

# Why Trials

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It goes without saying that there are many, many brethren going through severe trials. Look at the suffering of so many and look at the Sabbath Update and we all know people who are going through severe trials. Yet, the Apostle James says the following. Let's go to James 1:2. He says something that, on the surface, you would think is astounding, given the severity of the trials that God's people are going through. This is nothing new, but it seems that the closer we get to the end time, those trials seem to accelerate and seem to be more severe and encompass a greater number of brethren.

**James 1:2.** *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;*  
(KJV)

Now "temptations" is not the most accurate translation. It's Strong's 3986. Zodhiates, in his Complete Word Study of the New Testament, says this under temptations:

A state of trial in which God brings His people through adversity and affliction in order to encourage and prove their faith and confidence in Him.

It's a state of trial in which God brings His people through adversity and affliction in order to encourage and prove their faith and confidence in Him.

The Apostle Paul said, "I am exceedingly joyful in all of our tribulation." We find that in 2 Corinthians 7:4.

**2 Corinthians 7:4.** *Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.*  
(KJV)

Now we have to ask the question: Why on earth did James and Paul make these statements? What's going on here? How can severe trials bring joy? How does that happen. Why does God cause them to say this? What is God accomplishing in us through these trials? Is there a purpose behind it? Is He a harsh God that some have taught? Is He a harsh God who derives pleasure in seeing people suffer? Is that God's nature? Or is there some greater purpose behind our trials? Is there some long-term strategy behind our trials?

The title of the sermon today is:

### Why Trials

We're going to cover five areas. They go in progression in understanding.

## 1. Trials are part of our calling; they are necessary for us to be in the Kingdom of God.

This we need to establish right in the beginning.

Some modern-day protestant churches teach what is commonly called a gospel of prosperity. They teach that if you give yourself to the Lord, you will be physically blessed in every way. If you send money to the church, that is pleasing to God and you will be blessed more than the money you sent in to the church. That is a gospel of prosperity.

When I came into the Worldwide Church of God in the mid-sixties, many felt kind of the same way. They felt that God would not allow horrible trials to come to His chosen people. Then when one did, it was often said, "Well, I wonder what their sin is." In other words, God wouldn't allow a trial, but someone, because of their sins, brought the trial on themselves. They felt that God just wouldn't allow that to happen because, after all, we are His chosen people.

Many today, feel that if they are in the right group, if they follow the right man, they have greased slide into the Kingdom of God with no major trials because they are sitting in the right seat and they're looking at the right guy. It happens today. But here's the fact. God never promised any of us a rose garden when He called us. You cannot find that in the Bible. It is not there. God never promised us a rose garden. Let's go to Acts 14:22. This is talking about Paul and the disciples and those that were around Paul. It states it very plainly and sometimes those who preach the gospel of prosperity or those who believe that life will be rosy if they just sit in the right seat, they need to read this account.

**Acts 14:22.** Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that ... (KJV)

This is what Paul was exhorting them.

*22b) ... we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. (KJV)*

That is a promise. That is going to happen.

The Greek word for "tribulation" is Strong's 2347, and literally or figuratively it has exactly the same meaning. It means *pressure, affliction, anguish, burdened, persecution, or trouble*. Not good. Zodhiates says this about this word:

The Christian is presented in the scriptures as being joyful in tribulation since there is a deeper experience of the presence of Christ and of the kingdom of God when tribulations come."

There is a deeper appreciation of God and Christ and the Kingdom when we have trouble.

Why? Because we look to the future; we don't look to the now. We don't think now is the end result or should be our purpose.

Now many have gone before us in suffering. Many, many have suffered far greater than we suffer today as bad as it is today. Look at what Paul endured. Turn to 2 Corinthians 11:23. Paul here is defending his apostleship against those who are accusing him. He is saying (not bragging), he's saying, "Look, this is what has happened to me because of the gospel. Look at what I've had to endure and have endured."

**2 Corinthians 11:23.** *Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant (I'm working harder than them all), in stripes above measure ... (KJV)*

He can't count the number of times he's been beaten.

*23b) ... in prisons more frequent (happened more than once), in deaths often. (KJV)*

He means threats of death. He was threatened many times.

*24) Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. (KJV)*

He received forty stripes five times. Can you imagine the toll it took on his body?

*25) Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; (KJV)*

He was treading water for a night and a day.

