

DESPONDENCY AND JOY

in the Christian life

materials for a seminar by

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Oh the well-being of the person whom you train, O LORD!	אשר תגבר אשר תיסדנו ית
Oh the well-being of him to whom you teach your lesson!	ומורתך תלמידו
to make him trustful in troublesome times.	להקיסלנו מימי וע:

Psalm 94:12.

THE RESPONSE TO DESPONDENCY

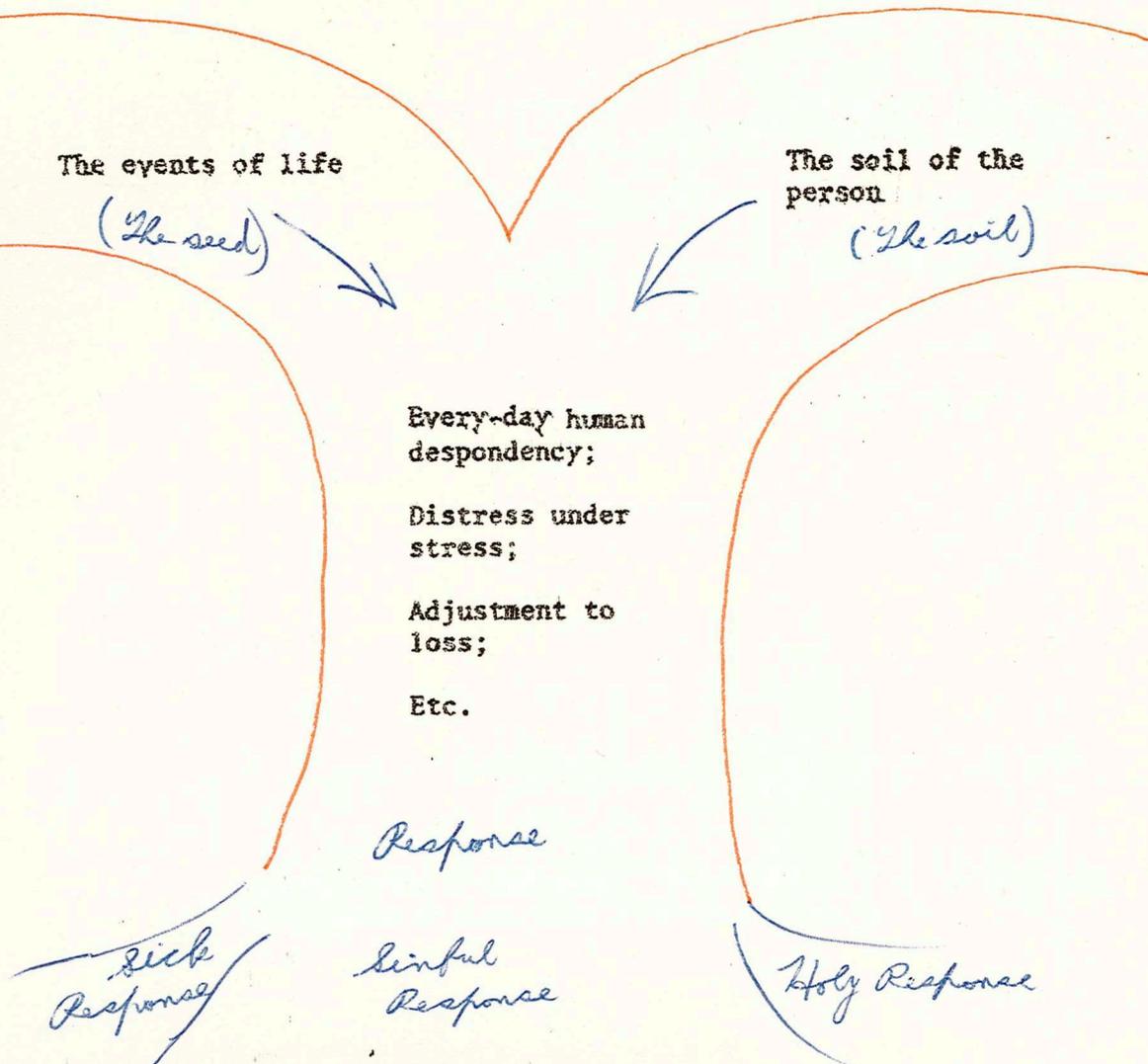


Diagram 1: The impact of various distressing events on a human life can cause upsets of various intensity, including despondency of one kind or another.

