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Statement of Faith

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# THE BIBLE'S BIGGER PICTURES

# Distraction Affects Our Understanding and Experience of Peace (Part 4 of the Differences and Relationships Between Peace, Pain and Distraction)

This last article of a 4-part series looks at how Satan tries to get us distracted. Spiritual distraction can cause us to miss out on the bigger picture of the spiritual goings-on in our lives. We must continually be on the lookout for this. It directly affects our ability to experience true peace and contentment in some of our trials.\*

\* The diagrams in this article build on the diagrams in the previous articles of the series. If you haven't read the other articles (November and December 2011, January 2012), you may want to consider doing so. You may need to review them in order to be up to speed on some of the meanings of the various shadings and shapes of "trials" depicted in the diagrams. To keep the flow, we have not repeated those things in this article.

The book of Hebrews gives us an example of how some Jewish believers were experiencing their own form of spiritual distraction. Apparently their circumstances were tempting them to either Judaize the gospel message, or to go back to Judaism altogether. These were temptations for them because it was difficult to be both of Jewish descent and to be a Christian. In some ways, after suffering continued trials, maybe it seemed easier to try to embrace the application of the message of Christ by making it more "tasteful or acceptable" to the non-Christian Jews. Perhaps the Christian Jews thought that if they were more like other Jews, they wouldn't have to deal with certain kinds of trials. If that really was the case, then that thinking presented a different kind of trial that Satan would enjoy using to lead them into distraction – overlooking or avoiding certain trials!

Remember, on the whole Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. The Jews persecuted Jesus, the Disciples and followers of Christ in many ways, especially when they were also of Jewish descent. When a Jew came into a relationship with Christ, they often suffered in various ways.

<u>Hebrews 10:32-34</u> But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

The writer points out that in the earlier part of their walks with the Lord, these Jewish Christians had zeal. They were willing to face unwanted trials with joy. They were successfully transforming their hearts during trials. They were experiencing the peace that passes understanding! However,

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now they weren't doing that anymore. Read what the writer of Hebrews says before this:

<u>Hebrews 10:23-27</u> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. (Italics and CAPS are part of translation)

We may tend to zero in on the part about "forsaking our own assembling together;" a reference to the fact that some "stopped going to church." This may make us think we are different from them because we go to church. However, when we couple all the verses from 10:23-34 together, we see that the writer is saying it is a willful sin that they do not make the sacrifices they must make in the kinds of trials they seek to avoid! The writer is saying that they could handle tough trials in the early years of their walk with God, but, the writer says now they need to find their endurance and confidence in God again!

<u>Hebrews 10:35-36</u> Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

He tells them that they (believers in Christ) were not called to the Lord to "shrink back to destruction!"

<u>Hebrews 10:38-39</u> BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. (CAPS are part of translation)

These are marks of Satan's attempts to distract us spiritually:

- 1. Loss of confidence in facing all trials, even ones in which we may "lose" according to the world.
- 2. Lack of spiritual endurance to face trials when there doesn't seem to be any point or advantage according to "normal" thinking.
- 3. Lack of consistency in transforming the heart, in order to experience the peace of God that permits an experience of certainty, confidence and spiritual endurance.

The writer of Hebrews then goes on in the "Faith Chapter," Chapter 11, to tell us, soldiers of God, about how vital faith is in all sorts of trials, especially ones where we followers of Christ face an unknown or uncertain future. Finally, the Spirit of God, through the writer, discusses an important relationship between trials, spiritual growth, God's love, and "the Lord's discipline."

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<u>Hebrews 12:1</u> Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

<u>Hebrews 12:4-6</u> You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reproved by Him; For those whom the Lord Loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives." (CAPS are part of translation)

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God's written Word has given us a valuable outline for seeing the deceptions of spiritual distraction, its dangers, and God's solutions to it. Let's look at it even more closely now, so that we may "stimulate one another to love and good deeds... and encourage one another" (Hebrews 10:24).

# Satan's Vicious Circle of Spiritual Distraction

The good news is that Christ died for us, and through His death we received the Spirit of God, Who lives within us! The Holy Spirit is The Teacher Jesus secured for us permanently. He continually tries to alert us to times Satan is distracting us. He has the counsel, guidance, correction and cautions we need to become aware of our own inner spiritual battles, and to fight them with the full power of God! Let us always strive to hear His voice with our hearts.

