

Defining Trials

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For the majority of us, the idea that we could obtain salvation, and escape to a place of safety, caused us to pursue the calling that God was giving us. I imagine that probably the place of safety had more appeal to us at the beginning than the calling.

Indeed, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong stressed all of the above, and the fact that we of all the churches in this world had the truth. That truth was that the gospel was not what the world thought of it (just the life history of Jesus Christ and the fact that He died for us), but in fact it was the good news of the coming Kingdom of God, and all that entailed, with a real kingdom, a king, subjects, and land.

We learned about God's government, and we learned that we would not float around heaven all day, but in fact be changed from flesh and blood into spirit, the very composition of Jesus Christ and God the Father. And we came to understand that we were called to become part of the first fruits mentioned in James 1:18 and that we would rule with Christ, as is described in Revelation 20:4.

We learned all about God's holy days and that they depicted the events that were to come upon the earth. The Feast of Trumpets pictured Jesus Christ returning, bringing us with Him. At last the earth is at peace, and the millennium begins, which is what this Feast of Tabernacles is all about.

We pictured the people who came through the millennium being under our care, and the world starting to blossom, until the thousand years were finished introducing the Last Great Day, which ushered in the Great White Throne judgment where all mankind would have a chance to be taught about God and to have their first chance.

All of these positive images prodded and encouraged us to stay the course, because we knew that they were true. These were the wonderful and true spiritual carrots on the stick held in front of us to urge us onward, but in all of these positive pictures and goals, a less discussed, a less popular aspect of our calling was not often mentioned.

Though this aspect was not something that one could ever use to persuade one to answer his or her calling, yet in the long run this aspect is one of the most important, if not *the* most important part of our Christian life, as it defines who and what we are before God. This aspect, this part of our Christian calling that means so very much to us and to God, are the trials, or the tests we go through.

I Peter 1:2 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.

We were set apart so that our very mind and nature might be changed and formed into those of God and Jesus Christ, by the obedience to His laws that would actually cause us to be changed.

I Peter 1:3 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, . . .

He is the firstborn of many brethren, and we are the brethren

I Peter 1:4 . . . to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, . . .

In short, we are called to an inheritance that is imperishable, and it is definitely reserved for each of us on an individual basis.

I Peter 1:5-6 . . . who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. [The word "kept" means as kept in a garrison or fortress, in a safe spot.] In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, . . .

Because of these wonderful promises of your protection, and the salvation that is set aside for you, greatly rejoice, and consider what is yours. If now for a season, whether it be long or short, if need be you be in heaviness through manifold temptations.

The term 'if need be' is a nice way of stating that there was a definite need for their—and our—afflictions. That there might be things in our character which God has chosen to correct with trials. In short, the trials that we all go through are designed to produce something in us; something that will produce good results.

Why specifically will God's people endure many trials?

I Peter 1:7 . . . 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 testing of our faith is of tremendous value. Trials show if our faith is pure and solid. Peter points out that this is far more important than the testing of gold to see if it is pure. Gold will wear away over time, but faith if proven pure and genuine will last throughout eternity, and this is what God is looking for. No more Satan, no more rebellions, solid faith.

What question must God have answered concerning of us?

Genesis 22:9-12 Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

He said, "Now I know you will obey Me! Now I know that you fear Me, and now I know you!"

Was this trial, and its positive conclusion, just for Abraham, the father of the faithful, or is it absolutely for every one of us as well? God the Father and Jesus Christ have to have that question answered as it concerns me individually, and they have to have it answered as it concerns you individually.

We have to truly work at not playing games with God, the game of not working to overcome our sins, just sort of thinking God will not notice, because if we do that we could miss out on the calling that we have been given.

The statement God made to Abraham, He has to make of everyone who will be in His Kingdom. God has to say of each one of us, whatever our names are: Now I know you fear Me; "Now I know you!" We are not accepted because we belong to this or that group, we are accepted based on our individual performance in this calling given to us.

How important is it that we are tried and tested? The proving of our faith, through trials, is the key to all that God has in store for us. Is this some new thing with God, or do the patterns of God show that He always tests His people?

Deuteronomy 8:1-6 Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers. "And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. "Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years." You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you. "Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.

I do not think that Israel was wise enough to know that they were being tested, but that should not be the case with us, we should be wise enough to know that we are being tested, and that it is for our good.

