

## **Trials: Much Needed Experiences**

**The Trials of Life**

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As the Passover season approaches each year our antennae go up, and we begin to look for expected trials.

I recently talked to a friend of mine in the church in Arizona. I had called him, and he was very nervous. I asked him, “What’s the problem?” And he said, “It is pre-Passover! And I am expecting trials!” And I then asked him, “Just why are you so nervous?” And he said, “Everything is going perfectly!” This really worried him!

In over 30 years in the church, one could almost tell when the spring holy days were about to approach, because the increase in trials that came upon everybody. Although we still need a church calendar to actually pick out the Passover day, we could include the element of trials pointing to the spring holy days season.

Although we always made light conversation about pre-Passover trials, down deep we realize some of the trials were quite serious, and they affected us very much.

This year, John Ritenbaugh said, “In his 30 years in the ministry, he has never seen the number of trials come on the church as they have this past year.”

In the past, it was customary after the Passover season, after the spring holy days were over, that the trials would let up. But this year, they have not. They seem to be hanging on. In fact, they seem to be intensifying. I think that to one degree or another, this has to cause each of us to ask the question, “What’s going on? Has God gone off somewhere? Is He greatly displeased with us? Why isn’t He hearing our prayers?” I am not saying in any way that asking these questions is not the right thing to do, because with the asking of the questions, we can begin to see some of the answers.

In general, the history of God's people as a whole is a history of a people going through trials. It just is. Those individuals whom God is working with faced one trial after another. Of course, you can read about this in Hebrews 11, and in the psalms of King David. There were times of peace, but more often individual and national trials usually were the order of the day as we read in God's Word.

Today, we are living in a world full of trials. The basic reason is that the world is living by its own standards, morals, business practices, governmental policies, and values apart from the laws of God. Therefore this is going to produce trials.

We live in a world full of confusion, compromise, anger, self-seeking, racial hatred, lusting for what we cannot afford, and lusting for what we should not have; plus a total disregard for the rights of others, and a disregard for the physical world we live in. This is producing trials.

Now, as the world suffers from wrong decisions, so we do as well when we make choices contrary to God's teachings. God is fully aware of what He has asked us to do. He knows how difficult it is to change from the way the world is living, from the ways we were raised, to putting on the new man in Jesus Christ. This is no small chore.

It is His job to see that those He calls make that change, and thus He will use one of His most effective tools to bring about that change—allowing us to be tested through trials. I do not think any of us relish trials. It is way down my list. But, when we finish our trial, we will be thrilled at the results that God has achieved.

I think we have a misconception of God sometimes. We can, if we are not careful, feel that since we are in God's church that we are doing better than the world around us, that we are special to the point that God will relax His standards a bit for us—cutting us a bit of slack, extending a bit of mercy to us. And if we are not careful, we can think that God is so merciful that we can let down, and He will not notice it. If we think like this, we are making a big mistake. It requires more energy and effort to reach the standard God wants than we ever thought of. God does extend mercy, He does forgive sin,

He does truly understand, but we are going to have to put a lot of effort into this calling we have been given.

Now to get our attention, God has always used trials—to know what is in our heart; to humble us; to test us; to teach us; to correct us; to encourage us; to build our faith; and to inspire us, and those around us. God brings some trials upon us for our growth; He allows others to come from outside sources for the same purpose; and He permits us to bring trials upon ourselves by our own actions that we might learn to repent of wrong thinking and wrong doing.

Today, I would like to go through some of the various reasons behind our trials and the results that God wants to achieve by our trials, that we might understand that God has not gone off somewhere but is intently working with each one of us preparing us for the Kingdom of God.

I have listed three categories of trials.

The first is something we must understand: The trials we bring upon ourselves. This type of trial teaches us to repent of sin, of conducting our life apart from God. We learn that when we sin, the trials follow almost immediately.

**James 1:13** Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God;" for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

The word "tempt" just simply means anything that will try and test the reality, the authenticity, and the genuineness, of the faith we profess. This could be anything from the outward affliction that we bring upon ourselves, to an inward desire to sin. James is telling us that God does nothing in any way to cause a man to sin. But, in man's heart is the tendency to blame God for his trials.

