

Topic:

Responding
To Trials

Responding To Trials

A popular gospel tract opens with an invitation for people to consider that God loves them and has a wonderful plan for their lives. Those who respond favorably to “God’s love and wonderful plan,” often risk serious misunderstanding of God’s purposes.

They think that God’s love and plan will keep them or immediately deliver them from the difficulties and troubles of life. They soon learn, however, that God’s plan is not what they expected. They discover that frequently God does help and rescue his children in times of adversity, but he does not guarantee protection from hardships. Instead, God normally allows his children to experience increased difficulty to teach them to depend on him.

This comes as a big surprise. The assumption that being loved by God will solve their problems and finally bring a life of undisturbed tranquility proves to be misleading and sadly disappointing.

“They advance into their new life,” wrote J.I. Packer, “joyfully certain that they have left all the old headaches and heartaches behind them. And then they find that it is not like that at all. Longstanding problems of temperament, of personal relationships, of felt wants, of nagging temptations are still there — sometimes, indeed, intensified. God does not make their circumstances notably easier; rather the reverse. Dissatisfaction recurs over wife, or husband, or parents, or in-laws, or children, or colleagues or neighbors. Temptations and bad habits which their conversion experience seemed to have banished for good reappear. As the first great waves of joy rolled over them during the opening weeks of their Christian experience, they had really felt that all problems had solved themselves, but now they see that it was not so...Things which got them down before they were Christians are threatening to get them down again.”

If these new believers turned to scripture for help, they would discover that Jesus explicitly said to his disciples, “In this world you will have trouble ...” and “each day has enough trouble of its own” (John 16:33; Matthew 6:33). Further, if they studied the lives of biblical characters, they would find that most of them had more hardships than they could imagine. They would not find one story of trouble-free existence in the Bible. What should they conclude? Is this really the way God works, and if it is, why?

Packer answers this way: When we walk along a clear road feeling fine, and someone takes our arm to help us, as likely as not we shall impatiently shake him off; but when we are caught in rough country in the dark, with a storm getting up and our strength spent, and someone takes our arms to help us, we shall thankfully lean on him. And God wants us to feel that our way through life is rough and perplexing, so that we may learn thankfully to lean on him. Therefore he takes steps to drive us out of self-confidence to trust in himself.”

And God accomplishes his purpose, “Not by shielding us from assault by the

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- J.I. Packer

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world, the flesh and the devil, nor by protecting us from burdensome and frustrating circumstances, nor yet by shielding us from troubles created by our own temperament and psychology; but rather by exposing us to all these things, so as to overwhelm us with a sense of our own inadequacy, and to drive us to cling to him more closely. This is the ultimate reason, from our standpoint, why God fills our lives with troubles and perplexities of one sort and another — it is to ensure that we shall learn to hold him fast” (Packer, “Knowing God”).

In his hymn “These Inward Trials,” John Newton (author of the hymn “Amazing Grace”) described his surprise at God’s plan.

I asked the Lord, that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek more earnestly His face.

I hoped that in some favored hour
At once He’d answer my request,
And by His love’s constraining power
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

Yea more, with His own hand He seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe;
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

‘Lord, why is this?’ I trembling cried,
‘Wilt thou pursue Thy worm to death?’
‘‘Tis in this way,’ the Lord replied,
‘I answer prayer for grace and faith.

These inward trials I employ
From self and pride to set thee free;
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou may’st seek thy all in me.’

Responding To Trials — Study Guide

Taken from 'The Disciple Making Manual' by Steve Cornell

The fifth resource for maturity to be studied is trials. God graciously uses our trials to produce Christlikeness in our character. The study of trials will cover four main areas: their reality, variety, and purpose and our response to them.

A. **The Reality of Trials.** Many new Christians entertain the mistaken notion that all problems ended with their acceptance of Christ as Savior. Many other Christians live with the erroneous thought that problems are to be equated with a lack of spirituality. The Bible abundantly clarifies that we should expect trials and suffering, particularly if we live godly and righteous lives. The reality of trials can be understood in ways listed below.

1. ***The prediction of Jesus Christ:***

- John 16:33 'I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.'

2. ***The perishing body:***

- II Corinthians 4:16 'Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.'

3. ***The price of a godly life:***

- II Timothy 3:12 'In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.'

