

Why We All Need Trials and Tests in Our Lives

We don't like trials. We don't want them, and we don't enjoy them. What's more, I don't think we should ask for them.

But the truth is, sometimes we need them.

Peter pointed to this when he wrote, "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials" (1 Pet. 1:6, ESV). *If necessary.* What a fascinating phrase.

Why would we need trials? Didn't Jesus come to give us life more abundantly (John 10:10), and hasn't He blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies (Eph. 1:3)? Aren't trials a contradiction to that?

Sometimes, we imagine the blessed life to be one of financial prosperity, excellent health, fulfilling relationships and a happy family—free of troubles, crisis or pressure. But a blessed life is not a trial-free life. A trial-free life makes us soft, fat and sluggish. The blessed life is that which endures through trials and overcomes (Rev. 3:21).

Since He *scourges every son whom He receives* (Heb. 12:6, MEV), how can I possibly consider myself blessed if He never chastens me? To be left alone is a curse, not a blessing.

Since pruning is essential to bearing more fruit (John 15:2), how could I think it a blessing for the vinedresser to never prune radically in my life?

I watched a winemaking documentary once in which they explained what makes a vintage wine. A vintage wine is coveted for its exceptional flavor.

I thought a vintage wine would come from a perfect growing

season—plenty of sun, ample rain and warm temperatures. Actually, it's the opposite. Perfect conditions might produce much wine, but they don't produce a vintage wine.

Vintage wine comes from hard seasons in which there was too much rain, not enough rain or too much cold. A hard season forces the vine to work harder. The harvest might be smaller, but it'll produce a wine they'll talk about for years to come. *The wine of 1992.*

During drought, vinedressers don't irrigate. They intentionally stress the vines by withholding water. Why? Because if they were to irrigate the vines, the roots would turn upward to capture the moisture. Without surface water, the roots have only one direction to go: *Deeper*. Desperate to survive, the vine will thrust roots into places never before reached. In the push to find moisture, untouched nutrients are accessed and absorbed.

You'll never get a vintage wine from an unstressed vine.

Pruned plants look bad. Take apples, for example. I was in apple country once in November, and said to my companion, "Look at that apple orchard!" It looked horrible. The trees were leafless and bare, with hardly any branches whatsoever.

My friend replied, "That orchard was bad; they had to kill it." I smiled to myself because I knew something—the orchard had been pruned. The trees looked grotesquely ugly, but next harvest I knew they would produce huge apples.

God's not trying to make you look good; He's trying to make you fruitful. We *need* trials if we're to be fruitful.

We *need* trials to keep growing in faith. Without them we get soft. Like a body-builder who stops exercising, a strong believer without any trials inevitably grows flabby. Trials make us desperate for more of Christ. Spiritual hunger drives us to God in fasting and prayer. Good fruit always comes from

a renewed pursuit of God because He rewards those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6).

Let me insert this qualifier: Trials are not a blessing. Proverbs 10:22 says, "The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and He adds no sorrow with it." When God blesses you with wisdom, provision, direction and protection, they come with no sorrow. But trials often come with great sorrow. Trials aren't a blessing, therefore, but a trial. In the end, however, they can produce great blessings in our lives if we respond properly to them by pressing deeper into Christ.

Arizona has a tourist trap called *the Biosphere*. Looking like a big, white bubble or half-globe, the Biosphere is an array of enclosed buildings that house a variety of scientific initiatives. Among their experiments, they wanted to see how fruit trees would produce under ideal conditions. With temperatures carefully controlled, they gave them perfect amounts of fertilizer, light and water. The trees produced an abundant crop but with one problem: The branches snapped. Why? Cultivated indoors, they were protected from wind. They knew no storms.

Wind stresses trees by forcing branches to remain flexible. Without wind to move them, branches become too brittle to sustain the weight of the harvest and eventually snap.

Trees need wind, and so do we. We *need* storms in our lives that keep us flexible and adaptable to the movements of the Holy Spirit.

I was speaking in a Texas church once, and a sister who was interested in my personal story was asking about my vocal affliction and associated limitations. She asked, "Does it hurt when you talk?" I answered, "Every word has been painful for 28 years." Her response was heartfelt and compassionate: "Oh, I'm sorry."

I replied, "God has never apologized to me for this trial."

In the Bible, God never apologized to anyone for their suffering. I can imagine God saying, "Job, why should I apologize to you for your horrific trial, when I'm going to use this to make you the first signpost in Scripture to the cross, use your example to encourage believers for millennia to come, make you the father of a stunning generation and give you an eye-to-eye visitation with Me in glory?"

"Joseph, why should I apologize to you for the horror of your dark Egyptian prison, when I'm going to use your consecration to make you a feeder of nations and the preserver of your family's national heritage?"

"Jesus, why should I apologize to You for forsaking You in Your hour of consummate suffering, when I'm going to use Your cross to vanquish Satan and make You the Redeemer of the entire globe?"

He doesn't apologize for our trials because He redeems them for greater blessing than if the trial had never happened.

How do we grow, mature, become more fruitful and change our world? Through trials. We need trials if we're to be history-makers.

I don't think it's biblical to ask for trials. But I do think it's biblical to pray tearfully and desperately for all of Christ. *Whatever it takes. Jesus, I've got to know You more. Whatever it takes—until I'm fully Yours and fruitfully partnered with Your holy purposes in the earth.*

For that cry to be answered you may, if need be, suffer grievous trials. But always remember: Stressed vines produce vintage wines. {eoa}

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fiery trials. He is the founder of Oasis House Ministries, associated with International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri. He is also an author and a traveling minister.