*26) In journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;*

*27) In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness. (KJV)*

Did Paul have a greased skid into the Kingdom of God? Did Paul just have no worries once God called him on the road to Damascus and everything was fine? It doesn't sound like it.

Notice what John added.

**Revelation 1:9.** *I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation ... (KJV)*

The point is that it is part and parcel of our calling. The fact is, so many others have suffered ahead of us. We are following in their footsteps. We're walking down the same path they did. But notice their suffering in Hebrews 11:35. This hasn't happened to us yet. It's talking about those who had faith and endured to the end.

**Hebrews 11:35.** *Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: (KJV)*

In many other scriptures, this leads us to believe that the first resurrection is the better resurrection because of what we have to go through.

*36) And others had trial of cruel mocking and scourging ... (KJV)*

We know what Christ went through. Some of the disciples and some in the Old Testament went through this for their beliefs.

*36b) ... yes, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:  
37) They were stoned, they were sawn asunder (Can you imagine?), were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;*

It's like we see today with those people trying to flee Syria, and I can only imagine what they are going through now that winter is starting. There are families walking. They don't know where they're going or what's going to happen to them. Some even give up their kids for a chance to get on a bus or something to go north.

This is the point:

*38) (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (KJV)*

The point is that we are just following in the footsteps of many, many converted brethren. We're just following in their footsteps. We're going to see, before we're through today, that there is a greater purpose being worked out by those trials. There is a great purpose behind these trials that come upon us. We shouldn't be surprised when the trials come, because we're going to find out that they are absolutely necessary for us to be in the Kingdom of God.

## **2. Trials are designed to produce fruit in us.**

In some cases, they are the only way that certain kinds of fruit will be produced in us, by having trials.

Let's go to 1 Peter 1:7. Peter is addressing the subject of trials. This is the subject.

**1 Peter 1:7.** *That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, (notice) might be found ... (KJV)*

That means, at the end of the day, for the end result.

*7b) ... might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: (KJV)*

The trials come so that ultimately we will have the praise and the honor and the glory bestowed upon us by the Father and the Son. The third word in this verse, “trial” is Strong’s 1383, and it’s “dokimion” and it means *a testing*, by implication (this is interesting) *trustworthiness*. That’s only one digit away from Strong’s 1384 that we’ve talked about many times before, which is “dokimos.” It’s talked about in 1 Corinthians 11:19.

**1 Corinthians 11:19.** *For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved (dokimos) may be made manifest among you. (KJV)*

This is only one number away, but it’s the same root word. Dokimos means acceptable after a sale. We talked about that being a term applied to coins. It also means *approved and tried*. So in 1 Peter 1:7, Peter is saying that trials show God who those are who are trustworthy and who are acceptable after they’ve been through the trial. The result of these trials are praise and honor and glory for us, because we now are approved after the testing is done.

Trials, as I said in the second point, they cause us to produce fruit. Remember what Christ said that every good tree brings forth good fruit (Matthew 7:17). So with this in mind, let’s go to John 15:1. This is Christ’s last night as a physical human being here on earth. Notice what he says. He draws an analogy between Himself and a vine.

**John 15:1.** *I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.*

*2) Every branch in me that bears not fruit he takes away: and every branch that bears fruit, he purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit. (KJV)*

The Greek word for “purge” means *to cleanse*. God cleanses it through trials. So not only are we promised a trial, we are promised many trials to purge us and cleanse us to bring forth more fruit.

*3) Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.*

*4) Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abides in (be attached to) the vine; no more can you, except you abide in me.*

*5) I am the vine, you are the branches: He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit ... (KJV)*

That’s our job. That’s one of the reasons we were called.

*5b) ... for without me you can do nothing. (KJV)*

We're going to see that as a point later on.

*6) If a man abides not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. (KJV)*

That's the ultimate fulfillment of that, of course, is the lake of fire.

*7) If you abide in me, and my words abide in you ... (KJV)*

We have to hear the words and do the words.

*7b) ... you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.*

*8) Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be my disciples (KJV)*

Now going to the beginning of verse 16, Christ says,

*16) You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should ... (KJV)*

So here in nine verses, He has mentioned bringing forth fruit four times. We normally say that when God wants to emphasize something, He mentions it a couple of times, but here it's mentioned four times. So there is a huge emphasis on bearing fruit.

Let's see what God says about bearing specific fruit. Let's go to Romans 5 and begin in verse 3. The word "tribulation" comes up. It's the same word that we talked about before. Paul says:

**Romans 5:3.** *And not only so, but we glory in tribulations ... (KJV)*

That's Strong's 2347, meaning *pressure or trouble*. Paul is saying that we glory in them. We rejoice.

