

## LONELINESS IS A PRIVATE TUTOR...*Where Else Can You Get Such Personal Attention?* The School of Experience – Session 1

LONELINESS, Thomas Wolfe said, “is far from being a rare and curious phenomenon...is the central and inevitable fact of human existence.” (Thomas Wolfe, “God’s Lonely Man,” in *The Spirit of Man*, ed. Whit Burnett, 20).

Wolfe’s later conclusion is almost surely right. Being human means having the capacity to be lonely; loneliness is part of what it means to be human. The only way to be entirely free of loneliness would be to become utterly indifferent to human beings and even to animals; and, especially, to be oblivious to God and the eternal. But if we have no feelings for people, for animals, or for God, we could hardly be called human. To be human is to be susceptible to loneliness.

We shouldn’t be surprised, then, that loneliness is not respecter of age. Almost a generation ago a British study concluded that persons between the ages of thirty and fifty are the most prone to loneliness. This loneliness probably reflects the transitional pain of middle age. At that point in life, we begin to recognize that some of our dreams will never come true. The age varies with the dream, of course. For those whose dreams are built on physical attractiveness, the thirties can be threatening. Career dreams are usually tested just a little later, along with romance and fantasy. Then loneliness becomes a greater issue because at middle age we find it hard to confide our dreams to others, as we did when we were younger – especially in their broken state. And with that, a unique loneliness sets in.

A multitude of older people would argue that the loneliness of old age is far worse. Many of one’s peers have died and infirmities bring on more isolation, both physical and social. I will never forget an octogenarian in a church I once served as pastor. He was bedfast and very hard of hearing. “But the loneliness is the worst,” he told me on nearly every pastoral call. “The loneliness is the worst.”

If the loneliness of age is painful, what about the loneliness of childhood? Is anything more painful than being shut out of the circle of play, or is anyone lonelier than the child at the edge of the playground? And how can one imagine the loneliness of the abused or rejected child? Some psychologists say that one of the main reasons infants cry during the first three months of life is loneliness. Since they so often stop crying when they are cuddled, it seems likely that their cries are not from physical pain but from loneliness, from the need to be embraced. If that be so, one wonders what happens to a tiny human being when the cry of loneliness is ignored, or perhaps even punished.<sup>1</sup>

TECHNOLOGY itself may be our enemy. Television has all but eliminated conversation in my families, except for a shouted, “Don’t change that channel!” Someone has argued rather persuasively that the dishwasher – a generally wonderful invention – has robbed homes of one of the guaranteed visiting periods. A parent washed, a child rinsed, and another child dried – and perhaps still another put the dishes in the cupboard. It was a regular, built-in time for getting together, and inevitably, for talking.

We used to talk with a bank teller, but now we bank with a plastic card in a machine. The service station attendant was once someone who knew not only the peculiarities of our automobile, but also the names of our family members; now we pump our own gasoline and pay at a pump-side credit card machine or at a window to someone who often says not a word. We now realize that these “lost” relationships, which we may have thought were only incidental and routine, were part of the significant fabric of community. Without them, loneliness is far more threatening. No wonder some older people come to think of soap opera characters as real people – in some peculiar, pathetic sense, the best friends they have!

NO AMOUNT of technology or creature comfort can take the place of people. It has always been so. The Genesis story makes that clear in the most poignant fashion. The story pictures a man, Adam, alone in an idyllic setting, an unspoiled creation of exquisite beauty. This was indeed a Camelot, with perfect climate, natural beauty, and absolute security. Adam must have enjoyed easy communication with God.

Nevertheless, something was missing. So looking at Adam, God said, “It is not good that Adam should be alone.” A human being is meant to commune, to touch, to be touched. God answered this need at first with the animals. They were good, but not adequate. They couldn’t enter into the depth of relationship that human beings need. For our capacity, you see, is also our necessity. Because we have this ability to commune, we are unfulfilled if we do not commune. So God created from Adam two humans: Adam and Eve. Adam described Eve as bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, the stuff of his very being.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ellsworth Kalas, *If Experience Is Such a Good Teacher, Why Do I Keep Repeating the Course?* 13-15.

This story is true to our human experience. We human beings are social creatures. We are singular enough that we need some solitude, but incomplete enough that we need one another.<sup>2</sup>

**L**ONELINESS is one of life's inevitable teachers, but what does it have to offer? Some people spend a large part of their lives under the tutelage of loneliness, often to their great pain. Since we must deal with it, what can we learn? The possibilities in the classroom of Loneliness are almost endless, but two seem to stand out from the rest.

First, loneliness can lead to creativity. I think, for instance, of the novelist Thomas Wolfe. He wrote with such power and insight partly because he was lonely, and in his loneliness he reflected on the human condition with a sensitivity that he never would have owned if it were not his loneliness.

Loneliness also can make us more sensitive to other people. If you have experienced the loneliness of bereavement, you probably will have more heart for someone who has just lost a loved one. Some of the best and kindest listeners I've ever known have been lonely people. They have experienced the anguish of inner aloneness and are therefore ready to listen to someone else.<sup>3</sup>

**U**NFORTUNATELY, loneliness doesn't work its benefits automatically; it is not a foolproof teacher. If loneliness makes some people sensitive listeners, it just as surely makes others tedious and unceasingly talkative. Some lonely people become bitter toward the whole human race. Some drink themselves into oblivion. Some become insensitive to others because they are so absorbed with their own pain. Loneliness, like every other teach in the School of experience, can teach only those who are willing to learn.

When we become lonely for some person in particular, or for communion in general, we realize that we are not completely self-sufficient. Sometimes we suppress our loneliness, or at least any expression of it, because we don't want to make such a concession to the rest of the human race. But when we suppress this need, we kill a part of ourselves, and we are smaller and poorer for it.

Loneliness can also teach us that we should not lay on others too much of a burden for our happiness. We dare not depend on any single individual for our fulfillment; it isn't fair to that person, and it inevitably lead to an experience of devastation. We lay an impossible burden on another human when we make our happiness contingent upon their devotion and unfailing availability. Loneliness should teach us to have a broader focus, for the sake of the other person and for our own emotional survival.<sup>4</sup>

**A**BOVE all, loneliness should teach us to find a better friendship with God. The ultimate relationship for us human beings – beyond nature, beyond pets, beyond human beings – is our tie with the eternal. This body and its touch will someday go, but the part of us that reaches out toward God will endure forever. We should expect God to make other humans unnecessary, but a better relationship with God deals with the eternal issues of loneliness and equips us to enter more effectively into our human relationships.

