

Times of Testing

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[0:00] When we think about times of testing, when it seems like our life is going to pieces, what can we do? What is happening we might wonder. And really though the only people that I have ever known who have no problems are down at the cemetery.

Every one of us, it's life, isn't it? In general, it's share of problems. And you could say, if you suffer, thank God, it's a sure sign that you're alive.

Suffering and testing is part of life and really it's God shaping of us. It's been said that adversity or troubles is like the hammer and chisel that God works on us with.

And through our lives, we can relate to that. And sometimes God tests his children. He tests us as his children, as his sons and daughters. Our Father tests us and tries us for a reason.

And so we're going to see some of that as we look through this scripture, for example, to start with. Deuteronomy chapter 8 and verse 2. And the context, the children of Israel, God's people.

[1:08] And Deuteronomy 8 verse 2. God says, And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness.

And we see four things listed here. To humble thee, and to prove thee, and to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments or not.

And we look back in our lives through times of testing, maybe even at present. Times of testing, times of trying. You can see God deals with these people through their desert wanderings in the word of God, the account there.

And in Deuteronomy 8 verse 2, it says there, To humble thee. God can humble us through testings. Bring us to a place of humility. To prove thee. Or to try us. To prove us like metal is proven. To know what was in thine heart. To know our heart. The very core of you. The very central part of us. Our heart.

[2:16] And to know whether thou wouldst keep his commandments or not. It's testing our obedience as well. It's testing whether we would keep his commandments or not.

Whether we would obey him or not. And we can look back at testings for our lives and learn from those things. Of the humbling process of the proving of the triumph. Psalm 7 verse 9 in part.

The righteous God trieth the hearts and reigns. The righteous God tries our heart, our reigns, our mind to see what's in us. What we're made of. The stuff that we're made of.

To know our heart. What it's all about. What our life is centred in. And to reveal our level of obedience. How hard is it for you to obey God?

How easy is it for you to disobey God? We all can relate. God is testing us in these four aspects. And yet the world's thinking and the marketing that we're barraged with all the time.

[3:13] The advertising. The magazines and media. Says that you can have a trouble free life. And it relates how that can be. You know through things or experiences or feelings.

And yet we know how hollow and shallow that is. I know I talked of late about storms. You could see the same concept that trouble. We sometimes see it as an unwelcoming intruder. It comes into our lives and upsets our apple cart.

And it messes up our peaceful life at times. Something to be avoided. Or at best tolerated. But God has got a plan for trouble. God uses trouble as we said of trouble as being like a hammer and chisel shaping us.

And the truth is that no one escapes from trouble. It's our lot as human beings. It says in Romans 8.22 that the whole creation groaneth.

And sometimes we have some groans and grizzles and we've got our share of life's difficulties. It's our lot in life. As we know as a result of Adam and Eve and the curse.

[4:16] It's something that the Word of God really it says in 1 Peter 4 verse 12 that it's a normal experience of a human being. It's normal for you. Verse 12.

Is it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you as though some strange thing happened unto you? But rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, ye shall be glad also with exceeding joy.

Now you might say, it's easy for me to say that when you might be having a real tough time and I don't need to be glib about this. And certainly I know some have had very trying experiences in recent times, in recent months as well as presently with health and concerns of family and the future.

But I just want to exhort you today that the Scriptures can give us, as we say, as it says, there's comfort in the Scriptures. We can find comfort and hope there.

If you're facing afflictions, it's not strange. It is normal. It is normal. It's not something unusual any more than night and day, the showers and sunshine, troubles and afflictions apart.

[5:31] They come across our path, the challenges of life. As Peter said, think it not strange. Don't think that it's unusual. It's normal. Another thing is about trouble, that at times trouble is needful.

It's needful. It says in Acts 14, when Paul exhorted the folk in verse 22, he said, confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith and that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God.

There's a must there. It's needful. It's needful. It's normal. It's something that God has a purpose to, that sometimes we may not fully comprehend. I know at times I've had some troubles of life.

