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[Statement of Faith](#)

## CONTENTS (SEE OUR [ONLINE INDEX](#) FOR KEY TOPICS AND SCRIPTURES IN PAST EDITIONS)

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Key In-Sights .....	4
The Bible's Bigger Pictures .....	
Part 3 of the Differences and Relationships Between	
Peace, Pain and Distraction.....	4

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## KEY IN-SIGHTS

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When we face some uncomfortable situation, the situation can make us think that God gave us a brain so we could solve some of our own problems without really having to go to Him to figure out any special guidance He might have for us. That thinking is like the vague warning on a first aid kit: “...and call 911 if necessary.” Well gee whiz; of course there are situations where CLEARLY we need to call 911, but what about the huge number of situations where it isn’t super clear and we don’t know for sure?! People get in situations where calling 911 seems extreme because they aren’t certain the situation is *that* bad. How many times have our minds wondered if the situation REALLY merits calling 911, because the emergency may turn out to be no big deal? Yes, to some people calling 911 involves a risk. We can get stuck with another bill we don’t need and it can really take up a lot of time! Sometimes, in the really unclear emergency situations, it can often be inconvenient to go through everything that comes from calling 911 – sitting in the waiting room, being forced to spend the night in the hospital, dealing with insurance companies, and there is always the possibility that the necessary treatment will turn out to be nothing more than you could have done yourself... and you still get a nice bill! The point is the thought of calling 911 can raise discernment issues for people.

This same mentality can arise spiritually concerning small trials, or in trials that don’t seem to have anything directly to do with spiritual issues or battles. In truth, there is no trial when we can “do it on our own.” God *wants* to guide EVERY step we try to take, especially if the step involves a situation that has a spiritual battle going on behind it! Satan is the one that gets us to feeling like “hearing God shouldn’t be so hard or inconvenient sometimes!” Well, sometimes spiritual battles *are* that hard and/or inconvenient, even when they are small. The small trials are the ones when Satan has an easier time convincing us that it is possible to “over-rely” on God, or that it is possible to “blow trials out of proportion.”

## THE BIBLE’S BIGGER PICTURES

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### Part 3 of the Differences and Relationships between Peace, Pain and Distraction

As this article is Part 3, let’s recap where we are. Last month’s “Hearts Up” looked at why it is that we sometimes experience stronger heart disturbances in some trials than in others. We discussed that when we are experiencing stronger heart disturbances, then it is in those trials that we may reason that the voice of God is trying “harder” to get through to us. It may seem that the volume of His voice is “louder.” We may reason that when our feelings and/or desires aren’t as strong it must be because the situation must not be as spiritually important. We also saw that just



because God’s voice may seem louder in some trials than in others, it doesn’t necessarily mean we can figure out what He is trying to say to us! We saw that the reason His voice often seems louder is related to whether *we* view whatever is going on in the trial as really important or not. We examined that the counsel God offers us in our hearts is always important because He offers it when Satan is attacking us. *Every* attack Satan mounts against Christ in us represents a trial where we will either sin or not, so God’s counsel matters whether we perceive His voice as loud or soft! In short, hearing the Holy Spirit’s guidance to us in “big trials” is just as important as hearing in “smaller trials.” The December 2011 “Hearts Up” edition also included:

1. What is going on when discerning God’s guidance is more difficult.
2. Four misconceptions we sometimes have when it comes to hearing God’s instructive guidance.
3. Why it is that sometimes the volume or intensity of our heart disturbances is greater in some trials than in other trials. (This one presented the diagram with the “spiritual ear.”)

**Also, for those of you just joining us, the goal of this series of articles is to examine the “why” behind some of the challenges we face in some trials, which tend to make it harder to hear God’s voice. Our prayer is by exposing some of the relationships between spiritual dynamics we experience in various trials will make it harder for Satan to use them secretly against us!**

The goal of this series of articles is not necessarily to identify the “1, 2, 3...,” so to speak, of hearing God’s voice with the heart. For that we trust you have access to solid discipleship training that goes beyond the elementary teachings of Christ (Hebrews 6:1-2). (The *Keys To Understanding Life* equivalent of that kind of training begins with *Feelings 101* – learning how to open your heart to God’s voice during trials more often.) Another of our prayers is that any knowledge or insight you gain from these articles will encourage and motivate you to be diligent in applying the Scriptural principles involved in being discipled by God’s Spirit in trials!

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To continue from last month’s article, we will start by looking at some examples of how *our perception* of the *external* aspects of a trial influences how loudly the voice of God seems *inwardly*, in our hearts, during that trial. It is important to note that while our perception of the external aspects of a trial can influence our perception of God’s voice internally, this isn’t because we have some special power over God’s voice. It doesn’t actually minimize God. God permits Satan to attack us and to try to influence, or distort, our perception in deceptive ways often without us recognizing it. This has to do with free will, making spiritual choices during spiritual battles, and is why Satan is sometimes called, “The Deceiver.” Examining our inner dynamics during trials is important for at least 3 reasons:

1. **Satan’s attacks against us often follow patterns.** Two things we share in common are that Satan attacks all of us and that we all experience trials. However, Satan doesn’t attack each of us exactly the same. Even when Satan’s attacks are similar, the differences in our own personalities and past experiences can cause us to experience the trial in remarkably different ways! Satan’s influence on us in trials is a huge variable. Because of the great differences in how we experience even similar trials, studying Satan’s influences in our own trials must be an integral part of our spiritual warfare and discipleship training. (The first 6 chapters of

*Feelings 101: Pain to Peace* presents a variety of exercises and questions devoted to assisting a reader in identifying patterns in Satan’s unique influences on him or herself in trials.)

