

RE-FORMATION

A COURAGEOUS JOURNEY

WRITTEN BY

JEFF ANDRAS

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RE-FORMATION, A Courageous Journey

By Jeff Andras

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DEDICATION

The love and patience of my family simply must be acknowledged. Without the love, encouragement, and dedication they provided, God could not have used me in such an amazing way. I thank them for allowing me the time needed to complete this work and their part in the stories that created it. To my wonderful wife, mother, and children, all I can say is “let us celebrate together because without you, it would not have come into the fruition for which it was created to be.”

This has been an amazing journey for our entire family and they all deserve as much credit as I. Not only were they there for me in patience, understanding, assistance, and grace, but it was through the circumstances of our life as a family that God has brought revelation into all of our hearts, minds, and souls. We have experienced life together. We have laughed together, cried together, celebrated together, and worshiped together. Together we sought out God’s mind through the circumstances of life. We bounced the Spirit’s voice around between us and all grew in the wisdom and understanding provided. As we journeyed this road together we all participated. Sometimes we had to experience trials and tribulations for the growth of another. Sometimes we had to watch as others experienced tribulations as the result of our life choices. Regardless, at the end of the day we traveled the road together, leaning on each other, being there to help each other, and helping each other find God’s hand in the process. Robyn, Tessa, Tyler, Mindy, Tristan, and mom: Thank you for your part in this journey. I couldn’t have done it without you.

INTRODUCTION

Approximately four years ago, God told me to study prophecy. At first, I resisted the idea because I didn't want to debate with people about the typical prophetic issues: when the rapture would be, where the anti-Christ would come from, what the ten geographic regions are, or if we are living in the end times.

He explained that although I would come to understand many of these things, His primary purpose in me is to help others understand WHY He is going to do what He has said He is going to do so they can be properly prepared.

Over the years He has refined and expanded this message to reveal how modern teachings have taught us to embrace only an aspect of who He is.

Sadly, our understanding of the very nature of God has been swayed by teachings based on a human perspective instead of ones that embrace what He says about Himself. Simply put, He wants us to love Him based upon who He says He is, not who we want Him to be.

Let's look at two examples. The first example will be as it should be. The second will be an example that is more representative of the trend of our current teachings.

Using a mother, father, and child as an example we have a child who disrespects the rules of the house. The child goes to the mother to complain about the father imposing the ramifications that were predetermined to be associated with the particular offense. The mother lovingly reminds the child

that she and the father had mutually agreed on the rules of the house. Furthermore, she and the father had mutually agreed on the ramifications associated with the particular offense. She reminds the child that he/she had been told about the connection between the offense and the ramifications. In a loving and kind way she confirms that the father is imposing the ramifications because he is a good father and that it would not be love for him to not impose the ramification. She explains that she fully backs the father, that they fully love the child, and that the two of them are sorry that the child has to experience the unpleasant consequences of the corrective aspect of the ramifications.

In this example, the mother fully respects and honors the father. She supports the father without attempting to explain away his actions in an effort to appease the child. She is as loving as possible while extending as much grace as the situation merits. The child is then given the free will choice to listen to the truth of the situation, accept it, and release the father from judgment, or hold onto his/her own pride and the associated judgment.

For the second example all things are the same except for how the mother reacts. In this example, instead of the mother sharing the facts she feels she must somehow paint a different picture of the father for her child. She decides to tell the child that the true father is the one who provides the gifts at Christmas, who takes the family on vacations, and who is fun to be with. She goes on to say that the one who imposes discipline is really the not-so-nice twin brother.

In this example, instead of honoring her role as being one with the father, the mother denies that position and starts

back peddling. She comes up with a pathetic excuse because she is too passive or because she really never bought into the rules, the disciplinary measures, or both. As such, she feels as though she must make excuses for the father and totally misrepresents the situation. She thinks she is doing this in love but in reality she is not as she is deceiving the child. In this case the child will not learn the true nature of the relationship between discipline, love, and parenting. As such, this passive approach from the mother could lead to serious problems for the child later in life.

