



Grace News Today

VOLUME 29
JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2003

An Outreach of Grace Evangelistic Ministries, Inc. • P. O. Box 17246 • Nashville, TN 37217-7246 • (615) 365-0015

“Faith alone in Christ alone”

Greetings from your missionary partners here at Grace Evangelistic Ministries. In our wildest imagination, we cannot begin to fathom what God in His matchless and sublime grace is doing for and through this ministry. Make no mistake about it, when we claim that Grace Evangelistic Ministries is God's handiwork, we do so without apology and without any reservation! In fact, the only way to explain it is to attribute everything to God! We stand in awe and reverence of His work and majesty as we echo the words of the Egyptian magician: "[Surely] this is the finger of God[!]" (Exodus 8:19a). To Him alone we stand in salute! What solace to know that His work continues unhindered.

In the midst of our Lord's compassion for the lost souls, He said to His disciples, "... The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech [Greek: it's imperative that you urge] the Lord of harvest to send out workers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:37, 38). Indeed, we truly lack proper ways of expressing gratitude to our heavenly Father for considering us to be vessels of honor in His Harvest. Indeed, the honor bestowed on us reflects His grace policy—never earned, never deserved! Consequently, Grace Evangelistic Ministries and our partners are full of gratitude to our Heavenly Father.

The year 2002 ended with a divine footnote underscoring our claim that He is the One who has employed us as workers in His mission field. If you'll recall, we planned a missionary trip to Africa covering four countries in November and December. But the funds were not forthcoming; however, our confidence in God's provision remained firm, rooted, and unwavering. Our attitude as God's slaves is this: If God is the One who opens the doors to Africa, He alone will provide the means to get there; and if not, then we'd have plenty of time to go fishing! But God has a great sense of humor. Suffice it to say, we had only one day leeway in which to cancel the trip. Instead, we have an amazing testimony to His faithfulness: The day we intended to call our African coordinator, Darlington Elekwa, to cancel the missionary journey, was the very day the funds arrived in the mail! In one day, we were given what we normally get in one month! Not too late, not too early,

provision was made. In essence, His provision implies, "Not so fast children—put back your fishing hooks—you are going to Africa!"

We pause to give thanks to the Faithful One, for His timely provision. Also, thank you to all who responded to God's voice to support us in such a generous way and to the multitude of prayer warriors for their relentless prayer barrage. You prayed; our Father answered. It was that simple. Paul expressed, "And [our] God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

On the last day of December 2002, we paused and took an inventory of the Lord's accomplishments here at Grace Evangelistic Ministries and counted our many blessings. We were amazed, again, at what GOD ALONE had done. And that should be true for you too. In light of His work, we were compelled to make King David's phrase our own: "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. But who are [we] and who [are our partners] that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You. For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our [dead believers in the Lord] were; our days on the earth are like a shadow... O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided... [for Your work], it is from Your hand, and all is Yours. Since [we] know O... God that You try the heart and delight in uprightness, [we] in the integrity of [our] heart, have willingly offered all these things; so now with joy [we] have seen Your people [our partners] make their offerings willingly to You [Father, we are forever grateful for all that You did for and through us]" (I Chronicles 29:11-17).

The year 2003 began with our Heavenly Father providing for us in a most unusual way—using His children, our partners in His mission field, to

start our year with a contribution totaling what we normally would receive in three months or so. Once again, we are reminded of His words through the Prophet Isaiah: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you [don't allow economic trends to cause loss of sleep], for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you [My child, GEM and other ministries that serve Me faithfully] with My [integrity] right hand" (41:10). And in Haggai His claim is sobering, "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine," declares the Lord of hosts" (2:8).

We wish to begin this year by encouraging you, our partner in Christ, to keep making perception and application of sound Bible teaching your highest priority, which will, without doubt, yield spiritual growth and the capacity for life's experiences and an abundance of blessings both in time and in eternity future. How marvelous that you and I have been entrusted with the greatest assignment in human history—the ministry of reconciliation. Thus we read, "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (II Corinthians 5:18-20). This is the message we share both at home and abroad.

As we serve in His mission field, our financial policy is ever the same: We do not solicit funds. We believe that God provides financial support for this missionary body by permitting believers like you to exercise their freewill, solely a matter between you and the Lord. As it is so aptly put in the Pauline epistle, "Let each [believer] do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves [a believer who's giving is gratitude-motivated]" (II Corinthians 9:7). We earnestly yearn for your fervent prayers as we strive day and night to glorify our Father to the maximum.

Dear Heavenly Father, we come to You with humility and recognizing Your faithfulness to each and everyone of us. We praise You for who and what You are. We thank You for what You have accomplished for and through this ministry. We equally thank You for all those You've called to be partners with us. Father, we are extremely grateful.

Heavenly Father, this country is experiencing the most severe turbulence in its history. And our president, George W. Bush, is at the crossroads earnestly searching for guidance. Father, please clothe him with wisdom so that his decisions would be compatible with Your plan for Your missionary nation, U.S.A. Father, we pray that this nation be revived spiritually, economically, and otherwise. We pray for our supporters, that You may continue to shower them with financial blessing so that Your support through them to our missionary endeavors will not be hindered.

Father, we pray that You use us greatly this year to bring honor and glory to Yourself. We lift up all this prayer in the name of the One who loved us and died as a substitute for us—Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

"The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Israel is our fortress" (Psalm 46:7).

While I remain profoundly grateful to you—our partners.

Yours in the grip of His grace,

Moses C. Onwubiko

President; Grace Evangelistic Ministries

“You shall know the Truth and the Truth shall set you free”

(John 8:32).

WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

GOD'S PROVIDENCE HAS NO BOUNDS

The primary objective of Satan is to disarm and make you a casualty in the spiritual warfare. He works on this objective relentlessly. One clever tactic is to block the pipeline of Bible doctrine in your soul with a plug of fear and uncertainty. Once he achieves that, your ability to draw and quench the fire of doubt with the spiritual water of Bible doctrine is wiped out. Consequently, the heat of the fire inevitably becomes stress in the soul and you are forced to examine every minute detail of your life with human viewpoint, rather

than divine viewpoint. Let's say it another way: Instigating fear in the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is unquestionably Satan's most dangerous weapon. And he uses it well.

The truth of the matter is that once you are in a state of fear, you become irrational and unable to think objectively in the light of divine viewpoint. My questions are these: Are you currently in a state of fear? Are you afraid that you may lose your present job and be unable to pay your bills? Have you lost your job and are afraid that you may never make both ends meet? Or, are you afraid that you may be a victim of terrorism? Again and again, you are beckoned by God to "Be strong [by means of application of Bible doctrine] and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the Lord your God is the One who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6); "Do not fear, for I am with you" (Isaiah 41:10a); "For I am the Lord your God, who holds your right hand, who says to you, 'Do not fear, I will help you'" (Isaiah 41:13).

WHAT ABOUT YOUR DAILY PROVISION?