The trials that we receive and how we respond to them define who we are before God. (And that is the title of the sermon today, "Defining Trials.") What exactly is it that God must define? It is our faithfulness to Him. I will just paraphrase Hebrews 11:1-6:

Verse 1: Faith is the mental realization of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen. Faith gives reality, body, existence, or substance to things hoped for, contradicting that which is not real, but imaginary.

It imparts reality to the mind concerning those things not physically seen, and helps us distinguish truth from those things that are unreal, and not correct. It helps us see God's future for us as being true, as opposed to man's ideas.

Faith enables us to act as if what we hoped for was in fact real, thus causing what we know to be true and what we hope for to exert influence upon us in the way that we conduct ourselves, causing us to live in a way that will produce what we hope for. True faith in God and in His instruction causes us to move toward Him in our lives; toward being what He is. In fact, one of the definitions for the term worship is moving toward the one that you worship.

Faith blocks the darts thrown by Satan and his demons. True faith in God's promises gives us unwavering confidence in God.

Verse 2: For by it, unwavering confidence in God in all situations, the elders obtained a good report.

Verse 3: It is by faith in God's Word that we believe that He arranged the heavens in the beautiful pattern we see today, and that they were created from nothing, by His Word.

Verse 4: By faith, or unwavering confidence in God, Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice.

Verse 5: Enoch walked with God in faith for three hundred years, and was translated, and he died in faith not having received the promises.

Verse 6: It does not say it is difficult to please God without faith, it says it is impossible to please God without faith. And we must believe that He is, and that His promises are sure to those who diligently seek Him.

What kind of faith is required? When I first came into the church, and I started to read that, I said that I have to have the faith to move mountains, or part the Red Sea or stop rivers up. That is not what God is requiring.

What specifically does God want us to be faithful in? It is obedience in what God instructs us to do; this identifies those who belong to God. We do not have to be giants and move mountains; just do what He instructs us to do.

When I first came into the church, a deacon that I went visiting with gave me the four principles of faith:

1. You must have proven God exists.
2. You must have proven that the Bible is His Word.
3. You must know where God's church is, and where the truth is being taught.
4. You must decide to obey God despite all circumstances.

This is what God is looking for, and it is very simple to understand

In I John 2:3-5, it says that God's love is perfected in those who keep His Word. Those who keep all His instructions will be perfected in love, and this is what God is after. It will be accomplished through obedience to His laws, as we obey and change and take on the new mindset.

In Hebrews 11:7-8, Noah was told to build an ark. He obeyed. Abraham was told to leave what had been a comfortable home among his friends, and step out not knowing where he was going. He looked for a city whose builder and maker was God. He believed God and obeyed.

We see that Moses left Egypt, when possibly he could have become the next Pharaoh and ruled the nation, to be obedient to God. By faith, Israel put blood on the doorposts and was spared, because they obeyed.

We have Rahab, in verse 31, who was listed in the book of the faithful. Many times when we think of Rahab, we think of her being a harlot, or we think of her lying to those that questioned her. What we

should remember is that she saw God as the only God. God opened only her mind in the entire city based on that she acted decisively out of her deep convictions, and in doing so she put her life on the line—and very probably the life of her family on the line—and saved the two spies. And because of that, God lists her in His Book of those who are faithful.

God next lists Gideon, a man of valor, but he was not at that time, in fact he was pretty cautious. He said, "Where are the miracles that you used to do for Israel?" He was going to be one of those miracles. They had been delivered into the hands of Midian for seven years, and had been driven into poverty, and God was going to use Gideon to free them. The key here is that Gideon obeyed, and went on to free Israel, and because of that obedience, he is listed as one of God's heroes.

The next listing (you will find this in Judges 4:4-14) was a man called Barak, and his name means "Lightning." He obeyed God, and defeated Sisera. Barak had to step out in faith against great odds. He had Deborah go with him, because he did not want to be alone, and he wanted to have somebody that could talk to God. So he went and did what he was instructed to do and is also listed as a hero.

It is interesting to note that each one of these heroes acted against great odds.

After that we had Samson who, alone and blind, destroyed more Philistines in his death than in his life and began the true freeing of Israel. Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets had to fight against great difficulties, but in all the trials they trusted and obeyed God.

Hebrew 11:33-37 Who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. [These were not necessarily strong people.] Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mocking and scourging, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—

This is something that we have not been asked to do.