None of us needs to make this journey alone. There is One who will go with us everywhere, even into the world to come. Loneliness should teach us to make that friendship strong and continuous. But if at times we become lonely, we can make the lonely place into a blessed classroom.<sup>5</sup>

1. What insights did you receive from this chapter?
2. How does modern life accentuate loneliness?
3. Why do you think God created loneliness in the first place?
4. Recall a time in your life when you were lonely. Why did loneliness come about, and how did you feel?
5. Does sin lead to loneliness? If so, how?
6. What life lessons can we learn from loneliness?
7. What happens when we suppress loneliness?
8. What are some causes of loneliness?
9. When we are lonely, what are we seeking? Fully explain your answer.
10. How do we sometimes cause loneliness for ourselves and for others?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 148.

## FRIENDSHIP IS THE LOVELIEST TEACHER...*So Lovely, You Can Easily Miss the Lessons* The School of Experience – Session 2

**I**N THE YEARS I spent as a student, I had several teachers who were so pleasant that the classes were a sheer delight. These instructors always created an air of excitement about the material, and they expressed an obvious love for the students. It was all so pleasurable that at times I hardly realized how much I was learning.

Friendship is that kind of teacher. The touch is usually gentle, the style unobtrusive. Even when the lessons are difficult, we feel the embrace of good will. Of course, friendship is not infallible, since it involves human beings at both the giving and receiving ends. But perhaps no teacher in the School of Experience treats its students so kindly.

The ancient wise person said:

There are friends who pretend to be friends,  
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a sibling. (Prov. 18:24 RSV)

I wish I knew the circumstances in which those words were written. Even without having specific details, it's easy to speculate that this person had gone through some particular human struggle in which help was desperately needed and in which likely sources may have failed. But all along the way, there was a friend. Perhaps there were several. Not all of them were of the same quality, but each was appropriate to the varying fortunes of life and wondrous enough to make the writer say, "There is a friend who sticks closer than a sibling."<sup>1</sup>

**B**UT IN THE SAME BREATH there is a warning. Friendship has its risks. This person who testified that a friend can be priceless also acknowledged that there are those "who pretend to be friends." There are counterfeits in friendship. That shouldn't surprise us, because anything as valuable as friendship is sure to encourage counterfeiting. Some people feign friendship only for the profit it brings; in their minds, "profit" is part of the very definition of friendship. They see it as little more than a technique to be employed in the pursuit of success. Others maintain a shallow level of friendship because they are essentially shallow people, picking up friendships easily and dropping them just as easily.

Even the best and truest friends are human, and they can disappoint us because of the natural boundaries of humanness – just as we can disappoint them. People have troubles of their own, and when we expect them to invest too much emotional energy in our concerns, we're likely to be hurt.

So make up your mind, as you pursue friendship, that you may be disappointed, perhaps even disillusioned. At the same time, remind yourself that you may – even unknowingly – disappoint or disillusion someone else. Sometimes we're unrealistic in our expectations of others, and they in turn may expect too much of us. Reconcile yourself to the fact that friendship entails risk. Anything of so much value must have its hazards.<sup>2</sup>

**F**RRIENDSHIP COMES IN VARIOUS shapes and sizes. Some friendships last for only a few years, yet for that time they are warm and significant. Friends may even be lost from the Christmas card list, yet the mention of their names will evoke a complex array of affectionate memories. Other friendships are the product of a limited common interest. I hear some say, "He's my fishing buddy," or "She's a golf friend." I don't happen to fish or golf, but I understand what they mean. I have such an identification for some service club friends from Rotary. These may not be profound friendships, yet they contribute to the wondrous fabric of life, its network of meaning.

There are also those who are friends-in-passing. I'm thinking of Bill, to whom I took my dry cleaning for years, and Stan, from whom I bought suits. With their retirement or death, my world grew measurably smaller. I didn't need John Donne to tell me that my life had been diminished. On the surface, our relationship might be classified as incidental or superficial, yet a bond of trust was there; these men were part of the wholeness of my life. We enjoyed a predictable repartee; each of us made the other smile and feel better. We were friends.<sup>3</sup>

**S**AMUEL JOHNSON, who knew a good deal about friendship, once said, "Friendship is seldom lasting but between equals, or where the superiority on one side is reduced by some equivalent advantage on the other." I recognize Johnson's point, yet I marvel at the strange patterns of friendship. I think of several close friends and wonder how we found each other! On the other hand, I think of a number of persons who I thought would make ideal

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ellsworth Kalas, *If Experience Is Such a Good Teacher, Why Do I Keep Repeating the Course?* 25-26.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

friends; it seemed we had so much in common. Yet friendship never developed in these instances beyond the most casual level. The chemistry of good friendship is very hard to analyze.

All of us need the stimulation and broadening that come from relationships with those who are different from ourselves; and we need to give something of ourselves to others who may at first be difficult to relate to. If we restrict our friendships to those who are nearly identical to us in education, life-style, and outlook, we will limit the effectiveness of friendship in teaching us.<sup>4</sup>

**S**ECULAR SOCIETY TELLS US to look at the bottom line, which generally means, “What’s in it for me?” Friendship teaches us that there is more to life than can be measured in self-centered ways. The moment we make friendship utilitarian, it ceases to be friendship. Friendship needs no other justification than itself. Friendship teaches us that people have worth without any measurable return; we will be friends simply because it is right to be friendly.

