

# The Uses of Trial

by Catherine Booth

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of affliction and trial in the Christian life, highlighting its role in revealing God's character, testing faith and love, and glorifying God.*

**Scripture:** Job 23:10, Matthew 5:10, Romans 5:3, 2 Corinthians 4:17, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 1:29, Hebrews 12:6, James 1:2, 1 Peter 1:7, 1 Peter 4:12

**Topics:** "Suffering And Trials", "Faith And Refining"

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## Description

Catherine Booth preaches on the importance of enduring trials and afflictions, drawing inspiration from the patience of Job and emphasizing that God uses suffering to reveal, refine, and manifest His people. She highlights that through trials, God reveals the true nature of our hearts, exposing our obedience, love, and faith in action. Additionally, trials reveal our weaknesses and areas where our faith may be lacking, urging us to seek a deeper relationship with God. Furthermore, she explains that suffering not only refines individuals but also serves as a powerful testimony to the world, showcasing the strength, peace, and unwavering faith of believers even in the midst of adversity.

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## Transcript

JAMES v. 11.--"Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy."

AFFLICTION occupies a large place in the economy of salvation, for though suffering is the result of sin, God takes hold of it and transmutes it into one of the richest blessings to His own people. From whatever secondary causes the afflictions of the righteous may arise, whether from the sins of their forefathers, the cruelty of their enemies, their own mistakes, or the mistakes of their friends, or the malice of Satan, it is their blessed privilege to realise that the Lord permits and overrules all, and that He has a gracious END in every sorrow which He allows to overtake them. Happy the Christian who, though he cannot see this "end" at present, is able to trust in the goodness which chastens, and cleaves to the hand that smites.

It may help us, however, to "endure chastening" if we consider two or three of the gracious ends, or uses of our trials.

I. Trial reveals us to God.

There is a sense, doubtless, in which trial reveals us to God; makes manifest to Him, what is in our heart. Perhaps someone may object, and say, no, no; we need nothing to make manifest to God what we are, He understands us perfectly. He knows what is in man, and needs not anything to tell Him. True! and yet He says of Abraham, "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." And to the Israelites. "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep My commandments or no." Now God knew that Abraham feared Him, and He also knew how far Israel would keep His commandments, but He did not know as a matter of actual fact, until the fact transpired. He must have the latent principle developed in action, before he could know it as action. Thus Abraham by his obedience to the painful command made his love manifest to God. Not that God had previously any doubts of Abraham's love, but He desired a practical manifestation of it towards Himself, or to know it in action. The Divine love is Eke all other love in this respect, it delights in practical proof of love in return, nor will it be satisfied without. Remember this, Christian, in thy various afflictions. The Lord is leading thee about in the wilderness to prove thee, and to see (to make manifest to Himself) what is in thy heart, and whether thou wilt keep His commandments or no. Remember also that in nothing is love made so manifest as in willing, cheerful suffering for the sake of its object. It is easy, nay, joyful to labour, but patient, cheerful suffering requires a deeper love, a more perfect self-abandonment. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." "We glory in tribulations also."

## II. Trial also reveals us to ourselves.

Although we do not agree with the adage that untried grace is no grace at all, yet unquestionably much fancied grace has proved itself, in the hour of trial, to be but as the early cloud and the morning dew. "How many who have received the Word with joy and for a while have believed, in time of temptation have fallen away." How many a professing Christian if he could have had predicted to him the effect of adversity upon his heart and life, would have said with Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this?" And yet when the true test of character was applied he fell. When he had eaten and was full, then his heart rebelled, or when he was chastened by the Lord he grew weary and said, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." There is no surer test for the Christian as to the state of his heart than the way in which he receives affliction. How often, when all has appeared prosperous and peaceful, and the child of God has been congratulating himself on spiritual growth and increased power over inward corruption, has some fiery trial overtaken him, which, instead of being met with perfect submission and cheerful acquiescence, has produced sudden confusion, dismay, and perhaps rebellion, revealing to him that his heart was far from that state of Divine conformity which he had hoped and supposed.