Hebrew 11:38-40 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. [This is a listing of the heroes of God.] And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

We normally consider Hebrews 11 as just giving a list of those who have had to go through trials. But to me it is much more than that. It is a listing of people who have gone through defining trials—trials that defined who they were before God by the way that they conducted themselves in faithfulness.

We, at this moment in time, may not have the same intensity of trial to go through as is described in Hebrews 11, but defining ourselves to God is every bit as important today, as it was to those in Hebrews 11.

Matthew 25:14-15 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them." And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.

This is Jesus Christ speaking, and He says that He gives us talents. He gives us things to accomplish according to our own abilities, and not to some standard that is so high that we cannot reach it. We can reach what He sets for us to accomplish.

Matthew 25:16-30 "Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents." And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. "But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money." After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them." So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' "He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' "His lord said to him, '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.' Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 'And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. 'So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. 'Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. 'And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Some people will not make it.

With our calling, and the giving of His Spirit, God expects us to strive to overcome, taking on His mind and character. Matthew 5:48: "Become you perfect as your Father in heaven." Philippians 2:5 reads: "Let this mind be in you that is in Christ Jesus." We can know, or think we know, all about prophecy, we can recite verse after verse, give large offerings, but if we are not struggling to take on the nature of God, we are unprofitable.

Whether, in fact, the individual who received one talent was afraid, and hid his talent, or whether it was just inconvenient to work to overcome, or whether he just never forced himself to get around to it, the result was the same, he lost his salvation. God said that he was a lazy slothful servant, and said that he did not put his heart into it.

How can we be certain to make it?

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

One of the major keys in defining that we belong to God is to deny ourselves, and to bear our cross. This same account in Luke states that we must bear our cross daily.

The cross is a figurative expression denoting that we must endure whatever is difficult, trying, or embarrassing, or disgraceful in following Jesus Christ. As we do our duty to God, trials will come upon us. And everyone called by God the Father will have to suffer in this fashion.

John 15:18 If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.

For us to deny ourselves simply means that we have to surrender our will to do what is right, our desires, our affections, and our lives to God. Not seeking our own happiness as being the most important, but being willing to put all our desires aside in obedience to God. All of the heroes in Hebrews 11 did just that. In their lives God and His desires came first without compromise.

Two inspiring examples of this can be found in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 3, we have the story of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, otherwise known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were told to bow down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. It was reported to the king that certain Jews he had set over the affairs of the province of Babylon would not worship his idol.

Daniel 3:13-18 Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

Daniel 3:25-29 "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." 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. Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have

frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God! Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this."

There were three presidents, and Daniel was the chief president. The lesser presidents wanted to find fault with him, but could not, except concerning the law of his God. The plan was simple, they asked the king to establish a royal statute that anyone making a petition of any other god or man for thirty days, except to the king was to be thrown to the lions den. They were starting to plot their own death.

Daniel 6:23 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.

Indeed, the trials of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and Daniel were truly defining trials. Not only could God absolutely say, "Now I know you," concerning the four men, but the trial gave the strongest of witnesses to these two kings, the leaders under them, and the people, that there was a supreme God that ruled over them and all the earth.

In the above trial, these men were bearing their cross that came with the worshipping of God. Their faithfulness to God allowed them no other course of action to take. Their faithfulness to God brought them into direct conflict with the world around them, just as our faithfulness to Christ will bring us into conflict with the world around us.

The question that should come to mind is: How were these men able to stand up to their defining trial? Did they just grit their teeth, saying, "If I can just make it through this one trial, I will be alright with God"? No, there was much more to it than that.

Luke 16:10 He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.

Adam Clarke had a comment on this verse:

He who has genuine principles of fidelity (faithfulness) in him will make a point of conscience of carefully attending to even the smallest things; and it is by habituating himself to act uprightly in the little things that he acquires the gracious habit of acting with propriety, fidelity, honor, and conscience in matters of the greatest concern.

By being careful of the little things, by watching over them, by being obedient to the smallest things of God's law, you begin to build a foundation that over a period of time is going to give you the strength and trust in God to stand even greater trials. This, in principle, is repeated in Matthew 25:21 and Luke 19:17, in the giving of the rewards in the parable of the pounds. This shows our rewards will be based on our faithfulness in the little things.