Unfortunately we may sometimes inadvertently slip into being spiritually distracted. Paradoxically, we can fall to the temptation of spiritual distraction because hearing the Spirit's correction is sometimes uncomfortable! Of course the old nature within us is active in some way during those times. So, while the good news is that the Spirit is with us, the tough news is that it sometimes takes a greater focus and a deeper love for God to NOT be distracted by running from God's "tough love." When the Holy Spirit is trying to tell us we're being distracted, He is also trying to tell us to deal with things that can be uncomfortable to deal with! Satan seeks to take advantage of that. Here is what Satan tries to do at each step along the way of manipulating us into distraction:

- 1. When we don't experience peace and contentment right away in a trial, it is often because we can't figure out how to transform our hearts to peace. Maybe in those times God is asking us to do something that is hard! Regardless, Satan tries to lead us into distracting ourselves *from* that spiritual transformation of our hearts!
- 2. The distraction from spiritual goings-on in our life is Satan's way of presenting us with a fake sense of peace. When we are distracted, it can actually feel good to try to "forget about our problems." It is, however, an illusory sense of peace that is an ungodly replica of the peace God can bestow upon us. Falling for Satan's false sense of peace (spiritual distraction) is like buying a fake Rolex, but actually believing and telling ourselves we have the real thing!

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- 3. When Satan succeeds in distracting us we can easily, though unintentionally, overlook other trials (that can actually feel good too fewer real-world and spiritual problems to deal with).
- 4. When we overlook other trials, the Holy Spirit continually works to tell us about it. And, if we are open to His counsel, we may begin to feel uncomfortable again.
- 5. When we finally listen to the Holy Spirit's correction after being distracted, we start to become aware of other trials we must deal with (ugh!).
- 6. When we begin to truly face those trials (not fun), peace and contentment again eludes us.
- 7. Satan again works his deceptive ways and influences to get us to fall back into distraction by thinking, "It isn't supposed to be this hard."

## It can easily become a vicious circle.

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## Distinguish between Peace and Mere Lulls between Spiritual Battles

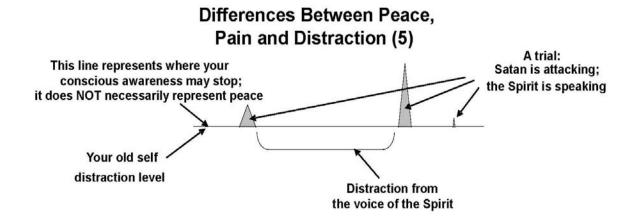
As disciples of Christ, we must be willing to seek out how and where we may inadvertently *assume* we are experiencing God's peace in between trials, when in fact we might not be. We must be *willing* to discern when our old selves are simply distracting us from the Spirit's voice in our hearts. We must be willing to do this even when the cost is steeper than we'd like; it is part of learning as Christ's disciples learn.

Sometimes after a trial it can be a while before we are aware we are facing another. This may mean that we are at peace in between. It also may mean something else. When we spend time in godly introspection, below are the kinds of things we must search our hearts and lives for.

- 1. Are we wanting to avoid certain trials for any reason whatsoever?
- 2. Do we think certain situations are not spiritual battles because they don't fit our concept of what a trial is, or because they seem like "normal" life stuff?
- 3. Are we making the mistake of distracting ourselves from a trial because there doesn't seem to be a point in making an issue about the situation?

To determine if we are dealing with trials by distracting ourselves from them, we have to be willing to recognize any disturbances in our hearts. When our sense of peace is lost, even momentarily, then, to let it rule in our hearts (Colossians 3:15; Philippians 4:7), we must cooperate with God to transform our hearts back to peace. Acknowledging we are disturbed is the 1st principle of taking on our responsibility to transform our hearts in Christ during a trial. We must do that regardless of how much work it might take or how inconvenient it may be to figure out the transforming part of the trial. When we are being distracted from trials, whether knowingly or unknowingly, our experience will look something like Diagram 5 below.

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As Christians, we cannot afford to make the mistake of assuming that the lulls between life's spiritual battles indicate we are at peace!

