

Bible Character Study

Paul | Acts 9:15-16; 13:50-52; 14:19-20; 16:22-24

Trials Show Us God's Power in Our Weakness

Have you ever wondered why God allows you to go through long-lasting pain or difficulties? Even when you know that they have been good for you, it is easy to get exhausted by the continued testing of your faith. God sometimes gives us lifelong trials to teach us that He is faithful through it all, and He wants us to stay in a place of humility so we can continue to see His Power through the trials that show us our weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:7b-10 (NLT) *"...So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.⁸ Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away.⁹ Each time he said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.' So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.¹⁰ That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

Romans 8:2-4 (NLT) *"And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.³ The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.⁴ He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit."*

Isaiah 40:29-31 (NLT) *"He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless.³⁰ Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion.³¹ But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint."*

Trials Help Us Identify with Christ

When we look at the life of Jesus, we see so many situations where He went through difficulties, persecution, false accusations, and suffering. With this in mind, Paul tells us in Philippians that our attitude should be the same as Christ's. How can we identify with Christ and learn to have an attitude like His if we do not also walk through trials? We can't. That's exactly why God promises we will have suffering, persecution, and difficulties along the way. They help us identify with our Savior.

1 Peter 4:12-14 (NLT) *"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. ¹³ Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you."*

Philippians 2:8-10 (NLT) *"...he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth..."*

2 Timothy 2:11-12 (NLT) *"This is a trustworthy saying: If we die with him, we will also live with him. If we endure hardship, we will reign with him. If we deny him, he will deny us."*

2 Corinthians 4:8-10 (NLT) *"We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. ⁹ We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. ¹⁰ Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies."*

Philippians 3:10 (NLT) *"I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death..."*

Philippians 1:29 (NLT) *"For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him."*

Trials Cause Us to Have an Eternal Perspective

Have you ever watched someone go through unspeakable tragedy? What defined them? We have seen many people walk through circumstances that seemed insurmountable: loss of loved ones, tragic accidents, medical diagnoses, unfaithful spouses, addictions, and many more. But what sets apart those who walked through those challenges successfully is always the same—their focus. When we focus on the problem in front of us and just the here and now, we miss out on the blessings that God wants to bring from it that will matter for eternity. Whatever the trial you may be facing, see it as an opportunity to let God work in your life for His glory in eternity so that you don't waste the trials that God has custom-designed for you.

Matthew 5:11-12 (NLT) *“God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. ¹² Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.”*

1 Peter 5:10 (NLT) *“In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation.”*

2 Timothy 4:18 (NLT) *“Yes, and the Lord will deliver me from every evil attack and will bring me safely into his heavenly Kingdom. All glory to God forever and ever! Amen.”*

Colossians 3:1-4 (NLT) *“Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. ² Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. ³ For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.”*

Philippians 3:14 (NLT) *“I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.”*

Notes:

Reflection and Response from This Week's Lesson:

What's my take-away and how will I practice trusting God more through my custom-designed trials?