The biblical term for a stress-full event is *thlipsis*, *tribulation*, which means combined pressure and friction. The New Testament indicates that tribulation is an inevitable part of life, especially for the Christian, and that it can be beneficial as well as perilous. Without attempting a full list, the EVENTS can include trying circumstances, bad relationships with others, our involvement in the troubles of others, especially of those we love; our constant struggle against our own sins, especially when there is grievous failure.

The soil of the person into whose life these events fall is made up of his or her constitutional make-up, temperament, including natural handicaps for which there is not likely to be a cure (Paul's "thorn in the flesh"?), and all that has been gained through experience, maturity, self-understanding, wisdom, and especially that knowledge of God and of ourselves gained from constant study of the Bible.

Without attempting a full classification, despondency can range from deep depression and melancholy, a torpid spirit, discouragement, despair, sorrow, etc.

The way God sees it	The person is to blame	The person is not to blame
I am to blame	Situation 1	Situation 2
I am not to blame	Situation 3	Situation 4

↑
The way the person sees it

Diagram 2: The facts of stress-full situation as seen by God and by the person concerned. The combinations of possible attitudes produce four different situations.

In the thinking of some people, since "all have sinned", everyone is always to blame in the sight of God. Situation 1 is the only real one and the only, the all-sufficient solution to the problem of sin and all its consequences is justification by the grace of God, through Christ's atonement, received by faith alone.

Refusal to recognize guilt (Situation 3) is a common response to the troubles of life, and we shall have to deal with it.

The fact of undeserved suffering, recognized and accepted as such (Situation 4) is frequently met in the Bible. Supremely in the Lord Jesus Christ, for whom alone was reserved the holy task of bearing the sins of the world, especially the penal consequences of death. This burden he accepted willingly in love; thus making the patient endurance of wrong, according to the will of God, a way of likeness to Christ open for all his followers. Situation 4 must thus be considered as a possibility in human experience.

Situation 2 (blaming yourself when you should not) and Situation 3 (not blaming yourself when you should) are in unreality.

N.B. In these studies we are not considering those extreme states of sick despondency or pathological depression which would usually call for the help of persons with special training.

The event

The person

Situation 2

(The person blames himself excessively, even though there is no corresponding guilt in the sight of God.)

Unnecessary and unwholesome pre-occupation with one's supposed personal guilt. Endless and futile attempts to set things right by acts of reparation or prodigious spiritual efforts.

Patient counselling should try to move the person into the realities of either Situation 1 or Situation 4 -- repenting enough, but not too much.

Diagram 3. The possible responses to the situation in which a person is obsessed with feeling of guilt out of proportion to any wrong they might have done.

This miserable condition is common in Christians, especially the more conscientious ones. It is often made worse by the expectation of the Christian community that we should have a high level of performance in things like witnessing, prayer, Bible reading, which none of us ever does as well as we might. It is easy to make Christians feel guilty by challenging them along these lines.

Situation 2 often arises because Situation 4 is not recognized. "Everyone deserves more punishment than they ever receive". It is fostered by the teaching that if something bad happens to us, it is probably because of something that we have done wrong. Our task is then to detect the sin, and to repent (Situation 1). *That is the way the Christian should always react to any one of these things that happen. Is it illness, is it accident, is it a failure, is it a disappointment, is it someone's death? I do not care what it is, but on the basis of this teaching, the first thing I should say to myself is: "Why has this happened to me, have I been going astray somewhere?"* (Spiritual Depression, p. 255). Add to this the doctrine that all sins are equally heinous in the eyes of God, and we shall always succeed in finding in our numerous sins, however slight, a sufficient explanation of the worst calamities. Definitely a no-win situation.

