

## Blind Faith through Trials

### DAY ONE – God Growing Tim (Part I)

It was a dark late night. The crisp air sent chills down my spine as gusts of wind shot across the railroad tracks. I stood there in New Jersey, all alone at a deserted subway train station. Everything was completely silent save for an occasional car driving past on the street above. There I waited, expecting my train to come at any moment, but apparently my expectations don't force trains to do as I would want. I waited, and waited, and waited, having way too much time to think. "I wonder what kinds of people might be around here at this time of night, especially in the dark." Being 16 years old didn't quite make me too threatening, especially since I was still wearing my Sunday clothes from church that morning. The two bags I carried, full of possessions from the weekend I had just spent at a friend's house, also weighed me down.

Before long I noticed a man slowly walk down the staircase to where I was. I couldn't see a thing about him except for the black clothes he wore, his slicked hair reflecting the weak light from the street above, and the red glow from the cigarette pressed between his lips. He didn't say a word, only walked to a beam supporting the concrete ceiling and slowly leaned against it. Starting to feel a little nervous, I thought to myself, "What's he doing here? Are there others around, too?" The train just wouldn't come! I sat there anxiously watching him out of the corner of my eye hoping he'd stay planted next to that pillar.

"Finally! There's the train!" I could hear it rumbling in the distance, growing louder as it approached. The man dressed in black remained motionless but asked with his deep voice, "You're taking this train to center-city Philadelphia, right?" I affirmed his question, surprised that he spoke, but even more surprised that he knew where I was going. I waited for some kind of response from him, but there was none. There he stood, as if he were a statue attached to the beam he leaned upon. It made no difference, though, because the train was there and I was out of that creepy place, heading to center-city Philadelphia where I would have a short walk through an underground mall to catch another train for home.

After taking a seat and resting my two heavy bags in front of my feet, I pulled out a map of the train stops to double-check where I needed to get off. However, as I looked the map over, I became confused. A couple of the stops sounded familiar. Which one did I want? The nervousness that had subsided since leaving the dark "dungeon" station began to come back. "Oh great! Now I have no idea which one of these stops I'm supposed to get off at!" Having no other choice, I randomly chose one and exited the train that quickly left me behind. I stood there for a second looking around. "This isn't the stop I remember being at earlier this weekend on my way to my friend's house." Panic started to grip me, but after saying a quick prayer and forcing myself to stay clam and rational, I climbed the staircase that I hoped would lead me to someplace familiar.

I reached the top and affirmed my fears – I was at the wrong station. Again I was

completely alone, no one around to even ask for directions. I walked back down the stairs and waited for the next train to come by. I didn't have long to wait. Not knowing whether this train was heading the same direction as my previous one or not, I decided to board since I had no idea what train I was looking for anyway.

Hoping to see something familiar, I kept a careful watch at the window but saw nothing but the dark concrete walls of the subway. However, after some time, I eventually thought I knew where I was and decided to get off the train.

Again I found myself at a station similar to the previous one. The fact that there was hardly any light and that it smelled of stale urine suggested that again I was at the wrong place. Knowing I was about as lost as I could be, I knew of nothing better to do than to sit down and cry. My emotions were completely shot. I had no idea where to go or what to do. The fact that I was constantly trying to fight off panic didn't help much, either. Again I was left alone in my tired and weak state beside the abandoned railroad tracks, nothing except for me and the brisk wind that chilled my body. (To be continued...)

In your Spiritual Journal:

When was there a time when you were scared and felt all alone? How did you handle it?

Read Matthew 28:20; Psalm 27:10; Hebrews 13:5; and Psalm 23

-- According to these passages, how does God relate to you? How is this different from any earthly friend you could ever have?

-- What kind of a response do these passages prompt in you? How do they shape the way you think of God? Is God someone you think you can trust? Why?

## DAY TWO – God Growing Tim (Part II)

Continued from yesterday....

There I sat next to those subway railroad tracks, completely lost and confused. I might as well have been dropped off in the middle of some desert somewhere. I would've had just as much direction then as I did in center-city Philadelphia that night. I was physically tired and emotionally drained. I had nothing left in me.

