



PLAIN AND SIMPLE SERIES®

# *Never Give Up!*

THE FRUIT OF LONGSUFFERING

NANCY  
MISSLER



***Never Give Up!***

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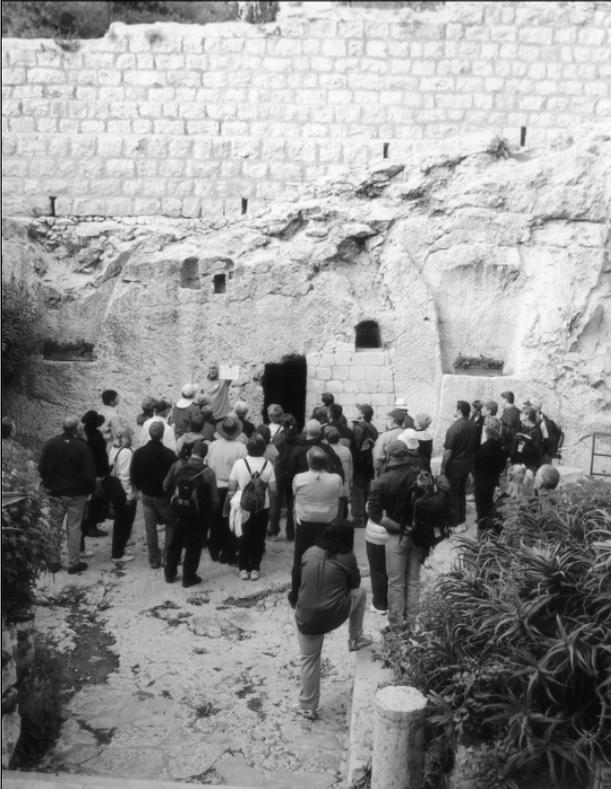
Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Holy Bible.

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## **Never Give Up!**

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**“We are troubled on every side, *yet not distressed*;  
we are perplexed, *but not in despair*; persecuted,  
*but not forsaken*; cast down, *but not destroyed...*”  
(2 Corinthians 4:8-9)**

*He never let go, He never gave in, and  
He never gave up!*

## ***The Empty Tomb***

*2005 Israel Tour*

## Introduction

What do you *do* when your dreams, your plans and your hopes blow up in your face? Who do you blame when everything in the Bible gave you hope but, then, out of the blue, all was destroyed? How do you react when difficult and trying circumstances seem to go on and on and on?

Have you ever experienced such a time as this? A time where you became so confused, so discouraged and so disheartened in your Christian walk that you wanted to let go, give in and give up?

The dictionary describes this feeling of utter disillusionment as *dismay*. It means we have become so perplexed, bewildered and confused at the total devastation we see in our lives that we are completely undone. The dictionary describes it this way: *Dismay occurs when courage and resolution are taken away from us by the alarm and fear we find at every turn.*

Synonyms of the word *dismay* are: appalled, horrified, disheartened, disabled, unnerved or cracked. It's the feeling of just *wanting to give up and die*. How aptly these words express Job's state of mind when, after all the devastation in his life, he cries out "now, I am nothing!" (Job 6:21)

If we are honest with ourselves, all of us at one time or another have felt dismay. However in many Christian lives, this state of mind seems to be the "norm." Many have experienced some sort of vision, dream or hope smashed in front of their eyes and have been left in an impossible situation. (Proverbs 29:18; 13:12) They not only feel deceived by God, but abandoned by Him in their greatest need. The

**“He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”  
(Philippians 1:6)**

desperation that results is beyond any sensory pain that one could ever bear. Psychiatrists tell us that grief of mind *is* often harder to bear than physical pain. Paul expresses it perfectly in 2 Corinthians 1:8 when he says that he “despaired of life itself.”

As Christians, *hope* in God and the promises of His Word are the anchors of our soul. (Hebrews 6: 19) It’s imperative that we have complete confidence that the Lord *will do all* that He promises in His Word. That’s the basis of our faith. Our spiritual existence is determined by our expectation of the Lord’s provision for our future. Consequently, if our trust and expectations are shattered by some inexplicable experience, then overwhelming fear and confusion and the feeling of wanting to give up result.

Take, for example, the young Christian woman who has undergone three open heart surgeries in the last three years. Cindy not only was assured by her doctor each time that she was healed and could go home, but she also has had many personal promises from the Lord about her healing. How does Cindy now deal with the fact that, as of today, her heart is once again 98% blocked and, she now faces her 29<sup>th</sup> angioplasty in 36 months?

Then, there’s the Christian wife, married for over 30 years, who not only has had hundreds of personal Scriptures promising the restoration of her marriage, but also the word of her wayward husband that “this time” he would remain faithful. How does she now deal with the fact that once again her husband has been caught cheating?

And, again, how does the Christian husband apply God’s promise of Psalm 91 *to give His angels charge over him and to keep him in all his ways*, when one year ago he lost his only daughter in a tragic car accident,

his only son, soon after, was committed to a long-term care unit because of drug use and today his wife lies in a hospital because of an attempted suicide.

In light of these trials, tribulations and tragedies, how does one keep from becoming dismayed, discouraged and depressed? How do we avoid the feeling of wanting to let go, give in and give up?

This is the kind of scenario that seems to be happening in so many Christian homes at the present time. As one believer put it to me recently: “It’s like being on a bungee cord, bounced back and forth, never able to stop.” Another expressed it this way: “It’s like bringing a baby to birth [meaning God’s own personal promises], but not being able to deliver it (promises unfulfilled).” And yet another: “I don’t know how much more I can take. I’m just about ready to give up!”

The question becomes: How do we refrain from being angry, bitter and blaming God in situations like these? How do we get to the point where we *never let go, never give in and never give up*?

Isaiah 41:10 tells us, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee. **Be not dismayed [never give up]**; for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” (See also Deuteronomy 31:8)

There’s our promise. There’s our hope. And there’s our part. God is telling us that if we choose *not* to be dismayed, then He will be with us, He will strengthen us, help us and uphold us!

The question is: How do we do this? How do we never give up, so that *He* will be with us, help us and uphold us?

