaking, if we stayed on the mountain top too long we would eventually either starve or freeze to death. Our humanity is not suited to such extremes. The rarefied air momentarily alerts our mind and peaks our wonder and amazement at the vistas of God's beautiful creation, but then it's time to go back to the arena of God's 'workmanship' (Eph.2:10). Truth is not directly dependent or subject to human reasoning and comes only by revelation (a true spiritual mountain-top experience) because these things that are 'not lawful to be uttered' are a private conversation between God and His sons, and usually take but a moment of hallowed and blessed time, hence the reason for such a short sojourn on the "mountain top" of life. A "mountain-top" revelation is given by God to be translated into ministry during our earthly sojourn and not to be turned inward for our own glorification, and that we not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think and thus be exalted above measure: 'of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities' (Paul: 1 Cor.12:5). For the spiritual Christians a "thorn in the flesh" usually takes care of this possibility. A mountain top experience for a "natural" Christian (1 Cor.2:14) is one of "feeling high", of elation, the possession of things and of positive circumstances - very much dependent on physical well being. As a result, the fall off the mountain is often a catastrophe, not understood with the natural mind (human reasoning versus revelation).

When times of humiliation come, when we fall from the heights, we have the promise Peter had in Luke 22:32: 'I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted ('turned back'), strengthen thy brethren'. In Luke 22:29 Jesus had just finished promising the disciples an appointed kingdom, "As My Father hath

appointed unto Me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel”.

In the next breath He said, “Simon, Simon, the accuser has desired to have you...to sift you as wheat...but I have prayed for you”. Peter, very sure of himself, said, “I’ll go anywhere for you Lord, even to prison and to death”. Before the day was done he fell from the mountain top into shame, humiliation and disgrace. He blatantly lied at a time when he should have confirmed his words of Luke 22:33. What an opportunity he had to prove his love for Jesus and how ignominiously he failed. What a disaster. Or was it? Or was this a wonderful example of God’s “workmanship” in action?

This was not a stereotypical account of the defeat and self destruction of a child of God. Christ used Peter’s humanity and natural weakness to teach him and the disciples a valuable lesson. For three happy years Peter walked closely with Jesus and if he listened and observed he must surely have formed a foundation of loyalty and conviction that would sustain him through most circumstances. Alas, his humanity proved frail and his human heart was unchanged (Jer.17:9) and in the crunch cowardice surfaced. Peter was devastated and ashamed. From the mountain top to the dark valley below in a few minutes of time. He had been warned that this would happen (Luke 22:32) and it probably gnawed at him. But it seems he did not remember the promise of Jesus, “I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not”. **What a prayer partner!** (Luke 22:32) (John 17:9-26).

In the context of the account of Peter’s denial in Mark 14, Luke 22, and John 18, it becomes apparent that Jesus did not blame Peter for his weakness. Jesus knew his makeup and knew that he was only dust (Gen.3:19; Job 10:9; 30:19; Psalm 103:14; Eccl.3:20) and that Peter needed this experience, excruciating as it was, if ever he was to be of any use to God and His Kingdom. Peter’s natural reaction at the arrest of Jesus was to “fellow afar off” and eventually when Jesus was taken away Peter sat at the fire that had been kindled in the Hall. He was brooding, disappointed and perplexed. He had been so sure that Jesus had come to take over the kingdom and to throw off the rule of the Romans, but now, as he sat there doubts flooded his mind. While he brooded, “a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with Him. And he denied Him saying, Woman, I know Him not...another saw him, and said Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man I know not what thou sayest, and immediately, while he yet spoke, the cock crew. The Lord turned and looked upon Peter...and Peter went out, and wept bitterly”. (Luke 22:56-62).

The next few days must have been torment for Peter. He probably slept very little. The shame of his lying and cowardice, and the disappointment over the crushed hope for the restoration of the nation of Israel, finally prompted him to blurt out, “I’m going fishing”. Five of the disciples said, “We will go with you”, and they all entered into a ship and fished all night, and caught nothing. Perhaps they were not trying very hard, they were still rebounding from all that had happened; Peter’s denial, the crucifixion of Jesus, the dashed hopes of the recovery of the kingdom of Israel, and the uncertainty of the future.