Thus the Christian often suffers more from a consciousness of insubordination under affliction than from the affliction itself. Dear reader, how is it with you in this respect? When trials overtake you, are you able to say "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good," and, "I know that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." Are you able to realise that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," and that these light afflictions are working a future increase of glory? If so, happy are you. This is the best of all evidence to yourself that the Divine Spirit is working in you to will and to do of your Father's good pleasure. This fruit does not grow on the corrupt soil of unregenerate nature; it springs only from a heart renewed by the Holy Ghost and baptized into fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. But is it otherwise with you? Does your heart chafe, and fret, and rebel? Are you saying, "All these things are against me?" If so, this is proof that the work of

grace is at a low ebb in your soul, that your faith is weak, and your spiritual perceptions dim. It is high time for you to awake out of sleep and cry mightily unto God for a revival of His work in your heart and for a sanctified use of the affliction which has overtaken you. "If God dries up the water on the lake, it is to lead you to the unfailing fountain. If He blights the ground, it is to drive you to the tree of life. If He sends the cross, it is to brighten the crown. Nothing is so hard as our heart; and as they lay copper in aquafortis before they begin to engrave it, so the Lord usually prepares us by the searching, softening discipline of affliction for making a deep lasting impression upon our hearts."

The fire our graces shall refine, Till, moulded from above, We bear the character Divine, The stamp of perfect love.

III. Trial also reveals us to the world.

As the greatest manifestation of God to the world was by suffering, so the most influential revelation of His people to the world has been by suffering. They are seen to the best advantage in the furnace. The blood of martyrs has ever been the seed of the Church. The patience, meekness, firmness, and happiness of God's people in circumstances of suffering, persecution, and death, have paved the way for the Gospel in almost all lands and all ages. A baptism of blood has prepared the hard and sterile soil of humanity for the good seed of the kingdom, and made it doubly fruitful. The exhibition of the meek and loving spirit of Christianity under suffering has doubtless won thousands of hearts to its Divine Author, and tamed and awed many a savage persecutor, besides Saul of Tarsus. When men see their fellow-men enduring with patience and meekness, what they know would fill themselves with hatred, anger, and revenge, they naturally conclude that there must be a different spirit in them. When they see Christians suffering the loss of all things, and cheerfully resigning themselves to bonds, imprisonment, and death, they cannot help feeling that they have sources of strength and springs of consolation all unknown to themselves.

Patient suffering, cheerful acquiescence in affliction and anguish, mental or physical, is the most convincing proof of the Divine in man which it is possible for humanity to give. "Truly this was the Son of God," said those who stood by the cross when they saw how He suffered. And how many who have been thoroughly sceptical as to the professions of their converted kindred, and have most bitterly persecuted them, and withstood every argument and entreaty advanced in health and activity; have yielded almost without a word before the patience and peace with which the billows of suffering and death have been braved, nay, welcomed! Such evidence is too mighty, such proof too positive to be resisted, even by persecutors and blasphemers.

Abraham might have written a book and preached all his life long, as doubtless he did, but the whole, ten times told, would not have convinced his family, his contemporaries and posterity, of the depth and fervency of his love to God, as did that holy calm surrender of the best beloved of his soul to the requirements of God. Job might have been the upright, benevolent, righteous man he was, but probably we should never have heard of him but for his wonderful submission, patience, and faith, under suffering. It is this which lifts him up as an example and a teacher to all succeeding generations. It was when sitting on the dunghill, apparently forsaken of God and man, and suffering the direst physical agony which Satan could inflict, that Job attained his greatest victory and made that wonderful exhibition of trust in God which has been the comfort and admiration of God's people from that day to this.

It was in the fiery furnace that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego won such glory to the God of Israel, that even a heathen king proclaimed His majesty and dominion, and commanded his subjects to worship

Him who could deliver after this manner. It was in the furnace of persecution that Stephen, Peter, James, John and Paul proved the divinity of their characters and the genuineness of their faith. Without suffering the world could never have known the strength of their faith, the fervency of their love, or the purity of their lives. Their trials made them "spectacles unto the world, to angels and to men," and won for their Master the ears and hearts of thousands.

When an Apostle would present to us the mightiest achievements of faith, and the most wonderful exhibitions of the power of Divine grace, he refers us not so much to the doings of God's people, as to their cheerful and triumphant sufferings (Heb. xi). Dear reader, how are your afflictions revealing you to those around you? Are you adding your testimony to that of the cloud of witnesses who are gone before, to the sufficiency of Divine grace to sustain and comfort in the hour of sorrow and suffering? Is your patient endurance saying to those who are watching you, I can do (and suffer) all things through Christ which strengtheneth me?

Watched by the world's malignant eye, Who load us with reproach and shame; As servants of the Lord Most High, As zealous for His glorious name, We ought in all His paths to move With holy fear and humble love.

That wisdom, Lord, on us bestow, From every evil to depart: To stop the mouths of every foe, While, upright both in life and heart. The proofs of godly love we give, And show them how the Christians live.

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