

## Facing Times Of Stress: Grieved By Various Trials

The Genuineness of Your Faith

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Take a piece of wax, a piece of meat, some sand, some clay, and some shavings, and put them on a fire and see how they react. The same agent is acting upon each of them, yet the wax melts, the meat cooks and sizzles, the sand dries up, the clay hardens, and the shavings blaze up in flames. We see different reactions for different materials.

In a similar way, under identical influence of circumstance and environment, one person is made better and he becomes stronger, while another becomes weaker, while yet another withers away.

This explains why one hears the Word of God and is made better, while another hears the same thing and is made angry. It is not so much what is done to us, or what God allows to happen to us that is most important, but it is what we have done to develop and prepare ourselves. What we do has a major effect on the outcome. So, we should be careful how we hear and act, because the genuineness of our faith will be tried by fire at times.

In his first epistle the apostle Peter introduces the matter of the great salvation to the elect in the church of God who were dispersed throughout the area. The people receiving his letter are elect exiles of the dispersion (as they are referred to historically)—the scattered members of God's church. Peter is not necessarily speaking of a literal exile, but a separation from their true home in the kingdom of God. They know it is coming, and they try to wait patiently for their end-time spiritual inheritance.

We can relate to what they felt and went through, because we are going through similar trials and sufferings. Although only rare and isolated violent persecution exists at this time, we are still going through things that really bother us and shake us up. It is very hard to persevere, because members of God's church do not resemble or conform in any way to the values and worldviews of this present evil age. As God's people, we stand out to the world.

Peter writes to believers who are not only physical exiles, but actually God's "elect spiritual exiles." They are His chosen people—His church. Since the recipients of Peter's letter were primarily Gentiles, Peter clearly teaches that the church of God with Jesus Christ is the new Israel—God's new chosen people (the Israel of God).

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**I Peter 1:1-2** Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

The term, "dispersion" in the Greek is, 'diaspora,' and is typically used to describe the scattering of the Jews throughout the world. But, Peter teaches a parallel in the church's scattering, that it is dispersed throughout the world. We certainly are today.

**I Peter 1:3-6** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials.

These people greatly rejoice in hope, even though they are neck deep in trials. From the viewpoint of the world, the life of a Christian is a paradox. From the perspective of human reasoning, people in the midst of trials and suffering should be in a state of misery, but not so with the elect.

The description of God's people seems quite contradictory. Christians are a people who at one and the same time are rejoicing, and yet are in a serious state. It may be paradoxical, but there is nothing contradictory about this.

The condition of the Christian, as described in the New Testament, seems to always include these two elements—these Christians (of whom Peter writes) are greatly rejoicing, and also grieving. This confuses the world. Even the religious world has a superficial view of Christianity that regards this paradox as impossible. The religious worldview requires that the Christian be one way or another, either grieving in his suffering, or rejoicing in his blessings. In their view a person cannot live with both. The people cannot accept Peter's description of the life of a Christian, and they think that any Christian who is grieved probably is not really a Christian.

There is this "Shangri-La" false belief that once a person becomes a Christian, there are no more troubles, no ripples in life, and everything is perfect. We understand—this is not

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true in God's church, because we know we are to go through trials and suffer with Christ.

So Peter describes the elect as showing these two characteristics at one and the same time—a great rejoicing and yet grieving. We find this frequently throughout the Scriptures.

A prime example of this condition is seen in the series of paradoxes that the apostle Paul uses to describe himself in II Corinthians 4.

**II Corinthians 4:8-12** We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you.

These statements appear to be mutually exclusive at first, but they are not. They are just part of the paradox of the Christian life. This is the amazing thing about us that at one and the same time we do experience both the grieving, and the rejoicing.

So, where is the problem? The problem lies in that we fail to maintain the balance. We tend to allow this grieved condition—this heaviness—to overwhelm us and get us down, pushing the rejoicing right out of us.

The danger is not merely that we are temporarily upset by it, but that it really may become a prevailing mood, a type of spiritual depression, which we can never get rid of. As a result, people looking at us are more conscious of this grievous heaviness than they are of the great rejoicing. We cannot get rid of it ourselves, but we certainly can with the help of God's Holy Spirit and the power that is involved in that.