Looking around I saw the stairs leading up from the landing area I was standing on. It looked similar to stairs at the previous station I was at, but I still knew this was a different place.

I got up and walked up the stairs to see if I could find anyone to help me. Upon reaching

the top, I saw nothing more than a chain-link fence blocking access to the landing below for those who didn't have a ticket. There was a long corridor in front of me, so I went through the one-way exit and started following it. It's not like I really had any other options. It was a little difficult to see with such dim lighting, but it wasn't hard to tell that this place functioned as the sleeping quarters for drunks and homeless street people more than it did as a train stop. Stepping over sleeping people tightly wrapped in their blankets required some talent since the last thing I wanted to do was wake any of them up and be found all by myself with my luggage of valuables.

Finally I reached the end of the corridor. There was an iron ladder in front of me leading up through the ceiling to the dark street above. I climbed it part way just to stick my head outside and look around. "Nothing but a cold street." I turned my head to look in the other direction only to be spotted by a pair of headlights that suddenly turned on from a parked car across the street. I heard some yelling, the car engine start, and then saw it take off in my direction. THAT scared me! I didn't waste any time. With my heart pounding, I jumped off the ladder to the concrete floor below and moved as fast as I could back to the train stop without waking any of the homeless.

I was so scared I could hardly think! Here I was late at night in what I gathered to be a bad part of the city. There was no one around that I knew and no way to contact anyone either. Even if I could contact someone, what would I tell them? "I'm lost in Philly! Come find me."? Philadelphia is a big place! Besides, the closest people I knew were still an hour's drive away from the city.

I had no idea where I was or how to get to where I needed to be. I was completely lost and completely stranded. I was trapped! I couldn't get back down to the train landing below because it was completely cut off by the fence and to go outside was just not an option for me. Prayers were shooting from my heart most of this time anyway, but at this point I was truly crying out to Him. I was trapped and couldn't do a thing about it.

I sat down to catch my breath and attempted to settle the tears streaming down my face. Not knowing what else to do, I reached in my bag and pulled out my Bible. Randomly turning to a passage in Isaiah, the Lord drew my attention to some verses describing how He was strong and mighty and able to deliver the Israelites. It was if God was telling me, "Tim, I am the same God that saved the Israelites way back then. If I was there for them, I'm here for you too. Trust me."

I wanted to argue. "Yeah right, God! Look at where you've allowed me to come! Look at this mess I'm in! I'm supposed to trust you after something like this?" I really wanted to disagree with Him, but I knew it would be useless because at that time He was all I had, and that's exactly where God wanted me.

I had no one. I had nothing. I only had the clothes on my back and the luggage in my bags. And if anyone on the street wanted to take even that from me, I couldn't have done a thing to stop them. If anything was going to change for the better, it was going to have to be God's doing, and I knew that. So instead of arguing, I earnestly prayed,

“Lord, I’m scared, I’m tired, I’m cold, I’m a wreck here! Please be with me! Give me peace and clear my mind so I can think clearly. I need your help and I know it!” My silent desperate cry to God continued for some time. He had completely stripped me of everything and everyone I previously trusted and relied on and brought me to the place where I had absolutely nothing besides Him. There was nowhere else to turn, no where else to go. (To be continued...)

Many times in life we find ourselves in situations that seem very hard to trust God through. We may question Him and doubt His love for us or we may turn our backs on Him completely. Maybe you’re going through a hard time with something now. How are you handling it?

Read James 1:2-8, 12

Answer these questions in your Spiritual Journal:

- What kind of attitude does James say we should have when going through trials?
- How does he say this attitude will benefit you? What will you develop that will help you through other trials to come?
- If you don’t know what to do where/who should you turn to first to ask for advice?
- If you ask, what should you do and not do?
- Verse 12 is the summary verse of all this. What will come as you lean on the Lord through your hard times?
- If you’re going through a hard time right now, how can you apply these things to your situation? How can you trust God through it?