The event

The person

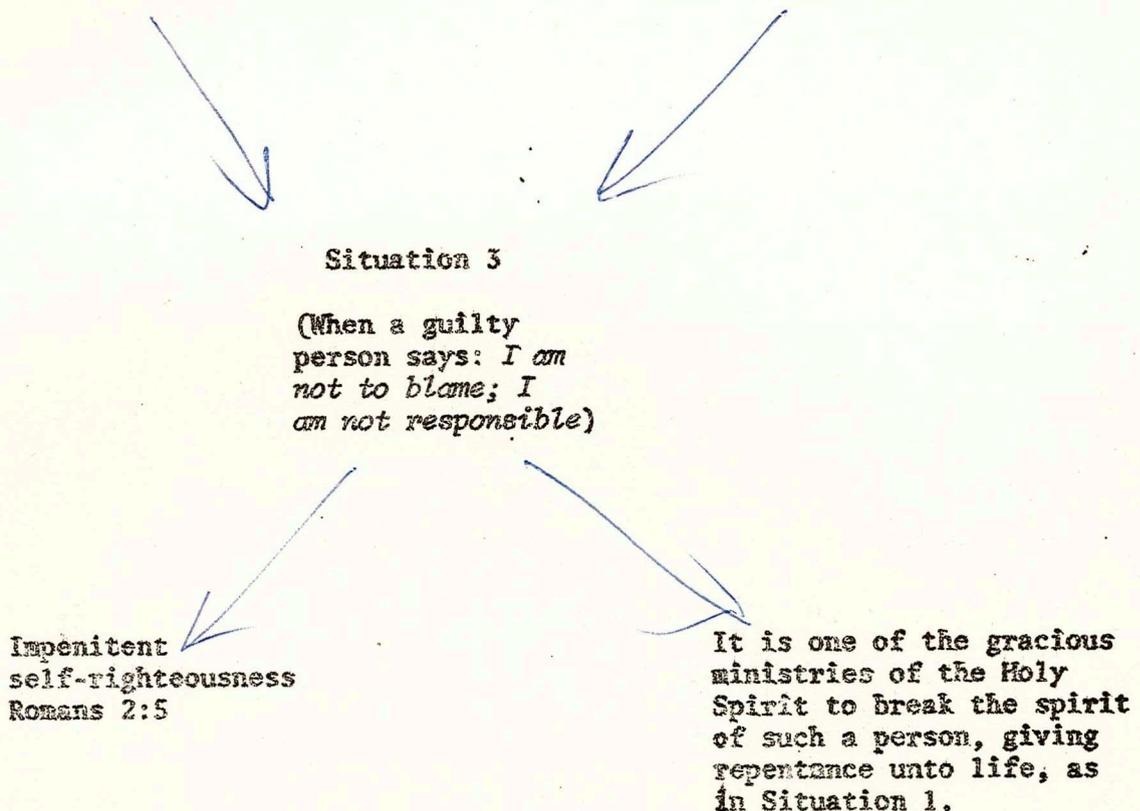


Diagram 4. The posture of unbelief in the situation in which God, by various visitations and reminders, such as failure, illness, or contact with death, provides an occasion for self-recognition as a guilty sinner, and a doorway to repentance. If the heart is not broken, it will be hardened.

74.

A Christian who does not use the solemn occasions of life for special self-examination, on top of his regular exercises of penitence, is likely to fall into the folly of despising the chastening of the Lord. There are two extremes to be avoided: first, the abject cringing -- often a great show of inverted self-righteousness -- "I deserve to suffer much more than I do"; secondly, the frivolous expectation that we are exempt from the disciplines that are intended to correct (not punish) our faults, because we are completely protected by the righteousness of Christ.

It is a great spiritual art to know just how much to repent for our actual sins with complete truthfulness about their magnitude, neither magnifying them (Situation 2) nor belittling them (Situation 3). The argument of Job's friends, that all the troubles that come to us are proportional to our actual sins, and call for commensurate repentance, was rejected by God as well as by Job. This leaves room for the interpretation of stress-full situations as possibly a mixture of Situations 1 and 4, for most of us.