2. **Studying various aspects of our own personal trials is an exercise that leads to greater and deeper spiritual maturity.** Our spiritual warfare training needs to include us studying our trials in order to discover patterns in them. This training helps us increase our awareness both of Satan’s attacks and issues within ourselves that God works to have us change.
3. **Satan can use the differences between our trials/disturbances and those of others to minimize how much we learn from studying trials described in Scripture.** Trials have an uncomfortable and often painful side to them. So, we naturally tend to want to avoid them. While there is wisdom to avoiding trials, Satan can get us to carry that desire too far. When we don’t fully appreciate the dynamic and subjective nature of how we experience trials, Satan can get us to under-estimate how much we can learn from them. So if we read about Esau’s anger toward Jacob, we may view ourselves completely different than Esau. We can’t imagine being as angry as to want to kill someone, so our tendency is to see that trial as not applying so much to us. But, the point then would be to discover how Satan’s attack *would* disturb us were we to experience what Esau did from Jacob. It’s natural to tend to connect with trials that seem more similar to our own. However, when we can’t readily connect with the external situation of a trial described in Scripture, Satan tries to get us to overlook the lessons we might learn from Scripture. It can help greatly, when studying trials in Scripture, if we are familiar with the patterns behind our own big or little trials and heart disturbances. That awareness helps us open up to what God can teach us as we study His written Word.

Let’s get to more of those examples we mentioned.

#### **Four General Relationships Between the Size of a Trial and the Size of Our Inner Heart Disturbance**

**Big disturbance; “big trial.”** When your inner disturbance seems big and the external situation is important (big) to you, then you might think it is normal and therefore OK to remain disturbed (as opposed to peace). A “big trial” could include a death in the family or your home being robbed. When Abraham was going to Egypt he had a big disturbance concerning a big trial. Abraham thought Pharaoh was going to kill him (Genesis 12:10-13).

However, sometimes we may experience a big disturbance over something that is big to us, but little to others. For a person who has been abused, simply seeing certain things on TV could result in a big disturbance relating to a big trial to them. If an onlooker doesn’t know the person was abused, they might judge the person’s reaction as an over-reaction to whatever the trigger was on the TV. Satan can use such misunderstandings to drive deep and touchy wedges between people. It is important for us to be aware of the kinds of situations in which we experience big disturbances and big trials. It is also important to actively remember that the differences in Satan’s attacks on people means that we each may define big and little trials quite differently. When a trial seems big externally, often God’s corrective and guiding voice through the heart internally can be very discomfoting at first.

**Big disturbance; “little trial.”** When our inner disturbance seems big and yet the external situation

seems insignificant (little) to us, we may get to a place where we start feeling stressed out. We may have a sense that we are getting overwhelmed because even the little things are starting to grate on us. We may judge or assess our own inner disturbances as over-reactions. That self-assessment is dangerous. When we see one of our own trials as “little,” something inside us (Satan’s influence) seems to make it OK to try to disregard, blow off, forget or otherwise minimize our inner disturbance. In short, Satan may get us to “stuff” certain low level disturbances in our hearts! (Stuffing is NOT the same as transforming our hearts and renewing our minds during trials!)

An example of a big disturbance, little trial could be the experience of an upset or worry because you missed your exit off the highway. Of course whether your disturbance is big or little could depend on whether you were driving to the hospital in an emergency, whether you are hurrying to get to the store so you can get home quickly, or whether you are just cruising on a Saturday afternoon outing. Your perception of the importance of missing an exit could also depend on how big you believe someone else’s trial might be if you are late! Clearly we can see how our perception of the external influences determines how strongly our internal heart disturbance is. Something as trivial as missing an exit can only be seen for what it is, a subtle attack by Satan, when we recognize it is a shift in our heart to which God is trying to speak. Satan gets us to underestimate certain trials.

Another example might involve having a bad dream. To an adult this may not be a big deal if he or she thinks dreams are meaningless, even though the inner disturbance is strong and noticeably disconcerting. We may try to shake the disturbance by reading the morning news or by focusing on getting to work. Pilate’s wife had a big disturbance over a dream (which some might consider to be a little thing). As a result, she encouraged Pilate not to be involved with Jesus, an innocent man (Matthew 27:17-20).

The story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42) shows that Martha had a big disturbance though she didn’t see that *she* was in a trial – it appeared to be a “natural” disturbance because Mary wasn’t helping her! Jesus, however, perceived the situation quite differently. Jesus indicated the many things Martha was worried and upset about were not as important as she thought. One way we could look at it was Martha was having a big disturbance over what was basically a little, unimportant issue – her preparations. That doesn’t mean the little issue didn’t involve a trial though. To us maybe the trial seems little, to Martha it was big. Satan’s influence can cause us to make a big deal about things that from God’s perspective need to be heavily tempered and placed in a godly perspective.