Henry Adams said, “One friend in a lifetime is much; two are many; three are hardly possible.” If one judges friendship only at the level of those who “stick closer than a sibling,” Adams might be right. But friendship would teach us to have respect for all its levels and to recognize that there is more to life than what can be measured by any so-called bottom line. Besides, if we don’t keep cultivating friendships, we may find ourselves declaring social bankruptcy. There is so much movement in our society that friends can soon be scattered from one coast to the other; then, as time goes by, death makes its inroads. If we don’t continue to make deposits in the bank of relationships, we someday may find that old friends are gone and we have no one to take their place.<sup>5</sup>

**F**OOD EATEN IN FRIENDSHIP is more than food; its flavor is sharpened by conversation and caring. Especially *caring*. I speak not simply of those times when the world is caving in, but of the times when caring shows itself in thoughtful listening and appreciative noticing. Life is made very rich when we give ourselves to someone. True friendship teaches that.<sup>6</sup>

**S**OMETHING SPECIAL HAPPENS in friendship when Christ is the focus. Jesus promised his followers that where two or three come together in his name, he will be present (Matt. 18:20). This isn’t an assurance that God blesses small attendance at worship services! It is testimony to a common, extraordinary experience: when those who believe in Christ engage in faith-talk, friendship reaches its highest potential. At such times we find that as two talk, three are there; as four talk, there are five in the gathering. The particular quality of conversation may thanksgiving, soul-searching, or confession, but the distinguishing characteristic is always the same – a sense of the Lordship of Christ, and of lives bound in friendship through him.

No doubt about it, friendship is a lovely teacher. But to learn its lessons, we have to engage ourselves with a high level of unselfishness. Friendship teaches profound lessons, such as the inexplicable devotion that endures even to the point of death, but friendship also teaches such simple lessons as daily thoughtfulness, courtesy, and kindness. To learn friendship’s lessons really well, we need the gift of divine love. But even the poorest students are well rewarded. Friendship is that kind of teacher.<sup>7</sup>

1. What insights did you receive from this chapter?
2. How do you define *friendship*?
3. Name some of the various types of friendships.
4. What are some of the risks of friendship?
5. In what ways are friendships a gift from God?
6. Recall a friendship that enriched your life. How did it begin?
7. What causes friendships to thrive?
8. Who was your first childhood friend? What did you and your friend have in common?
9. What causes friendships to fade or to fail?
10. What simple lessons do we learn from friendships?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 30-32.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 149.

**DON'T SEEK PAIN...*But If It Comes, Embrace It***  
**The School of Experience – Session 3**

**S**OME COURSES IN THE SCHOOL OF EXPERIENCE are omitted at great loss. They are so very nearly essential that to miss them is to leave a strategic empty spot in our character. I think that's true of the experience of pain, illness, and suffering.

Let me remind you of a disclaimer that must be said of every course in the School of Experience. Pain can be a most instructive teacher, so that our lives may hardly be complete without encountering it; nevertheless, pain doesn't always get its lesson across. The late Bishop Fulton Sheen once said, "Pain of itself does not make us better; it is very apt to make us worse. No one was ever better simply because he had an earache." Suffering produces sainthood and character in some, but it develops hypochondria and self-centeredness in others. In this course, as the saying goes, you pay your money and you take your choice.<sup>1</sup>

**S**OME ANONYMOUS SOUL, centuries before Christ, learned much from pain. Whether it was a man or woman, we do not know; the testimony is found in the longest chapter of the Bible, Psalm 119. This remarkable chapter has just one basic theme: the importance and beauty of the law of God. We learn God's law in the crucible of experience. This writer recalls what pain did in his or her life:

Before I was afflicted, I went astray;  
but now I keep thy word. (Ps. 119:67 RSV)

This is the confession of a good human being, whose relationship to God was a cherished part of life. Such a person would seem to be so spiritually sensitive that there would be no need for external incentives. But in truth, all of us need some prodding now and then, and so it was with this person. Taking soul-inventory, the writer realized that his or her life had somehow gone astray, and had then been brought back on track by affliction. Sickness had had a salutary effect.

The writer picks up the same theme a few lines later:

It is good for me that I was afflicted,  
that I might learn thy statutes (Ps. 119:71 RSV)

Affliction isn't usually high on our thanksgiving list, but it was for the psalmist. Realizing what might have happened to his or her soul, and how close he or she was to serious straying, the poet concludes that affliction was one of the best things that could have happened.

I'm impressed that this is not a sad song. The writer doesn't tell us how much he or she has suffered, but only that the suffering has done so much good. It isn't a recital of anguish, but a very tumult of thanksgiving.<sup>2</sup>

**A**FFLICTION is a great equalizer. It makes us all brothers and sisters in a very special way. Almost anyone who has ever shared a hospital room remembers their roommate; they have traveled together in the fellowship of suffering, and even if they never see each other again, they often feel uniquely close. This is partly because pain treats us all alike. It's easier to endure sickness in a private room than in a ward, but when you have to depend on a nurse or an aide for bedpan and bathing, it makes no difference whether you're rich or poor, learned or ignorant. And if you're accustomed to being independent, the burden may be all the harder to bear.<sup>3</sup>

**T**HE LINE BETWEEN PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SUFFERING is often hard to distinguish. So it is with pain. Sometimes our physical illnesses begin with mental anguish or distress of spirit, while in other instances physical illness leads to mental distress. You and I are such finely interwoven combinations of the physical and the spiritual that we cannot touch one without affecting the other.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ellsworth Kalas, *If Experience Is Such a Good Teacher, Why Do I Keep Repeating the Course?* 35-36.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

So while physical illness is a fact of the body, its impact on soul, mind, and the emotions – those hard-to-define areas – is very significant. Now wonder, then, that the ancient poet was glad to have been afflicted, because affliction brought knowledge of God’s law. Did the poet mean that the experience of pain drove him or her to study the law? Or was it that suffering made the poet realize the law’s importance? Or was the poet perhaps more mystical, telling us that suffering had made the law come alive in ways not sensed before? Regardless of the poet’s meaning, it is clear that pain affected every aspect of his or her being.<sup>4</sup>

**A**FFLICTION is particularly effective in helping us re-evaluate our priorities. When Thomas Chalmers became pastor of the church at Kilmany, Scotland in 1803, he was a young man of twenty-three with little real interest in religion. He had taken the parish primarily so that he could also teach mathematics and astronomy.

As time went by, Chalmers neglected sermon preparation and the care of his people. The church went into steady and precipitous decline. After several years he was stricken with a serious illness. For four months he was unable to leave his sick room, and for almost a year he did not preach. Slowly he came to realize that his view of Christianity as simply an ethical system was not sufficient to see him through this valley of the shadow of death. There in the lonely place of his illness he faced himself and the shallowness of his beliefs, until he experienced a dramatic religious conversion.

