

LOST IN THE MIDDLE CHAPTER 8–

“MAY I SPEAK TO THE MANAGER, PLEASE?”

To be used 10/30/05. Mostly summary of Tripp’s material.

The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time; Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next. Amen. --Reinhold Niebuhr

Proverbs 3

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own
understanding;

6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

OVERVIEW

Intro (Tripp Pages 209-212)

Section #1–Looking for Who’s in Charge (Tripp Pages 212-215)

Section #2–God & Surprises (Tripp Pages 215-221)

Section #3–It’s All about Control (Tripp Pages 221-223)

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Section #5–Turning the Corner (Tripp Pages 231-235)

INTRO (Tripp Pages 209-212)

Opening story about poor service in a restaurant.

Don’t like not being in charge, in control. Don’t like waiting or being disappointed.

Don’t like feeling like just another name in line, another hungry face in the crowd.

Don’t like settling for second best.

Get angry if we feel we’re being toyed with.

Things don’t turn out as we planned.

Feel like our life is more OUT of control than IN control.

Mid-life evaporation of the delusion that our life will unfold as we planned.

Loss of control is powerful and difficult.

Dealing with inescapable and life altering things that we have no control over.

SECTION #1—LOOKING FOR WHO'S IN CHARGE (Tripp Pages 212-215)

WLC 18 What are the works of providence? A. God's works of providence are His most holy,(1) wise,(2) and powerful preserving(3) and governing(4) all His creatures; ordering them, and all their actions,(5) to His own glory.(6)

(1)Ps. 145:17; (2)Ps. 104:24; Isa. 28:29; (3)Heb. 1:3; (4)Ps. 103:19; (5)Matt. 10:29,31; Gen. 45:7; (6)Rom. 11:36; Isa. 63:14

Think about how little of our life we really control.

Where/when we are born, family we are born into, birth order, intelligence, native abilities, heredity, environment.

World events that take place around us (Great Depression, Baby Boom, WW1 & WW2, Viet Nam, September 11, Watergate, shootings of JFK, MLK, RFK)

State of science, technology, and knowledge. Political climate.

Under God, MANY things impact our life that we have no control over.

Under God, MANY happenings, people, conversations, problems, and world events have brought us to where we are right now.

We try to guide our children's lives, but can't plan their lives for them.

Dangerous delusion of our own sovereignty, making an idol of control.

Not resting in the Lord's sovereignty and control.

Gary Smalley—Every day he commits his F-R-M-P-T-H to the Lord.

Future, Reputation, Money, Possessions, Time, Health

Psalm 131 (NIV)

1 A song of ascents. Of David. My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.

2 But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

3 O Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and forevermore.

Joy and peace come from recognizing and submitting to God's control.

We are not in charge and never have been. The Lord is and always has been.

At mid-life and in other times of crisis, God's plans and ours collide.

SECTION #2—GOD & SURPRISES (Tripp Pages 215-221)

Biblical history is full of "surprises": Cain & Abel, Noah/Ark, Abraham & children, Captivity in Egypt, Moses & Exodus, David & kingdom, Exile & return from exile, Jesus' waiting 30 years to begin public ministry.

Not what we anticipated/planned/expected.

We focus on outcomes, want things to turn out right.
 God cares about the end, but also the PROCESS along the way.

Romans 8

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,
 who have been called according to his purpose.

29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness
 of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified;
 those he justified, he also glorified.

Verse 29 speak about God conforming us, transforming us to be like Jesus.
 God's goal is holiness and that's the only thing we can take to heaven with us.
 GOD'S GOAL IS NOT OUR FUN AND COMFORT.

WAITING on God is a key concept in Bible.

We think waiting is a waste of time because we want the thing we are waiting for.
 God is active in the process too, changes us as we wait.

Not only gaining patience, but endurance and perseverance.

Romans 4:20,21--[Abraham] did not waver at the promise of God through
 unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully
 convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.

God uses TRIALS to mature us. Romans 5--

3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation
 produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

James 1:2-4--Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the
 testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect
 work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Trials don't get in the way, but are our appointed way for serving Christ.

Don't aim just to get through trials, but focus on good things God is doing in us in
 the middle of trials.

