

BIG TRUTH little books™

A Biblical View of Trials

Cliff McManis

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A Biblical View of Trials

*To Debbie,
loving wife and
faithful servant of Christ*

A Biblical View of Trials

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Clifford B. McManis
Sunnyvale, CA
July, 2015

Cliff McManis

SERIES PREFACE

Our mission with the *BIG TRUTH little books*[™] series is to provide edifying, accessible literature for Christian readers from all walks of life. We understand that is often difficult to find time to read good books. But we also understand that reading is a valuable means of spiritual growth. The answer? Get some really big truth into some little books. Every book in this series is only 5"x8" and around 120 pages. But each is full of Scripture, theological reflection, and pastoral insight. Our hope is that Christians young and old will benefit from these books as they grow in their knowledge of Christ through his Word.

Cliff McManis, General Editor
Derek Brown, Series Editor

Cliff McManis

INTRODUCTION

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

The Christian life entails a continuous stream of daily trials. That is reality. One wise pastor put it this way: “As a Christian, you are either entering into a trial, in the midst of a trial, or coming out of a trial.” Life is full of trials—trials that hurt, that are painful and make us tired and weary.

This harsh reality should not come as a surprise to the Christian, for the Bible is honest

about life in this world. Take the book of Job for example. Although Job was written almost 4,000 years ago, the truth found in this book of Scripture is still relevant to us today. Here's what God says through His Spirit in Job 5:6 and 7:

For affliction does not come from the dust,
Neither does trouble sprout from the ground,
For man is born for trouble, As sparks fly
upward.

The word “affliction” here refers to all the problems of this life: relational difficulties, trials, hardships, painful experiences—suffering of all kinds. Verse 7 says that, “man [i.e., humanity; all of us in a cursed world] is born for trouble.” This statement means that trouble will be second nature to being a human in this life...there's no escaping it.

“Humanity is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward.” This is a truism; a proverbial maxim that is universally binding wherever you are and universally true all throughout history. Nothing

changes. Life is hard—trials are the lot of humanity. Believing in the Bible is not about believing in some “pie in the sky” easy life like some would have us believe; like those who say that if you become a Christian your life will be rosy and you’ll never have any problems. That is not the teaching of Scripture. Just the opposite is true. Life is hard. It is already filled with trials, and many times when you come to Christ life only becomes more difficult in different ways. Jesus taught this very thing when He said to His disciples, “In the world you have tribulation” (John 16:33). The Apostle Paul promised the same: “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). The good news is that despite the unavoidable trials and hardships of life, God gives His children an amazing promise of rescue in 1 Corinthians 10:13, our main text for this book.

Paul’s View of Trials

So with that reality—the sobering reminder from

Job—let's go to 1 Corinthians 10 where we are catapulted now 2,000 years later and Job's truth is still relevant for the Corinthians. The Corinthian believers and their church, with all of their troubles, problems, struggles and trials—were experiencing what Job said was true for all people at all times.

Paul wrote his epistle to the Corinthians to straighten out several areas of their lives. They had a lot of trials, a lot of sin, a lot of compromise, and a lot of bad attitudes. They were arrogant (4:18), prideful (3:3), judgmental (4:3), worldly (3:1), and divisive (1:10). Were the Corinthians true Christians? Yes. Paul clearly commends them for believing in the gospel (1:2-7). Not all of these believers expressed these sins to the same degree, and there were probably some very blessed Corinthians in that congregation that were a sweet savor and a beautiful influence to the rest of the church. But the dominant voice that was echoing and reverberating and causing all the commotion, even though it may have been a minority, came

from professing believers with some wrong attitudes, wrong theology, and very sinful behavior. That's why Paul writes 1 Corinthians—all 16 chapters. Every chapter is laced with a rebuke to reign in their sin.

In chapter 10 Paul continues to rebuke and warn the Corinthian Christians. He has been hammering away, relentlessly, chapter after chapter, paragraph after paragraph, truth after truth, rebuking them in love. He'll say a pastoral comment or verse, call them "brothers"; he'll give an occasional word of encouragement, and then go back to exhorting them relentlessly where they need it. And then he comes back and lets them know that he cares for them personally. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-12, Paul gave them an extended warning and rebuke in the areas of practical living. But in 10:13 he makes a significant transition in tone and gives them some hope and encouragement to balance his verbal reprimand. He is careful not to exasperate them needlessly. He is skillfully tempered; he speaks

to them with pastoral balance. And he gives one of the most amazing promises of Scripture in verse 13.

But before we get to verse 13 in chapter 10, we need to back up a bit and look at what Paul has said a few chapters earlier.

The Context of 1 Corinthians 10:13

First we must note that chapters 8, 9 and 10 go together. Paul is dealing with one main theme in these three chapters. And he was talking to some Corinthians in the congregation who were a little proud and judgmental and who thought they knew it all. They were also looking down their noses at other Christians in the congregation who didn't know as much as they did. These strong, self-confident Christians were parading their so-called "Christian liberties" without deference to others. They were flaunting their liberties in gray areas, or even non-gray areas, in a way that was arrogant.

But the main problem was that they weren't living according to the truth we read in Philippians

2 where Paul tells us to consider others more important than ourselves (see Phil. 2:1-11). These Corinthians were only thinking of themselves. They didn't care. Their attitude was: "I have this right, I have this liberty, and I'm going to exercise it." And they were oblivious to the damaging effect their careless conduct was having on their fellow believers.

A Matter of the Heart

The main issue Paul is addressing here is attitude. And he is also addressing how believers should think about the Christian life. Paul's answer in chapter 8 is simple: don't be arrogant! Spiritual knowledge needs to be rooted in love. Don't exercise liberties to the detriment of other Christians around you. You might even need to refrain occasionally from using your liberty, because there may be times when the exercise of your liberty will cause other Christians to stumble and sin. So, be careful of how you exercise your liberties

because of how it might affect other believers. That's the emphasis in chapters 8 and 9.

Then, in chapter 10, Paul makes a little bit of a transition in his point of emphasis. Now he commands believers to be careful about how they exercise liberties so as not to detrimentally affect themselves (10:1-12). By way of example, Paul instructed the Corinthians to consider the saints of old, particularly the two million Jews in the days of Moses as they went through the wilderness for 40 years (c.1400 B.C.). Like the Corinthians, the Israelites at the time of the Exodus lost perspective when it came to exercising their rights and their liberties as believers. Despite being fresh out of cruel slavery in Egypt, they quickly adopted arrogant attitudes, and they were self-sufficient. They often disregarded the spiritual leadership of God's faithful servants, Moses and Aaron, even threatening during a revolt to stone them to death (Numbers 14:2, 10). They compromised with the world, and they got ensnared in gross sin—the sins

of idolatry (Exodus 32), sexual immorality (Numbers 25) and complaining (Numbers 11; 16). To chasten them God actually wiped out thousands of Israelites through the punishment of physical death, so that their bodies were strewn all over the desert over the course of 40 years (Numbers 14:26-35).

“Corinthians,” Paul exhorts, “take heed and be warned because that can happen to you.” And then Paul gives five imperatives in 1 Corinthians 10: (1) Don’t complain like the Jews of old; (2) don’t get involved in idolatry; (3) don’t toy with immorality; (4) don’t test the Lord or be presumptuous toward His grace. So Paul is coming down hard on these Christians, and the crescendo is verse 12 where he says, (5) “Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.” In other words, he is saying, “Fellow believers—you are arrogant; you are on the precipice of your huge pride, and you’re about to fall into the pit and possibly undergo the chastening of Almighty God

in a very disturbing, severe manner—the judgment of God’s chastening towards the believer, which could include physical death.”

