

Now I Can Fly

Living
Victoriously



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To Greg and Kathy who have brought such
pride and pleasure to their parents

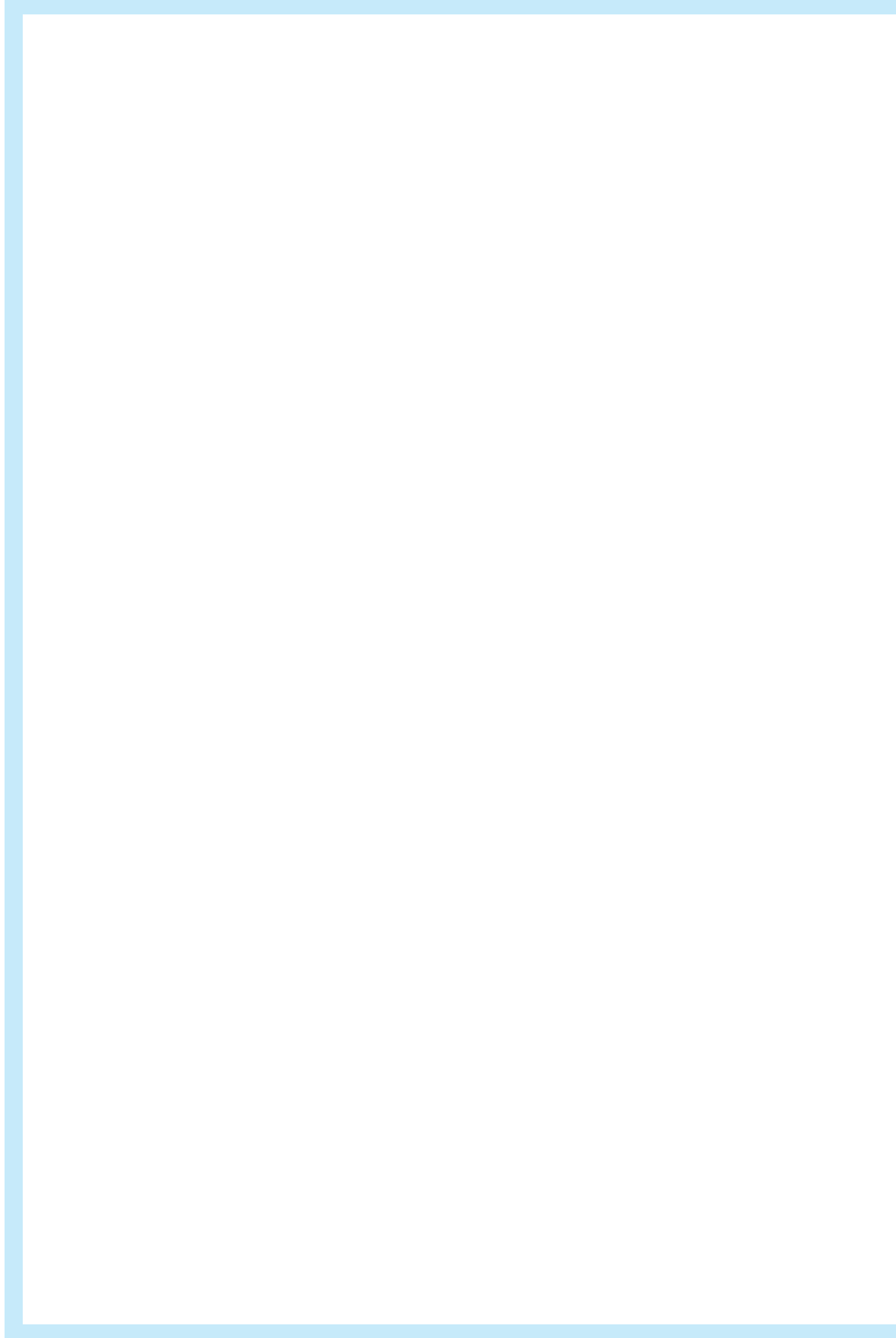
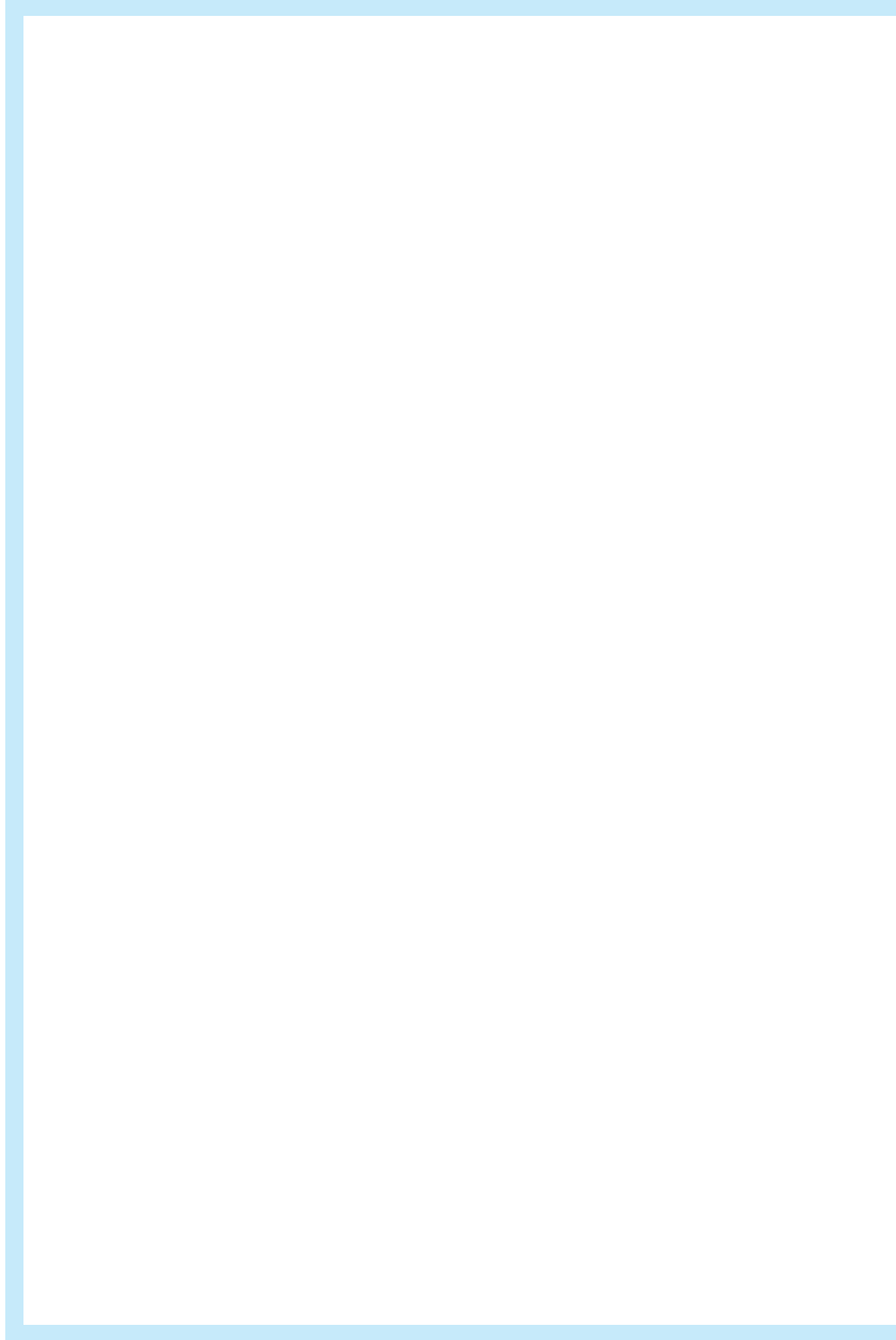