What we have to realize and remember is that we have not become immune to what is happening around us. There are some of us whose whole idea and concept of the Christian life is unrealistic. Their expectations are lopsided; they try to work up a sense of euphoria so their religion becomes an unrealistic emotional high that cannot be sustained. In reality, they spend most of their time in the doldrums, or in spiritual depression.

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Grief and sorrow are something to which we are subject. Now, there is an occasion in which the absence of a feeling of grief (in certain circumstances) is not spiritually healthy for us. We should be able to grieve, and we should be able to sorrow over the sins and suffering that we see going on.

Even God grieves and is sorrowful at certain times.

**Genesis 6:5-6** Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

God was both sorrowful and grieved in His heart, but we know that He has joyfulness and a rejoicing for every sinner that repents. God is balanced beyond all human imagination.

It is very instructive and encouraging to go through the Scriptures and observe that the saints were subject to human frailties. They knew grief and sorrow; they knew what it was like to be disappointed. There are many examples of this in scripture.

We see this also in the life of the apostle Paul perhaps more than in anyone else. He was subject to these things too, and he did not conceal that fact. He was still very human though, and he had such amazing faith. And, though he had such extraordinary experiences he was still able to both grieve and rejoice.

Consider why it is that we sometimes grieve, or are in heaviness, or are in this condition of grief and sorrow. The answer is, of course, these 'various trials.'

**I Peter 1:6** In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials.

Peter is writing to the scattered church, and they were in this condition because they were passing through various trials. The Greek word here translated, "various," or "manifold" in some translations, is an interesting word. It is obviously a favorite word of the apostle Peter, and he uses it later to describe the grace of God. It means many-colored, like the various colors in the spectrum.

Color is the result of light waves, and these are part of what is called electromagnetic

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radiation. Light waves come in many sizes. The size of a wave is its wavelength. The wavelengths of the light we can see range from 400 to 700 billionths of a meter. But the full range of wavelengths included in the definition of electromagnetic radiation extends from just one billionth of a meter, as in gamma rays, all the way up to centimeters and meters, as in radio waves. Visible light is one small part of the spectrum. But within that small part of the spectrum, we can see a tremendous number of different colors.

The average personal computer, for example, is able to produce 16.7 million colors. That is a lot of colors! If we apply that to these trials that Peter is talking about, that is a lot of trials! Of course, it is not 16.7 millions trials that we go through (though it may seem like it), but the point is that through our lives as Christians, we go through a lot of trials. We know that there is a purpose to that, and we should expect to have trials.

Peter says that they were troubled because they were experiencing these various trials. They come in different ways and colors, in different shapes and forms—there is no end to the variety.

What are these trials, then? In this epistle, Peter makes it quite clear that he is referring to the persecution that they were experiencing, mainly the persecution, but also other trials as well.

**I Peter 2:11-12** Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Because we are Christians, we are subject to this kind of thing in the world. Because we are new creations, because we are born from above, we are inevitably bound to be misunderstood. We are pilgrims and we are like strangers in a strange land. Many times the people in that land do not like us, because we shine light on what they are doing wrong.

We live a different type of life. We have different ideas and customs. The church of God has a totally different culture. Outsiders look on, notice the difference, and often do not like what they see. In fact, often they make it very obvious that they dislike it. Homosexuals, especially, report churches for hate crimes.

We have before us in our Bibles many accounts of these trials. The saints of God have

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always had to meet this kind of thing. The apostle Paul, in writing to Timothy, said,

**II Timothy 3:12** Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

In a sense, it is almost like a law, that according to the Scriptures the more we approximate to Jesus Christ in our life and living, the more likely we are to meet troubles in this world. Think about Him: He did no evil, neither was any guile found in His mouth. He spent His time healing people, doing good, and preaching the Truth. And yet look at the amount of opposition and trials He had to endure because the world so hated Him.

We are to become like Him. Overcome sin and not change from that overcoming. The worldly person does not like us overcoming, because our new man makes him feel uncomfortable and somehow filthy. That is the way sin makes people feel.

Peter knew what the members of God's church were experiencing at the hand of evildoers, and so he goes on,

**I Peter 4:3-4** For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.

The world was annoyed with these Christians because they had given up that sort of life and were living the Christian life now. As soon as they became Christians, they got into trouble with the world. How many friends have we lost in the world?