This is a tremendous warning that we need to hear and heed today as well. We are no better or different than the Corinthian Christians in some respects. As a professing Christian you can’t continually engage in sinful behavior and think you’re going to get away with it by saying, “Well, Jesus died on the cross and He forgives me of all of my sins past, present and future, and there are no consequences to be concerned with.” Yes, God does forgive the believer. But no sin is committed without a consequence, for God’s glory is at stake and your good is at stake. So, after an extended and sobering rebuke that lasted several chapters, Paul gives verse 13 to encourage them. Because at the end of verse 12 they may have wanted to say something like,

Okay I give up, Paul. Do you realize what kind of culture we live in here in Corinth? It’s in the

gutter. You're telling us we can't be even close to immorality or idolatry. It's everywhere we go! It's in the fabric of our society! We have temptations and trials that they don't have over in Thessalonica or in the kosher city of Jerusalem. We aren't like those other Christians, Paul. We have unique trials that no one has faced. You need to amend your exhortations to us.

That's why Paul says in verse 13 that actually no temptation is overtaking them that's not common to everyone else. Paul reminds the Corinthian believers that they are no different than any other human; they aren't unique. Everyone has difficult surroundings. Everyone lives on a cursed earth. Satan attacks all believers, not just some. Life is hard no matter where you live. The believers in Jerusalem have similar trials. That's why this verse fits into this context. It actually has a twofold purpose: (1) Paul is trying to encourage them (this *is* a very encouraging promise); and (2) he is

registering a mild rebuke to remind the Corinthians that they can fulfill the commands that he has given them despite their circumstances, surroundings, and culture.

Trials Haven't Changed

Another argument the Corinthians could have posed would have been to say, “Well, we’re not like the Israelites. That was 2,000 years ago, Paul. What happened 2,000 years ago doesn’t pertain to us; it’s not relevant! We live in modern times.” Have you ever heard that before? When people say, “This is a different day and age than years previous...we have different trials and temptations today.” In effect Paul says, “Hmm, I don’t think so! Trials and temptation have not changed in 2,000 years because sin hasn’t changed in 2,000 years.” Humans haven’t changed in 2,000 years and the God of the universe hasn’t changed in 2,000 years. So there’s the continuity from age to age. That’s why Paul can say with authority to anybody, regardless of his or her

trial or temptation, “no temptation,” or trial, “has overcome you that isn’t common to everybody else.”

Three Key Biblical Principles for Facing Trials

With that larger theological context, let’s hone in and make this personal and practical for us so we can be blessed by this fantastic promise. There are three main points in this verse. To help you follow along through the next few chapters, I will provide all three principles and summarize them briefly below.

Principle #1: Trials Are a Part of Life

Principle #2: God is in Control

Principle #3: Trials Help Us Grow

The first principle is about having a proper view of trials. Did you know people have a wrong view of trials? Did you know that Christians can have a wrong view of trials? Did you know that you might have some wrong views of trials? There are

times that I have a wrong view about trials. One of the main points of the long book of Job is to show that Job's friends had common, but very wrong views of trials. So our goal in this study is to allow the Holy Spirit to teach us through his Word how to rightly understand and respond to trials.

The second principle is about having a proper view of God in the midst of trials. Did you know that some Christians have a wrong view of God when they encounter trouble and difficulty? We're all susceptible to drifting from a right view of God when we are in the throes of a trial because it's easy to get disoriented and lose objectivity by the emotion that usually attends trials. It's not uncommon for some Christians to think their trials are always a direct punishment from God for some sin in their lives. That is what Job's friends proposed, and God said they were wrong. God is not up in heaven with a big stick ready to smack His children for every slightest infraction they make on earth.

A Biblical View of Trials

The third principle is about having a proper view of self with respect to trials. Why do I have trials in my life? That is a basic, but very legitimate and important question. Another one is, Why do I have this kind of trial when others around me don't have the same kind of horrible trials? The simple answer from the Bible is that God allows trials in our life to help us grow. None of us in this life have yet arrived to perfection or full maturity (Philippians 3:12-13; James 3:2).

Over the next few chapters I will flesh out each of these three principles. I believe all three of these principles are driven by the text in 1 Corinthians 10:13, but my answers here aren't too profound. Just consider the first principle: trials are a part of life. How deep. How heavy. How profound. Actually, it's not. It's quite simple, isn't it? It's almost like a no-brainer. That's what I love about the Bible. God is not trying to confuse us. It's clear what the truth is. It's clear what He wants.

But if we're going to rightly deal with trials

and have a biblical view of trials, we first have to know what a trial is—we need to define “trials” in order to have the right perspective about this topic. We will now turn to this question in chapter 1.

Questions for Discussion: Introduction

1. Why do you think so many people wrongly believe that if you become a Christian then you will have an easy life?
2. What was Paul's attitude toward the Corinthians when he penned the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13?
3. Why did the Corinthians need to be encouraged with the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13?
4. What was Paul's main point of emphasis in 1 Corinthians 10:1-12 leading up to the promise of 10:13?
5. In what way might the Corinthians have claimed to have "unique" trials, different than any other believers or churches of their day?

A Biblical View of Trials

~1~

THE ORIGIN OF TRIALS

The first principle we need to establish is the following: *trials are a part of life*. Notice that our verse says, “No temptation.” You could say, “No trial.” That’s a legitimate translation. The Greek word, *peirasmós*, is the word translated “temptation.” It’s also used in James 1:2 which says, “Consider it all joy...when you encounter various *trials*.” It is used similarly throughout the New Testament and it’s the common word for “test” or “trial.” In and of itself it’s a neutral word—it is neither good nor bad. It just means a trial, or a test. The context determines whether it’s a good trial or a bad trial. The context actually determines whether it’s a test for good or a

temptation inducing evil. Our response to the test also determines whether it is a test for righteousness or an inducement to evil. So, the context and our response make a difference, because a test can either be good or bad.

Say, for example, a teacher gives the class a diagnostic “test” about something that will be covered in the course. That kind of test is meant to be good. It’s supposed to be encouraging or informative. It helps the students learn. So tests are positive in that particular context. But tests can also be bad because they can be temptations toward evil. But the word itself is just neutral. That is important to keep in mind. A *peirasmós* can be either a test or a temptation, depending on the context or intent.

Next, notice that Paul says that, “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man.” As we’ve already noted, the meaning of the word “temptation” or “trial” has to be determined by the context. In this verse,

Paul is just talking about a regular, commonplace temptation. He assumes that everybody's got trials and temptations. The Corinthians have trials and temptations, Paul has trials and temptations—every Christian does. Every person does. That's the context for this word in 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Unrelenting Trials

Another truth about trials that we need to keep in mind is something to which I referred at the beginning of this book. I heard a wise pastor say it when I was in college. It was profound, and I was in the midst of a horrible trial when I heard it—which is why I never forgot it. He said a good summary of the Christian life is this: you are either entering a trial, in the midst of a trial, or just getting out of a trial. Isn't that encouraging? The Christian life is just one unbroken chain of trial after trial after trial until you go to heaven where there will be no more trials, troubles or

temptations.

If that is true, then I suspect there are some of you reading this book that are going through a trial right now. I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I will also predict that some of you just got out of a trial, and maybe a grievous one. And I'll venture to make another prognostication: I bet some of you are about to go into a trial you're not even expecting. And one more prophetic proclamation: there are some of you in here that are very unique and are experiencing all three in your life right now. I feel compassion for you.

But in order to rightly respond to trials, we need to know the kinds of trials that can afflict us. People rarely think of trials in this manner, but it is significant. Your trials and temptations will fit into one of nine categories.

Kinds of Trials

Over the years as a pastor and spending countless hours helping people with their problems, I've

heard a lot about the kinds of trials people endure in this life. I've heard just about every trial imaginable, and I have experienced a few as well. In addition to personal experience, the Bible is full of them—describing trials of all sorts in detail covering a period of 4,000 years of human history. So gleaning from the composite of personal experience and Scripture, these nine become manifest.

1) *Personal Trials.* Number one: there are personal trials. Here I am referring to personal issues, like loneliness, for example. This has to do with contentment—you're dissatisfied. It could be that you're single and you want to be married—that's a real trial. That's a grievous trial. You don't have satisfaction or contentment in your life on a very personal level. There are people reading this book who are in the midst of this kind of trial.

