

WHEN THINGS DON'T GO YOUR WAY

By Jim and Carolyn Murphy

May 1989

Teresa was an attractive young Christian in her twenties. She had recently given her heart to the Lord and began the long, joyful journey of following Jesus as His disciple. Nearly two years into her journey she was laid off from her job and began to experience financial difficulties.

As a result, her prayer life and walk with the Lord intensified. Some months passed with no change in her circumstances. Then she became conspicuous by her absence from her church.

What happened? Teresa, like countless others we have all known, backslid. She turned away from the Lord and His infinite resources to the world and its pitifully limited resources for answers to her needs.

How often we see believers in similar circumstances who turn from the Lord. How sad. What a waste of thousands of precious lives, years...and most important, the loss of trained workers in the midst of the most abundant harvest field the world has ever known.

Why do many fall by the wayside when some of the difficulties of life pay a visit? The immediate, obvious answer is simple. Jesus said in Mark four they have shallow roots. We understand that. But why are their roots shallow? By analogy we know that the roots of a tree will remain shallow as long as there is abundant water near the surface. Yet a tree with only surface roots is not a strong tree. It is easily uprooted or blown over by the wind.

But if a tree has only a limited supply of surface water it drives its roots down deep into the ground in search of life-giving water. Trees that have deep roots are strong. Such trees are unscathed by storm, wind and drought...for they have an abundant supply of deep water that gives them strength.

To apply the tree analogy to our spiritual growth, we ask: How may our roots be deepened? How may our roots be driven down...down to the deep stream of living water?

Most of us won't like the answer but here it is. Our roots are driven down deep in the same manner as the tree's roots -- through drought. The many droughts over the years had actually served to

strengthen the tree. For each time a drought came the roots actually deepened.

Why did Teresa dry up? Because her roots had insufficient depth when one of life's "droughts" visited her. Another common way we Christians describe Teresa's plight is to say that life's circumstances were too much for her.

The dictionary defines circumstances as "a fact or event accompanied by other facts or events." Most circumstances in life you and I encounter aren't "Divinely Inspired." They are simply events that occur. So when most unpleasant or painful circumstances occur, God hasn't "caused" them, they happened. However, God will use the circumstance...to drive our spiritual roots deeper...deeper into His abundant stream of Living Water.

Most of us have heard similar teachings. It would be wonderful if we could receive the facts of such teachings and smile through our tears and say, "Thank you Jesus. You are the Potter, I'm the clay. I love you. You know what is best for me, so whatever you want to do is OK with me." Then walk cheerfully and tranquilly into the oblivion of our awful happenstance!

But in real life most of us under such circumstances run crying to God begging Him to deliver us. Suddenly it's not someone else in trouble...it's me! "God! Do something! NOW...HELP!"

Of course most of the time He doesn't. We pray, we cry, we fast, we anoint with oil, we do everything known within the bounds of our theology in our futile attempt to invoke Divine deliverance from our situation. Yet nothing happens.

At this point we as believers have two basic choices. We may (as Teresa) 1) turn and walk away, or, 2) stick it out...trusting God without any understanding.

Unfortunately, we can't help the Teresas of life until they are ready to open their hearts' door. We can, however, bring understanding to those who elect to stick it out with God thereby increasing their spiritual tenacity.

The ones in dire circumstances, unable to receive relief, who tearfully clings to God's Word

saying, "...all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purposes." (Romans 8:28 KJV) are unequivocally on the right track. In fact, they are on the only track that will eventually lead to life and peace!

My purpose in writing this article is to bring understanding so as to keep each of us on that track... with understanding.

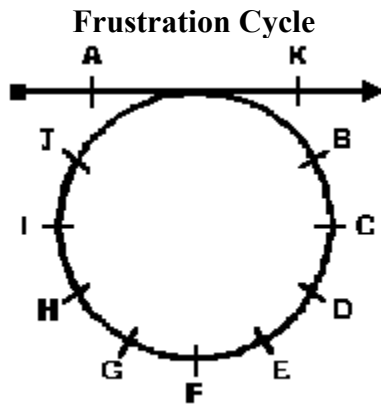


Figure 1

I want to introduce what I've come to call the "Frustration Cycle". Figure one shows the frustration cycle. The various alphabetical points around the cycle portray the stages most of us will go through before rising above our problem. Let's start at the beginning explaining the various stages.