The first two trials are shown to be quite far apart. A barely noticeable third trial is at the far right. The big gap in between the first and second trials (grey triangles) is NOT *necessarily* peace. The gap appears to be the absence of trials. The fact it seems that way may be a distraction. Notice that the triangles are all grey. This depicts an important flag, or indicator. Remember, the grey depicts trials in which we don't get to peace *during* the trial as a result of transforming our hearts. It depicts trials that simply came to an end

on their own, and we felt better because the trial was over! Waiting for trials to come to an end for us, in order to be at peace again, is a strong indicator of spiritual distraction.

Satan can make the lulls (or gap) between trials appear to be what we think the Scriptures describe as experiencing God's peace, when it actually it might not be. It could appear that way due to Satan's deception. Take a look at the line at the bottom, underneath the triangles. This line depicts times when there is a level at which our old selves work to filter out or distract us from seeing the deeper levels of Satan's attacks on us. It also depicts the fact that there is a level at which our old selves can filter out the corrective voice of God in our hearts! In other words, spiritually speaking, there may be more going on in our lives than we want to become aware of. The world teaches that the times between real-life problems are pretty much always about living a good and peaceful life. As Christians, we cannot afford to make the mistake of assuming that the lulls between life's spiritual battles indicate we are at peace!

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# Corrected Spiritual Vision Isn't Always Easy When It Causes Us To See More of Our Battles

Diagram 6, below, builds on Diagram 5; it shows what may happen spiritually when we do our part with God to acknowledge, and then overcome Satan's spiritual distractions. This is a key part to God's "spiritual vision plan." Diagram 6 depicts the first stage of corrected spiritual vision.

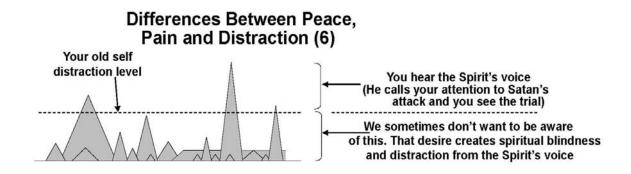


Diagram 6 depicts what can happen when Satan distracts us spiritually. The dotted line (labeled "your old self's distraction level") replaced the solid line from Diagram 5. Compare Diagram 5 with 6 and you will notice that Diagram 6 shows more of the "spiritual icebergs." This depicts the concept that there can be much more going on beneath the surface of our lives. Satan tries to cause us to fail to recognize any number of trials. Some of them might be "small," yet still involve unrecognized temptations to fail our Lord! Unfortunately, they are only "small" in the sense that we don't see how or why they are a big deal spiritually speaking! These "smaller" trials are represented by the shapes under the dotted line. (For more about smaller trials and spiritual blindness, check out the March 2010 "Hearts Up" edition – Spiritual Warfare Combat Tips article.)

Exactly how many trials we may overlook varies by person. Each of us has to do our own godly introspection work with the Lord in order to seek out trials He may be pointing to, which we maybe didn't want to look at before. Godly introspection is part of how we learn from the Lord's discipline. It is an important aspect of making sure we don't gradually learn to tolerate the heart disturbances certain trials create for us (very dangerous spiritually speaking)! Satan *wants* us to ignore, repress or distract ourselves from the discomforts of certain trials. Consciously, we may *want* to experience peace and contentment. However, a deeper aversion to facing certain trials can reside in our hearts! When that is the case, we won't embrace certain trials, and we won't do our part to cooperate with the Lord in enhancing our spiritual vision!

On the up side, sometimes we may get to a place in life where we say something like, "I'm not at true peace about \_\_\_\_. I've avoided changing in order to be at peace about it. I'm just putting it off (being spiritually distracted)." When the Lord is able to open our eyes to some level of spiritual

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distraction, then let's follow Him no matter what the cost! The challenge of being willing to get UNdistracted is that, for a while, we may actually become aware of more trials than we want to be aware of! That is actually somewhat spiritually normal, when recovering from spiritual distraction. Knowing that can help give us the courage to face a string of trials as God gets us back on track. Even then, however, that isn't a guarantee that your trials will end in this life! Still, Satan can use the fact that we got spiritually distracted in the first place, to make us feel like such a failure that we fall to the temptation of giving up on changing certain areas of

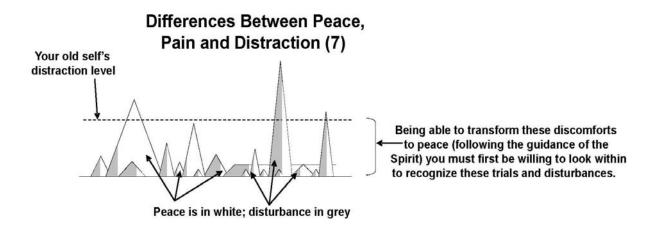
The challenge of being willing to get
UNdistracted is that...
we may actually become aware of more trials than we want to be aware of!

life. Satan may even cause others to view us as failures too. Any of these kinds of destructive heart disturbances can be transformed to peace in the Lord!