2) *Relational Trials.* Relational trials primarily arise when you are in a conflict with someone. It could be somebody in your family. It could be a spouse. It could be a sibling, a child, your parents, an uncle, or a neighbor. It could be somebody at church or somebody at work. These trials are real. These are tiring. These make you lose sleep. These kinds of trials, at times, destroy people's lives if they are not dealt with properly.

3) *Behavioral Trials.* These are trials based on your makeup or innate disposition and the fact that you have a sin nature. You have sin issues that you have to fight against and deal with and contend with regularly. These are tendencies that you might have in your own life that create trials or confront you as trials. For example, maybe you have a propensity

towards alcoholism and you have been battling it for some time or your whole life. Or, maybe you have a tendency toward sexual immorality and it is an ongoing, frustrating battle that continues to undermine you as a Christian. Or maybe you're a person that is consumed by anxiety and fear all the time; these feelings dominate your mind and cloud your thinking and make you unstable. This is a real trial. Or maybe you struggle with gluttony, or materialism. The list goes on.

4) *Emotional Trials.* By emotional trials I mean something very specific. You have sorrow because you're suffering loss, whether it is the death of a loved one or a tragedy that comes upon someone you love dearly. That's a real trial. It weighs you down and leaves you distraught with a heavy heart.

5) *Financial Trials.* These trials come in all forms: you can't find a job, you need a job, you're in debt, you are confronted with an unexpected financial burden beyond your resources. You wonder where all the money is going to come from. For those who have real financial hardship, it is a difficult trial.

6) *Physical Trials.* Maybe you have a physical trial that has to do with your health. This trial comes in many forms as well. Maybe it is an issue that you were born with that has haunted you your whole life that you will never be rid of. Maybe it is something that developed later in life, like a disease or cancer or whatever. Perhaps it is intermittent and something you have to battle in terms of physical health. That's a real trial.

7) *Criminal Trials.* Maybe you have a

criminal trial. What do I mean? This is when you have suffered an injustice that you did not deserve. Paul uses very graphic terminology in 1 Corinthians 10:13 when he says, “No temptation has overtaken you.” The word for “overtaken” is picturesque; it’s like you got mugged from behind unexpectedly. Wouldn’t you agree that trials sometimes feel like that? They come out of nowhere and you feel totally blindsided. “What in the world? Where did this come from?” And you lose your breath; you’re in shock. It’s that kind of word. If we could only predict when trials were coming—that would help, wouldn’t it? Why? Because we would run in the other direction. “Oh, we got trouble right here in River City! Well, I’m going to avoid that city.” Criminal trials are things people do to you or against you unjustly—someone robs your house, steals your

computer or your wallet or your credit card number. They are very painful and they wreak great havoc in so many areas of life.

8) *Natural Trials.* This trial is not something some person does to you; it's something that arises from nature. It could be a natural disaster. I think of my friends up in Vallejo, California during a recent earthquake. I never felt any reverberations or aftershocks; I slept fine. But it devastated a seminary building and a couple of churches in the city. Even peoples' homes and personal lives were severely disrupted. That is a real trial.

9) *Spiritual Trials.* This trial is in its own special category. Spiritual trials are when we as believers are subjected to satanic opposition and demonic harassment. This kind of trial is of an otherworldly nature

and is invisible—we can't see the source of harassment with human eyes. These trials are in the domain of what the Bible describes as “spiritual warfare.” Paul describes it as follows:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12).

Daniel 10 also gives a rare glimpse of what spiritual warfare is like, for in that chapter the veil is pulled away as we the readers get a brief look at Michael the angel fighting with demonic princes in the spiritual realm on behalf of Daniel while he was down on earth.

We find spiritual trials like this illustrated in the book of Job. The whole book is about trials. Satan attacks Job's family, Job's possessions, Job's

body, and all the while, Job does not even realize he is being attacked by Satan. The reader knows Job was being accosted by Satan because God revealed that information to us after the fact through written revelation. But at the time it occurred Job had no idea, because he could not see into the spiritual realm.

When you are experiencing trials, read the book of Job. Job is in the throes of suffering down on earth with his three friends. His friends are well meaning, but ignorant; they don't really know what's going on—and Job is just getting pummeled with all nine of these trials from on high. Job and his friends are grappling for answers and they're trying to understand what is happening. So what do they do? They do what we do when we are in the midst of turmoil and trials—we ask a lot of questions; ultimate questions; questioning God; questioning life. “What is the cause of these trials? *What* is God doing? *Why* is God doing this? Am I being

punished for my sin? Is God mad at me?” and on and on it goes. And Job’s friends are coming up with all these wrong answers as they are trying to analyze his situation.

Little did Job and his friends know that Satan and God had a previous conversation and made an agreement (Job 1:6-12). They are totally oblivious of what set the stage. Job probably didn’t learn of God’s agreement with Satan until several years later when God, through the Holy Spirit, reveals it to him. “Oh, by the way, Job, remember the horrific fifty years that you went through? Here’s the true story and here’s why it happened. And do you know that Satan had a huge part of that and that there was a spiritual component to it?” And I suppose if I were Job I would have been like, “Wow. I had no idea!”

By the way, every trial that we’re undergoing could be happening on a human, natural level without activity from the spiritual realm. We don’t need Satan and the demons to

create havoc in our own life. We are sufficient in ourselves to create our own misery, aren't we? We also experience trials for the simple fact that we live in a fallen world (Genesis 3:14-19; 5:29; Romans 8:18-25). You can't blame all your spiritual trials on Satan by saying, "Oh, this must be a spiritual trial from Satan himself." No, not really. We've noted above eight very good possibilities of why you may be experiencing a trial in your life. Spiritual trials are unique in that we can't really discern if our troubles at the moment have originated in the spiritual realm. We can't diagnose exactly what is going on. We don't know, at any point, if Satan has anything to do with a particular trial or not. That's what makes it unique. Also, categories one through eight can occur without number nine, and number nine can indeed complicate, exacerbate, and be involved in any other of the eight trials, making a particular trial worse by adding a supernatural, satanic component to it.

Your Trials Aren't Unique

Here's my point: If I can think of every trial that has ever faced humanity, and I can put it into one of the first eight categories, then that would mean that no matter what trial we are facing, it is not exceptional. Someone before me has already confronted every temptation or trial I have ever faced, or will face. There are no unique, unheard-of trials or temptations out there! That's exactly why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that no temptation or trial has overtaken you "but such as is common to man." That means your trials, and my trials, are common to everyone else. You don't have any unique temptations; I don't have any exclusive to only me.

The New Testament is emphatic about that reality: not one of our temptations are new; you are not undergoing a temptation that no one else has experienced before. Taking it further, the book of Hebrews says Jesus Himself was subjected to every conceivable trial, test and

temptation known to humanity (Hebrews 4:14-15). And He endured all of them perfectly as the God-Man. As such, He can sympathize with us no matter what our trial or temptation may be (4:16).

Occasionally I see an attitude among Christians in counseling where they are ignorant on this matter. It is not uncommon for people, when they are explaining their troubles, to say,

Pastor, you don't understand because I'm in a unique situation and I have a unique problem. I have a problem that you've never heard of before.

Or,

Pastor, you don't know my spouse. I know what the Bible says about how to fulfill my role, but I can't because my marriage is uniquely dysfunctional . . . because my spouse is like no other dysfunctional spouse

in the universe, or maybe even the whole galaxy!