Here's King David's testimony to God's faithfulness: "I have been young, and now I am old; yet I have not seen [not even once] the righteous [a graced out believer] forsaken, or his descendants begging bread" (Psalm 37:25). And the author of Hebrews put it this way: "For He Himself has said, 'I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU'" (13:5c). He didn't say that He would desert you when you lose your job. Rather, His promise is crystal clear; and above all, both the elect and fallen angels heard that promise. It boils down to this: God's promise to "never desert you" is at stake. Do you know what else is at stake? A component of His essence—Veracity! The truth of the matter is that if God should fumble in one iota of His Word, He would cease to function as the God of veracity; and that would leave us in the bitter cold.

Now you see why Matthew recorded our Lord saying, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not [should not, will not, and cannot] pass away [or go unfulfilled!]" (24:35). You may say to me, "Moses, you don't understand, I lost my job last week!" That's true, I may never understand, but the truth of the matter is that God promises "to help you" (Isaiah 41:10); and "never to forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). Whether or not anyone understands, God's Word stands

forever. Another person may say to me, "You don't really know what it's like to go hungry for two days!" While I may not know, there is One who does know—the God-Man, Jesus Christ. He tested every category of suffering that you and I would ever face—including going hungry for forty days. We are told, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses [or suffering], but One who has been tempted [or tested] in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrew 4:15). Therefore, my friend, no matter how dim your situation may look, slam your trust on Him and rest assured that He will provide EVERYTHING you need to fulfill His plan for your life so long as you remain Heavenly-minded.

SHOULD YOU LIVE IN FEAR REGARDING TERRORISM?

Satan says "yes". But the Word of God says emphatically "no"! Here is the truth of the Bible: God, in His omniscient, infinite wisdom and grace has allotted you "x" number of years to fulfill His plan for your life. King David knew that first hand when he said, "Your [Omniscient] eyes have seen my unformed substance [fetus]; and in Your [sovereign] book they were all written, the **days that were ordained for me**, when as yet there was not one of them" (Psalm 139:16). God is Sovereign; and that means that His decree is eternal—subject not to change—no matter what! God has ordained your days on planet earth. It's that simple.

His Word is comfort and encouragement: "For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper, and from the deadly pestilence [or biological and chemical weaponry]. He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge; His **faithfulness** is a shield and bulwark [fortification, barricade or a wall]. You [absolutely] need not be afraid of the terror by night, or the arrow [the suicide bombers] that flies by day...no evil will befall you, nor will any plague come near your [dwelling]. For He [God, the sovereign One] will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all your ways" (Psalm 91:3-11). You read it correctly. Read the last sentence again. Yes, God has assigned you your own bodyguard—an elect angel—perhaps more than one! If that's not enough, God Himself is your shield (Genesis 15:1).

Let's zoom into the heart of the infallible Word of God. In Luke's account we read, "For [king]

David **after** he had **served** [God's purpose for his life] in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers, and underwent decay" (Acts 13:36). You see, David died only after he had served God's purpose for His life, and not before. So, my friend, you "ain't going nowhere" until you have fulfilled every letter of God's plan for your life. So fly any airline with that confidence. Drive your car with that comfort; and live your daily life with the solace that "The eternal God is [your] dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27). As long as the Lord sees fit to keep you alive, He is under obligation to provide everything necessary to keep you alive. And when the time for you to depart comes, you will not stay one nana second longer. This is the beauty of the assurance we have in Christ.

God the Holy Spirit directed the apostle Paul to write these words of encouragement to believers in his day, and it's applicable to you today: "And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Roman 8:17, 18). No question about it, we are living in the most turbulent time in man's history—a time when America is experiencing great turmoil! Unquestionably, most of it is due to suffering the believer has caused. A large segment of believers has ignored or forgotten, outright, how the founding fathers of this country got here and why we are where we are today—the super power of the world in every sense of the word.

God in His matchless grace appointed this country to be His vehicle to spread the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ to the world and to be a mirror that would reflect His glory. He also made us the salt of the earth, but sadly, we are gradually losing our flavor and preservative power. We were reminded two years ago that "...if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these [mandates and assignments], if instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments and so break my covenant, I in turn, will do this to you: **I will appoint over you a sudden terror** [I will endorse the work of terrorists], consumption and fever that shall waste the eyes and cause the soul to pine away [hit the panic button], also

you shall sow your seed uselessly...you shall flee when no one is pursuing you (Leviticus 26:14-17). We are experiencing everything therein.

We're frantically buying up truckloads of duck tape, sounding alarms, blowing whistles when no one is pursuing us. I concur with what Pastor Clay Ward once said: "Many people are asking, 'How can a loving God let this 9-11 happen to us?'" He turned the question upside down, "What people should actually ask is 'How can a loving God—the God of justice—**NOT** let the event of 9-11 happen to us?'" Indeed there is irony in what he said. We are now in collateral suffering because many believers have gone so far in the wrong direction from God's plan for their lives. Many people are losing their jobs by the thousands. Many major corporations, airline industries, and what not are filing for bankruptcy protections—the list goes on. What about the remnant—those who are marching to the high ground of spiritual maturity—a pivot of believers for whose sake we are not utterly destroyed? Of course, this remnant will continue to enjoy the most protection and provision that heaven can offer.

"Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread [its economy], send famine against it, and cut off from it both man and beast, even though these three men [of great spiritual integrity] Noah, Daniel, and Job [and other believers like them] were in its midst, by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves,' declares the Lord God." (Ezekiel 14:12-14). Elsewhere, Jeremiah wrote, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat [recession] comes; but its leaves [daily grace provision] will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit" (17:7, 8). Therefore, my friend, no matter how dark things may look, no matter what your situation, the bottom line is crystal clear: "Those who trust in Him will never be put to shame!" So you need not let the lay-off statistics or tumbling stock market prices render you into a helpless bundle of nerves; rather, relax and take a view of our situation through the high-powered lens of His infallible Word which says, "I WILL NEVER DESERT

YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU" (Hebrews 13:5c). That's a promise my friend, and that's all you or I need—His Word!

DOCTRINE OF GRACE

Taught by Reverend Moses C. Onwubiko
Lesson 15

(Continued from volume 28, lesson 14)

THORN-IN THE-FLESH SUFFERING

In our last installment of volume 28, we briefly examined the five major categories of suffering: (1) Self-manufactured or self-induced suffering (2) Divine discipline (3) Spiritual growth dynamics suffering (4) the G4 Convention-endorsed-suffering—the most honorable suffering that any believer can ever experience, and finally (5) Thorn-in-the-flesh suffering. We want to study this last segment in detail.

It's of paramount importance that we reiterate our previous statement that God in His infinite wisdom designed thorn-in-the-flesh suffering to keep promoted, graced-out believers in check so that they do not become puffed up in arrogance. God, out of His super abundant grace, often promotes a believer to a place of honor. By the same token, as a graced-out believer, you should never lose sight of the fact that God's appointment is not based on your merits; it is totally contingent on His grace. Focusing on Paul's thorn-in-the-flesh will help us better understand why Joseph suffered like he did, or better yet why some of us have these nagging-sufferings that just won't go away.

