How to View Life’s Trials

KEY PASSAGE: 1 Peter 1:3-7 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE: Matthew 27:46 | Mark 15:34 | Romans 6:23; 8:29
1 Corinthians 10:13 | 2 Corinthians 4:7-9; 12:7-10 | Hebrews 12:5-6

SUMMARY

Throughout the world, people are hurting.

The reasons vary, but many of us ask the same question: “Where’s God in all this?” When difficulties and heartaches are overwhelming, we often struggle to make sense of the situation. When we don’t know why the Lord is letting this happen or how we should respond, we remain trapped in our misery.

Peter wrote a letter to a group of Christians who were in this same kind of situation (1 Pet. 1:4-5). He reminded them that they had an imperishable inheritance reserved in heaven. Furthermore, God was protecting them “through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (v. 5). Although they could lose everything on earth, they would never lose their salvation or their heavenly inheritance. Peter advised them to rejoice in this promise even though they were presently experiencing various trials.

SERMON POINTS

Although our pain and trouble may seem pointless to us, God has a divine purpose for everything He allows into our lives.

Because He is absolutely omnipotent, He could stop any hardship which comes our way. But if he doesn’t, we can know with certainty that He has allowed it in order to accomplish His good purpose. However, we don’t usually understand what He’s up to. From our perspective, it just doesn’t make sense, and the pain we’re experiencing drives us to simply want relief.

God uses life’s trials to accomplish His secondary purposes.

Although we may never know the specific reason for each difficulty in our lives, we can know the Lord’s secondary purposes.

■ To surface whatever is detrimental in our lives. We may have beliefs, attitudes, or actions, which are not only hurting us but are also damaging our relationship with God and with others. Since we’re usually unaware of them, the Lord uses pain to get our attention so we’ll recognize and deal with them. God loves us too much to let us blindly continue down this destructive path. His goal is to cleanse us by revealing our sin and drawing us to confession and repentance.

■ To test our faith. When we were saved, our faith was rather basic and childlike. We didn’t know much, but we knew Jesus had died for us. However, since our heavenly Father considers faith more precious than gold, He wants us to grow and trust Him for more than our salvation (1 Pet. 1:7). To understand how He tests our faith, let’s compare it to muscle strengthening. We begin by lifting small weights and gradually increase the difficulty by adding heavier ones. In the same way, God grows our faith through situations that increase the pressure and require greater trust. For instance, it’s fairly easy to trust Him to heal a cold, but what happens when we face a serious illness, a financial crisis, unemployment, or the loss of a loved one? When we walk through each trial depending on the Lord, our faith increases. Then when a harder challenge comes, we can remember how He led us previously and know He will lead us the rest of the way.
To test our devotion to God. Commitment to the Lord is revealed by our willingness to obey Him. When He gives us a challenging situation, which seems beyond our ability, we must choose whether to obey His will or go our own way. He’s given us His Spirit to enable and strengthen us to accomplish whatever He’s calling us to do. The apostle Paul was willing to endure his “thorn in the flesh” because the Lord promised to strengthen Him and use it to produce the humility he needed for continued ministry (2 Cor. 12:7-10). We don’t need to understand all God is doing; we just have to obey and watch Him work.

The Lord’s primary purpose is to conform us to the image of His Son.

According to Romans 8:29, this is what He predestined—or predetermined—for His children. Therefore, He allows whatever’s necessary to make this a reality in our lives. His goal is not to punish but to transform. If we fight against the process, we’re in danger of suffering all the pain without receiving the benefits God wanted to achieve in our lives. However, when we yield to His sitting, sanding, and shaping work, He’ll make us into a beautiful representation of His Son. The Lord isn’t looking for perfect people but those who are committed to a lifestyle of obedience, surrender, and purity.

God has a process for developing Christlike character.

■ He controls every trial. He sets the limit because His goal is to transform us not to needlessly hurt us. According to 1 Corinthians 10:13, the Lord will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able.

■ He designs trials to fit us. He knows exactly what’s required to get our attention and fulfill His purpose. In every situation, His actions are motivated by intimate knowledge of us, and personal love for us.

■ He uses chastisement. As a loving Father, He disciplines us in order to develop character within us. Although pain is involved, it’s not given for punishment but for training.

■ He uses afflictions. These are not the result of sin or rebellion but are simply trials which come to us because of our environment. Since we all have human bodies and live in a fallen world, even godly people get sick and have accidents. However, each affliction is an opportunity for God to display the surpassing greatness of His power in us (2 Cor. 4:7-9).

■ God’s trials are progressive. He builds character and faith in us by increasing the pressure and intensity of the adversity in our lives. What we couldn’t endure ten years ago, we can now handle because our trust in God has grown.

Our response to trials determines the outcome.

Hard times and suffering come into every life, but we each have a choice regarding how to respond. If we are committed to learning and profiting from each trial, we’ll become believers who are growing in faith and becoming more fully sanctified. However, if we refuse to submit to God’s purposes, He will turn up the heat—not because He’s mean but because He loves us and will never give up on His goal of conforming us to the image of His Son.

RESPONSE

■ When you’re suffering, what questions do you ask the Lord?

■ How do you typically respond to hardship and pain? Has this response helped you patiently endure, or has it made you more miserable?

■ How has God led and encouraged you in previous times of pain or trouble? As you look back, in what ways has your character become more Christlike as a result of your experience? How can remembering God’s faithfulness in past difficulties help you go through present or future ones?