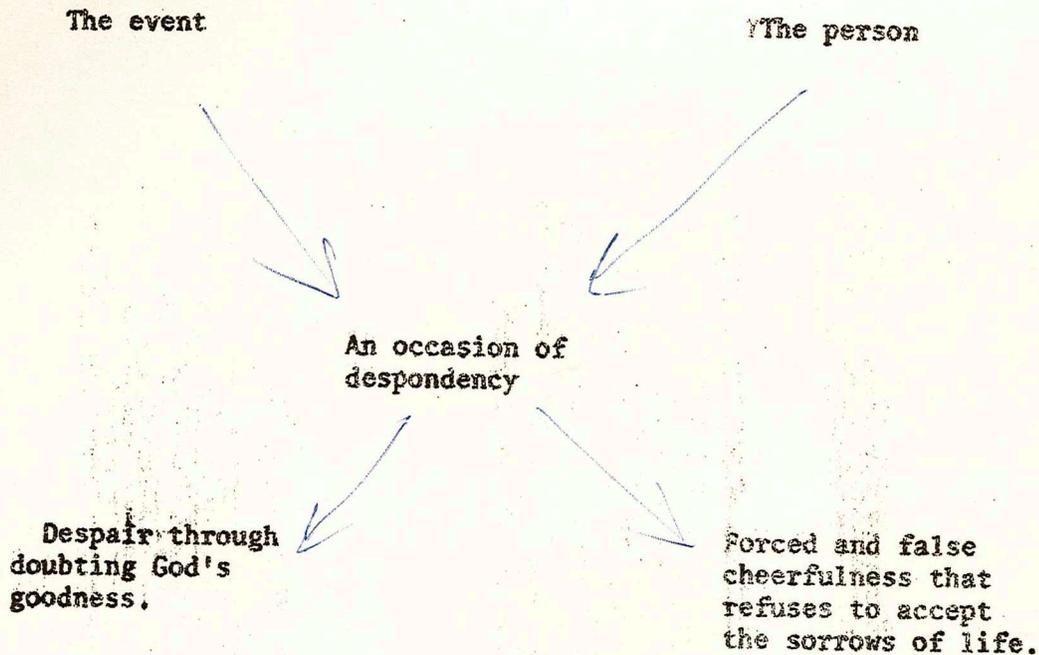


Diagram 5. Two destructive responses to trouble, one too pessimistic, the other too optimistic.

The unbiblical teaching that Christians should be joyful all the time sometimes produces a display of "victorious living" that is escapist, and, in too many cases, self-indulgent. St. John of the Cross has branded such persons "spiritual sweet-tooths." They rejoice with those who rejoice, but are less ready to weep with those who weep. Their "Cheer up!" slogans are pastorally inept. *As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon a wound, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart.*

*See Paul's balanced picture in Philippians
 Cheerfulness in the midst
 of sorrowing
 6 not just a false cheerfulness
 without recognition of a
 trouble.*

