God takes no delight in the testings of his children. The Bible says Christ is sympathetic toward us in all our trials, being touched by the feelings of our infirmities. In Revelation 2:9 he tells the church, “I know thy tribulation, and poverty….” He’s saying, in essence, “I know what you’re going through. You may not understand it, but I know all about it.”

It is essential that we comprehend this truth, because the Lord does test and try his people. Scripture says, “Thou hast tried us, as silver is tried” (Psalm 66:10). “Your faith be tried with fire” (1 Peter 1:7). “The Lord trieth the righteous” (Psalm 11:5).

Indeed, everyone who follows Jesus is going to face afflictions. The Psalmist writes, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous” (Psalm 34:19). Paul speaks of having “much affliction and anguish of heart … with many tears” (2 Corinthians 2:4). And Hebrews describes saints who are “destitute, afflicted, tormented” and “enduring a great fight of afflictions” (Hebrews 11:37, 10:32).

The fact is, the Bible says a great deal about suffering, trials and troubles in the lives of believers. According to the Psalmist, “My soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave” (Psalm 88:3). Likewise, David writes of enduring “great and sore troubles” (71:20).

I can’t name a single follower of Jesus who hasn’t endured all of these things that Scripture mentions: trials, tribulations, troubles, afflictions, anguish. I know I can say along with David, “I have endured sore and great troubles and trials.” And I know that many others reading this message can say, “That sums up my life right now. I’m facing several anguishing trials and afflictions.”

For this reason, every Christian has to know and accept that God has a purpose in all our sufferings. No test comes into our lives without his allowing it. And one of God’s purposes behind our trials is to produce in us an unwavering faith. Peter writes, “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7). Peter calls these experiences “fiery trial(s)” (4:12).

Paul testifies of being afflicted with trials yet finishing his course having won the faith test. He writes, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). Of course, Paul knew he still had much work to do. There were great trials and suffering ahead for him. But he was able to honestly say:

“I may not have apprehended Christ as I wanted, and I haven’t been perfected. But when it comes to faith, and trusting God through every trial, I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded. When the enemy comes in like a flood, I know the Lord will raise a standard against it. And I learned all of this in the furnace of affliction.”

I share this testimony with Paul. By the grace of God, the Holy Spirit has enabled me to come through a number of trials in recent years, the hardest being the death of our twelve-year-old granddaughter, Tiffany. The Lord provided strength and faith through that excruciating ordeal, and I came out of it saying, “I know whom I have believed, and I know he has a plan. God would not allow this kind of deep hurt to come upon me or my family without a purpose.
behind it all. Oh, Lord, I give this over to you by faith."

Think about your own present ordeal or trial. Have you had doubt, fear or anger as you’ve endured it? Have you accused God of putting too much on you, of placing you in your trial needlessly? Are you on the verge of giving up, thinking, “I’ve been faithful to pray, to read the Bible, to go to church, but nothing is working”? 

Or, can you still look to heaven and say, “I know the Lord is good. And I’m going to trust him through this. I won’t live in doubt. He will bring me out, to his glory.” If this describes you, then your faith has endured the fire. But if it doesn’t, I have to ask you: how many more trials and afflictions will you endure before being able to say, “My faith has prevailed”? 

A test is not always God’s purpose behind our trials.

The truth is, not all of our trials are tests of faith. Often, the Lord is after something more when we’re in the furnace of affliction. Indeed, the closer you walk with Christ, and the deeper your trials, the more he is working in you to accomplish something other than faith. 

Yet, don’t misunderstand: whenever our faith wavers, tests of faith will come. We will never be completely beyond such testing. But here is another of God’s purposes in our trials: The Father is preparing a bride for his Son. And he wants more from us in our trials than greater faith.

This bride is going to be tried severely, and her love for the Bridegroom will come through the fire. Her trust in him will be refined through fires, floods and afflictions. Yet these trials aren’t a matter of testing her love and devotion. Rather, they’re about refining a love that is already fully committed. Let me explain.

