

From the series: **Happy Corrections, because the Bible doesn't say what you think it says**

Your Notes

Because life as a Christian isn't always easy

- ***Our sadness and surprise when trials come***—and they always come, as 1 Peter 4:12 tells us, first in the NIV and then in the MSG translation where it says:
- *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.*
- *Friends, when life gets really difficult, don't jump to the conclusion that God isn't on the job. Instead, be glad that you are in the very thick of what Christ experienced. This is a spiritual refining process, with glory just around the corner.*
- ***But we are surprised when life as a Christian isn't easy!*** And so we will first talk about some reasons why we are surprised and then we'll talk about the correctives to our incorrect beliefs.

Our surprise comes from incorrect ideas about trials in 2 primary areas—

- ***#1 Incorrect presentations of what salvation in Jesus means, a foundational error.***
- ***#2 Not knowing what the Bible says about trials***
- As a corrective to these two faulty views we will now look at a correct view of salvation and then 7 truths the Bible teaches us about trials.

First, a corrective in our view of salvation

- John Mark Comer correctly identifies the problem in his book, ***Practicing the Way***, when he defines current views of salvation as, *"You say a one-time prayer, believe a set of doctrines about God, and attend church, thereby ensuring you go to heaven when you die. But (and here is the key) in a bizarre twist, it does not necessarily require a life of apprenticeship to Jesus in the here and now."*
- If salvation is reduced to this one-time gift, we expect to continue to get what ***we want***.

The thinking goes something like this. . . .

- Though often unexpressed, unless we've been taught otherwise, "If Jesus did all He did to save me, and it was a free gift to me....."
- Then it follows that He should continue to give me all I want and need, protect me from pain and troubles and make me continuously happy and prosperous."
- But that isn't what the Bible teaches. Check out other resources (Comer's book and others) on the expectation of discipleship after salvation.
- For this lesson, we'll focus now on one aspect of how we grow as disciples through trials
- But before we get into ***7 Ways God uses trials in our Lives, to help us grow to spiritual maturity after receiving the gift of salvation.***
- ***We need to take an honest look at if what we are experiencing is truly a trial.***

What is your standard for determining if something is a trial?

- ***First, look at your spiritual life***--were you unaware of or ignored a sin God wants you to change, a bad attitude, an attitude of spiritual immaturity? A

good diagnostic prayer is—

- *Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* Ps. 139: 23-24
- Second, look at your attitudes, your expectations for the way you think life should work and what they are based on.
- We won't get a realistic, Biblical view from our world—which constantly emphasizes all we are “entitled” to—prosperity, no troubles, THE BEST of everything without problems.

To determine if it's truly a trial or merely an inconvenience, or a unmet want—

- ***Is hard because...***
- A culture of entitlement (I DESERVE THIS) permeates all people's lives, social media, and even the church.
- IN tangible, practical areas, in North America, we think we deserve “it all” whatever that is to our social peers.
- In emotional areas, we want perfect love and friendship and don't want anything to disturb our self-fulfillment or whatever—this is our right, we deserve it we've been told.
- In retirement—we think we deserve self-absorbed leisure, our “bucket lists.”
- However.....the Bible presents an entirely different view of life—one ***of contentment, of self-denial, of service—through all of life, young or older, no time off from obedience, as it reminds us, in just one area.....***

In our material needs

- *“Keep your lives free from the love of money **and be content with what you have**, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’” – **Hebrews 13:5***
- *“Then he said to them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.’” – **Luke 12:15***
- *“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” – **Matthew 6:26***

What to do

- As always, get into God's Word—honestly look at His calling on lives, ***how His servants lived, (though you may not like it—if you look at their lives honestly.)***
- Be careful of your “referent others.”
- Who do you measure your life against in terms of values, affluence, how they spend money and leisure.
- How they handle trials or hardship.
- ***You may need new friends***, a new circle of influence, different social media feeds.
- Not just away from “bad” stuff and people but are those you spend time IRL or online influencing you to become more like Jesus, to have Kingdom values, to live a sacrificial life?
- With this evaluation as a foundation and the determination of what truly is a trial, let's look at ***7 Ways God Uses Trials in Our Lives***

#1 God is at work in the MIDST of trials

- He uses them as a reminder that He doesn't abandon us when they come. He is right there.
- ***When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze. Isa. 43:2***
- ***God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble. Ps 46. 1***

These verses encourage us because

- God never says He is only with us WHEN a trial is over.
- **God is IN it with us WHEN the trial is going on.**
- One of the biggest dangers in hard times is when we pray/think that God will show up and then the trial will be over.
- ***But God has shown up; He never left; He is always with us;*** He is right there in the trial, doing with the trial what needs to do in our lives.
- Which leads us to the reality that....

