

You Can Survive the Fire

Those of you who are familiar with the process of refining gold know that the gold is first placed in a crucible and subjected to intense heat. The heat causes the gold to melt and its impurities to separate and come to the top, where they can be skimmed off.

This process is repeated as many times as necessary in order to increase the quality and purity of the gold. For example, 10 karat gold does not have to be heated as much or as long as 14 karat gold. Twenty-four karat gold undergoes an even more intensive refining process.

In a similar manner, God is in the process of refining His church. He wants a pure, beautiful bride upon whom He can pour out His anointing and His power. God desires to manifest Himself through His church so that each of us is able to do the things Jesus did (see John 14:12-14).

Christ longs for each member of His body to see what the Father is doing and to do it with Him. It is His will that we walk in victory and be overcomers. These are His highest priorities for the church.

The Refining Process

God has to remove the impurities from our lives that hold us back from going all the way with Him. I believe that this is His agenda for the church right now and that we have entered a season of God's refinement.

Refining can be a difficult and uncomfortable process. At times, we may feel very much as the gold does when it is being melted. We experience heat, discomfort and adversity.

This process is walked out a bit differently in each of our lives. For some of us, important relationships seem to fall

apart. Others are misunderstood, misjudged and falsely accused.

Finances run out for some; others may face sickness or hardships. We may find ourselves struggling once again with emotions and issues that we thought we had long since conquered.

The purifying process can be especially confusing to those of us who have been seeking the Lord and drawn to a place of deeper intimacy with Him than ever before. We may not understand why God is allowing “bad” things to happen in our lives.

Is It God or the Enemy?

Some believers don't understand that God is refining them, so they “resist the devil” instead of submitting to the Holy Spirit (James 4:7, NIV). But God wants us to know what He is doing in this season so that we can properly respond to it.

Sometime the enemy's attacks and the refiner's fire look a lot alike. Fortunately, God has given us a strategy for distinguishing them. In his letter to the church, the apostle James wrote: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).

In other words, ask God, and He will make it clear to you. It may not happen the instant you ask because sometimes His answer has to work its way into our understanding.

God may choose to speak to you through circumstances. James says that the enemy must flee when we resist him and submit to God (see James 4:7). So if you apply the authority that Jesus has given you over the situation and nothing changes, that may be a hint that this is God's hand on you and not the enemy's.

Perhaps you've seen a certain weakness frequently rise up in

you. The Lord may be calling your attention to a character trait He wants to refine.

He may put a conviction in your heart, speak to you through the Scriptures or use friends to let you know that He wants to deal with you in a certain area. I can't tell you precisely how, but He will make it clear to you.

You can know when it's the enemy's attack and what strategy God wants you to use to resist him. And you can know when it is God's refining fire and how to best cooperate with Him in the process.

Why God Allows the Fire

We need to realize that God wants to purify our lives of the things that keep us from moving forward with His plan. Hosea 6:1-2 paints a picture of what God is doing.

“He has torn us to pieces but He will heal us; He has injured us but He will bind up our wounds. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will restore us, that we may live in His presence.”

When I first read that passage, I had a mental image of a lion mauling someone. I could not understand why a loving Father would maul His children in that manner, so I asked God about it.

He told me: “Teresa, you have the wrong picture. Let me show you what it really means.” Then I saw a picture in my mind's eye of a surgeon skilfully cutting around a cancerous growth so it could be removed.

The cutting away of the “death” within us can be painful. But God's goal for the surgery is to remove those things that work death in us and replace them with His life.

Even if you are already walking in holiness, you will go through a season of God's refinement because He desires to

radiate His glory and His presence through your life. He wants pure vessels that He can pour His anointing into.

We can't control whether or not God will take us through His refiner's fire, but we can control how long we stay in the fire. The more we resist Him, the longer the process will take. The more we cooperate with Him, the faster it will go.

Surrender to the Process

The first step in surviving God's refining process is to cooperate with Him rather than resist Him. Once I was holding on to something dear to me that held me back in my walk with God. For about a week, God and I struggled over this. Then He said: "Teresa, we can do this the easy way or the hard way, but we will do it."

God showed me two pictures. The first was a child's hand tightly clasping a stone. An adult's hand began peeling back the child's fingers one by one until the stone fell out of her hand.

The second picture was the same child's hand holding the stone. But the child relaxed her grip and placed the stone in the adult's hand.

"Which will it be?" the Lord asked me.

Suddenly I understood that God was going to remove this thing from my life. I could willingly cooperate with Him, and He would help me gain the victory with minimal pain and effort. However, if I chose to resist Him, He would orchestrate one situation after another to "pry back my fingers" until I could not hang on to it any longer.

Tearfully, I laid this thing on the altar. It was not long before God gave me the victory in this area, and I found new fruit of the Spirit emerging in my life.

Then God showed me a little girl holding on to a very dirty and tattered teddy bear. The girl's father was trying to take the bear away, and she resisted strenuously.

Finally, she released her grip on the old teddy bear. As soon as she did, the father placed an exquisitely beautiful doll in her hands that she liked much more.

God showed me that He made me give up what I had been holding on to so that He could replace it with something better.

Acknowledge the Need

The second step in surviving the process is to see our need for cleansing. "Impurities" will rise to the surface, and we will see behaviors, attitudes and character traits in ourselves that we do not like.

When the pressure is on, inappropriate responses from our weaknesses and woundedness will become more visible. These may include bitterness, unforgiveness, fear, anger or sinful desires that we know are displeasing to God. These have to come to the top so they can be "skimmed off."

We may be horrified at what shows up in our lives. Some of us may go into denial mode and try to push these things down.

But Jesus said, "'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick'" (Luke 5:31). We need to see our need before God will help us.

Receiving forgiveness for sins works on the same principle. We must see our guilt, confess our sins and repent before God will forgive us (see 1 John 1:9). If we acknowledge our need for God to help us in this area of our character, He will.

Some of us become upset and condemn ourselves when we notice impurities present in our lives. We may even pull away from God.

But God wants us to run to Him and receive His forgiveness and cleansing. His desire is not to condemn us but to purify us and transform us into the image of His son (see Rom. 8:1; Titus 2:14; 2 Cor. 3:18).

We're In the Fire Together

We can be of great help to our friends and acquaintances when they go through God's refining in their lives by (1) understanding that God is bringing impurities to the surface to remove them and (2) being quick to forgive and slow to take offense. We also need to encourage our loved ones to have hearts after God, bless their resolve for holiness, pray and speak God's strength into them.

We will survive the refiner's fire if we keep our eyes focused on God's sovereignty and what He is doing. His goal in this process is to refine us so that He might pour out His power and His glory on us.

The refiner's fire sets us free from hindering imperfections and works God's character and nature into us. And when the flames subside, what emerges from our lives will be pure, perfect, indestructible and worth more than the finest gold.

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