It is hard for me to remember, because I was nine when we came into the church. But for those of you who came in later, how many friends and family members did you lose, or lose contact with because of God's truth?

For some folks, nothing is more trying than this misunderstanding on the part of other people, and it becomes still more difficult if it happens to be someone who is near and dear to us. Is there anything more trying on a daily basis, than when a Christian finds himself the only Christian in his family? This kind of trial does happen, and for a Christian never to meet it in some shape or form suggests that there is something radically wrong with his conversion.

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Paul experienced this constantly. You remember how he told Timothy, "Demas has forsaken me"? Demas apparently was a good friend and member of God's church.

That was not a light thing to Paul. He was troubled by it. He had to stand trial absolutely alone; people on whom he thought he could rely suddenly ran away from him, and there he was, alone. He told Timothy, "No man stood with me, ...But the Lord stood with me." This is something that we should remember. It may be that we are arrested, or that we are accused, attacked, or persecuted in some way that we are standing alone. But we are never truly alone because God the Father and Jesus Christ will not leave us all alone.

But, at times men do forsake us. That is the kind of thing that grieves a Christian, and all we have to do is read about the lives of the saints to find this kind of thing constantly.

Christians do suffer various trials. We suffer comprehensive trials. Comprehensive (in this case) means anything in this life that tends to trouble us, something that touches us in the most sensitive and delicate part of our being, in our heart, in our mind, the things that tend to cast us down.

How does Peter deal with the situation? It is actually quite interesting, and it is what you and I must do if we are to maintain this two-fold aspect of our Christian life. If we are to go on rejoicing in spite of the things that grieve us, we must approach them and face them all in the way that Peter instructs us.

What does he teach us? The first thing he does is to lay down an essential principle, which is to understand why these things happen to us. A major part of being a Christian is asking questions. Our danger is just to let things happen to us and to endure them without saying anything apart from a groan, a grumble, or a complaint. The thing to do is to discover, if we can, why these things are taking place. To try to discover the explanation, and in this connection Peter uses the following terms.

**I Peter 1:6** In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials.

What does Peter mean by the phrase, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be." There is no uncertainty about the answer to that. It is a conditional statement, which can be translated, "Though now for a season if such proves needful." Who determines whether such proves needful or not? God does, according to how our growth is progressing, how our character is developing, and how hard that we are

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working in faith.

This statement is not merely a general statement to the effect that in a world like this these things must happen. It is much stronger than that. He means that we are greatly rejoicing in this hope, even though in a world like this we have to endure certain things. This is true, but Peter does not merely leave it at that.

Peter's emphasis in his statement, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials," is that, "We are at the moment persevering through this grief, because it has proved needful for us that we do so."

So that is the principle. There is a definite purpose in all of this. This does not happen accidentally. This is not something that just takes place because of the whole organization of life. That does come into it, but it is not the main reason. It is not the main emphasis. The apostle Peter says that these things happen because they are good for us—because they are part of our discipline in this life and in this world—because God has appointed it.

This is what we find to be true throughout Scripture and throughout our own Christian experiences. In other words, this is the way that we must view our Christian lives. We are walking through this world under the watchful and caring eye of our heavenly Father who never leaves us.

That is the fundamental thing. We must think of ourselves as in a special relationship to God. This is not true of anyone who is not a Christian. There is a very definite plan and purpose for the whole of our lives. God has called us. God has adopted us and put us into His family because He wants to bring us to perfection.

**I Peter 5:8-10** Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

At the very least, God allows these things to happen to us. At times, He orders these things to happen to us for our good. He may do it sometimes in order to chastise us. He chastises us for our slackness and for our failure. It is not always because of our failure;

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sometimes He wants to tweak the perfecting of our character, so that we will be ready when our position is ready in the Kingdom.

According to Peter we have a responsibility to discipline ourselves, to add to our faith, to finish out our faith, and not merely to be content with the bare minimum. It must be a well-established mature faith that we are developing, and God is developing in us. If we do not heed Peter's admonition to grow, but rather just persist in our slackness, we should not be surprised if things begin to happen to us. We should not be surprised if God begins to chastise us.