Hallowing His name, advancing His kingdom, getting His will done on earth.

We want what's good for US as our deepest concern.

Happy friendships, good investments and health, stable families, secure futures.

God doesn't enter our puny kingdom to make us successful, grant our wishes.

He takes us out of our personal kingdom (agenda) and brings us into His history-
 spanning eternal kingdom (agenda).

We were not created with our goals and needs to be our deepest concerns...
 But to know, serve, love, and worship Christ.
 We were created to seek His kingdom to flourish and His glory displayed.
 Not our own personal comfort and happiness.

QUOTE--Once when I was in the Himalayas, I was sitting upon the bank of a river. I drew out of the water a beautiful, round stone and smashed it. The inside was dry. The stone had been lying a long time in the water, but the water had not penetrated the stone.

It is just like that with the "Christian" people of the West. They have for centuries been surrounded by Christianity, entirely steeped in its blessings, but the Master's truth has not penetrated them. Christianity is not at fault; the reason lies rather in the hardness of their hearts. Materialism and intellectualism have made their hearts hard. So I am not surprised that many people in the West do not understand what Christianity really is. (Sadhu Sundar Singh, excerpted from Wisdom of the Sadhu, the Bruderhof Communities website)

God will do things that rob us of comfort to be our Comforter.
 Interrupt our plans to bring us into His plans.
 Bring us pain and suffering to bring us His joy and peace.
 To change us and our world.
 Take away temporary happiness to give us lasting delights in His kingdom of righteousness. (Romans 14:17)
 We know this but continue to be surprised by the turns God ordains for our lives.

Examples: 400-year captivity in Egypt, Promised Land filled with enemies, Jerusalem destroyed, Messiah comes from blue collar Nazareth, dies on the cross like a criminal, uneducated followers spread the gospel around the world.

Mid-life is a struggle because what we planned has not come to pass.
 Beneath the struggles of aging, regret, and disappointment are haunting questions of God's sovereign wisdom, goodness, love, and power.
 Dissatisfaction with God's rule, wishing we were in charge.
 As pseudo-sovereigns, we hate waiting, disappointment, obstacles, and failure.
 C.S. Lewis says that Christian faith makes our experience of pain more painful.
 Not an accident, ordained by our God who claims to be good.
 God's order looks like disorder. His wisdom looks like foolishness.
 His love seems to be cruel. As sinners, we want our own way.
 Hard to rest in the rulership of King Jesus when we are so preoccupied with the success of our own little empires.

Original Trinity Hymnal, #574

Have thine own way, Lord! (Repeat) / Thou art the Potter; I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after thy will/ While I am waiting, yielded and still.

Have thine own way, Lord! (Repeat)/ Search me and try me, Master, today!
Whiter than snow, Lord, wash me just now,/ As in thy presence humbly I bow.

Have thine own way, Lord! (Repeat)/ Wounded and weary, help me, I pray!
Power—all power—surely is thine!/ Touch me and heal me, Saviour divine!

Have thine own way, Lord! (Repeat)/ Hold o'er my being absolute sway!
Fill with thy Spirit till all shall see/ Christ only, always, living in me!

Mid-life surprises us with the reality of Christ's Kingship.
And how different His will and way are from ours.
We have lived for our needs, our wants, our dreams.
We thought that if God really loved us He would give us OUR WAY.
Loving parents don't give child all their wants. That's indulgence, not love.

Think if we obey, God will send good things our way.
Children turning out way we want, harvesting seeds of our investments, blessing
with good health.
Deep beneath every mid-life struggle is a collision of kingdoms.
When OUR WILL collides with GOD'S WILL, guess who loses?

What do we really want out of life?
What joys captivate our eyes and control our heart?
How much of our dreams have been personal, earthbound, physical?
Have we really wanted God to be our wise and loving Father who brings into our
life what He considers best...
Or have we wanted Him to our divine waiter/genie who delivers our dreams?

Case Study: Todd = Planner, controlling, organized in all areas of life.
Had trouble when people around him messed up.
Impatience degenerated quickly into anger. Severe with wife and children.
More concerned with order and schedule at home than building relationships of
appreciation, honesty, and love.
Wife left him, dissatisfied with his selfishness, demands, criticism, and anger.
Todd gets angry at God, feels he doesn't deserve this. War over sovereignty.
Forced leave of absence from work.
So busy try to be "god" that he's not devoted to serving God.