Our chat-board is open at <http://www.zjam.com/zboard> (password: “seeking”) I know each of you have gone through rough times in your lives, maybe some of you more than others. But the Lord never lets any child He loves go through life without giving them opportunities to grow in Him, and that’s exactly what these hard times are opportunities for – growth. If you have a story that might encourage others right now who are struggling with something, please share it on our chat-board. Tell us your story and how God worked through it in your life. I will continue my story tomorrow...

### DAY THREE – God Growing Tim (Part III)

Continued from yesterday...

I sat there in the dimly lighted damp corridor, the place that had become my prison cell for the time being. The fence before me separated me from the subway’s train tracks below and the homeless and drunks sleeping on my right separated from the dark street outside. Thankfully the Lord calmed my nerves, dried my tears, and set me in a functioning mental state once again as I prayed and read scripture. I gave my situation completely to the Lord. I decided to trust Him 100% with it, probably the first time in my

life I've ever done so. My fears were no where close to being settled, but yet there was still a peace that seemed to come over me during that time of committal.

Taking a deep breath, I put my Bible back in my bag and looked around at my surroundings once again. "Okay, God. You know where I am, I don't. Get me out of here or give me the strength to withstand it. What do you want me to do?" Then, for the first time, I noticed a brown iron chest leaning against the fence. It was about as big as I was but only standing as tall as my chest. I got up and walked over. Upon inspection I found it was an automatic ticket booth for the subway system! "Thank you, Lord!!" Much of its brown paint had chipped off and the glass was yellow from age, but it still looked functional.

Excitedly wiping dirt off the glass with my sleeve, I read the ticket price listing. However, not one of the stations listed looked familiar. I had no idea which one to get, but I was sure they would all lead to more civilization than I currently found myself in. Reaching into my wallet to purchase my freedom, I pulled out a couple \$5 dollar bills and one 10\$ bill. I checked the prices of the tickets figuring the one most expensive would get me the furthest away from where I was. Each ticket was under a buck. "Awesome!" I thought, "I can easily pay for any of these!"

Happy to have the option of leaving, I took a \$5 bill and inserted it into the machine. A second later it was spit back out at me. "Huh?" I took a different bill, a crisper one, and tried it instead. Again it went in and shot back out. It was then that I noticed a little sticker, "Accepts only \$1 bills." I wanted to scream! I had no one dollar bills, only \$5s and a \$10, and I sure wasn't going to wake up anyone around me to ask for change.

I wanted to yell at God for teasing me like that, for offering hope after I fully trusted Him only to be disappointed moments later and stuck in the same place I was before. Was God just making a mockery out of my pain? I didn't know what to think. I desperately wanted to trust Him, but what was He doing here? Fortunately, I still didn't have any other options but to trust Him because there was absolutely nothing I could do to fix my predicament, so that's what I did. I continued to trust Him anyway.

Returning to my bags that were patiently waiting by chain-link fence, I decided to inspect the gate closer. It didn't take long to realize that there was no way I was going to get through it without one of those tickets that were also cut off from me. Even if I could get through, how long would I have to wait until next train came to pick me up? Not a single train had passed since the one that dropped me off 45 minutes earlier, so maybe it was just a useless cause anyway.

Then an obvious idea hit me, "Duh Tim, throw your bags over the fence and climb over it." It was a tall fence, reaching almost up to the damp concrete ceiling, but definitely climbable. I still wouldn't have a ticket to show when I got off at another station, but at that time I didn't care anymore. What were they gonna do anyway? Put me back on the train and send me back here? Even if I had to pay a fine, at least I'd still be out of this place and that's all I cared about.

I picked up my bags and dropped them over the fence. Each landed with a loud CLANK against the concrete floor, but the Lord made sure my company continued to sleep. "Thank you, Lord!" A second later, my feet hit the floor on the other side as well. Picking up my luggage, I headed back down the stairs to the subway stop below. (To be continued...)

Has God ever seemed to let you down with something? Has there been a time in your life when you decided to blindly trust Him only to later feel like you regret doing so? If you have gone through something like this, briefly describe that event in your Spiritual Journal.