**Little disturbance; “big trial.”** This is probably how most of us would like to experience trials. When Paul was in jail there were times where he seemed hardly disturbed at all (Acts 16:22-28). In fact, even though he could have escaped prison, he didn’t. In Philippians 1:12-14, Paul is in jail. However, it is clear that he realizes he is “in chains for Christ.” If we were falsely accused of stealing and were thrown in jail, our perception of the situation may be that it is not as noble a cause as being jailed for preaching about the Lord. As a result, we may find ourselves in a big disturbance, big trial situation. The more we are able to see the spiritual battle unfolding behind our real-life events, the more we see external events as Paul did in terms of the true “Satan versus Christ” context. The more we study our trials and see that perspective for ourselves, the less Satan is able to use our external perceptions to make certain situations seem less spiritually important than they are.

We’d like to be disturbed as little as possible, so we feel the least amount of discomfort as possible, regardless of how tough things are. Satan knows this, and he will do what he can to encourage us to do whatever it takes to minimize times when God has something important He is

trying to teach us and warn us about. When our inner disturbance is relatively small and we see the external situation as big, we might actually view ourselves as being spiritually skilled because we aren't disturbed with something so big. It is true that sometimes we move so quickly through the inner transformation process that we are hardly disturbed at all at a big trial. That actually *can* be good, but it can also be deceiving.

When forced into a trial where the outcome is completely unavoidable, some people are able to embrace and accept the outcome relatively quickly. We reason that it's not worth being upset about. That response doesn't happen automatically for every trial we face. That reasoning itself isn't the formula for transforming the heart in all trials. When we are in a trial where the outcome is just as “big” but it is not “out of our control,” the same calm and cool person likely finds himself in the “big disturbance, big trial” scenario. Satan uses little disturbances during big trials to try to make us overconfident.

Rachel apparently experienced little disturbance over stealing her father's household gods (Genesis 31:19-35). Somehow Satan skewed her perception in a way that made her actions right for her. Perhaps Rachel would have experienced a big disturbance at the thought of not being able to take the household gods. Perhaps when studying Rachel's trial we might not readily connect with the trial because we think we desire no other gods or idols. Keep in mind that Martha's idol in her trial was the preparation she felt was important. Satan works to drive us into failing to see how almost anything can be made into an idol when the wrong heart is at work. Satan's influence can cause us to experience little disturbances when big spiritual issues are at stake.

**Little disturbance; “little trial.”** When your inner disturbance is small and the external situation seems small, you may view your inner disturbance as normal and hardly worth your attention. An example might be when a pet climbs on a chair. While some people might experience no disturbance at all, others may experience a big disturbance depending on which chair, which room, whose pet it is, or whether or not they like pets. Another example of a little disturbance and little trial could be seeing a shirt on the bed in the bedroom. This kind of little thing is often just one thing in a string of small disturbances that together point to some bigger trial.

There is another side to “little disturbances, little trials.” When God has made it clear to us what kind of heart we must have or what actions we must take or avoid, Satan causes us to over-think so as to essentially question the significance of that guidance. As such we experience a little disturbance thinking it is about a “little trial.” We may even start thinking the situation doesn't actually qualify as a trial! Eve's experience of Satan's temptation reflects “little” (although hugely important) disturbances (Genesis 3:1-6). She viewed eating the fruit as a little issue. These distortions in her perceptions were the result of Satan's influences on her perception of the external situation, which in turn minimized the spiritual importance of the situation.

Another example of a “little disturbance, little trial” could be that of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). They sold some of their land. They were going to give the money to the church, but they elected to keep part of the money for themselves. Perhaps to them it was a minor issue to keep part of the money for themselves. Perhaps they felt it was their right to do with the money as they wished. Perhaps they reasoned that it should go without saying that God would want them to look out for their own finances! Satan often uses our cultural views to shape our own perceptions of whether or not a given situation has anything to do with a trial; thus, Satan makes us fall in the trial.

Here is one last brief observation. When our inner disturbance is relatively small and we view



the external situation as little, we might be viewed as insensitive or as uncaring depending on the situation. For example, if you don’t cry at sad movies someone might see you as insensitive if it is a big deal to them. On the other hand, for some men it might be a big deal if you do cry! Similarly, a friend or spouse might consider you insensitive if you aren’t bothered by something nearly as much as they are bothered. If a friend or spouse is telling you the horrible drama behind their own trial, your lack of reaction or disturbance by their trials may be considered insensitive. In short, while their trial may be big to them, you may experience a little disturbance if your perception of their trial is that it simply isn’t that big of a deal.

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The examples above demonstrate that the triggers for our heart disturbances vary depending on what is going on. The examples demonstrate that peace doesn’t always rule in our hearts (Colossians 3:15), unless we readily transform something in us. Satan uses different triggers for different people in different situations depending on what might help him succeed! Everybody is different. Many self-help books address variances between people, whether in marriage, dating and/or work relationships. They help us understand differences between others and ourselves. They give suggestions on how to work out issues arising from our differences in order to form and maintain healthy relationships.