SECTION #3—IT'S ALL ABOUT CONTROL (Tripp Pages 221-223)

Bible story is about God's sovereignty over all of life—creation, providence, redemption.

The Lord is the central character of history (His-story)

He is good, powerful, wise, loving, and sovereign.

The Designer, Creator, Controller of all that is.

Best place to live is UNDER God. GETTING TWO CIRCLES RIGHT!

Eccles 5:2--For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few.

1 Peter 5:6,7--Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Adam and Eve rejected submission to God, believing the serpent's lie that they could be like God.

Left the best, safest place in the universe for the most dangerous place = at war with God.

Trusting in self is the most dangerous thing. Jeremiah 17--

5 Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man And makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the LORD.

6 For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, And shall not see when good comes, But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, In a salt land which is not inhabited.

7 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, And whose hope is the LORD.

8 For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, Which spreads out its roots by the river, And will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, And will not be anxious in the year of drought, Nor will cease from yielding fruit.

9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.

Bible shows us 2 competing lifestyles (Psalm 1 and 2).

Resting in and serving God's sovereign rule...

OR trying some way to establish our own rule.

Disobedience against God can be active (obvious, arrogant)...

OR passive (subtle independence that colors action, reaction, hope, or dream).

Adam and Eve called to trust and obey. Instead they dis-trusted and dis-obeyed.

Rest of the Bible and human history repeats this drama.

Struggle is to trust in the Lord, rest in His rule, and faithfully do His revealed will. Every act of disobedience, whether subtle and secret or public and arrogant, is a direct challenge to the sovereign rule of God.

Every time I step outside the boundaries of trust and obey, I question God's power, wisdom, and rule.

Believing God (what He says) is harder than believing in God (who He is).

2 Cor 5:15—[Jesus] died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

Ethical impact of cross. Definitive sanctification.

Most powerful and pervasive of all idols is the idol of self.

S-I-N has I at the center. Sin = selfishness.

Righteousness (following Christ) = self-denial.

At mid-life we assess how life has played out so far and what future is left for us.

Strong temptation to question God's rule.

Tempting to think that our plan for our life was better than God has ordained.

Hard to look at disappointing impact on sin on our family.

Decay of long-held dreams, physical aging, etc.

And to rest in the Lord who carefully ordained every detail.

We feel sense of loss, inescapable grief, crushing disappointment.

Hard to say—God is loving, kind, and good. All His ways are right and true.

"He has done all things well." (Mark 7:37)

Hymn #4

Then come before His presence now/ And banish fear and sadness;

To your Redeemer pay your vow/ And sing with joy and gladness:

Though great distress my soul befell,/ The Lord, my God, did all things well,

To God all praise and glory!

We KNOW it's true, but it doesn't always FEEL true.

Like telling kids we have their best interests in mind.

It's easier to accept God's sovereignty in global, eternal issues...

Than to accept it in the detail of our life. It's a spiritual war.

Dissatisfaction, disorientation, discouragement, dread, disappointment,
disinterest, distance, and distraction...

Are all reactions that flow out of our deep struggle with accepting what God has allowed to come into our lives.

God is in charge and we are not. Working His kingdom, not endorsing ours.

People around us are not under our rule, don't always do what we wish they

would do.

World does not belong to us, people (even loved ones) don't belong to us.
Don't even own ourselves.

1 Cor 6:19,20--You are not your own....For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Psalms 100:3--Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

SECTION #4--CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STRUGGLE (Tripp Pages 223-231)

Wrong ways to deal with God's sovereignty.

1. Wrong to be cynical about life.

God's sovereignty ought to make us biblically optimistic.

The Judge of all the earth shall do right. (Gen 18:25)

We are comforted that the Lord has a plan even if WE don't understand it.

Optimism = not that it will go MY way, but that it will go God's way.

He makes our steps fit into His plan. (Proverbs 16:1,3,9; 19:21)

2. Wrong to withhold our worship and service when we don't get our way.

Like a spoiled child pouting when he doesn't get his way.