I can relate in the workplace, in testings and tryings and relationships with others and concerns of various kinds. And we can all experience those things in different ways, to a higher or lesser degree.

And it was most troubling for me what experience I had of life. And yet we can take heart that whatever might happen, whatever comes across our path, that we have something more to hang onto than what this world affords, what this world can find.

[6:49] You know, this joy that I have, the world didn't give it to me and the world can't take it away. And we can have rejoicing that even through whether it be God's plan for you, I know especially for believers in many nations, it's through much tribulation.

I don't think us Aussie Christians have so much of that. And I guess we can be grateful for God's mercy and sparing us from that. And yet let's not be slack just because we don't have tribulation. We should act like they do. We should act as if we are a persecuted minority, which I think we're more threatened with and more so as time goes by. We are a threatened minority. We are a persecuted group.

Whether the impressions that the world puts on Bible-believing Christians, we are in the firing line. We are in the target sites and I think ever more so.

So let's be prepared for much tribulation. And while we don't have a great deal of it just now, let's have the resolve that our brothers and sisters have in these nations where there's terrible things happening.

[7:54] I know a brother shared with me a terrible video of Christians being burnt alive. And this is a reality in many lands across our world.

It's graphic. It's gruesome. And this is what is happening to your brother, to your sister. You've just got it so easy, man. You've got it so easy in Australia.

Brother, sister, we don't know what it's like. So friends, think about trouble. I want to talk through some of the reasons why. Why do I have trouble? It's often the saying, why Lord?

Why me, Lord? Why do we have these things? Sometimes we can just think in our times of adversity about the physical discomfort or the natural inclination to be despairing when things don't go how we'd like.

But there's spiritual principles at work too. There's spiritual things that are behind the scenes. God is working behind the scenes. And there's a song that goes, we don't need to understand.

[8:52] We just need to hold His hand. And there's a lot of truth there, I think. Why does God send adversity? From testing times, we can find some things.

A closer walk. As the Israelites, they had to take those 40 years to get to know what God was trying to show them. A closer walk of faithfulness. It could be through wilderness times, through desert, through dry times.

A time of learning to obey Him. They certainly learnt that, didn't they? They finally got the message to obey Him and a receiving of His strength. Some of the lessons we can learn.

I'd like to put a number of thoughts up just to capture this. One thing is, through testing, you can learn to be faithful.

Faithful. Testing will bolster your faith. It will strengthen your faith. And as your faith gets built, as that faith level increases and strengthens, so too does your spiritual power.

[10:00] Who are the most powerful Christians? The most faithful Christians. The most filled with faith Christians. The faithful Christians are the most powerful. It says in Jeremiah 17, Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord and his hope.

The Lord is. A man who is blessed is a faithful man. A trusting in the Lord man and woman. We can learn to get to that higher level of faith. Trust Him.

He knows best when trouble comes. Trust Him. Proverbs 24.10 it says, If thou faint in the day of adversity or trouble, thy strength is small. Don't faint.

Hang on. Dig deep. Find faith and a deeper level of trust. Sometimes our problems can come, as we know in life, from wrong decisions and unwise choices we've made.

You know, we reap what we sow. That can happen too. Whatever the case though, whatever trouble comes our way, God can lead you through as He did the children of Israel.

[11:01] And we see in graphic form too. That's the bottom line of the book of Job. That God is ultimately in charge. Ultimately sovereign over everything. So many principles about testing and trouble. That really that God is ultimately in charge.

That's the bottom line of the book of Job. That God is ultimately in charge. Ultimately sovereign over everything. And He's weaving His fabric. When we see, as I said, the underside.

It looks like there's lots of rugged, rough pieces on the underside of that tapestry that He's weaving. But He can see that work that He is doing. He's in charge of everything, including the trials, the temptations that come our way.

And He preserves us. He keeps His children in the midst of it all. And He allows us to go through these things to purify us and to prepare us for heaven. And so we can have faith.