Many self-help books zero in on the *external* differences between people and their trials, and that training can be very useful. Here, however, as with all the *Keys* books and materials we want to focus on “new-self help.” This is the kind of help we can get by virtue of having both a relationship with Christ and by having His Spirit within us. The Spirit of Peace is The Teacher. Though the *external* differences between people and trials can be endless, by connecting with The Teacher within us we can

*The Spirit of God works to help us transform our hearts to peace. This eliminates our inner disturbance so we can see the trial as it really is!*

be opened to His instructive guidance and discover the exact response God wants us to make regardless of the external differences. The Spirit of God works to help us transform our hearts to peace. This eliminates our inner disturbance so we can see the trial’s significance as it really is. The teaching of God’s Spirit focuses first and foremost on the *internal* (spiritual) patterns and dynamics within us. Those patterns and dynamics influence our perception of the external situation because Satan works to manipulate us in dynamic ways according to patterns that the Spirit of God wants us see. So with that understanding, the following series of diagrams create a pictorial view of the internal, spiritual differences and relationships between pain and distraction and the task of transforming them to peace.

## **The Uncomfortable Side of the Relationship Between Trials and Our Heart Disturbances**

Diagram 1 below depicts some basic dynamics of trials that we have all experienced at one time or another. The diagrams that follow later in the article will follow the pattern of this example so take a moment to digest it.

### **Differences Between Peace, Pain and Distraction (1)**

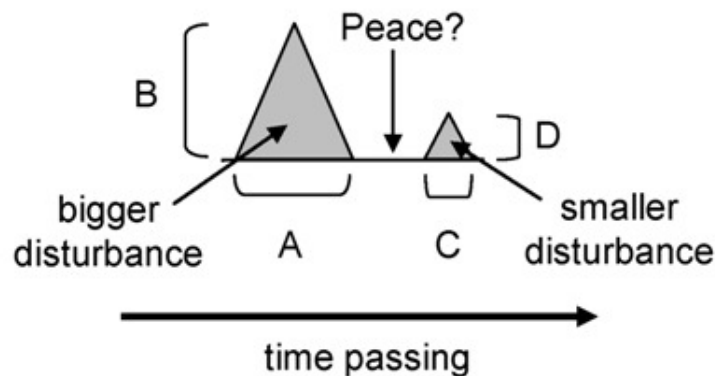


Diagram 1 as a whole depicts two trials. In addition to representing trials, the two triangles represent the relative sizes of two disturbances of the heart, a “bigger one” and a “littler one.” The big disturbance is associated with a trial represented by the first triangle. That situation has a start point, a peak, and an end point. Then, there is no awareness of any disturbance, which is represented by the gap between the triangles marked “Peace?” Finally, a smaller disturbance arises. Notice that the second trial doesn’t last as long as the first trial.

The shape of the triangle is similar to many life trials: things escalate, or ramp up, then peak and later they wind down. The bigger triangle represents that sometimes we perceive a stronger disturbance or a bigger problem than at other times. Again, what is “strong” for one person may be different for someone else. As you look at the diagram, you can come up with whatever would seem to be a stronger disturbance and lesser disturbance to you.

The labels in Diagram 1 describe the following characteristics:

1. The Grey Shading in the triangles represents the disturbance you are aware of. The grey shading indicates that the person is disturbed for the entire duration of the trial. The person is not at peace during the trial (the whole triangle is grey).
2. “A” and “C” generally represent the length of time that the challenging external situation lasts. It demonstrates that some trials seem to last longer than others. How long a trial lasts is usually associated with how long we feel uncomfortable.

3. “B” and “D” each represent how big or small we consciously perceive the disturbance in our hearts to be during a given trial.
4. The word Peace has a question mark by it (*Peace?*). This points to the gap between the two disturbances. The gap simply represents the fact that sometimes we aren’t aware of any disturbances in our hearts. Often we assume this means we are at peace, but we will see later that this is not always true. Do NOT interpret the diagram as saying the gap is a true absence of a trial. We will return to this later.

It is important to re-emphasize that just because we notice things building up externally does not mean we will always recognize or be willing to acknowledge our personal responsibility for the inner disturbance in *our* hearts! Whether we take personal responsibility for our heart disturbances is influenced by whether our focus stays external, or whether we discern what the Spirit is trying to get us to change internally.

Let’s look at some other examples of trials and heart disturbances. The first trial (first triangle) could represent something like the emotions which are present in an argument (or whatever you feel that leads to arguments, regardless of whether you actually argue or not), or it could represent a desire to correct someone else’s mistakes. For someone else, to be a big disturbance, the external situation might have to be something like a failure to be promoted or to be recognized in some way.

A big disturbance might be the strong preference you have for organization, which may interfere with relationships you have with those who, to you, have “lower” standards. A big disturbance could be what you feel if someone asked you to put the mail in the same spot two days in a row. A big disturbance might be experienced when someone you know has money yet refuses to go to nice restaurants. It could be what you feel when you see a walking fashion faux pas! A big disturbance could also be your desires or feelings at the idea of dressing up or going someplace nice once a year. A big disturbance might be how you feel when someone’s dog relieves itself in your yard, or it could be what you feel toward the thought of picking up your own dog’s business! Again, the point is to recognize what is big to you so you can be prepared to transform something in you more readily!

The smaller triangle represents experiences which, for you, might be the stress of your daily commute in traffic or the desire to avoid a particular person. It might be the annoyance you experience around a person you believe isn’t too bright, or a person whose speech you always want to correct (whether you actually do or not). Again, you’ve been around your old self for a long time. The value of the spiritual exercise starts with acknowledging what is small (versus big) to you.