If you'll recall, in our previous study of Paul (volumes 21-26), you saw how he was promoted from being a monstrous vampire—yes vampire—upon Christianity to being the greatest apostle the world has ever known! What a grace trade-off! We noted also that his commission to be Christ's right-hand man came immediately following his salvation—before he had time to learn the plan of God for the Church or to even know there was a plan—let alone to learn to live a spiritual life. **Grace**, once again, is highlighted, italicized, and underlined! On the other hand, his exaltation to a place of honor and his thorn-in-the-flesh were a package, sealed and taped with God's amazing grace. Thus in Acts we read, "But the Lord said to him [Ananias], 'Go, for he [Saul of Tarsus, later Paul] is a chosen instrument of Mine to bear My name before the gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must **suffer** for My name's sake'" (9:15, 16). With the

tables cleared, II Corinthians 12:2-4, 6-10 is our chosen passage for this unique doctrine. In Paul's account we read:

"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak...For if I do wish to boast I shall not be foolish, for I shall be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one may credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me. And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for [My] power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Paul's list of sufferings will serve as a bedrock for studying thorn-in-the-flesh suffering: "Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my country men, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from those external things there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without me being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" (II Corinthians 11:23-29). Can any other believer in the Lord Jesus Christ make such a claim? Better, is your suffering equal to that of the apostle Paul? Remember, we are talking about the greatest apostle ever! Now, on to our subject...

THORN-IN-THE-FLESH SUFFERING

DEFINED: It is God's endorsed and personally designed suffering to keep a graced-out, mature, or promoted believer from becoming arrogant and thereby forfeiting his super wealth of grace blessing. This suffering is a constant mental anguish—a nagging drip, drip, drip—type suffering which never goes away. It could be a disease or just varying degrees of suffering that follow in a procession. Prayer does not cause the removal of such suffering; rather, prayer strengthens the believer. Thus we read, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God for the peace of God, which passes all comprehension shall guard [protect, garrison, and insulate] your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6,7). In light of our definition, some important principles have emerged:

- God's promotion of a believer is the monopoly of His sovereign will, purpose, and pleasure.
- His decision to use and promote such a believer to a place of honor is not contingent on any merits of the believer.
- However, maximum realization of God's blessing is always directly proportional to the believer's development of spiritual capacity.
- Whatever this special promotion and blessing may be, a nagging suffering complements it—to keep the believer humble.
- Invariably, to remove the suffering is also to remove the promotion and blessing that go with it.
- A prayer to remove the thorn-in-the-flesh suffering is such that cannot be answered. The apostle Paul's prayer for his thorn-in-the flesh to be removed, and a negative answer from God, is a perfect example, which typifies this principle.
- Consequently, grace is multiplied in super abundance for the believer who experiences thorn-in-the-flesh suffering.

WHY THORN-IN-THE-FLESH? The Bible supplies the answer. In light of Paul's thorn-in-the-flesh, the Holy Spirit compelled him to put these words in writing, "And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations shown to me, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself [and becoming arrogant], there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to [keep on buffeting] me—to keep me from exalting myself" (II Corinthians 12:7). Ordinarily, one would think that accumulation and application of Bible doctrine in the apostle Paul's soul would be sufficient to keep a graced-out or promoted believer in check. On the contrary, Paul's answer above shows otherwise. Now we see, the only thing that

can constantly remind a person that he is nothing apart from God's grace is SUFFERING. It makes one climb down from their high stool of arrogance and rest in God's strength and grace. Suffering of this magnitude relentlessly reminds you not only of your inability to help yourself, but brings you to the threshold where King David stood and lamented, "What is man [a heap of rubbish], that You are mindful of him, the son of man that You care for him?" (Psalm 8:4 NIV). A believer who has come this low in his right lobe is unlikely to puff out his chest in arrogance.

Importantly, because of the presence of the Old Sin Nature, God permits a divinely exalted believer to be the object of a special kind of suffering. Let's not forget what the Old Sin Nature is; it is clever, shrewd, and dangerous, just like its inventor—Satan. It manufactures and feeds on pride! On the other hand, the erection of pride in our soul can quickly cause us to become a loser on the spiritual battleground, insuring that God in His justice will make war against us when we harbor it. In this way, **God protects us from committing spiritual suicide—becoming arrogant.**

So, thorn-in-the-flesh suffering is **INEVITABLE** for any believer who has reached the gold-status, or a believer who has been graced-out in a special way like the apostle Paul and Joseph were. With this principle planted in your soul, we can now move forward with our passage—II Corinthians 12:2-4, 6-10.

"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven." Some Bible teachers believe that the apostle Paul was not talking about himself; however, it's evident from verse seven that he was. Thus we read, *"And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me—to keep me from exalting myself!"* Here in this verse, the apostle Paul describes the remarkable experience when God took him to the third heaven; however, he was unsure whether it happened in a bodily or disembodied state. But whatever form, the truth is that he was taken up to the third heaven—where all believers in Christ go when they exit this world (II Corinthians 5:8). As God's quest of honor, the apostle Paul was given a once-in-a-lifetime privilege to see firsthand what the third heaven—God's abode—is like; an experience capable of causing one's Old Sin Nature to look down on those who've never

been given such a privilege.

PAUL'S THORN-IN-THE-FLESH: The precise nature of the apostle Paul's most unusual suffering remains totally unknown. Bible experts have varying opinions with regard to Paul's thorn-in-the-flesh. Some point to the barrage of his sufferings listed in II Corinthians 11:23-29, while others suggest incessant temptation, dogged opponents, chronic maladies (such as ophthalmia, malaria, migraine headaches, and epilepsy), to a disability in speech and so on. The bottom line is that we don't know, and we would be better off not guessing and be content with only what God the Holy Spirit has revealed to us. All we know is that whatever the suffering was, it was perfect enough to serve its purpose—it held Paul's self-exaltation in check!

PAUL'S PRAYER TO REMOVE HIS THORN-IN-THE-FLESH SUFFERING: *"Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me," (v. 8):* Here in this verse, one of the greatest prayer warriors ever, labored intensely three times in prayer that God might remove the suffering. Was Paul wrong in praying for the removal of his thorn-in-the-flesh suffering? No. Why not? Because the apostle Paul didn't know that it was divinely endorsed for his own blessing. Ironically, God summoned us to bring our needs in prayer before His throne (Hebrews 4:16) and to persevere in prayer (Luke 11:1-12; cf. James 5:16). That's exactly what Paul did.

In light of Paul's prayer, two important questions have surfaced: First of all, how can we determine that our suffering is thorn-in-the-flesh? And secondly, when can we stop praying for the removal of our suffering?

IS MY SUFFERING THORN-IN-THE-FLESH?

There is no clear-cut answer to whatever suffering you are going through at this moment. But suffice it to say only a handful of believers really experience thorn-in-the-flesh suffering. Nevertheless, you ought to approach your situation objectively and honestly knowing that every suffering that a believer faces has meaning, purpose, and definition. In view of this, there are several questions that can help you pinpoint the source of your suffering, but five would suffice for this study: The first question is, am I living a lifestyle of carnality? Secondly, am I in His geographical will for my life? Thirdly, am I resisting His call and plan for my life? The fourth one is, am I growing spiritually? And finally, has God promoted me to a place where there is potential for me to boast about my position, success, or have I become an icon to

people? If your answers are yes to the first and third question and no to the second question, then your suffering is most likely self-induced and perhaps divine discipline, or both. And if you answer yes to the fourth one, then your suffering is designed to develop your spiritual muscles or capacity for blessing. And finally, if your answer is yes to the last question, chances are that God has authorized a type of nagging-suffering for your protection—suffering to keep you from becoming arrogant—the greatest sin of all!