Read these verses:

- Psalm 5:11
- Hebrews 10:35-39
- Psalm 40:1-5
- Psalm 62:8
- Proverbs 28:26

What is your reaction to those verses? If you live your life according to the first four passages and beware of the last one (Proverbs 28:26), how will that impact you, your decisions, and the way you live? Think about it and then write your answer in your Spiritual Journal. Also share your answer with us on our chat-board <http://www.zjam.com/zboard> (password: "seeking") We would love to help hold you accountable there for anything you feel the Lord prompting you to change in this area.

#### DAY FOUR – God Growing Tim (Part IV)

Continued from yesterday...

I trotted down the stairs, thankful to be on the safer side of the fence. When I reached the last stair I was surprised to see an elderly couple sitting on a bench by the tracks. Their backs were to me, so I couldn't see their faces, but they had a presence about them that seemed to be gentle and caring. I stood there for a second, wondering what I should do. The man was tall and lean, especially for being close to maybe 75 years old. He was wearing a tan trench coat and a matching hat from the 50's that hid most of his white hair. His wife, sitting next to him, wore a nice white sweater and dark blue dress pants. Her white curls were also covered with a hat decorated with flowers. They looked friendly enough to me.

I approached them, careful not to come from behind. They noticed my presence and turned to smile. I quickly told them my predicament and asked if they could change a \$5 for me allowing me to purchase a ticket. I couldn't have blamed them if they said "No." I

mean, here it was late at night in center-city Philadelphia and a teenage boy was asking them to get out their wallets in a secluded subway tunnel. Not the best circumstance for them, but they did it anyway. I was ecstatic! I took their one-dollar bills and asked them to watch my bags. At that moment I heard a train approaching in the distance. Running as fast as I could, I darted back up the stairs, over the fence, and back to the automatic ticket machine. I could hear the train very close now. Not having time to think about which ticket to get, I randomly chose the brown one, purchased it, and flew back down to the elderly couple and my luggage arriving right when the train was came to a halt.

I followed them on to the train and sat right beside them. They were very helpful. The man had a map of Philadelphia and the railway system in his pocket. He showed me where I was and how to get to where I needed to be in order to catch a train for my home town. The train I intended to catch was long since gone, but he told me there were still others I could take that night instead.

By the time we were finished discussing my remaining travel plans, we had arrived at the original station I was supposed to be at in the first place. Their stop was further up the track, but they saw me off and waved out the window as they pulled away and disappeared down the dark tunnel. I turned around and felt good! Thanks to that man, I now knew where I was, where I was going, and how to get there. The subway station looked familiar. It was deserted, but everything as it was earlier that weekend on my way to my friend's house in New Jersey. I heaved a sigh of relief and started walking toward the stairs that would lead me up to the exit just below street level. Everything was going to be fine now. Or so I thought... God wasn't done with me yet.

(To be continued...)

Yesterday you answered some questions concerning your faith in God even when He's not working in your life, or at least not the way you want. It's hard to trust Him when everything continues to go wrong or even worse, isn't it? Hopefully today will be an encouragement to you.

I thought I had an escape when I found the automatic ticket machine. It seemed to be the perfect solution, but yet God cut off that option from me. At the time I had no idea why and became quite frustrated. However, now that I'm through it and can look back on it I can see that God didn't cut off my automatic ticket machine option just to tease me or to be cruel. Rather it was because He had something better for me – He wanted to provide in a much greater way.

Think about that elderly couple I met at the station. Where did they come from? They weren't there when the train dropped me off. No other train had come by since that time and there's no way they came in from the upstairs entrance because that's where I was the whole time. There's no way they could've showed up down there. So, where did they come from? The only answer I can come up with is that they were sent by God, angels taking on flesh in order to most effectively help me in my situation. I had no idea of this possibility at the time. In fact, it never crossed my mind to ask where they came

from, but just because I wasn't thinking doesn't mean that God had stopped too.