Not true! If you believe that, you're violating 1 Corinthians 10:13. Also, if you believe that you are undergoing a trial that does not fall into one of the nine categories above, or that you have a trial that a competent Bible counselor has never heard of before, or that you have a trial that is not exemplified or illustrated in the Bible, then you are undermining biblical sufficiency. The solution to all trials is found in God and His truth. The solution to trials is found in Scripture. If you think you have a unique trial that no one has ever gone through before—that there's no hope for you—then you are undermining the sufficiency of God's Word. As Christians we believe that the Bible has the answers for all trials and all problems in life that you are experiencing or will experience in the future. God is in control (Psalm 115:3). He tells us His Word is sufficient (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Cause of Trials

It is very important to recognize that our problems are not unique. Now here are a few other corollary truths about trials and how they work. We've discussed the eight normal kinds of trials that might afflict us. But we also need to understand the cause of trials from a biblical perspective. Job and his friends were unable to rightly discern the cause of Job's trials--they were resorting to limited human wisdom to come up with a diagnosis. Throughout the whole book of Job they were trying to figure out the cause of his trials, which proved futile. Don't try to do that; don't fall into "the paralysis of analysis" of trying to figure out the ultimate cause of a trial that has not already been revealed in Scripture. Why? Because Scripture already reveals the cause of trials, at least the ultimate cause. You could be undergoing any one of these eight trials for the following reasons, or a combination thereof.

Trials Caused by Your Sin

You could be experiencing a trial because of your sin. Our own sin gets us into trouble, doesn't it? In other words, a trial may be the "natural consequence" of sinful choices we make in life. I know from experience because that is what Scripture teaches. Galatians 6:7 warns us, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." Proverbs speaks to this idea of natural consequences, or trials, that hound us because of sinful things we do:

For on account of a harlot one is
reduced to a loaf of bread,
And an adulteress hunts for the
precious life.

Can a man take fire in his bosom
And his clothes not be burned?
Or can a man walk on hot coals
And his feet not be scorched?...
Wounds and disgrace he will find,

And his reproach will not be
blotted out (6:26-28, 33).

God has put basic laws in place in the moral and spiritual realm just as He put basic laws in place to keep order in the physical realm. For example, gravity is a basic law in the physical realm by which God maintains order. God established gravity when He created the world (Colossians 1:16-17). When we resist or ignore the law of gravity there can be serious “natural consequences.” If you jump off the Golden Gate Bridge, the law of gravity is challenged, or violated, and you pay the consequences by falling to your peril.

Similarly, a “natural consequence” in the spiritual or moral realm might be when someone steals—they get caught, arrested, thrown in jail. Jail time then served can become a “trial” for that person on many levels, but that thief brought it upon himself from sinful choices. In this case a trial can be self-induced or self-inflicted.

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It is important here to keep in mind that saying some trials are a result of our own sinful choices is radically different than someone saying, “I am going through trials right now because God is punishing me for some sin I committed.” The two ideas are categorically different. If you are a Christian then God actually punished you for your specific sins 2,000 years ago when He poured out His wrath on Jesus as the Savior died on the cross as your substitute. That punishment was punitive, legal, propitiatory and eternal and cannot be duplicated. Suffering “natural consequences” today for sinful actions is consequential, temporal, practical, indirect and non-efficacious. Don’t confuse the two.

Trials Caused by Another’s Sin

Trials may result from our own sinful doing or maybe you are in a trial because of someone else’s sin. Someone sinned against you; they committed an injustice against you; they robbed you; they created trouble in your life and you are under

duress as a consequence of their sin. Maybe you have a family member or friend who was killed in a car accident as a result of someone else's irresponsible or reckless driving. The grief and pain that results truly is the deepest kind of emotional trial, and it does not result from your sinful actions, but someone else's actions. This is a sad and all too frequent reality in this life.

The greatest example of this is when our sin sent Jesus to the cross, which was an unparalleled and unprecedented trial for Him:

Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
smitten of God, and afflicted.
But He was pierced through for our
transgressions, He was crushed for our
iniquities; the chastening for our well-
being fell upon Him,
and by His scourging we are healed (Isaiah
53:4-5).

So, a trial could be the result of your sin, or someone else's sin.

Trials Caused by Adam's Sin

But if your trial doesn't fall into these two above categories, then it could have been Adam's sin. When in doubt, blame Adam. But, there is a right way to do that and a wrong way to do that. The Bible says we inherited sin from Adam's disobedience:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and

death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...

death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not

sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam (Romans 5:12, 14).

And at the same time we are culpable for our own sinful thoughts, actions, words and nature. So in this case, the trials of life can simply issue from the sin and the consequences of sin

bequeathed to the world by Adam.

Trials Caused by The Curse

Finally, another cause for our trials could be the curse that God inflicted on planet earth in Genesis 3. We live in a fallen world, and so many of our trials result from simply living in a fallen world—and that’s just all there is to it. Adam and Eve were real people; they really sinned and they were really punished and cursed by God. We really came from them and the earth we live on now was cursed by God because of them. God said plainly to Adam after the first sin, “Cursed is the ground because of you”! (Genesis 3:17). And again, why is there a curse? It’s the result of sin. So sin is the three-letter answer and the ultimate cause of our trials. If you want to think about, meditate on, deliberate over, and go on and on and on about, “So what was the cause of this trial?” Well, “sin”. It is the ultimate, solid biblical answer.

Now that we have examined the kinds and

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causes of our trials, we will now consider in chapter 2 how our view of God either helps or hinders our ability to persevere through trials.

Questions for Discussion: Chapter 1

1. What are some synonyms for the word “temptation” that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 10:13?
2. Is a “temptation” good or bad? Explain your answer.
3. What are some of the most challenging trials you have had since becoming a Christian?
4. As you look back, did those big trials fall into one of the eight categories of trials listed in chapter 1?
5. Explain what you think of the following statement: “Your trial is not unique.”
6. Do you believe Jesus was subjected to every trial you have ever faced?

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7. What are the biggest challenges you are facing right now in your life?

8. Have you ever read the entire book of Job? If so, when was the last time?

9. Why is it wrong to say, “I am going through this trial because God is punishing me for some sin?”

Cliff McManis

~2~

FACING REALITY

In the last chapter we discussed the kinds of trials we might experience. We have also examined the ultimate cause of trials: sin. It is also important to keep in mind that trials can be either short-term or long-term, in any given situation. So, we just have to face reality; that's important when we are confronted with trials. When we undergo trials we can have an attitude and disposition that pleases God or one that does not please God.

By way of example, take Job and his wife, Mrs. Job. When they got pummeled with unprecedented adversity, even the sudden tragic

death of all ten of their children, the two of them responded to the trials differently. Job's wife responded in anger, a lack of faith and utter pessimism. It was so bad Job had to give her a resounding rebuke for blaspheming God.

When she spewed, "Curse God and die! (2:9)" Job responded with righteous indignation, putting her in her place, saying, "you speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" Job was commended by God for reprimanding his wife, for the Scripture says, "In all this Job did not sin with his lips" (2:10).

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul told the Corinthians not to complain and grumble in the midst of trials like the Israelites did who were then chastened by widespread death in the desert. It is to our benefit to respond with the right attitude in the midst of a trial. And it is possible to do so if you have a realistic view of trials and understand where they come from (the cause, the

source). And if you are a realist and not an idealist, then you can have the right attitude towards trials and you can be a content person in the midst of them. To pull it off is extraordinary, but God promises to be our sufficiency in such circumstances if we trust Him at His Word. You can even have a thankful heart and true joy in the midst of trials if you are driven by a biblical mindset.

This is why it is so important to have a realistic view of life. The world constantly tries to impose on us an unrealistic view of life. The world promises, “You can do whatever you want!” No, you can’t. That’s a lie! Believe that and you are setting yourself up for disillusionment of the first order. And on and on they go with their false proverbs that fly in the face of reality, saying the world and humanity is getting better and are more virtuous; that world peace is one John Lennon song away, that poverty can be eradicated once for all. But the biblical reality is that this

earth is under a curse and that Satan is real, that he's on the prowl, that he's a vicious lion (1 Peter 5:8), that he's out to destroy your life and your family's life, that he hates God, that he's a blasphemer, and there is sin that lives in your own heart and sin that lives in everybody around you. This life is a mess. That's the reality!