#2 Trials help us grow spiritually

- **We often grow the most when times are most difficult, because miserable as it may be, we often don't learn any other way.**
- Psalm 119:67-68, NIV *Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I obey your word.*
- Psalm 119:71-72, TLB *The punishment you gave me was the best thing that could have happened to me, for it taught me to pay attention to your laws. They are more valuable to me than millions in silver and gold!*
- Let's look at how trials help us to grow in more detail...

Like exercise develops our physical bodies, hard times grow our spiritual selves

- *Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work, so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.*
James 1:3-4 MSG
- This isn't difficult to understand. You don't learn patience without it being tested; you don't learn trust when you can handle everything on your own.

#3 Trials aren't only about us

- *All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! **He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.** We have plenty of hard times that come from following the Messiah, but no more so than the good times of his healing comfort—we get a full measure of that, too. 2 Cor 1:3-5, MSG*

- ***Sometimes we go through something difficult so we can help someone later. Or understand better what others are going through.***
- We listen to advice from people who have gone through challenges and sometimes ignore those who it seems have no idea what real difficulty is.

This is especially true if you are in a ministry position

- For better or worse, people are watching you.
- How can you be a witness for the sufficiency of God in your trial? What can other people learn from watching you?
- This can be incredibly hard when what we teach is put on the line for all to see (when we feel we are barely hanging on).
- Pray that your life becomes more congruent with your message.
- ***Cautions: Be kind to yourself, but also strict with yourself, take time to evaluate if what you teach is what you truly believe and are LIVING out—make corrections if necessary.***
- Especially as a leader, but for everyone –
- ***Don't assume people will respond in the same way you did if they go through a similar trial; SHARE what has helped or encouraged you, NEVER be adamant about what someone else SHOULD do especially in times of grief.***

Don't forget, there are spiritual forces at work also

- Remember Job—he never knew his life was being used as a lesson to the hosts of heaven on how a person could trust God, no matter what—He may use us also in this way, as a demonstration.
- This is not particularly comforting but is a reality we need to keep in mind, yet we are not without help, as we are reminded to...
- *Eph 6¹¹ Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand safe against all strategies and tricks of Satan. ¹²For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against persons without bodies—the evil rulers of the unseen world, those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule this world; and against huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world.*
- ***Your trials may be a great honor, as Job's were—make the Lord proud of how you respond.***

#4 Trials teach us the real source of hope

- Hope, real hope in a time where things will get better, ultimate hope in true justice where all wrongs are righted, all good dreams come true is only found in God and in His coming Kingdom where all will be renewed; all made whole.
- Hope in anything less will always disappoint and is often a lie.
- Be careful of human platitudes about Hope and there are a lot of them around that are blatantly false, like this one:
- "But hoping," she said, "is how the impossible can be possible after all.— Marissa Meyer
- That is simply a stupid, nonsensical statement.
- Trials show these human platitudes for ***the lie they are.***

Real hope is only found in the Lord because Hope, like Faith is only as good as it's object

- Hope and Faith must have an object—we must have hope ***IN something or someone.***

- You can't tell yourself or another to only, "have hope or have faith"
- **Always ask in what?** As this verse tells us—
- Isaiah 40:31 *but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.*
- **Because God is the object of our hope**, it is a hope that can give us strength.
- Once again, we won't know the Lord of Hope, and true reasons for hope and what it realistically is (not getting all we want right NOW) if we don't KNOW His Word.

#5 Trials teach us true thankfulness

- **"IN everything, give thanks" 1 Thes. 5:18**
- Evil does happen in this fallen world. Sad, tragic, horrid things take place—it seems unnatural to give thanks at those times but consider....
- Giving thanks **IN the trial** isn't denial—many biblical writers screamed, cried, asked why—but they didn't stop there.
- As David cried, *My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" These things I remember as I pour out my soul:*
.⁵ Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. Ps. 42:3-5
- It is ok to vent honest expression of feelings without complaining to say, "I hurt" ...not "why me" or "I didn't deserve this."

Thankfulness is powerful

- The Psalmist remembered to be thankful and praise God, IN THE MIDST OF IT ALL.
- No matter how awful the situation (and many truly are) you can always thank God, perhaps for no other reason than because this present hardship is not all there is in this life now or forever, and things may be happening in and through you that you can't see now.
- **Also, when you are thankful, it changes YOU.**
- Wallowing in pity often makes it worse for yourself, makes you unpleasant to be around, and certainly says nothing good about the God you claim you trust.
- What you focus on can consume you, either God or circumstances, the past or your future with Him.
- **You can be a witness or a whiner, you can't be both.**
- You choose.