**Hebrews 12:5-6** And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

If a person can say that since he has believed he has never had any trouble at all, his experience is probably psychological and not spiritual. It may be something that a tare would experience, rather than a truly baptized and forgiven member of God's church. There is a realism to God's way of life. God, for our own good, will chastise us if we do not pay heed the exhortations and the appeals of the inspired written word of God. He does not do these things to those who are outside the family, but if they are His children He will chastise them for their own good.

So we may be experiencing various trials as a part of our chastisement. I am not saying it is inevitable, but I say it may be so. All sins have a penalty, and when we commit a sin it has its automatic penalty with it.

But then, sometimes God does this to prepare us for something. It is a rule of the Scriptures and a rule that is confirmed by and exemplified in the long history of the church and her saints, that when God has a particular great task for a man to perform, He generally tries him with a fiery trial.

Look at the life of any man who has been notably used by God and you will find that there has been a severe time of testing and of trial in his experience. It is as if God would not even consider using a man unless He could be certain and sure of his faithfulness. So, one may have to pass through this kind of experience because of some great task ahead that God has in mind.

Look at Joseph, and at the things that happened to him. Joseph had an extremely

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dismal kind of life for a time. Everybody seemed to be against him. His own brothers were jealous of him and got rid of him.

He was taken to Egypt and there people turned against him. He had done nothing wrong, from the worldly standard, to cause it, but because he was what he was things went against him. But in all this, God was only preparing the man for the great position that He had planned for him. This may be why we as a church are going through so many trials, sicknesses, and terminal illnesses; it may be that God is preparing us for what is coming in the near term, and definitely long term.

It is the same with all great men of the Bible. Look at the suffering and trials in II Corinthians 11 and 12, which show the false teachers, and suffering that they (the Corinthians) had to deal with. It has always happened that God's people have to go through certain trials.

It is evident also from the teaching of the Scriptures and the lives of the saints, that God sometimes prepares a man for a great trial in this way. That is, He prepares him for a great trial by giving him some lesser trials. It is there that we see the love of God shining out so mercifully. This does not happen to everyone, but there are some serious things coming on this earth in the near future.

This is a great principle: God sees and knows what is best for us and what is needful. We do not see, but God always does, and as our Heavenly Father, He sees the need and He prescribes the appropriate trial, which is ordained for our good.

Faith is a major part of the foundation of our Christian lives. It is absolutely necessary in facing times of stress, and we cannot please God without it. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." But no matter how hard we try, we cannot work up faith by our own doing. Real, godly faith—the kind necessary for salvation—has to come from God.

**Ephesians 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

So faith comes from God through His Holy Spirit. We receive faith partly by reading and studying God's inspired written Word. To have faith, we have to draw close to God—to really know Him. We have to repent of our sins against God's law, to do God's will, to pray, to fast, to grow in the grace and knowledge of God, and to ask God to give us true faith. True faith is a gift from God, but it also requires a lot of work on our part.

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How can we know if our faith is from God—the very faith of Jesus Christ Himself—or something we worked up ourselves? Will it stand the test, or will it be found impure—worthless—useless in times of stress and when going through a trial?

The elect of God experience intense sorrow by fiery testing so that God can determine the genuineness of our faith—to see how true and pure our faith is.

**I Peter 1:6-9** 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, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

The end result of living a faithful life of righteousness is the God-given gift of salvation. I Peter 1:7 brings us to the second principle, which is the precious character of faith. Peter says that these things had happened—these various trials—in order that the genuineness of your faith, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The precious character of faith is essentially important, and Peter brings this out in his comparison with gold. He says in effect, gold is precious, but not as precious as faith. Why is that? Because gold is something that ultimately is going to vanish because it is physical, it is only temporary. There is nothing permanent about it, though it is beautiful, precious, and highly coveted.

But faith is eternal. Gold will eventually perish, but faith does not. Faith is something that is everlasting and eternal. We are in this faith position, and we do not always realize it.

Peter says we walk by faith. The whole of our life is a matter of faith, and this is a very precious thing in the sight of God. It is so wonderful, and it is so fantastic, that God wants it to be absolutely pure. It must be a pure faith for us to be in God's Kingdom. Gold is purified by means of fire. You get rid of the alloy and all the impurities by putting gold in the crucible and applying intense heat to it, and so these other things are removed and the gold remains.