The child represents the congregations and the mother represents the teachers, leaders, and authors who are not properly representing the true nature of God the Father. Instead of preparing the Body of Christ for difficult times they are setting us up for a great fall wherein we will not be prepared for the difficulties that may lie ahead. We are seeing too many teachings that tell us that grace has no room for pain, suffering, trials, or tribulations.

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

John 15:1-2

This principle applies to the individual on the micro scale and to the world on a macro scale. Families, churches, societies, and nations are all going through the same process. It is God's process, it is His way, and it is His Word. We see this in the life of Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Jesus, the disciples, and countless other Biblical characters. We see it in God's interaction with Israel, the Jewish people, and the Church.

This book allows us to take a deep look within to see if we are living a life that reflects all that the covenant promises. Assuming we embrace the notion that the covenant offers more than we've experienced so far, we will explore what has gone wrong, what changes need to be made, and how we can work with God as He attempts to honor everything He promises to provide.

In our journey together, we will explore how to hear God's voice daily and how to recognize when God is at work as He attempts to prune us into a branch that truly produces the fruit we are capable of.

We'll also address these same issues with the modern Church at large. Conceding that the Church has not experienced the fullness of the covenant promises, we can apply what we learn to the Church's journey. Similar to our individual process, God is attempting to prune the Church so the Body can produce the fruit it was designed to produce.

These understandings will allow us to discuss some critical aspects of our teachings on salvation, pain and suffering, and love with a new heart. This will lead us into prayerful considerations and understandings of the very nature of God, His plan of salvation, and His interaction in global events.

Ultimately we will come to understand God's love in a new way, a way that will help us find Him in the worst of situations, the greatest of trials, and the deepest of despair. It will be these understandings that provide us a solid foundation to stand upon as He delivers us into all that we truly desire.

This journey will prepare our hearts, minds, souls, and strength for the things to come. We will come to understand the road God has put before us individually and cumulatively.

Most of all, we will gain the understanding necessary to hold onto Him through the process and to always remember that in spite of anything, God is love.

I pray, as you read this book, God gives you new wisdom, insight, and understanding that will introduce you to a renewed relationship with Him. A relationship that is deeper, more meaningful, and more powerful than anything you've ever known.

I pray He uses the time you dedicate to this content, and the openness of your heart to pour His Spirit into you in a mighty and powerful way.

I pray that this is the beginning of a new chapter in your life. A chapter that will lead to countless blessings, unending freedom, and a unity with Him that is beyond anything you have ever dreamed.

Amen.

CHAPTER 1

Building a Foundation

My life with Christ began in 2005. Prior to that my spiritual life included being raised in an Americanized Jewish home where we celebrated the High Holy days, attended synagogue on occasion, and participated in Hebrew school. This trend continued until shortly after my Bar Mitzvah on my thirteenth birthday.

Over the next 30 years I hardly attended church or synagogue, read very little spiritual content, and experienced almost no spiritual growth. All the while I honestly believed that I was very “spiritual,” had “excellent morals,” and definitely “knew the difference between right and wrong.”

In essence, I was raised in a way that stressed ethics, and as such believed I was conducting my life in a way that was considered admirable.

Somewhere around 2003, one of the men I worked with suggested, “Why don’t you try reading the Bible, it doesn’t make sense to reject something you don’t know anything about.”

I agreed, especially since my wife and I were already thinking it would be good to get the kids into a church to solidify what I was trying to instill into their character.

Eventually, I started letting God show me that I didn’t have it together as much as I initially thought - not even close. He showed me that my way of thinking was the biggest factor in my disappointments with life and relationships. As He helped me to apply what I read in the Bible to my life, things became

significantly better. What was manifesting in my life proved to be better than what I previously learned and embraced. I caught fire for the Lord, His Word, and His teachings; and I developed a desire to help others discover for themselves what God had done for me.

Over the next 10 years, He gave me the opportunity to lead several Sunday school classes and small groups. He led me to enroll in courses at Light University on Christian Counseling, to get involved in prison and jail ministries, to work a few missions' teams, and to become active in church politics, functions, and outreach programs. All of these experiences led me into a deeper relationship with Christ where I experienced deeper revelations and freedom only found in living God's way.