Rivers and Races

Christians are to be realistic because the Bible is realistic. This realism helps us when we are facing trials. Life is not like a lazy river. You know what a lazy river is? They have them at nice, plush hotels. It's a slow-flowing river that doesn't have any waves, where you get in your inner-tube, or floatie, in the warm sun and coast endlessly at a cozy pace downstream, all the while sipping your beverage of choice, improving your tan, without anyone bothering you. But that's not life. That's a short vacation that always ends too abruptly. Life is not a lazy river. Life is like a river, but this river has massive rocks, strong currents, powerful

waves, and waterfalls, and it's usually surrounded by dangerous plants and critters living in the water that often and unexpectedly accost and trouble you.

And life isn't just a fun little relay race either. It's more like a 26-mile marathon with hurdles. That's what life is like. It is a race, but you jump over one hurdle and you're confronted with the next hurdle and you can hardly catch your breath. Hurdle after hurdle after hurdle after hurdle, until you reach the finish line with Jesus in heaven. No more trials.

You Got Robbed

Paul goes on in verse 13: "No temptation has overtaken you." Again, "overtaken" is a very specific word that describes what trials can be like: they feel like you just got mugged. Many times the trials of life, or a specific temptation, are spontaneous; they are unexpected; they are surprising; they are unpredictable. You feel like you just got assaulted. "No way in a million years

would I have predicted that would have happened to me.” That is all bound up in that word “overtaken” in this verse.

Paul goes on: “No trial has overtaken you, but such is common to man.” *Anthropos* is the root word here for “man” in the phrase, “is common to man.” It is not just males and it’s not just Christians—the word means “humanity”; the human race. So trials are common to the human race. You are not different than anybody else. That is incredibly important to keep in mind.

But who brings trials? Who causes trials? This is a pretty common question. Some Christians, when facing trials that they can’t seem to overcome, get exhausted and discouraged, and one person they blame is God. I’ve seen that time and time again. Sometimes you see that in the Psalms. Sometimes the Psalmist is not being legit and he is blaming God. You see it with Job’s friends—they at times blamed God. Is that who we are supposed to blame when we’re in a trial or

temptation? We have to be careful here.

Gilligan's Island and Our View of God

I grew up on *Gilligan's Island* back in the Stone Age (the 1970's) when all we had were four TV channels to watch. No DVD's; no Internet; no YouTube; no satellite TV; no Direct TV. No choices—you watched what was programmed. On one of those channels was the comedy, *Gilligan's Island*. Everyone in America at the time watched it and was familiar with it. There was the main character, Gilligan along with six other people stranded on an island in the Pacific Ocean somewhere in the vicinity of Hawaii.

Throughout the course of the three-season show, the seven castaways are ceaselessly trying to get rescued to get off the island, but to no avail. The island they are stranded on is frequented by “natives” or “head-hunters” who were primitive, dangerous and cannibalistic. As an impressionable little elementary kid, I will never forget one

episode that had an indelible impact on my life that I still vividly remember forty-plus years later. I was six years old and this particular episode scared me to death.

A practitioner of voodoo, a native Witch Doctor, came to the island and found the seven people, including Gilligan and the Skipper. He wanted to torture them so he made little voodoo dolls, the size of Barbie dolls, that looked just like each of the castaways. He strung them up in a line on a string over a campfire between two trees. He made a Gilligan voodoo doll, took it in his hands, and started torturing it. And every time he tortured the Gilligan doll, the real Gilligan felt the pain. Then the Witch Doctor took fire and began to heat the feet of all seven dolls as they hung on the string, and when he did all seven real people felt the heat.

That's comical, but it actually comes out of the voodoo religion, which is common in our world today. Yet, some Christians think God is

like that—the idea that a supreme being, whether it's God or even some demigod, is up there in heaven, like a divine puppeteer yanking your chain and poking needles in your body in order to torture you for His pleasure and entertainment; or that God is up there poking your doll every time you do something wrong down on earth to punish you. That is a wrong view of God and His relation to our trials, but the world often views God this way and, unfortunately, some Christians occasionally do as well. They think, “God is trying to torture me. He enjoys punishing me.” Or, “He’s against me; He’s my enemy; He doesn’t want me to succeed.” That’s very discouraging. “God’s tempting me; God brought this temptation on me.” No He didn’t. We cannot blame God!

Not Tempted by God

Perhaps you struggle with thinking that way about God. You need to get that thinking out of your mind. “Yeah, I am in a trial and this trial is

horrible!” But it’s not a unique trial. It is a trial you can overcome. We saw earlier that the author of Hebrews 4 said that Jesus Himself, while He was on earth, went through every conceivable trial known to humanity. There is not one trial that you have ever gone through or that I’ve gone through which Jesus was not subjected. Jesus was exposed to every conceivable trial imaginable and He confronted them head on as the God-Man; He faced them as real trials, but He confronted them successfully, resisting the sin that went with them. He met the temptation every time by trusting the Father who led Him through the Spirit. He confronted every trial and overcame them victoriously on your behalf and my behalf, so that now as the Mediator He can be a compassionate High Priest, able to relate to everything we will confront in life.

He understands. The Lord Jesus is the greatest of confidants to which we can go. In light of the truth in Hebrews 4, we need to pray,

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“Lord Jesus, you know about this trial in my life because you were subjected to a similar trial. Please be my High Priest. Sustain me, I pray to you.” If you pray like that, in faith, then He will answer your prayer.

Or you can pray, “God, give me wisdom.” That’s why James 1:13 says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.” This is a command. When you are tempted or undergoing a trial and you are emotionally distraught, don’t say, “I am being tempted or tried by God.” In other words, don’t blame the trial on God. He’s not trying to bully us or be mean to us or laugh at us or toy with us. Don’t blame Him. He doesn’t tempt anyone. Don’t say, “I am being tempted or tried by God,” for God cannot be tempted by evil and God Himself does not tempt anyone to evil.

Well, what about Job? It’s important to understand that God and Satan were involved in

the trials that befell Job, but God was totally sovereign over them. If Satan made a request, God could veto that request because God is in control. He is totally sovereign. He is all-powerful. He has power over the devil. He has power over all of our trials. That is clear when you read the book of Job. God defines the parameters and the extent of your trial. Yes, Satan was involved; Satan did inflict temptations. That's true. But God allowed the trials because He is sovereign. He allows trials, but He never tempts anyone to sin.

Jesus' Temptations

We can see this balance in Matthew's account of Jesus' temptation (4:1-11). Jesus lived the first thirty years of His life in obscurity. Nobody knew who He was. He had never done a miracle. He had not been out preaching. Everybody thought He was a normal person. His siblings thought He was a normal person. And then immediately after His baptism, Jesus began His public ministry. But

before He began His preaching and healing ministry we come to chapter four, verse 1 which reads: “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit.”

Here Jesus was prompted by (carried along by) the Holy Spirit to go into the wilderness to face a trial with Satan himself. God the Father allowed a trial to come to Jesus. God the Father was in charge, along with the Holy Spirit, of the trial that the Son was going to face and the temptation that He was going to endure. But the Holy Spirit didn't just *passively* allow it; the Holy Spirit Himself actively brought Jesus to that place where the trial and temptation would occur.

So where do trials come from? Where do tests come from? Tests come from God. Tests are allowed by God. Tests are authored by God. And God the Father and the Holy Spirit were in charge of this leading of Jesus into the wilderness. “So then Jesus was led up by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (Matthew 4:1).

Where does *temptation* come from? Well, it doesn't come from God. God tempts no one to sin. The devil was going to try to tempt Jesus to sin. That's not God the Father's fault; that's not the Holy Spirit's fault. The temptation to sin came from Satan himself. The same is true with us. Any temptation to sin can either come from Satan, his demons, or from our own sinful hearts. Because that's what James says: our temptations come from "indwelling sin." That's the beautiful balance we find in Matthew 4:1. God is involved in Jesus' trial in the wilderness, sovereignly overseeing His plan, but Satan is also involved in the trial that the Son of God faced. That's true of us as well.