David worships the Lord after death of his son. (2 Samuel 12)

Disappointment with God often causes lack of zeal for praise and ministry.

Hard to run enthusiastically to One we think has failed us, One we question.

3. Wrong to be angry with people around us.

This is often concealed anger at God for allowing painful circumstances.

For allowing obstacles, because life isn't working out the way we want.

Angry at the Lord who controls the plan.

4. Wrong to crave power and control.

When we feel out of control, often grab tighter on trying to control our life.

Struggle with God's sovereignty results in quest for our sovereignty.

5. Wrong to allow theological doubts.

We should use sound theology to interpret our experience...

Not let painful experience form our theology.

6. Wrong to be impatient with circumstances or people.

Short fuse, quickly irritated, angry reaction in small things.

Constant complaining, griping, never happy, always angry.

When size of a person's emotion is bigger than the size of the circumstance,

emotion is coming from somewhere else.

ILL–Dick Tilton, pastoral visit, complaint about preaching, marriage problems.

People angered about little things are already angered about life and God.

Doesn't take much to make them explode.

Anger with life is ultimately anger with the Lord who rules life.

7. Wrong to let go of godly habits when discouraged.

Disappointment with God breeds slacking off on devotional life, church attendance, time with godly friends, tithing, good reading, self control.

Really struggling with God's plan for your life.

Dissatisfied "customers" are not loyal.

8. Wrong to question God's love.

Leads to doubting Christian beliefs, worldview.

Inability to reconcile apparent contradictions between God's promises and our experiences.

Between God's revealed character in Scripture and His treatment of us.

LESSON–Lord always gets to define the terms—good, loving, kind. (Rom 8:28)

9. Wrong to question God's wisdom.

See commands on page 228 top. Bible is our Owner's Manual.

Failure to obey usually stems from lack of trust in the Lord as Source of wisdom.

10. Wrong to weaken our witness because of disappointment with God.

Normally share with others what we are excited about, happy with.

Questioning God's wisdom, faithfulness and love will hinder our evangelizing.

Not motivated to share with others the comfort and glory of resting in the Lord's care.

Dissatisfied "customers" are not good advertisements.

11. Wrong to have a growing attraction to the world.

Fortune, Fame, Power, Pleasure

The world system is committed to at least four major objectives, which I can summarize in four words: fortune, fame, power, pleasure. First and foremost: Fortune, money. The world system is driven by money; it feeds on materialism. Second: Fame. That is another word for popularity. Fame is the longing to be known, to be somebody in someone else's eyes. Third: Power. This is having influence, maintaining control over individuals or groups or companies or whatever. It is the desire to manipulate and maneuver others to do something for one's own benefit. Fourth: Pleasure. At its basic level, pleasure has to do with fulfilling one's sensual desires. It's the same mindset that's behind the slogan: "If

it feels good, do it.” (Swindoll, Living Above the Level of Mediocrity, p. 219)

World as God created it is good. Worldliness is bad. 1 John 2--

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world.

17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

We tend to exchange worship and service of the Creator...

With functional worship and service of the creation.

Battle for our hearts takes place in every circumstance, relationship, and location of daily life.

What will attract our attention? Command our affection? Control our behavior?

Will we be shaped by knowing, loving, and serving God?

Or by pursuing the glories of the surrounding world?

Dissatisfaction with God promotes looking elsewhere. O.T. Israel's big problem.

Tempted to find life, peace, happiness, security, pleasure, identity, etc. in world around us.

Eating too much, spending too much, lusting, indulging, too much leisure.

Subtle migration away from God-centered life into functional worldliness.

Hanging on external habits of the faith while love of the world has replaced love of God as the life-governing factor.

EXTRA

Six Mistakes of Man per Cicero (106-43 B.C.)

1. The delusion that individual advancement is made by crushing others
2. The tendency to worry about things that cannot be changed or corrected
3. Insisting that a thing is impossible because we cannot accomplish it
4. Refusing to set aside trivial preferences
5. Neglecting development and refinement of the mind and not acquiring the habit of reading and studying
6. Attempting to compel other persons to believe and live as we do.