*3b) ... also: knowing that tribulation (Notice the works of tribulation, trials, pressure, trouble) works patience; (KJV)*

The reason is that a trial doesn't start and stop in thirty seconds. Most of our trials last a long time. They can last hours, days, weeks, months or years. So because of this process of time, it brings forth patience on our part.

Going on in the beginning of verse four.

*4) And patience, experience ... (KJV)*

You see, when God brings us through one trial, then the next trial isn't so scary. We develop experience coupled with patience. Later trials are not as bad because we've been there, done that. God has rescued us and God has intervened, so we have experience.

I remember a family living in Portland and the husband lost his job. He was without work for I don't remember the exact time, but several months anyway. He then found this FAA job right in the area where his wife's parents live. He actually had a better job in a location where the kids could be near their grandparents and it all worked out fine. Then at some point, he got furloughed by the FAA. I called them and talked to his wife and said, "How are you all doing?" She said, "Hey, we're doing fine. We're not worried a bit. God got us through the first time. He will get us through the second time, so we're not worried at all. God will work it out, no worries." That's experience coupled with patience.

Now look at the latter part of verse 4.

*4b) ... and experience, hope: (KJV)*

Experience brings forth the fruit of hope.

*5) And hope makes not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the holy spirit which is given unto us. (KJV)*

So patience and experience leads to hope, and they're all brought forth as fruits because of trials.

Look at 1 Peter 5:10. Trials produce fruit in us. Peter went through a lot. Peter suffered along with Paul and the rest of the disciples. Notice what he says.

*1 Peter 5:10. But the God of all grace, who has called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, (Notice, there's a caveat here) after that you have suffered a while, make you perfect ... (KJV)*

The suffering makes you perfect. The Greek means *complete*; a complete and whole Christian.

*10b) ... stablish, ...*

The Greek means to set fast, like you nail something to a wall. It's set. It's fixed. It's not going to move. So the trial makes you complete and makes you fixed and it strengthens you and ...

*10 continued) ... strengthen, settle you. (KJV)*

The Greek for the word “settle” means *to lay a foundation*. It means to establish a foundation that is strong and not moveable. The trials produce strength and completeness and a strong foundation that otherwise would not be produced. Couldn't do it any other way.

Therefore, there's no rose garden. There's no greased slide into the kingdom because God uses trials to produce fruit in us.

Also, trials produce the fruits of compassion and empathy for others. This is so important. Sometimes we think that compassion, empathy; what's the difference? How do they relate? Webster says this about compassion: *Sorrow or pity aroused by the suffering of another*. So compassion is the sorrow or pity we feel when someone else is suffering. Mark Twain said, “Compassion is language the deaf can hear and the blind can see.” The works of having compassion, having sorrow for someone who is suffering.

The word “empathy” is a little different, because it internalizes the sorrow. I'm quoting again. *The capacity for experiencing as one's own, the feelings of another*. We have some wives right now watching their husbands suffer; they have empathy. Their husband's suffering becomes their own. They suffer right along with their mates because of the empathy that they have. So compassion and empathy are the result of trials that come our way.

Let's go to 1 Corinthians 12:13. It's talking about being baptized into the body of Christ and we've become a family. We've become a body together. All of God's people irrespective of corporations, races, nationalities, locations, we're all part of the body of Christ if we have God's holy spirit. Paul says:

**1 Corinthians 12:13.** *For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free ... (KJV)*

That was a huge deal back then whether you were a slave or a slave owner.

*13b) ...and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*

*14) For the body is not one member, but many. (KJV)*

Now to verse 25.

*25) That there should be no schism (division) in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.*

*26) And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it ... (KJV)*

What if we've never had a headache. So many people suffer with headaches. If you've never had a headache, how could you feel for that person? If you've never had pain, how could you feel for that person? So God allows trials to come on us, that we experience pain, so that we can feel for others. For instance, a very close friend, an



elder, has arthritis, where every joint aches. I don't know of anybody who has suffered as deeply and as long as he has. When we bang our thumb, we get a little bit of an idea of what arthritis might be and what that pain might be like. The loss of a loved one. If we never lost a loved one; if God just had everybody stay alive until Christ came, how would we feel or know what someone else is going through when you lose a mate or a mom or a dad or a child. We pray that never happens. So it's hard to know the sufferings of other people if we've never suffered ourselves. One of the reasons God allows suffering to come upon us is so we can develop compassion and empathy for the members of the body of Christ. If we have suffered, you see, then we know what they're going through and we can feel for them and it makes our prayers a lot more effective, it gets our mind off of ourself and onto other people.