When trials arise, we know from the Scripture that God is speaking to us and is providing guidance and instruction (John 14:27; 1 John 3:18-24). In Diagram 1, each triangle is shaded grey to represent experiences when a person, for whatever reason, doesn’t or can’t clearly hear what the Spirit is saying, whether the person intentionally wanted to hear or not. When trials come to an end “on their own” we usually start feeling better. Let’s apply this to one of our previous examples. When you finally get to work, the feelings you felt when you saw the walking fashion faux pas on the way to work, may disappear. This kind of “feeling better” is NOT necessarily due to an ability to transform heart disturbances (and their various levels of pain) to peace; it is due to slavery to our old selves and defining who we are by what goes on externally, i.e., in the world. Because the disturbance wasn’t

actually transformed (the situation just came to an end), the gap is labeled *Peace*? The gap doesn’t represent peace that results from transforming in a trial by keeping in step with God’s Spirit, The Teacher. In these situations, *Peace*? indicates a lull between trials that is usually misinterpreted as peace.

### **The Difference it Makes when We Hear God and Surrender To Him in a Trial**

The Bible tells us it is possible to experience joy in trials, peace in trials, and that we can have a strong, comforting understanding of how God is using the trial to mold and discipline us for His purposes. These are the internal results God gives us when we apply our part of the truth of the following kinds of verses in a trial:

1. Genesis 4:7 (we recognize sin’s influence in us and master it with God’s help)
2. Romans 5:3-5 (we exult in our trials and grow)
3. Romans 12:2 (we do our part to renew our minds *during* the trial)
4. 2 Corinthians 5:17 (we pass away the old in a trial and we embrace the new during the trial)
5. Philippians 4:6 (we do our part to transform our disturbance and pray with thanksgiving – so the peace of God that passes understanding will guard our hearts and minds, Philippians 4:7)
6. Colossians 3:15 (we let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts so that we can be thankful during the trial)
7. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (we give thanks during a trial so that we do not quench the Spirit, 1 Thessalonians 5:19)
8. Hebrews 12:7 (we endure hardship as discipline and feel God’s love for us, Hebrews 12:6)
9. James 1:2 (we do our part to transform our hearts and experience joy in our trials)

This next diagram depicts the difference it makes for us in a trial when do those things, when we hear God’s specific guidance for us, when we have faith, and when we actually, in our hearts, turn the outcome of a given trial over to Him. The diagram uses an abbreviation, “7SP,”\* to represent the place in the course of the trial where we’ve done our part in cooperating with God and transformed our own hearts.

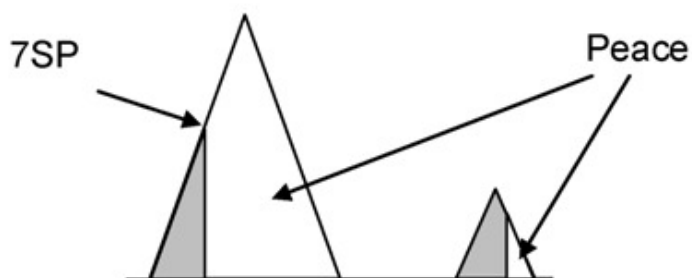
\*The 7SP abbreviation is short for 7 *Spiritual Principles*. These are Biblical principles that are highlighted in the *Keys* book *Feelings 101: Pain to Peace*. The presentation of these principles focuses on the “how to” of doing our part in discerning and cooperating with the Lord’s guidance in a trial. Every believer has applied these principles in a trial at some point in their walk with God. Every believer has, in some trial, experienced the transformation that leads to the peace which passes understanding that is depicted in the next diagram. In short, 7SP represents the Scriptural concept that there are principles by which transformation happens in a trial. Whenever we experience the peace that passes understanding, then we’ve applied those principles whether we can express exactly what they are or not. In those trials, we have “been disciplined” by the Spirit of God in our hearts. That kind of discipleship is often difficult to experience in every trial because it is of the Spirit and with the heart and we have to train to use our hearts more skillfully. That kind of discipleship is also difficult to experience continually because it is not simply a mental process and because Satan’s deceptions are, by nature, deceptive and often hard to recognize. By its very nature, being disciplined by The Teacher within is an unseen, non-physical process (it is spiritual – of the Spirit). The reason we (authors) sometimes talk in terms of 7SP is because it focuses more on the opportunity to train in using God’s principles and to strengthen our part in responding to His often unheard voice in our hearts. That aspect of discipleship training helps us increase the times we discern the Lord’s correction and guidance in our trials.



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## Differences Between Peace, Pain and Distraction (2)



As you can see, Diagram 2 builds off of Diagram 1. It shows how we experience a trial when we actually listen to and follow the instruction, guidance and priority God’s Spirit works to provide to us through our hearts. Notice that the heart disturbance (in grey) comes to an abrupt end part way through the trial. 7SP shows the point at which the person did his part in hearing and responding to the discipline and guidance of God. 7SP is the point at which the person changed; they were transformed by God in response to doing their part in submitting to Him. As a result, peace in the heart replaces the disturbance in the heart. Still, the outline of the triangle, representing the external trial itself, is still there. This represents the fact that the external problem or issue can still be ongoing. Even though the trial may still be ongoing, the person’s experience is reflecting that distinctive characteristic we often associate with 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians who faced unbelievable and terrible trials, but with the peace that non-believers could not understand (Philippians 4:7).