At the break of day, with an empty ship, they neared the shore and saw a figure on the bank who called to them and said, “have you any meat?” They said, “No”, and He told them to cast their nets on the right side of the ship where immediately their nets filled to the point of bursting. John recognized it was Jesus, and said so, and immediately Peter dove into the water, impetuous as ever. Jesus served a breakfast of broiled fish and bread and ate with them and then in the presence of the other disciples He turned to Peter, and with a gentle and forgiving spirit He entered into casual conversation with Peter, without rebuke, as though nothing had happened.

Jesus knew how miserable and heartbroken Peter was and how full of dread he was, fully expecting Jesus to reject him totally.

In this regard I would like to quote from an article by J.W.Follette: " Jesus had no rebuke for Peter. Instead He enters into a conversation as casually as in the days of old. He does not show by any gesture that there is anything the matter. His looks and spirit do all that is necessary. After they have eaten He says, 'Peter, lovest thou Me more than these?' Some think He was referring to the fish since he had denied the Lord and left his great calling to catch them. But we find in the Greek that the word **these** does not refer to the fish but to the others standing by. But why should He ask that? Had Peter not told Him twice that he loved Him more than that even to the measure of death? Yes, so Jesus keeps it fresh in His mind. Does it seem foolish and meaningless that the Lord should have said over and over three times, 'Lovest thou Me,' etc.? But Jesus did not say that. Read it in the original. There you will find two words for love are used. One is *agapao* and means a love, deep and of a sacrificial measure. It is the strongest word in Greek for love, the one used to show God's love for the world, etc.. The other word is *fileo*. This means to be very dear, and to be fond of, and is used to show affection such as brotherly love and feeling. It is a weaker word than the other.

Jesus is wise enough to use the very word that would characterize the statement Peter had made. So He says, 'Peter,(agapao) lovest thou Me?' etc.. He uses the strong word, for had not Peter declared his love in such lofty terms? (Luke 23:33). Doubtless Peter's failure had taught him a lesson. He had found by now that he did not love Him to the extent that he would die for Him. Peter knows what the Lord is getting at and in answer says, "Lord, Thou knowest that I (fileo) am very fond of Thee." He does not dare again to use the extravagant word he once used. Jesus takes the confession for what it is worth and says, "Feed My lambs." Again, the second time Jesus speaks and says, 'Peter, (agapao) lovest thou Me?' He again uses the strong word. Peter does some strong thinking. He answers the Lord, "Thou knowest, Lord, I am very fond of Thee," using the weaker word again. And all this time the disciples do not seem to know just what it is all about. A third time Jesus speaks, "Simon, son of Jonus" - and here we get a beautiful lesson. When we cannot measure up to the strong place He would have us reach, He comes down to us and meets us in the measure of love of which we are capable. So this time Jesus says, 'Are you very fond of Me' (fileo),or, 'Am I dear to you?'. This breaks poor Peter and he confesses, 'Yes, Lord, Thou knowest I am fond of Thee, Thou knowest everything.' Three times he failed the Lord and denied Him, and three times he confesses afresh his love for Him.

It was all the Lord wanted. He gained the victory in Peter and yet never rebuked him before the others or made him ashamed before them." - end quote

Peter was no different than the rest of us and he was not immune to trouble. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son that He receiveth". If we are one of His (John 17:9,10) we will, sooner or later, know all about trouble and failure. After his encounter with Jesus, in John chapter 21, Peter's life changed dramatically. In verses 18 and 19 the Lord told Peter he would indeed have the opportunity to live for Christ, and to die for God, as was Peter's wish back in Matt.26:35 and Luke 23:33 ; albeit somewhat rash at the time, and without understanding.

Now he was back on track and the evidence of this fact is found in a blazing trail of scriptures that tell the story of the restoration, renewal, and Spirit indwelling of a man totally sold out to the One Who forgave him there on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (Matt.18:21,22). Here he finally became in deed and in truth a "Fisher of men", as was previously promised by Jesus (Matt.4:18; Mark 1:16,17; John 21:17). In Acts 1:13 we see Peter mentioned first, of all those in the upper room, and in verse

15 he is the spokesman reminding the 120 in the room of the fall of Judas, after they proceeded to appoint a replacement in the person of Matthias. In Acts 2:14 Peter again is the spokesman as he stands up with the eleven and explains what had just happened as the Spirit was poured out upon them, and speaks of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter is again mentioned, several times, in chapter 3 and 4, in a leading capacity as they minister healing and the truth of the gospel of Christ. In Acts 5:3 Peter took the initiative in dealing with Ananias and Sapphira who had lied about an offering they allegedly had given to God's work.