## Longsuffering

The Biblical answer is by learning *longsuffering*. And, believe it or not, longsuffering is a fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22 lists it as number 4 on a list of 10!! Now, all of us yearn for the fruit of Love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance, but who on earth wants to learn “longsuffering” or patient enduring? No, thank you! And, yet, God says longsuffering *is* a part of His character, a part of His image and a part of His nature. Therefore it’s something He wants us all to learn.

Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 1:16 that he, himself, is a perfect pattern or model of Christ’s longsuffering. He says that since Christ patiently endured his (Paul’s), sinful ways, we must remember this example and patiently endure others’ sinful ways.

Longsuffering simply means “*suffering that seems to last forever.*” But please hear this: *Longsuffering is always associated with hope and mercy.* Therefore, it is the opposite of despair, discouragement and depression. 1 Thessalonians 1:3 confirms this with: “remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope [longsuffering] in our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Another definition of longsuffering that I really like is: *believing all things, hoping all things and enduring all things.* Longsuffering here describes someone who *continually* puts all unfulfilled hopes, dreams and visions at the foot of the Cross and never lets go, never gives in and never gives up!

***Longsuffering is simply Love that endures all circumstances. Are you willing to learn this kind of Love?***

That’s what this little book is all about.

## Precious Examples

Longsuffering speaks of a person who doesn’t give in to dismay, confusion and discouragement when difficult circumstances or trials occur, but patiently endures them without complaint, always “seeing Him who is invisible.” (Hebrews 11:27)

First, there’s the example of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Daniel’s three friends thrown into the fiery furnace, where Nebuchadnezzar had committed them because they would not bow down and worship him. Rather than bemoan their fate, they declared that the “God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” (Daniel 3:17-18)

Can you imagine giving this response to the king of the known world at the time? Nebuchadnezzar was so furious at their response that his composure completely changed. He commanded his mighty men to bind the three, make the fire seven times hotter and cast them into it.

We all know the end of the story. When Nebuchadnezzar looked into the fire to see what was happening, he said, “Did we not cast *three* men, bound, into the midst of the fire?” His men answered, “Yes, my Lord.” Nebuchadnezzar then said, “I see *four* men loose, **walking in the midst of the fire**, and they have no hurt, and ...the fourth is like the Son of God.” (Verses 24-25)

Truly, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego never let go, never gave in and never gave up! They persevered until they “saw Him who is invisible.”

A stunning example of one who hasn't given in to dismay or confusion in her trial but has patiently endured it without complaint, is my dear friend, Christine. Married to a pastor, mother of five children, Christine is desperately trying to hold on to her failing marriage. She has every Biblical right to leave, but more than anything else, she wants the Lord's will. Listen to what she just wrote me:

“Many of us face hardships in our marriages, but *we must never give up on God!* Although the valleys seem dark and it does appear that ‘we are troubled on every side, distressed, persecuted and cast down, but in the eyes our faithful God, *we are not distressed, not in despair, not forsaken and not destroyed.*’ (2 Corinthians 4:8-9) Because we are loved by God and He desires that we live the abundant life. His abundant life only comes from a dying to self and a living for Christ. He is a God that loves to have His children bear fruit. It's not the same fruit that the world bears; that of financial wealth, and material things but the wealth that never rusts and never passes away—the fruit of the spirit. Through the many trials of my life and the one I am currently in, I know that *all* is Father-filtered. He is pruning me and I am beginning to bring forth that precious fruit. The fruit of longsuffering has been the most painful to birth and I have resisted the process many days. But, I am beginning to see the blossom and one day this fruit will be evident for all to see.”

The following poem is one that Christine wrote only two weeks ago. She wrote it, as you will hear, from her heart. I know you will agree, after reading it, that God is not only in and all around this beautiful

sister in the Lord, but that He has a special future planned out for her. Listen:

*“As the sun sets each day the night brings despair, somewhere in the darkness my knight has disappeared. The road and the battle have been long and tough, only those in the darkness begin to enjoy the lack of trust.*

*“The knight that once rode upon a valiant white horse is lost somewhere in the darkness and appears so distraught.*

*“The one to whom he wed searches for the one that was so true, only to find the shadows of them she once knew.*

*“Her heart is broken and her head begins to spin, as she feels the enemy approaches, appearing to win.*

*“The maiden has turned older and a bit worn. Wisdom has crept by, her loved one has gone.*

*“She sees his shiny armor only in her dreams as she dances there with the man that used to call her queen.*

*“The younger maiden in the land has caught her husband's eye and the screams you hear are that of a dream that wants to live but only seems to die. The screams are silent many times as she sees him look at her, for that was her valiant knight who has drifted far from her.*

*“The old maiden used to feel that love was worth her while and that she would sail off with him and never ever cry.*

*“Time has past and seasons change, the night won’t last forever. One day the old maiden will awake with hope bound in her heart looking from the past to a brand new start.*

*“The days grow cold and the screams seem to linger but the maiden knows that it will not always be December.*

*“The winter will pass and the screams will go away and the maiden will arise with the promise of a new day. As God’s promise is bigger than the pain and her latter dreams become true, God’s promises will erase the trials and tribulations that caused her disgrace.*

*“The trials and tribulations will have made her strong and her screams will turn into laughter as the pain turns into song.*

*“Morning comes alive with the promise of a new day, weeping has turned to joy in a more excellent way. God’s Love has overcome and the birds begin to fly, the wind begins to whisper a familiar lullaby, ‘Never Give Up’ will be the words that the Holy Spirit imparts and that darkness now has turned to day and as the promises embark.*

*“Longsuffering has blossomed, a new beginning is made, God’s promises are certain and this is a new day!!!”*

In her letter, Christine went on to write a few thoughts to those experiencing similar trials. This is what she had to say:

*“Stay on the vine, the pruning process may make you scream, but the fruit that results is the sweetest in the land. I pray that if you are in the season of pruning that you would allow the fruit of longsuffering to come forth. I pray that in some way this writing will give you a hope of a new tomorrow. God will wipe away all the tears and you will break forth into song. Stronger for the experience, richer in your walk with God. My prayer is that this writing will give you hope. Again, as 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 says, ‘We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.’”*

This book is chock-full of examples like Christine. Men and women who in spite of their horrific circumstances, have chosen to never let go, never give in and *never give up*. We’ll explore their situations and learn just “how” they are able to do it.