With the exception of these five mentioned, all other suffering is a component of our spiritual heritage—and God expects us to utilize His grace provision to handle all suffering on our spiritual pilgrimage. And underneath it all, the principle is clear: Any suffering, which God does not intend to remove, He intends for you to bear by means of His divine provision—the Holy Spirit and His infallible Word resident in your soul, garnished with prayer for strength. Jesus Christ, our Role Model did just that at Gethsemane! He prayed; and He was strengthened! (Matthew 26:38-39).

WHEN CAN WE STOP PRAYING FOR THE REMOVAL OF OUR THORN-IN-THE-FLESH SUFFERING?

"Concerning this I (Paul) entreated the Lord three times that it [thorn-suffering] might depart from me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you'" There was no ambiguity in the answer that Paul received—it was loud and clear—the answer was, no. Paradoxically, we no longer hear God's voice like the apostle Paul did, so we are posed with a much more difficult challenge; however, if a believer were constantly in tune with the Holy Spirit, God the Holy Spirit would certainly guide the believer in one way or the other. After all, that's His promise: "For such is God, our God forever and ever; He will guide us until death" (Psalm 48:14). We can also use spiritual commonsense to modify our prayer. Take for instance, if you have persevered in prayer for your suffering to be removed, and yet the suffering continues, you can change the prayer by asking God for more grace so that you can surf through the wave of suffering in the strength He alone can supply.

THE POWER OF GRACE IN THORN-IN-THE-FLESH SUFFERING:

Let me get personal. Assuming you have a choice between (1) super abundant blessing accompanied by a God-endorsed/Satan-engineered suffering in time or (2) no suffering/no blessing in time or in eternity, which one would you choose? Hard question, isn't it? Of course, your choice reveals who you are in the spiritual arena; it reveals how thirsty

you are to glorify God in time. And far more intriguing, it reveals your level of spiritual growth. Of course, God the Almighty has what it takes to snap His fingers and remove your thorn-in-the-flesh suffering—poof—the suffering is gone! But do you know what follows next? Self-destruction! Then tell me, what grace can surpass God's gesture to keep you intact with your suffering lest you become a loser in time and eternity future? I don't know about you, but the Pioneer of our spiritual life, our Lord Jesus Christ, was absolutely content with His God-endorsed, unparalleled suffering, and likewise the apostle Paul and a handful of other believers who endured their tailor-made suffering.

God refused to remove Paul's thorn-in-the-flesh so that he could continue to glory not in self but in the "God of all grace" (I Peter 5:10). Furthermore, human weakness provides the ideal opportunity for the display of divine power. That's grace. Thus, God in His infinite grace, provided the apostle Paul with "Divine power"—Christ's power (II Corinthians 12:9) so that God alone is praised. God's grace transformed Paul's perception. When he came to the end of himself, Christ alone was seen—then Christ in His strength could make Paul spiritually strong, and no wonder we read, "My grace is sufficient for you." It's interesting to note that the Greek word rendered 'sufficient' actually has the connotation of providing contentment. This prepares us for the next increment, contentment in suffering.

CONTENTMENT IN SUFFERING: Incongruously, false brethren teach that suffering is not part of our spiritual package, and that believers should never be content with suffering—that believers should reject any suffering outright. The truth of the matter is that the only suffering a believer should never be content with is self-induced suffering. The sad note is that the victims of this heresy go desperately and indefatigably from one camp to another seeking deliverance, but all to no avail. Clearly, such teaching is contrary to Scripture. The apostle Paul vividly stated, "For I have learned to be content in **whatever circumstances** I am. I know how to get along with humble means [poverty suffering], and also I know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the **secret** of being filled and of going hungry, both of having abundance and **suffering** need" (Philippians 4:11b-12).

We have said it before, but let's underline it this time: suffering is inevitable in the spiritual arena. The sooner this truth settles in our right lobes, the better off we are in dealing with our suffering.

When you truly know that it's a part of our spiritual life, you won't ever be overwhelmed when it hits you right between the eyes. Idiomatically, *to be forewarned is to be forearmed*. Thus, the apostle John recorded our Lord Jesus Christ, saying, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation [Greek: *thlipsis* = *to crush, compress, squeeze—symbolically it means grievous affliction or distress*]; but take courage, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). And the apostle Paul added, "For just as the **sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance**, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ" (II Corinthians 1:5). He reiterated, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him [and be eternally saved], but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29).

It's apparent that the moment you declare yourself in allegiance with Christ, by virtue of faith alone in Christ alone, you become Satan's worst enemy and he will squeeze the last drop of his sweat just to make your life in Christ uncomfortable. On the one hand, we shouldn't give in to his wish! But on the other hand, it appears Satan is stacking up piles of victims—those who have retreated to the "Why me? syndrome." And this shouldn't be happening! The truth of the matter is that no believer can afford to deal with his suffering by means of human solution. Hold it. Let's back up a notch and take a closer look at how suffering affects everyone. Do you know that your soul is a target for suffering, even though God didn't design it to be? Although, in His omniscience, He knew that after man's fall in the Garden, each believer's soul would be a battleground between the Old Sin Nature and the Holy Spirit. Tragically, many believers are ignorant of this ongoing war in the Angelic Conflict. Suffering in itself, as we shall see, is not a sin; however, it produces a chain of sin-reaction once it captures your soul.

SUFFERING RESIDENT IN THE SOUL:

Poignantly, when Satan and his minions ambush a believer with suffering, their aim is always well defined: To invade the soul through the vehicle of the Old Sin Nature, to knock out the command post of the Holy Spirit through worry and anxiety, and cut off the soul's pipeline of Bible doctrine by means of fear and, consequently, to disarm the believer from viewing his suffering—any suffering—with divine viewpoint. If, and when he achieves these objectives, his victim would be left with nothing less than a spiritual warfare turned into a stressed-out soul—a depressed soul with an avalanche of human viewpoint solutions. The stressed-out, depressed soul becomes an incuba-

tor for all sorts of spiritual maladies—sins of murmuring, mewing, whining, groaning, guilt, self-pity, the why me? syndrome, abusive speech, anxiety, fear, malice, high-powered anger, bitterness, and lack of interest in Bible doctrine and its application. When a believer finds himself in this predicament, he becomes delusional and irrational—and cannot be differentiated from his counterpart—the unbeliever. Sadly, if the suffering is not expelled from the soul as quickly as possible, its poison can have detrimental consequences in the believer's physical well-being.

King David, who committed adultery and murder (II Samuel 11, 12), had first hand suffering experience under the paragraph of self-induced misery, garnished with divine discipline. In his account we read, "When I kept silent about my sin, [failed to acknowledge it before God, suffering took hold of my soul] my body [literally] wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand [of discipline] was heavy upon me; my vitality [energy] was drained away as with the fever heat of summer" (Psalm 32:3, 4). He added, "For Your arrows [of discipline] have sunk deep into me, and Your hand has pressed down on me. There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden, they weigh too much for me. My wounds grow foul and fester. Because of my folly, I am bent over and greatly bowed down; I go mourning all day long. For my loins are filled with burning; and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am benumbed and badly crushed; I groan because of the agitation of my heart" (38:2-8). Here you have it—the description of a soul invaded by suffering! But there is another side of the coin—a peaceful soul.