Let's go back to James 1:13: don't accuse God of bringing you into this temptation. You might ask: Why does temptation occur? Sin. Note verse 14: "But each one of us is tempted when we are carried away and enticed by our own lusts." See, sin is the problem. Verse 15: "Then when

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lust is conceived, it gives birth.” It’s a process. First, it was a neutral test that was allowed by God. Then, if you cross the threshold and don’t resist the test in a biblical manner through the power of the Holy Spirit, then you cross the threshold into dangerous, sinful territory brought on by your own enticed, intrigued, curious lusts from within. “I want to see how close I can get before I get hurt.” And then you just get sucked in and it’s too late. Note verse 15: “Then lust will conceive in your heart and give birth.” The byproduct is sin, and when sin is accomplished, it brings death or consequence.

Now we can go back to 1 Corinthians 10:13. So principle #1 is this: *trials are just a part of life*. We need to have a biblical view of trials, and the Lord Jesus Christ provides us with the perfect model of how to handle any trial that may confront us. We also need to remember that God does not tempt us to sin; He is in sovereign control of our lives—even our trials. We have the

answer in Scripture, for Scripture is sufficient to make us complete, no matter what's going on in our life (2 Timothy 3:16-17). In the next chapter we will consider God's faithfulness in the midst of our trials.

Questions for Discussion: Chapter 2

1. Read Job 1-2. What were some of the trials Job had to face?
2. Compare the differences in how Job faced the trials in his life with how his wife dealt with their trials.
3. Was it appropriate for Job to call his wife foolish as he did in 2:10?
4. What are some of the idealistic lies that the world often tells people to believe? Why are those lies so dangerous?
5. Paul says that we can be “overtaken” by trials or temptations. What are the implications for this strong word, “overtaken”?
6. Why do many Christians believe that their trial is the direct result of God up in heaven purposefully torturing people down on earth?

7. Hebrews 4 says Jesus was tempted in every way but without ever sinning. Do you think they were real temptations for Jesus? Could He have ever sinned?

8. James says God never tempts anyone. But Job says God let Satan tempt Job. How do you reconcile those two statements?

9. In Matthew 4, was Jesus tempted by the Holy Spirit or by Satan?

10. What does James 1:14 say we are tempted by?

~3~

GOD IS IN CONTROL

In this chapter we are going to consider a vital truth that will determine our approach to trials. It's the second principle we mentioned in chapter 1. What is the promise in the midst of these trials we're confronted with day by day? *God is in control*. That phrase is not a meaningless religious platitude; it's the anchor by which we are to rest our heart, our mind, and our soul. That truth is the foundation of everything. As we've discussed already: we need to have a right view of God when we are in the midst of trials. That's where we struggle sometimes. It's easy to have a wrong view of God: a wrong view of God's character, a wrong view of how God might react, a wrong view of how God perceives us, a wrong

view of how God orchestrates trials. There's a lot of wrong thinking at this point that needs to be corrected.

We need to look at the next phrase Paul gives in our verse of promise: "No temptation has overtaken you but such is common to man; and **God is faithful.**" Here's the good news. God is faithful! He is the anchor. If you are in a trial today—and I know just about every one of us is—then where do we go first in our thinking? Right here: God is faithful. Everybody else is letting me down. Everybody else is a threat. I'm a threat to my own self. The only one who won't let me down—God. He is faithful; He is our rock. God is faithful. He's in control; He is good.

That's important. God is faithful means He is good. He is loving. He cares for you if you are His child. He loves you more than you love your own children. Imagine that in the midst of a trial. Isn't that comforting? That is the rock on which you stand when you are enduring a trial.

What is God's view of me? I am secure: no one can snatch me out of the Father's hand or out of Jesus' hand regardless of what is going on (John 10:27-30). God is good. He is not up in heaven tinkering and toying and tempting or having fun or neglecting or abandoning us. That's not the God of the Bible. That is a warped view of God. "God is faithful" also means that He is true to His promises.

All Things for Good

What are these promises that I can hang on to in the midst of trials? The Bible is filled with promises regarding trials. For example, let's look at Romans 8:28. We need to hear the truth of this verse again and again. You may know it, and even believe it, but at times you doubt. That's when you pray, "God I believe. Help my unbelief!"

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who

love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

We know . . . – We Christians know for a fact—not possibly or maybe—we know with dogmatic certainty; it is a fact from the God of the universe.

. . . that God causes all things . . . – Isn't that amazing? He is in total control? The God who adopted you into His spiritual family, the God who loves you through the person of Jesus Christ; there's nothing that gets by Him—good, bad, or ugly—it doesn't matter what it is! He's in control of all things; He has a purpose in all things; He's orchestrating all things; there's a goal in all things; it's moving in a direction that fulfills His purposes. God is never passive or helpless—He “causes” all things.

....to work together for good...” – For His glory and for your good. For the believers' good.

It's not just God's good, but the believers' good as well! We know it. Everything will come together. Maybe not in this life, but in eternity for sure. Ultimately, nothing falls through the cracks; no incident is forgotten, no trial is superfluous, no pain is ineffectual because God works all of it together for His ultimate purposes.

“Help My Unbelief!”

If you're struggling with that concept, then you need God to help you. You can pray like this:

Help me to believe it. Help me with your Spirit. Eliminate and squash my doubt. I'm not believing in this, God. I'm really struggling. I'm lacking faith. I'm thinking negatively. I'm thinking wrongly. I'm undermining your promises. I'm undermining your character. God, help me. You're good, I know you are. All things work together for good. You have good in this difficult situation. You have good as a

result of this painful trial. I don't know what it is, but I'm going to walk by faith and trust you no matter what is going on. Help me.

This is how you should talk to the Lord in the midst of trials. This is how the Psalmist talks to the Lord in the midst of trials. All things work together for good for those who love God. But this isn't a promise you can extend to an unbeliever; this promise is only for you as a child of God. God loves you in a special way if you are in His family and if you are one of His children. He's going to take care of you. He's going to provide for you. He's going to see you through. He knows what we need more than we do. He's never going to leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). His presence is always there. His promises are always true. His character is always consistent. His love is enduring. He is an ever-present help in time of need (Psalm 46:1). What a blessing to be in the family of God.

I cannot imagine living life in this world

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for a prolonged period of time without knowing Christ. I don't know how unbelievers can endure in this fallen world. I don't understand it. And at the same time, I see how they try to deal with the trials, as they use any conceivable superficial means to try to numb the pain of the trials they experience. They seek remedies ranging from alcohol, to drugs, to immoral behavior, to living in a fantasy world, to the pursuit of a false religion, and to even suicide when all else fails. They pursue these things to cover up reality in an attempt to drown out the sorrows, hardships and trials of life because they don't have the answer; they're not walking with Christ. They don't have the promises of God like Romans 8:28 to see them through. We have that unshakable promise: God causes all things (including our trials) to work together for good!

Think right now of the worst conceivable trial you've ever been confronted with. Then go back to Romans 8:28—do you believe this

promise in light of your trial? Do you believe that God is working all things together, including your trial, for your good? Do you believe that? As a believer, you should. You have the right to, if necessary, pray to God to help you. “God, help my unbelief” (see Mark 9:24). God works everything together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

The Negative Side of Sovereignty

Now let’s go back to 1 Corinthians 10:13. Paul goes on to say, “God...will not allow you to be tempted (or tested) beyond what you are able.” We know that God is faithful. And He is faithful to protect you with respect to trials. He limits our trials. Our trials are tailor made for us. That is what Paul means when he says, “God . . . will not allow.” God is in charge; He will not allow anything to occur that does not comport with His plan. He is sovereign. This is the negative side of His sovereignty.

There are certain things He's not going to allow or tolerate. He sets limits and restraints to trials. So, don't be afraid. God is not going to allow you to encounter a trial and get consumed beyond what you're able to handle. He knows you better than you know yourself. He's in charge; He's in control; He won't allow it. Believe it. He is the Boss of the universe. He's the sovereign, blessed God who loves you, Christian. He will not allow you to be tempted or tried beyond what you can handle. That's really hard to believe sometimes. "I can't handle this." Yeah, you can. If you're a Christian you can. Why can you handle it? Because God can handle it, and He's in charge. "Well, I don't believe that I can handle it!" but Scripture says so; God says so. He's not a liar. He knows better than you. He knows better than me. You can handle this. He's seeing you through it.