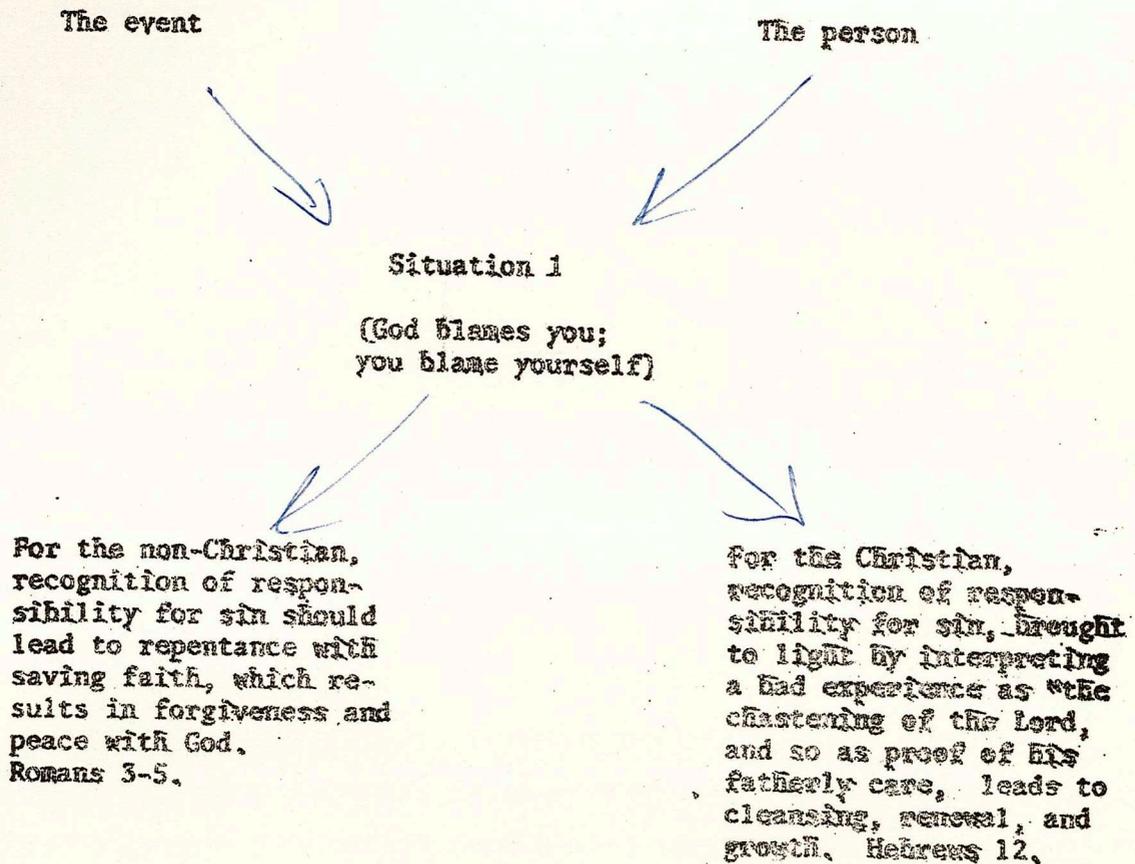


Diagram 6. Two constructive responses to an experience of despondency, with proper recognition of responsibility for sin.

If we believe that the Lord Jesus Christ fully sustained the penal consequences of all our sins, then we cannot regard "the chastisement of the Lord" as in any way a punishment, however much we might admit in our penitential prayers that we "for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished."

The event

The person

Situation 4

JOB

Undeserved suffering
acknowledged to be a
gift of God and
embraced in love

Resentment,
rejection,
and rage.
θεοσυμνος,
who protests
against unde-
served suffering
(his own or others')
to impeach the justice
of God and to justify
his own unbelief.

Acceptance made
possible through
trust in God's
goodness.

Diagram 7. Two ways of responding to a miserable experience of undeserved suffering.

Nothing is gained by arguing that all suffering (except that of Christ) is undeserved. This is the long-since discredited argument of Job's "friends". Unlike penal sufferings, which look back to prior sin as a cause and explanation, this domain of suffering is teleological -- *what the Lord is aiming at* (James 5:11). Only in the unique case of Christ's agony and death on the Cross were undeserved sufferings penal, a bearing of the sins of the whole world. Only a perfect substitute could bear the sins of others in this way, willingly carrying the burden of our sorrows in love.

It is a creditable thing for a Christian to endure the pain of undeserved suffering -- a fine thing in the sight of God (1 Peter 2), because in this way the believer comes, however remotely, to resemble his Lord.

Whether or not the Christian's sufferings can be partly explained as a corrective of his faults, the "suffering for his name's sake", which the New Testament mentions so often, is constructive and creative. It is a holy privilege, a gift from God, to be welcomed with gratitude -- not an easy matter, when it can often be so grievous -- but never to be sought or contrived, for one's own spiritual benefit. That rests with God; and we are to be equally grateful if he spares us such ordeals, not envying those whose trials have taken them deeply into the wounds of Jesus. Such "testings are intended, not only for training in holiness, but, also to equip us for ministry. There are three aspects. (i) Cultivation of the peaceful harvest of righteousness (Hebrews 12); (ii) The development of a base for a ministry of compassion to others (2 Corinthians 1); (iii) Opportunities to show to the world, however imperfectly, something of the loving and forgiving way in which Jesus endured undeserved wrongs. "The fellowship of Christ's sufferings" is not just identification with him in his death for the cancellation of sin, it is the cultivation of the "mind that was also in Christ Jesus, with a glimpse, however distant, into his heart.