James makes it clear that God cannot be tempted with evil. Nothing can be presented to His mind as an inducement to do wrong. God will not do an evil act, nor cause another to commit sin.

If you get nothing else out of this section, get this: God does not place any trial before a man to induce him to do wrong.

**James 1:14** But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

Man is drawn away by his own desires. James wants us to understand that we are a product of how we were raised; we are a product of the environment we live in; we are a product of the habits we have allowed in our lives; we are the product of the attitudes that we have built up over the years; and we are the product of the escapes that we run to when we are tired, run down, and emotionally drained. These are where our lusts come from. They do not come from God.

Those who feel inferior many times try to dominate or control or put others down so that they might feel superior. This desire to feel better might cause some to overeat, or to drink to excess, or to commit sexual sins to gratify their feelings of inadequacy. Some, out of a desire to have things might steal from others; or might charge too much on their credit card, and ruin their house financially. None of these problems are caused by God.

This does not mean that God will not take full advantage of the opportunity to work with us when we find ourselves in these situations. These problems plague us because we have not grown up enough to resist the pulls, so we give in to either outside influences or internal pulls of our own flesh. We are causing our own trials in these areas. We should not blame any other person, situation, or object; it is our reaction to those things that produce the temptation to sin.

The word enticed (above) is a fishing term. It is like a fish being drawn in after he has been hooked. Our desires pull at us into sin, and then we are trapped and caught. In short, we are snared by our own weaknesses. This is what puts us into the trial.

**James 1:15** Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Here James gives the formula of sin: First we have the desire, then it is followed by the conception, which brings forth death.

**James 1:16-17** Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

James tells us not to be deceived! God is not the author of a trial by this means.

**James 1:18** Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

*Barnes' Notes* has an interesting comment on this:

Since God, the only source of good since He tempts no man, and since by His mere sovereign goodness without any claim on our part we have had the high honor conferred on us of being made the first fruits of His creatures, we ought to be ready to hear His voice, to subdue all our evil passions, and to bring our souls to entire practical obedience.

[And, here is a gem of wisdom:] We should learn the necessity of obedience; the gospel is not only to be learned, but also to be practiced.

So many think that because they know and understand the Scriptures, they are in God's good favor. But this is not the case. The Scriptures have to be practiced.

**James 1:19-20** So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

So, be more ready to learn than to teach. Always be ready to govern and restrain your temper, for he says wrath, or any angry spirit, is not inclined to

keep God's law but to break it. Over the years we have seen that an angry heart, an angry attitude will not keep God's law.

**James 1:21** Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

He is saying to change your ways. Face the lifestyle of your past; face what it is that has produced this; counsel if you need to, but fight hard against those results of living apart from God all these years.

**James 1:22** But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Basically, just like verse 18, we are to learn the necessity of obedience to God's Word, remembering that God's Word is not just to be learned, but to be put into practice in our lives. We are to be *doers* of the word, and not hearers only.

I think every one of us can relate to these verses! I can look back at my life where my things, my desires, my passions, and my pulls, took me where I wish I had never gotten into. There are things that my mouth said that I wish I could take back. But it is too late.

Even though we repeat these same mistakes over and over again, hopefully the pain and lessons will be drummed into our head that we are bringing this upon ourselves. God is going to continue to work with us and teach us.

We may have brought the problem upon ourselves, but they will produce something that God wants to see in us, especially when it gets painful enough: our desire to draw close to Him and repent, going to Him for help and instruction. That is a fruit that God wants to see in you.

Second, trials are also produced by the world we live in. Let us look at a verse we have all looked at over the years, and it has been quoted many times. It is a memory scripture.

**I Corinthians 10:13** No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Now, in the *New English Bible* it reads,

**I Corinthians 10:13** (NEB) So far you have faced no trial beyond what man can bear. God keeps faith, and will not allow you to be tested above your power. But, when the test comes He will at the same time provide a way out, by enabling you to sustain it.

Basically, Paul is saying that the trials we face we share with the common man. Verse 13 follows all the admonitions that come upon us who are living at the end of the age.

