

Faith

Part 8 – Faith And Trials continued

2 Cor 4:17-18 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, (18) while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Imagine: no mortgages, no thefts, no family hassles, no pollution, no politics, no hunger or thirst, no problems. The place you're imagining is what heaven is like.

Wouldn't it be nice if it was like that here?

Wouldn't it be wonderful if life always went smoothly?

But anyone older than about one realises that life presents many challenges, difficulties, trials.

The crucial factor is our faith.

Now we can't escape the trials of life with our faith, but we can overcome them.

Because they're such an unavoidable part of life, we're going to continue to look at what to do when we face them.

Why Trials?

Let's first reinforce the reason why God allows trials in our lives.

1. God uses times of testing to show us what's really in our heart.

Did you know that you and I are like teabags? Think about it. This is deep. Our real strength only comes out when we get into hot water.

Are you sometimes surprised at your response to some of life's challenges?

God is showing you something about yourself.

Do you remember we talked about our faith being like precious gold tested by fire? The gold looks pure until it's heated, then all the impurities come to the surface. How? Heat.

Job went through a lot of trials, and he was a righteous man. But he was also a bit on the self-righteous side. God didn't allow those trials in his life to punish him, but to show him something about himself. Then God blessed him.

2. Sometimes the only way God can get our attention is through trials.

Nahum 1:3 ...The LORD has His way In the whirlwind and in the storm ...

It's a real challenge sometimes for parents to make sure their children are listening.

God has the same problem with His children.

But when the storms of life come and everything comes to a grinding halt, we look up to God and say, "Okay Lord, You've got my attention. What are You trying to tell me?"

God uses whatever He can to get our attention.

3. God wants to change us and bless us.

Is 45:3 I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the LORD, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel.

In ancient times, it was common for conquerors to hide treasures taken in battle, and only use them when necessary.¹

The hidden treasures belonged to the conquerors.

Rom 8:37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

This is a beautiful promise.

God makes us conquerors, then as conquerors He gives us the “treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places”.

Character is like a photograph; it develops in darkness.

God develops the beautiful qualities and strengths of our lives in times of darkness.

Common human responses to trials

1. Doubt – I can’t do it

Judges 6:36-40 Gideon’s doubt led him to test God with a fleece.

2. Fear – God said to Gideon – “If you’re afraid...” (Judges 7:10)

God gave Gideon instructions on what to do if he was afraid.

Evidently he was afraid, because he did what God said to do.

Fear is a natural response, but we have to overcome it.

Someone once said that boldness is not the absence of fear; it’s the ability from within to overcome it.

Our minds are our own worst enemies; we’ve got to be careful not to blow things out of all proportion.

“The greatest cause of ulcers is mountain climbing over mole hills.”

3. Questioning God

For instance, Job: “Why God? Why me? It’s not fair.”

Faith Responses

1. Faith remembers that testing – whether finances, job, health, relationship or other challenges – testing is an opportunity for growth

In life, there are times of resting and times of testing.

We like to think that when all is well we’re streaking ahead, but that’s not necessarily true.

A man who is climbing a mountain may rest on the plateaux, but the real progress is made when he faces the mountain, toughs it out, and heads for the peak.

Real growth comes in times of testing.

Question: What happens when you flunk Grade 10?

If you don’t pass the test, you stop at that level until you do.

And there’s not much point in going on to Grade 11 unless you’ve passed Grade 10, is there?

God will keep bringing us through the same test.

Why? Because He wants us to pass.

Parents are exactly the same. When their kids come home and they’ve failed some exam, they don’t say, “Ha, ha, ha, you flunked.”

Teachers don’t put us through tests in the hope that we’ll fail, but hoping that we’ll pass.

God is the same: He’s on our side and wants us to pass.

2. Faith sees the contrast between the temporary and the eternal

2 Cor 4:17-18 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, (18) while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

These verses are making use of comparisons – the comparison between the eternal and temporary, light / heavy, seen / unseen.

The comparison is between what our natural senses perceive, and what our faith perceives.

Real faith sees trials through God's eyes.

Matthew Henry says, "...that which sense was ready to pronounce heavy and long, grievous and tedious, faith perceived to be light and short, and but for a moment²."

You might feel that what you're going through is a heavy burden, but in comparison with the blessings you'll have in heaven it's very light.

Most of us had nightmares as kids, but for most of us they are now a dim memory. One day, million of years from now, this physical life – along with its trials – will be a dim memory too.

3. Faith rejoices – James 1:2

Don't be caught by surprise: Jesus promised, "In the world you will have tribulation." John 16:33

Expect it, and when it comes, make a choice to rejoice.

It's not easy, but do your best.

4. Faith gives obedience beyond understanding

Eccles 3:1-8

There may be seasons for all sorts of things, but righteousness is never out of season.

Obedience is the pivotal issue of Christianity.

James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

John 14:15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.

Our love for God is measured by our obedience to Him.

And it takes courage; the wishbone will never replace the backbone.

It's not what we know but what we do that counts.

5. Faith puts its trust in God, because He sees the whole picture, we don't

Faith alters our perspective.

We need to remember that God sees things from a different point of view.

Rom 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Tough times don't last, but tough people do.

¹ *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible* p 715

² Henry, *Matthew A Commentary On The Whole Bible* Vol 6 p 618