Not On Our Time Table

Maybe one of the problems that exacerbate our

suffering is that we really don't believe that God sets parameters around our trials and temptations. "Really?" we might think, "God is not going to allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able? I don't know if I really believe that." You know why we don't believe that, aside from the fact that we are finite and not omniscient? Aside from the fact that we are sinful and twisted and self-centered in our thinking? Aside from all of these things is that many times—probably most of the time—we have a solution in our mind of what we think should happen. "Here's how I think a temptation or trial should be overcome, according to my plan. I should be relieved and comforted on this timetable; I should be delivered in this manner."

We can have our own myopic mindset at times, reasoning to ourselves, "My solution isn't happening, therefore His promise isn't true." No, that's wrong thinking. God is going to do what He said He was going to do, but He's not going

to do it your way. He's not doing it on your timetable. He may not give you the result you want. The solution will always be the way God wants it, on His timetable. And sometimes, on this side of heaven, we may not know what that is.

“Even If He Doesn't Save Us”

At a pastor's conference I attended in the fall of 2014, the preachers preached out of Daniel. We were reminded of when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were going to be thrown in the fiery furnace, after the wicked King Nebuchadnezzar had confronted them with an ultimatum: worship the golden image or die. The three said, “We're not doing what you say.”

So the king said in effect, “Fine, then I am going to throw you into the furnace.”

And their response was amazing. Their attitude was, “Fine—because we know Yahweh. He loves us. He is in control. And God is going to rescue us.” And then this astonishing phrase:

“And even if He doesn’t—even if God doesn’t do what I want Him to do by rescuing me the way I want to be rescued out of that trial—even if we go to death, we’re still going to submit to and trust our Yahweh” (see Daniel 3:16-18). That’s how we need to face trials. God is faithful. I may have a plan and way I hope it goes, but even if it doesn’t go my way I am going to trust the Lord. What a great rule to follow.

God Working *Through* Our Trials

Now, returning to the next phrase in 10:13 from Paul: “He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, **but with the temptation He will provide the way of escape.**” Here is the positive side of sovereignty. There’s a negative side of sovereignty—God is going to define parameters, and He won’t let certain things happen—then there’s the positive side. Here’s what He’s going to do proactively on your behalf in the midst of this trial.

Well, how does God work through trials?

A Biblical View of Trials

A key aspect of understanding how God works through trials is found in this phrase—“He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.” So, first we must acknowledge that He’s going to allow the trial to happen. You shouldn’t be praying, “God, free me of trials in this life and give me lots of money and make me happy all the time.” This life is full of trials. It’s an unrealistic prayer. God is going to keep the trials; He’s going to put you into trials; He’s going to preserve you in the midst of trials; and He’s going to walk with you through the trials. How’s He going to do that? He’s very rarely going to bring on supernatural deliverance for you by pulling you out of the lion’s den or by pulling you out of the fiery furnace. God doesn’t typically work that way. God works on a human level through human means and normal circumstances. That’s called providence.

Many Christians are unfamiliar with the doctrine of providence, but there’s the word right

there in verse 13: “provide.” The providence of God is when God supplies what we need as He works indirectly through secondary causes, through the circumstances of human life, the human will, human decisions, and a cursed earth to accomplish His will on behalf of His people. The world will call this luck, chance, coincidence, or even *karma*. But providence is none of these. Providence is God utilizing secondary means to continuously sustain and provide for His creation. Our deliverance will not always come through a supernatural intervention. That is why we struggle so often to see the hand of God, because it’s actually being worked out through normal, human circumstances. Step by step, in a long chain of activity that God is orchestrating from above. That is the providence of God. And it’s usually hard to detect, if not impossible. But that’s not our job. So with the temptation, God will provide the way of escape. He’ll allow you to be in the temptation and He’ll just take you

through the temptation through the normal circumstances of life. But most importantly, God is faithful, and He is in control.

The Gauntlet

Second, notice also at the end of the phase Paul says that God “will provide the way of escape.” There is light at the end of the tunnel. But we might ask, “What is the way of escape?” Often we hope God will provide us a secret hatch out the back door so that we won’t undergo any trials, pain, or suffering? Is that the way of escape? No: there’s only one way of escape, and it’s kind of bad news. It’s not happy news. The way of escape is going *through* the trial. The way of escape is going through the gauntlet.

When I was in 4th grade playing tackle football, we began every practice with “the gauntlet.” I feared it and hated it. In full pads, the players would form two long lines facing each other just a few feet apart—a kind of human tunnel. Then the coach would give one player the

football and they had to run down the middle of the tunnel, or gauntlet, without fumbling while every guy was allowed to give him one vicious hit.

“McManis, it’s your turn. Go! Run down the gauntlet.” I was skinny, scrawny, underweight. Teammates would take shots at my head with glee. I would bounce around like a pinball, sometimes getting knocked down to the ground. The drill wouldn’t stop till the runner made it all the way through the gauntlet. You couldn’t turn around and go back out the front. You couldn’t quit before getting to the end. Cutting through the middle of the line crying for mommy was forbidden. The only way of escape from the misery was going through the whole gauntlet, or trial. It was brutal. It was painful. And if I made it through, then I was successful. And our coach made sure everyone made it through, even if you were crying and bloody and your teammates were laughing at you.

But that’s the way of escape: going

A Biblical View of Trials

through the trial. And God will see you through the trial, so you have His strength to make it through every trial you experience. Many of our trials are temporary and help us flex our spiritual muscles and help us grow. Some are more severe and last longer. For some, trials can even end in death. In those cases the believer ends up in glory where there are no more trials –no more death, or crying, or mourning or pain (Rev. 21:4). That’s why the apostle Paul could say as his life verse “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). That’s the Christian worldview.

Questions for Discussion: Chapter 3

1. What is the significance of the phrase, “God is faithful” in the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13?
2. Give an example of how God proved faithful in light of a trial you went through in your life.
3. What does Romans 8:28 have to do with our personal trials?
4. What phrase in 1 Corinthians 10:13 guarantees us that God is actually in control of every trial that comes into our lives and He even sets the limits on the trials?
5. Are there things that ever happen that surprise God or catch Him off guard?
6. What are some wrong thoughts we might have in the midst of a trial that makes things worse?

A Biblical View of Trials

7. In Daniel 3, what was exemplary about the three young Jewish men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego when they faced the trial of death?

8. What is “the way of escape” from the trials that confront us?

9. What is “providence”?

Cliff McManis

~4~

THE PURPOSE OF TRIALS

Now we come to principle number three. What's the purpose of trials? It's real simple. As Christians, we undergo trials *to build up endurance*. Another way of saying it is that *trials help us grow*. Paul concludes the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13 by saying, “**so that you will be able to endure it.**” The word “endure” (from *hupophero*, “to bear up under; to shoulder”) is related to the word “endurance.”

Getting Stronger

“Endurance” is a positive word. It refers to building up strength, increasing stamina, going the distance, becoming stronger. Trials serve to strengthen our faith. Trials help us grow; they

refine us. In the physical realm, we lift weights and exercise to increase strength and endurance and to facilitate and maintain health. To achieve that goal, we need pressure and resistance when we exercise. No pain, no gain! When I am in the gym or weight room, the two exercises I fear and despise the most are dips and pull-ups. For me these two exercises create the most resistance against my anemic arms and they give me the most pain. But they are incredibly effective for increasing endurance and strength in my arms and shoulders.

None of us have arrived in the Christian life. We all walk with feet of clay. We all have areas where we are weak, soft or flabby, spiritually speaking. We all have rough edges. And we all need our rough edges smoothed off. How do you smooth off rough edges? Think of a rock. How do you smooth a rock's rough edges? You take off the rough edges with a hammer. That's painful—smack, smack goes the sledge. But we

all need that kind of refining. And that is the purpose of the trials in this life: so that God may grow us and refine us so that we become more and more conformed into the image of Christ. We are all like a big piece of clay when we get saved, and then God sets out to form us as the Potter with resistance and pressure and pushing and pulling and stretching and shaping, all the while making us uncomfortable. But more and more He is fashioning us ultimately into the image of the glorious Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:28-29; 2 Cor. 3:18). And that kind of refinement can't occur apart from the trials of life. That is God's purpose. He is in control and we need to rejoice in that truth.

