

Ephesians 1:3-14*Chapter 15***TENNIS SHOES**

If someone said you could never be comfortable as a Christian, would you give up your faith for the sake of comfort?

It's amazing what they've done to tennis shoes. I remember black and white high tops with a red or blue stripe around the bottom. Not anymore! I

wear Nike Air tennis shoes as my dress shoes. I even wear them for worship services. Yet almost nobody knows it because they look just like dress shoes!

There are tennis shoes designed for almost anything! Stores have running shoes, walking shoes, court shoes, and the list goes on. And comfort? Boy, have they improved on comfort! Granted, those black and white high tops were more comfortable than work boots, but they're nothing compared to the comfort available today.

People like comfort; they insist on comfort. Discomfort is simply unacceptable. So, how well do

tennis shoes reflect your goal in life? Is comfort your goal? Is comfort an appropriate goal for the Christian?

How important is comfort to you? Comfortable shoes aren't the issue. The real concern is, "How important is comfort to daily living?" If someone said you could never be comfortable as a Christian, would you give up your faith for the sake of comfort?

St. Paul can answer that question. He penned the words, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing."

Did Paul live a comfortable life by our definition? No way! Paul says he fought the good fight. That

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sounds like work to me. Have you ever fought a battle sitting in your lounge chair? Fighting off a pesky mosquito doesn't count! Ever run a race while sitting at the starting line

with a lemonade?

God never promised you a life of comfort. Life for the Christian is a battle, and you can't fight that battle unless you get out of your easy chair. If you want comfort in life, a life where everything is won-derful, don't become a Christian, because it won't happen. By the way, it doesn't happen for the unbeliever either!

The life of a Christian takes energy; it takes daily effort. Crossing the finish line means running the race, expending energy to accomplish God's task for your life. Winning a battle implies that you've fought the battle.

Battles don't win themselves. I've yet to see anybody cross the finish line by sitting in the stadium or putting their feet on the couch. To win God's battles, to cross His finish line is to give up the notion that comfort is your goal in life.

The goal of running the race and fighting the battle isn't comfort here, but an eternity in heaven. A trophy waits for those who fight the battle and run the race with persever-ance. That trophy isn't

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one you set on the mantel, polish once a month, and show off to your friends. It's the crown-of-life trophy, the greatest trophy anybody can ever receive. It's a trophy that declares, "Race

completed; battle won. Perfect comfort, now yours."

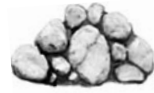
Tennis shoes can provide some physical comfort. They can make life a little more comfortable for our feet. So, the next time you put on tennis shoes or see someone wearing a pair, think about what it means to be comfortable as a Christian. Think about the perfect comfort trophy in heaven.

Then seek comfort in your life according to God's standards. Get out there and fight the good fight of faith. Run the race; keep the faith. What you gain provides more comfort than the finest shoes money can buy!

Gracious and loving God, far too often I find myself searching for comfort. Show me that Christian living takes effort, but has amazing rewards now and when I arrive in heaven. Set me on my feet to run the race and fight the battle. Thanks for reminding me that Your definition of comfort is spelled, "E-F-F-O-R-T." Amen.



Time For Action



Today

1. Do two things that will demonstrate that you are acting as a comfortable Christian according to God's standards.

This Week

1. Each day, do one thing to remind yourself that being a comfortable Christian takes effort.
2. Each day this week, ask God to show you what the comfortable life looks like according to His standards.

Psalm 66:1-20

Chapter 22



TURTLE CROSSING

The shell surrounding you
can handle any impact
you face, because it was
designed as part of God's
master plan.

While enjoying
the interstate
scenery,
I noticed an
unexpected blob
on the road. Upon
closer inspection,
I realized that my
little blob was alive!

It was a turtle plod-ding across the hot pavement to safer territory!

I don't know whether he made it across the road or not, but the turtle can remind us of the shell God designed for His people. When God created turtles *and people*, He designed them with a protective shell.

Now don't go looking for your shell, because you can't see it. Yet it still exists. When God gave that little turtle a shell to protect him from the elements, He also gave each of us a protective shell.

St. Paul gives us insight into God's shell for our lives. "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not

persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (NKJV).

Like the turtle, difficulties are part of life. The turtle’s concern was getting across the interstate in one piece, a serious matter to a turtle. Our concerns focus on the trials of life. Life isn’t easy; it will never be easy. Challenges, difficulties, and unanswered questions more pressing than, “Why did the turtle cross the road?” are normal. Expecting something different is to live in deception.

Knowing you’ll face difficulties in life, you might be inclined to say, “If that’s life, I give up.” Rather than giving up, remind yourself of the protective shell that God has designed just for you. Does Paul say that life will destroy you, that you’re fighting a losing battle? No. He says that you will be hard pressed on every side, **yet** not crushed.