A PEACEFUL SOUL: A peaceful soul belongs to a believer who refuses to subscribe to or look at his suffering from the binoculars of human viewpoint—refuses to allow suffering and its components, namely groaning, self-pity, and so on, to invade his soul—refuses to be consumed by the varying degrees of his circumstances. Rather, by using the high-powered microscope of divine viewpoint through the Mentorship of the Holy Spirit, he is focused on divine solution. Obviously, when we contrast the Old Sin Nature-invaded-soul, with the soul occupied by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit-filled-believer has the potential to experience, "The fruit of the Spirit is [unfailing] love, peace [an undisturbed soul], joy [in the midst of chaos], patience [the ability to wait for God as He causes all things to work out for your own good], kindness [unhindered gesture to oth-

ers even in the heat of your suffering], faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22, 23).

When suffering is self-induced, the believer should follow precise instruction: Isolate the sins that brought on the suffering, and confess or acknowledge them to God, like King David did: "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgression to the Lord'; and You forgave the guilt of my sin" (Psalm 32:5; cf. I John 1:9). If the suffering persists, the believer is not disturbed. Rather, by thinking Bible doctrine in his soul, he knows that he has been forgiven and that whatever suffering is left over is for his blessing (Psalm 119:67, 71). And when the suffering is not self-induced, the believer under the Mentorship of the Holy Spirit rejoices knowing that the aftermath of his suffering is for God's glory and his own blessing. He knows the full benefit of, "In everything [including suffering] give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (I Thessalonians 5:18) or in Ephesians 5:20: "Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father." The believer reaches the conclusion that our all-knowing Father knows what He is doing in his life.

SUMMARY AND ENCOURAGEMENT IN SUFFERING

Indisputably, you are living and operating in the enemy's territory. Scripture makes it clear that Satan is "the god of this world" (John 12:31). Thus our Lord asserts, "You are not of this world" and prayed for your protection (John 17). But, what does the truth that "Satan is the god of this world" mean to you? It means that you are operating in a hostile environment. In Satan's hostility, he has become fierce—outrageously insane—pacing back and forth: "... prowls like a roaring lion, seeking someone [a careless believer] to devour [to tackle; to put out of action]" (I Peter 5:8). What a relief to know that "... greater is He [God] who is in you than he [Satan] who is in the world" (I John 4:4; cf. II Kings 6:8-17). The good news is that you are totally encapsulated by the wall of fire (Zechariah 2:5) as you live and operate in his territory. Satan knows that God has provided you with the most security that Heaven can offer (Job 1:10)! That should be your solace! That's the beauty of God's amazing grace!

As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, as long as you are learning and applying His Word on a daily basis, you will enjoy God's maximum security. It's that simple. It boils down to this: There is no system of sophisticated weaponry, no act of terrorism, no attack by Satan—visible or invisible—

not one iota of suffering that can pass unnoticed through God's security and get to you without His sovereign endorsement! Not now, not then, and not ever! He is your Shield (Genesis 15:1)! However, if you have been hit by the enemy's flaming dart, do not fear. Relax. Because God, who allowed it to pass through His sovereign security, is at work right now on your behalf! Again, nothing gets by God without His knowledge. There is absolutely no reason to fall apart, or hit the panic button, or retreat to self-pity—the "why me? syndrome." Instead, listen to His words that are sweet to the taste: "[Happy] is a man who perseveres under [adverse circumstances]; for once he has [passed the spiritual test], he will receive [super abundant blessing in time, and] the crown of life [in eternity], which the Lord has promised to those who **love** Him [those who have acquired spiritual capacity]" (James 1:12).

James put it this way: "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials [when the adversities of life hit you hard], knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance [through application of doctrine] have its perfect result, that you may be [fully equipped] lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4). In fact, what Paul wrote fits perfectly: "And we know that God causes all things [pleasant and unpleasant situations] to work together for good to those who **love** God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). God knows exactly what He is doing in your life; and while you may not be able to fathom all of it, one thing is crystal clear: There is absolutely no such thing as bad luck or an accident in God's plan, because God can blend the bad with good to come up with extraordinarily marvelous results! Essentially, we can face a seemingly bad situation and expect the good that will follow. Such is our awesome God!

Here's the apostle Peter's take on this subject: "But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exaltation" (I Peter 4:13). Finally, the apostle Paul put it this way: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). Hence, we should rejoice in each and every event in our lives—pleasant or unpleasant, for our Father is at work on our behalf 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year! Allow Job's confidence in God to be yours: "But He knows [what I am going through]; when He has [tested] me, I shall come forth as gold [way better than before!]" (Job 23:10). And no matter what, always remember God's promise: "I will strengthen you, **surely I**

will help you, surely I will uphold you with My [integrity]" (Isaiah 41:10c). This was also Joseph's confidence as he rode the rugged road of slavery to Egypt.

JOSEPH'S RUGGED JOURNEY AS A SLAVE TO EGYPT:

(To be continued volume 30—Lesson 16)

FINAL THOUGHT

We are reminded that our position in Christ is by grace all the way. The apostle Paul wrote, "But by His doing [minus anyone's effort] you are in Christ Jesus..." (I Corinthians 1:30a). God is perfect and His work is perfect. God the Son purchased you (I Peter 1:18, 19)—eternal transaction. God the Holy Spirit sealed you (II Corinthians 1:22)—eternal sealing. God the Father keeps you saved by His power (John 10:29)—eternal security. God provides salvation in grace. We have nothing to add. We are the objects and beneficiaries of His grace forever.

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling [*losing your salvation*], and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen" (Jude 1:24-25).

SPIRITUAL HUNGER IN AFRICA

There is a tremendous hunger in Africa, not for food as such, but for the truth. Would you make it a burden to pray routinely, that God would graciously provide them with enough doctrinal materials on tape and literature for those who are starving for sound Bible teaching? That this ministry would never lack in quenching their spiritual thirst to know and have rapport with the Living God!

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2002 MISSIONARY REPORT

We realize that it would be humanly impossible to give you a full report of what God alone is doing as we take His gospel message and sound Bible teaching coast-to-coast. So whatever report we

give you, it's just the tip of the iceberg!

THE GAMBIA: Our missionary trip to the Gambia last November was our second visit. As you may recall from our previous report, the country is about 98% Muslim. And the Lord has given us a wide open door for our ministry in that Muslim-dominated country. Normally the Gambian customs are very restrictive to people bringing Christian literature to their country, but the Lord has given us favor; and we have never had a problem taking our literature in—much appreciation to our prayer warriors and God's grace. One may ask, "Are the Gambian Muslims positive?" Yes indeed! We now have a local church there.

