

Deuteronomy 8 (1-6) – The Trials of God

Why did God create a world where he knew such evil, injustice, and suffering would exist? Is God not all powerful? Or is God not actually good? Those are the questions we considered in our last message. And we discovered that God allowed evil in order to show his righteous anger and terrible wrath. But we also discovered that God allowed the depths of our evil in order to show the depths of his love.

In this world, against the backdrop of sin, evil, and injustice, God is showing you just how good and loving he really is, by overcoming the bad no matter how bad it is. Evil will be finally and fully destroyed. And righteousness will finally and fully prevail. It's been said this way: God allows what he hates in order to accomplish what he loves. God hates sin. God loves redemption. God loves you. And on the cross, Jesus proved all of that. God is all powerful. And God is good in a way that only he can be. You need to start there, and then you can begin to ask how this relates to your personal situation.

Now, what is God doing in allowing trials in our lives? Well, Romans 8:28-39, one of the most beloved passages in the Bible, deals with this very thing. Vs.28 starts with – *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good.* And vs.39 ends by saying that nothing – *will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* And in between those statements we see that God has destined us to become more like Jesus. And though we must go through trials, and it may seem as if we are like sheep being led to the slaughter, everything that happens, whether good or bad, God is using for our ultimate good and his eternal glory.

Our text today, Deuteronomy 8:1-6, shows us that God uses trials to expose your heart, teach you to depend on him, and train you in faithful living.

First, trials expose your heart (Deuteronomy 8:1-2). The Israelites wandered for 40 years in the wilderness with Moses because they didn't trust God and his promise to help them conquer the Promised Land. God had to reveal

their hearts to them, so that he might make his heart impression upon them. Suffering pierces through your self-deception and makes you aware of what you turn to apart from God to make your life work the way you want.

It's easy to think your faith is strong when things are going well. But as you suffer, that's when you really find out about your faith. In 1 Peter 1:6-8, the Apostle Peter writes about trials in the Christian life. And he says that God reveals your faith to you through that trial, and it is more precious than gold, even though it feels like fire when you're going through it. Peter is saying that the thing that brings you sorrow is the thing that will reveal your faith. Whether it is the loss of things you depend on, the absence of things you need, the addition of burdens you must bear, or pain you must endure, you discover if your hope is in God, or in the things he has given you.

And that includes the suffering of others. It can be an intense trial having to watch as your loved ones suffer. Their trial becomes a trial for you, too. And when you're suffering because someone else is suffering, it still reveals your heart. This is what pastors, and parents, and all Christian people must come to know. Your trial is still about you and knowing God. It isn't wrong to hurt because others are hurting. Yet you still must face the truth about what you think of God. Because God will use their suffering to reveal your heart.

The trial of your faith might involve the lack of someone else's faith. This can be a Christian's greatest fear. It is so hard to watch a loved one deny God. It can seem like there is nothing you can do. But this is still a call for you to come close to God, to teach you to depend on him, and to train you in faith. So don't be afraid to confess your sin, your lack of faith, and your need of him. He has designed this for your good. And for their good.

Now on this very point you might seriously protest. How is my trial, my suffering because they are suffering, for their good? Well, think about this. If you learn to know and trust God through this, it will help you to help them do the same. To know God, even in the depths of suffering, in the middle of a trial, this is what we all need. To know God is what can bring you joy even

during sorrow. That's what you need, and that's how you can best help them. Because the greatest joy that Jesus gives is a greater revelation of himself. But to begin to know him, you must first see the truth about yourself. Then you'll be more able to speak about God. It's your witness.

If your loved one doesn't know God at all, of course that's what they most need. And their trials can bring them to that place. But you need to help them get there. When they are asking you about God, they are reaching out to you, in order to see if they can reach God. You can bring them to the heart of God by bringing the heart of God to them. You are a witness.

Be the bridge that God is calling you to be. But to be that bridge, your own foundation of knowing God through trials must be stable and strong. That's why you need to go through this whole process and understand it for yourself. You've got to root this truth down into your soul to be a faithful witness. Otherwise, it will just sound like strange and insincere words.