See, God took away my plan of escape by not allowing me to buy a ticket. My ticket to freedom was cut off from me. What did God think He was doing? But it was only because He had something better for me than just a ticket. He wanted to provide angels for me that would not only help provide that ticket but would also guide me with maps (who else randomly walks around carrying the exact maps I needed to see?), offer support and encouragement, and be friends for me when I had no one else. They were a glimmer of hope in the midst of the worst experience of my life. God obviously knew what He was doing. I'm glad he provided that route of escape rather than allowing me to leave the way I wanted to. His way was truly much better than mine.

Read John 11:1-44

This is a story about two sisters who did not at all understand God's plan for what had happened. From their perspective, Jesus allowed it to go from bad to worse, but they were yet to see what He had another plan in mind, a plan much more glorious than theirs. Read this passage and in your Spiritual Journal answer these questions:

- What happened that upset the two sisters
- Verse 1 says that Jesus loved this man, so why then did He let this happen?
- Looking back on it, which plan do you think the two sisters would agree to be the better of the two: the way they wanted Jesus to fix it at first or the way Jesus decided to handle it?
- What is there in your own life that you are struggling with now? What are you having difficulty handing over to the Lord? Identify it and then describe it.
- Knowing that God's solution is more wonderful than yours, how will you trust Him with it today?

#### DAY FIVE – God Growing Tim (Part V)

Continued from two days ago...

Knowing I was finally at the place I needed to be, the familiar train station I was at earlier that weekend, I felt confident I could get myself to the last stop before home. The Central Train Station that was about a half mile away. The chilled air hit me now that I was off the warm train, but I didn't care. I knew where I was and how to get to where I needed to be. I was certain I could get myself there without too much trouble. I prayed, "Thank you, Lord! I can take care of this now." That was definitely the wrong thing to say. God needed to teach me to give Him everything, not just the things I didn't think I could handle on my own. God is not a backup plan, someone to turn to only as a last resort. He makes and determines your plans so it's best if you let Him lead you through them, as I soon learned (again!) the hard way.



I took off up the stairs, excited to be on my way home and away from the city I now hated with a passion. I approached the chain-link gate, similar to the one I had jumped earlier. There was no one around, just me and the spiders waiting motionless by the intricate webs they had stitched in the fence. The lighting was again poor, but I still managed to find the brown ticket I had stowed in my bag. Eagerly inserting it into the slot that would open the gate, thoughts drifted into my mind. "There are probably all sorts of people out in the city at this time of night, especially in dark places like this. I looked around carefully, but couldn't really see anything too far down the three walkways I had to choose from on the other side of the fence. I could hear cars driving on the street not too far above my head and the wind rushing through the subway's tunnel below, but that was it. The automatic ticket master took my brown stub, but then spit it right back out at me. "Not again," I thought. I looked closer and saw that I needed the orange ticket for this stop, not the brown one.

I thought it was dumb that I still wasn't allowed to exit just because I had the wrong ticket. Do they like to keep people like me trapped until they can come in the morning and see what victims they caught during the night? I wasn't about to wait there until morning like a caged animal, so pocketing the ticket, I dropped my bags over the fence and climbed that one, too. They had my money for the ticket. That's all they cared about anyway, right?

I carefully made my way toward the Gallery. The Gallery is a mall under the city streets, streets that buzzed with activity and business during the day but at night were roamed by very unpleasant people, to put it mildly. My body was once again gripped with fear as I kept a sharp eye on the shadows and dark areas the dim light did not illuminate. I felt like someone was watching me, like someone was going to jump out at any moment and sacrifice my body for the possessions I carried. My Sunday clothes stood out in stark contrast to the dirt and filth of everything around me. It wasn't hard to tell that I was an innocent suburban white boy with no street smarts. I was prime picking for anyone who wanted me.

After what seemed like an eternity, I arrived at the Gallery's entrance. There was better lighting now that I was in an area where tourists visit during the day, so I felt more at ease. As I approached, I looked in at the Gallery through the door's windows and saw that most of the lights were out. Then it hit me like a ton of bricks: it was after hours! The Gallery was closed! I hadn't even thought of that before. How was I supposed to walk through it to get to my final station? I looked around for an alternate entrance but found nothing... nothing! I was still very set against the idea of camping out there overnight. It wasn't exactly the safest place in the world to be, so that just wasn't an option for me. The only other choice was to keep walking, but I didn't want that either because that led outside and would put me on the streets, definitely not a good thing.