STAGE A: LIFE'S GREAT

Things are going well. Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God and Saviour. Yes, there are some things in our life that could stand some improvement, but on the whole we are pleased. We are happy campers.

STAGE B: TRAUMA

Some significant event occurs beyond our control such as sickness or injury, loss of a job, a relationship or a loved one, severe financial reversal, emotional strain or pressures on the job, etc. It could be any combination of or "all of the above"! The beautiful roses have been cut and brutally snatched away from our mythical cottage and ugly weeds have grown in their place.

Life is now unpleasant, even miserable. The breaking of the morning light into our sleepless night is a welcome sight. But the coming day

brings no relief, it may even bring more problems. Things have not gone as we planned.

STAGE C: MANIPULATION

At this point we begin our attempts at manipulation...though usually they are futile. From our own resources we attempt to bring about changes that will rectify the situation. We do everything within our power to escape. We bring all our resources to bear against man and circumstances.

Naturally, while the above is going on in the natural realm we are feverishly crying out to God in the spiritual realm. It is at this stage we raise our tearful prayers to the Lord. It is here that we acknowledge of our sins. It is here we make promises to God--many of which we never keep. It is here we try to bargain with God as did Abraham of old.

Alas. The heavens are brass. God seems to be far away on the other side of the universe--out of hearing range of our prayers. God is certainly not answering our prayers as we wish!

STAGE D: ANXIETY AND FRUSTRATION

Anxiety moves in. We are inescapably gripped in its powerful clutch. Even in our sleep the tightness never leaves our body. The reality of the situation and the sense of being captured or victimized soon leads to frustration.

Frustration may express itself in a number of ways such as agitation, depression, sullenness, shortness of temper, anger, rage or even violence. It is during times like this that the silent, wonderful keeping power of the Holy Spirit within us does His quiet, saving work of conveying the abundant grace of Jesus to us--though we are usually not aware of it. Even when it seems that God doesn't hear, His grace is there, continually sustaining us...if we control the forceful emotions brought on by frustration.

STAGE E: HOPELESSNESS

Having gone progressively through Stages B, C and D the next stage of the cycle leads us to absolute despair! Man either cannot or will not help and God certainly will not help. Where else is there to turn? Though most of us won't admit it, at this point even hope, the candle of the soul, dies. We fear we may make matters worse by such

admission but we know deep down we have lost hope.

Humanly speaking, hopelessness is one of the most devastating forces known to man. It is far more destructive than the atomic bomb. All the bomb can do is destroy the body, hopelessness devastates the soul.

I know a woman who was at this stage once. One day as she stopped in traffic on the bumper of the car ahead was plastered this sticker:

I SURE FEEL BETTER SINCE I GAVE UP HOPE!

Most certainly the author of that little expression gave birth to it out of experience! In a few humorous words he aptly portrayed human despair.

You see, in this stage God is shaking us loose from everything else in which we have placed hope -- false hope. He must become our only hope. Somehow, being stretched beyond human hope leads us to the next stage.

STAGE F: "THE PITS"

The absolute bottom. No place is lower. Everything we have tried has failed. We have failed in our appeal to man and to God. Neither temper tantrums, tears, prayerful pleas nor manipulation, bargaining or begging have brought fruitful results.

Up to this stage we have had an excuse for our own behavior: "If he (or she) hadn't done so and so or if God would only do such and such." Up to this stage the bulk of the problem has been someone else's fault...man, circumstances, or even God's fault.

Here...only here...in the pits do we finally begin to look inwardly for blame. Maybe I contributed somehow. Maybe my reactions were wrong. Maybe it's me God is after!

Finally, with honesty and fully open ears we ask, "God, what's wrong with me?" Now, for the first time, God is free to answer. He is now free to lovingly, gently bring to our understanding things that He has wanted to have us free from for years: Things that flawed our character, things that hindered our Christian walk, things that hindered the flow of Living Water and separated us from Himself.

STAGE G: DIVINE INSIGHT

"But if men are bound in chains, held fast by chords of affliction, He tells them what they have done - that they have sinned arrogantly. He makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil." (Job 36:8-10 NIV).

No one wants to live in the pit of despair. But if the pit is the only place we are able - or willing - to hear correction from the Lord then the pit becomes the threshold of relief, the beginning of a new life. It may be only in the pit that God is able to get our attention and open our receptors to Divine instruction and correction that He will then pour forth.

