

Empower
Session 9

Trial By
Fire

Updated: 10/24/2009

Trial by Fire

This is a teaching that we may not like to hear, but it is one that we need to hear.

When we first come to the Lord and He fills us with His Holy Spirit, it's often like He lifts us up above all our problems and cares. Everything seems so perfect. The Lord may allow this spiritual high to get us established in His kingdom.

But if you've walked with Him for any period of time, you realize that we don't stay up on top of the world.

- Something negative happens; we come down a little bit.
- Persecution occurs, we come down a little lower.
- Someone disappoints us and pretty soon we are down to ground level again.

We can't live up on the clouds of a spiritual high all the time. So the Lord allows spiritual trials, tribulations, and other things to come into our life. This is known as the "trial by fire".

Jesus said in the scriptures, "To him that overcomes, I will give the crown of life." You can't overcome if you don't go through something.

God also wants to test our commitment to Him. He allows the trial of fire to come to verify for us and for Him that we are committed to Him through good and bad, regardless of the circumstances. In the fiery trial our commitment is confirmed.

Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer for I have overcome the world."

He told His disciples that the world would treat them the way it treated Him.

Often we find that not everyone around us – in our families, our friends, our work or school acquaintances – is all that happy about what's happening to us spiritually. They may make fun of us, they may give us a hard time, or they may get put off by our new life in Christ. Some are convicted by our new lifestyle and their defense mechanism is to attack us. Others may try to force us to return to our ancestral religion.

This has always happened. We have to realize that there is going to be some heat.

In your notes, in Acts 14:22, Paul and Barnabas warned the early church that they would "pass through many troubles (hardships and tribulations) to enter into the kingdom of God." This would be part of their experience with God.

TRIAL BY FIRE

Paul and Barnabas strengthened the believers and encouraged them to remain true to the faith. “We must pass through many troubles (hardships and tribulations) to enter the Kingdom of God,” they taught. Acts 14:22

When we pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit, we must not expect that our problems will all melt away, instead, expect a period of testing and trials. This is a necessary part of the package. Our preparation is not yet complete. There still must be the “Trial by Fire.”

Illustration: Baptism under Fire

As soon as Jesus baptizes you in the Holy Spirit, your life begins to have real power. As you allow God’s Spirit to overflow into your soul and body, and into the world around, Satan becomes painfully aware of you, and you will know it! He will give his full attention to “shutting you down” if possible.

THREE WAYS SATAN TRIES TO STOP US:

1. **Keep us from the power**

2. **Attack our testimony**

- John 8:48
- Luke 7:34

3. **Get us to misuse the power**

Jesus’ example — Luke 4:1-13 “in every respect” — Hebrews 4: 15

Then Jesus full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan River, being urged by the Spirit out into the barren wastelands of Judea where Satan tempted Him for 40 days. He ate nothing all that time, and was very hungry. Satan said, “If You are God’s Son, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread.” But Jesus replied, “It is written in the Scriptures, ‘Other things in life are much more important than bread!’ Then Satan took Him up and revealed to Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time; and The Devil told Him, “I will give You all these splendid kingdoms and their glory—for they are mine to give to anyone I wish—if You would only get down on Your knees and worship me.” Jesus replied, “We must worship God, and Him alone. So it is written in the Scriptures.” Then Satan took Him to Jerusalem to a high roof of the Temple and Said, “If You are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say that God will send His angels to guard You and to keep You from crashing to the pavement below!” Jesus replied, “The Scriptures also say, ‘Don’t experiment with God’s patience.’ “ When the Devil had ended all the temptations, he left Jesus for a while and went away.

Sometimes we don't make allowance for the trial by fire. Our initial experience is so wonderful and so glorious we don't realize that the trial by fire is also part of the package.

When they launch huge rockets into space from Cape Canaveral in the US, they first test the equipment to make sure it will work. There are large clamps holding the rocket to the ground. They then test fire the engines that will be used to propel the spaceship into orbit. Once they have tested the various systems of the spacecraft under these flight conditions, then they know it will be safe to launch.

