

# Faith And Our Trials

**1 Peter 1:6-7** [NIV] *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.”*

It is easy to understand that faith in God’s Promises is more precious than gold.

But how can we come to regard a trial of that faith as equally precious?

Nobody particularly likes trials.

**Philippians 1:29** [NIV] *“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,”*

**It is predestined that we as Christians will have trials, they come to us in conjunction with our faith in what God has done for us through Jesus our Saviour.**

Trials are a way in which God tests the quality of our faith.

Trials are essential for our maturing in our Christian life.

**We mature in the measure that the Holy Spirit is active in us.**

Our spiritual life and growth is regulated by the level of activity of the Holy Spirit within us.

**John 6:35** [NIV] *“Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”*

The more we digest the “bread of life” the more we mature, within the “womb” of the church.

The physical analogy of the growth of a child in the womb of the mother helps us to understand our own spiritual growth.

**1 Peter 2:2** [NIV] *“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,”*

A baby [born-again-Christian] is nourished by the body of the mother [the Church] by the “milk of the word”.

**The activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives, which determines our rate of spiritual growth, is regulated by the way we respond to the trials in our lives.**

What determines our response to our trials?

Our level of faith.

**Faith, trials and spiritual growth are linked one to another.**

The Greek word used for trial has more than one meaning.

“*Pēirasmōs*” – a putting to proof – [trial] or provocation [temptation].

The context determines which is meant to be understood.

**James 1:2** [NIV] *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,”*

Trial is indicated as the best translation in this context.

**James 1:13-15** [NIV] *“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 desire, 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.”*

Temptation is indicated as the best translation in this context.

**1 Corinthians 10:13** [NIV] *“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 up under it.”*

The context indicates that in this case trial or temptation are equally valid translations.

How then do we respond to a trial to obtain maximum growth and Holy Spirit involvement?

**When faced with a trial do we dignify that trial?**

Not complain while it lasts.

Not try to hasten its conclusion by manipulation of circumstances.

Learn all we can from the painful experience about ourselves and our Creator.

Such a response will please God and the Holy Spirit will become a special presence in our lives.

**Or when faced with a trial do we show contempt for that trial?**

Constantly complaining about the trial we are experiencing, considering it to be unfair.

**Not** seeing it as being allowed by God and trying to hasten its end by any means, even turning our back on God and His people.

Making **no** attempt to learn about our own attitudes and God’s response when we are under the pressure of a trial.

Such a response will not please God and will grieve the Holy Spirit. Also, it will force God to allow an even greater trial so that we can eventually learn from that trial and have faith in Him.

**Remember every trial has a built-in time scale and eventually comes to an end.**

**1 Corinthians 10:13** [NIV] *“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 up under it.”*

The way out could be physical death.

**Isaiah 57:1** [NIV] *“The righteous perish, and no-one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no-one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil.”*

God sometimes takes the righteous away in death to spare them from experiencing evil times, which would be more than their compassionate character could endure.

**Not every trial will end in this physical lifetime.**

**2 Corinthians 12:7-10** [NIV] *“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 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. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

**God cannot powerfully use a person who is proud or conceited, so He will allow a trial to continue to keep that person in a humble, dependent on Him attitude.**

**Galatians 3:6-9** [NIV] *“Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”*

Abraham is the “father” of all who have faith in God’s Promises, an example for us to follow and learn from. Abraham was tested to the very edge of his endurance.

**Hebrews 11:17-18** [NIV] *“By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.”*

All Abraham’s hopes for the fulfilments of the promises God had made and Abraham had believed steadfastly over many years centred in Isaac. Yet here was God testing Abraham’s faith by asking him to sacrifice Isaac.

Yet we see that Abraham’s faith in God went beyond the grave, beyond death.

Does our faith in God’s Promises do this?

**Some people suffer more than others, some are tested more than others. Why?**

I conclude from scriptural examples that suffering is a Sovereign invitation to receive two things.

### **1 A greater anointing of the Holy Spirit now in this physical life.**

**Isaiah 66:2** [NIV] *“Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?” declares the LORD. “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.”*

God holds in esteem the person who is humble, when weakness has brought us to a humble attitude of mind. Trials and suffering can humble us.

“Contrite” the Hebrew literally means “smitten”, “maimed” or “lame”.

Only when we have a total dependency on our Creator God can He use us by giving to us a greater anointing of the Holy Spirit.