New Creation Bible Church: This church was formally established two years ago, and is made up of about 40% indigents—Muslim converts. Tayo Arikawe is the one who pastors the church, using study materials from R. B. Thieme Jr., Bible Ministries; Joe Griffin's Grace Doctrine Church; Rick Knapp's Tetelestai Church; Rick Hughes' Evangelistic Ministries; and Grace Evangelistic Ministries. The Lord is using him very effectively. And currently we are supporting the church financially until they are able to support themselves—a reflection of the thrust of our ministry as framed in the section of our newsletters—"Overview of Grace Evangelistic Ministries." This local assembly, NCBC, was the organizer of last November's program. And it was well attended. God brought people who were positive to His Word, to hear Rev. Moses C. Onwubiko, as he humbly and gracefully preached and taught the gospel and sound basic Bible doctrine, respectively. You should have seen the faces of those who came to the two-week program—their faces were indescribable!

REACTION OF POSITIVE VOLITION: Rev. Moses' intention was to spend one week in the Gambia, and another week in Dakar, Senegal, all on the west coast of Africa; however, logistics were not in place for him to travel to Senegal, so he decided to extend the program in the Gambia for another week. When Pastor Tayo broke the news to those who came to the program, they literally jumped from their seats, shouted, and clapped their hands for joy!! They were so happy they would have another week with Moses. This kind of reaction is what we mean when we say that the Africans are hungry for the truth.

TOTAL CONVERSION OF A PENTECOSTAL CHURCH IN THE GAMBIA: This remarkable turnaround is totally the handiwork of God—the rejection of legalism and salvation-by-works to the embracing of grace outright. It began two years ago when Rev. Moses went to the Gambia. The pastor of this local church, Dennis, a well-known international speaker among the Pentecostals, was a beneficiary of the weeklong program. This gentleman had been searching for truth for more than twenty years. He's been everywhere—ranging from big camp meetings, the so-called super-duper trainings, to seminary; and yet wasn't satisfied. He knew something was missing. That something turned out to be grace. Gee! Does God know about this man's positive volition or spiritual hunger? You bet He does! When he attended Moses' program for one day, what he heard was exactly what his soul had yearned for—for decades! At the end of the first meeting, he ran to Moses saying repeatedly, "Reverend we have to talk—we have to talk!" He asked for our web address and got it. The same night he went through all our newsletters. And from there on,—his embracing of grace became real.

Then in May 2002, he arranged for Moses to go to Canada, a country Dennis has visited several

times. If you'll recall, in our previous newsletter, we mentioned him. While in Canada, he often kept Rev. Moses up past 3:00 a.m., asking a gazillion questions concerning spiritual matters. At the end of their time in Canada, he humbly said to Moses, "...I want you to know that our coming to Canada was meant for me alone—now I have a better understanding of God's plan for the Church." That's not all.

After the end of the November 2002 program, he went to his church with a grace package—starting all over in every sense of the word. He scratched out tithing—the last thing an African minister would want to do! But he took courage and abolished it—without any outside pressure from anyone. That's just the beginning. Like Pastor Tayo, he is now using the same grace material in his teaching. Wait there's more to this—God's providence.

SATAN ATTACKS GRACE IN THE GAMBIA:

The work of Rev. Moses C. Onwubiko in the Gambia has opened a can of worms among the Pentecostals who can hardly stand grace, especially among the leaders; however, some of their members are leaving their local churches to join Pastor Tayo's church because of his solid stand on the grace message. In light of losing mem-

bers, the leaders of the Pentecostal body reported us to the Gambian government accusing us of falsehood. In their report, they named Rev. Moses and Dennis—the Pentecostal pastor-turned-grace-teacher! Here is where God's providence is underlined. The Gambian officials summoned Pastor Dennis for interrogation regarding the accusation. What is ironic about the whole ordeal is that if the report were made two years ago, it would have been very difficult for Pastor Dennis to defend the truth. But after our time together in Canada, and 14 days of teaching last November, he was somewhat ready to be used by God the Holy Spirit in our defense! Talk about God's sense of humor.

PASTOR TAYO'S REPORT AFTER PASTOR DENNIS' INTERROGATION:

"Great things are happening here. The fact is that doctrine is prevailing. The conference was a turning point for most of the attendees. The way people are coming for Bible class now is amazing and we do not expect any other reaction except emotional revolt from those who want to keep people in bondage.

A few days ago, the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) here in Gambia summoned for Pastor Ejila (Dennis). On the agenda were the grace confer-

The Overview of Grace Evangelistic Ministries

Grace Evangelistic Ministries is incorporated in the State of Tennessee as a nonprofit, non-denominational, sound Bible teaching missionary oriented Christian organization.

Our Mission: In obedience to the command of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.....

"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation " (Mark 16:15)

WE HAVE THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES:

Objective #1

Evangelize unbelievers with the simple, grace gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will depend solely on the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit to make the gospel clear without resorting to gimmicks or imposing our personal views on others. We must present the gospel, but leave the decision "to believe in" or "to reject" Christ to the hearers.

Objective #2

For those who choose to believe in Christ, we will seize the opportunity to assist in the following ways:

a. Help them form Bible study groups;

b. Provide them with doctrinal materials, including recorded Bible lessons and literature, enabling them to fulfill the command: "As newborn babies desire the sincere milk of the word [sound Bible doctrine] that you may grow thereby." (1 Peter 2:2);

c. Where possible, assist them in establishing their own local churches;

d. Help them select pastors who teach sound Bible doctrine; and

e. As the Lord makes funds available, provide financial assistance until they are self-supporting.

Objective #3

Because those who have responded to the gospel will become unfruitful if they are not exposed to sound Bible teaching, we will seek out or establish theological seminaries to prepare indigenous pastors. Their training will be consistent with Paul's mandate to Pastor Timothy to "study to show yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth." (II Timothy 2: 15)

Objective #4

As the need arises, we will send doctrinally motivated, short-term and long-term missionaries to minis-

ter to newly formed groups and churches.

Objective #5

We will use literature and other media to reach and nurture those to whom we cannot minister in person. To minimize expenses, we will establish overseas centers for audiocassette duplication of recorded Bible lessons and reproduction of doctrinal literature. In keeping with our grace policy, individuals and groups will never be charged for these materials.

Objective #6

Offer humanitarian assistance as the Lord provides and directs us. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Provision of used and/or new clothing;
- Provision of food;
- Provision of medicines and medical care; and
- Assist Grace Evangelistic Ministries associates as necessary.

Objective #7

Prepare periodic newsletters, which include Bible exposition and testimonies, for distribution to our associates by mail and the Internet.

ence and his association with the grace message. Some pastors had written that we are preaching doctrines contrary to the belief of the Christian Council. The officials wanted to know what these newfound beliefs are and why Rev. Moses is the communicator. They had all the details of our Bible class and Rev. Moses' messages. After Ejila explained our stands...they (the NIA, who were also Muslims) told Ejila that they believe in our message and that the pastors who wrote the petition must be "crazy." Also, that if the Christian Council fails to register us next year that they [the NIA] will forward our papers to the Ministry of Justice for registration.

Romans 8:28 is indeed a reality. This is the grace of God at work again. Keep us in your prayers. We have recorded more attendance since they started this persecution. We are walking with our shoulders high upon God's matchless grace. As for this year's conference, folks are already waiting eagerly and it's going to be more glorious."