Life hurts; the pressures of the world close in more than we prefer. Yet before you crumble under the load, recall the protective shell God designed for you. He knows your pressures. He knows your crushing point. When that moment arrives, He breaks in with His protective shell keeping life from smashing you into a useless heap.

God’s shell reminds us, “We are perplexed, but not in despair.” Have you encountered any perplex-

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ing situations
lately? Have you
found yourself
concerned about
something far more
important than
a turtle crossing

the interstate? Congratulations! You’re normal!
Welcome to the real world!

Everybody gets perplexed. Yet when those perplexing situations arrive, God’s promise of a protective shell keeps you from despair if you use the shell He offers. Protective shells are useless if we refuse to use them. You may feel you’re at the point of

despair. Yet when your trust is in God, when you surrender to Him, you can know that God's shell around you hasn't shattered after all.

"Persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed" is yet another aspect of our shell. Before you get stuck in the rut of "misery loving company," remember: God will not forsake you. Destruction is not His plan. That's a promise and God never breaks His promises.

It's all part of that protective shell God designed

His shell makes it possible for you to cross the road of life without getting run over.

for you. No matter what you face or how you may feel, God's shell can handle the impact. His shell makes it possible for you to cross the road of life without getting run

over.

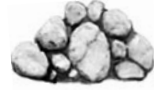
I don't know if that little turtle made it across the interstate. Maybe he did; maybe he didn't, but I know the shell surrounding you can handle any impact you face because it was designed by God as part of His master plan.

The next time you see your kid's pet turtle, a turtle crossing the road or sunning himself on a log, think about the protective shell God designed for you. Then pick up that invisible shell and keep on truckin' down the road of life!

Gracious Lord, You provide a marvelous shell for my life, and I thank You for it. When the load gets heavy or I feel like I will never make it, show me my protective shell. No matter what I face, let me know that You will never leave me without protection. Give me strength to press on, to move forward down the road of life assured that I will arrive safely in Your presence. Amen.



Time For Action



Today

1. Make a list of the items that belong to the protective shell God designed for you.
2. Take time in prayer to thank God for each item individually.

This Week

1. Create a list of the situations that occur during the week where you needed your shell.
2. At the end of the week, answer this question for each situation, "How could I have used my protective shell more effectively?"

Matthew 5:3-16

Chapter 23



LIGHTNING BUGS

God gave you a light. Whether you think other people see your itty-bitty light doesn't matter. You have a light. Either you let it shine by what you do and say or you hide it.

It was a summer's evening activity for my brothers and me, a low-cost, high-enjoyment opportunity. An empty mayonnaise jar with a lid punched full of holes was the only

requirement. What was the task of four boys on a summer's night? Catching lightning bugs, and boy did we catch a bunch of them! Some nights we caught over fifty. Our jar glowed with bugs. From a distance, they looked like a tiny fluorescent camping light.

Why do lightning bugs light up? Is it just to give four boys something to do on a summer's evening? Why did God bother? It's just an itty-bitty light. It doesn't shine more than two inches, unless you

have fifty of them in a jar! Didn't God waste His time?

That depends on who you ask. To a lightning bug, that light is very important. Just because it

Just because it doesn't light up the whole back yard doesn't mean their light is useless.

doesn't light up the whole back yard doesn't mean their light is useless. It may look worthless to us, but that's our perspective, not the bug's perspective.

Lightning bugs need that light to survive. God created them to be "lightning" bugs, remember?

God also called *you* to be a lightning bug. You may not light up as you walk, yet you're still a light to others. Matthew penned these words, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do they light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

All right, so it doesn't call you a "lightning bug," but you still provide light for others. It says, "*You are the light of the world!*" You may be thinking, "I know what it says, but come on, my light isn't any bigger than a tiny lightning bug! How much difference can my tiny light make?"

Actually, quite a lot. Notice what it says. "It gives light to everyone *in the house.*" You don't have to light up the whole world, just your house. Your light makes a difference to those around you. Yet you may think, "Nobody pays any attention to my little light." Are you sure? How do you know what God is doing with your tiny light?

God uses little lights in little places to do His greatest work. He uses you in your house, your neighborhood, and among your friends. People two

towns away may not see your light; your light may not brighten the entire sky. It may appear as insignificant as a lightning bug. Yet it still provides light. If it only lights the way for one person, your tiny light serves a tremendous purpose.

Like the lightning bug, you have the capability to let your light shine or to hide it. Suppose you walked into your dark house at 11:00 PM. Wouldn't it be foolish to stumble through the house

If it only lights the way for one person, your tiny light serves a tremendous purpose.

when you could turn on the lights?

Your life is no different. God gave you a light. Whether you think other people see your itty-bitty light doesn't matter. You have a light. Either you let it shine by what you do and say or you hide it.