# When God Helps Us See More of Our Battles Then There is More Opportunity To Change And Grow

When it all comes down to it, the most challenging part of being focused and getting UNdistracted is the fact that we have to take on the burden of getting better at transforming our hearts! This requires us to train and hone our spiritual skills in practical ways. We must "practice" during our trials! It takes trials to get better at transforming during trials! We have to get better at using (applying to life) the spiritual armor God gave us. We have to get better at cooperating with God, so the heart disturbances that would otherwise wear us out can be transformed to peace. At first this can be quite difficult. Still, God desires to lead us through that spiritual process of growth. Let your love for Him build perseverance within you.

There is a hope that doesn't disappoint (Romans 5:3-5). As we get better at cooperating with God's guidance in order to change us, the kinds of experiences depicted in Diagram 6 can eventually start to look like Diagram 7.



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Diagram 7 differs from Diagram 6 in that the different shading depicts the peace we may experience during trials when our hearts transform and we hear the Spirit's counsel and correction to us (with spiritual ears). While the number of trials doesn't necessarily decrease, the peace and contentment we may experience can increase.

One of Satan's tactics is to get us to thinking that experiencing peace and contentment has to do with experiencing fewer unwanted life problems. By listening to the Holy Spirit, it is possible for us to avoid creating life problems which come from acting in sin without even realizing how what we are doing is sinful! Living in peace can be experienced even when we have unavoidable spiritual battles and trials. To receive that peace which the Lord offers, we must, during the trial, transform the undesirable emotional and desirous sides of ourselves to peace in God.

Again, the process of experiencing the peace of Christ depicted in Diagram 7 begins by being willing to face one's old self, one trial at a time. In order to continually pass away the old self's wants and desires (and to transform the pains, discomforts and stresses when Satan's attacks and the Spirit is speaking), we *have* to start by being willing to become aware of how much of the old self is present.

## The Lord's Discipline and Consistent Spiritual Growth

When we are certain, and at peace, with the degree to which we are aware of our trials, then something changes. The issue doesn't have to be so much about being spiritually distracted from time to time. Our spiritual journey can become more about embracing the Lord's disciplines (Hebrews 12:4-11), thus growing more consistently through trials.



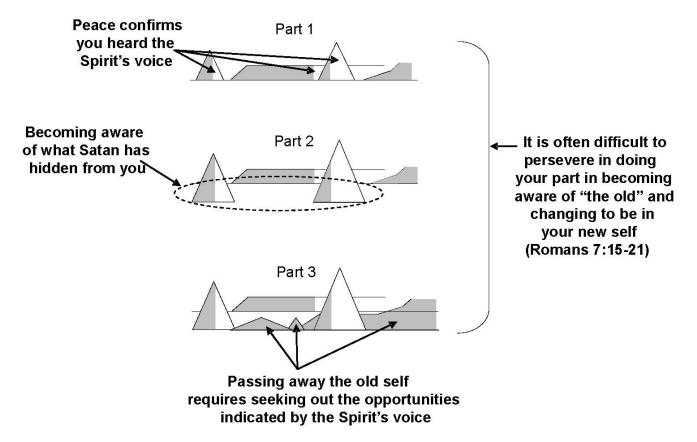
As we look at this final part, we are going to indicate a couple places where the training tools from *Feelings 101: Pain to Peace* (F101) can help you in discerning what's going on spiritual in your unique battles. If you are already engaged in some form of study that focuses on application of God's Word to real-life, then you should be able to substitute whatever that is in place of the tools we talk to here. Hopefully this won't be a hindrance to you profiting from the true point of the article, which focuses on the spiritual dynamics we may experience when Satan attacks and God is seeking to guide us.