Why didn't He tell us back at Stage A? Because few are the open ears, especially to correction, back at Stage A. For most of us Stages B, C, D, E and F are prerequisites to our willingness to hear such from our Father.

STAGE H: CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE

King David knew about confession and repentance:

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." (Ps 51:1,2 NIV)

Once God points out our sin there is only one proper response. With poetic beauty King David portrayed that response in deep, heartfelt confession of his sin to God. Another thing about confession from the pit of despair - it's usually accompanied by repentance! Confession alone is a mere acknowledgement. Repentance is the turning away from our sin. David did both, so must we.

By now some are thinking, "But what happened to me was truly someone else's doing. I have no part in the blame! I am a victim, this doesn't apply to me."

Maybe so. But God seldom passes the opportunity for instruction in Godliness to the soul so poised for His Word. We have not yet measured up to the fullness of the stature of our elder brother, Christ.

STAGE I: ACTION!

It's time now to DO SOMETHING! It's time to act on the Lord's instructions. It's time to begin to put into practice the Lord's Word to us. Jesus said:

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."
(Matt 7:24 NIV).

Also James tells us in the Scripture (James 1:22-26) it is the doers of the Word who benefit, not the hearers. This means that we must act, speak, think and do in our daily life according to what He has revealed to us. No longer are we permitted to fall back into the old rut. No longer are we permitted to sit in judgement, blaming everything and everyone else for our problems. Those things are now a part of our former life.

STAGE J: NEW LIFE!

Having gone through all the preceding stages we now find ourself embarking on a new life style. Our countenance has changed. It is now that friends and loved ones see a difference. There is now a smile on our face though it's very important that we understand that the circumstances that brought all this about may still be the same. Quite possibly they have not changed, it is we who have changed. It is we who have heard...and acted on the Word of the Lord. It is in this fashion that we are able to rise above our circumstances. It is in this manner the power of the Lord is able to transform us - in the midst of our problems. Indeed, we are now moving in a dimension that God intends us to possess. We are moving in a dimension in which circumstances have far less control over us than

they formerly had. We are now free of its' awful grip. We are walking in the true liberty of the sons of God!

To put a time frame on this cycle, it may be anywhere from a few days or weeks to a few years, depending on how long we spend in each stage. The Lord will move us through each stage as quickly or as slowly as we dictate by our own stubbornness, willingness to hear, commitment to prayer, and all the other ingredients it takes to move with God to a deeper walk.

STAGE K: POWER

From this point on we have access to Divine power we never before had. We possess an understanding, an assurance we never knew possible. God's power supernaturally sustains us. This is not to say life has no problems. It is to say we have power to plow through them with Divine energy.

Our roots have now reached the supernatural, ever-flowing, deep streams of Living Waters. He now provides an abundant supply of His power and grace for us to shine His light into this world of darkness, leading others to Him.

I feel a deep sorrow for the countless Teresas among us. They have turned away from the very thing that brings power - real power - to the trials of this world. Let us recognize the cycle of frustration for what it is. Properly viewed and acted upon it becomes a springboard for a life of power and closeness with the Lord we never dreamed possible.

Are you living in a dry land? Then let your roots grow deep down and have a drink of Living Water.

HUNDREDFOLD MINISTRIES, INTERNATIONAL

P. O. Box 625
Blue Jay, CA 92317

Telephone 909/336-9701

E-mail: jim.murphy@hundredfold.org Web site: www.hundredfold.org

Rev. Jim Murphy and his wife, Carolyn, of Blue Jay, California, United States, head Hundredfold Ministries, International. They write Christian teaching literature and travel to the Developing Nations of the world teaching Christian leaders. Hundredfold Ministries, Int'l is a cross-denominational Christian ministry dedicated to strengthening the church in the Developing Nations of the world.

Hundredfold Ministries, Int'l provides in-country Bible school courses and leadership training seminars. The classes and seminars are taught by seasoned, anointed teachers. The subject matter is directed towards the development and maturing of Christian leaders. The goal of the Ministry is to produce leaders who will be better equipped to lead and direct national churches.

All of Hundredfold Ministries training material is available from our web site listed above. Pastors in the Developing Nations may receive this material free of charge by going on our web site and requesting it.