In the bigger triangle, we see that the person cooperated with the Lord’s discipline and transformed while the trial was still in the process of escalating. In the smaller triangle, the person did so after the trial had been going on for a bit and was actually on the downhill side. During a trial, we can choose to listen to God’s Spirit within us at any point, but we have to do our part – intending to cooperate with God isn’t enough. In terms of the diagram, this means that how much of the triangle is grey (how long our inner heart disturbance or pain lasts) depends on when we do our part in keeping step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25).

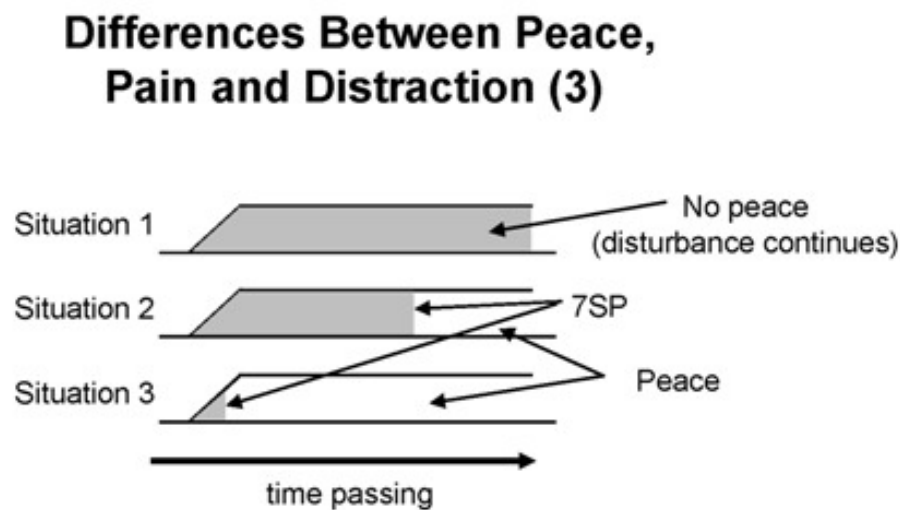
Sometimes we are able to keep step with the Spirit in a matter of seconds after we recognize a trial. We quickly see through Satan’s deception and recognize how God would have us change and respond. We quickly experience certainty about what God wants of us and what Satan would like to tempt us with! We quickly experience that wonderful peace that can only come from God. However in other trials, that rapid connection with God doesn’t seem to happen as easily or “naturally.” It is during these trials, in particular, that we have the opportunity to be discipled by God’s Spirit and grow greatly. Our more difficult trials have greater opportunity for continued growth. So, for lack of

a better analogy, we have to go “to school” in that trial. The spiritual teaching we must embrace can often require us to improve in using certain tools and skill sets:

1. Solid evaluation of our old self patterns.
2. Skilled recognition of our *Scriptural* role in a trial.
3. Applied willingness to see what God wants us to change in us, and to cooperate with that change.
4. Taking the action God directs for us, as well as not acting in the ways Satan tempts us to act.
5. Fully releasing the outcome of the trial to the Lord and being content simply to do the part He asks us to do.

Responding to that kind of “spiritual schooling,” in the midst of a trial, is different from learning at church, Bible Study, or Sunday school. It deals with getting “hands on” with spiritual dynamics during trials. It deals with dynamics that, by nature, can’t be grabbed physically or simply with our minds. Being discipled by the Lord deals with our spirits, our hearts, The Spirit, and dark, unseen spiritual forces (Ephesians 6:12) behind the external circumstances of the trial!

Unfortunately not all difficult trials come to an end in the same way as the trials presented by our triangles. Take a look at Diagram 3 below.



Here we see that a trial ramped up, but the trial did not go away of its own accord. Situation 1 shows that since the external situation doesn’t end and the person isn’t actually listening to God, the disturbance (grey shading) remains. You may have experienced times you are stressed, then you focus on other things for a while, until you recall the situation and start feeling stressed again. While it may seem that we can experience peace by focusing on something else, it only seems that way. That isn’t the true nature of the peace of God; it is a false sense of peace that Satan encourages. For

these reasons, Situation 1 represents uncomfortable experiences from which we have to continually tolerate, ignore or distract ourselves.

Situation 2 shows that, unlike the person in the Situation 1, the individual is actually disciplined by the Lord and so transformed the pain to peace while the trial was still ongoing. That person has experienced the actual application of Romans 5:3-5. Situation 3 shows what a person can experience when he or she gets really good at recognizing the Spirit’s voice, intentionally listening to God’s voice and submitting the outcome of the trial to Him. Such a person can do his/her part to interact with God’s Spirit and transform discomforts and pain to peace very quickly. The person who can do this consistently could be said to be a person who is imitating Paul, who imitated Christ (1 Corinthians 4:16-21; Philippians 3:17-21).

