

Trials Essential

*“My brethren,
count it all joy
when you fall into
various trials.”*

—James 1:2, New
King James Version

ALL THOSE WHO HAVE

been invited by God to be his people during this present Gospel Age are called with what the Apostle Paul describes as the “high call-

ing,” or “heavenly calling,” which is an invitation to share with Jesus in his “glory and honour and immortality.” However, the call is not the end of the matter; it is merely an invitation with certain definite conditions.—Phil. 3:14; Heb. 3:1; Rom. 2:7

Christians are called not only to righteousness, but to walk in the Master’s footsteps of suffering, self-sacrifice, and service. Those are the only terms on which any are received as disciples of Christ. We understand the Scriptures to teach that during the future Messianic Age there will be other terms of acceptance that God will offer to the world. Nevertheless, there are no conditions offered now other than those of becoming followers and disciples of Jesus, and to walk “in newness of life” as he walked.—Rom. 6:4

The Apostle James in our opening text intimates that trials and temptations will be allowed to come into the life of the followers of Christ, into which

they will “fall” [Greek: be surrounded with]. Although God does not cause these trials, he allows the great Adversary, Satan, to bring these about in our lives, but only by divine permission and providence. Satan is more than happy to oblige, and he will make every attempt to misguide our minds and to lead us away from proper conceptions of truth and righteousness. We should be very careful to avoid his snares.

Temptation is not sin, but every temptation, trial, test, persecution, and difficulty in life, permitted to come upon us who have made the covenant of sacrifice with the Lord, is intended to prove us. They are to test our love, to see whether or not our characters are fixed, rooted, and grounded in righteousness, and are being built up in love. To realize this should put all these trials, difficulties, and temptations in a new light before us and greatly assist us in fighting a “good fight of faith,” and in gaining the “victory that overcometh the world.”
—I Tim. 6:12; I John 5:4

When we find ourselves suddenly in trials, we should say: If by these trials God is proving my love and devotion to him, then, however trifling they may be, or however severe, I will diligently use them as favorable opportunities to demonstrate to my Lord the fullness of my love and devotion to him and his cause. I must fight a good fight against this thing—the world, my fallen flesh, or the Adversary—whatever it might be that brought the trials to me.

We can rejoice because we know that if we overcome under such trials our characters will make advancement towards crystallization. We can rejoice also because we know that God would not let us fall into any temptation which he would not cause

to work out for us a blessing if we are wholly loyal.—Rom. 8:28

Let us dwell often upon these additional words of the apostles: “Greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it be tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”—if we are rightly exercised by these experiences.—I Pet. 1:6,7, *NKJV*; James 1:12, *English Standard Version*; II Cor. 4:17

ENDURANCE REQUIRED

We are assured that those who love the Lord, and who because of this will receive the kingdom, will be those whose love will have been tested by trials and temptations. Those who do not love the Lord with all their heart—in whom self, or some other idol, has first place—will be seduced by the world, their flesh, or the Adversary into some form of rebellion against God’s will or divine providence.

They will have schemes and theories that they will prefer to the Lord’s plan. These, when analyzed, will usually be found to be based either upon selfishness, ambition, or a spirit of lethargy and slothfulness. The Heavenly Father’s leading and words lose their attraction to such, and they lose their interest correspondingly. They perhaps even

become as some of Jesus' followers, who "went back, and walked no more with him."—John 6:66

As there are some substances that are soft, weak, or brittle, so are there those which have fiber, strength, and endurance. God chooses for himself such characters as have the strong, enduring qualities—fortitude, patience, and long-suffering. These desire to walk close to the Lord and will not be driven from him by any of the arts and wiles of the Adversary. They are such whose heart is fully the Lord's—not their own. They follow wherever the Heavenly Father may lead, because they have no will except the will of God. These will follow the Lord in the narrow way of trial, discipline, and testing during the present life, and by and by, as he has declared, "They shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy."—Matt. 7:14; Rev. 3:4

Any who attempt to avoid all trials, temptations, and difficulties have reason to question their relationship with God as sons. All such should go to the Father and make sure that there is no impediment on their part, and to make sure that they have put themselves in the proper attitude in which they can be prepared for the kingdom. "The Lord corrects the people he loves and disciplines those he calls his own."—Heb. 12:6, *Contemporary English Version*

All of us will rejoice when the tests are over and we are accepted as overcomers, to share with the Lord in his throne. (Rev. 3:21) First, however, patience, trust, and love must do a refining work in our hearts, making us submissive and obedient to God. Let the good work go on! Let us rejoice if our trials have made us stronger in character, more humble

and Christlike, more aware of our blemishes and imperfections, more watchful and earnest in our endeavors to correct them as far as possible.

