

The work of any refiner and purifier of silver was to subject precious metal to intense heat in order to remove the impurities from it. The dross which rises to the top is then scooped away. As the refiner sits over the purified metal and looks down upon an even more valuable product, he is able to see an image of himself. And so it is with us: our Father in heaven, subjecting His own special people to the purifying process of trial and affliction, makes us a more valuable and precious commodity to Him, being conformed to the image of His Son, Rom. 8:28-29.

The great patriarch Joseph also offers us some additional lessons about the trial of our faith. After going through years of severe personal trial, he also acknowledged the beneficial effect that it produced. Rising to the rank of Prime Minister of Egypt, he was able to look back and acknowledge the hand of God at work in his life. His two sons named Manasseh and Ephraim outlined his response to trials. The first he named Manasseh saying, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house." Gen. 41:51. The second he named Ephraim, stating "...God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction" verse 52. Despite the rejection and hurt caused by his brothers, the slander of Potiphar's wife and being forgotten in prison by the chief butler, he avoided the snare of bitterness and resentment, deliberately "forgetting" the plethora of personal slights against him. By so doing, he was able to attest to the fruitful result from such a course of action—and a great pattern for us to follow; first "forgetting", then fruitbearing, the inevitable consequence of committing our way to the Lord. In due time, God will honor us as we honor Him.

How much more could be said about the positive effect of trials in the life of the believer if we yield to Him! There is Paul's request to have his thorn in the flesh removed, only to be denied by the Lord to

keep him humbly dependent upon Him and cognizant of His all-sufficient grace, 2 Cor. 12:9. There is Jacob's all-night wrestling episode at Peniel with the Angel of the Lord, ending in a limp but also a changed life and a changed name and a changed purpose and a changed direction, as he crossed back over the river Jabbok to reconcile with his brother Esau, the sun rising upon him, Gen. 32. What a picture! And then there is James' direct exhortation to adjust our attitude as we enter a trial to see the rounding-out of character that it produces: "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.", James 1:2-4.

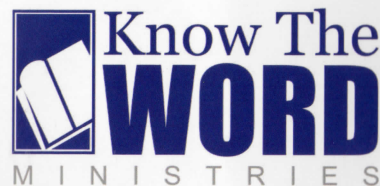
The apostle Paul reminds us "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." 2 Cor. 4:17. Only as we look into the mirror of God's Word will we begin to understand more clearly the bigger picture and the wisdom of God in passing us through various trials and tribulations that we go through. As we do, we will be able to sing more convincingly the words of the hymn writer: "every joy or trial falleth from above, traced upon our dial by the Son of love. We may trust Him fully all for us to do, they who trust Him wholly, find Him wholly true".

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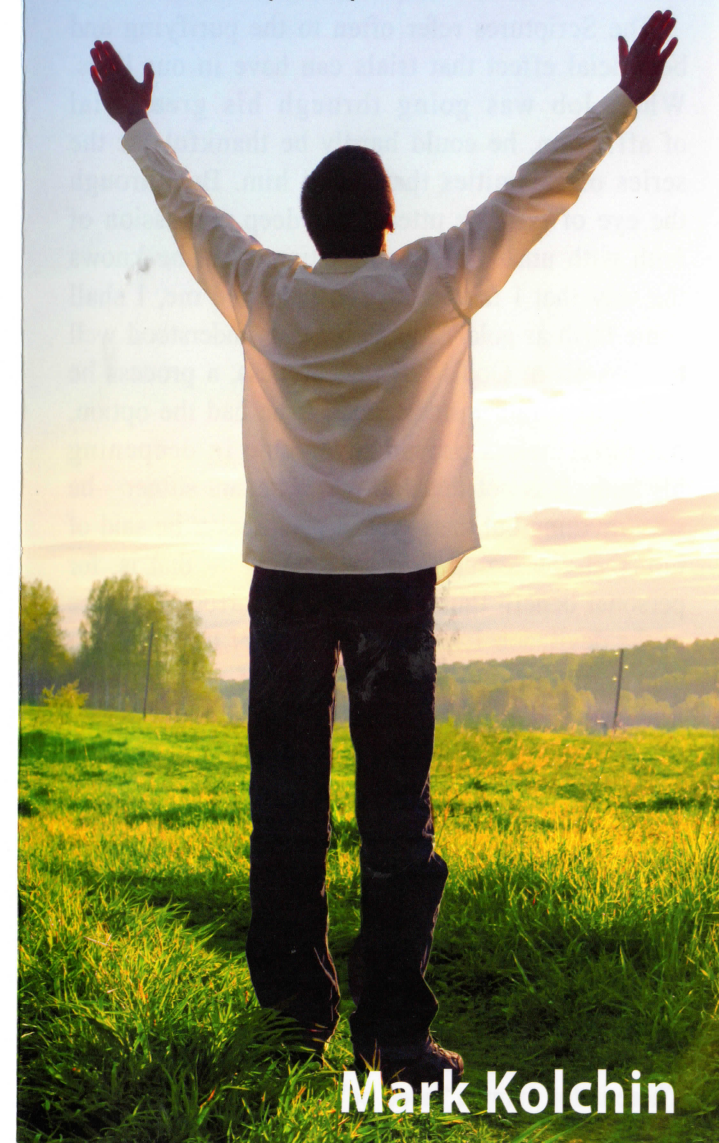
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Tried and True