That's the way it is with us. Look at your notes. "As soon as Jesus baptizes you in the Holy Spirit, your life begins to have real power. As you allow God's Spirit to overflow into your soul and body, and into the world around, Satan becomes painfully aware of you, and you will know it! He will give his full attention to "shutting you down" if at all possible.

Up to this time, he may not have paid any attention to you. You weren't a threat to him. But now that God is working in your life, he will attempt to shut you down.

So here we have the rocket ready to lift off. If it's to have a successful flight it needs to be tested under flight conditions. Here you are ready to go out and live your life under the direction of the Holy Spirit, doing what He wants you to do. You want to know, God wants to know and Satan needs to know ...

- Are you going to be able to do it?
- When the pressure is on, are you still going to be there?
- When things aren't going exactly the way you thought they would or should, can the Lord count on you?

So He allows the "trial by fire". And many times, as was true in Job's case, He allows Satan to be the instrument to test us (within His parameters, of course).

There are three ways that the enemy tries to shut us down:

- First, he will try to **KEEP US FROM THE POWER**
 - Many of us had spiritual blinders on before we received the empowering of the Holy Spirit. We read the verses, but our eyes weren't open to see or receive the message.
 - Satan may try to get us to believe that the power "isn't for today", that it was only for the early church and that we don't need and should not seek that power.
 - There won't be much conflict between the two kingdoms if we don't accept the power.

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- The second thing that he will try to do is to **ATTACK OUR TESTIMONY.**
 - We see that he did this in the life of Jesus
 - Why do you suppose that the religious leaders of the day were vilifying Jesus and calling him a winebibber (drunkard) and a glutton in Luke 7:34? Why do you suppose that they were accusing Jesus of hanging out with sinners and the unrighteous? They were trying to attack His integrity and ruin His reputation.
 - In John 8:48, we read about the time when they actually attacked Jesus by accusing Him of doing miracles and wonders by the power of satanic demons.
 - Many mainline pastors who have been filled with the Holy Spirit and have begun to lead their congregations in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit have been accused of being influenced and led by demonic forces.
 - In one case, leaders from a denomination met with such a pastor for several hours trying to deter him from continuing to flow in this new empowerment. Finally, after three hours, they turned to his wife and said, “Madam, you would be better off if you were married to an alcoholic.” The enemy will even use those who should be encouraging us to attack our testimony and credibility.

- The third way that the enemy will try to shut us down is to **GET US TO MISUSE THE POWER**
 - Unfortunately, this may be the area where he has his greatest success.
 - All of us have a certain amount of pride and selfishness. If he can get us to use what Jesus is putting into our lives to make ourselves look better in the eyes of other people, or to get things for ourselves (material goods, prestige, reputation, etc.), then he will have gotten us to misuse the power.
 - There is even teaching out there that tries to motivate us to walk in God’s ways so that we can be rich! That’s not why Jesus gave us the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Jesus never used the power of the Holy Spirit for His own benefit, for His own things, or even for His own reputation.
 - Jesus never expects us to do anything that He hasn’t already experienced Himself. Jesus’ example in Luke 4:1-13,
 - We see Jesus receiving His double baptism – in water and in the Holy Spirit
 - Then after that experience, He is led by Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days to be tempted of the devil - His “trial by fire.”
 - He had to stand up against the enemy.
 - A Christian who experiences an empowering of the Spirit may be told by well-meaning, but misled, fellow believers that he is now ready and prepared for “doing a great work for God.” Thus, he may be totally unprepared for what often comes next - a trip to the wilderness for intense confrontation with the enemy.

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- The things that the devil tempted Jesus with are the same things that he will use to tempt us
 - The first temptation was the satisfying of His **HUNGER**.
 - This is the temptation to yield to our physical body desires. Jesus was hungry; Jesus hadn't eaten for 40 days. The rocks looked like loaves of bread. Satan tempted Him to turn the stones into bread. What would be wrong with that? First, it was at Satan's initiative; second, God had made other plans. Angels were waiting in the wings to minister to Jesus once the temptations were over. He didn't have to take things into His own hands. He didn't have to respond to that raging desire within Him. And so Jesus resisted temptation using the Word of God.
 - The second temptation was for Jesus to make a spectacular **DISPLAY** of His power.
 - This was an attempt to misuse the power of God for prideful reasons. Satan took Him to the top of the temple and quoted scripture to tempt Jesus ... "... just jump off, surely the angels will watch over you. Everybody will know who You are!" But never in His ministry did Jesus do things in a "spectacular" way to draw attention to Himself, He always did things in a very natural way. He didn't come to put on a show.
 - Some evangelists today make a dramatic show of their ministry, often drawing more attention to themselves than to God's kingdom
 - Jesus resisted Satan, again quoting God's word, stating that we are not to tempt the Lord our God.