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INTRODUCTION

*But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you;
and the birds of the air, and they will tell you.*

—Job 12:7

The sight was a pitiful one. Young birds were flopping in the sand and debris along the beach. Evidently instinct had prompted the parents to push their offspring out of the birdhouses that dotted the coastline. The young had been nurtured and sheltered long enough. The time for independence had arrived. If the fledglings were going to know the joys of maturity, they had to be forced into a situation that demanded flying for their survival. As I watched this rather common but awesome occurrence of nature, I noticed that several birds flew immediately from the safety of the nest out over the ocean. Others timidly sat on the perch while the parents flew back and forth attempting to summon courage for their little ones to try their wings. Still others made an effort at the swooping of the wings but landed on the sand beneath the house where danger lurked in the forms of all sorts of predators. Realizing the imminence of destruction, the older birds frantically flew up and down, in circles, and all around their terrified offspring cringing on the ground. They seemed to be saying, “Watch me. This is the way it is done. Come on! Give it a try!”

At first, the incident simply seemed interesting to me, but it soon grew into one of deep concern as I watched and realized that these precious creatures of nature would either learn to fly or die. It was just as simple as that. Several decaying little bodies along the shore served

as grim reminders of the ones who were so fearful that they died from shock, exposure, starvation, or the gnawing of some predator.

I watched and pondered as the waves rolled in and out. I reflected on my own life. In many ways, my years have been like the events along the shore. When the time came for me to leave the nest and launch out on my own as a full-grown Christian, I was anxious to try. I honestly thought I could take off across the ocean on the first flutter of wings, but I couldn't. I fell to the ground. After shivering in the cold, after the paralysis produced by internal fear, after being severely wounded by predators, I finally heeded the examples of "how to" from the Master Instructor, as my own feelings of self-sufficiency gave way to the admission of inadequacy. Only then could I place my trust in Him, listen to the instruction from His Word, and begin my flight over the ocean with the full assurance that underneath are the everlasting arms.

Faith in letting go and completely trusting comes rather easily for some. Most, however, are reluctant learners, and often years slide by as the parts of the puzzle slowly fit together, revealing the shading and blending of various hues. "Wisdom is with aged men, and with length of days, understanding" (Job 12:12). After all the letters and telephone calls from across the nation regarding previous publications, I have reached the conclusion that most of us are basically alike. For the masses who fall into this category, perhaps this work will be of help. At last I have learned how to fly!

Underneath are the everlasting arms.

—Deuteronomy 33:27



CLIMB ON THE ROCKS

The Patterns of Life

For most of us, the real meaning of life unfolds slowly. Some of us don't get our act together until it is almost time for the play to be over. Prayerfully, this book will prevent such a tragedy. I hope you profit from the lessons I learned from my mistakes. Readers have followed me all the way from *She Hath Done What She Could*, through *Caterpillars or Butterflies* and *Let This Cup Pass*, to *Meet My Friend David*. I once thought when someone cleared a tremendous hurdle, the battle was won. I now know that broken bones often heal much more rapidly than broken hearts. Like most people, I had my share of ups and downs since the first publication.

Perhaps the most important lesson I learned is that Christians should remove their always-smiling, always-happy, always-untroubled masks. Do we present a false picture of Christianity when we always give the appearance we're on cloud nine—never frustrated? Such an unrealistic, phony facade drives people away. The world should see beyond us to a higher strength. Followers of Christ are not super-fantastic beings, but people who are learning and growing each day. Life is not a joyride but a mission. Never are we promised to be without disappointments. Putting

on Christ is not comparable to donning a magic shield to protect us from all hurts.

Christians should be more than conquerors (Romans 8:37). In the middle of all our problems, we should be the happiest people on earth. We are triumphant because we have learned the purpose of life. Do we simply suffer and wait for an eternal reward for all our earthly



Fall to the
ground or
learn to fly.
The decision
is yours.

hardships and trials? No! We can be joyful right now—this very minute! But victorious living is impossible unless we learn to fly. Only then can we rise above life's muck and mire to experience a bird's-eye view of the entire landscape below. Only then can we look with intensity at the storm clouds and see their beautiful silver linings that evade those focused on the mundane!

Life is made up of highs, lows, and level plains. Your heights, your depths, and your smooth points will not coincide with mine. Neither will they match those of anyone else. But you will have them. In effect, God is saying, "This is the basic pattern of life. Through its variations, you can either wallow in self-pity or you can live a happy, victorious life. You can fall to the ground or you can learn to fly. The decision is yours."

✦ What are the drawbacks of a Christian wearing a smiling mask all the time? What are the advantages and disadvantages of allowing others to see that we are human and capable of experiencing the normal range of emotions?

- ✦ What patterns of highs, lows, and level plains do you see in your own life? Share them with the class, if permitted.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM BIRDS

God created birds to fly, so the young ones must learn—as mentioned in the Introduction. Some reluctant ones were fearful, and their wings allowed them to fall pitifully to the ground. What happened on the ground? They either summoned enough courage to try again or else lie helplessly until some predator snatched their lives.

Deuteronomy 32:11–12 tells how an eagle urges her young to take the first leap.

As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the Lord alone led him.