STEPPING STONES

The conflicts in which we have perhaps had only partial victory may have resulted in blessings to us. Even in those experiences where we feel we have suffered absolute failure, there may be, through a resulting greater development of humility, a strengthening of our character, a firm determination for greater watchfulness, and a more fervent prayer for the Lord's sustaining grace, the need of which has been more deeply impressed upon our hearts. Thus partial defeats and even failures can become "stepping stones" by which we progress through our experiences under the divine influence of God's providence. Only through "much tribulation" shall we enter the kingdom of heaven at all, the Apostle Paul states.—Acts 14:22

If, therefore, Christians find themselves involved in temptations, trials, and tests, instead of feeling downcast they are to rejoice and say: These are evidences that the Lord is preparing me for a place in the kingdom. This should give us courage to fight the good fight against the world, the flesh and the Adversary. The flesh is suffering; but the new mind, the new will, has the joy of the end result. Therefore, we can rejoice, knowing that these trials are not for our harm, but for our eternal good.—I Pet. 4:12,13

A WAY OUT

The apostle states, "No trial has overtaken you that is not faced by others. And God is faithful: He

will not let you be tried beyond what you are able to bear, but with the trial will also provide a way out so that you may be able to endure it.” (I Cor. 10:13, *New English Translation*) The Heavenly Father will direct every trial to its full completion. Hence, when we find ourselves in difficulty, we are to say, The Heavenly Father is permitting this trial, and so I will rejoice in the fact that he will not allow me to be overthrown; for he has promised that all things shall work out for my good, because I love God and seek to know and do his will.—Rom. 8:28

Our text says that we are to “count it all joy” when we encounter various trials. Our joy is largely dependent upon our study of the Scriptures, and our knowledge of the precious promises contained therein for those who overcome. The Lord wants those who will endure a “great fight of afflictions,” who will endure patiently, though the trials continue long and the tests become more severe. (Heb. 10:32) All our previous good resolutions and standing for what is right would not make us overcomers, if we should lose our faith.

“ADD TO YOUR FAITH”

To those who are of this anointed company, and who are striving to attain the glory promised to the faithful followers of Christ, the Apostle Peter issues a very definite word of instruction. In the opening chapter of his second epistle, he urges Christians to add various qualities of character that thus they may be fitted for the glorious things that God has promised to the faithful. He specifies faith as the primary qualification. To this he says that we are to add virtue [moral excellence], knowledge, self-

control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love [Greek: *agape*, a broad, generous love] for all mankind. The reason the Scriptures declare that our measure of progress will be according to our faith is that while in the flesh we shall never be able to perform works such as would be up to God's perfect standard.—II Pet. 1:4-7, *American Standard Version*

What God approves is our heart intentions and sincere efforts to develop these qualities to the best of our ability. By exercising faith, and by demonstrating loyalty, we will be able to please him, and to work out the proper character as enjoined in his Word, developing the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. "If ye do these things," says the apostle, "ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."—vss. 10,11

Faith is necessary all along the Christian way. Without it we could not have courage or the inner strength to go on. We have been called to be "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." (Rom. 8:17) If we are obedient to his instructions, and are properly exercised by the experiences which are given us in the school of Christ, we shall gain divine approval. "He who calls you is utterly faithful and he will finish what he has set out to do."—I Thess. 5:24, *J.B. Phillips New Testament*

SELF EXAMINATION

Some will fail to utilize their trials and tests to the full extent necessary to attain the "prize of the high calling." (Phil. 3:14) Perhaps they will have not sufficiently turned their back on the world, or have allowed their fallen flesh to stunt their growth in

Christ. Others may not manifest sufficient zeal in serving the Lord and thus fail to take advantage of the many opportunities afforded them along this line.

If, in examining ourselves, we see any tendencies in these directions, let us be reminded of these words of Paul: “Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation.” “It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we [first] believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.”—Heb. 6:9; Rom. 13:11,12

Let us not be discouraged if we find ourselves making insufficient progress in gaining the needed lessons from our trials and tests. Rather, let us go “boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” Let us also recall the many promises of the Scriptures which encourage us to continue onward in the Christian way even when we come short. “A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.” “Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.”—Heb. 4:16; Prov. 24:16; Ps. 37:24

Many years ago, a faithful student of the Bible would often say: “Trials are worth millions. Don’t waste any!” How true that is. May we evermore recognize that trials are an essential part of our spiritual development, without which we would be unable to enter the kingdom of heaven. Above all, let us remember what Paul states: “All things”—including trials—“work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”—Rom. 8:28 ■