46 F.L.C. — EMPOWER: Adopting the Lifestyle

1. Satisfying his **Hunger** (desires)

2. Making a spectacular **Display** (pride)

3. Avoiding the painful **Path** (rationalization)

DEFINITION OF “TRIAL BY FIRE” —

The process of separation employed by God such as testing, tribulations, financial reverses, and persecutions, to bring us into maturity and to set us aside for His service and to make us partakers of His holiness.

John the Baptist said, “I baptize you with water, but one who is much greater than I am is coming...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” -Luke 3: 16

GOD’S GOAL: ROMANS 8:28-29

And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are called according to His plans. For from the very beginning God decided that those who came to Him—and all along He knew who would—should become like His Son, so that His Son would be the First, with many brothers.

not just **Salvation,** but **Sonship**

(vs. 29 is the **Good** of vs. 28)

God sends the fire of trial into the lives of all believers to test the depth of their love and the strength of their faith in Him. If they endure the trial, their love and faith deepens, maturing them as sons. They learn that all these things will work together for their good.

GOD’S PURPOSES IN THE “TRIAL BY FIRE”

I. HE SIFTS – **Matthew 3: 12** Luke 22:31.

“His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear and cleanse His threshing floor and to gather the wheat and store it in its granary, but the chaff He will burn with a fire that cannot be extinguished”

- The final way that Satan tempted Jesus was to try and get Him to avoid the painful **PATH**, the one God had chose; to try to get Him to take a different path to achieve the same outcome.
 - Jesus knew from the beginning how painful His path would be. When the time came for His death by crucifixion, every part of Jesus' body rebelled against the pain and anguish that He was about to experience. This was a very real temptation. Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and told Him that He could walk a different path to reclaim authority over them. All He had to do was bow down and worship him. He could avoid the cross and all it's pain, suffering and shame. To the human mind that would be very tempting. It would be easy to rationalize, "Is this the only way? Maybe I wouldn't have to put myself through that ..."
 - But Jesus resisted by again quoting the Word of God to Him.
 - We may also be tempted to take an "easier" path, a more "sensible" way, a path that will avoid difficulty and conflict, pain and suffering.

- Once the temptations were complete, the angels came and ministered to Jesus.

- When Jesus faced these temptations, He faced them as a man, just as we will. He only had His own will, His knowledge of the word, His commitment to the will of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit to rely upon.

Now we are ready for a definition of the trial by fire. It is there in your notes: *"The process of separation employed by God such as testings, tribulations, illness, financial reverses, and persecutions, to bring us into maturity and to set us aside for His service and to make us partakers of His holiness."*

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- We've talked about water baptism and the baptism with the Holy Spirit, but here is also the baptism with fire.
- Just as the Holy Spirit wants to fill our whole life and energize every part of our being with His presence and power, so all of our life also needs to be tested and tried by the trial by fire as well.
- The goal which God intends for each of us is set forth in one of the great verses of the Bible - Romans 8:28: *"For we know that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose."*
 - We often ask, "How can this be good?"
 - "I've lost my job and have to receive help from others."
 - "There is a nasty person working next to me."
 - The "**GOOD**" of verse 28 we find in verse 29: *"For from the very beginning God decided that those who come to Him – and all along He knew who would – should become like His Son, so that His Son would be the First, with many brothers."*
 - The good is not that everything goes well for us, not that we have our own way, not that Jesus does whatever we want Him to do whenever we pray, not that we live on easy street. The good is something far higher ... the good is that we become like Jesus. The King James bible says, "... that we be transformed into the likeness of His Son."
- God's goal is not just **SALVATION**, but it's **SONSHIP**!
 - The trial by fire is the way that God helps produces the likeness of His Son in us so that we may bring eternal glory to Him. The road to that goal takes us through the fire.