*Never giving up* is what this little book is all about. *How do we avoid becoming overwhelmed and dismayed at our horrifying and tragic trials? How do we persevere through them rather than falling apart in them? And, how do we take a negative situation (in our minds) and turn it around into a positive one? Remember, Isaiah 41:10: “Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you. I will uphold you...”* Again, this is our promise. This is our commission. And this is our hope!

But, first, we must learn to do our part in that promise: not to become dismayed; *never to give up!*

In light of this, Hebrews 6:12 is an interesting Scripture. It tells us that we are to be followers of them who through *faith* and *patience* (i.e., longsuffering) inherit the promises of God. Well, let me ask you a question: Could the reverse also be true? *If we don't learn longsuffering, we won't inherit God's promises.* Wow! Read that again! Could this Scripture be telling us that only as we learn patiently to endure will the Lord's promises be fulfilled in our lives? It's just a question, but it certainly tells me that longsuffering is an essential "fruit" and that it must be learned in order to embrace all of God's promises.

## Definition of Suffering

The definition for the word "suffering" is probably quite different from what you might imagine. Suffering means "barring our selves from following sin and self." In other words, when we choose to bar ourselves from following what *we* want, what *we* feel and what *we* desire, and choose, instead, to follow what *Jesus* has asked, we often do suffer. It's hard to say "no" to self and "yes" to God. And, it's difficult to put another's interests and needs before our own.

"L o n g" suffering then, is simply a means of unselfing us. As someone said to me yesterday, it's the means by which we *unlearn* all that we have learned so far by the flesh; and, it's a *relearning* of everything all over again by the Spirit. This in-between learning time is often called "longsuffering."

The root of the word "longsuffering" in the Greek is *thumos* which means anger, wrath or indignation. Longsuffering means "holding back or restraining" what we really feel (anger, wrath or indignation) and what we really want to do; and instead, doing what God wants us to do. The way we hold back or

restrain our natural response is by choosing to give our anger, wrath and bitterness, etc., to God, rather than acting upon them. Again, it's "barring ourselves from following what we would really like to do" and, instead, doing what God wants us to do. God, then, promises to be our champion, our defender and our vindicator.

When we learn to respond in this way, Romans 5:3-5 tells us we'll be able to "glory in [our] tribulations...knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, *experience*; and experience, *hope*; and, hope maketh not ashamed, because the *Love of God* is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us."

Note, by the way, the order of spiritual growth here: hope and love are apprehended only *after patient enduring* and experience. Not *before*!

## An Extreme Example

An extreme example of this is the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor, professor and one of the most brilliant minds of the twentieth century. He witnessed Adolf Hitler's diabolical rise to power in the 1930's. After struggling with the moral issues involved, he joined the resistance movement. He was found out, caught and put into solitary confinement until they hanged him just a few weeks before World War II ended. He wrote a magnificent work called *The Cost of Discipleship* and paid the cost with his life. It is a classic today.

A biography of Bonhoeffer's life describes him as never truly being alone because, as the author puts it, "the Lord was always with him." Anchoring his daily

life in the simple disciplines of Bible study and prayer, he used his time in prison to ponder and write on deep spiritual issues.<sup>1</sup>

We will be quoting Bonhoeffer quite often throughout this book. He felt strongly that “*fulfilment of the Christian life can only be found on the other side of suffering.*” Only patient enduring and experience can bring about the hope and love we are all seeking.

## The End Times

I truly believe we are living in the “end times,” because something drastic has changed in the world. Something has been unleashed. Something is different!

David Wilkerson in his *Times Square Pulpit Series* (June, 2003 & Sept. 2004 issues) wrote:

“In all my years of ministry, I’ve never seen so many believers under such affliction. There has never been a time like this, with families facing financial crises, enduring marital struggles, despairing over children in rebellion...Wives and families are being overwhelmed. Pastors are quitting by the hundreds in every nation...Everywhere we go, we see pandemic despair...”

“We’re living in a time of the greatest gospel revelation in history. There are more preachers, more books, and more gospel-media saturation than ever. *Yet there has never been more distress, affliction and troubled minds among God’s people.*”

From my own walk of 47 years with the Lord, it appears that God has begun to wrap up life as we know it. He’s accomplishing this by allowing more world problems, a greater magnitude of personal problems and a wave of evil that we have not experienced before. Consequently, Christians are being forced to choose sides. The Lord is not letting us be “fence sitters” any more. Lukewarmness is no longer to be tolerated. In these end times, no one is exempt from God’s purging. We’re all in the “fire” together. Thus, rather than get burned up from ignorance, apathy and fear, let’s find out how to use our difficult times *to* our advantage and *for* His glory.

1 Peter 4:17 reminds us that “the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God.” Now, I never thought I would live long enough to see this Scripture come alive before my very eyes. But, it has! It’s telling us that each of us, every Christian, will pass under the judgment of God. Every aspect of our lives will be tested; all our secrets exposed; all our motives revealed. The method God uses to accomplish this will come through our tribulations. It has been aptly said that we are forged in the crucible of adversity!

James 1:3-4 teaches that “the testing of [our] faith produces patience. But [we are to] let patience have its perfect work, that [we] may be *perfect and complete*, lacking nothing.” Clearly, it is the fruit of longsuffering that transforms us into the image of Christ. Wow!

These are heavy Scriptures.

So, no matter how we look at it, “longsuffering” seems to go with being a Christian, certainly nowadays. Most of us probably didn’t realize this when we “signed on.” But at this point in our walk with the Lord, *we*

*have no other choice but to proceed.* Luke reminds us that those who look back are not fit for the kingdom. (Luke 9:62) Besides, where else would we go? Who else has the answers to life? And who else knows the end from the beginning? Only Jesus Christ.