In chapter 5 Peter is used of God in miracles of healing, and many believed on Jesus Christ. The disciples were jailed, beaten and released. Peter had no problem, by this time, keeping his priorities straight. No longer did fear overshadow his zeal for the Lord. In Acts 8 the Lord used Peter to deal with Simon the sorcerer and in chapter 9 he ministered healing to Aeneas and Tabatha (Dorcus). In chapter 10 the Lord taught Peter a graphic lesson through a vision : that he should not call any man common or unclean and that God is no respecter of persons. In chapter 11 Peter had to deal with the thorny and legalistic issue of circumcision and because of his vision he was able to judge correctly. In chapter 12 he was jailed and the messenger of the Lord released him from prison.

In chapter 15 legalism reared its head and Peter and Paul had a dispute resulting in Paul going one way and Peter another. Peter re affirms that God has made no difference between the circumcised and uncircumcised and in Christ "we shall be saved, even as they". In Galatians 2:7,8 Paul confirmed that "the gospel of the circumcision" was committed to Peter, and "the gospel of the uncircumcision" was committed to Paul "that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision". A study of the Acts and of the Epistles reveals the struggles Peter faced with "false brethren" who slipped in unawares, to bring God's people back into legal bondage and the traditions of the letter of the law.

In 1 Peter 1:1 : "Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers ("dispersed") scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia". In 2 Peter 1:1,13-16 : "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ...yea I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed (John 13:36; 21:18,19)I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance...we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye witnesses of His majesty".

Peter anticipated the end of his course, having fought a good fight, remembering what Jesus told him many years before how he would die, not ignominiously but with courage, honour and integrity. According to the records of historic tradition Peter died by crucifixion, head down. The impetuous, spineless and prevaricating fisher of fish, by the miracle and patience of the grace of God became a fisher of men, a fire brand in the hand of God that left a trail of burning hearts, set on fire for God, fit for the kingdom of God.

The accounts of the hardships Peter and the other apostles endured would fill many books. They did not spend hours daily praying to be relieved and rescued from trouble. They gloried in tribulation. They traded ease and comfort and the gingerbread of life for the way of the cross and "the fellowship of His suffering". Trouble and tribulation played a large part in the committed lives and ministry of the apostles. It was like salt seasoning the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom. It helped preserve the meat of the Word and drove the apostles and fellow laborers

closer to God and to each other. It produced unity and expelled false prophets and their traditions.

God uses trouble like a Craftsman, which He is. Troubles are the tools of His trade. We come into His 'shop' like rough pieces of shapeless wood, full of knots and perverse grains. After the rough sawing and removing of bark and extraneous limbs the divine Sawyer cuts off slabs from each side to make squared beams of wood, ready for the lathes and the planes. After a great deal of sawdust, shavings, and rasping, the furniture begins to take shape and now comes the finishing. The finishing process takes longer than the initial forming. The trips through the lathe are more precise, the configurations are time consuming, the sanding is tedious, the many coats of lacquer and varnish are applied over long intervals, between more sandings, and inspection becomes more critical, until we hear the Master Carpenter say, 'well done', and the finished furniture finds its place in the service of the kingdom. *"...and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22)*

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17)

"...all that will live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12)

"...we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience" (Rom. 5:3)

"...now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Heb. 12:11)

There are many more verses such as these, stating unequivocally that the committed Christian will suffer persecution and will have tribulation and will be afflicted by pain and trials, and so, on the basis of such evidence, why is there so much time and effort spent in Christendom in prayer and pleading to avoid and alleviate and side step these problems? The Lord has not promised us exemption - in God's Plan tribulation is part of our inheritance. Tribulation is a word uniquely used by God in His dealings with His children, His chosen. The word tribulation has the meaning of 'threshing'. The farmer threshes his wheat crop for only one reason: for the golden grain. He is not interested in wasting time beating up on the straw or the weeds, his attention is focused on doing what is necessary to extract the grain and see it safely deposited into the granary. The chaff, straw and weeds are later burned to make way for the next crop.

"Tribulation worketh patience". The golden grain of patience, long suffering, and kindness comes from this process. The divine alchemy that turns crass and ordinary human nature into mercy, love, and wisdom is the transforming power of the Spirit of God that makes trouble a servant and brings forth the best in us.