Let's look at six major purposes revealed in Scripture for the Trial by Fire:

- I. He Sifts Us – **MATTHEW 3:12** and Luke 22:31 *"His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear and cleanse His threshing floor and to gather the wheat and store it in its granary, but the chaff He will burn with a fire that cannot be extinguished."*
 - God sifts us until the chaff is thoroughly removed and all our life is cleansed
 - In the winnowing process, the grain is harvested and then placed on this hard floor. The ox would tread the grain, or the people would walk on it to break down the shell and loosen the grain. On a day when the wind was blowing, they would take the winnowing fork and throw a fork full up in the air. The wind would blow the lighter chaff away and the heavier grain would fall to the ground.
 - God will thoroughly cleanse His threshing floor. It doesn't matter where God starts in our lives, because He is going to winnow the whole thing, to get rid of all the chaff from our lives.

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II. God also uses the trial by fire to expose WHO and WHAT we really are.

- Our reaction to testing shows what is really going on at the core of our being and what direction we intend to move.
- Sometimes you can't tell the difference between God's people and others who live in the world.
- Jesus said there are two roads – the broad road that leads to destruction and the narrow road that leads to life. Some of us try to straddle the fence and walk both roads.
- When the children of Israel went out of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army was drowned, the Bible tells us that they went out of Egypt a "mixed multitude". Not all were Israelites. Not all believed in God. Not all were committed to worshipping God. Not all were open to hearing the voice of God.
- Once they crossed the sea, all were rejoicing and singing and dancing. But three days later, they were murmuring and complaining. Their water had run out. Some of them were ready to go back. It only took three days. Some were ready to kill Moses and Aaron. They were a mixed multitude! Time after time, this rebellious, stubborn group of people stirred up God's people against Him. The trial by fire removes the "mixed multitude" from our lives ... it exposes attitudes and behaviors in us that God wants to remove.
- In Matthew 13:20-21, Jesus tells the parable of the seed that was sown on various types of soil. These verses describe the rocky soil, *"The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away."* It wasn't that these people were hardened to the gospel, for they received it with joy. But it only lasted a short time because it had no root in their heart.
- Jesus allows some heat to come, and it exposes what's really in our hearts. If it's just an emotional experience, or just something that we're trying out, or just something that others are doing – if we haven't really made Jesus the Lord of our life - it doesn't take long before trials or persecution causes us to fall away.

God sifts us until the chaff is thoroughly removed and all the life is cleansed

II. HE EXPOSES — “Who” AND “What” we really are.

Our reaction to testing bears out what we are really like at the center of our being and what direction we are going to take (Matthew 7: 13 -14)

Illustration - The mixed multitude

— If we become Offended with the trial, there are areas of correction needed.

The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

— If we **Rebel** in the trial, then we will backslide!

Matthew 13 :20-21 (NIV)

John 15:6

If anyone separates from Me, he is thrown away like a useless branch, withers, and is gathered into a pile with all the others and burned.

II Peter 2:20-21

And when a person has escaped from the wicked ways of the world by learning about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and then gets tangled up with sin and becomes its slave again, he is worse off than he was before. It would be better if he had never known Christ at all than to learn of Him and then afterwards turn his back on the holy commandments that were given to him.

James 5:19-20

Dear brothers, if anyone has slipped away from God and no longer trusts the Lord, and someone helps him understand the Truth again, that person who brings Him back to God will have saved a wandering soul from death, bringing about the forgiveness of his many sins

III. HE CHASTENS — Hebrews 12:5-11

— Rebellion is curbed, and the life is Redirected

— A sense of Belonging is instilled.