Let's go to 2 Corinthians 1:3. When we suffer, we have compassion and empathy, but you must do something with it. You can't just sit on it and say, "Be warm and fed." We need to do something. Paul said:

**1 Corinthians 1:3.** *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies (That's part of God's nature.), and the God of all comfort;*

That tells us something about the nature of God.

*4) Who comforts us in all our tribulation ... (KJV)*

That word is "trials." Now he gives us the reason. Why does God comfort us? Why does God get us through trials?

*4b) ... that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble ... (KJV)*

How can we comfort them?

*4 continued) ... by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. (KJV)*

So when we go through pain and suffering and trials, God comforts us, and we know what that feels like. Then when a member of the body of Christ suffers, we can take that comfort that God gave us, maybe through other people, and that same comfort we can shed abroad to others and comfort them.

So you see, trials are there for specific purposes. Compassion and empathy motivate us to serve and pray for those who suffer. Trials are the only way to bring forth these kinds of fruits. It's the only way we learn. Sometimes, yes, they are painful, but they are for a longer, greater purpose in us, so that we bring forth the kinds of fruits in our life that God's wants us to. We have to understand that trials come because that's the only way we can bring forth those fruits.

Now that leads us to the third point.

### 3. God promises to help us in times of trial.

This is a promise. We are not alone. When trials come, God allows it to happen and He says, "I'm going to be right with you. I'm allowing the trial to happen because I want you to develop certain kinds of fruits and I'm going to hold your hand and teach you as we go through this together."

Look at Romans 8:35. When God helps us, guess what. We get closer to God. Paul asks the question:

**Romans 8:35.** *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation ... (KJV)*

That's Strong's 2347 again, which is "trouble."

*35b) ... or distress ... (KJV)*

Trials bring distress.

*35 continued) ... or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (KJV)*

What he is saying is none of these can separate us from God. Therefore, when we go through any of these trials, these trials cannot separate us from God. God is with us. When God is with us and we go through the trials together, guess what happens. We get closer to God. God doesn't move. We draw closer to Him and we become more like Him and have more of His mind as we go through these trials.

Notice 2 Peter 2:9. Peter is saying that God knows something that we don't know. When we're going through the trial, we need to remember this.

**2 Peter 2:9.** *The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations (trial), and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: (KJV)*

This word "temptations" is Strong's 3986, and means *putting to proof by an experiment*. God brings a trial upon us to prove us, to test us, to see if we are dokimion (trustworthy). Zodhiates says this about this word:

God brings His people through adversity and affliction in order to encourage and prove their faith and confidence in Him.

We grow in faith and confidence. We prove God exists by going through trials. It's been my experience that sometimes when people get together and pray for an individual, God can deliver immediately, within minutes. I've seen that happen here in

the last year. Then God can deliver people right at the edge, right when they're ready to die. He allows it to go on until we are right at the edge.

That little girl I remember in Boston who had a brain tumor, and the side of her head was swollen. She just didn't have long to live. The church fasted and prayed and within a few hours, everything changed. But it took her right to the edge, and it took the entire congregation right to the edge. God watching to see what the congregation was going to do. How serious are they going to take it? Do they have compassion? Do they have empathy? He was watching to see. Then for some people, God will deliver in the resurrection. He allows some people to die, and some people die in great pain and suffering. But they will be delivered in the resurrection. You see, the whole point is, God will deliver us. We don't know when. It could be right now, or right before death, or in the resurrection, but God will deliver us.

Another way God helps us is what we find in 2 Thessalonians 1:6. We read here in 2 Peter 2:9 that God knows how to deliver us, and here is another way God helps us. I'll read this from the NIV. It's a plain and direct scripture.

***2 Thessalonians 1:6.*** *God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you. (NIV)*

He will pay back trouble. He will give them trouble. Don't mess with one of God's widows. You start messing with a widow, you are in deep doo doo as far as God goes. He will step in and take care of that situation. You see, God will fight our battles. He can do things that we cannot do.