We can have faith. Faith in God's protection. For when they pass us through the waters, I will be with thee. And through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. And when they walk us through the fire, they shall not be burned.

[12:02] Neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. God's protection. You can have faith that He will protect. You can have faith in God's promises. 2 Peter 1 talks about exceeding great and precious promises.

These promises aren't just great. They're exceeding great and precious promises. The psalmist in Psalm 119, he said, from verse 67, Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now have I kept thy word.

When you get tested, when there's troubling times, it can help you to turn to the word, to find the faith, to find the answers that you need in the word of God. And to find that Christ will have His rightful place in your hearts.

To know your heart, to search your heart, and for Christ to have the rightful place on the throne of your heart. And you can walk in that relationship with God. Faith will be strengthened. Hebrews 13, Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do His will, working in you, that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Christ Jesus, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

He's working in you. Every good work, He's working in you, to do His will. So you can have faith. You can be faithful. Be a faithful man, a faithful woman of God.

[13:30] And secondly, you can also be joyful. Strange though it may seem, those times of testing can lead to joy. You can find joy even in the midst of the greatest test that faces your life.

You can be joyful. James 1 verse 2, it tells you, Count it, all joy, when you fall into diverse temptations. When you fall into various temptations and trials, testings and troubles, James says, count it.

J-O-Y. Count it as joy. Count it. And be joyful. Because our source of joy isn't in our circumstances. It's in Christ. Our source of joy isn't in the earthly.

It's in the eternal. Our source of joy isn't in the happenings. It's in the one who's behind the curtain. Who's there, behind, in the shadows. Who we can put our trust in.

Our Saviour. Because Christ is our life. Colossians 3, 4. And really, testings, it's all about searching our character, isn't it? Searching where we're at. When the tough times come, it tells you where you're the same sun that hardens the clay melts the wax.

[14:41] And it's our response to trouble that can be the critical thing. How do you respond when tough things happen? There's a story about a young lady. She was just 18. 18 years old.

Very young. And she contracted a dreadful illness. It was horrible. To save her life, the doctor said that he must amputate her feet. This he did, but the disease spread further.

So he took off her legs to the knees. Later he amputated her thighs. Then it broke again in her arms and hands. First one arm, then the other was taken off right up to the shoulders.

She was left with only her trunk. For 15 years she lay there. The walls of her room were covered with Bible texts. All of them affirming God's gifts of love and peace and power.

The woman meditated on these scriptures and she projected such grace in the midst of this time of suffering that hundreds of people were converted to faith in Christ through the letters that she wrote.

[15:44] Here she was just a trunk. No arms or legs. Nothing. How did she write? A carpenter made a special instrument that fitted on her shoulder that held a pen.

And this special contraption on her shoulder held a pen. And she wrote with her whole body. We just write with our hands and fingers and arms.

But she wrote with her whole body. And her writing was beautiful. And eventually there were some 1500 letters that she collected of people that she ministered to in writing to them that were blessed by her.

And when asked, How did you do this? How did you do this work? She smiled and replied, Well you know, Jesus said that those who believed in Him, from within them would flow rivers of living water. I believed Him. That's all. Joyful. She was joyful. She projected joy when everything was saying, Well you've got every right to be grizzle guts.

[16:50] But she had a joyful spirit in the midst of that test. Another thing we can have is a thankful spirit. We can learn to give thanks. As we know the scriptures tell us that in everything give thanks.

1 Thessalonians 5.18 For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. That's hard to do, isn't it? To thank God in the midst of what isn't going our way.

But the believer can. The believer can give thanks in everything. Does this mean that everything that happens is wonderful? No. No. No.

Much is a result of sin and selfishness. Yet everything is either good or can be made good. We know that as the scriptures tell us that all things work together for good for them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose.

Note that it says not to be thankful for everything, but to be thankful in everything. Of course there's times when we just can't thank God for specific things that might be happening to us.