In the years that followed, Chalmers became the most powerful preacher in Scotland. And with it, he came to have a compelling social conscience. The finest pulpits in Scotland were available to him, but he also chose to minister to the poorest of the population in special services on tanner’s second story. A century later Lord Roseberry said of him, “An illness lifted him into a higher sphere, and he soared aloft.” Illness can do that to us, because it helps us get our values in order.<sup>5</sup>

**T**HE OLD VILLAGE PREACHER said that sickness has its value, because when you’re flat on your back, there’s no place to look but up. With such a focus, life can take on different proportions. That’s what the psalmist meant when he or she said, “It is good for me that I was afflicted.” Don’t court pain, but if and when it comes, embrace it. Pain can be a wondrous teacher.

1. What insights did you receive from this chapter?
2. How do you define pain?
3. How can pain be a blessing?
4. Recall a time of pain in your life and the end results.
5. What lessons have you learned from pain?
6. What, if anything, can we do to prevent pain?
7. What does God want us to do with our pain?
8. What does it mean to embrace pain?
9. How is pain or affliction a great equalizer?
10. How can we help our friends and family deal with pain?
11. Discuss different types of pain and the impact that they have on our lives.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 150.

**REGRET IS A HUMANIZING TEACHER...*But Don't Stay in the Class Too Long***  
**The School of Experience – Session 4**

**R**EGRET is closely related to our desire for excellence. Only the indifferent or the self-satisfied never feel regret. Regret can be a powerful and effective teacher, but it can also destroy its students. Berthold Auerbach, the nineteenth-century novelist, said, “Regret is the most stupid feeling one can possibly cherish.” But on the other side, Henry David Thoreau, the American essayist, said, “To regret is to live afresh.” It all depends, you see, on how you deal with the lessons this teacher offers.

Regret is one of our distinguishing human characteristics. You can't feel regret unless you have some measure of reflective intelligence. Regret is possible only for a creature who can stand off at a distance and look at itself, or who can evaluate and analyze its past. Regret requires a certain degree of moral sensitivity. To feel regret you must have some standard of right and wrong – or perhaps, of better and worse. The higher one's level of moral intelligence, the greater one's capacity for regret.<sup>1</sup>

**S**OME OF OUR MOST PAINFUL REGRETS are for opportunities lost. How many people go under a dark cloud by thinking, even momentarily, of the person they almost married, the investment they almost made, the position they nearly won. But for every person who is filled with regret for an opportunity lost, there is another who regrets a deed done, a word spoken, a relationship consummated. These are the stories of decisions made, of tempers lost, of conversations that cannot be recalled. Here are deeds – sometimes sinful ones, but often only erratic or misguided ones – that have changed the course of life and have left a person with a crushing burden. “I'd give anything,” a man or woman says, “absolutely anything, if I could take back that one day of my life.” *Regret*. It can eat at your inward being like the most malevolent cancer, destroying by the inch and the hour. And there is no surgeon's knife, no radium or chemical that can reach it.

Yet, regret can refine and improve character as only a skilled teacher can do. I venture that there are few great saints who have not possessed a high capacity for regret. Effective regret is the growing edge of godliness. But the key word is *effective!*<sup>2</sup>

**E**VERY INTELLIGENT PERSON had reasons for regret. To feel regret is one of our better human characteristics, if out of it comes repentance. Repentance is that act by which we say to God, to ourselves, and perhaps to some concerned human beings that we realize we have done wrong and we're sorry for it – and, more than that, that we will now take a different course. The wrong we've done may be something that has affected primarily ourselves; it may be nothing other than a bad choice or the neglect of an opportunity. Whatever it is, it's important that we face it, confess that it exists, and pledge ourselves to change it.

This is the point of difference between good regret and destructive regret. Good regret leads us to repent and thus to change, and to be rid of the impossible burden. Destructive regret causes us to push the troublesome thought underground, where it begins to eat away at our psyche, or to immerse ourselves in a misery of remorse without actually doing anything to change or be free.

Those who engage in the Twelve Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous have a prayer that is a perfect guide for dealing with regrets. This prayer asks for the courage to change what can be changed, the serenity to live with what cannot be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference between the two.

If the matters of which we feel regret are matters we can remedy, we should do so. If there are mistakes we can rectify, sincere apologies we can offer, hurts we can relieve, we should be about them without delay. By doing so, we can take the sting from regret.<sup>3</sup>

**I**THINK it is the devil's business to keep us so occupied with useless regret that we are unable to do anything about our present opportunities. Regret must never become a dead-end street. It must lead to repentance, sometimes to recompense, and always to action. And if there is no longer anything that can be done, the action is simply to go on with life.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ellsworth Kalas, *If Experience Is Such a Good Teacher, Why Do I Keep Repeating the Course?* 45-46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49.

In such instances when we cannot directly remedy the errors or omissions or hurts of the past, we have to move on. Such is the insistence of God's grace. It is no wonder that the person who wrote "Amazing Grace" was one who knew something of regret. John Newton went to sea when he was only eleven years old. His life rapidly degenerated into every kind of immorality and crudeness of living. He came to work on slave ships, which must surely have been the vilest of jobs.

Then one day he was converted from his shameful, destructive life. He must have known a continuing torrent of regrets for all the people he had hurt, all the laws he had broken, all the years he had wasted. How could he repair all the harm he had done? As a matter of fact, he couldn't. Should he live, then, in unceasing regret? Some choose, under such circumstances, to do so, using regret as a kind of daily intoxicant that puts them into an emotional stupor. But Newton wisely chose to harness his regret and to put it to use. At thirty-nine years of age, he became a minister of the gospel, and over the years he wrote many hymns. Newton put his regret to productive use. He could not repay many of those whom he had hurt in wasteful years, but he could extend benefit to countless others. And so can we all.<sup>4</sup>

**R**EGRET is to life what pain is to the body. It is an instructive warning, to help us avoid further, and perhaps worse, anguish and to guide us into more productive living. But regret is not an end in itself. It is intended to lead us along.

I pray that I will never lose my capacity for regret. And I pray just as fervently that I will make my regret a productive factor. Regret is heaven's good gift, probably unique to us human creatures, to help us grow into better, more honorable, more expert human beings. But run amok, regret is fired with the power of hell.