In verse 10 we see that we should not lust after evil things, nor be idolaters, nor commit fornication, or tempt Christ, nor murmur. All this has been written as examples for us upon whom the end of the ages has come. These are the things, and others, that are common to man. He will make a way of escape.

The word “tempted” means to try, or to prove, either in a good or bad sense. In this verse it means God will try us by adversity. We will have to face adversity to test our faith and confidence in Him. The word “common” means belonging to man; manners; customs; nature; or condition. In this verse it means human temptations or trials common to man, just like it says.

In a broad sense, this opens up our understanding of trials even further. Where we live can dictate in part the type of trials that we may have to face—spiritual or physical. If we were living in Zaire, and a rebel chieftain came in and took over, the trial might be to lose our home or have enough food to eat. With our religion, we would stand out like a sore thumb. Compromise might become a sore trial. If you lived in a solid Catholic community, and we kept the Sabbath in front of them, again the pressure would mount on us to change our beliefs. And if we lived in the Arab states, we would be viewed as “Jewish” and just saving our life would be a tremendous trial.

But, living in America or other Israelite nations, presents again a whole different picture. In this country many of our trials come from the abundance: easy-payment plans; the easy life in comparison to the rest of the world; an environment of compromise; and then rebellious attitudes of the nation that has so much—they are unthankful.

We are faced with a population that thinks nothing of divorce, free sex, infidelity, pornography, plus all other types of perversion and violence. We live in a society that no longer believes in God, His laws, His penalties, or His moralities—nothing. This is the environment we live in.

From the health aspect, because of our prosperity comes rich, fatty, hormone-filled, vitamin- and -fiber deficient foods. We are a people being fed products made from white, bleached flour and sugar in just about everything we eat. And because of this, we can expect trials of health issues.

We can see this because hard working people in less fortunate countries seem to be free of the health issues we have in abundance.

Our trials that are common to man could be based on any of these weaknesses of our society, but the overall test for us in the church of God (and it is a big one) is to stand fast in what we have been taught; learning to make right decisions based on the principles of God's law, and not allowing ourselves to let down. That is a major test. With this picture in mind, we can perhaps picture people from different areas, and get an idea of what they face.

But God says that no matter what trial you find yourself in, He is faithful and can be trusted as your source for strength. If we cry out in repentance, asking for help and deliverance, He will hear. He is our security. He will not fail us. He will not suffer you beyond what you are able.

*Barnes' Notes* has 5 points I think are very good to share with you. This is a general promise just as applicable to all Christians as it was to the Corinthians. It implies:

- (1) that all circumstances, causes, agents that lead to temptation are under the control of God. He is sovereign. Every man that tempts another, every fallen spirit that is engaged in this, every book,



every picture, every place of amusement, every charm of music and song, every piece of indecent statuary [pornography], and every plan of business, gain, or ambition are all under the control of God. He can check them, He can control them, He can paralyze them and their influence; He can destroy them.

(2) When men are tempted, it is because God suffers it, or permits it. He does not Himself tempt man, He does not infuse evil thoughts into the mind, He does not create an object of temptation to place in our way, but He suffers it be placed there by others. When we are tempted we are to remember that it is because He suffers it, or permits it, not because He does it. We are to remember, too, that there is some good reason why it is thus permitted, and it may be turned into some way to His glory, and to our advancement.

(3) There is an extent to which we are able to resist temptation, there is a limit to our power. There is a point beyond which we are not able to resist; we have not the strength of angels.” [and then he said something remarkable here] That limit will in all cases be beyond the point to which we are tempted. If not, there would be no falling.

(4) If men fall unto sin under the power of temptation, they only are to blame. They have strength to resist all temptations that assail them. God has given them assurance that no temptation shall occur in which they are not able by His aid to resist.”

This does not mean we do not have to do our part. This means, as it says, if your right hand offend you, cut it off; if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. We have to remove ourselves from the areas of temptation.

*Barnes' Notes* goes on to say,

(5) God knows what His people are able to endure, and as He has entire control of all that can affect them, He will adapt the trial for their strength, and will enable them to bear all that is appointed to them. That is the positive promise from God.