[17:59] Yet we can thank Him nevertheless. Thank Him for the grace that He gives you. Thank Him for the blessings that yet He still gives you. Be thankful. And we see such examples of this thankfulness, this attitude of going beyond the circumstances.

In the hymn book we've got various writers that were actually blind. Blind hymn writers. And yet they testified about even the blessing of their blindness to a degree that it helped them to have a greater tuning in to God Almighty.

It helped them to be more spiritual that they could see beyond what we can see with our human eyes. And what a blessing, what an inspiration.

It's been said that setback isn't failure. It's often just the encouragement that we need for greater inspiration. You see those men and women of God and even in the natural secular world, people that have had opposition and tough lives and tough upbringings and everything against them in the natural sense.

Yet they persevered and pressed through and made a life for themselves. So we see we can be faithful, we can be joyful, we can be thankful and also we can be prayerful.

[19:19] We can be prayerful because it says in everything give thanks. It says that we can pray and we can trust Him and learn to be dependent upon Him.

We can find that comfort of prayer. And some in this church are going through difficult times even this day, even this time, this season. You can learn to depend upon your heavenly Father.

You can learn to ask, to seek, to knock. He says ask and keep on asking. That's the sense of the scripture. To seek and keep on seeking, to knock and keep on knocking. And learn to be depending upon not the circumstances, not your feelings, not having a warm and fuzzy and everything rosy and as you'd like it.

But to be dependent upon Him. It says in 1 Peter 5.18 of how we should be sober, be vigilant because your adversary the devil roameth about as a roaring lion.

He says, who resists steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. Your brethren that are in the world have the same afflictions, the same suffering.

[20:30] But then it goes on, the God of all grace, who has called you, after you've suffered a while, will make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you. That's 1 Peter 5.8-10.

As God's people, we can find that strengthening, that settling, that establishing. And to be the fellow soldiers in this conflict. Help your brothers and sisters. As you see others going through tough times, you can come alongside.

It talks in the scriptures now, we've got the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our tribulation, so we can comfort others too, who are going through that. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.

Think of our Lord for a moment. Think of our Lord as we read earlier, Hebrews 12. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him, it says, who endured such contradiction of sinners. You know, the hate, the mockery, the spitting, the shame, the revulsion of the cross, of the death sentence, of the beating, of the bashing of our Saviour.

[21:42] He endured such contradiction of himself. Lest ye be weary and faint in your minds, consider him, consider him. You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

Our Lord is an example, isn't he? He's an example for you. Think of our Saviour, our Lord. The opposition from sinful men. The hatred only endured to blood, to bloodstead.

That's how far our Saviour went for you. Really, training is another aspect here. Training itself, even our Saviour went through this discipline, this chastening.

It says that God chastens every son. It's been said that God had one son without sin, but he never had a son without sorrow.

So suffering and sorrow, testing is part of life. And as God's children, as his son, as his daughter, he will chasten every one of you, every one of us.

[22:52] That's not easy to take. As we know, as young ones growing up, there's a chastening, necessary disciplining that helps us to develop. And it says of our Saviour, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

And in Hebrews 2.18 it says, In that he himself has suffered, being tempted, he's able to succour or to help them that are tempted. He can help you. He can relate to you.

He can empathise. He can support you, because he has been through suffering. And if the Son of God had to endure chastening and suffering, how much more should we? We shouldn't be surprised at that when it comes across our path too.

It's part of God's training program for life. It's part of his training program. Our Father is strengthening his son, his daughter. In what comes your way, he's chastening, he's teaching, he's disciplining, he's leading you.

And it says, Hebrews 12, as it goes on, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.

[23:58] For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth. He loves those that he chastens. He chastens those that he loves. He scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons.

For what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? We are under the training of a loving Father. Chastening is his special work with his children because he loves you.

Because he loves you. And the scourging, at times it can be the pains of life, of discomfort, the trials that may come. He's testing, he's learning, he's training you.

