

Faith Persevering in Trial

With Bishop Ronald K. Powell

Psalm 40:1-3 New King James Version (NKJV)

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

40 I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me, and heard my cry.

² He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay,
And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps.

³ He has put a new song in my mouth— Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear,
And will trust in the Lord.

Faith grows best in darkness.

- When life is full of favor and good things we fail to see that our faith is beginning a decline.
- It's when things become darkest, that our spiritual life is stretched and growth truly begins.
- Our pain endured in the darkest valley, and not the warm feelings in the afterglow of mountaintop ecstasy, test our faith's true effectiveness.

An athlete, in the midst of a personal record-breaking run, has never in his life been so fit and strong. Yet his pain-racked body may have never felt so weak.

Likewise, in the midst of a spiritual trial, it is not uncommon to be stronger and yet feel weaker than ever before.

Miracles and signs of God's favor and positive feelings give only an illusion of faith.

- Real faith is what is left after all this is stripped away and the only feelings left are raw unpleasant ones.
- Often when people seem to have great faith, it is merely God's compensation for their lack of faith, until he is sufficiently confident in their spiritual maturity to strip away the props so that their faith may at last begin to develop.

Precious metals are of little use until they are refined.

- Removing signs and feelings from a believer is like removing the dross from faith and so that at last it becomes useful and of great value.
- The process where our faith is made of great value is often so painful and can seem so cruel that it is almost like being thrown alive into a fiery furnace.

Look with me at these Scriptures:

1 Peter 1:6-7 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Psalms 66:10-12 For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.

Zechariah 13:9 This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God.’

James 1:2-3 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. (Emphasis mine.)

In what was perhaps my most painful trial, I was convinced I desperately needed some personal indications of God’s presence, but deep inside I felt I was being badly treated by God when he left me to stagger through life devoid of any tangible proof that I was important to him.

The more I sought God, the more he seemed to leave me floundering. Crushing disappointments and devastating blows dragged on for years, despite fervently seeking God. Eventually I remembered Thomas, who was granted perhaps the greatest of all such tangible experiences – (the opportunity to physically handle the risen Lord). How blessed he was! And yet the astounding thing is that Jesus told Thomas that the person who is really blessed is the one who is not granted an experience like him. The best is reserved for the person compelled to hold on by faith alone (**John 20:29**).

Finally I understood how I had forced my Lord into the position where he either had to deny me the experience I was longing for, or deny me the greater blessing he had planned for me – the chance to gain glory by finding faith without experiencing anything dramatic and, by doing so, grow in faith, that exquisite commodity more valuable than gold.

The Lord had lovingly risked my wrath so that he could give me the greater blessing. And instead of being grateful, I was annoyed at him!

How often we must unknowingly put God in such a situation.

- Seeing only one possible solution, we demand it of God, convinced that he must either act the only way we can figure, or God cannot be loving.
- We force God into either denying us what is best or acting in a manner that we have fooled ourselves into thinking is unloving.
- We repeatedly find ourselves in such situations because God is so intellectually superior to us.

- Puzzling things that God does, or omits to do, sometimes make us secretly wish God had our intelligence! When all is revealed, however, these are the very things that will fill us with eternal praise that God does not have our intelligence.

Isaiah 55:8-9 ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’

And yet the power of an finite intellect finds its match in infinite love.

Psalms 103:11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.

Isaiah 61:3 New King James Version (NKJV)

³ To console those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”

1 Peter 5:10 English Standard Version (ESV)

¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Isaiah 40:29-31 New King James Version

◦²⁹ He gives power to the weak, And to *those who have* no might He increases strength.

◦³⁰ Even the youths shall faint and be weary,
And the young men shall utterly fall,

◦³¹ But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary,

They shall walk and not faint.

You will find strength while you wait

◦² **Samuel 22:3 New King James Version**

◦³ The God of my strength, in whom I will trust;
My shield and the horn of my salvation,

My stronghold and my refuge;
My Savior, You save me from violence.

Closing & Prayer

◦Psalms 66:10-12

For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver.

You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs.

You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water,

But you brought us to a place of abundance.