One of our brethren worked for Amazon. He has spinal muscular atrophy, where the muscles along his spine deteriorate over time. In the general course of events, in the next ten years, he will catch a cold which will develop into pneumonia and the muscles are so atrophied that he can't cough and he will have his lungs fill up and he will die because he cannot breathe. The normal course of muscular atrophy. He is in a wheelchair, and he was working for Amazon and doing incredible work for the company. When the stock was going to be vested, they manufactured a bad report and wanted to get rid of him. So here is a guy with SMA battling Amazon. Everybody prayed about and guess what happened. He received a severance package. Now he and his family are traveling around the northwest as much as they can in a travel trailer, and they are living together enjoying their family, because who knows how much time is left? God provided all of that. By the way, he is going on disability soon and we need to pray that God would grant him disability and grant him favor with the amount of the disability income. But the point is that God provided a settlement and he wasn't just kicked to the curb.

God works behind the scenes and changes people's minds and attitudes in a way we cannot comprehend and we don't even know about. Yet at the end of the day, everything seems to work out because God is there. I can't tell you the number of times that has happened to the widows and the fatherless. God has stepped in and taken

care of it. Then we know the familiar scripture where God promises not to bring trials greater than we can endure. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 10:13. This is something we can take great, great comfort in. Paul says:

**1 Corinthians 10:13.** *There hath no temptation ... (KJV)*

The Greek word for "temptation" is Strong's 3986, and it means *putting to proof by experiment*. There is no trial, no putting to proof by experiment on God's part.

*13b) ... taken you but such as is common to man (It happens to everyone): but God is faithful, who will not suffer (allow) you to be tempted above that you are able ... (KJV)*

Notice this last part of the verse.

*13 continued) ... but will with the temptation (trial) also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it. (KJV)*

Notice what it says here. God is not saying, "I will remove the trial." That's not what it says at all. He says, "But with the trial, I will make a way for you to escape the trial so that you may be able to bear it." He doesn't say, "I'm going to wave a magic wand and the trial will go away." But He says, "I will provide a way for you to get through it. I will give you the strength, the power, the relief and comfort and whatever it takes to get you through that trial."

How is this possible? Let's go John 16. We will be looking at some of Christ's last words. He's trying to encourage the disciples, because they were going to come into all kinds of trouble. They didn't have a clue. He is trying to encourage them.

**John 16:33.** *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace ... (KJV)*

All that you're going to face. He said, "I've spoken these words so you can be at peace.

If you want to go out and follow the world as Adam and Eve did:

*33b) ... In the world you shall have tribulation (trials): but be of good cheer ... (KJV)*

Why should we be of good cheer?

*33 continued) ... I have overcome the world. (KJV)*

Christ has overcome more trials than any of us will ever see in our lifetime. He has overcome them. And Christ lives in us. He lives inside us. Therefore, with Christ inside

us, we can overcome anything. All we have to do is rely on Him. All we have to do is follow Him and have His mind and follow God's word.

#### **4. Trials make us rely on God and not ourselves.**

Too many times we look to ourselves, especially when we are young. We have energy, we have health, maybe we have a certain amount of talent, whatever it might be. We just rely on ourselves. As we get older, we realize how much we need God, how helpless we are without God.

**Proverbs 20:29.** *The glory of young men is their strength ... (KJV)*

When you've never had pain and you can do fifty push-ups in a stretch and you can run, everything is possible. "I don't need God. I can do it all myself." In 1 John 2:16, it talks about the pride of life. That is youth. The pride of life is one of the three big ones. It refers to us being youthful. When you're young, you have a pride in life and your energy and enthusiasm and all of that. But as we get older, we realize that without God we are helpless, because our physical lives, our physical health, our stamina is in decline.

Let's go to 1 Corinthians 1 and we will begin in verse 5. I'm going to read this from the New Living Translation. This translation is interesting. I think they did a great job of getting to the gist of the meaning of this.

**2 Corinthians 1:5.** *For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ.*

*6) Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation!*

To produce fruit in us.

*6b) ... For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer.*

*7) We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us. (NLT)*

That is a promise.

*8) We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia ... (NLT)*

Notice what Paul went through.

*8b) ... We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it.*

*9) In fact, we expected to die ...*

Paul thought it was all over.

*9b) ... But as a result (Notice what he learned), we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. (NLT)*

He said, "I'm right to the point of death, and I know God can resurrect me." How much harder is it to resurrect someone from the dead than to alter a few circumstances for somebody who is living? Paul is saying, "If I know that God can resurrect me from the dead, I know He can take care of me in this life, even though I'm right near death now. If He wants me to carry on, He can take care of it. I have absolute faith in that."