Peter's point is, that if you do that with the gold that perishes, how much more does it need to be done with faith? Faith is this extraordinary dynamic that links a person to God. Faith is this spiritually astounding thing that can take a person who is dead in sins, and make him live as a new being, a new person in Jesus Christ. That is why it is so

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precious. It is so precious that God wants it to be absolutely perfect. So we are in these 'various trials' because the character of faith must be absolutely pure and perfect!

But let us put that in a slightly different form. Our faith, we understand, needs to be perfected. There must therefore exist degrees of faith. There are differences in the quality of faith. Faith is many-sided, and it is many faceted. For example, the faith that we have at baptism, is a lesser degree of faith than we develop later. It is not the faith of salvation so to speak, but rather it is a faith that we have in God that we are willing to repent of our sins, and realize that we are guilty of those sins.

Generally, at the beginning, there is a good deal of the flesh that we are not aware of. And as we begin to learn these things, and as we go on with the process, God puts us through His testing of us. He tests us by trials as if by fire, in order that the things that do not belong to the essence of faith may fall off or be purged.

Some may think that their faith is already perfect and that it can stand up against anything. Then suddenly a trial comes and they find that they fail. Why is that? Well, that indicates that the trust element in their faith needs to be developed. And, God develops the trust element in our faith by trying us in this way. The more we experience these things, the more we learn to trust God. How many times have we been through mild trials, or even serious trials, where we have not seen a solution, or we have not seen a way out? Then, out of God's mercy comes the solution.

It is easier for us to trust Him when He is smiling on us, and when He is blessing us. But a day comes when things seem dark and we begin to wonder whether God loves us any longer, and whether God's way of life really is what we thought it would be. Hopefully, as long-time members we do not have that problem, or those thoughts very often, but certainly those that are new in the faith do.

And God reveals to us that our faith had not developed the element of trust, and so God deals with us in a way that brings us to trust Him, even in the dark when we cannot see 'the light at the end of the tunnel.'

Look at a man like Abraham. God had so dealt with him that he could 'hope against hope.' He trusted God absolutely when every appearance was to the contrary. And that needs to be developed in us as well.

We do not start like that, but as we go through these experiences we find that 'behind a frowning providence He hides a Father's face,' and the next time the trials come we remain calm and collected. It is by means of these trials that the element of trust is

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It is exactly the same with the element of patience, or patient endurance. It is the sheer capacity to go on and to keep going on in spite of discouragement. This is one of the most painstaking tests we can have. Human beings are not patient by nature.

We start as children and we want everything right now. And, if it does not come, we become more impatient and grumble. We complain and we sulk. Everyone must have patience developed in him. Patient endurance is developed over a long time of training.

There is great emphasis and admonition in the New Testament epistles that this quality of patient endurance is required in a Christian. Patient endurance is needed as we are tried and tested in faith, so our faith can become developed and perfected.

For clarity, let me put this in a final general principle. These trials are essential in order to prove the genuineness of our faith.

**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.

The picture that Peter has in mind is of a test being applied to something, and then after it has been tested a certificate is given. For example, the test report on a ring might be, 'Yes, it is 18 carat gold.' So it has been tested, and then it is certified.

That is what is meant by tested by trial. Peter is not interested in the process as such; the trial is the certificate of attestation declaring the genuineness of our faith. The approved character of our faith is thus manifested. That is why these tests and trials are allowed to happen to us. This is the way we endure trials that really certifies our faith.

You remember how Jesus Christ, in the Parable of the Sower, depicts the seed falling amongst thorns. There seemed to be a spectacular harvest coming, but it did not come because these other things choked the Word.

Christ interprets that as being comparable to the way that trials come and crush and choke the Word so that it never comes to fruition. At first it seems so wonderful, but it does not last. The trials prove that it was a spurious faith, that it was not a real faith, not

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a genuine faith. We have seen this in God's church over the last four or five decades or so, that people fall by the wayside. At one point when the Worldwide Church of God had 140,000 people attending the Feast of Tabernacles, in the mid 1980s, they quoted a statistic that showed 50% of the people had come in since 1980. So in less than a decade half of the people that were in the Worldwide Church of God back then had come in. That means that a lot had left, because there were over 140,000 people in 1980. So, people come and people go; it is a revolving door (and it always has been). The testing of our faith is tried by fire.