God wants us to glorify (reflect) Him in every situation, no matter how difficult. In doing so, we prove that we do, indeed, love Him. In Genesis 22:12, the Lord says to Abraham, who in obedience would have sacrificed his only son, that now He knows “that you fear [love] God, seeing that you have not withheld thy son [your most precious possession]...” We, too, must learn how to love the Lord in all circumstances, not withholding *our most precious possessions—our dreams, our hopes and our visions*—but willingly laying them down at the Cross, remembering that nothing can touch us but what God has not *first* ordained. In other words, no person, no situation, no tragedy and no illness can come into our lives that is not “Father filtered”—allowed by His sovereign permission. And when He does say “yes” to certain situations, He promises to ‘be with us, not fail or forsake us, to strengthen us, help us and uphold us.’

The most wonderful promise of all is 2 Timothy 2:12, “If we suffer [deny self], *we shall also reign with Him.*” Could the reverse also be true?

I believe the Lord is telling us here that the fruit of longsuffering is absolutely critical to experience, imperative to implement and essential to display. There seem to be eternal consequences!

## What About Us?

Most of us talk very openly about “being like Christ” and of having His characteristics of Love, joy,

peace, etc., but what about the fruit of longsuffering—that determination to *never give up*? Do we also manifest this fruit to others? How easy it is for us simply to *preach* “Christ crucified” without ever really living it.<sup>2</sup> One of Jesus’ main characteristics was longsuffering Love! So the question we must constantly ask ourselves is, how can we preach Christ crucified if we really don’t understand what longsuffering is all about?

Someone made a statement to me recently that was absolutely profound: she said, “It’s crucial that the messenger becomes the message itself.” Think about that for a moment. The messenger (the one relaying God’s Word) must become the message (one living God’s Word). What she was saying is that we must not only “talk the talk,” we must also “live” the message of God’s Love, joy, peace and longsuffering.

How can we even talk about the fruit of the Spirit, if we don’t manifest all of it? There’s no way we can communicate God’s message of Love to others, especially in trials, if we have not first experienced it for ourselves! Head knowledge can only produce head knowledge in others. Heart knowledge can only produce heart knowledge. But, “foot knowledge” (His life showing forth in our actions) births “foot knowledge” in others.

Our daily prayer should be exactly what Paul prayed in 2 Corinthians 4:12, that death [of self] would work in us, so that Christ’s life could be formed in others.

Longsuffering is God’s means of answering that prayer.

Yet, the question remains: how do we *do* it?

## Chapter 1

### God's Cycle of Trust

**“Though He slay me, yet will I *trust* Him.”**  
**(Job 13:15)**

#### Why Trials and Suffering?

Trials, problems and tragedies come to all Christians. They come because of personal sin, they come because of the sins of others, they come because of the schemes of the devil, and they come because God has allowed them for our growth. In my book *Faith in the Night Seasons* we covered some of the basic reasons why God allows trials.

- 1) To strengthen our faith and trust in Him (1 Peter 5:10)
- 2) To produce all the fruit of the Spirit (Hebrews 10:36; James 1:3; Psalm 30:5)
- 3) To silence the enemy (Job 1:9-12; 2:3-7)
- 4) To glorify Himself through us (John 9:1-3; 11:1-4)
- 5) To conform us more into His image (Philippians 3:10)
- 6) To enlarge our ministry (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)
- 7) So that we might see, and then deal, with our sin (1 Peter 2:20; Hebrews 12:5-9)
- 8) And, finally, to search our hearts to see if we really love Him (as in Genesis 22)

Judges 2:20-23 is a perfect example of this last point. In this chapter God tests the Israelites by *not* driving out their enemy, but, instead, letting their enemy stand and not be conquered. How many of us have experienced a similar time when God *doesn't* seem to answer our prayers, but actually allows the opposite to occur! This Scripture tells us that He does so simply to know our hearts and to see if we love Him.

A precious, single Christian woman I know just recently experienced this very thing. She moved away from her home, her job and her family because of a very painful experience. She was convinced that God had told her to move and that He would bless her in the new situation.

But, unfortunately, once she settled in the new city, got a great job and a wonderful apartment, all hell broke loose. Her friends betrayed her, her job evaporated, a relationship she prayed would work out disintegrated; and now she's wondering if she ever heard God at all.

The Lord is obviously very concerned with our comfort, our security and our future, but I believe He is primarily concerned with how those circumstances are going to affect us internally. In other words, will they bring about a changed heart and a transformed life? In the long run, will they draw us closer to Him? And will they cause us to love others more? Again, as someone said to me recently, God's more interested with the sanctification process *in us*, than He is with the success or the attainment that we are after. Remember, God's ways are opposite to the world's ways. Now that's not exactly what we want to hear, but I do believe it's the truth.

God's ways are not our ways. He's not interested in the "outward" man. He looks at our hearts, our true motives and our real intents. This is what He wants exposed. Not for His own benefit, for He already knows the truth, but for our own. He wants *us* to see it for ourselves.

The woman above is slowly beginning to realize all of this as she looks back over the last year of her life and sees God's handiwork. *Hind-sight is wonderful, isn't it?*

One of our natural responses in a trial, however, is to blame the enemy for most everything that happens. In reality, however, we must acknowledge that not every difficult situation comes from him. Please don't misunderstand me, the enemy is *always* involved when difficult things occur in our lives and he rejoices when we get into trouble or when we react poorly to what the Lord has allowed. Our negative reactions give him more ammunition and more inroads into our soul. But the enemy, himself, is not always the one responsible for sending the trial. God often does that! This is a hard truth to hear; but listen to what Isaiah 53:10 has to say, in speaking about Jesus, "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him;... [and] put Him to grief."

I believe there are times that God must do the same with us. What the Lord means to use "for good" in our lives, the enemy, on the other hand is right there trying to use to destroy.

## How We Respond is Key

*In all of this, the most important thing is "how we respond." Whether we withdraw, advance or simply stay where we are, which is really impossible, depends upon our moment-by-moment responses. Because this*

is what will determine our whole spiritual future. If we understand what God wants from us and what we are to do, then we can remain peaceful in the eye of the storm and come through the circumstances quickly. If, however, we don't understand what God is after and we react poorly to His set-up, then we'll stumble, become confused and only prolong our agony.

Some tragic examples of this are:

After losing his job, his home and his family, Mike (a dear, Christian friend of mine) commented, "Nancy, where's God in all of this? I feel completely abandoned. And, I just can't take it anymore. I'm giving up. I'm out of here."