Note that the mother urges her eaglets to the edge of the nest and makes them uncomfortable. She may swoop from behind or even push them out of the nest. In an effort of encouragement, she gives an example by flying around and flapping her wings.

MOUNT UP WITH WINGS LIKE EAGLES

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself (Exodus 19:4).

On its first flight, the young bird falls through the air, frantically flapping virgin wings. At the last moment, the mother spreads her wings and catches the fearful offspring. This process is repeated until the eaglet

gains enough confidence to trust the relationship of the wind and his wings.

Isaiah 40:31 speaks of a lesson learned from the eagles:

But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Renew simply means exchange. We exchange our strength for His strength; then we are able to soar.

No matter our fear of heights, God never intended for us to stay in the nest forever. A few of us may fly victoriously on the first attempt, but most of us are fearful and need additional strength and encouragement to venture out on God's promises. But remember: *God created us to fly*. He intended for us to rise above life's ups and downs to live victorious, happy years, confident that "underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

✎ The eternal God is your _____, and underneath are the _____ (Deuteronomy 33:27).

✎ Apply the training of young birds in the art of flying to the living of a Christian life.

DROP THE WEIGHTS

In the same way the birds were frustrated, discouraged, and paralyzed by fear, so are we. We don't seem to have any concept of what life is all about. Neither are we knowledgeable of God's instructions. Too often,

we are tossed back and forth between extremes and hold on to weights that keep us aground:

1. We assume the whole responsibility of our lives with no concept of grace.
2. We fail to realize the value of work.
3. We can neither accept God's forgiveness nor can we forgive others.
4. We do not bask in the sunshine of the love of our fellow man.
5. We cannot offer love to others because we have never learned to love ourselves.
6. We overlook the fact that being a good wife and mother is also an important part of God's work.
7. We fail to learn to rise above strife.
8. We become discouraged over inevitable holding patterns in the Christian life.



God never
intended for us
to stay in the
nest forever.

We will never learn to fly victoriously until we can drop the weights that prevent our flying as God intended.

✎ Review the “weights” above, and circle the ones you need to drop.

FLY WITH HAPPINESS

Do we have a real concept of Christianity? Do we show the world a face that looks like it was weaned on a dill pickle? Are we joyful? Christ came that we might have an abundant life (John 10:10). Life is meant to be happy right now! An old proverb states it well: “Happiness is a journey,

not a destination.” The journey includes accepting responsibility, for sure. Life was never meant to be a merry-go-round of carefree happiness but rather accountability to our Maker.

As we trust in God enough to fly, we look back over our shoulders to see happiness flying with us—a deep-seated sense of satisfaction that we are fulfilling our task. We must develop the habit of seeing something positive in every event. Both happiness and unhappiness can be self-fulfilling prophecy. We will find good or bad according to what we expect.

✎ What thoughts come to your mind when you read of the abundant life in John 10:10?

✎ Give an example of how we usually find what we are looking for, either good or bad.

ATTITUDE DETERMINES ALTITUDE

Problems are neither good nor bad. They are simply neutral. Your attitude toward them determines whether they will weigh you down or enable you to develop wings and soar.

Do you sometimes become so engulfed in a particular problem that you can see nothing good in the situation? Maybe you have felt like the writer who penned these words:



Lord, I'm drowning
In a sea of perplexity.
Waves of confusion
Crush over me.
I'm too weak
To shout for help.
Either quiet the waves
Or lift me above them.
It's too late
To learn to swim.



I can understand the desperation of the poet. I have been there and have felt the same sense of helplessness. Through it all I have learned some great truths about troubles. My own weaknesses have caused me to rely completely upon the strength of God.

✎ Consider the statement: “Problems are neither good nor bad—simply neutral.” Do you agree or disagree? What role does attitude play? Give concrete examples, either biblical or personal.