God knows that sometimes temptations and trials go on for a long time. God has said that He will enable them to endure it. He will sustain them through all trials and temptations, no matter how severe the trial. And, as long as it might be continued, He will not let down. In spite of our weakness, He is abundantly able to uphold us.

Now the overall lesson to be learned in this type of trial is that the world around us will produce trials in our lives because we live in it, because we are travelling a different path than the world does by following God and His laws. We had one man who almost lost his job during the Days of Unleavened Bread. His boss said he could not keep them. But the fellow stuck to his guns, and he kept the Days of Unleavened Bread, but it did cause problems. He is handling that okay. He stood up for the right things first. You can read John 15:18-21 and John 16:33, where Christ said that if they did not love Him, they will not love you either.

God is fully aware of our struggle, but He allows us to face these trials for our tests, for His glory, and our growth. That is what trials are for.

Also in this category, I threw in “time and chance.” You can read that in your leisure over in Ecclesiastes 9:11 and Solomon's remark, “Time and chance come upon all men.” This does not necessarily mean haphazard occurrences, although it could be. But it means an event that we find ourselves involved in whether anticipated or not. Something just comes upon us.

As this is Satan's world, there will always be unexpected events to confront us, which will need to be dealt with. Satan is the prince of the power of the air, and he controls the earth. He does all he can to destroy us.

The third type of trial is one specifically designed by God for us as individuals. God keeps that prerogative for Himself.

**Job 1:1** There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil.

Job was a remarkable man. There was no doubt about that!

**Job 1:6-12** Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it." 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. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

And you all know what happened after that.

**Job 2:1-6** Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it." 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? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause." So Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life."

Job was perfect in all his ways, and it does not appear that Satan even noticed him. He probably would not have had *God not pointed it out*. Even

though Job was perfect in all his ways, he was not as perfect and complete as God knew he had to be to fulfill God's purpose for him. And because of this, God specifically set Satan up to put Job through what was a *terrible* trial. We have already learned that God was totally in charge of what was going on in that trial. It was not out of God's hand. God set the limits of the trial, and He brought Job through to the end of it. In Job 42:2-6 we see the results of the trial. Job saw himself, at last, how despicable he was, and how awesome God is. This is what God wanted. And then, of course, came many blessings.

**Acts 9:1-6** Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

**Acts 9:10-16** Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

We could probably have two or three sermons just on the trials of the apostle Paul. And Acts 9 was the first of those trials that were specifically brought on by God.

Paul was a Pharisee among Pharisees, he was zealous for what he believed, and he felt that the Way was the wrong way at this time. He intended to do all he could to destroy it. But it was God's decision to get Paul's attention, so the blinding light was sent from heaven. I am sure that at that time, Paul thought that this was anything but profitable. But how he did change his mind!

Now II Corinthians 11 talks about many of the trials that Paul went through—physical, hard trials. Then in chapter 12, it says:

**II Corinthians 12:1-5** It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities.

Paul was glorying not in all the visions he received from God, but in the infirmities that he was suffering. He knew that infirmities kept one humble and gave one compassion to others who were going through trials too. It is really important. Paul is saying that he “would not boast in my talents, but in my infirmities, weaknesses, and sufferings because they help me to understand why others go through sufferings, and how they feel.”

**II Corinthians 12:6** For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.

He basically said that because of all he had done and seen, he could easily have become puffed up.

**II Corinthians 12:7** And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

Paul said, “Lest I should become spiritually proud, lest I should become self-confident and vain, supposing I was one of God’s great favorites, God in His great love and concern for me, gave me a thorn in the flesh to afflict me, so that I might not consider myself great.”

**II Corinthians 12:8-9** Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

He said, “I prayed three times for its removal, and God said, ‘My grace is sufficient for you. You must look to Me, and I will support you with My strength, and not let you fail. And the reason is that My strength is made perfect [complete, mature] in your weakness.’” When we are weak we are not relying on our own strength, money, health, or good looks, then God’s strength is made evident in us [that it was Him, and not us].