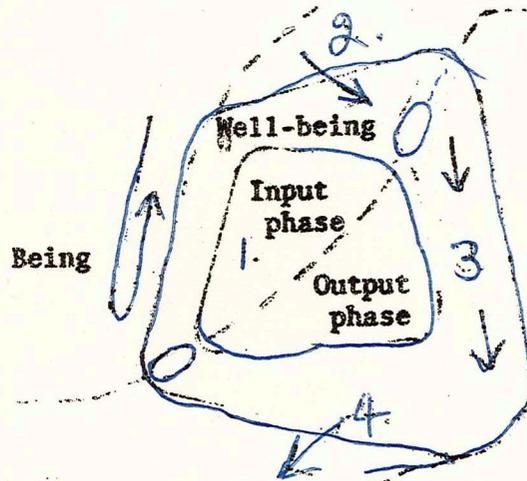
1. ACCEPTANCE

The personal source comes down to the person waiting in need.

2. SUSTENANCE

3. STATUS

Who I am.
Motivation



4. ACHIEVEMENT

Diagram 8: The dynamic cycle of BEING and WELLBEING arising out of normal personal relationships in infancy and later years.

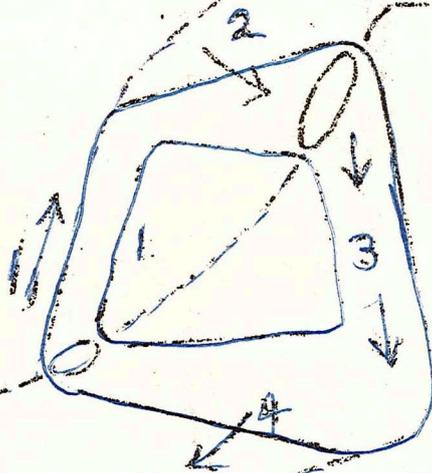
1. ACCEPTANCE

Human personal being develops in a relationship between an attentive mother and a responsive baby.

A baby lives in the light of her countenance. This is an obligatory need. Its denial or undue delay leads to deep anxiety.

2. SUSTENANCE

The fulfilment of WELLBEING by the mother's abundant self-giving, that is, sustenance on all levels of life.



4. ACHIEVEMENT

The dynamic input is expended in "work". The achievement of limited skills in relationships, in tolerance of frustration, in learning and in play.

3. STATUS

Who I am.

Dawn of joyful self-consciousness. Status as a loved and satisfied person. The way out to normal freedom and selfhood.

Motivation arises here.

The person is prepared for out-going relationships.

Diagram of Analysis of Mother-Baby relationships through which selfhood or human BEING and WELLBEING develop.

1. ACCEPTANCE

Of Christ the Son by his Father: the voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son".

His spiritual being as Son of God, subsists in a relationship with the Father, who attends with love, mediated by the Holy Spirit, given to him without measure.

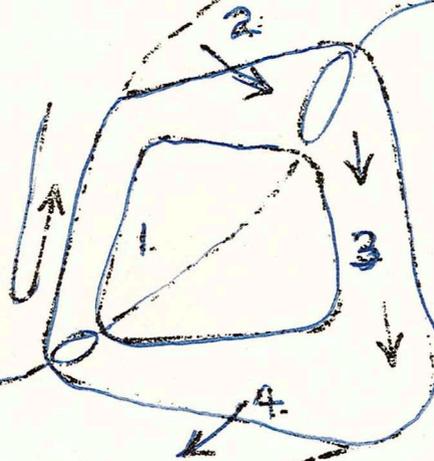
Christ's response to dependence as Son and as man is to pray. He knows that he has constant access: "I know that thou hearest me always".

2. SUSTENANCE

Sustenance and well-being as Christ abides in the Father: "The only-begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father".

Wisdom. The Father shows the Son everything which He himself is doing. Christ is given the Holy Spirit and his gifts -- love, joy, peace, patience -- all without measure.

"I am in the Father and the Father in me. We are one."



3. STATUS

Who I am.

His status is expressed in the "I am" sayings of St. John's Gospel.

The dynamic outflow of personal BEING and WELLBEING occurs when the Son of God proceeds forth from the presence of his Father, full of grace and truth, deeply conscious of his status as Son of God, to work among mankind.

His motivation is to love as he is loved: "As my Father has loved me, so have I loved you."

4. ACHIEVEMENT

Christ has all the characteristics of the Holy Spirit's indwelling. He is strictly limited to the Father's will. "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do." The words that I speak, they are spirit, they are life".