Tests for our defining come to us in many forms. Probably the most common arena for our testing is as Pogo in the comics said, "I have met the enemy, and it is us."

Remembering whom God calls, we know that He calls the weak, base, and foolish. How many years of weakness, bad habits, wrong thinking, wrong ways of solving problems, and dealing with each other do we bring with us that have to be overcome?

Romans 8:13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

This is Jesus Christ speaking to us personally.

Matthew 16:25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

What He is saying is that you cannot have another God.

He that is anxious to save this physical life with its comforts, its way of thinking, its way of doing things, its habitual weaknesses, at the expense of denying Christ and His clear commands, shall lose his eternal life. But he that is willing to lose all in obedience to God, shall have life everlasting.

Matthew 16:26 "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

The placing of God in a secondary position that personal achievements might be accomplished, the putting of riches, position, and pleasure first, means that the individual's life is lost. No matter how wealthy one becomes, or how much he is into the pleasures of this world, the day comes when his life must cease, and at that time his scorecard is in, and it is too late to qualify.

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong left us a quote that defines the job each of us has in his definition of building godly character that many of us may not have heard for years.

Building godly character is: the attainment of the ability, in a separate independent entity of free moral agency—to be able to discern right from wrong—the true values from the false—truth from error—the right way from the wrong; and then make the right choice or decision, even against self-desire, impulse, or temptation; plus the will and self-discipline to resist the wrong and do the right.

That is part of what our job is, and sometimes we just do not want to do it.

Trials come to us in all fashions. Those we bring on ourselves, those that witness for God, those that come with age and poor health, those that come from the world around us, and those that others may cause for us. But in all of this, God will use these trials to perfect us, and will not try us above what we are able to bear.

In I Corinthians 10 Paul looks back to Israel as a warning and instruction for us today, stressing their miraculous passage through the Red Sea, and all the fathers sharing in God's grace and the many blessings. But despite that, with the majority God was not pleased, because of their idolatry, lusting, fornication, and their murmuring.

I Corinthians 10:11-13 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 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.

We are given the warning in verse 12 that we would be tempted as well, but remember that these temptations are not something that we are unable to overcome.

These are everyday things that you can overcome. God will do what He can to bring us through it. We all know that God is intimately working with those that He has called and that He is acutely aware of every trial that we find ourselves in. God is aware that there is a limit to our power, and will not try us above that limit, but with the trial we are in, will make a way to escape it, that we might be able to endure it.

I used to always read verse 13 and then stop there, but then He says in verse 14, because of God being on our side, and being willing to help us, we are to flee from idolatry. Any thing, any idea, any activity, or personal mindset that sets itself above God should be done away with. We are to flee from any personal idol that has pre-eminence in our lives over God; flee anything that would cause us to sin.

I remember years ago, over in Korea, we had an R & R and they had this place called V.D. Bridge, because on one side of the bridge were the prostitutes and the other side was just the city. We had one of our men who wanted to go over to the prostitutes and we were keeping him from it. The prostitutes were grabbing him on the one hand and we were pulling him across this bridge so that he could not get over there. We are to flee fornication, we are to flee whatever it is that is going to cause us to sin. In this world we have so much that can affect us, and that can hurt us.

Then the apostle Paul puts it in a way that I do not think that I really noticed before.

I Corinthians 10:15-17 I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

He said you keep the Passover, you keep the holy days, you go to Sabbath services, and that identifies you as belonging to God.

I Corinthians 10:18 Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? [That identified them with God.]

I Corinthians 10:20-22 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. [Then he sets the principle for us.] You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the

cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. [For us today we cannot be part of the world and sin, and be part of God.] Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?

Are we stronger than God? No!

It is in this state of testing, through adversity and affliction, that proves our faith, our obedience, and gives us confidence in God. Difficult as trials may be, we must remember that God is with us in every trial, and more than that, He is with us that we might grow and benefit from that trial. That is the purpose of all of the trials for His children.

The benefit might be the learning of a valuable lesson in living, or having our faith strengthened, or being toughened up, or discontinuing a habit, or way of living that would keep us from the Kingdom. We learned from the trials of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, their tests proved with utter certainty that God can deliver us from any seemingly impossible trial.

God wants us to understand that He does correct us. He is our Father in heaven, and we could not have a finer Father. Sometimes we do not want the correction, but nonetheless God is going to give it to us because it is for our own good.