I believe many reading this message are fully committed to Christ. Jesus is the great love of your life, and your trust in him is flourishing. Certainly, there still are times when that trust is tested. But God is looking for something else from you, something more. His preparation of the bride requires that he do a supernatural work in you.

This bride — Jesus’ chosen beloved — must be consumed with a longing to be with her Bridegroom. She has to be weaned from all other attractions. She must be obsessed by a desire to always be in his bodily presence. Paul refers to this longing when he writes of his own desire “to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

This was not a morbid fixation with death on Paul’s part. The apostle clearly lived a full, useful life. But, he said, “Something in me yearns to be with the Lord, where he is. I long to be with him face to face.” To make such a claim, Paul had to be completely weaned from this world and its attractions.

Right now, God is at work preparing a new world — a new heaven and a new earth — for his people. And this new creation will comprise a New Jerusalem, including a home for Christ’s bride. Isaiah saw this new world that God is creating, and the sight of it must have overwhelmed him. God says through the prophet, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy” (Isaiah 65:17–18).

God is making a powerful statement here to the bride of Christ. He’s saying, in effect, “In the midst of your present trial, fix this truth in your mind: the present world is not your home. Everything you see is going to pass away — earth, moon, sun and stars. I am creating a new world, where there are no fires, floods, devils, trials or afflictions.”

Do you get the message? Your trial is going to end, and your troubles will pass away. Therefore, focus your eyes on Christ, and set your affections on spending eternity with him in the new world. According to him, the world we toil in now, with all its pain and sorrow, will not be remembered when that day comes. It won’t even enter our minds! (see 65:17).

Beloved, this tells me that the trial many are enduring right now isn’t testing — it’s training. We’re being prepared for a world where there will be no more pain. And that world is going to be populated with brand-new bodies. Paul tells us the body that goes down into the grave won’t be the one that comes out of the grave. We’re going to have a brand-new body, one with the DNA of Christ himself.

Abraham is an example of one who was focused on the world to come. The Bible says of him, “By faith he sojourned … as [an alien] in a strange country … for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and
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maker is God” (Hebrews 11:9–10).

Abraham passed a great test of faith when, in obedience to God, he offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Yet, even more than his tested faith, Abraham was weaned from this earth — a fact proven when he offered up his son. He had faith that there was a greater purpose than the one he could see. Here was a man truly in the world but not of it, seeing his citizenship in another world.

Now consider what Hebrews says of Christ: “(He) … suffered without the gate” (13:12). Jesus suffered as an outsider — always on the outside of formal religion, outside of accepted society. Yet Christ was also “outside” in the sense of having no place here on earth, even to lay his head. In everything Jesus did, he always looked to heaven.

Like our Savior and our forebear Abraham, “Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come” (13:14). We live and work on this earth, but we are aliens here; our true homeland is in the New Jerusalem. Thus, Hebrews urges, “Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach” (13:13). Until we also are “outside” the camp — outside this world’s lusts and materialism — we won’t be where our Bridegroom is.

I live in a nice home and drive a nice car. But I continually guard against such material things ever taking hold of my heart. The fact is, you can have a mighty faith and still not long for Christ. “Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity [love], I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2).

Sadly, as I look around today, I see multitudes of believing Christians who have overcoming faith, but have no longing to be with Jesus. Instead, they’ve set their eyes on the things of this world and how to obtain them. I find that such people don’t want to hear about focusing on heaven or being weaned from this world. To them, such a message means an interruption from the “good life” they enjoy here.

Thank God, he has a wonderful way of pushing us outside the gate. He tells us, in essence, “If I’m going to give my Son to you in marriage, there can be no other attraction in your life. I want to be sure you’re not lusting for something or someone other than Christ. Your most exciting dream, the deepest pull on your heart, has to be a desire to be with Christ.”

Beloved, this explains many of the deep trials of righteous saints who walk in faith. Think about it: how did God get the children of Israel out of Egypt? He had to put them in a furnace of suffering, to bring them to the point that they cried, “Enough of this! I don’t want to be here anymore.” Then, when the time came for God to say, “Go,” they were ready to uproot and move into his Promised Land.