I had never been much of a reader, but I would listen to Moody Radio almost exclusively. As I drove I listened to sermons from Chuck Swindoll, Dr. Erwin Lutzer, Chip Ingram, Gary Chapman, Dr. Charlie Dyer, Tony Evans, Ravi Zacharias, James MacDonald, and many more. I also listened to talk shows such as, Chris Fabry Live!, In The Market with Janet Parshall, Midday Connection, Radical With David Platt, Today in the Word, and others.

As I listened to these programs, attended my local church, completed various Bible studies, and read spiritual counseling books, magazines, etc., God started showing me that there are almost as many different theological views as there are teachers, pastors, and authors. Apparently, interpreting the Bible isn't as easy as we would like to think, accept, or are told.

Moreover, through a course called HaYesod, God showed me that the ranges of teachings that are available and compiled from the same Scriptures are very diverse. He showed me that

interpretations often reflect the teacher's vantage point of Scripture based on their background, upbringing, and preferences. God started showing me that if I honestly wanted to know the truth, I would have to listen to what all these pastors, teachers, authors, and educated people were sharing. Then, I would have to take the time to dig deep into the Bible myself and spend lots of time praying and talking to Him about the differences between the teachings, approaches, and attitudes.

During my studies, God revealed which teachings were on target, and which were flesh-led. He led me toward Scriptures that would help bring reconciliation between those teachings that were on target while culling away what was not. This has been the journey of the past six or seven years of my life.

I am no different from you or any other person walking the face of this earth. I too, have my flesh, and I am still blind to many aspects of where it leads me. As hard as I have worked, attempted to let go of my personal preferences, and attempted to be open to the Spirit, I am sure I have failed in some areas.

I know the Spirit's objective in assigning me this task is not to bring glory to me or to convince others that what He has given me to share is the exclusive truth. More so, it is my belief that His desire is to reconcile and bring together what has already been torn apart. I encourage you to keep an open heart to what I believe God has led me to share. Also be mindful that I too, am simply another teacher who is viewing Scriptures from the vantage point of where my personal relationship with God has brought me thus far.

It has taken me more than two years to assemble the thoughts and discussions summarized in the pages of this book. In all honesty, it was the fear of not having the perfect theology that nearly paralyzed me in this effort.

A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, "Do business with this until I come back."

..... Another came, saying, "Master, here is your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man."He said to him, "By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave."

Luke19:12-19

This Scripture gave me the strength and the courage to push on with this endeavor. In order to be used by God, I had to trust that He would use me in my imperfection.

Doing His work requires me to risk failure, reputation, and status. For it is through both success and failure that I grow, come to know myself, and move deeper into my relationship with Him.

God encouraged me to speak the words He has given me; but only after doing enough research to confirm, to the best of my ability, that what I believe to be from Him truly is from Him. As such, I have completed this work, shared what He has called me to share, invested what He has given me to invest, and gone where He has told me to go.

I acknowledge that (and I pray you agree) God is not waiting for any one of us to get to Heaven so that He can shake our hand and congratulate us for being the only one who ever understood everything perfectly. As you read this book, I ask you to consider the Scriptural support of the theology shared. More than anything, I ask you to listen to your own heart, allow yourself to understand why you accept what you accept, and to see why you reject what you reject.

We tend to embrace teachings that lean toward one of the following: God's grace and love as so wonderful, and His gift of salvation is so complete, that we cannot reconcile His rebuke, correction, or wrath. Or, God's rebuke, correction, and wrath are so connected to our transformation and subsequent salvation that we can't reconcile His grace.

Accepting these as basic precepts, we tend to see it in one of two ways: 1) As long as we maintain a “reasonable” relationship with God, we will remain fully justified and righteous in His eyes, secure in our salvation. 2) Or, we recognize that unholy and selfish living is sinful. We acknowledge that God hates sin, and we attempt to maintain holy and selfless lives. The fundamental foundation of our decision to live selfless and holy lives comes down to our desire to please God, wherein we will secure our salvation and earn greater blessings here and/or in the afterlife. Let’s take a moment to consider four questions:

- Can we agree that what we are being taught and accept as the mind of God are merely man’s interpretations, views, and opinions as to what God is attempting to communicate to us through His Word?