This emotional roller coaster was about all I could handle! Tears started to drip down my cheeks as the feeling of helplessness once again came over me. I was cold, I was tired, hungry, and was completely terrified. I had no idea what to do now.

“Footsteps!” I immediately poised motionless in front of the locked Gallery doors I was agonizing over. Someone was coming. I held my breath and waited. Whoever it was, they were coming slowly, but coming just the same. My mind went wild with possible horror stories that could come from the meeting with this person. Would I be mugged? Raped? Kidnapped? Or even worse yet, murdered? Worst-case scenarios flashed through my mind, gripping me with more fear than I thought was possible for a person to possess.

After a couple minutes, the footstep’s owner finally came into view. I looked hard, expecting to see a muscular man in a black leather jacket and armed with semi-automatics. Instead, all I saw was an African-American man about my size dressed in a brown janitorial suit and armed with a broom and a trash bin. I breathed a sigh of relief as I watched him sweep up the garbage lying around. I approached him and asked for directions to the train station. He stopped, looked at me for a second, and then burst out laughing. This just wasn’t a normal laugh, as if something was funny. It was almost like an evil laugh, as if he was excited to hear that I didn’t know where to go. His laugh sent chills down my spine. I remember physically shaking because of it, unable to stop. This just encouraged him to laugh all the harder. Then suddenly, in a split-second, his face was serious and cold. His dark eyes stared right into me as he said, “F#%\$ you!”

I slowly backed away, wanting to flee and run but not doing so for fear that he would come after me. His eyes followed me the whole way. When I turned a corner and he was out of site, I turned and ran not really noticing where I was going. A minute later, though, I found myself standing out on the street curb. There weren’t many cars, but the ones that were out were driving rather recklessly. Besides some drunks stumbling around and couple homeless people sleeping, I saw no one else on the street. I guess I was the only one stupid enough to be out there. Then I looked up and saw that I was standing right under a street lamp. “Great!” I thought, “Now everyone around is informed about my presence.”

Once again I was at the place where I had to completely trust the Lord. I had no idea which direction to take or where to go. I was on the streets now, fair game for anyone who wanted to play. I prayed something like, “Lord, this ball is back in your court now. Forgive me for taking it into my own hands again. Please give me a clam spirit and mind to think at least half-rationally. Guide my steps and especially, please protect me!” Taking a deep breath, I randomly picked a direction and started walking.

(To be continued...)

After I prayed on the street that night, the Lord brought Proverbs 3:5-6 to my mind. When Solomon wrote this, he meant the Lord will guide our steps figuratively if we trust Him to do so. It’s meant to give the idea that the Lord will walk with us and direct His perfect plan in our lives if we trust Him with it. But for me that night, I was counting on God to direct my path quite literally. I trusted him 100% to guide my steps to where He wanted me to be in that city that night.

Read Proverbs 3:5-6 and Hebrews 7:25. If you know Proverbs 3:5-6 by memory already read it in a translation other than the one you have memorized to get a different angle of the verse.

We are to trust the Lord in everything and not depend on what we think is best. Only the Lord knows what is best for us. So, have faith through it. Then He will direct you through it and make your paths straight.

Think through your life. What part are you still clinging on to for yourself? Is there an area or an event in your life that you do not trust Him with completely? If you give Him a chance I know He will not let you down. In your Spiritual Journal, identify the part(s) of your life that are not completed dedicated to Him.

- What's holding you back from totally turning these things over to Him?
- What do you think could happen in your life if you do turn them over to Him, trust Him, and allow Him to direct your paths?
- What do you think could happen in your life if you do NOT turn them over to Him?
- Make a decision now. What are you going to do with these things you identified in your life? Are you going to trust Him or continue directing your own path?
- If you decide to give it to Him, how will you do this? What steps will you take to do so? If you decide to trust in yourself rather than God, be careful because the Lord will do whatever it takes in your life until you learn to trust Him, and it won't be pretty. (See Hebrews 12:4-13) He did it with me; He'll do it with you.