With that in mind, if old-self deception hides below the surface of our life in some area, then how exactly do we see what is below the surface? This is a great question. As mentioned earlier, it starts with a *willingness* to see, quickly followed by *doing our part* with God in order to see. Let's look at Diagram 8 below and use that as we talk generally to the kinds of things we can do to grow in the application side of being discipled.

Starting from the top of Diagram 8, follow the overall process by reading the two bullets on the left side, and then the bullet at the bottom.

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# Differences Between Peace, Pain and Distraction (8)



Part 1 depicts how the heart disturbances (grey shading) change to peace (white shading) during a trial. Basically, the trial may still be ongoing externally, but we can be at peace within. We experience this when we hear the Spirit's guidance, change in response to Him, and do exactly what He instructs us to do throughout the trial, regardless of the outcome. The diagram shows that the person (in Part 1) is being fairly successful in doing this regularly.

Part 2 shows that a combination of discerning/listening to God's guidance with your heart reveals previously unseen parts of trials. The skills involved in this discernment can be developed by studying our old self in past trials. Studying our past trials reveals connections between spiritual battles. There are similarities in attacks and deceptions which Satan uses against each of us in different ways. The patterns are often spiritual in nature. In other words, the patterns can often be seen even in trials that look quite different externally.

The exercises in F101 work to guide a person in making a very simple record of trials. It is short, sweet, and yet still effective. After recording a few trials, a simple glance at the record helps patterns

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become more apparent to the person. That record is what we at *Keys* call the Painful Pattern Tool. It is a tool for godly introspection. The more one uses it, the more the exercise in introspection functions like a sort of testament that exposes Satan's attacks and old self activity in trials. Whatever form of introspection we use is to help us become more sensitive to the kinds of things the Spirit would need to speak to in our lives. As a result of godly introspection, we begin to recognize battles faster, which gives us the opportunity to transform sooner.

Part 3 indicates that as we recognize those patterns from past trials, and as we increase our sensitivity to the Spirit's voice (feelings, heart, etc.), we can become increasingly aware of the patterns of our old self on a *regular* basis. Eventually, our spiritual eyes can begin to open to the Spirit when He is pointing to more predictable trials. The Spirit of God can help us "see more things coming" AND He can help us to prepare for them from a place of peace and love. In short, we can become more adept at doing our part to pass away the old self and become the new self in our trials. We and the wonderful Spirit of our Lord can work on ourselves daily no matter where we are.

On the right-hand side of Diagram 8, above, it mentions that it can be hard to fight our old selves in order to be in the new. It can be hard to discipline ourselves to become more aware of stuff that the old part of us doesn't want to become aware of. This difficulty is related to the overall challenge of spiritual battles described in F101, Chapter 8, Commitment 2. There were some early church fathers who called this challenge, "The spiritual desert." The analogy simply likens the uncomfortable feelings we experience in trials, to the experience of walking through a desert. Satan hurls his painful darts at us when we are really trying hard to submit ourselves to changes required by the Lord's discipline through trials. The result is that we may experience a time of true inner battle, as we strive to place the Lord higher within us by becoming someone we've not been before (more staying power in the new self).

When we feel like we're in a "spiritual desert" situation, it is difficult because, essentially, it is like becoming more aware of the ways we are slaves to the old self! That is part of it, but it also means the Lord loves us. If He didn't, He wouldn't be disciplining us (Hebrews 12:4-11). When we recognize how much we have to work on, Satan works to make us feel frustrated, disappointed and overwhelmed. When these kinds of feelings arise, then in some way God's Spirit is indicating there are areas in which we must get better at taking up our cross. Even those

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feelings must be transformed while simultaneously recognizing we do have to change. Remember, when we transform in a trial, we get the blessing of peace in that trial. Sometimes this submitting to the Lord must happen one trial at a time!

The process of acknowledging uncomfortable and painful experiences may seem to run counter to the idea of being at peace and living a peaceful life as a follower of Christ. Chapter 6 of F101 discusses how peace functions hand-in-hand with the work of the Spirit. Peace is a blessing, and it is

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also a spiritual tool. A heart that is at peace enables us to see how God's Spirit is trying to guide us in avoiding even the most subtle of sins. Following Christ, picking up our crosses, and being led by the Spirit all deal with handling uncomfortable situations in a godly way. They do not involve trying to live life by thinking we are inherently more godly if we experience fewer problems and unwanted trials.