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

Most problems seem to fall into one of three categories:

1. Problems beyond our control.
2. Problems caused by our own carelessness.
3. Problems caused by sin.

PROBLEMS BEYOND OUR CONTROL

1. *Nature.* Tornadoes strike righteous people as well as evil ones. A raging river ignoring its assigned boundaries is relentless as it rushes down Main Street, ravaging shops, factories, and houses. Lightning strikes the most convenient conductor. Fire destroys any combustible material within its reach. Disability does not discriminate: emotionally and physically handicapped children are born to faithful Christians as well as to the vilest of sinners. Death comes to all, barring the return of Christ at the last day. Illness strikes the elderly and the young, Christians and unbelievers. Aging is part of life's process—our bodies peak around age 26. Then we begin our long, degenerative march to the city of dead. Nature is no respecter of persons.
2. *Carelessness or the maliciousness of others.* A drunken or irresponsible driver can hit us just as easily as he can hit someone else. A criminal will assault or kill one of his vile associates, or an innocent bystander. Burglars covet possessions without respect of persons. Those under the influence of drugs exhibit bizarre behavior, harming anyone who gets in their way—even those they love.

The victorious Christian encounters these risks just as often as anyone else. Can she change the circumstances? No, but with

God's help, she can exercise complete control over her attitude. She accepts obstacles as inevitable hurdles in the road of life and develops spiritual mega-muscles by climbing over them, digging under them, crawling around them, or balancing them on her shoulders and walking with them if all else fails. Her Christian attitude enables her to put such troubles into proper perspective. The Christian sees the silver lining!

PROBLEMS CAUSED BY OUR OWN CARELESSNESS

We may blame our misfortunes on God, but be completely honest: we bring many of them on ourselves.

- Carelessness can cause our house to go up in flames.
- Speeding or failing to heed a stop sign may result in a disabling automobile accident.
- Carelessness might be the culprit for an accident that disables or takes the life of a loved one, or even ourselves.
- Ignoring common rules of good health can weaken our bodies, making them more susceptible to disease.

CARELESS ATTITUDES

How can our bad attitudes cause problems? Does a bad attitude often precipitate emotional hurts? Yes, yes. It is careless of us to ignore the importance of looking at situations positively. Here are two examples:

1. *Stinking Thinking.* People usually find what they are looking for. If we condition our minds to see only the bad in everything that comes our way, we fail to find the nugget of gold buried deep inside every burden. We choose a bad attitude rather than a silver lining!

What if we constantly live in the past, imprisoned by circumstances that should have been laid to rest long ago? Or we may have such a low self-image that we broadcast negative thought waves. If we do not love ourselves, we cannot love others. If others feel unloved by us, why should we expect them to accept us with warm, open arms? Then their failure to accept us creates even more negatives from us. The cycle becomes vicious.

2. *Negligence*. What if we never look up to God? Does this mean we are careless? We can become so bogged down with the cares of this life that we succumb to the ravages of stress. Maybe we're such perfectionists that we can tolerate no faults in others, so we alienate



Sin will
inevitably
bring misery.

ourselves from the comforts of friendships. When we cannot accept the grace of God in our lives, our feelings of guilt burden us and we neither forgive ourselves nor others. We stand as a miserable island.

Negligence in the training of children and failure to construct a strong marriage are examples of carelessness. The consequential heart-break may be wayward children or broken homes.

What about mismanagement of money? How many materialistic problems are related to financial ignorance and negligence? Heavy doses of self-pity may warp our personalities into cynical, irritating, cantankerous people. Then how do we expect anyone to get along with us? Why do we fail to see silver linings in our clouds of trouble? Often we blame God for the problems we cause. Instead, we should step back and take an objective look at ourselves.

PROBLEMS CAUSED BY SIN

Although many of the troubles discussed in the previous section are the results of sins of the heart, they are found to some extent in the lives of practically every Christian. Gross sins recognized by any court in the land will also inevitably bring misery. Murder, adultery, child abuse, lying, stealing, illegal use of drugs, and a host of similar sins will produce only misery.

- ✎ What are the three main categories of problems?

- ✎ Define *victim*. List four problems that result from a person's being a victim.

- ✎ How can a Christian woman find a silver lining in the midst of problems over which she has no control?

- ✎ When can our own carelessness bring about troubles?

- ✎ How does a wrong attitude develop many of our problems?

- ✎ Give an example from the Bible of a problem that resulted from sinful living.

SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS

The first step in dealing with any problem is an outright admission: “I have a problem with . . . !” Refuse to nurture your difficulty by wallowing in self-pity. Instead, deal with it. Emotions never die, regardless of how deeply we bury them. We should be big enough to say, “My problem is beyond my control and I must learn how to accept it gracefully,” or “My problem is caused by my own carelessness.” It is better to admit the problem and recognize legitimate suffering. Carl Jung said, “Neurosis is always a substitute for legitimate suffering.” Sometimes the neurosis becomes more painful than the actual problem.