Hiding it will only cause more people to stumble. Your light doesn't shine for your benefit. It shines for the benefit of others. Don't worry about what they might think. Don't concern yourself with what others might say. Your light is shining for their benefit, to prevent them from stumbling, even if they don't realize it.

Matthew says, "Let *your* light shine before men, that they may *praise your Father in heaven.*" What others think isn't your concern. Your goal is praising your Father. You're not doing it for them; you're doing it for Him, to lift Him up.

God changes lives, not you. Yet He uses your tiny light to make it happen. So let your light shine for others. Use your itty-bitty light to praise Him. God will take care of the rest.

Those little lightning bugs may not have lit up the whole back yard as my brothers and I were growing up. But they did light up their part of the world. So go out there and be a lightning bug in your little corner of the world! As you do, remember

this: Sometimes all another person needs is your itty-bitty light to lead them on their way!

Lord, I want my light to shine for others. When I think it's too tiny for others to see, remind me that my light shines for You. Who it affects is Your work. Thanks for making me a light in my part of Your world. Grant me courage to let my light shine so that others will see You in me. My light may be tiny, yet with You, it can change my world. Let me never forget that truth. Amen.



Time For Action



Today

1. Choose at least one situation today where you will let your light shine.

This Week

1. Each morning as you get up, ask the Lord to show you an opportunity where you can let your light shine.
2. As you close each day, thank God for choosing you to be one of His lights in your corner of the world.

Daniel 3:16-28

Chapter 28



WATER PUDDLES

Problems are like puddles.

They're challenges, not disasters. They're here today and gone tomorrow!

As predictable as the sun rising and setting are water puddles after a spring rain. Big puddles, little puddles, some clean enough to drink, others dirty as cowhide can be found.

Some view puddles as an opportunity, others as an inconvenience. To kids, puddles are the best thing that ever happened after a rain. Yet parents who claim the kids beneath those muddy clothes perceive puddles quite differently.

Puddles possess a predictable characteristic. *Puddles always disappear.* If they don't, they aren't puddles!

Aren't problems a lot like puddles? Puddles and problems have a number of similarities. Like puddles, problems are predictable. No matter who you are, where you live, or whether it rains every week

or twice a year, *you will face problems* in life. They're as predictable as puddles after a rain.

Problems, like puddles, also come in different sizes and shapes. You don't face the same problems I face. The challenges I endure aren't the same as those you undergo. Everybody's trials are different, and a magic cure for every problem isn't available. Yet no matter what your predicament may be, one thing is certain. It will always disappear at the right time.

Like puddles, we view dilemmas as something to avoid at all costs or a challenge to face head on.

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Some dodge puddles on the highway; others splash through every one they find, even if it's on the other side of the road. Likewise, some run from difficulties, while others view them for what they are, chal-

lenges God is using to accomplish His plan.

Puddles and problems have much in common. Yet our dilemmas create more challenges than puddles, challenges that need guidance and direction to overcome.

Psalm 103 points us in a proper direction as David says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (NKJV).

So, how does the Psalmist suggest you face life's puddles? By blessing the Lord. Yet when most come face-to-face with problems, they don't typically

bless the Lord. Predicaments and challenges usually lead us down the wrong path as we get angry with God for His lack of consideration.

But what good does that do? What value is there in getting angry with God if He is using our puddles (challenges) to provide growth? Blessing the Lord

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in the midst of our dilemmas results in a complete reversal. Our approach toward life's predicaments changes radically when blessing replaces bickering. Blessing the Lord *while* we

struggle enables us to focus on the problem solver instead of the problem.

As we remember the problem solver, we remember His benefits. No matter who you are, God has blessed you beyond what you can comprehend. Every day the Lord showers you with blessings like the rain. He forgives every mistake, forgets each blunder, and buries your sins in the deepest ocean. Healing is another of His forgotten benefits. Whatever the dilemma, He will heal. The timing and the method may differ from yours, but healing is one of His promises when we carry a heavy load.

He also showers us with His kindness and mercy. We deserve nothing. He gives us more than we need. Our efforts earn us misery and torment. His work on the cross provides hope, peace, and contentment. If you could count the number of raindrops in a gallon pail, His blessings in your life would still exceed that number. Your challenge is to discover His benefits, even during your most troublesome times.

Go ahead and splash through the puddles after the rain or drive around them if that's your nature. Yet as you do, remind yourself that your problems

are like puddles. They're challenges, not disasters. Most of all, remember that, like puddles, they're here today and gone tomorrow!

Father in heaven, it really makes sense to think of my problems like puddles. As I look back on them, they've always gone away. When I face a dilemma, help me see it as a challenge You are waiting for me to walk through. Thanks for puddle problems and what they teach me about trusting You. Help me remember that my problems will disappear like puddles after a spring rain. Amen.