Here's the problem today, and we're part of the society we live in. Today the modern world does not know God. It has gone so far away from God, it doesn't even know who God is.

Let me give you a few statistics pertaining to the United States. We'll talk about the world and Europe in a minute. The United States, since 1968, Sunday attendance has dropped 43 per cent in all churches. A recent Pew Research Center study; this was reported in the Times Columnist of Victoria on May 16, 2015, the first time in the history of the United States, the total number of Christians has declined. Because obviously the population is expanding, it has gone up every year except this last year. It has started a decline. It's a symptom of the times. In regard to 2014, in the age group of 18 to 33, only fifty per cent of that group identify themselves as Christian. Yet, in the age group of 70 and above, it's eighty per cent. This tells you where the young people are and this also tells you where this country is going. We shouldn't be surprised.

In Europe it's far worse. Only ten to fifteen per cent of the population of Europe attend church on a weekly basis. This is in Catholic countries. The only exceptions are Ireland, Italy and Poland, because they are so heavily Catholic. But in all the other countries, ten to fifteen attend on a regular basis.

If you go back and look fifty years ago or even ten or twenty years ago in Europe, during this time in the last ten years in Europe, the gross national product has doubled in Europe. Because they are socialist countries, they provide cradle to grave security. They have free education, free health care, they will provide college education, they will bury you, and they provide retirement. Everything is provided by the government. Well, if the government provides everything and you have relative peace since World War II, you don't need God. They've got everything they need. We know this is folly, and God is showing it to them right now. For example, the events in Paris. It's showing the people that without God they have no hope. God is going to teach that to this country, to Europe, and all countries. That's one reason He is letting the Islamic fundamentalists have their way, because God is going to show them by events like in Paris or recently in California, that no one is safe. I don't care how wealthy you are. I don't care what part of town you live in, you are not safe apart from God Almighty.

It makes my point that God is showing us that we must rely on Him and not on ourselves, and trials are the 2 x 4 between the eyes that teaches us that lesson.

When Christ was on the earth, remember, He had all power. He said, "I could call legions of angels to rescue me." Yet what did He do on His last night on earth? Let's go to 1 Peter 2. We're going to see that Christ, despite having all power, relied on His Father. He relied on God.

*1 Peter 2:21. For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us ... (KJV)*

The Greek word for "suffer" means *to experience a sensation of pain*. Christ experienced pain for us, leaving us an example. This is what we are called to.

*21b) ... leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: (KJV)*

Which means we, too, will experience pain.

*22) Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:*

*23) Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not ... (KJV)*

Notice what Christ did, who had all power.

*23b) ... but committed himself to him (the Father) that judges righteously: (KJV)*

Remember in the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ was sweating blood. He knew what was going to happen. What are we told? He said, "If this cup can pass, I would really like that to happen." But God said, "No, we planned this. You must go forward. Christ asked for strength, and then we're told that an angel came and strengthened Him. God was there. If an angel can come and strengthen Christ, an angel can come and strengthen us. Christ committed His cause to God and then God shouldered the burden, took it away from Christ, put it on His shoulders and Christ went forward.

When I anoint someone, I ask the same thing. Matthew 8 tells us that through His stripes, Christ takes the burden off of us and assumes it on Himself, because He has already suffered on our behalf.

So ending point number four is that our trials teach us to look to God, not to men, not to organizations of men, but to look to God and Jesus Christ, and certainly not to look to ourselves.

## **5. Trials are a test so God can learn about us.**

This is where the rubber meets the road. God tests us to learn about us. How do we deal with our trials? Do we trust in God during the trial, or do we go to pieces? Do we just shrivel up into a little pool of blubber and wring our hands and whine and cry, or do

we trust God? He watches us to see. He also watches by how we react to the trials of others. Do we care about them? Do we pray about them? Do we encourage them? When you or other people have trials that seem to last a long time, don't feel bad that maybe you're doing something wrong. The purpose of the trial could be to get all of us to get on the ball. God is watching us to see how many of God's people are going to pray for them. How many people are going to fast for them? How many of God's people, through any given day, are going to have their mind on those who are suffering through long, long trials and say a little prayer for them? That right now, this minute, that I hope they're having a good day. I hope they're not in pain. I hope they had a good night's sleep. Those tests, whether they come on us or on people we know, God watches us to see how we react.