The purpose of trials in
the life of the believer



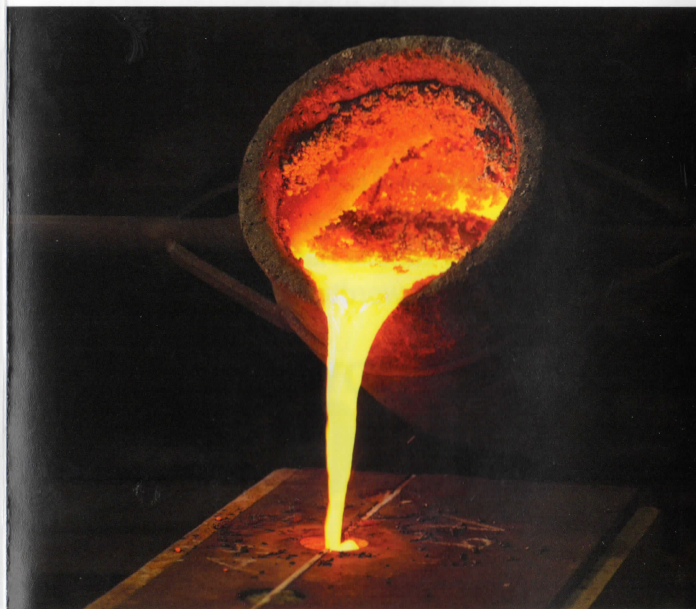
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It could hardly be said that any Christian enjoys going through a trial. It is one of those aspects of our faith that we would rather avoid. Depending upon its depth and length, it could shake us to the core, far more than we ever anticipated when we first began traveling down its winding (and perhaps harrowing) path. Yet after coming through it in dependence upon the Lord, we will undoubtedly admit that it had a significant part in deepening our faith, sharpening our once nebulous convictions, and conforming us more closely to the character of Christ, Rom. 8:28-29.

The Scriptures refer often to the purifying and beneficial effect that trials can have in our lives. When Job was going through his great trial of affliction, he could hardly be thankful for the series of calamities that befell him. But through the eye of faith he uttered his deep confession of faith with unshakeable conviction: “But he knows the way that I take: when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold”, Job 23:10. Job understood well the benefit of God’s refining process, a process he would have rather sidestepped if he had the option, but nevertheless proved invaluable in deepening his faith. It is not that Job was a blatant sinner—he was anything but that—yet, it could never be said of him that “he feared God for nothing” – that is, for personal benefit thus dismissing the arrogant charge of the devil, Job 1:9. There are a lot of trials that we also would prefer to sidestep, but if we do would likewise forfeit its beneficial effect in our lives. It was a tough road for Job and it may be a tough road for us, but it can and often does turn out to the glory of God and a shining example of how the Lord does indeed bring many sons to glory, Hebrews 2:9.

Sometimes however there are gaps in our lives as Christians that necessitate the disciplining hand of God through trial. Peter stated, “if need be you are in heaviness through manifold temptations (trials)”. There is for many a “need be” from the Lord because

of certain sins that have found an open door in our lives and have been permitted to go unjudged. Like Israel who failed to cast out all of the Canaanites in the land, we too can tolerate and fail to cast out the residue of sins of our past life (James 1:21), only to impede our progress in the life of faith. Strangely, we allow some things that are objectionable to God to comfortably coexist with us without realizing the slow erosion that can occur in our walk with the Lord. Trials serve to jar us out of that complacency and to realign our spiritual priorities. Just as Samuel had to hack Agag to pieces, so too we are exhorted to take decisive action and mortify the deeds of our flesh in obedience to the Lord, Colossians 3:5. In short, it helps us to stay on track spiritually. David confessed, “Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now have I kept your word”, Psalm 119:67. He knew too well the sting of the disciplining hand of God upon his life on more than a few occasions, only to express later the surpassing value of it. Eventually, God would call him “a man after my own heart”, Acts 13:22. Regarding this, Charles Spurgeon the great 19th century preacher once related the account of a rope bridge in his day that collapsed unexpectedly, plunging many to their deaths in a ravine below.



Upon investigation, it was determined why the catastrophe occurred: a little seedling had been ignored and taken root between the strands of rope and the wooden planks, thus weakening the bridge. Trials help us to do surveillance on our lives in order to motivate us to pull the weeds of sin that could eventually weaken and mar our testimony.

God wants all believers to reflect the character of Christ in their lives. To accomplish this, God may bring certain trials to soften the hearts, making the believer more compassionate and sensitive to the needs of others.

In so doing, they are able to comfort others with the same comfort that they are comforted of God, 2 Cor. 1:4. They become more like Christ. Col. 1:27 states this principle succinctly: “Christ in you the hope of glory”. Additionally, like Daniel’s friends, the believer going through a trial will sense the Lord’s nearness perhaps more than at any other time in our life as they go through the furnace of affliction. There will be a reality to the words Is. 43:2, “When you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you”. Further, in a mysterious way, the Christian going through a trial will ultimately sense that they actually are the object of His attention and affection just as Zechariah prophesied to Israel about the Man among the myrtle trees, the Lord Jesus, who reassured them of a future glory when at the time they were at the “bottom”, Zech. 1:8.

This principle is depicted for us as God explains what will yet occur with the nation of Israel during the future Tribulation. As the result of His refining work during that time, He will bring about a great spiritual purging within the nation. He is described as sitting like “a refiner and purifier of silver” in order to “purify the sons of Levi and to purge them as silver and gold that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness”, Mal. 3:1-3.