*Adam Clarke* had a comment on this:

The more violently you are afflicted and tried, being upheld by My power and prospered in all your labors, the more imminently will My power be seen and acknowledged; for the weaker the instrument I use, the more power of my grace shall be made manifest.

On to verse 10:

**II Corinthians 12:10** Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

*Barnes' Notes* adds:

Paul is saying, 'Since so many benefits result from trials, since my afflictions are the occasion of obtaining the favor of Christ to so eminent a degree, I rejoice in the privilege of suffering.'"

What is a trial?

The dictionary definition of a trial is: The treatment or action performed to determine a result; the act of testing or proving; the act of being tried or tested.

The Bible definition of a trial is: To cause one to be assayed; to see what is real and what is waste.

1. God wants to find out what part of our mind and actions are working with His teachings, and what part is still operating from our own human nature.
2. To refine or purify; purge out the waste. (This is really important because trials will do that.)
3. To prove that what we are what we say we are. We say we are the children of God and that we belong to Christ, are we conducting our life in that fashion?

What steps should we take when we find ourselves in a trial?

The first one might seem a bit unusual, but it is: Start listening to God. So many times we know why trials come upon us, usually the mishandling of something. We know what God says about it. The thing is, we are not listening! So, the first step is to listen to what God has to say.

The second step is to ask God to show you what He wants you to learn from the trial.

The third step is to get back to the basics of prayer, Bible study, meditation, and fasting. So many times when trials come upon us, we have put God

second. We have or put other things in front of God; idols we have set up; desires and things we decided to do. We end up pushing God to the back, and we skip the things that would keep us on track.

The fourth step is to get wise counsel. If it is financial, or spiritual, go to the appropriate person. Get wise counsel.

The fifth step is to persist with God and be impatient to overcome. Ask God for results and understanding. Be impatient to overcome but be patient to allow God to work things out Himself.

Anything over 5 minutes is a long trial for me. I always like short trials. It does not work that way. We have people suffering trials for months—six months and the trial has not gone away.

What fruit is a trial supposed to produce in us? A partial list starts with teaching us patience.

**James 1:1-2** James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.

Now, there is a tough nut to crack. That is a concept difficult to believe. Why are we to count our trials a joy?

**Hebrews 12:11-13** Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

What is being said is, once you see that you are in a trial, once you understand what the problem is, get back on the right path, because if you stay lame, if you stay in your sins, you are going to be turned off to the side. You will not be walking on the path God wants for you.



**II Corinthians 4:14-17** . . . knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

You see, we rejoice in trials because of what it produces in us. We will see more of this in a few moments.

Temptation is used in the sense of trials (King James Version) by persecution, poverty, calamity of any kind, sickness, and bereavement. That is the overall sense of how temptation is used here. It is used to see if we will stand fast in the faith.

**James 1:3** . . . knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

Patience, here, means endurance; perseverance; constancy under suffering in faith and duty. Today, we might say tenacity, or stick-to-it-iveness. It is not the patience that passively endures, “Well, that’s how it is.” Instead, it is the quality that enables a person to stand on their feet and face the trial. It is a courageous patience! It is a wonderful fruit of trials. Luke 19:21 says that by your patience, possess your souls; by endurance, you save your lives.

**Romans 5:1-5** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Another word for “experience” would be character. Trials produce experience. They produce godly character as we struggle through the things we deal with and change. The important thing that God wants us to have is experience. It is going to teach us something.

**James 1:4-5** But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach.

This is saying that the trial will work patience, which brings experience, which brings hope. Let it be fully developed that the right effects and results might be produced in the life of those being tested with nothing lacking in the completing of your godly character.

The word “perfect” above is only used here and in Acts 16 where it is rendered, “soundness,” while in the verse it means entire; whole in every aspect. This is what God is after in us.

God always teaches in trials. If any of you lacks wisdom, go to Him in your trial, and go often because you are concerned. Do not worry about your frequency. God will listen.

The answers will come to you, maybe in a way you do not expect, but it will be in God’s own time and way. It might come by study, counsel, or word that comes to your mind, or by the conditions you find yourself in that make it evident what the answer is, or what you are to do.