- Here's what happens when we are tested and exposed:
 - If we become **OFFENDED** with the trial, then it shows that there is something which needs to be dealt with in our lives. It draws attention to a weakness in our character, to a selfishness that we haven't come to grips with yet. If we hold on to the offense, we will **REBEL** begin to backslide.
 - If we find that we are taking offense, then our response is pivotal. We will either cry out to God to help us deal with the thing which is being exposed, or we will rebel. If we rebel, then we will backslide.
- We are going to look at three strong scripture passages here which are given as warnings:
 - John 15:6 *"If anyone separates from Me, he is thrown away like a useless branch, withers, and is gathered into a pile with all the others and burned."* The work of God comes to an end in our lives. Since the life and fruit of the Vine isn't flowing within us anymore, we wither and are thrown into a pile and burned.
 - II Peter 2:20-22 *"And when a person has escaped from the wicked ways of the world by learning about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and then gets tangled up with sin and becomes its slave again, he is worse off than he was before. It would be better if he had never known Christ at all than to learn of Him and then afterwards turn his back on the holy commandments that were given to him. "*
 - There is a proverb that talks about a dog returning to his vomit and a washed pig wallowing in the mud. We do this if we "turn our back" on God, on what He has done for us, and we are again entangled in the things of the world.
 - The key phrase here is "turns his back." God will never turn His back on us, but if we rebel in the place of testing, the prospect that we will turn our back on God cannot be discounted. That is not to be taken lightly.
 - God didn't make us to be robots, but gave us a free will, and we have the ability to turn our back on God - to even tell Him to just get out of our life.
 - James 5:19-20 (read) ... this is both a warning and an encouragement. It shows that a backslider can end up in hell (soul saved from death). But, it also clearly shows that a backslider can be reclaimed.
 - Some of you have been experiencing some heat. How are you handling it? Have you become offended? Is something that you need to deal with being exposed so that you can cry out to Him, allow Him to cleanse you, strengthen you, redirect you and pour His life into those areas?

III. Another reason for the trial by fire is that through it God chastens us. He chastens or corrects us so that our rebellion can be curbed and our life **REDIRECTED**, according to His purposes.

- God doesn't punish us with any vindictiveness in His heart. He isn't like a parent that's gone to the last ounce of his patience and then vents His anger on us. God always is seeking to redirect us.
- Like a parent who corrects his child to protect him from danger, God corrects us in order to redirect us into the boundaries which are for our good.
- Through chastening a sense of **BELONGING** is instilled in us.

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James 5:19-20

Dear brothers, if anyone has slipped away from God and no longer trusts the Lord, and someone helps him understand the Truth again, that person who brings Him back to God will have saved a wandering soul from death, bringing about the forgiveness of his many sins

III. HE CHASTENS — Hebrews 12:5-11

— Rebellion is curbed, and the life is Redirected

— A sense of Belonging is instilled.

- The Bible says that if we are a child of God, He will discipline us because we are His children, just like our earthly parents discipline us. Hebrews 12:5-11 clearly states that children are actually made secure under loving discipline. If a child isn't disciplined, they even wonder if they are a child who is loved.
- God's correction is always right. It's is always for our own good. And it produces His holiness and character within us.

IV. A fourth purpose for the trial by fire is that He Witnesses to the reality of our commitment and our love for Him by the way we respond to the trial by fire.

- In **LUKE 6:22-23**, Jesus said that you should count yourself blest every time someone puts you down or throws you out, every time someone smears your name or discredits you because of Him. Count yourself blest! God sees us and rejoices in our response.
- Don't be surprised, Peter says, in **PETER 4:12-16** (read)
 - It's an honor to suffer for Christ
 - Don't let this happen because of our own wrong behavior
 - He says it's not strange, it's going to happen all the time

v.5- 7 Children are really made secure under discipline.

And have you quite forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you, His child? He said “My son, don’t be angry when the Lord punishes you. Don’t be discouraged when He has to show you where you are wrong. For when He punishes you, it proves that He loves you. When He whips you it proves you are really His child”. Let God train you, for He is doing what any loving father does for his children. Whoever heard of a son that was never corrected?

v. 8 Without discipline we are not really God’s sons at all.

If God doesn’t punish you when you need it, as other fathers punish their sons, then it means that you aren’t really God’s son at all- that you don’t really belong in His family.

v. 9-11 God’s correction is right—and for our good

Since we respect our fathers here on earth, though they punish us, should we not all the more cheerfully submit to God’s training so that we can begin to really live? Our earthly fathers trained us for a few brief years, doing the best for us that they know how, but God’s correction is always right and for our best good, that we may share His holiness. Being punished isn’t enjoyable while it is happening-it hurts! But afterwards we can see the result, a quiet growth in grace and character.