- What is it about these interpretations, views, and opinions that lead us to embrace the ones we embrace and reject the ones we reject?
- What would be the implications if we allowed ourselves to let go of current understandings to provide room in our hearts for something new?
- How does the fear of those implications keep us in bondage to our old way of life?

These are the questions God pushed me to consider several years ago. Questions that compelled me to look beyond what I wanted to hear in order to understand the things leading me into a deeper relationship with Him. Questions that formulate what this book is intended to stir up within us.

It's my hope that the answers you provided will help you understand why you are not experiencing God to the fullest extent possible, and how you are not allowing Him to accomplish everything He desires to do in and through you.

Throughout this book, we may be challenged with theological views that differ from what we've been taught and/or embraced. While contemplating these things, we might argue that our pastor or teacher comes straight from the Word of God. But, in reality, unless they are reading the Word to us and nothing else, they're not simply teaching the Word of God. They are actually teaching doctrines they believe to have been revealed by the Spirit through the studies of others. Because these doctrines are so widely accepted we tend to put our faith into them. Something being widely received does not make it true.

***For God so loved the world, that He gave
His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in
Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.***

John 3:16

Some view this as saying that “anyone who believes in Christ will have eternal life.” However, a problem arises when we attempt to define what “believes in” means.

Our definition and view makes all the difference in how we apply this Scripture to our lives. Consider the following progression of what “believe” might include:

- We believe in the person of Christ.
- We believe in the process of salvation offered through Christ.
- Since Christ is the Word in flesh, we believe in the Bible.
- We believe that the Bible exists and that it is the inspired Word of God.
- We believe God’s Word establishes a way of life that if followed leads to an abundant life.
- We define an abundant life as a life free from pain, trials, tribulations, difficulties, sickness, and setbacks.
- We believe an abundant life is comprised of whatever is necessary to draw us closer to God, where our hearts may be filled with an understanding of Him, His ways, and the magnitude of the love He has for all people.

How we view John 3:16 and many more like it comes down to being honest with ourselves about how deep we are willing to dig and how much of the truth we really want to know.

Some of us are happy ending our journey with the simplest definition of “believe.” We understand John 3:16 to be a promise that “God will provide eternal life” to anyone who believes in the person of Christ. Others may go beyond the deepest understandings offered and choose to see that all of these things are included in what delivers us into God’s promises.

At the end of the day, we must ask ourselves, are we approaching our spiritual journey as one of minimums or maximums?

How would we feel if, after we died, we discovered that our theology erred on the side of caution, promoting a standard of life closer to Christ’s walk than was absolutely “necessary?”

On the other hand, can you imagine finding yourself before God, after living a life you thought was dedicated to Him, telling people about Him, pointing people toward Him, quoting His Scriptures to people, and even performing miracles in His name; only to have Him remind you of the following verses:

Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.”

Matthew 7:22-23

What was your emotional response to reading that last Scripture? What were your thoughts? Perhaps you thought, “Oh no, here we go....another hell and damnation teaching?”

Or maybe you thought, “Oh, I need to write that one down. I know some people I need to show that to. This will prove.....”

This book is designed to encourage self-reflection as we take an apologetic view of various Scriptures and build a case toward a deeper understanding of what our relationship with God is all about.

We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

2 Colossians 10:5

As we examine our thoughts and attitudes toward different Scriptures and teachings, we will discover that our views on salvation become the foundation in which we stabilize almost all of our theological understandings. This foundation dictates the approach we have toward Him, His Word, others, and all of our thoughts and actions.

Because of this, the vast majority of the theology we accept and reject ultimately comes down to our understanding of salvation. The journey of this book is a progression of Scriptural support alongside an apologetic argument that points us toward a fresh look at our understanding of:

- Salvation
- Pain, Suffering, and Satan
- Love
- The Law and Prophets
- The Fulfillment of God’s Redemptive Plan

Dear God, we pray you give us the courage to approach each page with an open mind, heart, and soul. We ask you to give us divine understanding as we review what is presented.