Consider It All Joy

Let's close with James. The book of James relays a beautiful complement to Paul's promise about trials. James says the following:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you

encounter various trials (*perasmois*), knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

This passage begins with a command: “Consider it all joy” (James 1:2). The action verb in this verse is “consider,” which some Bible versions translate as “count.” The Greek word used simply means to “consider, deem, think deliberately about.” This command tells us that we are responsible to think about our trials in a specific way. It is a mindset and an attitude. It refers to having a sober, rational evaluation and response to the troubles of life. The point is that we need to confront trials first and foremost with our “mind,” keeping an objective assessment in our thought life, and not resorting to emotions or circumstances, both of which are utterly subjective and unstable. James is saying, “when

you encounter various trials, the first thing you need to do is think biblically about it—don't get swept under by the emotion of it all, otherwise you will drown.”

Further, James says that “all joy” needs to saturate our thoughts as we contemplate the trials at hand. “All joy” is actually emphatic in the verse, and means that godly joy needs to infuse our attitude every time we face trials. This command is unnatural and counter-intuitive. It can't be achieved on a normal human level. Also, this command does not imply that we must be happy about trials or the bad things in life. The “joy” we pursue and maintain is joy “in the Lord.” As Nehemiah 8:10 says, “the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

True inner joy comes only from knowing God personally through a relationship with Jesus Christ. It means that you are to maintain your deep-seated, God-honoring joy that comes from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a result of

your salvation. The Holy Spirit who lives in the believer is the source of inner joy (Galatians 5:22). Maintaining that joy in the Holy Spirit deep in the recesses of your heart no matter what's going on in your life is the command, and the challenge. It doesn't mean we say: "Bring on the trials, God! The more the merrier" That's not what James is talking about. Rather, we deliberately determine in our thinking (it is a conscious choice and decision we are accountable for) that no matter what is going on in life, we can always have true joy that unbelievers can't have because of our secure relationship with Jesus Christ.

There is our foundation, our rock, and our stability in the midst of trials. "Count it all joy." Don't lose your joy. Don't let your joy be robbed by fear and unbelief and the lies of the world and the emotional state of circumstances in the midst of the event. All of these can blind us and lead us astray.

A Biblical View of Trials

“Consider” also implies that you’re thinking *properly*; that’s inherent in the meaning of the Greek word used here (*hēgēsasthe*): to think the right way; think correctly. When you are in a trial, control your thinking; subject your thinking to Christ and His truth and His Word in Scripture and keep it in subjection to His will. Keep your thinking in check. “*Think correctly* regarding biblical joy, my brothers and sisters in Christ, when you encounter all kinds of trials.” It’s not thinking about the here and now and all the pain we experience. Rather, it’s knowing the end result: that “the testing of your faith that produces endurance.” The test is given to make you stronger; it’s intended to help you so that you can look back over your life, and see the byproduct and the fruit of the testing—that God used trials to help you grow spiritually.

I can see that this verse is true as I look back over my life. Having been saved for decades now, I look back over the years and I think,

“Wow, look at all those trials and how painful they were. And look what God did as a result! He strengthened me; He changed my thinking; He amended my thinking; He rebuked me; and He humbled me, and all for His glory.” That’s how God works. That’s what this is. It’s all for His glory. No one can rob your joy when you know Jesus Christ personally, and so count it all joy.

Questions for Discussion: Chapter 4

1. What is the purpose of trials?
2. What is “spiritual endurance”?
3. What does it mean to have “joy” in the midst of a trial? Are we supposed to be happy with the actual trials?
4. What does “consider” or “count” in James 1:2 and how is this key to having a proper attitude about trials?
5. Think of a trial in your life right now. How do you have “joy” currently in light of this nagging trial?
6. Think back over trials you had previously. Can you see today how God used to it create spiritual endurance in you? In what way?

7. Is it true that it is easier to see the benefit of certain trials in hindsight and years later than when in the midst of a trial?

8. Are there trials in your life that still have you questioning how God might work it together for good?

~5~

CONCLUSION

To summarize, we looked at God's amazing promise to the believer about trials in 1 Corinthians 10:13 and other related passages. Several principles issued forth from this truth that still apply to us today.

First we looked at the context of 1 Corinthians 10:13 to see what Paul meant as he wrote to his original audience.

Second, we defined the meaning of "temptation" as a test that can be either good or bad, depending on the context.

Third, we were reminded that trials and hardships are a normal part of life for everyone.

Fourth, we delineated life's trials into nine

categories: (1) personal; (2) relational; (3) behavioral; (4) emotional; (5) financial; (6) physical; (7) criminal; (8) natural; and (9) spiritual, which we highlighted as a distinct one.

Fifth, it was observed that all of our trials fall into one of these categories, and because of this we can maintain that none of us have unique trials that are different from everyone else or that are foreign to God and the Bible.

Sixth, we noted that Jesus was subjected to every possible trial and temptation during His life on earth, and overcame them all perfectly (Hebrews 4). And as a result He is our perfect sympathetic High Priest at all times.

Seventh, we looked at the cause of trials and found out it all stems back to sin. Some day God will eliminate all sin; and with that all trials and temptations will be gone.

Eighth, we saw that we need to have a realistic view of life. And the right view of life begins by having a right view of God: God does not

tempt any one to sin.

Ninth, we highlighted the amazing truth that God is always faithful in the midst of our trials and even works them out for good every time, for our good and His glory.

Tenth, we answered the question of “Why does God allow trials into our lives?” He does so to help us grow and mature spiritually.

And finally, number eleven—God expects all believers to maintain joy in the Holy Spirit even in the throes of any trial. That is possible because our joy should be based on the nature of our relationship with God through Christ, and not based on emotion or circumstances around us. This requires ongoing, disciplined, biblical thinking.

Perhaps a useful exercise today or this week would be for you to have some quiet time before the Lord and write down your trials. “Here are my trials. I’ve got a relational issue with someone. I’ve got an injustice I suffered this week, God, and I lay this before you and I’m going to trust You that You

are going to work all things together for good.” You can even write it down and date it—like a prayer journal entry. And later on you can look back and say, “Wow—look what God did, just as He promised. He is true to His Word. God, You are so faithful.” And in the meantime, even if you never see some of these things fulfilled in this lifetime, we can still believe with certainty that God will resolve them in eternity. God is faithful. He will be with us during any trial, for our good and for His glory.

Questions for Discussion: Chapter 5

1. As you think about this study, what is one of the biggest things you learned about trials and temptations?
2. What area of your thinking has been challenged or changed as a result of this book?
3. Which of the eight areas of trials most typify your trials?
4. Which of the eight areas least typify your trials?
5. How often do you talk to God in prayer about dealing with your trials in the proper manner?
6. How often do you think of Jesus as being your High Priest who can sympathize with your trials as opposed to just thinking about Him as your Savior who forgives your sins?

7. In heaven there won't be any more trials.
What do you look forward to most about
being in heaven?

8. How are you doing at maintaining "joy" in
the midst of your trial-filled life?

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Rev. Cliff McManis has been in pastoral ministry since 1989. He graduated from The Master's College with a B.A. in Biblical Studies and earned an M.Div. from The Master's Seminary. He went on to earn his Th.M. and his Ph.D. in Ecclesiology from the Bible Seminary in Independence, Missouri. He is the author of *Christian Living Beyond Belief* and *Biblical Apologetics*, and editor and contributing author of *Rescued by Grace*. He has served in churches in southern California, Utah, Texas, and the San Francisco Bay Area, and has been the teaching pastor of Grace Bible Fellowship since its inception in 2006. He and his family currently reside in Cupertino, California.