Some trials arise and simply level off or stay challenging. For example, let’s say that at work the management says there won’t be any annual bonuses this year. Once the news is broken, the situation will be unchanging and ongoing for a long time. (If you’ve been in that kind of situation, you know that people usually talk about how bad that decision was well into the next year. Discomforting feelings linger for a long time.) Perhaps you are familiar with such examples at work. Feelings start arising as soon as the company starts talking about how the budget is tight and there is a need to trim expenses. If you’ve been in the working world for longer than a month then you’d know that such discussions are leading up to something. Such discussions are often a company’s way of trying to break bad news carefully and with concern. Disturbances in the heart happen regularly and, when it comes to accomplishing work, companies know that productivity goes down when people have heart disturbances, which includes feelings and desires. In spiritual terms, when employees are attacked by Satan, when they get messages from the Spirit and when they do not transform them, productivity goes down. While companies don’t use these terms, generally the working world has learned to recognize the relationships between productivity and heart disturbances. Since transforming pain to peace is not a skill in common usage, companies and organizations use “people skills” to approach predictably painful events (a.k.a. trials) with care.

Trials that arise and don’t go away often indicate that God’s guidance will deal with some sort of permanent lifestyle changes. A couple of examples of these from Scripture could include:

1. Matthew 26:36 and following. Jesus’ trial in the Garden of Gethsemane arose because this was the place where He would be arrested, and Satan sought to use that against Jesus. From that point on He would remain a prisoner and ultimately be killed. The freedom to go about and teach would be taken away. See also John 18:4-11, which shows the peace Jesus had concerning His trial.
2. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. The thorn Paul talks about represents an ongoing trial he is challenged to accept and with which he must continually cooperate in the Lord’s discipline.

Some trials arise and simply don’t go away anytime soon. The problem is that we don’t always know if they will go away, or when. So, practically speaking, God’s guidance deals with a lifestyle change which we must be prepared to accept permanently. Satan’s goal, of course, is to keep us hoping for the day our situation will end and the trial will be over. That kind of hope is not what Romans 5:3-5 is speaking about, and is depicted in the diagrams by the ongoing grey shaded areas. Even when God

intends to permit the trial to end someday, the challenge of transformation involves releasing our desire for that to happen according to our own timing.

1. Genesis 12:2. God promises Abraham (indirectly) that he will have a son. While Abraham can figure out that, he may have to wait some unspecified amount of time. His trial, of not having a son, will *eventually* come to an end. We may think that were God to tell us when a trial would end that it would help us stay strong. But, as Abraham’s trial indicates, Satan still attacks and tries to make us weak even when we are blessed with such knowledge. Abraham’s trial lasted 25 years.
2. Genesis 15:16. God tells Abraham that it would be 400 years before His people returned to the Promised Land. The trial can be seen from the perspective of someone who lived during that 400 year period. Many were born into the trial, and many died long before the trial ended for the nation of Israel.
3. Genesis 37:23-28. Joseph is attacked by his brothers and sold into slavery. While he too had knowledge (via his dreams) that one day his family would bow before him, his trial would last a very long time. Joseph was about 17 when he was sold into slavery (Genesis 37:2). He was about 30 when he was finally released from jail after interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams (Genesis 41:46). Joseph was about 37 when he finally saw his family again (the brothers came to Egypt after the 7 years of abundance and during the 7 years of famine).

In Diagram 3 above, Situation 1 also reflects what happens when a person doesn’t make time to listen to God. Even though the person may be aware there are principles comprising the process of listening to God and transformation, sometimes we “don’t have time” to do the spiritual work required by the complexity of Satan’s attack and the trial. This is a surprisingly common belief. The reasons why we don’t listen to God may vary, but they all are the result of Satan’s influence and represent a choice we make between who runs our lives in the moment of trial: God or the deceptive slanderer. Regardless of why we may sometimes think we are justified in dealing with trials without imitating Christ and transforming our hearts to peace, doing so simply reinforces our old self patterns. It enables Satan to create within us a strong need for distraction.

### **DISTRACTION!**

Situations which, once they begin, do not come to a tidy close are the ones that can really get us into the habit of tolerating disturbances through distraction. Distracting ourselves from the voice of the Spirit (Who disturbs our hearts as a way of warning us) is what creates a distorted view of the peace of Christ. When we are powerless to do anything to change our external situation, the world has its own solutions to help us deal with prolonged stresses and frustrations: we exercise more, we become more resolved to do activities to relax, or, if it really gets bad, we see a “shrink” and/or take medication. This doesn’t mean these things are wrong; they simply aren’t to be whole substitutes for the effort and practice required to listen to God’s Spirit as He seeks to teach us how to follow Christ in our real-life trials (John 16:14-15).

Everyone knows it is important to release the pressure created by long-term painful emotions and strong desires. Let’s translate that knowledge into the Scriptural terms we’ve been discussing. It sounds like this: “Everyone knows it is important to do something with our inner heart disturbances



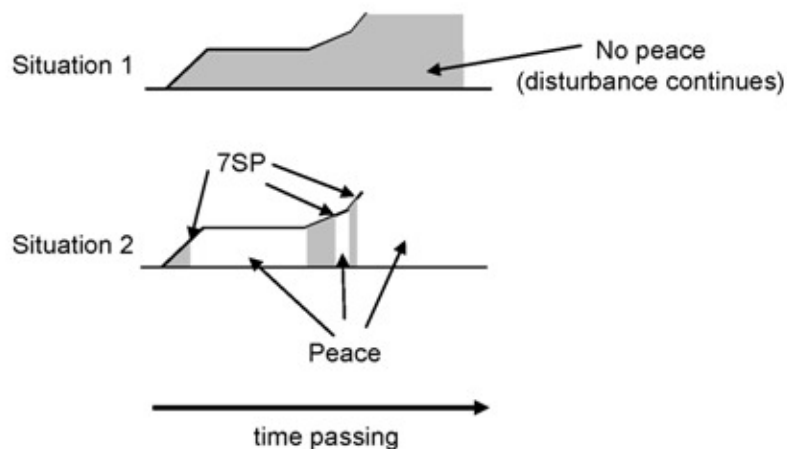
because our health starts breaking down when the Spirit keeps speaking to us about an attack by Satan and we do not listen to Him!”