**James 1:12** Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

He is saying simply that the man who is proven, who is approved, is in an enviable condition. He has been through the test, he stood the trial, he is been proved like if he had gone through a furnace. He has been proved to be pure and righteous. He has won that contest. He will receive the crown from God.

More fruits of trials are humility and obedience.

Some trials are serious, and this fruit comes quickly. They humble us and bring us to deep repentance and meekness before God. When God takes things out of our control and all seems lost, we are forced to throw ourselves before God—helpless and powerless to do anything—totally placing the situation in His power, in His hands, trusting Him to make the best decision.

Fred Kellers (currently [2024] a retired United Church of God pastor Nashville, TN) gave a sermon some years back (before 1997), and I was privileged to hear it. The subject was healing, and all the different healings he had seen over the years. He talked about his wife in one particular case. They were having one of their children in a home birth. They had a doctor there. The baby came forth beautifully, but the placenta did not show. However, the doctor was in a rush and did not want to wait, and so he found it and pulled. Blood came pouring out. Fred Kellers saw the doctor's face and knew that things were not right and were serious. His wife was bleeding to death. Fred got on his knees and anointed his wife, but nothing happened. So, he went into a separate room, and closed the door, and prayed to our Father, "Father, whatever you want, go ahead, and even take her, if you wish. I have no power in this. I completely put this over into your hands." He gave up everything to God—totally.

When he returned, the bleeding had stopped, and he had his wife and child. That is what that kind of trial can do. You are just completely helpless.

I know there are many examples of humbleness and obedience before God, and the finest is found in Hebrews 5. The subject is Jesus Christ.

**Hebrews 5:7-8** . . .who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him [the Father; is there any other way to do this?] who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

I do not recall from where I found this next comment but here we see Jesus Christ going through the great trial [of His crucifixion] being humbled and

obedient to God's will even unto death. This is total faith and trust in God! Jesus Christ learned obedience by going through trials by suffering.

Quote from an unknown commentary:

There was a quality involved, when one has performed a required action, a quality that is lacking when there is only a readiness to act. There is a perfection that results from actually having suffered, which is different from perfection from a willingness to suffer. Jesus Christ was not willing to compromise an inch regarding His Father's teaching and plan. And He learned by humbling Himself in obedience to all the truth He knew.

This is a marvelous example.

We know that we are to be purged, and certainly one of the fruits of trial is to humble us. It is to correct us. And so many times we know what God says. But every once in a while, we go off on our own way and do our own thing. And it is here that God steps in to tweak our ear, or give us a bloody nose, applying correction that we might saved.

**I Corinthians 11:31** For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

In other words, if we live our life as we should, if we measure ourselves against Jesus Christ, we will not be judged.

**I Corinthians 11:32** But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

We will not turn to Psalm 119:67, but in this area he asks, teach me how I should live; teach me how I should conduct myself, and then he says in verse 67, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray." In other words, "When You afflicted me, I started to pay attention." This is exactly what God wants.

Trials produce thankfulness—that we are mature, that we share the same trials that Jesus Christ did; that we are drawn closer to God in trials; that God

wanted us enough to correct; that we have been delivered and are now back on the right track; that we might understand what others suffer and go through.

Now, there is one more vital element that God wants us to gain from going through trials.

We all know the trial of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; what stand they took; and the firmness they exhibited. We understand that in their heart they trusted God completely. To be thrown into the fiery furnace was unbelievable though.

Now, the trial is over, and they are out of the furnace,

**Daniel 3:26-27** Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.

And we know the story of Daniel, of how the king was tricked into having Daniel put into the lion's den. And, how the king longed with all his heart to save Daniel, but he could not because the law had been stated.

**Daniel 6:18-23** Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have

done no wrong before you." Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God.

What do you think happened after the king finished speaking, and Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego returned to their quarters? What did the crowd do? These were all outside the palace walls—the lion's den and the fiery furnace. How many were there? 100? 150? 500? I do not know. But can you picture the attitude of the people while these men walked back to their apartments? "Don't get in their way! These are the children of the Living God!"

What did they do when they were alone in their apartments? I am sure they got down on their knees and thanked God profusely.