To be the light of the world, so that those who follow do not walk in darkness. To finish the work of redemption God gave him to do,

Diagram 10: Christ as the Norm for dynamic studies of "normal" man.

1. ACCEPTANCE

Offered freely by God "in his beloved Son".

Justification. Through grace, by faith. Complete discharge from the guilt of sin.

Regeneration. The renewal of BEING through new birth. "Born of God". "A New Creature." The image of God is renewed. "The renewal of your mind."

Adoption. The Spirit of adoption, whereby we call God: "Father!" We have boldness of access. We are certain that he hears our prayers.

2. SUSTENANCE

"Filled with all the fulness of God".

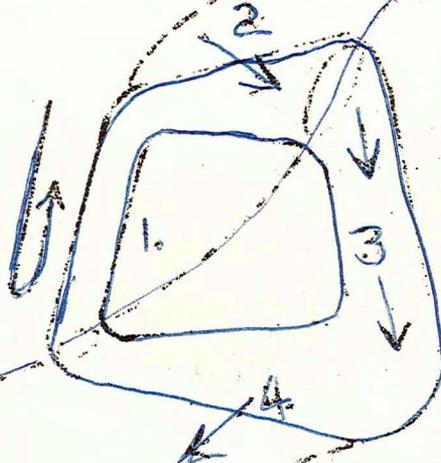
"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." I have called you Friends.

"The Word of God dwells in you richly."

Sanctification. God works in you. Christ in you.

The Holy Spirit is given, manifesting his fruit -- love, joy, peace, etc.

Strengthened with all might in your inner being.



4. ACHIEVEMENT

"To love one another, as I have loved you."

"It is God who works in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

"We are his workmanship, created anew in Christ to do those good deeds God planned for us to do."

"He comforts us in all our troubles, so that we in turn may be able to comfort others in any trouble of theirs and to share with them the consolation we ourselves receive from God."

"The Spirit produces these fruits in human life, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faith, adaptability and self-control, without ambition, envy or jealousy."

3. STATUS

Who I am.

We are the children of God. Members of his Body.

"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."

Handicapped, but not frustrated;
puzzled, but never in despair;
persecuted, but never standing alone in it;
experiencing in our bodies both the death of the Lord Jesus and the power of his risen life.

Diagram 11: The status and achievement of the Christian as output of Acceptance and sustenance in God.

1. ACCEPTANCE

"Accept one another, as Christ has accepted us, to the glory of God."

"I have begotten you through the Gospel."

"Forgiving one another, as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you."

"The right hand of fellowship."

2. SUSTENANCE

"Love builds up."

"Love one another."

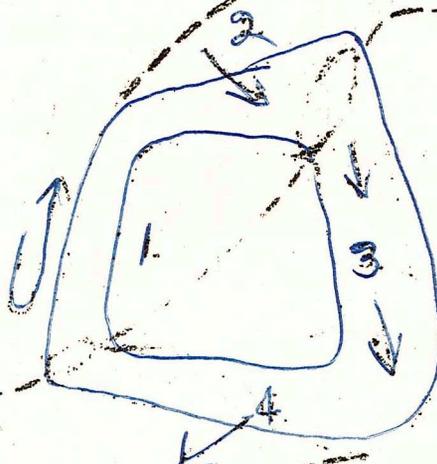
"By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another."

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep."

"Pray for one another."

"Encourage one another."



3. STATUS

Who I am.

"Members of one another."

"Sent out by the Church."

"There is indeed no single gift you lack."

"Friends and fellow-workers."

"You are our glory and our joy."

"You welcomed me as if I were an angel of God."

"I swear it by my pride in you, my brothers."

4. ACHIEVEMENT

The same as in Diagram 11 since the Status and Achievement of the Christian is the output of Acceptance and Sustenance by God together with that of fellow-Christians.

Diagram 12: The status and achievement of the Christian as output of acceptance and sustenance by fellow-Christians.

See overleaf for Abnormal Inverted Cycle as against Dynamic cycle

1 CORINTHIANS 13

1 Even if I speak both human and angelic languages,
if I don't have LOVE,

I am a clanging gong or a clashing cymbal (I say NOTHING).

2 And even if I have the capacity to prophesy,
and (even if) I know all the mysteries, and all the knowledge,
and even if I have total faith, so as to move mountains,
if I don't have LOVE,

I am NOTHING.