CAMEROON

Rev. Moses has traveled to Cameroon several times visiting with Mr. George Mueller in Belo, a remote village in the northwest province. But last November's visit was special. It was special in that our Heavenly Father highlighted the fact that **He is the One who pilots the course of our ministry.** Here is the rest of the testimony: Dr. Lawrence Asong was a grace teacher and founder of Grace Mission Seminary in Kumba, southwest province. He opened ten churches in various towns and villages. And for many years he had written to R. B. Thieme Jr., Bible Ministries requesting a speaker for their annual crusades. Each time, Thieme's ministry would forward the request to Moses, but the thought to go never materialized until November 2001. Here again, God's providence was evident. Three months after Moses spoke at their annual conference, and was also introduced to Dr. Asong's seminary students and pastors and host, the Lord called Dr. Asong home. He died in an auto accident. Had Moses not gone when the Lord stirred him up to go, we would have lost contact with them. Conversely, God in His matchless grace sent Moses last November; and again positive volition was clearly seen.

Rev. Moses arrived in Duala, International Airport, Cameroon, having flown to Duala by way of Gambia and Nigeria. He was physically tired because of the length of his journey. Notwithstanding, some of the pastors in Kumba picked him up—a four-hour journey to Kumba. Upon arriving, he discovered that many people had already left, having waited for hours. Here is the sweet part of the report: When the organizers asked for Moses' agenda, he told them that he would teach from 8:30 a.m. until noon and then resume at 5:00 p.m., hoping to have a break to recuperate from his journey. Right? Wrong! Many of the people said, "Can we continue without going home?" Seeing how anxious people were for the truth, Moses had no choice but to say, "Ok." He relied on the strength the Lord alone could provide. Moses did not leave the venue until 8:45 p.m! But before he left, he humorously asked them whether they were tired, and almost everyone said, "No!" Moses left the following morning for an 11 hours journey by road to meet with Mr. Mueller on the other side of the country. Before he left, the people asked whether it would be possible for him to teach them in the morning before boarding his bus to Belo. But Moses was unable to do so since his bus left early; however, he promised them he'd be back this year if the Lord permits!

NIGERIA: Moses concluded his three-nation missionary journey in Nigeria. He shared gospel pamphlets at the airport, although not everyone received these pamphlets because of the quantity he had. He witnessed wherever there was an opportunity for the gospel—in the hotels, with taxi drivers, on the streets, and so on. He rounded up his work by teaching for five days in one of the churches we established in Umuahia. In the end, God alone was glorified. Moses and his wife Gloria returned on December 28, 2002.

PROGRESS REPORT

Our purpose is to inform and bring you up-to-date about what God is doing for and through this ministry. Our hearts are filled with gratitude and thanksgiving for His indelible work. When you approach His throne in prayer, please remember Grace Evangelistic Ministries. Praise Him for His work through us; our work is nothing apart from His grace.

USA

Demand for our publications continues to grow. Many of our partners have joined us in the distribution of our materials to positive believers. Our mailing list gets larger by the week, causing us to stand in awe and reverence of the Almighty God for what He is doing.

OVERSEAS

- We currently support pastors teaching doctrine in the churches we established in Africa until they become financially independent.
- Right now, we have six men that we sponsor at GEM's recommended seminaries in Africa. Dozens more are on the waiting list.
- Today, our mailing list includes addresses from Australia, Canada, China, Croatia, Germany, India, Philippines, Scotland, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Gambia, Kenya, Nigeria, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The list grows as God directs and removes linguistic, racial, cultural, and geographical barriers to make Himself known to those who seek to know Him. We consider it a great privilege to be His instrument in spreading the gospel and doctrinal truths.

LETTERS TO GRACE EVANGELISTIC MINISTRIES

We would like to share some letters we received to show how your partnership is producing awesome dividends for the glory of our heavenly Father. As you read, please join us in giving thanks to God, for the Scripture is crystal clear concerning who does all the work in a ministry that is honoring to Him: "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

Dear Grace Evangelistic Ministries,

Thank you for the books you sent me. I feel that I should give you some background information. I found your book on a table in a hotel in Nashville, and for some reason I picked it up and saw that it was placed there for me. And after I started reading it, I saw that it was very beneficial reading and would also help others. So I asked you to send me 12 copies and you did without me sending you any money. So now I would like to begin to support your ministry. If there is any way that I can help get the message out just let me know.

Thanks and God bless.

U.S.A.

Dear Grace Evangelistic Ministries' team,

Earlier this year, a friend gave me a copy of the book "Focus on Christian Marriage." I met the author, brother Moses, at a meeting in northern Saskatchewan. I have, along with my wife, been blessed by the godly wisdom found in this book and have recently been sharing its insights with many people in our small community.

I would like some extra copies of this book to bless others as I have been blessed by it.

Thank you so much.

Canada

Grace Evangelistic Ministries

Sir/Madam,

I want to express my sincere appreciation to God for your ministry and all that the spirit of His grace has enabled you to do. Thank you so much for the book you sent me. It was an answered prayer, not just for me but also as I launch out into the deep to reach out to many Christians in this our generation. Thank you so much for the great voice of blessing. May the Lord continue to expand His favor upon all you do, as you know that your labor of love is not in vain. I would love to be a member of your ministry.

Thank you so much once again. Looking forward to bearing from you.

Yours truly,

West Indies

Dear Rev. Moses,

I have no words to express my gratitude to God on your behalf. Indeed, Sir, you are a gift to our generation. We appreciate all you have come to teach us. It's unique!

Your book "Focus on Christian Marriage" mended our already collapsed home. I thank God for the inspiration of His Holy Spirit. May God Almighty continue to strengthen you in Jesus name.

I would be forever grateful.

Your brother in Christ,

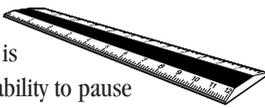
The Gambia.

BIBLE DOCTRINE FOR THOUGHT

The Lord Jesus Christ said, "I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor" (John 4:38). Earlier, His words were sobering: "Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal; that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together" (v. 36). Do you have passion for the dissemination of the gospel message of our Lord? Are you 'gathering fruit for life eternal'? You may wish to meditate on this.

SPIRITUAL YARDSTICK

The spiritual growth of a believer is measured on one's ability to pause under pressure and think objectively in terms of divine viewpoint.



- Are you constantly in the gossip business? If so, it's very likely that you are still residing in the first stage of spiritual growth dynamics.
- Do you have zeal to study and apply the whole realm of Bible doctrine to the exigencies of your life? If you do, it's more than likely that you've arrived and are perhaps beyond spiritual adolescence.
- Do you anxiously wait to share in Christ's suffering? It's more than likely that you are close or have already arrived at the mega-gate of spiritual maturity.

HERE IS THE TRUTH

Does the book of James advocate salvation by faith plus works?

It's interesting to know that the book of James was one of the last to be admitted as part of the canon of Scripture. Ironically, a handful of theologians still reject it. Their argument is that it contradicts the Pauline epistles; however, the truth of the matter is that the problem lies with the interpreters and not with the book itself. If

one were to give the book a title it could be called, "Lack of Divine Production and Loss of Rewards." James addressed his book to believers only; thus the word brethren is seen in all five chapters (1:19; 2:1; 3:1; 4:11; 5:12). James wrote to carnal believers who had failed in their spiritual life. They were guilty of committing mental and overt sins, ranging from gossiping to maligning (1: 26; 3:3-8), judging (4:11-12), partiality (2:1-7), lack of compassion (2:15-16) and the list goes on.