Share your decisions with us at <http://www.zjam.com/zboard> (password: "seeking")

## DAY SIX – God Growing Tim (Part VI)

Continued from yesterday...

Not wanting to give the appearance that I was lost, helpless, and had now idea where to go, I put on a determined face, picked a direction and started walking. I tried my best to look as if I knew exactly where I was going, where I was going, and that I wasn't stranded, but inside I was torn apart. I felt like a scrawny dog on the run for his life, not knowing where I was going but still knowing I couldn't stay where I was.

A couple things happened during that night's walk through Philadelphia that I will not mention here. To make a long story short, though, God took me on a tour of the city that evening. He took me through a couple events and showed me some not-too-pleasant sights. However, as I continued my tour in random directions, I realized the tour really wasn't that random. God had His hand on it the whole time and was directing me every step of the way. I am absolutely positive of this because when I looked up to see where I was, I found myself standing no more than 10 feet in front of the entrance to the train station that would take me home! I couldn't believe my eyes!

I ran inside and down the stairs, hoping to escape anyone who might have been following me. The sense of relief that hit was just incredible! I arrived physically unharmed and with my luggage still intact, but emotionally I was completely torn apart. On the inside I was a mess.

I tried to maintain a half-normal countenance as I reviewed the schedule to see when a train for home would depart and on which track it would leave from. Having about a half-hour to wait, I found a pay phone and called home. When I heard my mother's voice answer the phone, I could not contain myself any longer. I burst out sobbing. Not wanting to attract attention, I quickly told her I'd be home on a later train, to pick me up then, and that I would explain everything when I got home.

From that point on, everything went smoothly. Still feeling very much afraid, the Lord provided two police officers who positioned themselves across from where I was waiting for my train home. Their presence helped me relax a little. My mind was still replaying the night's event, though, so to distract me I pulled out my Bible and read from Psalms. I continued reading all the way home. What comfort it brought!

I hated going through all of this! At times I questioned God, wondering if he knew what He was doing, but now that I'm through it and can look back I wouldn't trade that experience for anything in the world because of what He taught me through it. I now have a faith and a trust in God that can never be shaken. He proved Himself to be faithful that night by protecting my life and guiding my steps, so now I have no problem trusting Him with my future and anything else in life.

For three nights afterwards, my dreams vividly replayed that late-night experience in Philadelphia. It was as if God was saying, "Tim, you went through this now. Don't you forget it!" He ingrained that time into my mind so I will never lose the lessons He taught me.

God teaches some people in one night, like He did with me. Others He decides to teach over a longer period of time. Either way, we all have growing up to do and often it can be very painful.

Maybe you're familiar with the story of Job. Job's life was perfect. He was very wealthy, had many successful children, everyone loved him, and he had an awesome relationship with God. But then the Lord allowed destruction to come to his house. In almost no time he had lost everything except for his wife and a couple friends. Not even his health was intact anymore! His life went from being perfect to being horrendous. Everything went bad for him. He questioned the Lord about what was going on, but when it was all over He could look back and see that God knew exactly what He was doing.

For your Spiritual Journal:

Read Job's final response to the Lord in Job 42:1-6.

-- Describe the attitude Job seems to have here. What's it like?

- What's your attitude toward God when he brings "bad things" into your life to stretch you, grow you, and provide you with an opportunity to lean on Him?
- Identify a time in your past that was really tough on you. Maybe it was something spiritual, emotional, physical, or anything else. Think of a time that was very trying for you. How did you react to it? Did you trust God with it or did you try to control part of it yourself?
- Looking back over that time now, what do you think God wanted to teach you through it? Did you learn your lesson or will He have to bring something else into your life again to get you to understand that He's worthy of ALL of you?