There is nothing that so confirms the quality of the genuineness of a person's faith as his patient endurance—his continuing on steadily in spite of everything else.

**James 1:2-4** My brethren, 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.

So we see how rigorously God puts us through trials and testing to bring us to the point of perfection. Our duty and responsibility is to patiently endure.

It is a wonderful thing to see in the lives of the greatest saints that they stood like rocks when others fell away round about them. They had trials, but they just stood on what they knew to be God's truth without regard for the consequences.

Now these things are happening to us so that the genuineness of our faith may be perfectly evident to all. Those who fall away are false witnesses to God's truth. Those who start well, but who do not continue disgrace the faith.

The thing that shows the difference between the spurious and the real is the capacity to stand the test of "All that glitters is not gold." That is found out and made very clear by fiery trial.

How do you prove gold? You put your material in a crucible and you put a flame underneath. You find that dross will burn off, or float to the top, while the gold remains, and is purer than it was before. These things happen to us in order that the genuineness of our faith may be revealed.

What is the consolation? It is that although these things happen to us, yet they only happen for a limited time. Remember what Peter said, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials."

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This state of trial is not the perpetual condition of the Christian. These things come and go as God sees fit. We are not tried and tested except it be for our good. As we respond to the teaching, God will withdraw the test.

He does not keep us permanently under trial. Take for example the prophecy about the Smyrna Church of Revelation 2:

**Revelation 2:8-11** "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.'"

Now there are several ways that these scriptures can be applied. One is that the Smyrna church was an era of God's church in a chronological order. In history if you go back and research the lineage of God's church, and what happened to it, there was a period of time where the church was so devastated by persecution, all kinds of stake burnings, murders, and things like that, but it only lasted for ten years. It was a horrible time for the church and you can find that in history. In fact, one of my sermons on church history covers that.

Now the question is, it appears that the seven eras or the seven attitudes of God's church appear at the end time. So does this mean that there will be something like this happens to some of God's people? I do not know, and I do not want to speculate any further on that.

This passage is an exhortation not to be afraid of any of those things that were to come upon them. Although they were to be persecuted, and some of them were to be imprisoned, and some even martyred, if they were faithful, they would have a crown of life.

The tone of the language addressed to the church of Smyrna is that of commiseration and comfort. God decided that they would have to be subjected to a test to show whether the reality of their faith was genuine.

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God sometimes allows Satan to persecute His elect with trials and tribulation in order to show that His church is of divine origin, and that it can patiently endure in faith testing by fiery trials giving a true witness of the church's spiritual character.

Regardless of whether some of God's people are to suffer a violent death or not, the same promise of salvation and eternal life applies. It is true of everyone who is a Christian, in whatever way he may die, that if he is faithful even to death, a crown of life awaits him.

Trials and tests alternate, and God knows exactly how to send them and when. Do you remember the apostle Paul's admonition and encouragement to the Corinthian brethren?

**I Corinthians 10:12-13** Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 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.

God is our loving Father, and He knows how much we can take and how much we can stand. It is only for a limited time. Have you been discouraged in your trials? Are you spiritually depressed? Do not be troubled! You are in the hand of your heavenly Father. There may be a wonderful period of relief coming for you in the near future. It is definitely coming eventually by Christ's return.

God may have some unusual blessing for you; He may have some great work for you to do. Are you lacking work or completely out of work? He may bless you with a better job, one you enjoy more.

Are you sick? He may glorify Himself by healing you completely today or tomorrow, certainly you are being healed spiritually right now during your trial. God's purifying and perfecting us is a spiritual healing.

Which is more important: to be healed physically or spiritually?

Looking at it from God's perspective, the importance of your physical healing is dwarfed into little significance when compared with the value of being spiritually healed of some flaw in your character. Physical healing only lasts while we are human; but spiritual

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healing lasts for eternity!

Contentment is found in getting our minds off ourselves, and focusing on and doing God's will.

The second main principle is, as you are experiencing this grieving, this heaviness, remind yourself also of the things in which you greatly rejoice. The trouble is that when these trials come we tend to see nothing but the trials, or nothing but the clouds and gloominess. And, we become very negative.

