

TRIALS ARE NOT GOLDEN

- A. Introduction: We are talking about learning to respond rather than react to life's challenges. We respond to our situation by acknowledging God. We respond by talking about who He is and what He is doing.
1. You cannot respond without knowledge of who God is and how He works. When hardships hit your life you must be able to accurately answer two questions: Why is this happening? What is God doing?
 - a. Many people answer those two questions this way: Troubles come from or are allowed by God to test us, teach us, and perfect us. But, that is inaccurate. Trials are not from God. They are part of life in a sin cursed earth. Rom 5:12; John 16:33; etc.
 - b. When the Bible says God "tested" or "proved" people, God's test is always His word -- will the people obey God and believe what He says despite what they see and feel? John 6:6; Gen 22:1,2; Ex 15:25; Ex 16:4; Ps 105:17-19; etc.
 - c. God does not work "on" us through outside forces or circumstances. He works "in" us by His Spirit and His word. Phil 1:6; Phil 2:13; Heb 13:21; II Cor 3:18; James 1:21; I Thess 2:13; etc.
 2. Many of the things we believe about God and how He works are based, not on scripture, but on religious clichés that are quoted like Bible verses. "Everything happens for a reason" is a popular one.
 - a. Implicit in that statement is the idea that God is for or behind everything that happens. But that is not correct. People sin, committing horrific acts of violence and immorality. Yet, God is not "for or behind" sin in any way. People go to hell. Yet it is God's will that no one be lost. II Pet 3:9
 - b. Others believe that everything that happens is either God or the devil. In the sense that the devil is the first rebel in the universe and he enticed Adam and Eve into sin, he is ultimately behind all the hell and heartache in this world.
 1. But he does not orchestrate every negative event in our lives. People give the devil way more credit and power than he deserves.
 2. The devil seeks to devour people, but the primary way he works is through our minds, through thoughts, as he attempts to influence behavior (Eph 6:10-12, another lesson for another day).
 - c. Everything that happens is not "God or the devil". Many things are random. Random means haphazard or determined by accident rather than design.
 1. That does not take away from God's sovereignty. The fact that God is sovereign means He is all powerful and the highest authority. It does not mean He is behind everything that happens.
 2. God is so great and so big that He can take random acts which He did not cause, events that occur because of the chaos in this world due to sin, and cause them to serve His purposes, bringing great good out of bad. Eph 1:11; Rom 8:28
 3. In this lesson we want to continue to discuss the fact that God does not orchestrate the trials of life.
- B. There are some verses in the Psalms that people refer to as proof that God tests His people with trials.
1. Ps 11:4,5--This is a prayer which David prayed when Saul was pursuing him to destroy him.
 - a. v1-3--Some of David's friends and advisors counseled him to flee immediately, as a bird.
 1. They said: Because Saul does not care about truth, justice, or righteousness, the foundation of government is destroyed.
 2. I Sam 22:9-19--Saul had ordered the deaths of Ahimelech and the other priests (eighty-five altogether) who had helped David by giving him bread and Goliath's sword.
 - b. David's response (not reaction) was: I put my trust in God. God is still in his temple. His throne is still in heaven. God sees everything that is happening. God see the hearts of everyone involved in this situation. v4
 1. The idea is not that God is testing men but rather that God is watching men. v4--His eye is upon mankind, he takes their measure at a glance (NEB); He closely watches everything that happens on earth. (Taylor)

