

3. VICTORS OR VICTIMS

Trials can make us either victors or victims. Let me rephrase it. We have a choice to become victors or victims through trials. We can be put through trials and tests by God time after time. But if we don't understand His reasons, we would be bitter and bitter toward God. We wouldn't know that God wants to use those hard times to mold us into His character and bless us spiritually.

Romans 8:28 And we know that ALL things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

We often think that when we face trials, we should roll up our sleeves and charge down and try to make the difference. Yes, in a way, that is correct. God expect us to do our share of work. But He wants us to hold on to Him, depend on Him so that His strength might be shown. If we think that we can conquer our trials by our own strength, we will tell ourselves that we should get glory. God will not share His glory with anyone else. It is a wise thing for us to follow Him and wait upon Him and rest upon Him with assurance from Him that He will take care of everything.

A. STAYING CLOSE TO OUR GOD

I am now just a dumb. But before I became a Christian, I was not only dumb, but also a rather suicidal. I used to fly down highways like "The Speedy Gonzales" driving over 85 miles per hour on 55 mile zone. I used to stay right behind a huge semi-truck while they drive around between 85-90 miles per hour. When I see another semi ahead, I passed by the first one and stay behind the one ahead. The ideas of staying right behind those semis were; first, they get all the wind resistance, I was in the wind pocket behind him so I get better gas mileage. Another reason was that if there was a highway patrol with a radar gun, he would pick up the big semi in the front of me easier than my little car. What I am trying to explain is not that you should go crazy by driving your car less than 15 feet away from a semi in 75-85 miles per hour. We should be behind our big God who goes ahead of us. He can take all the resistance and problems for us. All we have to do is follow Him. By the way I don't recommend to do the way I drove. If that semi driver had to step on brake, there wouldn't have been anything left over in my car.

Can you believe that all of trials and tests were allowed by God to teach us (providential blessings) and raise us up as men and women of God? If we can have that concept, it would be much easier to face those fiery trials and tests. It is so great to see someone who are going through heavy duty trials, yet stand tall in God's strength.

*Phil 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; Rev 2:8-11
8"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write,*

As apostle Paul said here, with confidence in Him, we believe that He will take care of all of our trouble as He promised.

Luke 9:23 Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

It is not easy to crucify our own desires whether that is pride, sexual lust, greed, or all the other pagan desires. But He expects us to do so. As we talked about 'Bondsman of God and Lord Jesus Christ', our Master's wishes become our wishes. No longer what we want is what we want. We want what the Master wants.

B. TRAINING AFTER TRAINING

James 1:3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.
We should realize and rejoice that when our faith gets challenged with trials and tests, God will pour His strength into us bring the character of Jesus.

The definition of 'Perseverance or patience or long suffering' is a virtue that God prizes highly in man and seems to be best developed under trials.

However you call it -perseverance or patience or long suffering, it takes times. While it takes time, we have to go through many difficult unpleasant things. Such as the things we cannot change in our own human power, or facing a gigantic wall.

One of the reason why the military training is routinely scheduled is that after soldiers finish their basic training, is if they don't receive any further training, they would become lazy and fat civilians. More and vigorous trainings horn their physical edges and make them to be keenly alerted soldiers who become combat-ready for any-time.

C. BECOMING MATURE CHRISTIANS

James 1:4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

I don't like to say this and nor like to admit this, but there is no other substitutes for us other than trials and tests to bring us His character. Thus we have to be willing to learn about His character. We are suppose to get into His Word, and get on our knees to pray, and facing the trials with His strength by applying the Word in our lives. Otherwise we would be nothing more than whining babies. No Pain, No Gain!!!!!!

God would not do anything, unless we give Him our permissions to do His work in us. If we refuse to work with God, we cannot grow spiritually. There are many thousands of people who believe this way. We are supposed to give everything to God, not just taking something from Him when we need.

"You may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" - This does not mean we become perfect like God. But become mature and growing. Can you imagine that if our spiritual condition become into a form of physical condition so that we can see? We will be able to see many of us in malnutrition, or deformed or unbalanced growth.

"lacking nothing"-The simplest way to win in our trials and tests is growing up in the Lord by praying to Him, trusting Him, and obeying Him.

Isa 40:31 But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

D. BETTER OR BITTER

Rev 2:8-11 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until

death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

I'd like to suggest that we take a good look at the Church of Smyrna from the Book of Revelation. Because this particular church went through a great deal of persecution. Instead of becoming bitter, they became a better church as an example to us.

The city of Smyrna was a proud and beautiful Asian city closely aligned with Rome and eager to meet its demands for emperor worship and the city with a very busy port. Like the city of Ephesus, it had a great deal of import and export in that city and this brought abundance of wealth to its people. Their main export item was myrrh. The interesting thing about myrrh is that it does not bring forth sweet fragrance until it get crushed and broken.

The church of Smyrna was persecuted by three groups of people: first, a large and actively hostile yet non-religious Jewish population made it extremely difficult to live there as a Christian; and second, the group of people who follow Roman emperor worship. The Smyrna's Christians didn't buy meat or any food which were offered to idols from meat markets. This was bad for Smyrna's economy. So the people in the city of Smyrna who were very much oriented to money, hated Christians. This brought poverty to Smyrna Christians. Third, the group of people who worship idols including emperors of Rome didn't care for Christians.

This is an epistle of Jesus Christ who wrote seven letters to each church which have not only types and characters of modern churches, but also exact alignment with the history of the church. The church of Smyrna was famous for Polycarp's martyrs, who was the pastor of the church for many decades.

E. FROM MESS TO BEAUTY THROUGH TRIALS

When Adam & Eve sinned against God, the suffering started with them. The original design of God for mankind was no suffering. But the suffering started with them. Even though the mankind fouled up, God used that mess to bring the glory to Himself by using suffering. Because when we go through suffering, we call out to God.

C. S. Lewis said once, "God whispers to us through our pleasures, but He screams at us through our pain. The pain is a God's megaphone to the deaf world." He also said, "God cannot use someone greatly, until He hurts them deeply."

F. APPLICATIONS

Q) Why does God use suffering, trials, and tests to bring His characters in us?

A) As a sculptor, I know that I cannot make any form of sculpture with raw clay. I had to pound, add water, squeeze, and pound that bundle of clay until it became a right texture. As that raw clay did not have right formation until I put it through pounding, we do not have the right character in us to receive His. So by using suffering, trials and tests He put the right characters in us.

Q) How can we handle those suffering, trials and tests?

A) With our own strength, it is impossible. But God will give us what we need to endure suffering, trials and tests as the Word of God says in many different places.