#6 Trials teach us the truth about God

- We are told God is love, that He can be trusted, that all works together for our good, but this might be hard to believe when you are in a difficult time—
- Because Satan will always lie about God.
- "Hath God said?" was the first lie in the Garden of Eden.
- **Satan will tell you that God doesn't love you if He gives you trials, but when you read your Bible, you see that God's love is expressed often in the trials—that is the truth you need to learn and believe.**

- To do that you need to learn more than just a few scattered verses here and there about God.

You need to learn what the Bible shows He is truly like

- Remember, as Jesus said, we are in error (even in sadness) because we don't KNOW the Scriptures.
- One of the most important reasons to go through the Bible chronologically and read the whole thing so that you can see how God has worked through all human history.
- ***You will learn the patterns of how He interacts with people in many situations.***
- ***At the same time, you learn how He is both tougher than popular views of Him and more comforting than we ever imagined.***

Some other things you learn about God the more you read the Bible

- You get an honest view of how He treated His servants in the past and how they responded, a good summary is in Hebrews 11, and I highly recommend you read it all, but here is one section, after listing the trials many had (and they were BAD), it says:
- ***Hebrews 11: 13-16 All these whom we have mentioned maintained their faith but died without actually receiving God's promises, though they had seen them in the distance, had hailed them as true and were quite convinced of their reality. They freely admitted that they lived on this earth as exiles and foreigners. . . . the fact is that they longed for a better country altogether, nothing less than a heavenly one. And because of this faith of theirs, God is not ashamed to be called their God for in sober truth he has prepared for them a city in Heaven.***
- Many of their lives were incredibly difficult and they did not receive the promises of what we too often demand as our right and what we want NOW...but—
- Can you imagine a more wonderful thing to be said of you than that “God is not ashamed to be called your God?”
- Your faithfulness and trust in trials can make that happen.

#7 Trials refocus our view on eternity

- Eternity is one moment away.
- But we forget that. We are often look at things so close to us, we forget the reality of our eternal souls and the importance of preparing to meet our Creator.
- We look too closely at what is going on today, what's fun, what we want, what our earthly goals are.
- But then a tragedy, a trial happens, and our view is forced to shift.
- If Covid taught us anything, that is it. People are healthy one week and gone the next.

But it doesn't take a pandemic to remind us of the fragility of life

- Many have crushing health issues no treatment can solve; loved ones can be taken at any time without warning.
- Or perhaps we have had a devastating material loss from fire or theft or natural disaster—as so many have experienced with earthquakes, hurricanes, and even too much of a good thing like the snow and rain in California.
- All of them show us that we can't anchor our love, hope, satisfaction and

fulfillment in this life—it is too fragile and fleeting and as much as it hurts, a severe trial may be the only thing to remind us of that reality.

Had trials, small and large, not happened

- We might live foolishly believing that this life is the best it will ever be, and we will chase empty and ultimately unfulfilling goals.
- When trials shift our focus and we set our heart on eternity with our Lord, we can order our lives with a sense of what is truly important as Amy Carmichael said,
- ***“We have all of eternity to celebrate the victories, but only a few short hours before sunset to win them.”***
- A trial can help us refocus our view on what is truly, eternally important and live with that in mind.
- As the Apostle Peter said...

In a great shift of perspective

Since everything here today might well be gone tomorrow, (and that includes our loved ones, the earthly treasures we have, and also our pain and trials) do you see how essential it is to live a holy life? Daily expect the Day of God, eager for its arrival. The galaxies will burn up, and the elements melt down that day—but we’ll hardly notice.

We’ll be looking the other way, ready for the promised new heavens and the promised new earth, all landscaped with righteousness.

2 Peter 3:11-13, MSG

In closing, let’s review the 7 Ways God Uses Trials in Our Lives

- #1 God is at work in the MIDST of trials
- #2 Trials help us grow spiritually
- #3 Trials aren’t only about us
- #4 Trials teach us the real source of hope
- #5 Trials teach us true thankfulness
- #6 Trials teach us the truth about God
- #7 Trials refocus our view on eternity

One more thing, if you are in a hard, sad place

- If the application of this lesson is difficult, if you don’t “feel” encouraged or hopeful or thankful in your trial even though you are diligently in God’s Word and truly want to peacefully trust Him....my advice is....
- ***“Act as if”***
- C.S. Lewis talks about how if we act as if we love another person, we will soon find ourselves loving that person. It is the same with the relationship with our God.
- Sometimes we need to go through the motions of trust, obedience, thanking and trusting God IN THE MIDST of trials as an act of discipline.
- Eventually our feelings will often catch up.
- And even if they don’t in this life—we will have the calm assurance that someday there will be no more lessons to learn from trials and as Isaiah 51: 11 promises
- ***Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.***