I don't think I would know how to handle regret if I didn't believe in the grace of God – the grace not only to be forgiven, but also to be restored and made better. At the one extreme, I might try to harden myself against regret so that I would never feel its pain. But in that process, I would become less than human. At the other extreme, I might become so burdened with regret that I would come to despise myself.

With God's grace, we can harness regret. When we have hurt another or have violated the law of God, we can find forgiveness through grace. If we have disappointed ourselves, we can use the regret as a building stone in the erecting of a better life.<sup>5</sup>

1. What insights did you receive from this chapter?
2. Share a regret that you have and how it has affected you.
3. What causes us to feel regret?
4. What determines whether regret destroys or refines us?
5. What are some of the things we learn from regret?
6. What is effective or "good" regret? Where should regret lead us?
7. Compare good regret and destructive regret.
8. How is regret an instructive warning?
9. Share how you deal with your regrets. Do you deal with regrets differently now than when you were younger? Explain.
10. What does regret have to do with God's grace?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 50-52.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 151.

**LOVE IS A BEAUTIFUL TEACHER...But the Lessons Are Not Always Easy**  
**The School of Experience – Session 5**

**L**OVE seems to come naturally. I believe that every baby emerging from the womb desires to love and to be loved. Perhaps it is because the womb itself is a warm and embracing place. Or perhaps love is instinctive to us because we are social creatures; we reach out for love as naturally as we reach for food, simply because we cannot live without it. Or perhaps it is that love is the image of god that is printed on our very being; God is love, and because we are made in God's image, we love, too.

It isn't long, unfortunately, until our love-capacity takes something of a beating. Soon enough we encounter unloving people, and soon enough we are disappointed – rightly or wrongly – by those who love us. But the urge to love remains, and the lessons of love go on continually, for love is one of life's greatest teachers. The lessons are not as simple as they at first appear, and they are surely not always easy. But love is a persistent, strong teacher, and if we give love a measure of attention, we learn in ways that make life very beautiful.<sup>1</sup>

**O**UR CONTEMPORARY IDEA of love is likely to be very narrow. We think of it primarily in a romantic or sexual way, and we associate it with feelings of passion or ardor. We don't often think of love in the long pull, the kind of love that shows itself in dogged loyalty.

So what does love teach us? Love means responsibility. Our first experiences with love don't necessarily prepare us for such a realization. In the earliest years of our lives we usually experience love as recipients; we're cuddled and cared for. We give love in return, but our infant love is an instinctive thin, a simple pouring out of affection.

As a result, most of us are likely to have a rather shallow idea of love. It's something we enjoy, something that makes us feel good, something we show with a hug or a kiss or a kind word. Sometimes love received may even incline us to be selfish; after all, if people are always doting on us, we come to expect such doting. We become people who expect to receive love without understanding love's responsibilities. Some, unfortunately, never get beyond this stage. All of their lives they expect love to flow their way, never thinking that mature love involves responsibility. And responsibility often means sacrifice.

I have nothing against romance; as a matter of fact, I'm a sentimental, romantic person. But romance is measured in ecstatic moments, while love is measured in untiring years.<sup>2</sup>

**B**ECAUSE LOVE is spelled responsibility, it sometimes teaches through pain. When we first receive love, we think that all of love's lessons are beautiful. But we usually learn before too long that there is a price for love. If you want never to be hurt, don't love anyone and don't let anyone love you. On the other hand, if you refuse to love or to be love, you will never experience any great heights of joy and fulfillment. Love comes at a price of pain. There is really no way to have love without giving up something of yourself and your freedom, and without making yourself vulnerable. That's why love, beautiful as it is, is a painful teacher.

**I**'M happy to say that love pays, but let me make clear that it doesn't always pay when we expect it to, or in the way we thought it might. In its highest expressions, love doesn't really seek payment. It gives because it is right to give, and because the heart and warmth of life demand it. Nevertheless love *does* pay. There is a reward. But it doesn't necessarily come from the one to whom love is extended. Love is the original networking arrangement; it is built into love's very nature. I'm very sure that I didn't love my parents in the measure they loved me, but I have been privileged as a father to repay my parents by the love I've given to my children. In fact, part of the love I have opportunity to share each day is drawn from the deposit that my parents and others gave me long ago.

Love requires repayment. The person who doesn't pass love along finally loses the love that he or she received. Love is a kind of spiritual manna; keep it too long and it will rot. Some of the most unpleasant people on earth are those who have been favored with loving attention but, giving little away, have become the traditional "spoiled brats." And adult spoiled brats are the worst of the breed. Love must be passed along! If

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ellsworth Kalas, *If Experience Is Such a Good Teacher, Why Do I Keep Repeating the Course?* 55-56.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-58.

there is no one in your circle of life to whom it can be given, go out on the street and distribute it prodigally, wherever you can; in a word here, a smile there, a deed of careless generosity, a letter to someone long forgotten or known only by newspaper reference. Somehow, somehow, pass love along. It will spoil if it isn't shared.<sup>3</sup>

**F**REDERICK M. HINSHAW describes in strong but sensitive fashion an expression of love after death in a poem he calls "Last Act":

Six weeks after the fainting spell at lunch  
when he broke his hip, the old man died.  
The family had come daily to the bed  
of the half-blind, half-deaf patriarch  
saying, "Do you know me, Pop?"  
and "Are they feeding you? Where do you hurt?"  
and in the night he would cry for help,  
call names of those who came  
and other names as well and plead for death.

As the wife, daughter, and grand-daughter  
filed out after the visit of the nurse...  
the weakening, slowing sounds of death,  
(whispered – "Is that what they call the death rattle?")  
the silence...they said, "He's gone, now,  
we wish our best to you." Moments later  
the sound of the electric razor started:  
the dutiful son trusting to no-one else  
this final loving task he wanted to do himself.

(*The Rotarian*, August, 1981, 9)

I believe that the act following death almost surely reflects the feelings and conduct before death. It is a continuation of a quality of caring that must have existed for years. But more than that, I believe in the power of love to penetrate those barriers of time, space, and eternity that we usually consider impassable. Love has a language and power of communication beyond our comprehension. So it is that love goes on paying those who have loved long after the usual measures of this life are past. I know I can't prove I'm right about this. But come to think of it, no one can prove I'm wrong. I simply believe that because God is love, love can break the otherwise impenetrable barriers of time and space. So while love is sometimes late, it is never too late.