In many ways, the activities that take up our time, including the ones we do to relax and have fun, often become ways we cope with the stresses and pains of life not just in healthy ways, but in unhealthy, ungodly ways too. In other words, Satan can get us to try to “cope” with the Spirit’s messages to us as opposed to doing our part in letting God transform our discomforting desires and feelings to peace. Satan may not care if we know about the spiritual war when his goal is to get us to thinking that spiritual battles shouldn’t involve having to grow by changing regularly.

When and how we distract ourselves varies by person. Satan uses deception and old self desires to turn “good things” into ways we distract ourselves and “treat” our disturbances in lieu of improving our spiritual hearing in order to get better at living as followers of Christ. When we do not dedicate the time and energy to listen, then at some level of our being we are assuming Satan’s attacks are fairly easy to recognize. At some level we are assuming we can overcome those attacks in the way Christ would have us to, but without actively interacting with The Teacher. Prayer includes this spiritual hearing we’ve been talking about, but only when it is accompanied by thanksgiving for the trial, and with a heart that transforms in some powerful way. Prayer can be reduced to talking *at* God, as opposed to *with* God, which includes us listening to Him.

Diagram 3 showed three different ways of handling the same situation. We can face and transform the disturbances in our heart in Christ sooner than later. When we do, we can discover Satan’s attack and know exactly what the Spirit wants us to do to live without *acting* like we are victims who happen to be followers of Christ. Being a Christian isn’t about living without peace or going through life feeling like a victim. That’s what Satan wants. Transforming heart disturbances often requires listening to God’s Spirit intentionally and with practice. Following Christ through life is pressing on “toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). Let’s look quickly at one more dynamic – a variation of Diagram 3.

### Differences Between Peace, Pain and Distraction (4)



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In Diagram 4, we see that some trials level off for a while, but then they ramp up again, and maybe even again. In this way, problems that start with one trial often lead to other trials. Situation 1 depicts what happens when we resist the correction of God’s Spirit: peace isn’t ruling our hearts. Situation 2 shows what can happen when the follower of Christ actually transforms each disturbance in the heart as it arises. He or she spends much more time at peace and has a lot more energy NOT being spent in old self-deception and denial. Notice that peace is not about the absence of a trial, but rather about the presence of a heart centered on GOD’S will during a spiritual battle. Even though the trial may not go away, the disturbance can be replaced by peace and joy in the heart!

Sometimes it seems that the worldly person gets to “enjoy” using his or her freedoms in attempts to fulfill his or her own will. Sometimes it seems people get away with enjoying doing whatever they think God “should” want or “probably” wants, which really seems to be about what *they* want. Satan can even use that to attack us and cause us to become discouraged. It is important to focus first on what God wants of us! The New Testament bears out the rejection, challenges and trials which we sometimes must face regularly when we aren’t blending with the world like worldly Christians!

Following Christ is about seeking out the influences and desires of our own will, when it is influenced by Satan. Following Christ involves taking on the additional tasks of listening to Him, cooperating with Him by being changed, and fulfilling God’s will. The idea is to get better at hearing God’s voice in order to be at peace with whatever God tells us to do or not do. Being certain about what He wants often requires discipleship training that goes beyond the basics and focuses on application in trials. Following the Lord as spiritual warriors is the new-self way of life.

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God willing, next month’s edition of “Hearts Up” will conclude this series of articles on the differences and relationships between peace, pain and distraction. The February 2012 edition will look more closely at the deceptive challenges and illusions of distraction in comparison to peace and the painful discomforts we sometimes experience. We will also look at diagrams depicting the bigger spiritual picture behind some of the diagrams we looked at in this month’s edition.

I pray that as you start this New Year you will resolve to continually improve in doing your part in being disciplined by the Lord within you. May you discover all the blessings and joy of accepting His good and perfect will for you, especially when you face trials that He seeks to use to grow you. May you work together this year with your brothers and sisters in Christ, encouraging each other to continually work to transform the heart whenever Satan attacks and spending as much time as possible connected with the Spirit of Peace.

## HEART TO HEART

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If you write poems, psalms, lyrics or prose of faith, and would like to share one of them with others in a “Hearts Up” edition, you may submit it for consideration for the *Heart To Heart* feature. You may also submit a personal story or testimony of your own to share how one of the articles or the *Keys* materials helped you draw closer to God during a trial. You can email your submission through the [Contact Us](#) page or send it to the snail mail address provided on that webpage. Be sure to read the **Contribution Guidelines** before sending us your submission. You can view those guidelines by clicking the link provided on the Contact Us page itself.

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