

Trials

#30

Trials in life are inevitable. Paul knew that his people would face many trials. In fact, if you read through the New Testament, you'll find that the majority of letters have, as a major concern, the stabilizing of believers during grief, and preparation for impending trials. For example:

"We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know." (1 Thessalonians 3:2-4)

So, we too, must be prepared for the coming waves of tribulation, because they are coming. Your understanding of God's purpose in trials will determine your ability to persevere and find peace in the storm.

How do you know when you're in a trial? _____

Read 1 Peter 1:3-7

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

Underline what you feel are important words or concepts.

Why were those important to you? _____

The following are a few thoughts on trials you may have picked up on.

"Greatly Rejoice"

What is the source of rejoicing? _____

The answer is our salvation, which really is our source of comfort and joy in any trial. Though we might lose our job, money, relationships - nearly everything, in fact - this is the one thing that can never be taken from us. It will never "perish, spoil or fade" and is kept safely by God. But since our faith in our salvation is the anchor for our souls, Satan does target this security. That is why doubts often accompany trials.

"May Have Had To"

Why might this phrase be important? _____

The answer is that it shows forethought, and intentionality on the part of God, as it relates to their trial.

What is the most painful thing to ponder when you are in a trial? _____

It could be that the fear that my suffering is random and purposeless, causes the most discomfort. Nothing that comes into your lives is random. Even when we are the cause of our own grief, God is the one who decides if we will experience the consequences of our actions. Peter's trial was a result of his own failure, but clearly allowed by God.

“Little While”

There is a divinely appointed start and stop time to a trial. Forethought was given, not only to the necessity of the trial, but its intensity and duration. It is great to remember that these trials will pass.

Why do you think Peter uses the phrase “all kinds” to describe trials? _____

The hardest thing about trials is that they don't come in spiritual wrappers. There is no accompanying warning that says, “This is a trial. Apply Biblical principles now.” Rather, trials often sneak up on us as mundane, everyday events. It is usually mundane things that effect people: sometimes they are emotional trials, sometimes physical, circumstantial, or even mental. These things become trials, because we need to continue to believe that God cares, loves us, and is good in all He does, even though we are still suffering.

A trial not only tests our faith - it stretches it - sometimes to proportions far greater than its original size. That's what the next section deals with:

“These have come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

Like the gold smelting process, trials heat up our lives, causing impurities to float to the surface and making it possible for our faith to bend and stretch. Which brings up another interesting question:

Why do trials often occur, not when you've been in rebellion, but when you've been trying to walk with God? _____

Trials prepare you, and grow you, for the next step of your spiritual journey. They enable you to graduate to the next grade. The faith and character needed at your current level, is not what will be required for the next.

Here is an interesting reality that can be observed at a local hospital. Non-Christians, even non-religious people, will often try to encourage someone seriously ill by saying things like: “It will all be over soon; it won't last forever; every cloud has a silver lining; all will turn out for the best.” Instinctively, they know what a person needs to hear in a trial. Unfortunately, it's a meaningless platitude if they don't know God, with no guarantee of any of those things. But, God in this passage, is saying the same thing, and that makes all the difference in the world, because, well, He's God.

Read 1 Peter 4:19

When trials come, what does Peter encourage us to do? _____

Are you facing any trials at the present time that the group could pray for? _____

Close in prayer.

Memorize James 1:2-4