Hebrews 12:5 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;

In this case the afflictions were designed to produce positive results in the lives of God's children. He is perfecting us that we might rule in the Kingdom of God. Just as you correct your children so that they will be better citizens, God corrects us that we might be His perfect citizens.

This was taken from Proverbs 3:11-12, "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither detest his correction. For whom the Lord loves, He corrects, even as a father the son in whom he delights."

The phrase "despise not the chastening of the Lord" literally means: Do not regard it as a small matter, or as a trivial thing. The word "chastening" does not refer to affliction in general, but the type of affliction which is designed to correct our faults, or which is in the nature of discipline. The verb refers to the training up of a child, and the giving of instruction, counsel, and discipline.

We should know that God sends them for some very important purpose; therefore we should not collapse under them, but bear up.

Hebrews 12:6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

It is in His fatherly correction that He shows His great love for us. The phrase, "And scourges every son whom He receives" in the Hebrew would read as follows: "He corrects, even as a father, the son in whom he delights." In short, because God has called us, and delights in us, He will exhibit watchful fatherly care over us.

Hebrew 12:7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

You can toughen yourself up in the chastening, and say, 'I can take it, it will not break me.' But if you do that, then verse 8 comes into play.

Hebrew 12:8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

The chastening is supposed to produce something; it is supposed to teach you something. It may teach you not to perhaps lose your temper, not to fly off the handle, not to gossip, not to spend your money unwisely, whatever it is.

Hebrew 12:9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

Some fathers that I know of have not done a good job raising their children, and the children are terrified of them. By coming into God's chastening, His correction, and His teaching we are going to live, because He wants us to make it.

Hebrews 12:12 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. [It is for our profit that trials come, even though we do not like them.] 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, . . .

Because of this, renew your courage, and make effort to bear up under the trial, because victory is just around the corner. Quoting Albert Barnes: "A courageous mind, braces a feeble body, and hope makes it fresh for new conflicts."

Hebrews 12:13 . . . and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

What that means is get back under God's laws and His teachings, and come back under what God wants you to do.

Hebrew 12:14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

The world around seems to think that God is harsh. I have often said that they do not seem to object to the commandments at least in principle. What is wrong with not killing? Nothing. And what is wrong with not telling a lie? Nothing. What they seem to resent God for is when He says, "You shall not. . ." They do not want to have anyone over them.

But after the trial, after He has accomplished what it was He wanted to teach us, then He blesses us. He certainly did with Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Also, Job was blessed greatly.

Job 42:10-17 And the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then all his brothers, all his sisters, and all those who had been his acquaintances before, came to him and ate food with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversity that the LORD had brought upon him. Each one gave him a piece of silver and each a ring of gold. Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first Jemimah, the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren? Happuch. In all the land were found no women so beautiful as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children and grandchildren for four generations. So Job died, old and full of days.

God is not vengeful; He wants to help us with everything that He can help us with.

What trials are on the horizon for us at this time?

Certainly we all will have the daily trials of overcoming and working to go on to perfection, but on top of that will come the events of the end time that will additionally test us. The cultures that have come into this nation are going to cause us to be unsettled. Much of the stability in our life is the environment around us, and when that starts to fall apart fear is going to take over. We will start to wonder if we are on the right track and that sort of thing.

We are also very small in the world today as far as our numbers. I figured roughly if there were 20,000 people left in the church, and the world is six billion people, then we are one in three hundred thousand. Our world is going to begin to change, and one that seems so orderly and trustworthy is going to start to disappear out from under us.

We are also going to be faced with some other things.

Matthew 24:4-5 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.

Matthew 24:11 Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.

Matthew 24:24 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."

This is the first seal. We will have to face this in the end time. This is why you had better have your foundation solid. Jude 3-4, 18 tells us that men crept in unnoticed who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, who turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying God. Peter tells us that there shall be false teachers in this age, and many shall follow their ways.

Matthew 24:6, the second seal, tells us that we will hear of wars and rumors of wars. This is what is taking place now with Iraq and the Muslims. Verse 7, the third and fourth seals, mean we will have famines and pestilence in the earth. All of these are just the beginnings of sorrows. Hopefully we will not have to be there for the 5th seal, and we will have personal protection from God, instead of being tortured, persecuted, hated and afflicted.

James 1:2-3 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

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 promised to those who love Him.