God help us to get disengaged from the materialistic spirit of this age, and to transfer our every affection to the New Jerusalem. Isaiah prophesied that the world God was creating is a place of praise, where the inhabitants rejoice.

“He be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy” (Isaiah 65:18). The Hebrew word for “create” in this verse means “to bring into being.” Do you see what Isaiah is saying? God is creating not only a new world, but also a special people. He’s bringing into existence a bride who hasn’t just been weaned from this world, but has learned to praise her way through trials.

The fact is, our present sufferings comprise a school of worship. And all the ways we’re learning to praise Jesus, especially in our trials, are training for that glorious day. What does this mean for Christians who live with constant fret and worry? How can those who live as if God were dead suddenly know how to praise their way through a trial?

It is very important how we react in our present trial. When Israel was in their hour of great suffering, they gave up hope. They decided they couldn’t take any more, so they simply sat down in the dust. Here were God’s people, with rock-solid promises, yet they sat there with a chain around their necks.

Likewise today, some Christians give up at this point. They don’t abandon their faith, but they stop pursuing Jesus with their whole hearts, thinking, “I can’t live under this kind of intensity. It seems the closer I get to Christ, the more I suffer.” They wonder how Paul could say, “I … rejoice in my sufferings” (Colossians 1:23–24).

Here is exactly how Paul could make such a claim: he had been taken up into heaven, and he saw the glory that awaits us. Because of what he saw, Paul was able to embrace his trials and afflictions in this life, learning to praise God through every ordeal. He was determined to learn gladness of heart no matter what his situation, and he
began practicing praise in preparation for the world to come.

“If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also 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” (Romans 8:17–18). In light of the glory that awaits him, what is his trial in comparison?

Likewise, he wants us to turn our eyes from present sufferings to focus on what is coming, and that will change everything. One minute into our new habitation, Paul says, we won’t remember what came before. His point is to start praising now, rejoicing over the joy that awaits us. “By him [Jesus] therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Hebrews 13:15).

God has chosen those “refined … not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction” (Isaiah 48:10).

The people to whom Isaiah offered this vision of a new world had just endured the fury of a raging enemy. Now they were reeling from their tribulation, bound by fear and weariness. They felt God had forsaken them, and they were afraid of what the future held. So what word did God send them? It’s the same word he gives his people today:

“Wake up! You are not undone, as you think. The Lord, your strength, is still with you. So, get up out of the dust of discouragement, and sit down in the heavenly place I have promised you. You have not lost your righteousness, so put on your robe. Shake yourself, talk to yourself, give yourself a lecture. And tell the flesh and the devil, ‘I am more than a conqueror through him who saved me’” (Isaiah 52:1–3, paraphrased).

Consider the powerful example of the three Hebrew children, whom King Nebuchadnezzar threw into the fiery furnace. These men weren’t being tested over their faith; the fact is, it was their faith that put them there. The Lord clearly was after something else. Think about it: the heathen Babylonians weren’t influenced by these men’s prayers or preaching. They weren’t impressed by their wisdom and knowledge or by their holy living. No, the impact on Babylon came when the people looked into the furnace and saw these three men rejoicing, praising God in their most trying hour.

Jesus appeared in that furnace, and I believe his first words to the Hebrew children were, “Brethren, rise up now, for your bonds are loosed. Let this heathen government and godless people see you rejoicing and praising your God in your hour of affliction.”

The men did just that, and Scripture says Nebuchadnezzar was “astonished” at the sight. He rose up in haste, crying, “What’s going on here? We cast three men into this furnace, but now there are four and all their bonds are gone! Look, they’re singing and praising that fourth man.”

That is the impact our praises bring during our trials. So, how have you been reacting in your hour of affliction? Are you drinking from the cup of trembling, feeling weak, with no power to resist the enemy? It’s time to shake off the heavy bands and lift up holy hands in praise to your Redeemer. You are free, no matter what your trial, so be glad and rejoice, knowing that the fourth man is in the furnace with you. Christ will reveal himself in your trial, and the fire is going to burn off all the cords that bind you.

Most likely you are not being tested but trained!

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