This response broke my heart.

Another Christian woman cried out in a recent counseling session, "What have I done to deserve all of this? Praying doesn't seem to help. Reading the Word is useless. I'm going back to what I know."

I could hardly hold back my tears.

And, finally, another brother asked, "What about all God's promises to me? How could He allow this to happen? I can't trust Him anymore! I'm just going to have to get myself out of this mess."

No, no, no! The answer is not to give up, *but to trust more!*

All the above responses are disastrous. And their emotional outburst cost them in their relationship with the Lord. It severed their communication with Him and quenched His Spirit at the time that they needed Him the most.

When God's promise seems to fail and the vision tarry, it's not time to grow weary and give up, even though that's exactly what we "feel" like doing. *It's a time to do just the opposite! It's a time to hang on tighter, trust the Lord further and **never give up!***

Remember, in Exodus 32, where all the Israelites in the wilderness "gave up" on Moses on the mount and began making for themselves a golden calf? And remember, too, in Numbers 13, where all but two of the spies *gave up* because, they said, giants "dwell in the land...and they are stronger than we."

Again, we must remind ourselves in our crises that it's not a time to grow weary and give up, but a time to trust the Lord further and *never give up*. A time to say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." (Job 13:15)

So, how should the above Christians have responded? What should they have done? What steps would have made their circumstances more tolerable? How could they have had victory in their storms?

## Jesus is Our Example

We are told throughout the New Testament to keep our eyes upon Jesus because *He is our example*. He showed us how to think, how to act, how to live and how to respond. The apostle Peter validates this in 1 Peter 2:21:

"For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, *leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps.*"<sup>3</sup>

Also in 1 Peter 4:1:

“Forasmuch, then, as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, *arm yourselves likewise with the same mind* [or the same attitude].”

Jesus is not only our Savior, our Lord and our King, He is also our role model, our standard and our example. Jesus defined the Christian life for us. He walked it “perfectly.” He showed us how it’s supposed to be done, how it’s supposed to be walked and how it’s supposed to be lived. Now, obviously, we’ll *never* be able to emulate Jesus perfectly, but Scripture tells us that we are to set Him as our example. We are to learn by His model. In other words, if God used the “way of suffering” in Jesus’ life to accomplish His will, then it’s reasonable to expect that *He will use our trials and our suffering to accomplish His will in our lives also.*

Bonhoeffer wrote, “The cross means sharing the suffering of Christ to the last and to the fullest... If we refuse to take up our cross and submit to suffering and rejection at the hands of men, we forfeit our fellowship with Christ and have ceased to follow Him...” And, again, there is “no easy way to God, for He resides *behind the Cross.*”<sup>24</sup>

2 Peter 3:15 teaches that it was only through “the longsuffering of Jesus” that we received salvation! Take a minute to comprehend what this Scripture is saying. If the Lord arranged for us to be saved *only through His longsuffering*—through His patiently enduring our failures, our blunders and our errors, are we not to do the same for our families, our friends and our loved ones? Perhaps *our* longsuffering towards other people might eventually bring them salvation—just as Jesus’ did for us.

## Love That Endures

Matthew 24:12 is a Scripture that I have quoted many, many times over the past 25 years in regards to the *Way of Agape*: “And because iniquity shall abound, *the Love [Agape] of many shall grow cold.*” But, take a look at the very next verse in regards to *longsuffering or never giving up*: “he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”

The word “endure” here is *hupomeno* which means to stay under or to stay behind. Endurance is the agency by which we stay, abide, continue in, and dwell under. Just as Jesus endured the Cross, we, too, must stay under, courageously suffering and enduring all the difficult situations that the Lord allows in our lives. Why? So that others may come to know Christ through our patient hope and loving endurance.

*Hupomeno* can also mean “perseverance.” Perseverance is far more than simple endurance. And, it’s far more than just hanging on. Perseverance means *continuing* to fight, *continuing* to act and *continuing* to initiate. I am reminded of Jashobeam, the chief captain of David’s army, who slew 300 foes at one time with only his spear. (1 Chronicles 11)

Perseverance is endurance combined with absolute assurance and certainty that what we are looking for, will happen. Again, it’s *never giving up!*

Listen to some of the incredible Scriptural promises to those Christians who persevere, endure and never give up:

Mark 13:13, “...*he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*” (“saved”)

2 Timothy 2:10, “Therefore, I endure all things for the elects’ sake, *that they may also obtain the salvation* which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” (“salvation”)

Hebrews 12:7, “If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” (“sonship”)

Revelation 3:10, “Because [you] have kept the word of my patience [*hupomeno*], *I also will keep [you] from the hour of temptation*, which shall come upon all the world to try them.” (“kept from coming evil times”)

James 5:11, “Behold, we count them happy who endure. Ye have heard of the *patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord*, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.” (“mercy of the Lord”)

1 Corinthians 13:4 & 7, “Love...beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” (“never failing Love”)

James 1:12, “*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation*; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.” (“crown of life”)

Notice in all of the above Scriptures what one who *never gives up* receives: salvation, sonship, protection from tribulation, the mercy of the Lord, unfailing Love and the crown of life. *Aren’t these worth learning the fruit of longsuffering?* You decide...

God uses our trials and our suffering to accomplish His highest will and purposes in our lives. 1 Peter 5:10 assures us that “after you have suffered awhile,” the God of all grace will “perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.”

Because our trials can come upon us suddenly and without advance warning, they can end up in either one of two ways: **cycle of trust** or **cycle of defeat**. If we know what God’s basic will is and we trust Him, then we can, at least, have the faith that no matter what we see or feel, He will work out His perfect will in our lives in His timing and way.

## What is God’s Will?

This brings up a very good question: What exactly is God’s *basic* will for our lives? It’s easy to say that God will use our trials and our suffering to accomplish His will in our lives, but what exactly does this mean?