IV. HE WITNESSES — To the reality of our commitment and love through our suffering.

Luke 6:22-23 (Matthew 5:44 and Romans 12: 14)

I Peter 4:12-16

Dear friends, don’t be bewildered or surprised when you go through the fiery trials ahead, for this is no strange, unusual thing that is going to happen to you. Instead, be really glad because these trials will make you partners with Christ in His suffering, and afterwards you will have the wonderful joy of sharing His glory in that coming day when it will be displayed. Be happy if you are cursed and insulted for being a Christian, for when that happens the Spirit of God will come upon you with great glory. Don’t let me hear of your suffering for murdering or stealing or making trouble or being a busy body and prying into other people’s affairs. But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being in Christ’s family and being called by His wonderful name!

- There is a perfect illustration of this in a story communicated by Corey Ten Boom in her book, "Tramp for the Lord" ... The story is set in the continent of Africa.

Thomas was a tall black man who lived in a round hut together with his big family in the middle of Africa. He loved the Lord and loved people - an unbeatable combination.

Thomas' neighbor, who lived across the dirt street, hated God - and hated men like Thomas who loved God. His hatred grew stronger and stronger until the man began sneaking over at night and setting fire to the straw on Thomas's hut, endangering his small children. Three nights in a row this happened and each time Thomas was able to rush out of his hut and put out the flames before they destroyed the roof and the walls. The fact that he never said an unkind word to his neighbor, only showing him love and forgiveness, made his neighbor hate him even more.

One night, the neighbor sneaked across the street and set fire to Thomas's home. This night, however, strong wind came up and as Thomas rushed to beat out the fire, the sparks blew across the street and set the neighbor's house on fire. Thomas finished putting out the fire on his roof and then rushed across the street to put out the fire on his neighbor's room. He was able to extinguish the flames, but in the process, he badly burned his hands and arms.

Other neighbors told the chief of the tribe what had happened. The chief was so furious that he sent his police to arrest the neighbor and throw him in prison.

That night, Thomas came to the meeting where I was speaking (as he had on each night). I noticed his badly burned hands and asked him what happened. Reluctantly he told me the story.

"It is good that this man is in prison," I said, "Now your children are no longer in danger and he cannot try again to put your house in flames." "That is true," he said, "But I am so sorry for that man. He is an unusually gifted man and now he must live together with all those criminals in a horrible prison." "Then let us pray for him," I said.

Thomas dropped to his knees and holding up his burned and bandaged hands, he began to pray. "Lord, I claim this neighbor of mine for you. Lord, give him his freedom and do that miracle that in the future he and I will become a team to bring the gospel to our tribe. Amen." Never had I heard such a prayer.

Two days later I was able to go to the prison. I spoke to the prisoners about God's love and joy. Among the group that listened intently was Thomas's neighbor. When I asked who would receive Jesus in his heart, that man was the first one to raise his hand.

After the meeting, I told him how Thomas loved him, how he had burned his hands trying to put out the fire to save his house, and how he had prayed that they might become a team to spread the Gospel. The man wept big tears and nodded his head saying, "Yes, yes, that is how it shall be!"

The next day I told Thomas. He praised God and said, "You see, God has worked a miracle. We never can expect too much from Him." He left, running down the path, his face beaming with joy.

Was there something going on in Thomas's life that God allowed this terrible thing to happen? No, God was establishing a witness to his neighbors through his trial.

- Paul cried out to God three times to remove a thorn in his flesh, and God said no, that His power shows up best in **WEAK** people. Paul was glad to boast about how "weak" he was in II Corinthians 12:9 in order to demonstrate Christ's power! When I am weak, and everyone knows it, if something good happens, then they know it's God, not me, and He is glorified!

Illustration — “Thomas with the bandaged hands”

II Corinthians 12:9 — God’s power shows up best in **weak** people.

Now I am glad to boast about how weak I am; I am glad to be a living demonstration of Christ’s power, instead of showing off my own power and abilities.

V. HE MATURES

Trial is God’s instrument to **perfect** and **complete** us.