Time For Action



Today

1. Choose three things you will do today to walk through a "puddle" you are facing.

This Week

1. Create a puddle in a bowl with one drop of water.
2. As each hour passes, *until your puddle is gone*, ask God to show you ways to walk through your struggles and see them as challenges instead of a problems. (P.S. It would be wise to start your puddle in the morning!)

Jonah 2:1-9

Chapter 37



MIGRATING FROGS

If you only ask God for help on days when you think you're in trouble, you're missing many opportunities to talk to God.

I don't know much about frogs except they're slimy, they hop, and my kids like to catch them for pets. Yet it sure looked like they were migrating when I came home from services one evening. In four miles, I counted ten frogs crossing the road! According to my calculations, there were 2.5 frogs per mile. I don't know how half a frog made it, but that's what my trusty calculator told me!

As I watched those frogs migrate, some waited until I went by; others made it across before I arrived, and then there were some, well, they didn't fare too well. They jumped; I heard a bump, and I don't think they made it to the other side.

I don't know what frogs do before they cross the road, but this is what I envision:

Sitting on the edge of the road was Dad frog, Mom frog, and Son frog. Mom and Dad frog were explaining some important information to Son frog. Dad frog said, "Son, if you cross that road whenever you feel like it, you'll jump, there will be a bump, and you'll be part of the pavement." "You don't know what you're talking about," interrupted Son frog. "I'll do it my own way; I don't need you!"

So Son frog started across the road. Mom frog chewed her frog legs to the bone while Dad frog shook his head in disgust. Son frog hopped on saying, "See I can do it; I told you I didn't need you!" Son frog jumped; there was a bump, and Son frog became road kill for another crow to munch.

Frogs may not have such conversations, yet they can give us something to think about. When was the last time you did something without talking to

We're never so self-centered that we act like Son frog, are we?

God first? How often have you said, "Lord, I don't need Your help; I can do it myself?" Of course, we never do or say those things!

We're never so self-centered that we act like Son frog, are we?

Psalm 50 says, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me" (NKJV). How many days of trouble have you had in the past week? One or two? Bad week? Maybe four or five? It doesn't matter to the Psalmist. His point is: *Since you live in a sinful world that's corrupted at every corner, does a day exist that isn't a day of trouble?*

If you only ask God for help on days when you think you're in trouble, you're missing many opportunities to talk to God. You don't need God *only* when you think you're in trouble! You need to call upon Him *every day!* Your worst day is a day to call on Him. So is your best day and any day between.

Whatever the day may bring, you need God. He's waiting for you to call on Him.

Days may pass as you think, "I can handle it; I've got it all under control." You may imagine yourself as Son frog who thought he didn't need any help, but you do. You need God's help every day, even on days when you think you have the world by the tail.

You need Him every day you spend on this earth. Without Him, you're as helpless as a frog on the road. Thinking you're in charge insults God. You're not in charge. God is and His promises prove He knows what's best.

He promises to deliver you from the troubles you face. He may not explain how, yet that doesn't

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really matter. If you know that He will, do you need to know how? It would be nice, but it's not a necessity! When you call on God, He

will deliver. How, why, and what next are God's to decide. Unlike Son frog, we benefit most from listening to our Father, even when we think we have a better plan.

When we call upon God and watch Him deliver us, what is our response? Do we cross the road and ignore our God like Son frog did his parents? That's not what it says! We are to glorify, praise, and thank Him. All that boils down to one activity, serving the Lord.

Serving the Lord is giving Him our lives. As we serve Him, we surrender our lives. We wave the white flag and say, "I can't do it alone. Here's my life, Lord. You're in charge now. Use me as Your instrument."

Whether frogs migrate or carry on conversations like Mom, Dad, and Son frog did doesn't matter. What changes life is listening to the Lord, calling on Him every day, and trusting Him to deliver you.

The next time you see a frog crossing the road or your kids catch another pet frog, ask yourself, “Have I called upon God today? Have I listened to Him?” Son frog missed a life-changing lesson. Don’t let the same happen to you. Call, listen, and learn. It’s a plan that will keep you from landing face-down on the pavement.

Precious Savior, many days I tell myself I can get by without Your help, but I can’t. Other times I know I need help, but never ask. I don’t want it to be that way anymore. Give me a heart that wants to talk to You, a heart that can’t make it through the day without talking to You. When I have those really tough days, don’t let me forget that when I listen, You will deliver me. Amen.



Time For Action



Today

1. Choose four times you will call upon God.
2. Each time you call, praise Him for being your God and thank Him for your blessings in life.

This Week

1. Take a small piece of paper and write on it: “Call God today at H-E-A-V-E-N!
2. Put it by your phone and each time you use the phone, take time to talk to your God.