1. *Be objective about a problem.* An infection can never be healed by applying a bandage. The cause of the malady must be cleansed or cut away. The process may be painful, but it is necessary if we expect to live victoriously. Looking deep within calls for stronger glasses than most of us are willing to wear.

2. *Expect to find a solution.* If you don't expect to find one, you won't. The answer may result in a complete removal of the problem. It may involve a compromise. It could necessitate a mature acceptance of the inevitable. However, we must believe that with God's help we can handle anything. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).
3. *Confront work head-on.* Nothing great in life has ever been achieved without effort—a lot of effort. The answer may not be easily found, but it is there if we are willing to search honestly for it. Never automatically accept failure.
4. *Understand and accept problems.* Even Christ learned obedience from the things which He suffered, not in spite of them (Hebrews 5:8). So do we. All things will eventually work together for good for faithful children of God. Accept that divine promise at face value (Romans 8:28). Climbing over life's hurdles produces strong emotional and spiritual muscles.
5. *Thank God for the tests.* Strong winds produce deep roots for survival. Deep roots produce beautiful trees. "The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the hearts" (Proverbs 17:3). Realize that God is more interested in how we react to trials than He is in relieving our burdens. Once we realize that truth, our "why me" becomes "why not me" as we slowly develop our spiritual shock absorbers. We can see further through tears than through a telescope; we learn to accept a problem as the dawn instead of the twilight. We learn wisdom from failure much more than from success.

“Troubles are often the tools by which God fashions us for better things.”

—Henry Ward Beecher

“Those things that hurt, instruct.”

—Benjamin Franklin

✎ What are the five steps to finding solutions to most problems?

REACTIONS

The key to any problem lies in attitude. William James, a noted psychologist, observed: “The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.” The writer of Proverbs proclaimed that truth centuries earlier when he penned: “As he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).

We make our own emotions. A problem is neither good nor bad. Our reaction to that problem causes us either to become better or to totally destroy our usefulness. The same event may cause anger in one person and amusement in another. A trying event may crush one person and strengthen another.

Oddly enough, our physical systems work in direct proportion to our emotions. NASA has learned that nausea, sweating, and vomiting in space can be controlled in 75 percent of the cases by influencing the emotions through biofeedback and relaxation techniques. Since we make our own emotions—which, in turn, affect every aspect of daily living—we hold the key to living victoriously in the midst of inevitable

troubles. Search diligently for the key! With the help of God, we can all find our silver linings.

“Rocks in the road of life are not problems—they are simply challenges.”

—Unknown

- ✎ How is our own attitude the key to any problem?

- ✎ Give specific examples of making your own emotions, especially in relation to the effect they have upon our physical well-being.

- ✎ Why is it more positive to look at problems as challenges? Cite a scripture to back up your answer.

HIGH POINTS

Every person's existence has its low points, but it also has peaks. While writing this chapter, I originally used the term *prosperity* to describe the high points, but that particular word has many different connotations. To some it simply means money and material possessions. To others it implies a successful, prestigious career. Many consider a prominent social status to be synonymous with prosperity. Money, career, and prestige

have absolutely nothing to do with the peaks in a person's life. Perhaps the phrases *good times*, *clear sailing*, and *absence of serious problems* better convey the real meaning—times when everything seems to be going well. Money may be plentiful or the bank account may barely stretch to make ends meet. The house or apartment may be either spacious and



*Prosperity is
the test of our
integrity.*

—Unknown

plush or small and unpretentious. The job may be prestigious or menial. The clothes may be bargains or designer fashions. However, life is generally smooth. There are no serious emotional or spiritual problems. All seems to be going well.

Such a situation may appear to be good, but it is not conducive to the development of the spiritual muscles needed to fly victoriously. We will never develop our wings as long as we are content to rest in the nest. Sometimes we need

the high points to balance the low ones. But a constant barrage of troubles is likely to create conflict between us and the winds that lift us above the mundane. While low points are necessary to develop our spirituality, an onslaught can completely destroy us. In His wisdom God is in effect saying, “You have gone through many hard times. Now is the time for life to seem good to you. It’s a time for you to catch your breath.”