When I first came into the church we were in Southern California, and I had a boss that was a controller. He wanted to know where I was at every moment. Every Friday night he would say, "Call me and tell me the sale." Once I learned about the Sabbath, and that it was holy time, I would not answer the phone on Friday evening. He became more irritated. I would not answer the phone on holy day nights because that was God's holy time. He called the vice president and the regional manager, and we had a meeting in a big hotel in Los Angeles. I was not counting this all joy, I was not Rahab, I was not Barak, I was Foster Farms chicken. All the way down there I was thinking, "I have little children, I have a house to pay for, I am going to lose my job."

The vice president stood up and said, "Well John, what is this I hear about you not calling Jean on Friday nights." I do not know where the words came from, because inside I was a Mixmaster going on there. I said to him, "I work for you almost seven days a week, I call on Las Vegas at midnight on my way back home, and if I cannot have one day to go to church then there is something wrong with the company." There was silence. Then the vice president said, "Thank you John, go home."

I went home and thought my trial was over. I had my boss for four more years. He would put sausage on my plate in the sales meetings, and say, "Eat that sausage." I felt like an outboard motor, I kept saying, "but, but, but."

I do not think that many took their trials with joy. Certainly Joseph when he was kidnapped and sold to the slave owners and he was taken to Potiphar, and he was thrown into prison when he refused Potiphar's wife, all of this time I do not think he said, "O joy, this is wonderful." But all of this time God was humbling him.

Hebrews 12:2 Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

He did not look forward to the cross, He endured it, and it is the same with us as we look forward to the joy that is set before us. This is why we endure our trials.

James 1:4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

He says to count it all joy when you are surrounded by trials, and in this case it means persecution. Trials put our faith to the test, and we slowly build muscle because of it. But the word translated

"patience" is much more forceful than passively enduring. It means standing up and facing the trial, and over a period of time when you have gone through many you begin to have that type of courage to face the trial. The statement that "perseverance must finish its work" indicates progress and development, which in turn produces Christian maturity. Thus perseverance in facing trials develops maturity of character, and a balance of all the abilities and strengths needed for this life that we have been called to.

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.

Many have come with trials to the Feast. Many are suffering health trials, financial trials, trials in their marriage, trials in child rearing. We have teenagers that have to resist the world around us. God is with us in all our testing

II Chronicles 16:9 For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars."

I Samuel 12:22 "For the LORD will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you His people.

Hebrews 13:5 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."

Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

Psalms 149:1-9 Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, and His praise in the assembly of saints. Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise His name with the dance; let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp. For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation. Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud on their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute on them the written judgment—This honor have all His saints. Praise the LORD!

God has promised this to those who love Him. To those who see the beauty in His law, and understand that His way of living is the only way that this world will ever know peace and fulfillment in life. It is those who truly value God, and all that He stands for, that will receive the crown of life.

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.

II Timothy 2:11-12 This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

Paul encourages us to stay the course.

Romans 8:18-19 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 16:20-23 Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

He was saying, "Peter, do not try to talk me out of this trial. This test and this trial are important, not just for me, but for all of mankind, and by inference the tests that you are going to go through are just as important to you if you are going to rule with me in the Kingdom of God."

Matthew 26:36-42 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Then He came to the disciples and found them asleep, and said to Peter, "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."

Jesus Christ knew the importance of trials and tests.

I Peter 4:1-2 (New Jerusalem Bible) Think of what Christ suffered in this life, and then arm yourself with the same resolution that He had: anyone who in this life has bodily suffering has broken with sin, because for the rest of his life on earth he is not ruled by human passions, but only by the will of God.

I Peter 4:1-2 (The New English Bible) Remembering that Christ endured bodily suffering, you must arm yourselves with a temper of mind like His. When a man has thus endured bodily suffering he has finished with sin, and for the rest of his days on earth he may live, not for the things that men desire, but for what God wills.

This is the purpose of testing.

Brethren, working to come out of this world, to resist giving in to sin, will indeed try and test us, but if we stand fast in what is right, it will yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. As I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon, we have been taught, and will be taught at this Feast, the wonderful things that God has in store for us, and these should encourage us and give hope.

But, with that hope, must come the realization that to obtain those promises, we must be fully known by God. And for Him to gain that knowledge, and to train us for His purpose, we must be tried and tested. But in that there is great hope for us.

I Peter 1:2-9 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. 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, 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.