4. ***The participation in Christ's suffering:***

- I Peter 4:12-14 'Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trails you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests in you.'
- Also: Philippians 3:10

5. ***The painful battle:***

- II Timothy 2:3 'Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.'
- Ephesians 6:11 'Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.'

6. ***The picture of an athlete:***

- II Timothy 2:5 'Similarly if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules.'
- I Corinthians 9:25-27 'Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.'
- Also: Philippians 3:1-16; Hebrews 12:1-4

7. ***The perilous times:***

- II Timothy 3:1 'But know this that in last days perilous times will come.'

NOTE: All people, both saved and lost, face trials to some degree. In many cases one's trials intensify when he comes to the Lord Jesus Christ. The difference for the believer facing trails is his understanding of God's purpose for him as a child of God.

B. **The Variety of Trials.** The difference in trials is primarily measured by the difference in people. What one might consider a trial, another may not. Included under this heading is the study of the difference between trials and temptations and an examination of the three categories of trials.

1. ***Trials and temptations:*** The Bible teaches us that God cannot be tempted by evil and that He does not tempt anyone. Temptation is something that is internal. Inward temptation may grow out of external trials, but God cannot be linked to the internal evil desires of temptation. God may allow us to experience the external trial for our good, but in order for that trial to lead to sin, it must pass through the internal channel of temptation.

- James 1:13-15 'When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desires, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.'

NOTE: Temptation comes from 'our own evil desires'. Trials caused our Lord to suffer, but He did not have internal evil desires that could drag Him away to be tempted. Our Lord knew the agony of sin when He became sin for us and bore the suffering of any possible sin in existence. Temptations come through the channel of our thoughts. The thought life is where we should begin in dealing with temptation. We must renew our minds through God's Word.

- Scripture for handling temptation: Gen.39:1-12; Job 31:1; Psalm 101:3; Psalm 119:9-11; Proverbs 4:23-27; Matthew 4:1-11; Hebrews 11:24,25; Galatians 6:7; Ephesians 6:10-18; Romans 6:11-12; Col.3:1-2; I Timothy 6:11; II Timothy 2:22; Philippians 4:6-8; Gal. 5:22-23.

2. ***Three categories of trials:*** The trials we face as believers can generally fall into three categories. The last two categories may be interrelated at times. The three categories to be studied are as follows:

- Trials from obedience:*** Trials from obedience are those (trials) we experience in the course of godly living. These trials are not brought on by our disobedience, rather they come as a result of obedience or as part of God's maturing process in our lives.
 - I Peter 2:19-21 'For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow His steps.'
 - Matthew 13:20-21 'What was sown on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has not root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.' (Emphasis mine).
 - James 1:2-4 'My Brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.' (NKJV)
 - Also: Genesis 22:1-18; 39:1-23; II Corinthians 5:3-10; 12:7-10 Philippians 2:25-30; Job 1,2.
- Trials from disobedience:*** Trials from disobedience come as a result of violating the direct teachings and principles of Scripture. When an individual disobeys God's will, he will bear the consequences of his sin.
 - Galatians 6:7 'Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.'
 - II Peter 4:15-16 'If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.'
 - Also: James 1:14-15.

NOTE: When we disobey the Lord, we should confess it to God, accept His forgiveness, and turn to obedient behavior. If we choose not to confess our sin, God will remain faithful and just in dealing with us as His child, and we may experience the third category of trial.

- c. *Trials of discipline:* Trials of discipline come directly from God to all His children. These trials may come as a result of our sin or as a result of God's training process as He produces His character in His children.
 - Hebrews 12:7-11 'Endure hardships as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then are all illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the father of our spirits and live! Our God disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.'
 - Also: II Corinthians 12:1-10.
- C. **The Purpose of Trials.** As Christians, we are given promise of direct purpose from God in our trials. When we know God's purpose in trials, we find our trials easier to endure. Scripture teaches a general purpose of God in trials that can be broken down into two specific areas of purpose.
1. **God's general purpose for trials:** God's general purpose can be understood by a common word in the verses below. The common word is good. God's purposes for His children are always good. God can even take our failures and use them for our good.
 - a. *The experience of Joseph:*
 - Genesis 50:20 'You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.'
 - b. *The experience of David:*
 - Psalm 119:67,71 'Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word....It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.'
 - c. *The experience in all things:*
 - Romans 8:28 'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.'
 - d. *The experience of discipline:*
 - Hebrews 12:10b '...But God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness.'
 2. **God's specific purposes for trials:** God's purpose in trials may be recognized on two specific levels. God has both eternal purposes and present purposes.
 - a. *God's eternal purposes:*
 - II Corinthians 4:16,17 'For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.'
 - Romans 8:18 'I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.'
 - Matthew 5:11-12 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'