Love is a beautiful teacher. All of us are blessed with some of love's classes, and some of us receive love's lessons in abundance. But to whom much is given, much will be required. Love is sometimes a strict and demanding teacher, because love is strong. But watch love with rapt attention and learn. And as you learn, vow more surely than ever that you will love as others, and as god, have loved you. God to love's school again tomorrow, because there is no end to the lessons love can teach.<sup>4</sup>

1. What insights did you receive from this chapter?
2. What was the first thing you learned about love?
3. How does love teach us about responsibility?
4. What is the difference between romance and love?
5. What are some of the costs or prices of love?
6. Why do we need to pass love along to others?
7. What person has taught you the most about love? Explain?
8. What passages or stories from the Bible can you recall that teach us about love?
9. What do you think is the most difficult lesson to learn about love?
10. Explain this statement: "Love is sometimes late, but never too late."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 62-63.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 152.

**ONLY THE TOUGH LEARN FROM SORROW...*But You're Up to It***  
**The School of Experience – Session 6**

**S**ORROW is one of the primary teachers in the School of Experience. I wish I could spare you Sorrow's lessons, but it isn't possible. Love long enough, and you will experience sorrow. Live even long, and you will experience even more. So since the class is inevitable, we need to see how we can best learn sorrow's lessons.

Sorrow has to do with the experience of loss, particularly loss in its most dramatic form, bereavement – the death of someone we love. There can be almost the same experience in the loss of a treasured friendship or the breaking of a marriage or a romance, because many of the same emotional elements are involved. Sometimes people say that their divorce was like a bereavement. But other emotions often enter into the ruptures of human relationships, such as anger or a desire to strike back; and, of course, as long as the other person is still alive, one may nurture some hope of reconciliation. I think we can say that the purest form of sorrow is that which comes from bereavement.<sup>1</sup>

**M**ANY PEOPLE think of David the king and psalmist, as one of their favorite Old Testament characters. The Bible describes him as a man after God's own heart. But David was nevertheless painfully human. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his army officers. When David learned that she was pregnant, he tried first to deceive her husband into thinking that he was responsible, and failing in that effort arranged for him to be killed in battle. He thought he had done all of this without being detected, but the prophet Nathan soon came to him with a message of judgment from God. He had broken God's law and had brought dramatic sorrow and hurt to a number of people. The prophet announced that the child who had been conceived in his adulterous relationship would die.

Shortly thereafter the infant fell ill. Though David had been told that the child would die, he nevertheless implored God to spare the boy. His earnestness puts one in awe; he fasted and lay on the ground all through the night. His trusted servants and advisors pleaded with him to forsake his vigil, but he refused.

One the seventh day, the boy died. Who would dare to tell the king? "When the child was still alive," they reasoned, "we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us; how then can we tell him the child is dead?" (2 Sam. 12:18). David noticed that his servants were whispering, and he sensed the reason. "Is the boy dead?" he asked. "Yes, he is dead." David then rose from the ground, bathed, dressed, and went to the house of God to worship; then he came home and ate.

His servants dared to ask for an explanation. Having agonized when his boy was struggling for life, how is it that he could now rise up and return so naturally to the routine of life once he knew the child was dead? David answered:

"While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows? GOD may be gracious to me, and the child may live.' But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me." (2 Sam. 12:22, 23)

David was a remarkable, deeply spiritual man. He was a sensitive poet, but he was also a pragmatic military and political leader. Very few people in the scriptures, or in secular literature, have expressed themselves with such depths of feeling as David did; yet when he confronted sorrow, he was a pragmatist, dealing with it in the style of a military tactician. Now that this particular battle was lost, he was deploying his emotional forces to another field, so he might win some other battles!<sup>2</sup>

**D**AVID teaches us a major lesson concerning sorrow: Don't enroll in Sorrow's class any sooner than absolutely necessary. So many give in to sorrow prematurely. Some argue, perversely, that it's better to expect the worst, and then if it doesn't happen, you'll feel better! David didn't reason that way. The prophet had told him that his son was going to die. Yet when the child fell ill, David refused to acquiesce to his death. He chose instead to pray, to see if he might get a different result. Whether David's theology was right or

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ellsworth Kalas, *If Experience Is Such a Good Teacher, Why Do I Keep Repeating the Course?* 65-66.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

wrong, I will not argue; I only know that I admire him for not giving into despair until there was no other way to go.<sup>3</sup>

WHEN WE experience sorrow, our usual reaction is to hide away with books, music, and memories. A little of this goes a long way! We can too easily wrap ourselves in the kinds of songs and poetry that aggravate our sorrow. King David took the opposite course. His story is marked by a series of action verbs, and the very intensity of those verbs instructive. He “got up.” He had been lying on the ground, prostrate with agony and prayer; but when he knew the baby was dead, he got up off the ground. Prayer had sustained him through the long struggle, but now it was time to rise up and build on his prayers by beginning to live again.

Then the scripture says that David “washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes” (2 Sam. 12:20a). We can dramatically alter our spiritual and emotional state by what we do with our bodies. Sometimes when we are despairing we can do a world of good for ourselves by simply attending to our physical selves.

David changed his clothes – he had worn the garments of agony and abasement long enough – and “he went into the house of GOD, and worshiped” (2 Sam. 12:20b). Now, above all, he would draw on the strength of the Almighty. After suffering a tragedy we can easily harbor resentment against God. The beleaguered soul asks, “Why should this happen to me?” forgetting that most of the things that happen to us also happen to most of the human race; why should he expect to be exempt. In time of pain, however, we lose that perspective and think the universe itself is against us. In time of sorrow, we need to go to the house of worship to clear away any such feeling of inner anger.

Finally the writer tells us that David consoled his wife Bathsheba. He got out of himself. But its very nature, sorrow can be quite self-centered. Sometimes people in sorrow tell themselves that no one is suffering as they are, shutting themselves into a strangely arrogant private chamber of pain. David was wise enough – and compassionate enough – to know that Bathsheba was in at least as much pain as he was, so he comforted her with the strength he had now received.<sup>4</sup>

EACH OF US must deal with sorrow. It is one of the inevitable courses in the School of Experience. The secret is to learn the lessons well, so our lives are not permanently caught in pain. David, a man of deeply sensitive feelings, could easily have spent the rest of his life with sorrow after suffering the loss of the infant son. He and Bathsheba, already off to such a questionable start in their lives together, could have poured the remainder of life into some pool of bitterness.