How can we best utilize trouble so that we do not lose the advantage that is given us by God? Rather than justify oneself and become bitter and resentful in the process we should see trouble as a magnificent privilege. We can react either in our human reasoning and natural logic and become critical and cynical or we can accept it as a gift from God and allow it to break us and to mold us so that God can use us as ministers of "fire" to set others free and in turn set them on fire.

Trouble alone does not make us strong or spiritually wise, nor does it in itself have some magic transforming power. In Romans 8:28 we are reminded that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to

His purpose. This verse however is not meant for the casual Christian, it is meant for the committed and surrendered Christian. Natural minded Christians do not understand how trials and tribulations can be God's will. They picture "successful" Christianity as "victorious living" that is free of trouble and that abounds in financial and physical possessions. They look for signs of "success" from a natural man's viewpoint. Their theological mentors have convinced them that success is a promise of God that is given in the form of tangible health, wealth, and possessions.

"Trouble will either make us bitter or better". A lot of Christians are looking for justice. They demand justice in our legal system, in the government, internationally, and in their private lives. They, like the rest of the worldly community, are ready to sue at the drop of a hat. We are prone to believe that we have the same right for redress as does the world and in the process we use the logic and natural wisdom of the world to obtain a "fair and equal" judgment. But, if our desire is to live a victorious, Spirit filled life then we need to drop the word "justice" from our vocabulary. Justice ("vengeance") is the Lord's prerogative, and He will repay in His way and in His time, and God's time table is not always clear. Even Jesus said in Mark 13:32 that there were times that even He did not know, only His Father.

We need to take care that we do not become bitter and resentful just because we think we have been treated unjustly and now feel it is our right to expect an apology or financial redress. (See Matt.6:14,15). It hurts even more when the "guilty" party is another Christian. But as we partake of His grace and love we can overcome and live above the hurt and the disappointments, and even, like Paul, "glory in tribulation" (Rom.5:3) and grow in grace and mature in the wisdom of God. God allows these circumstances to trouble us for a purpose. Like Joseph, we can in the end say, "But as for you, you thought it evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (Gen.50:20). Even Jesus, "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered". (Heb.5:8). "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim.2:11,12).

Quote: "Trouble, if correctly used, will bring you great peace and a deep surrender of spirit which nothing else can work in you. I have not gone far on the way but I can give as my personal testimony that these deeper revelations of truth and clear understanding of the things of God have come only through suffering. I cannot offer you any other method. May God grant you grace to take your share of trouble. Don't pray for exemption, but may He teach you and use this strange servant to build your life into noble proportions of strength and beauty, and from your life healing streams of understanding and love will flow to broken lives and timid, fearful hearts "For he who suffers most has most to give" - unquote

In the midst of our trials and the troubles of life the Lord says, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light". (Matt.11:29,30). All the while that we think our burden is so heavy, and just too hard to bear, and we're so tired, it is in reality light because it is He that is bearing the load, even though we are yoked together with Him. If we find the load too heavy it may be that we are trying to carry the load in our own strength, and we are carrying weight that is of our own making, that He has not laid on us, nor expects us to carry. Amidst the noise and pressures of life He alone gives rest and the gift of peace and serenity; and the ability to be still and know that He is God.

E Al Stahl

TROUBLE IS A SERVANT

All of us know trouble - at least I hope we do;
Trouble is a servant, but known as such to few.
We are taught to shun her and, if she comes too near,
Seldom do we face her but run away in fear.
Good and bad must meet her, the universe around-
Sinners, saints, kings and knaves - she comes where man is found.
Always make her serve you, for she can serve you well,
Just HOW you may use her your life will always tell.
Trouble is but passive - it's by our power to will
We make her either bless us or do the soul some ill.
How do you translate her from phrases filled with pain
To messages of strength - from loss to endless gain?
By faith we see behind the outer frightful mask
A servant in disguise, to do a gracious task.
Hearts may feel her wounding and life may suffer loss;
Faith translates her working, as freeing gold from dross.
Trouble will discover to any yielded heart
Hidden depths of power it only knows in part;
Sympathizing power, and love that understands;
Strength to help another with trouble-tested hands.
Trouble will release you from self and make you kind,
Adding new dimensions to heart and soul and mind.
Do not shun this servant, but look beyond her task
To beauty she will work - for which you daily ask.
Always see in trouble a chance to grow in grace,
Not a stroke of evil to hinder in your race.
Live the life triumphant above her fiery darts;
Rich fruitage will be yours to share with needy hearts.

- John Wright Follette