2. Try (v4), trieth (v5) are the same Hebrew word, meaning test, especially metals. It is used figuratively meaning to investigate, to examine, to try, to prove. v5--The Lord scrutinizes the virtuous and the wicked alike. (Harrison); The Lord weighs the just and unjust. (NEB).
- c. The point is not: God tests men to see what they will do or to purify them, etc., but rather, God sees everything, he will help me, and eventually, justice will prevail. v6,7
2. Ps 17:3--David wrote this prayer when he fled from Saul to hide among the Philistines (I Sam 27).
 - a. v1,2--Hear O Yahweh the right. Attend to my loud cry. Give ear unto my prayer. On lips that would not deceive (Rotherham); From thee let my vindication come! For you will see that justice is done. (Harrison). David then goes on to make his case for his righteous cause.
 1. v3,4--You have proved my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and find nothing -- no evil purpose in me; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. (Amp); Through Your solemn decrees I have avoided lawless behavior. (Harrison).
 2. v3--Proved and trieth are the same word used in Ps 11, the verb, to examine, to investigate.
 - b. Nothing in the context of this psalm gives us the right to say that God orchestrates circumstances to test us or that He leads us into circumstances to test us. That's not what David is saying.
 1. When David was on the run from Saul he was also the victim of slander and false accusations that he was plotting to take Saul's throne from him. David was proclaiming that God, who is all knowing and sees everything, examines the depths of my heart and sees my motives.
 2. God knows I have not acted unrighteous toward Saul and He will help me.
3. Ps 26--In this Psalm David asserts his innocence and uprightness because he knows that the Lord delivers the righteous -- and he is righteous.
 - a. v2-- "Examine" is the same word used in Ps 11 and Ps 17, meaning to investigate, to examine. "Prove" is the same word used when God tested Abraham and Israel (Gen 22:1,2; Ex 15:25).
 1. Try (v2) is another Hebrew verb meaning to test, It describes the purifying process of a refiner who heats metal, takes away the dross, and is left with pure substance. The emphasis is not on the process, but on the end result -- the metal is pure.
 2. Reins literally means kidney, but is used figuratively to mean mind (as in the interior self).
 - b. v2--Try me, Lord, and test me; examine my motives and my mind. (Harrison); Examine me, O Jehovah, and prove me; Purify my inner self, and my heart. (Spurrell).
 1. Trials don't cleanse the inner man any more than water cleanses the inner man.
 2. This verse has nothing to do with the Lord "testing us with trials". David is proclaiming his certainty that God will help him because he is innocent.
 - c. v1,2--Dismiss all these charges against me, Lord, for I have tried to keep your laws and have trusted you without wavering. Cross examine me, O Lord, and see that this is so; test my motives and affections, too. (Living Bible)
4. In the Old Testament we see no examples of God orchestrating circumstances to see what men will do. Instead, we see him examining men's hearts.
 - a. A theme that appears over and over again in the Old Testament is that Almighty God, who sees all and knows all, reads men's hearts.
 1. Ps 139--The main point of this psalm is: You know me inside and out. v23,24--Search me, O God, and know my heart; test my thoughts. Point out anything you find in me that makes you sad, and lead me along the path of everlasting life. (Living Bible)
 2. Ps 7:9--The God of justice reads the inmost heart (Moffatt); For you, the righteous God, look deep within the hearts of men and examine all their motives and thoughts (Living Bible)
 3. I Sam 16:7--I don't make decisions the way you do! Men judge by outward appearance, but I look at a man's thoughts and intentions. (Living Bible)
 4. I Chron 28:9--No heart but is open to the Lord's scrutiny, no thought in our minds but He can read it (Knox)

5. Jer 17:10--Only the Lord knows! He searches all hearts and examines deepest motives so He can give to each person his right reward, according to his deeds -- how he has lived. (Taylor)
- b. That theme continues into the New Testament which tells us that it is God's word (as opposed to circumstances) that tests and reveals our true motives.
 1. Heb 4:12--For the Word that God speaks is alive and active: it cuts more keenly than any two-edged sword: it strikes through to the place where soul and spirit meet, to the innermost intimacies of a man's being; it exposes the very thoughts and motives of a man's heart. (Phillips); is skilled in judging the heart's ponderings and meditations. (Berkeley).
 2. I Thess 2:4--We have passed God's scrutiny, and he has seen fit to entrust us with the work of preaching; when we speak, it is with this in view: we would earn God's good opinion, not man's, since it is God who scrutinizes our hearts. (Knox)