You see, we can't teach God anything. I met a few who thought they could, but we can't teach God a thing. Yet, God can learn about us, not from us, during trials. How do we react? Do we look to Him or do we fall to pieces?

Let's go to the biggest example of that trial in Genesis 22.

**Genesis 22:1.** *And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham ... (KJV)*

Tempt means to *prove or to try*. God proved him or tried him.

- 1b) *... and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.*
- 2) *And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom you love, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you of.*
- 3) *And Abraham rose up early in the morning (He didn't delay), and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.*
- 4) *Then on the third day ... (KJV)*

It was a three-day journey. He had a lot of time to think about it. He had a lot of time to think about what he was going to do.

- 4b) *... Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.*
- 5) *And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide here with the donkey; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, (Notice what he says) and come again to you.*

He didn't know that, but, you see, that was Abraham's experience leading to hope, what we talked about earlier. He knew he could trust God; and because of that experience he previously had, he had hope that they both would come back.



6) *And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.*

7) *And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?*

8) *And Abraham (wisely) said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.*

9) *And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. (KJV)*

Abraham was an old man. His son was a young man, so Abraham's son had to yield and did so willingly. Otherwise he could have overpowered his father, but he didn't do that. He respected his father and he respected God.

10) *And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. (KJV)*

God takes us right to the edge.

11) *And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.*

12) *And he said, Lay not your hand upon the lad, neither do anything unto him: (Here's the key) for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from me.*

It was a test. God didn't know before. People who believe in predestination can't answer this scripture, because God said, "I didn't know before." For people who believe that God knows everything we do, think, or say tomorrow, no, He doesn't. Just like Abraham, He said, "Now I know." God brings trials on us as He did with Abraham so He can learn about us and where we are in this Christian walk. Then when He know where we are at this moment in time, He can plan things down the road, other trials and tests and other blessings to see what we do with those, all with the effort of seeing us in the kingdom.

You see, the real test is, how bad do I want the kingdom? How bad do I want to be a son of God, a child of God? How bad do I want that? How bad do I want to be like God and Christ?

I had a little taste of that when I graduated from high school, and a mentor of mine, a coach, convinced me to go to Texas A & M. I didn't have a clue of what I was getting into. It was all male and all military at the time. It's not all male or all military now, but at the time it provided more officers to the military than all three service academies combined since World War II. As I said, I didn't have a clue. You were hazed from the time you stepped on campus in September until you left in June. You were hazed

morning, noon, night and weekends. It didn't make any difference. You were under intense pressure and physical punishment, hazing, etc. At the end of the first year, fifty per cent didn't make it. Then four years later, if you looked at the graduation rate, it was only about ten per cent, sometimes fifteen per cent, because of the pressure. The Navy Seals and Army Rangers do the same thing. They try to weed people out by putting them under great stress. At the end of the day, whether it's the Seals or the Rangers or at Texas A & M when I was there, the point is that they only wanted the people there who really wanted to be there.

God is doing the same thing with us. He did with Abraham and He does with us. He wants to see how badly do we want it? How badly do we want to be there? What are we willing to give up in this physical life so we can be there?

Remember what Christ said. Let's go to Luke 14 and begin in verse 25. Christ said the same thing and the point is, God allows trials so He can learn about us to see how badly we want it.

**Luke 14:25.** *And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, (KJV)*

I will read verse 26 from the NLT.

*26) "If you want to be my disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. (NLT)*

You just can't. You must love God more than anything.

*27) And whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.*

*28) For which of you, intending to build a tower, sits not down first, and counts the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?*

*29) Lest haply, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,*

*30) Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.*

*31) Or what king, going to make war against another king, sits not down first, and consults whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?*

*32) Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an ambassador, and desires conditions of peace. (KJV)*

Now verse 33 sums it up.

*33) So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsakes not all that he has, he cannot be my disciple. (KJV)*

You see, our trials, which either God causes to happen or God allows to happen to us, are ways of showing God how badly we want it, how much we love Him, how fully we love Him, and how badly we want to be like Jesus Christ and not like our stinking human nature or like Satan. We want to be like Him. Therefore, we change from the old person to the new person, because we don't want to be the old person. We don't want to be the old man.

So you see, this fifth point teaches us that God uses trials to watch us, to test us and help us to become His children.

Let's summarize.

