

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: LIFE'S TESTS** ~ The tests of life are to make, not break us.

Trouble may demolish a man's business but build up his character.

The blow at the outward man may be the greatest blessing to the inner man.

If God, then, puts or permits anything hard in our lives, be sure that the real

Peril, the real trouble, is that we shall lose if we flinch or rebel.

~M. D. Babcock

### **SHAKE IT OFF AND STEP UP!**

A parable is told of a farmer who owned an old mule. One day the mule fell into the farmer's well. The farmer heard the mule braying and went looking for him. After carefully assessing the situation, the farmer sympathized with the mule, but decided that neither the mule nor the well were worth the trouble of saving. Instead, he called his neighbors together and told them what happened and enlisted them to help haul dirt to bury the old mule in the well and put him out of his misery.

Initially, the old mule was hysterical! But as the farmer and his neighbors continued shoveling and the dirt hit his back, that old mule started shaking the dirt off and stepping up. This he did, blow after blow. Shake it off and step up, shake it off and step up. No matter how painful the blows or distressing the situation seemed, that old mule fought his panic and just kept right on shaking it off and stepping up!

It wasn't long before the old mule battered and exhausted stepped triumphantly over the wall of that well! What seemed like a tragedy that would bury him actually blessed him; all because of the manner in which he handled his adversity.

That's life! If we face our problems and respond to them positively, and refuse to give in to panic, bitterness, or self-pity, the adversities that come along to bury us usually have within them the potential to benefit and bless us! Forgiveness, faith, prayer, praise and hope are all excellent ways to shake it off and step up out of the wells in which we find ourselves.

Some of our wells today are governmental issues, new bills, health care changes, the economy, wars, violence in our cities and etc. Pick up a newspaper, turn on the news or converse with others and you will hear disturbing events happening world wide. Discussions on bills that are being proposed nationwide that can bring chaos into the American way of life, as well as those already voted in, are causing emotional stress and panic in the hearts of people; young and old alike. Things are looking pretty bleak!

But standing amidst all of the violence, all of the mixed up values and fragmented people, stands our hope—Jesus! Our hope is in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. We must keep praying no matter what destructive changes are coming or have already taken place in our government, and put our trust in Jesus. We cannot take our eyes off Jesus for changes are coming, of that fact there is no doubt, but you can experience positive living in a negative world if you know Jesus Christ. Abundant living flows from knowing Jesus and living in right relationship with Him. If ever there was a time to read your Bible, pray, and deepen your relationship with God, that time is now!

There were two boys who like to play on an abandon section of railroad tracks. One boy was of average size while the other boy was very heavy. The boys would challenge each other to see who could walk the track the furthest. The slender boy would walk the track a few steps and fall while the heavier boy would walk and walk and never fall off.

A man, who was standing by and watching this contest, asked the overweight boy the secret of his success. He pointed out that the slender boy kept looking at his feet and would quickly fall off while he was too big around to look down at his feet, so he just picked out a target down the track and keeping his eye on the target, walked toward it. His focus was properly placed and it held him steady!

You look down, you fall. Scripture tells us to Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

In John 10:10 (read for yourself), we see there are three very vivid pictures of Jesus who is our source of abundant life and living. In verses 1-6, we see Christ as the true Shepherd. There are a lot of voices that cry out for our attention and allegiance, but Jesus is the one who comes from God on the divine mission. He is the true Messiah. He is our true shepherd. To follow any other person or thing is missing the boat!

In verses 7-10, we see that Christ is pictured as the Door of the sheep. He is the way into communion and fellowship with God. He is the way for a wonderful abundant life. Entering the sheepfold through Jesus is a saving action and provides the sheep (you and me) with abundant life/provision.

Fact! There is a thief on this planet earth and his name is Satan. He is out to keep every one of us from entering into this wonderful abundant life. He is the panic maker! It is a “No holds barred” in these battles where believers are concerned. Satan uses every trick imaginable to turn us aside from God, to hinder and eventually if he can, destroy our faith and relationship with God. Our life is also in jeopardy!

In verses 11-18, Jesus is the good Shepherd in contrast to the wolf who comes to devour and destroy. Jesus is the good Shepherd who is willing to lay down His life for His sheep (people). Jesus is the good Shepherd that fulfills the 23rd Psalm.

When St. Patrick was a boy of sixteen, he was taken prisoner from his home in Dumbarton, Scotland by a band of Irish pirates and was sold into slavery. It was as a servant in Ireland that Patrick worked for the next six years until he escaped and returned to Scotland.

As time passed, Patrick decided to enter the priesthood. Following his studies, when it came time for an assignment, he asked if he could return to the country where he had been imprisoned. His wish was granted.

According to church history, one of the first actions that Patrick took upon arriving in Ireland was to go to his old master’s home and pay him the price of his freedom. The man was so impressed by Patrick’s act of goodness that the man himself became a convert to Christianity.

Such an act of goodness, despite being treated so unjustly, parallels exactly what God through Jesus did for us. While we were yet sinners, aliens, rebels; God sent His Son Jesus to make the payment for our sins and to bring us into God's saving grace of love. Therefore, Jesus is the source of this wonderful abundant life.

Many times we are going along in life doing just fine and suddenly we are blind-sided by the enemy of our soul. The props are knocked out from underneath you and you never even saw it coming. You were flattened! Wiped out! Leveled! Sound familiar? With all that is happening in our nation today, people are feeling this way. Our life as we once knew it is being challenged and changed. But if we are prepared, we have a chance to survive!

God tells us in 2 Corinthians 2:11 to know the plans of the enemy, and in Ephesians 6:11 we are told to stand against the devil's schemes so that we can deal with them intelligently and effectively.

In God, we can SHAKE IT OFF AND STEP UP; keeping ourselves "UP" in a down world.