Training you, developing that character within you. Developing that inner fortitude within you. And you can accept that chastening, that scourging, with an attitude of trust and patience.

With a willingness to learn from it. To use that as his tool to strengthen and lead you and shape you. Trials are not accidental and meaningless, but sent from his hand.

[25:03] At times there's an all-wise God who loves us, who wants to see you grow through those testings. Hebrews 12, 9 onwards it talks about how we have fathers who chastened us, but he chastens us for our profit.

Verse 10, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

So it's telling you here in Hebrews 12, the context we see. Firstly, our Lord was chastened. He was disciplined in effect. He suffered. And then it goes on to say that God chastens every son whom he receives.

So it's a discipline of a loving father to guide us, to educate us, to give us character and maturity, to give us training. As the word means there.

The word exercise, it means training. And it's good when God chastens us because it's what we need. And just lastly, there's a growth that happens. It says there there's a fruit that results.

[26:13] Not only can we be faithful, joyful, thankful and prayerful, but we can be fruitful. There's a fruitfulness about testing. There's a fruit that results.

It tells you there in Hebrews 12 that there is a fruitfulness. It talks about afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby.

Peaceable fruit. Peace and character. There's a fruitfulness that comes. As we know, the farmer has to prune the vine. God comes sometimes as that master gardener, as the husbandman, and he comes and he prunes the vine, doesn't he?

He prunes out those things of life. Sometimes the growth will come through pain. As we know, in the natural, in our garden, I know, when my wife and I had our first house, my dad saw that the apricot tree was very overgrown.

And he hacked away at it. And my wife was just about breaking down in tears that this lovely tree was hacked to pieces. But yet, the next season, what a blessing. What a fruitfulness.

[27:24] What a joyfulness. What a fertile, flourishing tree that resulted from that pruning work that was done. And like that too in our lives, isn't it?

That as the tree is pruned, it produces more fruit. In our lives too, suffering and testing, unpleasant though it be, and nobody wants it really, yet character comes from it.

And a heart is grown, and the fruit of the Spirit can result. And just lastly, when you're testing, when things are testing, keep on keeping on. Just let me leave you with this last quote.

So keep on keeping on, to press through. About tests and resolve and endurance, don't quit. Just lastly, this poem to close. Somebody said that it couldn't be done, but he with a chuckle replied, that maybe it couldn't, but he would be one who wouldn't say so till he tried.

So he buckled right in with a trace of a grin on his face. If he worried, he hit it. He started to sing as he tackled the thing that couldn't be done, and he did it. Somebody scoffed, oh, you'll never do that. [28:32] At least no one has done that. But he took off his coat, and he took off his hat, and the first thing he knew, he'd begun, with a lift of his chin, and with a bit of a grin.

Without any doubting or quit it, he started to sing as he tackled the thing that couldn't be done, and he did it. There are thousands to tell you it can't be done. There are thousands to prophesy failure. There are thousands to point out to you, one by one, the dangers that wait to assail you. But just buckle in with a bit of a grin.

Just take off your coat and go to it. Just start to sing as you tackle the thing that couldn't be done, and you'll do it. Whatever faces you. Maybe there's opposition.

Maybe it's a mountain. You know, it's been said, if you can't move the mountain, climb it. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you that whatever faces every believer here this morning, that your loving hand is there to hold, to guide, to lead, as you did the children of Israel.

[29:40] Lord, to humble them, to teach them, to give them obedience, to give them a greater character. Lord, in our lives there might be those times of trial, of fire, of test. Help us, Lord, to knuckle in, to dig deep, to trust you, to cry out, to develop that faithfulness, that prayerfulness, that thankfulness.

Lord, that resource that is beyond our own, that strength that comes from you, that we can find through faith. That power, that powerful Christian life that we can grow in.

Lord, as you help us to be fruitful, as that pruning work happens, help us, Lord, not to shy away from your hand, not to doubt you, not to cry out against you, but yet, Lord, to cry out to be closer to you.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.