“Adversity will check the depth of stability, whereas prosperity is the test of our integrity.” I don’t know the source of that quote, but isn’t it true? While the high points in any person’s life are necessary for survival, they should be approached with caution. When things are going well, we are tempted to feel self-sufficient—no need to rely on God for strength. Success then becomes a severe test. Abraham Lincoln said, “If you really want to test a person’s character, give him power.” Certainly, the same can be said of prosperity.

- ✎ When the word *prosperity* is mentioned, what thoughts come to your mind? Discuss the connotation of prosperity that has nothing to do with material possessions, achievements, or social status.

- ✎ Why is the rest or relief found in the high points of life necessary for survival? What can be the dangers?

LEVEL GROUND

What experiences can best be described as level ground? The bottom has not fallen out of our world, but neither are we soaring above the clouds. It is the in-between time of life when things are neither all rosy nor all black. It is a mixture of both good and bad, with neither gaining preeminence. True, there are ripples in the sand, but they are minor vexations.

Sometimes we can handle trivial irritations without any trouble. At other times, they can become major threats. Solomon admonishes us to beware of the little foxes that can spoil the vines (Song of Solomon 2:15). These trivial vexations left to their own can gnaw at our inner beings until they completely destroy us. They are not big problems. In fact, they seem so trivial that we usually feel it is unnecessary to bother God with them. After all, aren't we big enough to handle them ourselves? That proud attitude might be our downfall. Beware of any movement toward self-sufficiency because there is no such thing! A head-long dive into oblivion might be hidden just around the bend. Minor vexations can smolder deep within and poison us. Let's heed Solomon's advice and beware of little foxes.

Thorns



Little things.
Things that prick, penetrate
 . . . and progressively poison.
Unexpected things.
Low-lying vines that trip, tangle
 . . . and eventually imprison.
The thorns which I have reaped
 are of the tree
I planted! They have torn me,
 and I bleed.
I should have known what fruit
 would spring from such a deed.
—Byron

- ✎ Solomon warned of the dangers of little foxes in Song of Solomon 2:15. What little foxes have you experienced? How have you coped with them?

CONCLUSION

I have been the bird on the sand. With the publication of *She Hath Done What She Could*, I thought I could fly from the nest without any trouble. Through *Caterpillars and Butterflies*, *Let This Cup Pass*, and *Meet My Friend David*, I have experienced my share of struggling to fly,

falling to the ground, and rising again only to find that my wings were not strong enough for me to soar. There have been times of songs in the night.

“Where is God, my Maker, who gives songs in the night?”

—Job 35:10

“The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me.”

—Psalm 42:8

There have been low points and high peaks, in addition to the level ground with its minor vexations. Through it all, I have learned some valuable lessons as I have grasped the entire scope of life.

I am sharing my struggles to help you. Perhaps the words will strike heart chords that will vibrate for centuries.

I once thought we should struggle through hardships here on this earth and one day be rewarded in heaven. I failed to thank God for the little thorns that came my way. Looking back over the years, I am sure I took the high points of life for granted. With the gaining of wisdom, I have learned that we mount to heaven primarily on the ruins of our cherished dreams. Our failures are the rocks on which we climb. Happiness and peace are not reserved for later; they are intended to be enjoyed today! A Christian’s life is meant to be victorious, happy, and joyful right now—this very minute!

For years, I have treasured these thoughts our daughter cross-stitched. Her handiwork hangs as a priceless possession in our home.

*What we are is God’s gift to us.
What we become is our gift to God.*
—Louis Nizer

C



TRUST THE DIVINE FLIGHT PLAN

No commercial pilot can legally take off from an airport until he is instructed by the official in the control tower. The tower official, with his instruments and visual capability, has a more comprehensive view of surroundings than the pilot does. Long before the pilot is licensed to take control of an aircraft, he has mastered the knowledge necessary for flying, including subjection to air traffic controllers.

The instructions are not quite so sophisticated when a young bird spreads its wings to fly over the ocean, but the scene is similar. The mother tirelessly prepares her eagle chick by swooping around the nest, fluttering her wings with much ado. Although the sounds mean nothing to us, they are very important to both the mother and her fledgling. It is a wise eaglet who realizes he is dependent on his parent for proper guidance. Smug self-confidence with no flight instructions could very well cause him to perish in his attempt to traverse the air space over a vast ocean.

What can we learn from birds and airplanes? Before we can live victoriously, we must cease to rely on ourselves and put our trust in God. Over and over, the Scriptures stress the importance of God's instructions: