

Hedged About On Every Side

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God is continually and constantly involved in our lives. Yet, He is not dragging us to participate in His way; we always have a choice to choose God's way or to continue in Satan's way. God calls or draws us to Him by Jesus Christ (John 6:44), and He leads us in growing in grace and knowledge (II Peter 3:18). All along the way, Satan is whispering in our ears, as it were, trying to tempt and deceive us to stray from God's way and eventually reject it.

In most cases, God does not drag us against our will, and Satan cannot. Though God forced Jonah to preach to the Ninevites and stunned Paul on the road to Damascus, they still had choices to make along the way. In a similar way, Judas Iscariot, as the "son of perdition" (John 17:12), betrayed his Master and fulfilled prophecy when "Satan entered him" (John 13:27; Psalm 41:9). From opposite sides, God and Satan attempt to direct us to go their ways, and we choose our path.

Notice, in the case of Job, how God works from Satan's perspective:

Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"
So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land." (Job 1:8-10)

What does it mean that God "made a hedge" around Job? A hedge is a fence, boundary, or barrier to provide enclosure and protection. In other words, God insulated Job from the things Satan would have liked to do to him. God does the same for us. Under the safety of our most powerful and loving Father, nothing can compromise our protection. God provides this hedge as much as He determines we need under any given situation.

As it was with Job, being hedged about happens at least partly by the application of the knowledge of God's truth in our lives. When we know the truth, we are free to make proper decisions (John 8:32), and these decisions will keep us from the destructive consequences of sin. In His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asks the Father to keep His disciples through His name (which describes the attributes of God's character, which we learn through His Word), as well as to sanctify us by His truth (John 17:11, 17). Knowing God and His truth guards us against error and its results.

Trials

Satan knew he was powerless against Job so long as God's hedge about him remained. The same thing happens with us when we are close to God and living righteously, shunning evil (see Job 1:1). If we are willing to look, we will realize that God has indeed hedged us about in many ways in our own lives.

God promises that He will never try us beyond our ability to endure, and that He will always give us a way of escape (I Corinthians 10:13). Knowing this, we know that God would not allow Satan to do any more to us than God knows we would be able to endure.

Yet, God did not know absolutely what Job would do when the pressure came—although He undoubtedly had a very good idea—just as He did not know for sure what Abraham would do when told to sacrifice Isaac until the knife was falling (Genesis 22:12). He knew Job *could* successfully endure the trial if he chose to exercise the faith toward God he had developed. He knew Job had the strength of faith and character that he needed to succeed.

God allowed Satan to bring trials upon Job to test the man's faith and true character. Once Job learned what God intended the trial to teach him, he would come out the other end stronger in faith and knowledge than he was before it.

Because God is sovereign, He can intervene in our lives at any time. In His omnipotence, He can do all things. However, God has reasons for the things He does and does not do—as well as for the degree He hedges us about from additional trials from Satan.

God brings us to a point in our lives where He tests us to see what we will do. Sometimes God is waiting for us to do something, and sometimes He wants to see what our attitude will be while we wait. Our responsibility is to maintain a proper attitude and perspective at all times, not expecting God to do the things for us that we can do for ourselves, but waiting patiently and faithfully while God chooses the right moment to intervene.

One thing we seldom consider is how many times Abraham failed when God tested his faith before he succeeded. The Bible records a few accounts of his failures (e.g., Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18), but how many went undocumented? As Abraham's spiritual progeny, we are similar. God has given us multiple opportunities to succeed or fail. He wants to know what choices we will make and what it will take for us to make the correct ones.

We often fail. When we do, God continues to work with us to teach and strengthen us. Each time He feels we have grown, He will bring us to the point of trial and choice. He will watch to see what choices we will make.

By this process, we will all one day come to the point where God will be able to say of us, "Now I know that he will obey Me." In certain instances, we may have already proven our resolve to go God's way and to do what is right; in some things, God already "knows." But in the areas He is still working on, the trials will continue.

Every trial is an "opportunity" for us to learn and to prove to God and to ourselves what we truly have in our hearts. Each trial is an opportunity to strengthen our faith and to confirm that God is always with us and that His way is the only way that works. It is an opportunity to choose God's way, which is our protection and way of escape.

God's Mercy

God limits Satan in what he can do by the merciful hedge that He has placed around us. Even so, sometimes what He allows is very painful. When we ask for mercy from the pain but feel He has not given it, it does not mean He has not granted it.

For instance, God shows mercy by preventing circumstances from being worse than they are. If He did not extend mercy by hedging us about to one degree or the other, Satan would destroy us. It is the Devil's goal.

Even though God's mercy prevents our trials from being worse than they are, He requires them to be difficult enough that they test us to the extent of our abilities to endure them. Only by so doing will we learn and grow in strength and faith from them.

To look at this optimistically, it is God's *blessing* that the trials of our life are not worse than they are. But it is also a good thing that trials are so difficult. By no other process can He instill in us the perfect, righteous character—the image of God—that we need to be in His Kingdom.

Consider the hedge God put around Job. God's mercy is shown in His not allowing Satan to do any more or go any further in his torment of Job. God limited Satan's activities by the hedge He placed around Job. God set the parameters of what Satan was allowed to do to Job then—and to us now.

The Bible describes Satan as roaming to and fro over the earth like a lion seeking someone to devour (Job 1:7; I Peter 5:8). God's hedge about us prevents Satan from succeeding in his homicidal rampage, and the closer we are to God the greater our resistance to Satan's assaults. Generally, our ability to defend against the Devil's attacks increases by the degree we yield to God and the truths found in His Word.

Within the boundaries God has placed, Satan has free reign to try to deceive us, trick us, or take us off God's path, just as he did with Adam and Eve and with Job. The Bible promises that, if we resist the Devil, he will flee from us (James 4:7). How do we resist him? We find the answer in the same verses: "Therefore submit to God. . . . Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (verses 7-8). By choosing to do what God says, we repulse the attacks of the Adversary.

Jesus Christ did the same thing in resisting Satan. He did not lean on His own understanding and rationalizations but relied upon every word of God (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3). The truth was His rock of defense and confidence. By it, He knew what was absolutely right and wrong. Once He chose it and used it, "the devil left Him" (Matthew 4:11). And so he will slink away from us too.

Our Own Choices

The fact that the Bible tells us that man devises his own ways (Proverbs 16:9) and chooses the direction he will go (Proverbs 14:12) tells us that we pick our own path to walk. That God says He sets before us the choice of life or death, blessing or cursing (Deuteronomy 30:19) tells us that He does not make our choices for us. That God says we will reap what we have sown for ourselves (Galatians 6:7) tells us that we decide what seeds to plant.

We bring many—if not most or all—of our trials upon ourselves by the choices we make. We decide according to the spirit we are listening and yielding to. Yet, it is this very free moral agency coupled with the guidance of God that is the strength of building true character.

When we are tried, we make our choices based on what we understand or what we think we understand. We even ignorantly make choices based on things we do not understand. Consequently, we give Satan more free reign to work havoc in our lives, but only as far as God allows.

If God made everything happen by divine fiat and altered the consequences of our choices and actions, then we would probably never know the true results of our choices or learn whether our choices were either good or bad. Thankfully, He does not do this. God uses every trial as an opportunity for Him to observe and to know how we are doing, where we are headed, and what is in our hearts. He sees this through the choices we make.

God's Plan

Every time God allowed Satan to go a little further with the disruption of Job's life—whether it was destroying his possessions or ruining his health—it was no greater trial than God permitted. The trial was not greater than God knew Job already had the ability to endure.

Every time Satan does something to us, he thinks he is creating a problem for us. In reality, Satan is just helping God help us to develop the character we lack. God knows what we lack and what kind of stress to put us under to strengthen us. Satan does nothing more than God permits. Satan is powerless unless God peels the hedge back to allow further testing.

Therefore, when a trial confronts us, even if it is unto death, we must know that the trial is not greater than God knows we can endure. We must remember that He allows the trial for the strengthening of our faith. We must realize that the trial is for our learning and that God is in it with us.

Job and the other heroes of faith may have felt at times that they were alone while enduring their trial, just as we do sometimes. However, at just the right moment, God intervenes and the trial is taken away. If we have been successful, God blesses us, just as He blessed Job with more than he had before (Job 42:12-16).

We have a merciful God and Father. He uses the situations our choices have gotten us into to teach us. He hedges us about and protects us as we would protect our own children (see Proverbs 22:6). When we fail, we need to just pick ourselves up, realizing that God is there to get us through to the end as long as we continue to do our part in yielding to His way. He who endures to the end in faith will be saved (Matthew 24:13).

Satan is powerless in the face of God, and amazingly, he is powerless before our faces too, unless we choose to yield to his temptations. When we yield to Satan's ways, we give him control and power over us, and that is the way to destroy godly character. We can put on the image of God only by His character-building process; trying to do it any other way is submitting to the Devil.

Even if we are righteous in all of our ways, like Job, God still allows trials to strengthen us. The trials we have should show us and encourage us that God knows we have what it takes to succeed. We can take comfort in knowing that God, our strength, has hedged us about as He did for Job as long as we are obeying God's Word in our lives.

Once we understand this, we can say with the psalmist: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear. . . The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Psalm 46:1-2, 7).