Instead, David rose up and started again. He treated sorrow with the respect it so richly deserves, but he didn’t build a permanent dwelling there. He moved on – by common sense, by faith, and by God’s help – so that he might live another day. He was tough enough to learn from sorrow. So are you and I.<sup>5</sup>

1. What insights did you receive from this chapter?
2. What is your definition of *sorrow*?
3. Why do we need to be tough in order to learn from sorrow?
4. What was one of your first lessons from sorrow?
5. What impresses you about David’s experience with sorrow?
6. Why is sorrow inevitable?
7. What are some common causes of sorrow?
8. What are some common reactions to sorrow?
9. How does a person recover from sorrow? Name and describe some strategies.
10. What does God want us to learn from sorrow?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 67-68.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 70-73.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 74-75.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 153.

**SUCCESS IS A FUN COURSE...*Unfortunately, You May Not Learn Much from It***  
**The School of Experience – Session 7**

**I**F STUDENTS in the School of Experience could always choose their teachers, there is no question who the favorite faculty member would be. All of us, or nearly all, would make Success our major professor. We would specialize in its courses – the more advanced and sophisticated, the better.

But there is a problem with this curriculum. Though Success is a popular teacher, it's not usually an effective one. Or perhaps, as with many teachers, the fault lies in the students. We probably don't understand how to learn from Success.<sup>1</sup>

**O**NE REASON we don't learn much from success is because we don't necessarily recognize success when we see it. Sometimes we think ourselves successful when we've won some competition, when in truth we may have been mediocre or less, and we survived only because the competition was even worse. Sometimes we think ourselves successful simply because we have such poor standards that we accept shoddiness as an achievement.

On the other hand, sometimes we fix our eyes so firmly on a particular goal that we overlook some very real achievements of another kind. I'm told that Beatrix Potter never found great satisfaction in her Peter Rabbit stories, which have blessed so many millions, because her pride was in her work as a natural scientist. Clement Moore was a professor of Oriental and Greek literature at Columbia University for twenty-nine years. He produced a Hebrew dictionary and some books of fine poetry. But one Christmas season he wrote a little poem for his children, which within a year or two was bring laughter to children everywhere – to this very day, in fact, over 150 years later. It begins like this:

'Twas the night before Christmas,  
And all through the house,  
Not a creature was stirring,  
Not even a mouse.

The poem always embarrassed Professor Moore. He knew it was not great poetry. It certainly wasn't in the style of the Greek and Oriental literature he explained to his students each week. But for children and parents around the world, he is a success, for the measure of magic he has brought into our lives.

You may have heard of "The Peter Principle" – the theory that every employee in a hierarchy tends to rise to his or her level of incompetence. People achieve in some phase of work, but instead of recognizing this success and developing it, they decide they ought to be something else – generally something that represents more money and more prestige. So people go on to a position in which they may do poorly and in which they find less satisfaction, because they didn't appreciate success when they had it. Of course, it's hard to learn from success if we aren't sure of its definition.<sup>2</sup>

**E**ARLY IN HIS CAREER Solomon had a dream. In it, God said to him, "Ask what I shall give you." That's quite an offer, when the One making it has every resource at easy disposal! Solomon answered, first, by thanking God for the blessings his father David had enjoyed and for making him king in his father's succession. Then he pleaded, "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?" (1 Kings 3:9).

Solomon teaches us a huge lesson: to have a sense of gratitude. Since no one is really self-made, this lesson ought to come easily to those who succeed; they have more reason than others to recognize the degree of their debt of gratitude. Yet so many successful people forget those who have contributed to their achievement.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ellsworth Kalas, *If Experience Is Such a Good Teacher, Why Do I Keep Repeating the Course?* 87.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-89.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

**A** LONG WITH GRATITUDE, success should give us a good memory. It doesn't always do so, but it should! People who succeed so often forget what made them succeed, until their success slips from them. Most of us have known salespeople who built a loyal following by their attentiveness to every detail of their customers' needs; but with success, some of these same people become so hurried they all but brush off the very people who got them where they are. It happens to entertainers too. They build a following by loving people, but with success they begin to feel superior to their crowds. Slowly the people slip away from them. They forget the secret of their success.

God often gets the same treatment. In his early success, Solomon leaned on God; he knew the source of his strength. But as time went by, he seemed to forget God. Success itself may have been partly responsible; as people told him how wonderful he was and how much they admired his wisdom, Solomon must have begun to think the wisdom was his own doing.

Success ought to give us a good memory: for God, for people, for the abilities that enabled us to achieve. But ironically, success often causes a lapse in memory – a strategic, even fatal, lapse.<sup>4</sup>

**B**ALTASAR GRACIAN includes in his lessons from life, "I learned that mediocrity within yourself is unacceptable." Success teaches us to expect the best from ourselves. The most successful people need no other quality control; they're harder on themselves than any critic. And if there is any word they despise, it is the word *mediocrity*.<sup>5</sup>

**S**UCCESS ought to breed success, but it doesn't always work that way. In fact success has no greater danger than itself. The problem with success *is* success. This reminds us again of the importance of godly character. Success has within it the seed of failure and even of self-destruction. The more success a person achieves – including the most honorable and praiseworthy success – the more one needs the correction of the Holy Spirit.

I'm very sure God wants us to succeed. It is better that we become saints than corrupters, better that we use God's generous gifts rather than letting them lie idle or perverting them to unworthy purposes. God, the ultimate Source of success, would like for us to succeed and to learn from each success. But that calls for sensitive students, who never feel that they are above correction and reproof. In other words, the greatest lesson success can teach each of us is the humility that makes us keep on learning.<sup>6</sup>

1. What insights did you receive from this chapter?
2. How does the world measure success? How do Christians measure it?
3. In your own words, tell what *success* means to you.
4. Recall a success in your life.
5. Talk about someone you know who you feel is a success.
6. Why do we sometimes fail to learn anything from success?
7. Why is gratitude such an important element of success?
8. What is the role of "remembering" when it comes to success?
9. What are some of the hazards of success? What role does humility play in success?
10. Explain this statement: "The problem with success *is* success."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 155.