God’s will *for all mankind* is that we might have a personal and eternal relationship with Him through salvation. As John 3:13-17 says, Christ came so that all might be saved. God’s will *for believers*, however, is much more specific. He wants all Christians *to be conformed into His image by the process of sanctification*. (Romans 8:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 6:1) In brief, He wants to reproduce His Life in us, including the fruit of longsuffering which, as we said, was one of Jesus’ most precious characteristics. (John 10:10a)

I have always taught that God’s basic will for our lives is that we be conformed into Christ’s image, but for some reason I never realized the full ramifications of this statement. Not only does God want us to be conformed into His image of Love, joy, peace, etc., *but also to be conformed into His image of endurance*,

*longsuffering, forbearing and perseverance.* This is what the process of sanctification is all about—teaching us how to never let go, never give in and ***never give up***, no matter what the cost. It cost Jesus *everything*. He gave up His heavenly place of authority and humbled Himself to take on humanity. He gave to us in a complete outpouring of His Godhood, of sacrifice for us, and perhaps He risked beyond what we can even imagine. Are we willing to do the same for Him?

Again, Bonhoeffer relates: “The wondrous theme of the Bible that frightens so many people is that the only visible sign of God in the world is the cross. Christ is not carried away from earth to heaven in glory, but He must go to the cross. And precisely there, where the cross stands, the resurrection is near; even there, where everyone begins to doubt God, where everyone despairs of God’s power, there God is whole, there Christ is active and near. Where the power of darkness does violence to the light of God, there God triumphs and judges the darkness.”<sup>5</sup>

## Trusting God Is Essential

The first place we must begin our exploration of the fruit of longsuffering—never giving up—is with the concept of trusting God. The only way we can ever learn this most precious characteristic of His, is by unconditionally trusting Him.

What exactly is trust? The Greek word is *peitho* which means “to rely upon, to have confidence in or to believe in.” Think about it for moment. Trust encompasses absolutely everything. Everything we think, say and do is built upon either trust in *someone* or trust in *something*. Most of us have learned the hard way that if we put our trust in material things or other people, we’ll usually be let down. That leaves us with just two other options: either put our trust in ourselves,

which again most of us have found out to be deadly (see Proverbs 28:26), or put our trust in the Lord. We *cannot* do both. We cannot fully trust in God and trust in ourselves at the same time. We must choose one or the other.

For Christians, Hebrews 2:13 tells us that there is only one correct answer. We must unconditionally trust in the Lord and Him alone. He is the only One who has all the answers to life. He is the only One who knows all the intricate plans He has for our individual lives. And He is the only One who can control what comes in and out of our lives. *Trusting God means cleaving to Him with unreserved confidence no matter how we feel, what we see or what we understand; being fully persuaded that what He has promised, He will perform in His timing and in His way.* (Romans 4:20)

By experience, most of us have learned that God’s ways are often far far beyond our human understanding. Thus, if we are to walk with Him, love Him and experience His Life through us, we must unreservedly cling to the assurance that whatever He allows in our lives is for a purpose. *Being able to trust Him, rely upon Him and have confidence in Him in these times is absolutely essential.* If we give in to doubting His Love and His care at this time, we can easily lose our way. It’s impossible to do His will and learn longsuffering without being able to trust Him completely!

## The Lord’s Cycle of Trust

One of my favorite Scriptures is Psalm 37:5 which says: “Commit your way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He will bring it to pass.” Trusting God is simply knowing and being absolutely assured that *He will do all He promises*. Remember the definition of

perseverance—*certainty that what we are looking for, will happen*. Trusting God is the basis of that perseverance.

Trust incorporates many things,—from knowing what His will is to walking it out. And, of course, it incorporates the whole process in between. The more we understand what trust really is, the more we'll be able to confidently walk out His will. Like many other principles in the Christian life, trust doesn't just happen; *it's a learned experience*. Simply saying "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" is far different than actually *living out* being slain and still trusting Him. Trust begins with *one faith choice* at a time. When we experience God's faithfulness in the first incident, we'll have the confidence to make the same kind of choice in all the rest.

There are eight principles that make up God's **cycle of trust**. These eight principles (each of which makes up some form or aspect of trusting Him) will take us from beginning knowledge of God to intimate knowledge of Him. These are principles that you and I have bantered around for years and thought we understood. But perhaps we'll see, for the first time, how these terms are interrelated. They not only depend upon each other but also build upon each other. Consequently, unless we are "living" the first principle, we'll be unable to go on to the next. And if we are not living that one, the third one will be out of our reach. And so on. All these principles are related and must go in the order God has laid them out. Again, *each defines some aspect of trusting God*.

So, after 47 years of being a Christian and many, many stumbles and falls, this is what I see as the Lord's **cycle of trust**: (You check me out. We have the same Guide Book.)

- 1) First, we must **know His basic will**. We must know what He desires to do in our lives. Romans 8:29 tells us He wants to "conform us into His image."
- 2) Next, we must **know He unconditionally loves us**. We must know this not just in our heads but in our everyday experience.
- 3) As a result of the above two things, we'll be able to trust Him enough **to obey Him** by faith, not feelings

The way we obey Him is:

- 4) Choosing to **love Him**— continually giving our selves over to Him.
- 5) Choosing to **renew our Mind**—continually dealing with our sin and self.
- 6) Choosing to **have absolute faith**—continually walking by faith, not feelings.
- 7) If we are doing the above, we'll have the ability to **see Him in all things**.
- 8) And, as a result of this, we'll be able to **patiently endure all He has allowed**.

In simpler terms, knowing **His Love** produces **our obedience** which brings about **His presence** and the ability **to persevere** through any trial.

These are the principles that make up the Lord's **cycle of trust** and leaving any one of them out puts a hole in our ability to trust Him fully. Each principle depends completely upon our living the previous one. Leaving out one of the precepts will prevent us from going on to the next one. For example: there's no way we can love God, (lay our wills and our lives down before Him) unless we *first* know that He loves us.

So the bottom line is: we can only learn the fruit of longsuffering by living all eight of God's principles

of trust, His **cycle of trust**. If we fall down in any of these steps of trust, chances are we'll feel like giving up, letting go and turning back. And, most likely, we'll not survive our crises without confusion and devastation.