When this happens, go back to I Peter 1:3-5. When you can see nothing positive at all, just open God's inspired written Word and start reading this:

**I Peter 1:3-5** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Remind yourself of that. These things are happening, these trials are falling around us and coming from all directions, but we cannot fall or sit down under the weight of them. Remind yourself of the things in which you greatly rejoice, though now for a season if need be you are in various trials, but it is a limited period of time.

**I Peter 1:6-9** 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, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end [outcome] of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

Look at the statement in verse 7, "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." The return of Jesus Christ is coming. So, all that happens to us in this life and world has that as the initial goal.

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The apostle Paul, in writing about Apollos, the other ministers, and himself in I Corinthians 3, says that everyone in the church is building on a foundation.

**I Corinthians 3:9-17** For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

Some are building with hay, wood, and straw (these are perishable things); others are building very carefully with sturdy spiritual elements, and Paul says that the day will declare it. Every person's work will be tried and tested by fire. Will your work go up in smoke, or will it be rewarded?

The day will declare who has been building sturdily and who has been short on patient endurance—rushing up his building with shoddy material. Does God's truth bore you?

The apostles realized they were inadequate as far as faith was concerned, and they said to Jesus, "Increase our faith." You and I should have the same request today. So Jesus' answer is of the utmost importance to us.

**Luke 17:5-10** And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat?' But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We

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have done what was our duty to do."

God owes us nothing, but we owe him everything, even our very lives. In verse 6, Christ spoke of the grain of mustard seed, showing the fantastic power of even a small amount of real, godly faith.

Jesus shows that God does not thank us if we do only what He has commanded us to do. To please God, we have to go above and beyond what God commands. To go above and beyond the call of Christian duty is a very powerful tool for increasing godly faith. This was Christ's answer to the request from the apostles to increase their faith.

In this end time, a person's spiritual growth is directly proportional to how much his or her heart is in the work of God.

And this principle, of doing more than is required, applies to all of God's laws of love; it applies to how faithfully we support God's work with our tithes and offerings, how wholeheartedly we are striving to come out of this world's society, how fervently we are trying to root out weaknesses and character flaws, and how committed we are to one another.

If we are striving to go above and beyond the call of duty to please God in all areas of our Christian lives, then if and when a trial or crisis strikes we will not fear from a lack of faith. God will give us the faith of Jesus Christ to cope with the trial. That is God's promise! With the strength and power that can only come from godly faith—we can stand.

Paul wrote in his epistle to the members in Thessalonica, that he and the other apostles mention the brethren's example of patience and faith to the other congregations. Their faith and love is evidence of what God expects of His church.

**II Thessalonians 1:3-12** 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; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with

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His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Their patient endurance of trials and their faithfulness through afflictions shows unwavering confidence in God. There is nothing that so confirms the truth and quality of the genuineness of a person's faith as his patience and his patient endurance, his continuing on steadily in spite of everything.

When Christ 'comes in that day' the genuineness of our faith will be made obvious. There will be praise and honor and glory. Our little faith, the faith we think is so small, will stand out as something extraordinary. It will have stood the fiery tests.

Whose honor and praise and glory is it? First of all it is God's! God the Father and Jesus Christ look with a sense of satisfaction at the faithful. The saints pass through various trials and they stand the test, because God gives them the strength to fight hard to be faithful. They are faithful to God's glory, praise, and honor at their resurrection as first fruits of the Kingdom of God.

But, it will also be to the saint's honor, glory and praise as well. God willing to yours and mine.

We will share in that glory, and we will hear Him praising us and saying the words recorded in Matthew,

**Matthew 25:23** "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

He will clothe us with His own glory, and we will spend eternity enjoying it with Him; and the more genuine our faith the greater will be our reward.

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**II Corinthians 5:10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Faith without works is a dead faith. There is to be a judgment of works; and it is according to our faith, and the way it stands the test, that we will be rewarded.

We may be in grief, in heaviness, through many temptations and trials at this present time, and we may be weeping as we go along. But that does not really matter. We are promised that the day will come when, "the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd [us] and lead [us] to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes."

That is the Christian way of facing various trials, and facing times of stress. We should be so very thankful that we are the apple of His eye.

May we greatly rejoice in faith to God knowing that we are in His trustworthy hands.