

"LET'S GROW UP, NOT JUST OLD"

(Acts 24:1-27)

(Chuck Swindoll)

Maturity is one of those qualities we all desire. It's not simply a matter of growing old in the Lord but growing up in Him. We have a wonderful example in the life of the apostle Paul, especially as we see him under the stress of one trial after another in our study of the book of Acts. As the Lord continues His transformation process, applying divine discipline as needed, I feel reassured by three truths.

First, *the disciplines God applies assure us of His love* (see Heb. 12:5-11). An athlete knows that when a coach stops riding his or her case, it's not a good sign. That means the coach considers other players more promising and, therefore, a better investment of time. We have God's assurance that He will never give up on us; He will always invest Himself in our continued growth and maturity. Regrettably, not many opportunities for growth are easy, brief, or pleasant. Nevertheless, they offer tangible evidence that the Holy Spirit remains committed and involved.

Second, *the reproofs they bring carry God's message*. At the conclusion of a crucible experience, something amazing happens. A part of our spirit has been transformed. A place deep within us that once responded to temptation now resonates in perfect tune with a truth from Scripture. A biblical truth we once accepted intellectually, but never completely assimilated, now enlightens every aspect of our lives. We see the world more clearly. We experience relationships more fully. We make decisions more wisely. We work, love, serve, create, learn, and discern more effectively. With each reproof, we incrementally think and behave more like Christ.

Third, *the results of both disciplines and reproofs make us invaluable for His use*. The Lord doesn't lift believers out of the world when they first begin to trust Him. He has us here for a reason. When Jesus prayed on our behalf, He said, "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth" (John 17:18-19). Just before He departed physically, He said to His followers, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). He encourages us and equips us through disciplines from the outside and by His Spirit on the inside so that we might fulfill our purposes more effectively.

God has a plan for you. He made you with a specific purpose in mind, not because He needs you—He can achieve all things on His own—but to let you join Him in accomplishing something wonderful and then share the joy of victory with Him. His disciplines help prepare you to fulfill your unique role in His plan to redeem the world from evil.