Sometimes we bring trials upon ourselves. I think that most of them we do. We bring them on ourselves. We bring trials on ourselves through lack of wisdom, through neglect, through laziness, or through sin, and the trials come our way. But regardless, even in our sins, God uses trials that we bring on ourselves for our benefit. God wishes we wouldn't sin and then bring the subsequent trial, but even there, He uses what we bring on ourselves as a way to teach us, and He promises to bring us through them.

Other times, trials come our way through no fault of our own. God either causes them or allows them; but again, it's for our benefit so that we learn and grow and get rid of our human nature and be more like the Father and the Son.

We have seen that suffering helps perfect us.

Above all, through all of this, we should be encouraged. We've heard so many times of joy in our sufferings. We should be encouraged, because God is not a harsh or cruel God who derives some kind of pleasure in seeing His children suffer. In the early days of Worldwide, a lot of sermons were preached about ruling with a rod of iron, and God is going to just smash us to bits the minute we step out of line and that God, somehow, was just waiting to do that. That is not the case. It's just the opposite. God wants to encourage us to overcome our faults and sins and shortcomings and become like Him and His son. He has called us to be in His family. What greater blessing can that be? He calls us to be in His family, and we've seen by numerous scriptures, He and Christ are aware of our sufferings. Christ particularly, having been a human being, knows exactly what it is like to be a human being. They know.

We should be encouraged because we have a loving God who is in control of all things. There is nothing that God is not in control of. So, if it's for our benefit that we go through the trial, we accept it. However, if we get to our limits, and all of us have been close to our limits. Some are close to their limits right now. But have faith in God. He will bring us back from the edge. He will take care of it. He is in control of all things and He understands and knows all things. The point is that God has a higher purpose for us in our trials.

Let's go to 1 Peter 4:12. Peter uses the term "fiery" trial. That's a bad one.

**1 Peter 4:12.** *Beloved (He's talking to us), think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you ... (KJV)*

He says, "They're going to come your way."

*12b) ... as though some strange thing happened unto you: (KJV)*

I thought I had a greased skid. I thought everything was going to be fine. I thought bad things don't happen to good people and I'm a good person.

The Greek word for "fiery trial" is Strong's 4451. It literally means *ignition*. It's used as far as smelting is concerned. Figuratively it means a *conflagration*, meaning a *giant fire, or calamity, as a test*.

So Peter says, "Don't think it's odd that a fiery trial comes your way."

*13) But rejoice (There's that joy again), inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy. (KJV)*

Over and over it talks about joy in trials.

*18) And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*

*19) Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God ... (KJV)*

We are called, and God is aware of our suffering, and it's according to His will.

*19b) ... commit the keeping of their lives to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator. (KJV)*

We give our lives over to Him. We do well, we obey God, we love our neighbor as ourselves, we love God with all our heart, and then let God handle the rest.

You see, the encouraging thing is that our sufferings don't even compare to the reward that we have.

Let's go to 2 Timothy 2. This is the encouragement. This is the end of the day. This is the ultimate goal.

**2 Timothy 2:11.** *It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him ... (KJV)*

Through the resurrection and in this physical life.

*12b) ... If we suffer, we shall also reign with him ... (KJV)*

That's the better resurrection that we covered earlier.

*12 continued) ... if we deny him, he also will deny us: (KJV)*

If we suffer, the promise is that we will reign with Him.

Then a final scripture in Romans 8:16. Talking about the encouragement that we can derive, even in severe trials, because we know what the end result is.

***Romans 8:16.*** *The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: (KJV)*

No doubt about it.

*17) And if children ... (KJV)*

He's taking us down a logical step.

*17b) ... then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ (of an inheritance); if so be (Notice this) that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. (KJV)*

We have to suffer as Christ suffered. If we do, and we pass the test, we will be glorified with Christ.

*18) 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. (KJV)*

There is no comparison. It doesn't even come up. What Paul is saying is that when you're going through trials, keep it in perspective. Look at what you're going through now and compare that with what lies ahead. There is no comparison. What we have to suffer today, there is no comparison.

Final verse:

*28) And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (KJV)*

What a wonderful, encouraging promise we have as we go through trials.

So let's understand, above all, that we serve a loving God who uses trials to help us become more like His Son. They are for our good, our benefit. The ultimate goal for the trials is our being His children forever.

So when we go through trials, or when we see others go through trials, let's keep this in mind that God either causes them or allows them for the express purpose of molding us and shaping us into the image of His Son so that we can be His children forever.