So then, the third set of fruits from trials is how the outcomes affected them—and how will they affect you? What was produced was great faith, complete trust and confidence in God. This is what God wants to find in us. And it certainly was produced in these men. Do you think there would ever be a trial after those trials, and their deliverance, that they would not trust God in? That is what it was all about.

At the beginning of this sermon, I mentioned that trials are not disappearing, but are intensifying. Why? What is God doing? I would like to read a quote from a letter that was written to Bob Bricker from John Ritenbaugh:

The tests are gradually becoming sterner. We must surely be close to the end of this world. If we are, we can expect that the next round of tests will be even more difficult. We can also know that because our Brother is faithful, the current tests are preparing us, and we will be ready. Being ready means that when they come, they will be more difficult than we imagined, and we will feel as though we are overwhelmed. This is good because it drives us to turn to Christ. When we are weak we are strong. Hang in there. The best is yet to come.

Now, Richard Ritenbaugh always gives assignments. And so I am going to give you all an assignment today. By the patterns of how God dealt with His people in the past, we can understand the way that God will deal with His people in these last days. So, based on that, I would like to give you the assignment to read out loud Ezekiel 5, 6, and 7. This will describe the pattern of what God has done in the past, and what He plans in the future. This, coupled with Matthew 24:21-22 where Christ points out that the tribulation would be so great that no flesh would be saved alive, unless those days were shortened, should give us a picture of what this world faces. And if we believe that we are close to the end of the age, then this is what is on the horizon.

I want to read to you a little bit of what Mr. Armstrong said on this subject. He said,

Our people will continue only a few more years in comparative economic prosperity. This very prosperity is our fatal curse, because our people are setting their hearts on it, seeking ease and leisure; becoming soft, decadent and weak. Then suddenly before we realize it, we will find ourselves in the throes of a famine, and uncontrollable epidemics of disease. Along with the coming of famine, and disease epidemics will come an invasion of billions of crop destroying insects on a scale never before seen to devastate the land.

We have these hybrid crops today that only seem to be resistant to one thing. If something else hits, it could destroy an entire crop. He says you can go on to read about this in Joel 1.

When we are weakened, what will take place in the world? What part are we to face? We do not know. Are we ready? Do we have the strength of character and the complete trust in God that we need? I know I do not. And I wish with all my heart that I did. We have to learn to trust and look to God to prepare us in this case.

We are a soft people, nationally. Our people may jog and lift weights in a gym, making for hard bodies, but we as a nation do not have the mental toughness that we need to stand up in trials such as these. We need the toughness to face heavy trials. We have gotten soft in areas of love of

country, work ethic, moral character, love of family, love of God, honor, honesty, concern for our fellow man, and all the other things that are important to giving us a right and sound mind. We are weak and decadent. We who live in this environment share in these weaknesses as well. Thus, it is up to God to get us ready. I think you can see why we are having so many trials, now. God must put us through difficulties now so that we will be able to stand when the great trials surely come.

I can remember when I went into basic training with the Golden Gate Freedom Volunteers. I thought the army was pretty nice. We got into camp, and they had our beds made for us. We had lemonade and cookies. I said, "The army isn't bad!"

The next morning, everything changed. The army was determined to take us out of our citified sloppiness that we had in civilization, and to bring us into condition that they had to prepare us to be in. They got us up at a certain time and put us to bed at a certain time; we did pushups, calisthenics; crawled on our stomachs; took weapons apart; learned to take them apart blind-folded; learned to obey; learn to be disciplined; and learned to respond to the leadership that was over us.

After 16 weeks of infantry basic training, some of us went to airborne. And airborne training made the 16 weeks of infantry basic look like a cakewalk. We did calisthenics until I thought we would drop. Every morning we ran three miles. And if somebody got sick and threw up, they could go outside the ranks and throw up, and then had to run back and catch up, and finish those three miles. There was no mercy extended.

Our instructors who were conducting these training exercises could run backwards those three miles. And quite often ran backwards for most of it, keeping an eye on us, all the while talking about their good times in town last night while we were just trying to get our breath.