Hebrews 5:8-9 (Luke 12:50)

And even though Jesus was God’s Son, He had to learn from experience what it was like to obey, when obeying meant suffering. It was after He had proved Himself perfect in this experience that Jesus became the Giver of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him.

James 1:2-4

Dear brothers, is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So let it grow, and don’t try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete.

God is not going to entrust us with powerful gifts until we are mature enough to handle them.

I Thessalonians 2:3-5 (The Message)

God tested us thoroughly to make sure we are qualified to be trusted with this message.... since we’ve been put through that battery of tests, you’re guaranteed that both we and the Message are free of error, mixed motives or hidden agendas.

V. Another purpose for the trial by fire is that He Matures us. Trials are often Gods instrument to **PERFECT** and **COMPLETE** us.

- Jesus Himself was perfected through the things that He suffered (Hebrews 5:8-9)

- James 1:2-4 “If your life is full of difficulties and temptations, then be happy.” Why? Because when the road is rough, our patience can grow and we will mature into Christians who are ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete.

- We normally try to squirm out of difficulties and temptations. James encourages us to see the hand of God in these things and allow the trial to be used to complete us.

- God has so much to accomplish in and through our lives, but He can't do it if we haven't become mature.
 - Otherwise it would be like allowing a 2-3 year old to bake a cake, or giving a handgun to a child

- God has incredible power and gifts and purposes for our lives, but many of them can't be fulfilled until we mature
 - I Thes. 2:3-5 (The Message) *“God tested us thoroughly to make sure we are qualified to be trusted with this message ... since we've been put through the battery of tests, you're guaranteed that both we and the message are free of error, mixed motives and hidden agendas.”*

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- The last purpose that we are going to look at is that God Refines Us through the fiery trials.
 - The **IMPURITIES** are removed from our lives.
 - Malachi 3 pictures Jesus coming as the flaming One to take His rightful place and refine His people as precious metal and bleach their garments white and pure. *“Like the refiner of silver, He will sit and watch as the dross is burned away. He will purify the Levites, the ministers of God, refining them like gold or silver, so they will do their work for God with pure hearts.”*
 - In Malachi’s day, they would take a large pot, fill it up with ore and place it over a fire. It would begin to melt. Then the person doing the refining would watch because at a certain temperature, an impurity would be released from the ore. The impurity would float to the top as dross, and the refiner would skim it off the top and remove it. The heat would be turned up and more impurities would surface and be skimmed off. The heat would be turned up even more, and more impurities would surface and be removed. Do you know how they knew when the refining was completed? When it had become so pure and clear that the person doing the refining could see his own image reflected in the metal.
 - Can you see Jesus lovingly working in our lives, burning out the impurities and bringing us to a position where our lives will glorify Him? And what is He looking for? Remember the “good” in Romans 8:29 ... that we would become like Him! What Jesus is looking for as the Refiner of our lives is to see His image in us. So there He is turning up the heat in our lives. And selfishness surfaces. Good. He takes the ladle and removes it from the top and throws it away. He turns up the fire and something else is released – unforgiveness. He skims it out and throws it away. Again the fire is turned up. One after one, the impurities in our lives surface and are removed by Christ. And finally, He begins to see His image in us. His heart rejoices.

VI. HE REFINES

— The Impurities are removed.

Malachi 3:1-4

“Like a refiner of silver he will sit and closely watch as the dross is burned away. He will purify the Levites, the ministers of God, refining them like gold or silver, so that they will do their work for God with pure hearts.”

The refiner sits over his heating pot of metal until all impurities are released, skimmed away, and he can clearly see his own reflection in the silver or gold.

— The life is purified

I Corinthians 3:11-15 (II Cor 5:10)

For no one can ever lay any other real foundation than that one we already have—Jesus Christ. But there are various kinds of materials that can be used to build on that foundation. Some use gold and silver and jewels; and some build with sticks, and hay, or even straw! There is going to come a time of testing at Christ’s Judgment Day to see what kind of material each builder has used. Everyone’s work will be put through the fire so that all can see whether or not it keeps its value, and what was really accomplished. Then every workman who has built on the foundation with the right materials, and whose work still stands, will get his pay. But if the house he has built burns up, he will have a great loss. He himself will be saved, but like a man escaping through a wall of flames.