Give us deep understanding as to how to apply it to our lives and the strength to honor what you will place upon our hearts.

Help us to be true. True to you and true to ourselves. Our heart's desire is to love you with ALL our heart, mind, soul and strength; and to love others as we love ourselves.

Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Why We Do What We Do

Why do we do what we do? We could say we work because we need to eat, we play because we like to have fun, or we get married and have kids because we don't want to be alone and want the fulfillment of raising a family, or some other surface level truth. Do all of our choices come down to such simple reasoning?

I don't think so. I believe there is something deeper; deeper in our thoughts and deeper in our hearts.

How do priorities, goals, and choices relate to each other? What influences our priorities? In other words, what causes us to make one decision instead of another?

When I was ten years old, I lived next door to an amazing guy who seemed to have it all together. He owned a stretch Lincoln, a customized Corvette, an awesome house, a motor boat, a sail boat that my brother and I could water ski behind, and (oh yeah!) lots of money. Not only did he own all that stuff, but he was also good at everything he did. When we raced sail boats, he always won. He was a successful attorney, investor, judge, and business man.

Fortunately for me, he liked kids, and he was a really nice guy. I used to go over to his house, sit on his porch swing, and he'd talk to me about life. One day we talked about goals. He explained how important it is to have our goals written down, to read them every day, and to carry them with us at all times.

According to him, making the right choices proves we really put our FAITH into our goals and that they are a priority in our lives.

Not making the right choices proves we never believed in our GOALS or in our own ability to accomplish them. And yet still, if we failed to accomplish a goal, we shouldn't let it set us back.

In essence, he was a great guy who taught me to set goals, make them a priority, and make choices consistent with them, proving that my goals were the focus of my life.

When I was about nine, my dad told me that if I wanted a car when I turned 16, I had better start working. From that time on I worked every chance I got. By the time I was 16, I had saved up nearly \$10,000. I had taken that goal my dad had given me seriously, made it a priority, worked hard, and denied myself in many ways.

I bought my first car just before I turned 16. It was a 1969 Mustang. By the time I was 17, it was beautiful. For my 18th birthday present to myself, I put a new motor in it. I had the machine shop duplicate a build I had torn out of a Car Craft magazine four years earlier. I was 18 years old with one of the nicest cars at our school, and one of the fastest on the streets.

I should have been happy, proud, and self-confident. Instead, I felt empty inside, angry, and basically unconcerned. I lacked motivation and drive in all areas of my life, and I didn't understand why. To say I was depressed would have been an understatement. Looking back, I truly believe the only thing that kept me going, and even alive, was the love of my mother. Knowing how deeply she loved me made the difference.

As I matured into my early adult years I observed similar patterns in my parents' lives and other adult relationships. I witnessed a lot of pain, sorrow, broken promises, fights, tears, anxiety, and a general sense of frustration with life; all from people who were working hard, playing hard, and accomplishing their goals. I noticed how things weren't adding up, and I couldn't figure it out. It occurred to me that my neighbor's formula wasn't working for him, me, or anyone else for that matter. Sure, we were acquiring things and accomplishing things. Still, something was drastically wrong. Something was missing.

This realization prompted me to change the formula, to set goals and work hard to achieve them for other people in hopes of finding joy and happiness for myself. After two failed marriages and eight years into the third, I realized that didn't work either. My vision of happiness required too much of my loved ones, too much of myself, and too much of the things I turned to when my loved ones let me down.

Eventually, by the age of 40, I learned to accept that other people cannot love me enough to keep me from hurting them, and I can't love other people enough to keep them from hurting me.

Accepting this changed my life. Now, as I go about life, I don't worry about what everyone else is thinking. I relax and have fun. When I do things around the house, I know it makes my wife feel loved, even if she's in a bad mood. When I do things for my kids, I show them they are loved, even if they are complaining about something else ten minutes later.

Amazingly, since I have dropped my expectations of receiving the responses I "felt I deserved," I have become less

angry, less critical, and way more relaxed. I, in turn, have seen the people around me change too. There is more laughter and happiness in our home. As soon as I stopped trying to make them happy, I quit making them unhappy. Isn't it funny how that works?