3 And even if I hand over all my possessions,
and even if I give up my body, so as to boast,
if I don't have LOVE,

I achieve NOTHING.

4 LOVE is patient, 1 +

LOVE is kind, 2 +

LOVE is not envious, 3 -

not boastful, 4 -

5 not arrogant, 5 -

not ill-mannered, 6 -

not selfish, 7 -

not irritable, 8 -

does not feel ill-used; 9 -

6 is not gratified when others go wrong, 10 -

but is delighted with others' achievements; 11 +

7 bears everything, 12 +

believes everything, 13 +

hopes everything, 14 +

endures everything. 15 +

8 LOVE never fails.

If there are prophecies, they will be left behind;

if there are languages, they will cease;

if there is knowledge, it will be left behind.

9 Because we know partially,
and we prophecy partially;

10 but, when that which is complete comes,
that which is partial will be left behind.

11 When I was an infant, I spoke as an infant,
I thought as an infant,
I reasoned as an infant;
when I became an adult, I left behind the things of infancy.

12 For NOW we see in a mirror, by means of a riddle,
but THEN face to face;
NOW I know partially,
but THEN I shall know, even as I am known.

13 And now Faith, Hope, LOVE, these three, remain --
but the greatest of them all is LOVE.

MATTHEW 11:28-30

A	Come to	ME		
B			all you who are worn out and over-loaded,	Invitation
	and	I	will give you <u>relief</u> .	Promise
D	Put	MY	<u>harness</u> on,	Invitation
E	and learn from	ME		
F	<u>because</u>	I	am lowly and humble in heart,	Reason
G	and		you will get <u>relief</u> for your minds.	Promise
H	<u>because</u>	MY	<u>harness</u> is helpful,	Reason
	and	MY	<u>load</u> is light.	

THE COLLECT FOR TUESDAY OF HOLY WEEK

FROM THE AMERICAN EPISCOPAL BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

O God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but ~~first~~
He suffered pain and entered not into glory before He was
crucified: grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,
may find it none other than the way of life and peace.

Through the same thy son Jesus Christ, our Lord.

*** *** ***

CHRISTIAN JOY

Although it is highlighted in the New Testament as a supreme gift from the Lord Jesus (John 16:20-24), a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and an essential of the Kingdom of God (Romans 14:17), the theology of Christian joy -- "joy unspeakable and full of glory!" -- has not generated as much good writing as more "serious" subjects. If we leave aside the "heavenly sunshine" tracts, it is hard to nominate any books.

Dante's *Paradise* is the classic. Dorothy Sayers' sublime translation, completed after her death, is now available in the Penguin Classics.

There are good passages in writers who have expounded "the fruit of the Spirit". Sangster's book on Christian Perfection is one. Also Stephen Neill's *The Christian Character* (World Christian Books, YMCA, 1955), also published as *The Difference in Being a Christian* [Reflection Book] (New York: Association Press, 1960).

The Christian's joy in God's world was given poetic expression in Thomas Traherne's *Centuries* (New York: Harper, 1960). The best modern statement I know is Chapter V in W. R. Inge, *Personal Religion and the Life of Devotion* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1924). I have not seen E. W. Williamson, *An Anatomy of Christian Joy* (London: SPCK, 1946).

The most biblical treatment is found in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, in particular in #55 of "The Doctrine of Creation" (Volume III, Part 4), and his marvelous exposition of 1 Corinthians 13 in "The Doctrine of Reconciliation" (Volume IV, Part 1).

Some clinical literature:

Ellard, John. "The Spotters Guide to Middle Age Depressions", *Modern Medicine of Australia* 18 (1975): No. 13, pp. 47-52.

Holmes, T. H. and Rahe, R. H. "The Social Readjustment Rating Scale", *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 11 (1967): pp. 213-218.

Hordern, Anthony. *Tranquility Denied* (London: Rigby, 1976). An extended study of contemporary depression by a leading British specialist.

Raphael, Beverley. "Grief", *Modern Medicine of Australia* 18 (1975): No. 17, pp. 55-57.

Stone, Peter. "The Many Faces of Depression", *Australian Family Physician* 2 (1973): pp. 578-581.