I remember one of the most difficult things I thought I could not do was the squat-jump. That is where you lace your hands over your head, staring straight ahead, and you drop down one leg and you spring back up on the leg, and then you drop down on that other leg. Down and up, and down and up was one; Down and up, and down and up was two; and so forth. We had



to do 60 of those! I thought I would never do them. But when they finished with me, I could do them. Their job was to prepare us for whatever we might have to face.

What do you suppose it would be like to send troops to the front line without training them? What would have happened without knowing which end of the rifle was the front? Without discipline, and without being in good physical condition, without tactics learned, or confidence in what had been taught, what would it have been like?

You see, *men* would not do that.

The army puts its people through very difficult experiences in training here in the safety of a basic training camp so they might have confidence in their leadership, their conditioning, their equipment, and their skills.

Because we are blessed, we face the training of God that we might have confidence in His leadership, and in our ability (with God's help) to stand in whatever trials may yet come upon us. Our trials will not necessarily be to train us physically, but to strengthen us spiritually with faith and trust in God that we might share the confidence that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego had after going through their trials.

I have no idea what we will be facing in the future. It may be individual trials, or trials collectively, but because of God wants us in His Family, He will see to it that we receive the training that we need to toughen us, and prepare us for what is to come. I know that if we had our choice in the matter, we would opt for a really small trial or no trial at all. But because of God's great love and purpose for us, He will see that we are going to receive what is best for us.

We have already had a share of trials in leaving the Worldwide Church of God and take a stand. That was not easy. And so, in those areas of life we have experienced what it was like, and we have been strengthened in that particular area.

We are told we are going to have trials.

**Acts 14:19** Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

None of us have had to resist to that.

**Acts 14:20-22** However, when the disciples gathered around him [standing around the dead body of Paul], he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

**II Thessalonians 1:3-5** We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer.

**I Peter 1:6-7** In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

**I Peter 4:12-13** Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

The world may be leaning on you now; though your neighbors or family may be laughing at you for the faith that you keep, the time will come they will be visited. The resurrection will come when all the truth you believe and stood for comes to pass. And you will be so thankful that you stood by the Word of God.

What encouragement does God give us concerning trials? Let us see some patterns of God. God does not change.

**Deuteronomy 4:30-31** “When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice (for the LORD your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.”

**II Corinthians 1:2-7** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.

**II Corinthians 7:4** Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.

Here Paul had written a letter to the Corinthians [I Corinthians]. It was a scathing letter and it corrected them mightily. And Paul was deeply concerned whether they would respond to it and repent or if they would leave the church and simply fold up.

**II Corinthians 7:5-6** For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.

**Psalms 34:17-22** The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken. Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous shall be condemned. The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.

Now for the final verse, this one always reminds me of Richard Ritenbaugh. We find it in Hebrews 13. I think it was from him that I first heard it explained this way.

**Hebrews 13:5-6** Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Concerning verse 5, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you."

*Adam Clarke* writes:

The words are peculiarly emphatic. There are no less than 5 negatives in this short sentence, and they are connected with two verbs and one pronoun, twice repeated. A literal translation is scarcely possible. It would run something like this: 'No, I will not

leave you; no, neither will I not utterly forsake you.” [And then, he made it simpler], “No, I will never leave you; I will never, never, never, never, never cast you off.

So, no matter what the trial, Jesus Christ will be there.

We are living in a time when the Great God is going to start dealing with the world around us. Heavy trials will come upon this world that we live in, and it will be a terrible time of fear, agony, destruction, confusion, and pain.

God has chosen to call us now to work with us at this time and to test us now that we might be prepared to face the bigger trials. And surely are going to come.

And we should remember that it is always God’s purpose to develop us to the point that He can give us the Kingdom of God. Putting us through testing is one of God’s most productive ways of developing us, bringing us closer to Him.

Even though we may not wish to, we should work at rejoicing in our trials, one, because it is through this exercise and testing that we will grow, learn patience, be corrected, and overcome. And two, it is by this going through these trials that we will have the experiences we need to be able to rule with compassion, mercy, love, intelligence, thoughtfulness, and kindness in the Kingdom of God.