Interestingly, this **cycle of trust** is a chronology of my own walk with the Lord. First, I learned about His Love and what His will was (when my marriage fell apart). Then, He proceeded to teach me what He desired from me (obedience): how to love Him, how to renew my mind and how to have naked faith (throughout desperate circumstances in my own life—as I will share later). As a result of applying these principles to my life, I began to see Him as I never had before. So, again, **His Love** in my life produced a **willingness to obey Him** in all things, which resulted in my **seeing Him** and being able to **endure** through harsh and tragic circumstances.

Even for us older Christians, trusting the Lord completely during horrific trials and tragedies is still hard. The route our natural minds take when everything falls apart in our lives is *not* towards trusting, enduring and persevering, but towards discouragement, confusion and depression. Being willing unconditionally to trust the Lord and *not lean to our own understanding* is essential. (Proverbs 3:5)

Only *living* God's **cycle of trust** will allow us to say, "Though You slay me, yet will I trust You..." (Job 13:15)

### Personal Example: Chip

Here's a personal example:

Five years ago, when I was in the middle of writing the book *Faith in the Night Seasons*, God

allowed one of the biggest trials of my trust in Him ever,—probably the hardest thing I will ever have to face. One Saturday night as we all sat around the dining room table eating dinner, came the unthinkable phone call: "We are very sorry to inform you that your son, Chip, has just died."

Our beloved "Chip," our firstborn son, Charles Jr., had suddenly died of a massive heart attack while out jogging. He was only 39 years old, married with two precious little girls, 3 years old and 6 months old. Chip had not seen a doctor for five years. He had been in excellent health and had no prior medical problems. He had run for fun and pleasure all his life, from high school races to recent city-wide events. He had personally known the Lord for about 20 years and had just recently re-committed his life.

There is no reason on earth why this tragedy should have happened. There is no human understanding for it and we could spend years trying to figure out "why" God allowed it. The fact is that He did, and only He understands the full ramifications of "why." Chuck and I have chosen, by faith, to leave all our questions at the Cross, and implicitly trust God in it.

This is where faith choices fit in. Faith choices are choices we make by faith, not feelings. God, then, in His timing and in His way aligns our feelings with the Godly choices we have made. We'll talk more about faith choices as we go, but that first year after Chip's death, I probably chose, by faith, a hundred times a day, "to give the situation back to God" and unconditionally trust Him in it. I certainly didn't feel like making those choices, but I did it out of obedience. And God was faithful to eventually align my feelings with my faith choices.

## Blessings Resulting From Sorrows

Through Chip's death, I've learned that *trusting God is simply accepting a situation I cannot fully understand and no longer being troubled by it*. Because God has taught me His **cycle of trust**, I know by faith that *there is no sorrow so great that He cannot somehow "recycle" it to bring forth a blessing*. And this is exactly what He has done with Chip's passing.

The first blessing we were able to see as a direct result of his death was that my 86-year-old Christian Science mom, my daughter-in-law and my grandson all came to know Christ personally. Another blessing was that my other son, Mark, came fully back to the Lord. And, finally, mom's 96-year-old "boyfriend," Doug, accepted Christ as a result of seeing the change in Mom's life. Both she and Doug have since passed on. But, the biggest blessing for us is that we now know exactly where they are—at peace with Chip and waiting for us to join them. These are all miracles that Chip would have willingly given his life for. And, in a sense, he did!

So, it's true, there is no sorrow so great that God cannot somehow use it to bring forth a blessing. If we are living God's **cycle of trust**, we'll be able to recognize the blessings when they come, because we'll be expecting them. If, however, we are unable to live God's **cycle of trust** for whatever reason, we'll find ourselves on a path towards doubt and unbelief.

## Only Two Choices in the Eye of the Storm

Because trials often come upon us suddenly, they can produce either of two results: 1) We can be left with *more* trust and faith in the Lord, or 2) We can be consumed with doubt and disbelief in His care and love. Many of us have experienced both.

If we know what God's basic will is for our lives (to form Christ's character in us) and we unconditionally trust Him to do so, *then* we'll be able to experience a "peace that passes all understanding," even in the midst of our trials. If, however, we are confused about what God is doing in our lives and we *don't* trust Him (we're not living His **cycle of trust**), then we'll experience doubt that He is even there, unbelief that He cares and, eventually, a hardness of heart and a falling away from the faith.

*Doubt* is the first step towards that defeat.

Nothing will bring us down faster than doubt, because it affects every choice we make. Doubt in God's faithfulness and Love will influence everything we do. Everything we think, say and do is either impacted by our faith in the Lord or by our doubt in His existence. Doubt robs us of our vision, immobilizes our actions and defeats our even trying. It also thwarts every effort we might want to make in the future! Doubt can easily spiral out of control and lead us to discouragement, which then breeds confusion and results in depression. This is the enemy's formula for defeat—his **cycle of defeat!** *Doubt—discouragement—confusion—depression—loss of vision—disorientation—despair and defeat.* The feeling of "giving up." And, oh, how many of us have fallen for it!

**See Chart** on page 45

Doubt can be traced back to unbelief in God's Word and His promises. His Word is our *fixed point of reference*. His Word is infallible. (John 8:44) But it happens that when a person's trust in God is shaken, faith in His Word also wavers. At such a point, we must not only guard against the enemy inserting doubt into our minds about God's faithfulness, but we must also be careful that he doesn't twist Scripture, which

can lead us to uncertainty—especially when things don't turn out as we hoped. The enemy not only wants to insert doubt and twist Scripture, he also wants to attack us with the Word. We must be ready for these assaults, ready to defend God and His Word at all costs. And the way we do that is by continually saying by faith, “Though [You] slay me, yet *I will [choose to] trust You.*” (Job 13:15)

When God's promise seems to fail and His vision tarry, it's not a time to grow weary and give up but, rather *a time to trust Him even more.*

### An Example: Aggie

Here's a story that graphically shows one man's slide down the enemy's **cycle of defeat**. All because, he doubted... This story is from one of David Wilkerson's newsletters.<sup>6</sup>

“In 1921, two young missionary couples in Stockholm, Sweden, received a burden to go to the Belgian Congo (which is now Zaire). David and Svea Flood (along with their 2-year old son) joined Joel and Bertha Erickson to battle insects, fierce heat, malaria and malnutrition. But after six months in the jungle, they had made little or no contact with the native people. Although the Erickson's decided to return to the mission station, the Floods chose to stay in their lonely outpost. Svea was now pregnant and sick with malaria, yet she faithfully continued to minister to their one and only convert, a little boy from one of the nearby villages.