It is not Scriptural to assume that our ability to follow Christ is greater if we have fewer painful, uncomfortable or challenging life experiences (Hebrews 12:4-8). When we think that being a good Christian means having fewer heart disturbances and trials, then we are *assuming* Diagram 5 is how our lives *should* look (take a moment to go back and look at that diagram). Watch out for times when Satan tempts us with the following assumptions...

- 1. ...assuming God created us with brains so we can control what happens to us in life.
- 2. ...assuming God designed us to be able to *control* how we feel *before* we feel something.
- 3. ...assuming godly desires in our hearts come primarily from our thinking, i.e. from the thinking that goes on *before* we transform our hearts in a trial.
- 4. ...assuming we have the ability to decide when to permit our desires to be influenced by Satan.

Satan likes to hide the way God actually designed life. He doesn't want us to see how God designed us to use our hearts and minds in spiritual battles. We must be alert so as not to let Satan deter us from learning more about our spiritual battles. Again, it includes a greater awareness of how the disturbances in our hearts indicate times the Spirit is trying to give us His input, feedback, and guidance. Being a follower of Christ involves acknowledging disturbances in the heart (Psalm 4:4; Ephesians 4:26-27), getting the Spirit's message, and doing what He says. So let's not take matters of our own lives in our own hands during trials, and then settle for giving God credit when it works out the way we want.

Make listening to God's Spirit, being at peace and following Christ number one in your discipleship training. Strive to get better at hearing the Lord's counsel, one trial at a time. Be willing to put second any other activities that compete for your time. If you listen, the Spirit of Christ will lead you into the balance He knows you need in life. Trust Him, have faith and do what He tells you to do. This is the path to peace and contentment in Him in all things. It is a path that transforms painful heart disturbances and avoids spiritual distraction.

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## KEYS WEBSITE ALERTS

In the last month we had 2 major changes with the *Keys* website.

New Background Music. We are proud to announce that we've had an opportunity to work with Hilton Johnson, a singer and songwriter, to add background music to the *Keys* website. By his permission we are presenting music from his "Sonshine" album. His songs are quite inspirational and are pleasing to the ear. The music certainly glorifies the Lord, and it calls attention to the Lord's love and watch care over us during trials! We hope you enjoy the music as you use the website (the music plays on all pages except any with other video or audio feeds).

To Hilton and his wife Jessica, we want to thank both of you for partnering with us to present this extraordinary heartfelt music. The message of our Lord is powerfully presented through the music, and it is very clear the Lord has blessed you. Thank you for your patience in the process, and may God continue to bless you both.

If you'd like to know more about the Sonshine Album, simply click on "Sonshine" under the circle (with KTL in it) on the upper right-hand corner of the webpage. You can also learn more about Hilton Johnson or about getting your own copy of his CD by visiting *Keys* LINKS to Other Hearts.

If, for whatever reason, you need to turn the music on or off, you may either adjust the volume on your PC or mobile device, or you can click the on the music player (the little circle that has KTL in it.

Finally, we need to acknowledge our "web guru," Stan Forrest of <u>Digital Magic Show</u>. Without his efforts and time, the background music wouldn't be what it is. Stan not only helped us with the music, but has been behind the web design of the entire *Keys* website. Stan has a nice portfolio showing a multitude of other great websites he's designed – you may want to check it out. We are very pleased with the key part you played in helping us to share the wonderful gift of music and inspiration from Hilton. Thank you very much.

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**Terms of Use modified**. The *Keys* website Terms Of Use was modified as of 1/19/2012. The "Website Content, Copyrights, Trademarks and Intellectual Property Rights" section and "Electronic Communications" section were updated, and the "Featured Artists and Ministries" section was added.

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## **HEART TO HEART**

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 <u>Contact Us</u> 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.

If you find this e-publication beneficial to your walk with Christ and would like to give a financial gift to the *Keys To Understanding Life* ministry, you may do so by mailing your gift to our Snail Mail Address (our current Snail Mail Address is always listed on the <u>Contact Us</u> page on our website).

Our ministry is not yet a non-profit ministry, although our goal is to be a fully non-profit organization this year. As it is, any gift that is given is a "true gift" in the sense that it is not tax deductible right now.

At this time, donations or gifts to Keys To Understanding Life may be made out to: William J. Clark.

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