Instead of laboring to make them happy, I learned to show them love. Showing them love is within *my* control and does not place expectations upon them. Laboring to make them happy is a futile battle because their happiness is not controlled by what I do, what I say, or what I provide. The difference is not in what we do, but why we are doing what we are doing.

Unfortunately, my neighbor passed away years ago. If he were alive today, I would love to ask him why he set the goals he set. I wonder how many of his priorities would change if he had the chance to do it all over.

Dear God, help us to embrace whatever it is that the Holy Spirit reveals to us about our journey through this life, the choices we have made, the goals we have set, and the outcomes they have brought us. Please help us hear the Spirit as He leads us toward new goals, new priorities, and a new purpose.

Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Does It Really Matter?

Does it matter why we do what we do? Why can't we be happy just doing what we do and not over-think it?

The thing is, until I began to understand why I do what I do, why I think what I think, and why I react the ways I react, I never really knew myself. I defined myself based on what I did, what I thought, and the way I reacted to things. Who I saw wasn't who I am.

Once I started asking these deeper questions and listening to the answers, I began to see some things that I had never seen before. I saw my heart was being consumed by the painful experiences of my life and the unforgiveness I was holding onto. I saw that the pain I had caused others and the associated guilt was overwhelming me. I started to see the lies I had bought about who I am, what I am worth, and what I am capable of.

I began to see that our thoughts have power. And what we feed our thoughts and our spirit is critical to how we view ourselves and others.

Are you open (totally open to the depths of your heart, mind, and soul) to the concept of a spiritual war?

If so, then do you believe that we are the actual prize being fought over in this battle? And do you believe that God put Satan over this realm, and that he is the prince of this world?

Or is there a soft voice deep down inside that's urging you to resist believing these things?

Our thoughts about power, fame, strength, weakness, riches, sexuality, pride, entertainment, and everything we "live for" is based on the world we interact with; and our response to the temptation of each is shaped by our belief or non-belief of spiritual warfare.

Once we concede that the majority of the ways we think are influenced by the environment we live in, we can admit that the way we live and think is influenced more by what we have been taught than who we are.

The truth about who we are is buried deep within us, waiting to be uncovered so that we may truly enjoy life to the fullest.

Since Satan is the prince of this world, we must assume he has set up a mode of teaching designed to lure us to him. This is a method of teaching that appeals to our carnal, human, or lower nature person instead of our spiritual person. A method that *intentionally* directs us toward carnal, human, or lower nature solutions for our spiritual problems. A method that moves us away from spiritual relationships and toward the false intimacies offered through sex, power, materialism, and fame.

Since God gave Satan power over this world, we could struggle (consciously, unconsciously, or subconsciously) with loving God because of the pain and suffering we see Satan inflicting. This can result in rejecting God all together, or twisting the understanding of who God is in our effort to reconcile God to our fleshly desire of who we want Him to be.

Our spiritual person may become buried to the point we hardly realize he is even there. We are left disconnected from God and unwilling to love or be loved. This is exactly where I found myself after 40 years of pain, frustration, and confusion.

I know that this is not the way it is supposed to be and I know that it is not what life has to be like. I know this to be true because I am a living testimony to the reality of what is possible. For me, the process came through my spiritual journey and the work of God through Christ. I do not believe that I, in my own strength, am capable of understanding these things. I do not have the strength to grow, heal, and transform myself. Nevertheless, the healing and the enlightenment God provided made it possible. It's my prayer that my personal journey is consistent with the model of Christ. The same model that is available to each of us - available to all humanity.

Let's revisit my earlier question: Why do we do what we do? I believe we desire to feel at peace and crave a sense of well-being. At some level, all of our choices ultimately come back to this, and I think the following Scripture summarizes what our soul deeply desires.

***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,
peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.***

Galatians 5:22-23

The decisions we make, the thoughts we embrace, the dreams we consider, the responses we have, and the aspirations we seek ultimately provide the evidence of what we honestly believe will help us obtain the peace and sense of well-being promised in this Scripture.