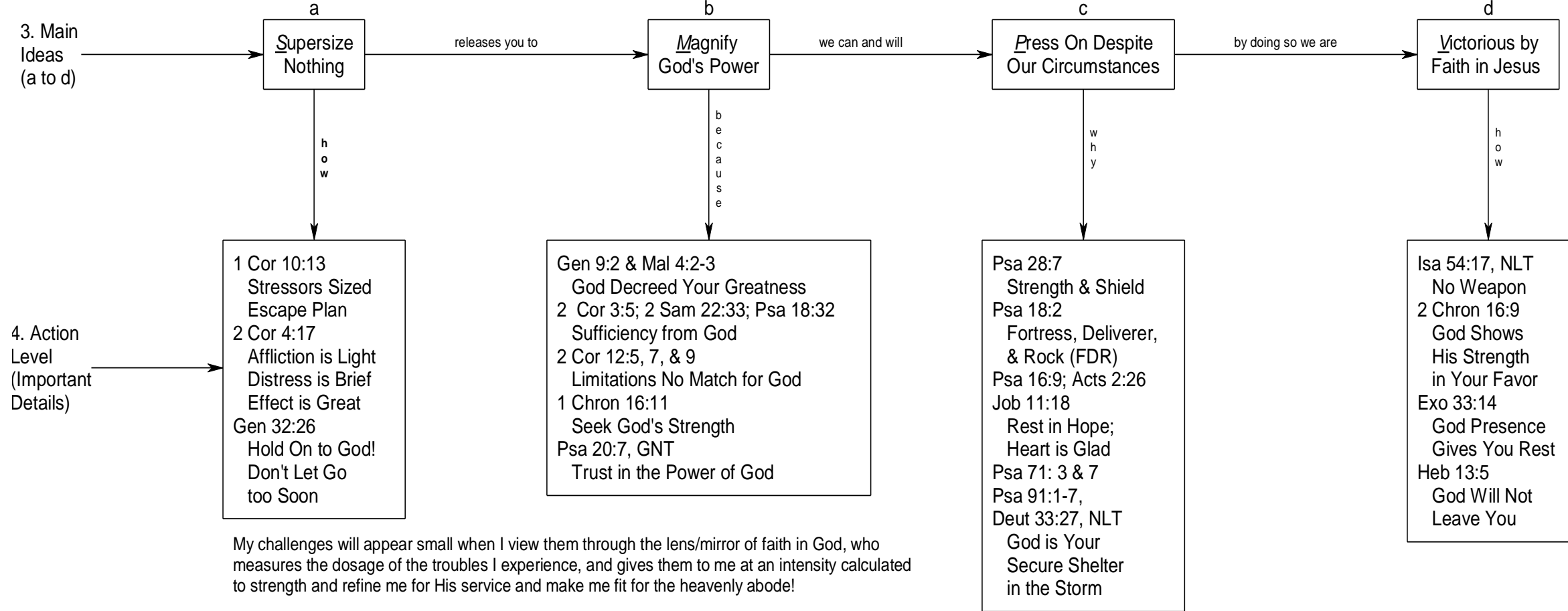


Escaping the Incarceration that Arises from Hopelessness and Despair

1. Side view mirrors on automobiles come with this safety warning, "Objects in this mirror are closer than they appear." Translated, the physical distance between the object, viewed in the mirror, and the car is shorter than what it appears. In other words, the object is closer to you than you think. This happens because the side mirror on automobiles is convex, (rounded outward), that is, bulges toward you. Because the image appears to form where the light rays, from different angles intersect, an object that is closer to you appears further away. From this literal phenomenon, we see that things are not always what they seem to be on presentation. If we limit our discussion to objects seen through automobile side mirrors, most, if not all drivers make the adjustment for distance. But in this discussion, side mirror is a literary device to help study participants grasp a key idea. The specific literary device is a metaphor--a word or phrase that compares two distinct, very different objects, and draws a similarity between them. Thus, side mirrors is a metaphor for life's experiences. Side mirrors display objects further than they really are, and life's experiences sometimes show situations differently from what they are on initial presentation. Hence, situations don't always unfold or mature in the way we anticipate they would based on their initial or superficial presentation. For example, people may put on a great showing during the honeymoon phase of relationships, only to flip the script and show their real selves as soon as the honey leaves the moon. Return on an investment, during the first three-years, may exceed the 10-year average only to plummet precipitously during the fourth year. Things happen in life! We all know that! The occasional shock from infrequent disappointments is tolerable, but when disappointments appear to come from multiple sources and occur at a frequency that we perceive as systematic, the average person has questions, sometimes serious, unsettling questions. If no comforting answers are forthcoming, or if the answers reflect injustices and unfairness, for some people, that experience can become a burden, if it is not appropriately shifted to the One who wants us to cast all our cares upon Him (1 Pet 5:7). However, the act of shifting, (i.e., casting), one's mental burdens onto Christ may be a challenge for some people; causing hopelessness and despair, and even prompt questions such as, How can I thrive in a world where uncertainty is the norm and righteousness is the exception rather than the rule? The purpose of this study is to illustrate how to shift the focus from the temporal, that is, the here and now experiences perceived to be more unpleasant than they really are, to our eternal, unimaginable, inheritance that Christ has reserved for all who are faithful to Him.

2. Your memory aid for this study is SMPV: supersize nothing; magnify God's power; press on despite circumstances, and victorious by faith in Jesus. To focus and delimit the study, the guiding question ask, "How can a person shift his/her focus from unpleasant, temporal circumstances to pleasant, eternal circumstances? The chart below offers one answer. Follow along as we navigate from 3 to 4. At level three, you have the study in a nutshell. At level four, we explore the details encapsulated at level three.

Figure 1: Illustration of How to Shift the Focus from the Temporal to the Eternal & Escape the Incarceration of Hopelessness and Despair



Definitions (What do these words mean?):

Trust is belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of (Num 11:23; Isa 59:1, & Rom 4:18, GNT)

Sufficiency is an adequate amount of something (Neh 9:21, Luke 22:35, & 1 Thes 4:12)

Supersize is artificial enlargement, the act of thinking of things as bigger than they really are, of giving too much attributions such as strength and power to transitory experiences.

Magnify is to recognize the greatness of and to think of as existing without boundaries or limitations