Now if your loved one knows God, or says they know God, you still need to help them while they are in that trial, to see it for what it really is. It's an invitation to know God, to trust him, and to become more like him. That's what they need. That's what will help. You need to get down to the real, deep, basic "why" questions, to see the big picture, and then realize the truth about what you really think about God. You need to have your heart exposed if it is going to be changed.

So, trials expose your heart, but they also teach you to depend on God (Deuteronomy 8:3-4). In the wilderness, God's people were allowed to suffer from hunger, but then he fed them with manna. And their clothes lasted 40 years without wearing out. God was their ultimate source.

The God who created everything out of nothing can certainly take care of your every need. You might know that, but wonder why he doesn't seem to do that for your loved ones at times. But the lessons God is trying to teach you are the same lessons he is trying to teach them. He wants you to know

him, and for them to know him also. And you knowing him in your trials can help you lead them to him in their trials. You witness to God's worth.

Jesus knew severe hunger when he was being tempted in the same way as the Israelites. He hadn't eaten in 40 days, and Satan urged Jesus to turn the stones to bread, but instead, he quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 (cf. Matthew 4:1-4). He passed the test they had failed. They had grumbled, but he was faithful.

When you are suffering or you see loved one's suffering, you probably want to take matters into your own hands. You wish God would just "do something about it." You wonder why he doesn't. And you imagine that if you were God, you would. But as Jesus was suffering in the wilderness, he was still God the Son, and yet he left it all in God the Father's hands.

Jesus was and is God, but he was also a man. And Jesus responded with perfect faith in his suffering and temptation. He passed the test with perfect trust, not only for himself, but for all who put their trust in him. And you can ask him to forgive you and to pour his Spirit into you so that you can learn to respond well in suffering and trials. You don't have to let trials destroy your faith. Even when you haven't suffered well, you can respond in faith. You can claim the grace of Jesus Christ, knowing that Jesus has paid for your failures, and your failures of faith in your trials. Depending on God is not only about learning to win, but learning to lose.

In suffering God exposes your heart (Deuteronomy 8:1-2), and teaches you to depend on him (Deuteronomy 8:3-4). And he also uses suffering to train you in faithful living (Deuteronomy 8:5-6). When you are personally suffering, or suffering because of the suffering of others, if you will cry out to God, and depend on him, he will use your trials to train your faith. And that molds you to move in God's kingdom. God makes you his witness.

This is what God did with the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness. After 40 years, the old generation had passed away. As the new generation stood ready to enter the Promised Land, they could have been even more

cynical and doubtful than their parents. The inhabitants were even stronger than 40 years ago. And their great leader Moses wasn't going to go with them. But this time the Israelites responded with faith. The hardships they had endured had trained them to be godly. And they knew in their hearts that God had orchestrated this for them, like a father with his children (cf. Hebrews 12:4-11). Instead of doubting God, they believed his promise. And they moved forward in faith. They knew that they didn't live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Of course, they eventually grew complacent, as you know if you know the story. But God knew all of this ahead of time. Listen to Deuteronomy 31:20 – *For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to give to their fathers, and they have eaten and are full and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, and despise me and break my covenant. So, God would bring them into the Promised Land, but they would forget him. And he would expose their hearts again, and refine them, and bring them back to his heart, again. Time and time again, the Israelites would go through the process. And God does the same thing with us, with you. To draw you to him, and to make you more like him. To make you his witness.*

This is God's pattern and purpose in your trials; your heart is exposed, you're taught godly dependence, and you're trained in godly living, for your good and his glory. He's refining you, tempering you, molding you, and proving himself to you. It's not to punish you. It's because he loves you. Trials come to all people, even when they're obedient. It's not a matter of if, but when. Trials are God's design for you. Embrace God in them.

Hebrews 4:12-16 shows you how. God's word exposes your weakness. Jesus Christ sympathizes with your weakness. His sacrifice pays the penalty for your weakness. And his strength is your confidence. You can confidently come to him, and draw close to him, to receive the mercy and grace you need to make it through and come out the other side more like him. Come to the throne of grace, where Jesus is, and confess your sin, your lack of faith, and your need of him. He's right there, waiting to hear from you.