

Rejoice in Your Trials!

One of the hardest things we as Christians must face is the matter of trials. With trials come pain and suffering, and none of us enjoy pain. Our minds and bodies want to escape suffering, avoid the rough spots in the road, and ride along smoothly upon the smooth pavement of the wide and pleasant highways of life.

However, our Saviour Jesus Christ has a lot to say about this natural proclivity of man, which seeks the easy way.

“Enter in at the strait [stenos (4728) = “narrow, distressful, counter to natural inclinations”] gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it”. Matthew 7:17.

This idea is reinforced in Romans 8:16-26, where it says,

“The spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I reckon 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 creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who has subjected the same in hope. Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the

children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now, and not only they but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man sees why does he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

We Follow Christ's Steps

Further, Peter stated emphatically that we are to endure temptation and trials just as our Saviour Jesus did. Note I Peter 2:21-24:

“For even hereunto were you called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judges righteously: who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes you were healed.”

The prophecies of Isaiah 53 portray our Saviour as a man “... despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (verse 3) surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows (verse 4);

... but He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed (verse 5).” Then, after all of these predictions of Christ’s sufferings, the Father states that it pleased Him to bruise, since His soul should be an offering for sin (verse 10). The word for *pleased* is *chaphets* (2654), a verb in Hebrew meaning literally “to take pleasure in, have delight in”, or, more than have an intense pleasurable emotion, to “prompt the heart to take a certain course of action from a sense of fitness” (*Strong’s Expanded Concordance*).

Just as Jesus suffered for us — the sinless for the sinful — that He might pay for our sins, so we as His younger brothers (Romans 8:29) must endure trials so we might be tested and proven, often under the most dire circumstances. This is all for a great purpose, however, one that is essential but seldom pleasant ... *because God loves us!* Because of that love, He allowed Himself to be nailed onto a tree and die an agonizingly brutal death (Matthew 27:32-50; Mark 15:21-37; John 19:1-30). We follow in those very steps that Christ walked on earth.

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Galatians 2:20.

“Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13.

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” I John 3:16.

“For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made

manifest in our mortal flesh.” II Corinthians 4:11.

“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him but also to suffer for His sake.” Philippians 3:10.

“If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us.” II Timothy 2:12.

Rejoice in Trials!

Despite the fact that we may not relish trials, we need to view them as our Creator does, and accept them as crucial for our development as the sons of God. James tells us plainly in James 1:2-5,

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him.”

This test of faith is a very precious, more precious than gold that will someday perish, tried with fire, that it may produce the righteous fruit of Godly character to be evidenced at Christ's return (I Peter 1:7). These trials can take many shapes, such as

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- Illness
- Death of loved ones
- Job difficulties and lack of adequate funds
- Friends that leave or disappoint us
- Lusters of this world: overeating, addictions to foods, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, pornography, and other lusters.
- Marital or family conflicts

We can be certain that the devil has a big part to play in these trails and temptations, for “... *we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in high places*” (Ephesians 6:12). Yet, we have the power of the Almighty on our side who, with our own personal will, will send the devil fleeing as we cleanse our hands and purify our hearts (James 4:7-8).

We need to rejoice in our trials because they change us from what we have been to what we ought to be ... and changing old habits is not easy, as we all know. The “old man”, the carnal nature within us, is a tough adversary to battle, as Paul acknowledges in Romans 7. Only through Jesus Christ can we gain the victory (Romans 7:24-25).

Examples of Endurance in Trials

Let us look at some examples of those who endured great affliction in this world, and yet overcame and have a place reserved for them in the heavenly city. The list of examples is nearly endless, and only a few examples will be given here.

Job. The quintessential icon of suffering, Job endured incredible pain by losing nearly all that he had, and was then tortured with painful boils until life seemed pointless to him. He even cursed the day he was born (Job 10:18-19). Yet, through tremendous pain Job answered his wife who had asked him to curse God and die, “*What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*” (Job 2:10). In the end, Job learned the lessons he needed, and received double what he had before.

David. The “man after God’s own heart”, king of Israel, suffered enormous trials throughout his life as related in many of the Psalms. He was at

times under such duress that his bed became drenched with sweat. Note Psalm 6: 1-7.

“O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, neither chasten me in your hot displeasure. Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak: O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed. My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O Lord, how long? Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: oh save me for your mercies’ sake. For in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave who shall give you thanks? I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears. My eye is consumed because of grief; it waxes old because of all my enemies.”

Paul. This amazingly effective apostle was given a “messenger of Satan” “*to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure*” from an abundance of revelations. Even praying to God three times to have the affliction removed did not convince Him to heal Paul, but instead God told Paul, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness*” (II Corinthians 12:7-9). Paul took pleasure in infirmities, persecutions, and distresses for Christ’s sake, and he stated “*When I am weak, then am I strong*” (II Corinthians 12:10).

Hezekiah. When King Hezekiah was about to die, Isaiah told him to get his house in order because he was indeed going to die. Then the king turned to the wall, prayed, and wept, pleading that God would give him more years to live. Isaiah received God’s message that Hezekiah would be given 15 more years to live (II Kings 20:1-7). The king’s trial led to repentance, and a renewed opportunity to serve the nation.

Abraham. Faced with the prospect of killing his son Isaac, Abraham nonetheless, through great conflict, nearly performed the task before being told to stop and sacrifice instead a ram caught in a thicket nearby (Genesis 22:1-13).

Peter and other apostles. These apostles were preaching the message of Christ in Jerusalem, and were thrown into prison, only to have an angel release them so they could, the next day, preach yet again. After being arrested a second time and brought before the high priest, they were told to refrain from preaching this message, and were then beaten and released. Their response: *“And they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name”* (Acts 5:41).

What Trials Indicate

Among the many things trials indicate, as already pointed out, is that God loves you, and is diligently working with you to be changed into His pattern ... He being the Master Potter of His creation. One thing trials do not indicate is that you are spiritually weak, or that God has abandoned you. Psalm 34:19 points out that *many* are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Eternal delivers those individuals out of them all. Notice too what Hebrews 12 reveals:

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children. My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” Hebrews 12:5-6 (See also verses 7 to 11, and Deuteronomy 8:5; Psalm 94:12; 119:72; Proverbs 3:11-12).

Your Creator has a great purpose in having you endure trials, building traits of character such as outlined in Galatians 5:22-23. He may be moving you somewhere else, to a different line of work or to a different part of the country. He may be teaching you to empathize with others who have, or will have, the same affliction you are enduring. Like with Job, He will do whatever it takes to humble and lead you through the minefield of experiences that fulfill His plan.

Responding to Trials

We oftentimes are blindsided by a challenge we have never faced before ... but this is part of God’s plan to uplift you. We are in the same league as Jesus Christ, the early apostles, and all Christians who have lived, including those who are living today. Recognize that God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to endure, but with the trial will grant you a way of escape that you will be able to bear it (I Corinthians 10:13).

Do not be caught up in fear with the difficulty you are facing, but allow the spirit to flow through you in power, love, and soundness of mind (II Timothy 1:7), knowing that in your Creator you have an advocate in whom you can trust entirely. He really cares for you.

“Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him.” James 1:12.

“Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects: therefore despise not you the chastening of the Almighty: for he makes sore, and binds up: he wounds, and his hands make whole.” Job 5:17-18.