“Svea died after giving birth to a healthy baby girl, and as David Flood stood over his beloved wife's grave, he poured out his bitterness to God: ‘Why did You allow this?

(**doubt**) We came here to give our lives, and now my wife is dead at 27! All we have to show for all this is one little village boy who probably doesn't even understand what we've told him. You've failed me, God. What a waste of life!’ (**discouragement and confusion**)

“David Flood ended up leaving his new daughter with the Erickson's and taking his son back home with him to Sweden. He then went into the import business, and never allowed the name of ‘God’ to be mentioned in his presence. (**loss of vision and disorientation**) His little girl was raised in the Congo by an American missionary couple, who named their adopted daughter ‘Aggie.’

“Throughout her life, Aggie tried to locate her real father, but her letters were never answered. She never knew that David Flood had remarried and fathered four more children, and she never knew that he had plunged into despair and had become a total alcoholic. But when she was in her forties, Aggie and her husband were given round-trip tickets to Sweden, and while spending a day's layover in London, the couple went to hear a well-known black preacher from the Belgian Congo.

“After the meeting, Aggie asked the preacher, ‘Did you ever know David and Svea Flood?’ To her great surprise, he answered, ‘Svea Flood led me to the Lord when I was a little boy.’ Aggie was ecstatic to learn that her mother's only convert was being mightily used to evangelize Zaire, and he was overjoyed to meet the daughter of the woman who had introduced him to Christ.

“When Aggie arrived in Sweden, she located her father in an impoverished area of Stockholm, living in a rundown apartment filled with empty liquor bottles. (**despair and darkness**) David Flood was now a 73-year old diabetic who had had a stroke and whose eyes were covered with cataracts, yet when she identified herself, he began to weep and apologize for abandoning her. But when Aggie said, ‘That’s okay, Daddy. God took care of me,’ he became totally enraged.

“‘God didn’t take care of you!’ he cried. ‘He ruined our whole family! He led us to Africa and then betrayed us! Nothing ever came of our time there, and it was a waste of our lives!’ (**defeat**)

“That’s when Aggie told him about the black preacher she’d just met in London, and how the Congo had been evangelized through the efforts of his wife’s one and only convert. As he listened to his daughter, the Holy Spirit suddenly fell on David Flood, and tears of sorrow and repentance began to flow down his face. Although God mercifully restored him before he died, David Flood left behind five unsaved and embittered children. *His anger towards God had totally wasted his life’s potential, and created a tragic legacy for his family.*” (**giving up**)

This story clearly illustrates the fact that we must *never* doubt God or base our faith upon our own human understanding of what God is doing. Had David Flood chosen by an act of his will to accept his situation as coming directly from the hand of God, who knows what awesome fruit God could have brought forth

from his life? Only faith will allow us to unabashedly accept His promises, even though we cannot see or understand how they will ever come about.

### Choosing to Believe

As seen in the above story, doubting the character of God will immediately stop our spiritual growth, devour our faith and set us on the enemy’s **cycle of defeat**. *The only way we can ever counteract doubt, is by an act of our will—i.e., by choosing to believe by faith (not feelings) that no matter what happens, God will never deceive us, never let us down and never abandon us.*

We must submit ourselves to the trial that God has allowed, accept what is happening and allow the Holy Spirit to resolve it for us. *We must love God without the need to see or understand exactly what He is doing.* God is involved in every aspect of our existence and there is no sorrow so great that He cannot somehow “recycle” it to bring forth blessing—as seen in our Chip’s passing.

Only our unconditional trust will allow us to unabashedly *accept His promises, even though we cannot see or understand how they will ever come about.* This is expressed and shown beautifully in the life of Abraham whom God had promised an heir, and who “against hope believed in hope” (Romans 4:18-21) and also in Hebrews 11, which lists the saints, who “all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.”

Thus, *the triumph of faith is seen just as much in the bearing of a temporary defeat as it is in the securing of a victory.* Read that again! We grow even

more in faith when we experience a set-back, than we do when we have a mountain-top encounter. God wants to conform us into His whole image, and does so through trials, tribulations and tragedies. Overcomers are simply those who, regardless of how they feel or what is going on in their lives, are ready to die rather than give up trusting God.

In conclusion, some important points to remember when we are going through suffering, are:

- God allows troubles in our lives to drive us to our knees and to bring us back to Himself.<sup>7</sup>
- Sometimes our troubles must get worse before freedom comes.
- We must realize that we can't get ourselves out of trouble. If God has allowed the trial, then He will be the only One who can get us out. Remember, the battle is not ours, but His.<sup>8</sup>
- Our troubles should always push us towards God, not away from Him.<sup>9</sup> If they push us away from Him, we should check to see who is the instigator.<sup>10</sup>
- Once we understand that God is involved in our trial, it should give us hope.<sup>11</sup>
- God wants to use our trials to help us learn His statutes and His laws.<sup>12</sup>

God always has a reason for the things He allows in our lives. He is preparing us for a future which He alone knows. He is preparing us as His "bride." He not only wants to make us perfect (holy), established, strengthened and grounded in Him, but also joint heirs.<sup>13</sup>

"Though You slay me, yet will I [choose] to trust You." (Job 13:15)

## In the Eye of the Storm Two Choices

### The Lord's Cycle of Trust

Knowing His will (faith in His plan for our lives)



Knowing God loves us in spite of what has occurred in our lives



Obediently choosing to do His will



Loving Him—laying our s wills and lives down to Him



Constantly renewing our minds



Walking by faith, not feelings



Seeing Him in all things



Persevering—no matter what the circumstances



**NEVER GIVE UP**

### The Enemy's Cycle of Defeat

Doubting God's plan for our lives



Discouragement over what has occurred—God doesn't love me



Confusion over what His will is



Depression—holding tight to our own wills and lives



Complete loss of vision



Disorientation—emotions out of control



Despair and darkness



Total defeat



**GIVE UP AND DIE**