- C. We have accepted many religious clichés about trials, thinking that those statements are based on scriptures. Christians sometimes refer to trials as being golden or precious. But, nowhere does the Bible call trials golden or precious. Let's consider some verses that talk about trials and gold.
1. Job 23:10--From this verse people get the idea that God puts us through fiery trials to refine us or purify us just as metal is purified by being put through the fire, just like God did to Job.
 - a. Job thought God was the source of his trials. God was not the cause of Job's troubles, Satan was (another lesson for another day). But, the point for our discussion is that Job did not see his trials as God testing him to see what he would do or as God trying him to refine him. Job saw it all as unfair treatment because he felt he had done nothing wrong.
 - b. Throughout his ordeal Job maintained his innocence: I haven't done anything wrong to deserve all this calamity.
 1. Job 23:2--My complaint today is still a bitter one, and my punishment far more than my fault deserves. (Living Bible); Job 27:5--Until I die I will vow my innocence. I am not a sinner -- I repeat it again and again. (Living Bible); Job 23:11,12--I have stayed in God's paths, following his steps. I have not turned aside. I have not refused his commandments but have enjoyed them more than my daily food (Living Bible); etc.
 2. Job is saying that if God examines me and He'll see that I am as pure as gold. Job 23:10--Yet he knows how I live (Moffatt) and when he has examined me, he will pronounce me completely innocent -- as pure as solid gold. (Living Bible)
 - c. Job is not saying: God is putting me through these trials and when I come through them I will be like purified gold. Job is saying: God, you've got the wrong guy!! Examine me and you'll see I am pure as gold.
 2. I Pet 1:7 is sometimes used to say that trials are golden because they are tests from God. But that is not what the verse says. It says that our faith is precious -- more precious than pure gold. Trials are not precious. Faith in Christ is precious.
 - a. I Peter was written to Christians who were suffering persecution for following Christ and for refusing idolatry and immorality. I Pet 4:3,4
 1. In this epistle Peter is not referring to the trials or challenges of life which all of us -- believers and unbelievers -- experience. Peter was referring to the trial of persecution.
 2. In I Pet 4:12,13 Peter defines what he means by the fiery trials they were experiencing. They were partaking of the sufferings of Christ -- or persecution for following Christ.
 - b. The only thing that Christ suffered which we can share with Him is persecution. John 15:20
 1. Acts 9:4,5--When Jesus appeared to Saul who became Paul on the road to Damascus, Jesus said Paul was persecuting Him. As far as we know, Paul had no contact with Jesus prior to this moment. He did nothing to Jesus. What does Jesus mean? Because Christians are His body, because Christians are in union with Him, persecution of them is persecution of Him.
 2. This epistle is sometimes called the "suffering epistle". The word suffering is used sixteen

times in the letter. The trials or suffering Peter refers to is something only Christians can suffer -- not car wrecks and cancer (the world suffers those, too) -- but rather persecution and any cost or discomfort we face as we live for the Lord.

- c. I Pet 5:9--Peter encourages his readers to stand fast in their precious faith, knowing that they are not the only ones facing such persecution. Peter's point in this epistle is not: Trials are golden. He is admonishing his readers to hold fast to their faith in Christ, despite the persecutions. Their faith in Christ is their most important possession.
3. Peter would have been thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament and its references to God refining people. He would not have heard the words "gold" and "trials" through religious clichés like we do.
 - a. The word most often translated refine in the Old Testament describes the purifying process of a refiner who heats metal, takes away the dross, and is left with a pure substance. The emphasis is not on the process of being "fried in the fire", but on the result, which is purification.
 - b. The word was used in connection with Israel during their periods of rebellion and idol worship. The idea is not, "God's gonna fry you!", but rather they are words of hope: Israel, you won't always be like this. One day God is going to purify you so that you never again abandon Him.
 1. Mal 3:1-3 compares Messiah's coming to that of a refiner. Jesus, through the Cross which made possible the new birth, will purify (not "fry, test, refine") His people.
 2. It is an inward purification accomplished by the Spirit of God. Trials (outward) don't purify people inwardly any more than water baptism (outward) washes away sins.
4. Let's look briefly at Ps 66:10-12 and apply the things we are learning about how God works. This psalm was composed after Israel returned from captivity in Babylon.
 - a. God told Israel before they entered the Promised Land that if they worshipped the gods of the nations around them He would allow their enemies to overrun them and remove them from the land. That is exactly what happened. Deut 4:25-30
 1. Soldiers rode over them, destroying their temple. They went through fire and water (severely afflictive circumstances). In the Old Testament, God is said to do what He only allows.
 2. God told them through His prophets, I will be with you through the fire and water. Isa 43:2
 - b. At the end of their captivity God brought them back to the land as He had promised. Their testimony about themselves was: You have proved us (investigated, examined) and tried us (describes the purifying process of a refiner).
 - c. They were acknowledging God. Since their return to the land, Israel has never again worshipped idols. They were cured of it. God brought good out of bad for Israel.
- D. Conclusion: So much of what we believe and repeat about God -- what He is like and how He works -- is not based on scripture, but rather on religious clichés. We need to learn to read verses in the context of the rest of the Bible. God is good and good means good. God does good and good means good. When you know that you can respond rather than react to the challenges of life in a sin cursed earth.