Our chat-board is open at <http://www.zjam.com/zboard> (password: "seeking") for you to share with us what the Lord is laying on your heart. Tomorrow we'll summarize and conclude our look at our blind faith in God through trials.

### DAY SEVEN – Conclusions

I didn't tell this story about my night in Philadelphia to impress you in some way or place any kind of focus on me. Rather, I pray it encourages you through any trials and struggles you are currently going through. If you're not going through something right now, there will come a time when you'll go through a test that requires blind faith in the Lord. How you will respond to it determines what you will learn and how the Lord will act in your life. It may be something big, a great catastrophe in your life when the Lord leaves you with nothing to lean on besides Him. Or, it may be something small and seemingly insignificant. If you can learn your lessons during the small times, the difficult times will be much easier to handle with the Lord.

Trials are a part of life. When you're an infant, losing a pacifier is big deal – definitely something to scream and cry about. A couple years later things change. Now it's no longer the pacifier but your nap-time that's a hardship in life. Heaven forbid a couple extra hours of sleep. I would love to sometimes have a hardship like that now! Ten years later you're in middle school and a white-capped pimple the size of Mt. Everest erupts right between your eyebrows. You weren't really listening too well in church last Sunday but you remember the pastor saying something about the Mark of the Beast. You were not quite sure what he was talking, but now you know because there it is right on your face! You pray and pray, asking God to remove this thorn in your flesh, but a half-hour later it's still there and so is the school bus waiting to pick you up. No matter what you do or how hard you try, you will never escape tough situations. Be thankful for it, though, because it's during times like that when you can really grow in the Lord.

It's kind of like the immunizations you receive from your doctor. Immunization shots can be painful at first but will save you from even more pain later on. When the doctor gives you an immunization, like a flu shot for example, he injects a small dose of the virus that's been considerably weakened. The virus enters your body, but because it's in a weaker form your body can fight it off and build up a resistance to that kind of

infection. That way when the real thing comes along and your body is attacked with a big dose of the flu, your body easily fights it off because it's already prepared and has built up the resistance it needs.

God uses little doses of tough situations in our lives to teach us endurance and to have faith in Him. Then, when a big thing comes along, we're strong and can endure that, too. And that's how the Lord grows us and builds us to be stronger in Him. He allows things to come as infant Christians to build our endurance in Him. Then as toddlers we can handle more difficult situations as we mature in our faith. When we're in spiritual middle school we will be able to trust the Lord with even more because of the hard times we went through before. Our goal is Spiritual maturity through these hard times.

Balloons can be a good example too. Before blowing one up it's easier if you stretch it a little first – stretch it and then let it relax. Next time you're able to stretch it a little further before allowing it to return to normal. The third time you stretch it, it is even more pliable. When it's time to blow it up, it's already been stretched and will allow you to fill it with air much easier than if you had not first stretched it.

God knows what He's doing with our life. We need to have blind faith (not being able to see ahead at what He's doing) and trust Him regardless. We need to endure these little doses of trials so that when the big ones come, we'll be completely ready for them and ready to trust Him again since He's already proven Himself. We need to be pliable and allow Him to stretch us a little as He sees fit.

Maybe you're going through something tough in your life right now. Maybe you have a tough situation at home. Maybe you're in a new school this year and are having a hard time making friends. Maybe your relationships with family members or other people are stretching you a little. Or, maybe someone close to you just recently passed away. The possibilities are endless – only you and the Lord know what you're truly struggling with right now.

It's all about attitude and how you CHOOSE to handle the situations the Lord brings before you. What should a Christian's attitude be toward the things that God brings our way? Read these verses to help shape your thoughts about it.

- 1 Peter 5:9-11
- 1 Peter 4:12-13
- Romans 5:3-5
- Romans 8:18

In your Spiritual Journal, identify what it is you might be struggling with right now.

- Are you trusting God with it? Is your faith in Him? Explain your response to your situation.
- According to these verses, what would an appropriate Biblical response look like?
- Why are we to respond in such a manner?
- How close to your answer is your attitude toward what's going on in your life right

now?

-- What do you need to do to change it to be in-line with the outlook God says you should have?