**DEFEAT IS A REQUIRED COURSE...*Not an Elective***  
**The School of Experience – Session 8**

**A** PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE has to develop great toughness regarding defeat. Even the best professional basketball teams rarely win two-thirds of their games in a season, and good teams struggle to get safely over the .500 mark. That means that a player goes home from nearly half his games with defeat.

The odds are about the same for life in general. Defeat is a required course. No one escapes it. Some, unfortunately, seem to stay in last place most of their lives, but even those whose lives seem to be a stadium decked with pennants have had more defeats than anyone can imagine. In many instances, the major difference between the pennant winners and the last-place folks lies in the way they have handled defeat.

Don't let defeat terrify you. It's far too commonplace to be given that power. Rather, see defeat as a primary teacher – an unavoidable one, and an unwelcome one, but one that can give a depth, a height, and a breadth to our lives that cannot be received from any other teacher.<sup>1</sup>

**W**HEN JOSHUA was still a relatively young man, he became a first assistant to Moses, the epochal leader of the Jewish people. When twelve persons were selected to make a reconnaissance trip into the land that the Israelites planned to invade, Joshua was one of the twelve. Ten of the committee came back with a negative report, but Joshua chose, along with Caleb, to make a minority report. He believed in winning, and he was confident that his nation was capable of winning, no matter what the majority felt.

As it turned out, forty years went by before Joshua's convictions were put to the test, and when they were, he was the commanding officer. On his first campaign, he won a stunning victory, the battle of Jericho. The odds were dramatically against Israel; they were not an army, but an unknown, untried body of people only a generation removed from slavery, and they were marching upon one of the most impregnable fortress cities of their times. But they won, and won big.

Then they marched on to the city of Ai. This looked easy, compared to Jericho. Instead, however, they suffered a humiliating defeat. Joshua didn't handle it well. Joshua was so done in that he accused God of poor judgment in bringing the nation this far only to see them defeated.

God didn't let Joshua wallow in defeat. "Get up!" God said. "Why are you lying on your face?" Then God told Joshua to search out the reason for his defeat. That is, God told Joshua to let defeat be his *teacher*. Nothing would be accomplished by lying on the ground crying "We've lost, we've lost!" Defeat has value only as we find out *why* we've lost. Defeat is a course, not a comprehensive curriculum.<sup>2</sup>

**I**DON'T KNOW any really fine person who hasn't studied well in the course of defeat. Sometimes our defeats come in the field of our eventual achievements and sometimes in some other areas of life. It doesn't matter too much where we study defeat as long as we learn from it and come to apply its lessons across the broader spectrum of life. The lessons we learn will vary according to our personalities and the nature of our needs. A key lesson for business success may have little to do with establishing an effective family life. Perhaps that's why we take so many courses from defeat; the courses don't easily cross register in the School of Experience. A key rule, then, is to learn, not be destroyed.<sup>3</sup>

A member of my parish was showing me through the research unit of his manufacturing firm. One engineer's desk had a framed message: "Babe Ruth struck out 1,330 times." A research engineer has to remember that there are more strikeouts than home runs. He has to be read to say, after another failed effort, "I must be closer to the solution, because I've just eliminated another incorrect possibility." The secret is to learn from the error, not to be devastated by it.<sup>4</sup>

**I**F WE WIN all the time – or if we think we're winning when in fact we're not, for sometimes we fool ourselves – the elements of life get out of proportion. As a matter of fact, we need an occasional defeat to

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ellsworth Kalas, *If Experience Is Such a Good Teacher, Why Do I Keep Repeating the Course?* 97-98.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

help us remember that God is God. It's painful to see someone broken by defeat, but sometimes it is the most important experience a person will ever have.

It can be hard to know God if we're so enchanted with our own successes that we become unduly fascinated with ourselves. Even as good a man as Job learned that. After his devastating losses, he was exposed to the glory of God: "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5).

Defeat's effect on our relationship to other people is especially significant in keeping life in perspective. If we never know what it is to lose, we have little compassion for the human race. Too many victories can make one unkind and insensitive to the feelings, limitations, and problems of others. If we have been so long without a defeat, or if we have forgotten the feeling of failure, or if we are unable to relate the quality of our own weakness to that of another person's shortcomings, our soul will become a mean and narrow thing.<sup>5</sup>

**W**HILE DEFEAT is a great teacher, it is limited, as are all teachers, by the willingness and the aptitude of its students. A teacher is only as effective as the students allow her or him to be. Defeat is almost without a peer in the dramatic, incisive way it makes its points, yet some of us will not learn from it.

Some simply refuse to apply the lessons. They complain that they can't see why such things should happen to them; they wonder how life can be so unfair. Others seem to insist on taking the same lessons again and again. Nevertheless, let's remind ourselves that defeat has no desire to see its pupils a second time. Defeat prefers that we take the course once, and move on.

I have said that I don't know of any really fine person who has not studied well in the course of defeat. On the other hand, I've known many who seem to have learned nothing from their defeats. They come out of their experiences harsh, bitter, and meanspirited. Their occasions of defeat have not beautified or refined them. Instead, they have become resentful of life.

Defeat has seemed at times to be an unconscionably harsh teacher; but in review, I realize it is only because I have been so slow to learn. Defeat would have been satisfied to treat me more kindly if I hadn't insisted on advanced and elective courses! I am grateful that eventually I've been willing to learn. In at least some phases of my life, I have gotten to the point where I seem to have graduated. And believe me, I'm holding tight to my diploma!

In the School of Experience, there are only a few required courses, and defeat is one of them. It is not so bad to lose a battle at Ai, as Joshua did, if only we learn from the defeat.<sup>6</sup>

1. What insights did you receive from this chapter?
2. Recall a defeat from your childhood. How did it happen? How did you feel? How did you handle the situation?
3. What defeats, do you think, are the worst?
4. What is the Christian attitude toward defeat?
5. What are some strategies for dealing with defeat and learning from it?
6. How do you normally react to defeat?
7. What causes us to be depressed or angry after a defeat?
8. Why do some people fail to learn from defeat?
9. Is there ever a reason for blame after a defeat? Why or why not? Why do we often place blame?<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 104-105.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 105-108.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 156.