James also had another type of justification in mind when he wrote his book—justification for reward. Thus there are two types of justification in the Bible. For the first one, justification for eternal life—faith plus nothing—minus nothing—faith alone in Christ alone—all work is excluded (Rom. 4:1-11; Eph. 2:8, 9, Titus 3:5; II Tim 1:9). The second justification is based on divine works (I Cor. 3:11-15; Rev. 22:12). To demonstrate his point, he used Abraham in James 2:21: "Was not Abraham justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?" But (aha!) was it at this point that Abraham became a believer? No! He had been a believer for more than forty years. In fact, he was a believer before his circumcision (Rom. 4:9,10). That means he was a believer before Isaac was born. Abraham walked with the Lord and advanced rapidly to the mega-gate of spiritual maturity where he received the mega-test of his spiritual life. He utilized doctrine in his soul and passed with flying colors and thus was justified for the highest rank that the Supreme Court of Heaven can award a believer, "A Friend of God" (James 2:23). A title that would bring him so many privileges and decorations in the eternal state! So, James concludes, "You see that a man is justified by [divine works for eternal rewards], and not by faith alone [for salvation]" (v. 24).

We can further see the correlation or relationship between his maturity and his mega-test: "By faith [what is believed—by means of Bible doctrine in his soul], when he was tested, offered up Isaac [even though the Lord had promised to bless the world through this uniquely born one—Isaac]..." (Heb. 11:17-18). What was going on in Abraham's right lobe when he attempted to offer up Isaac? In two words, divine viewpoint. "He considered that God is able to raise men from the dead..." (v. 19). It's clear that he was already a believer in the Lord when he was tested; for only a believer in Yahweh can have such confidence!

James also talks about a carnal believer dying the sin unto death (James 5:19-20). "Save his soul from death" (v. 20) should read, "save his life from sin unto death" (Cf. I John 5:16). One's faith in Christ should not save one from the sin unto death if he is in perpetual carnality! So James affirms, "What use is it, my [carnal] brethren [in Christ], if a man says he has faith [and he does], but he has no [divine production or] works? Can his faith [alone in Christ alone] save him?" (2:14). But save him from what? The Lake of Fire? No. Not at all! Because James himself teaches that salvation is a gift (James 1:17,18). Rather can his faith in Christ save him from dying the sin unto death? Obviously, the question anticipates a no answer. No, it can't!

Correction: In 2:14, some translators added 'this' or 'that' faith. It's not in the Greek text.

REV. MOSES' ITINERARY (JANUARY-JUNE 2003)

Jan-Feb U. S. A.
 Mar. 14-27 Ghana
 March 28-April 5 U.S.A.
 April 6-14 Jamaica
 April 15-June 30 U.S.A.

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- Ghana: (March 14-27)
- Jamaica: (April 6-14)

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- ❖ The US military
- ❖ The safety of Moses and his team as they travel
- ❖ Col. Thieme Jr.'s ministry and his wife's health
- ❖ The spiritual growth of the churches we formed
- ❖ Seminary students that we support (that God will equip them in every way)
- ❖ Special fund to establish a printing press for reprinting of GEM's and Thieme's publications in Africa
- ❖ Israel's protection
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- ❖ For the provision of many open doors in the year 2003
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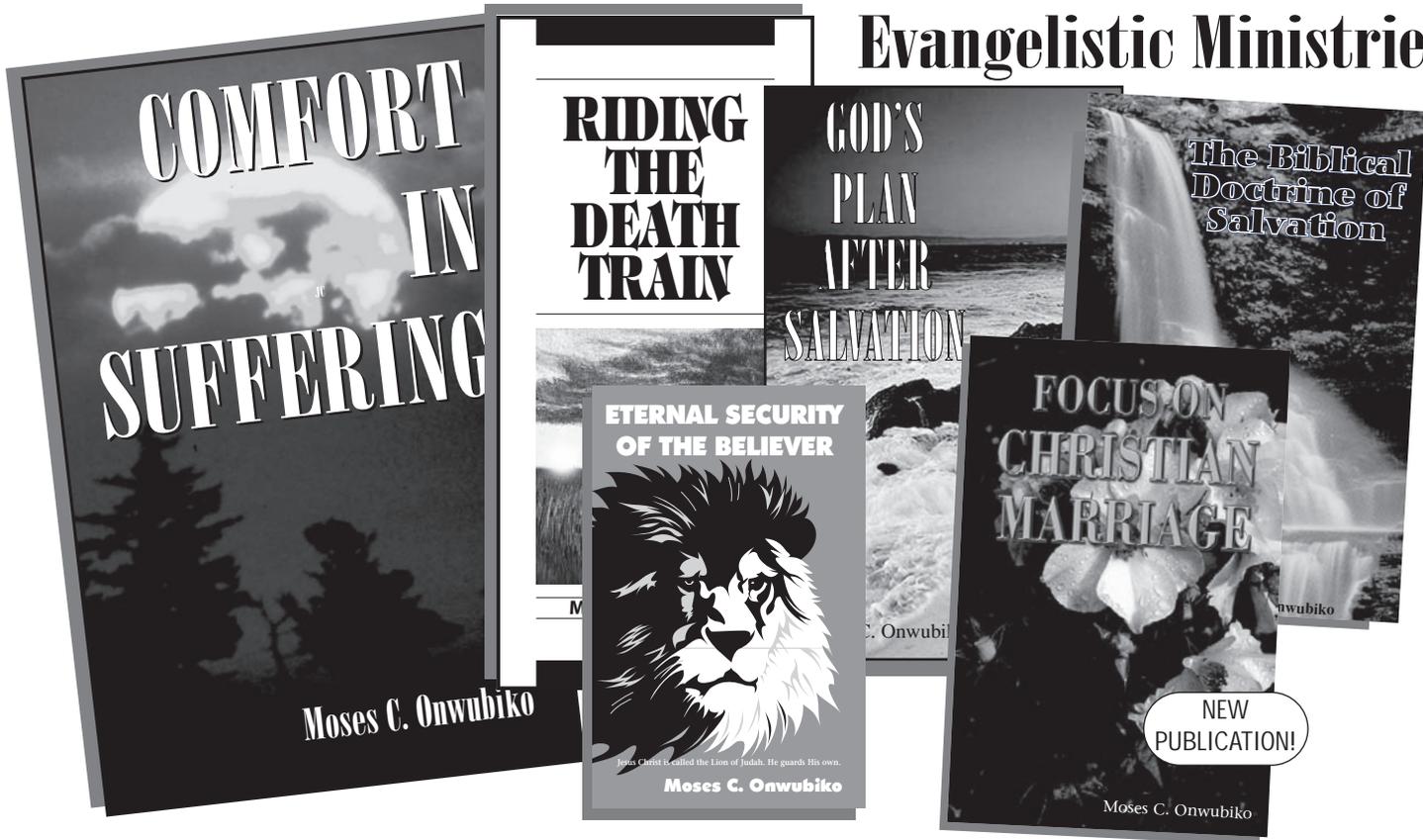
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