### **2 A greater reward in the Kingdom of God.**

**1 Corinthians 3:10-15** [NIV] *“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality*

*of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."*

Faith in what Jesus Christ has done for us is the foundation of our future eternal life. But what we build on that foundation will determine our reward in our future life. The quality of the work we do will be tested by trials and suffering [fire] and what remains after testing by fire will be the structure of our reward.

**Some Christians will not receive any reward, just eternal existence.**

**1 Corinthians 9:18** [NIV] *"What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it."*

**It seems that our reward is based somewhat on going beyond the call of duty.**

**Luke 17:5, 7-10** [NIV] *"The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" ... "Suppose one of you had a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"*

Faith is also increased by going beyond the call of duty. This pleases God by proving our dependency on Him.

**What can we learn from Abraham's ordeal and our own trials and suffering?**

**1 What God asks of us often makes no sense at the time.**

If God's request is logical no faith would be needed.

God tests us through trials and suffering, to see if we really do trust Him alone.

**2 Faith is never brought to maturity without suffering.**

**James 2:20-22** [NIV] *"You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, **and his faith was made complete by what he did.**"*

The traumatic mental suffering that Abraham must have gone through as he led his beloved son to the place of sacrifice is beyond our comprehension.

But this was the path Abraham had to travel to become "*complete*" [mature or perfect].

**James 2:23-24** [NIV] *"And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that **a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.**"*

This path of suffering led to Abraham becoming righteous and the friend of God.

**Hebrews 5:8-9** [NIV] *"Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him"*

Even Jesus, the Son of Man, needed suffering to make Him perfect [mature or complete].

**1 Peter 2:21** [NIV] *"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."*

By implication suffering is to be a normal part of a Christian's life.

**Acts 14:22** [NIV] *“strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.”*

The pathway to the Kingdom of Heaven is paved with suffering.

### **3 Our faith is tested by blind obedience to the Holy Spirit.**

**Genesis 22:2** [NIV] *“Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”*

Abraham was not told the purpose or end of this seemingly senseless demand by God, what was demanded by God was *“blind faith”*.

Total trust in God is what God is seeking in us, obedience to His Word whatever our personal circumstances.

### **4 We may not be permitted to let anyone else know what God is doing to us or with us.**

**Genesis 22:5** [NIV] *“He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”*

Not Abraham's personal servants or even Isaac were allowed to know the full implications of this act of obedience.

**Psalms 25:14** [NIV] *“The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.”*

### **God limits certain knowledge and promises to those who fear Him.**

Isaac showing total trust in his father Abraham is a *“type”* of Christ and his total trust in His Father.

**Genesis 22:7-8** [NIV] *“Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.”*

We have in this short passage the foreshadowing of the provision of a substitute for our death by a male lamb provided by God.

### **5 Faith involves our total commitment to obeying God whatever the circumstances**

**Genesis 22:9-10** [NIV] *“When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.”*

In his heart and mind Abraham had said *“goodbye”* to Isaac. When Abraham lifted the knife to cut Isaac's throat, there was not the remotest thought that God would stop him.

**Hebrews 11:19** [NIV] *“Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.”*

Abraham was looking to God to bring Isaac back from the dead.

**Genesis 22:11-12** [NIV] *“But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything*

to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

**As far as Abraham was concerned he had received his son back from the dead.**

## **6 Faithful obedience always pays off in the end.**

**Genesis 22:15-18** [NIV] *“The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”*

God loves to reward obedience and He rewarded Abraham with the greatest reward outside of the Kingdom of God, an oath.

## **7 Every trial must run its full course to produce the maturing faith.**

**James 1:2-4** [NIV] *“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, not lacking anything.”*

Every trial has a built-in time scale and the end product is well worth waiting faithfully for.

**The reason God allows suffering and trials is multi-purposed.**

- 1 Suffering and trials make us stronger mentally and spiritually when we dignify them.
- 2 Suffering and trials increase our faith and the anointing of the Holy Spirit.
- 3 Suffering and trials make us draw close to God and then make Him more real to us.
- 4 Suffering and trials make us more godly because of this closer walk with God and some of His characteristics *“rubbing off”* on us.
- 5 Suffering and trials teach us more about the character and perfection of the Creator God we worship.
- 6 Suffering and trials perfect us and our faith.
- 7 Suffering and trials show us just how much God loves us.

**Hebrews 12:2-6, 10-11** [NIV] *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.” ... “Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in 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.”*

When we suffer and are under the pressure of trials, be encouraged by the fact that this proves we are children of God.

**Hebrews 10:32-39** [NIV] *“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathised with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, “He who is coming will come and will not delay. But **my righteous one will live by faith**. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.” But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.”*

**Persistent obedience to God in trials and suffering pays off in the end.**