“Trial by Fire” prepares us for the judgment of fire. That in our soul and spirit which has responded properly to testing will appear purified and precious in that day. But, the believers who dodge the fire down here, who rebel and insulate themselves, will experience the fire on the day of judgment—only then it will consume their life’s works and leave them naked.

— Praise for you, praise for Him

I Peter 1:7

These trials are only to test your faith, to see whether it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies it - and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold; so if your faith remains strong after being tried in the test tube of fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day of His return.

Following the baptism with the Spirit, there comes the trial by fire. It’s part of God’s plan that we might be conformed into the image of His Son. Hallelujah!

The life is **PURIFIED** - I Corinthians 3:11-15

- We who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and have received Him as our Savior are never going to have to face the Great White Throne Judgment, where lost souls are consigned to the lake of fire. We never have to worry about that. His righteousness has been applied to us, we're saved.
- But there is a judgment that we will face. It's the judgement seat of Christ, when we will stand before Him and our works will be judged. I Cor. 3:11-15 (read)
- All of us, day by day, are building a life that God is going to test at the judgment seat of Christ. Some of us are building with hay and sticks and straw. We may be doing great things, but our motivation is for self. the fire will test our motives. We may be building in the eyes of man something that looks pretty good, but God is saying it will burn.
- In Mark 9, Jesus says, "everyone is going to go through the refining fire sooner or later." We need to allow God to put us through the refining fire in this life so that He can burn out all wood and hay and chaff so that the works we do for God will stand out as precious jewels, and gold and silver.
- There will be simple people who will stand before God and He will say, "Look at this wonderful abode that you built!"
- While others will be there who think that they've done great things for God, but the fire will try it, and there will only be ashes left. The verse says, "they'll be saved, but only like someone who has gone through a wall of fire." It will all be gone. They spent a lifetime trying to dodge the fire that would purify them, that would produce the good silver and gold in their life. They wouldn't let God get at them. Now here they are, with only the smell of fire upon them.
- The Bible says God will wipe away all tears. Some of those tears will probably be from people whose life work has been burnt away by the fire of judgment and they have nothing to offer their Savior.

50 F.L.C. — EMPOWER: Adopt the Lifestyle

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- 1 Peter 1:7 ... *“These trials are only to test your faith, to see whether it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold. And your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold; so if your faith remains strong after being tried in the test tube of fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day of His return.”*
- Write in your notes, **PRAISE FOR HIM AND PRAISE FOR YOU**. The day will come when He will receive all praise. And we will be able to add to that praise as we lay our crowns before Him and give Him the glory for all that happened in our lives. But this verse says that there is going to be some praise for us, too. Before all the angels of heaven, He will receive praise and we will receive praise.

May God help us to accept the difficult things that come as part of God's plan to conform us to the image of His Son.

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FULL LIFE IN CHRIST, Group Facilitator Suggestions
EQUIP: Learning The Tools, Session 9

FIRST

- Discuss last week's question sheet. Let them quickly share answers.

- Then, let each one share their experience with "feeding" on John 15:1-8. Collect the sheets. Make helpful comments and return to them within the week.

- Continue to encourage those who are having difficulty with this feeding experiment. Give them two more practice sheets to work on. Have them write the assigned passages in the top right hand corner of each sheet.

THEN (Discuss tonight's session as time allows with questions such as:)

1. Ask for the groups reaction to James 1 :2.
2. In what kind of danger do we place ourselves if we "rebel" as a result of trial?
3. Let various ones share their own experiences as to how the "Trial by Fire" can be used by God to:
 - "Sift" - Matthew 3: 12 (or)
 - "Chasten" - Hebrews 12:5-11 (or)
 - "Witness" - II Corinthians 12:9

NEXT

- Let the group share the desires of their heart for the future.

FINALLY

- Pray for and with one another. Continue to practice "Conversational Prayer."

ASSIGNMENT FOR THIS WEEK

1. Ask each one to complete the Question Sheet for Session # 9 and bring it with them to the next group session.
2. Assign the following passages for "feeding" practice during the next week.
II Corinthians 9:6-15 and I Peter 1 :21-22