b. *God's present purposes:*

- To produce maturity in Christlikeness. (Romans 8:28,29a; James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3-4)
- To produce the ability to comfort others. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)
- To produce trust in God and not in self. (2 Corinthians 1:8-9)
- To reveal the sufficiency of God's grace. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)
- To produce perseverance. (Romans 5:3; James 1:2-4; Hebrews 10:36; 12:1-3)
- To produce His character in us. (Hebrews 12:10-11)

NOTE: As Christians we can have hope in the face of trials because we know that God has purpose in all that comes into our lives. Philippians 1:6 assures us that we can be confident because 'He who began *a good work* in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.' (Emphasis mine).

D. **The Response to Trials.** In dealing with the response to trials, we must consider both personal trials and the trials of others. Responding to trials properly is an important area of growth in the Christian life because of the reality of trials. Many Christians get frustrated and confused on the path toward maturity because of a lack of knowledge about trials in general. Various points expressed below will be helpful in responding properly to trials.

1. **Personal trials:** Under the heading of personal trials we will study the response that we should give to our individual trials.
 - a. *Pray for wisdom:* When we do not understand why something has come into our lives as a trial, we should seek God's wisdom.
 - James 1:5 'If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.'
 - b. *Realize God's purpose:* We must not forget that God is working for our eternal good and that He is producing the image of His Son in our lives. (Hebrews 12:10-11; Romans 8:28, 29a).
 - c. *Respond to God's provision:*
 - I Corinthians 10:13 'No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand under it.'
 - II Peter 2:9a 'If this is so then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials...'
 - Also: Psalm 34
 - d. *Consider it joy:* We are able to be joyful in trial because we know God's purpose and control. This attitude toward trials views them as opportunities to grow rather than hindrances.
 - James 1:2-4 'Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete.'
 - Also: Matthew 5:11-12.
 - e. *Remember God's grace:*
 - II Corinthians 12:9 'But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.'
 - Also: James 1:2 with I Peter 4:10; Hebrews 6:16 with I Peter 5:5-6 Hebrews 12:15.

- f. *Confess disobedience:* When we know that our trial has a direct relationship to our disobedience, we must confess to God and accept His cleansing work in our lives (I John 1:9).
- g. *Look for a growth opportunity:* Several questions may be asked to guide us in our evaluation of God's dealings in our trials.
- (1) How has this trial affected my relationship with others?
 - (2) How has this trial changed my behavior?
 - (3) How has this trial deepened my relationship with the Lord?
2. ***Trials of others:*** The focus of the Christian life is to be toward the needs of others. The Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme example of an other-centered lifestyle (Mark 10:45). God's Word gives guidance on responding to the trials of others.
- a. *Comfort others in trials:*
- II Corinthians 1:3-4 'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.'
- b. *Be sensitive to the trials of others:* Often we as believers tend to be completely focused on what God is doing in and through our own lives, and we fail to be aware of the work of God in the lives of others. We must be sensitive to the hardships others face.
- II Corinthians 1:8 'We do not want you to be unformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despised even of life.'
- c. *Support others in their trials:*
- Galatians 6:2 'Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.'
 - Also: I Thessalonians 5:11,14.

Concluding Note

Trials are a real part of life in this sin-cursed world. God's children can be assured of God's purposes in their trials, and they can use their trials to be an encouragement to others. We can praise the Lord for using our trials to mature us to serve others.

Study and Discussion Questions

1. What do the following passages teach about the process of temptation:

Joshua 7:21

II Samuel 11:2-4

Matthew 5:28

2. How should a Christian handle temptation?
3. Do all trials come as a result of sin? See Job 1.
4. How would you counsel another Christian facing trials?
5. How would you counsel an unbeliever facing trials?