

Trials that Christians Face

From my experience, one of the items that tends to get “glossed over” in mainstream churches is the following concept:

*Sincere Christians should **expect** to face difficult circumstances - and even to be persecuted.*

There are numerous passages in Scripture that verify this concept. Here are a few of them:

Matthew 24:4-5,9:

⁴And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. ⁵For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray.

⁹“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake.

John 16:1-4:

¹“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ² They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. ³And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. ⁴But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

2 Timothy 3:12-13:

¹²Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

1 Peter 4:12-13:

¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

There are many other passages that contain similar information. Overall, the sense that I get from the above passages is:

*Being a Christian is **not** all “sunshine and lollipops”.*

In other words, it seems to me that we should *not* expect our lives to become extremely easy, when we decide to follow Christ. In fact, if anything, we might expect our lives to become more *difficult* once we become a sincere Christian!

Of course, in many parts of the world, that fact is readily apparent - many countries overtly persecute Christians. In some countries, it is even illegal to *own a Bible*.

In the United States, we are fortunate that there isn’t any organized persecution of Christians. (At least, not yet.) However, even in the US, sincere Christians are often the objects of mocking and derision.

So, in my opinion, passages like the ones above should be emphasized more often - so that Christians (especially new Christians) will not become discouraged, when difficulties arise in their lives.

Fortunately, there is a “silver lining” to the trials that Christians have to face. First off, Paul tells us that God will not allow us to be “overwhelmed” with temptation:

1 Corinthians 10:13:

¹³No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

(Of course, just because God gives us the *ability* to endure temptations, that does not mean that temptations will be *easy* for us - i.e., we still need to consciously *resist* temptations, in order to endure them.)

Another point to note is that James tells us that undergoing trials will improve our faith, and will allow us to become more mature Christians:

James 1:2-4:

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

So, the question is: “what, exactly, is a trial”? I would define a “trial” as: “any sort of difficult circumstance”. It occurs to me, though, that there are two different “types” of trials - “temptations” and “tests”. Here is my take on those two types of trials:

- A **temptation** tries to entice us to **disobey** God.

- A **test** is designed to determine if we will **obey** God.

The main reason why I bring up that distinction is because James explicitly tells us that God does **not** tempt anyone:

James 1:13:

¹³Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

However, God certainly **does** test people. For example:

Isaiah 48:10 (NIV):

¹⁰ See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

Jeremiah 17:10:

¹⁰ "I the LORD search the heart
and test the mind,
to give every man according to his ways,
according to the fruit of his deeds."

Here are some examples of temptations and tests:

Temptations:

Genesis 3:1-5:

¹Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" ²And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Mark 1:12-13:

¹² The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

1 Thessalonians 3:5:

⁵For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

Tests:

Genesis 22:1-2:

¹After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." ²He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

Exodus 16:4:

⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.

John 6:5-6:

⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.

1 Thessalonians 2:4:

Just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

Overall, it appears to me that if we sincerely try to follow God, then we should *expect* to undergo trials. In other words, we should expect that many temptations, and tests, will come our way. This is for two reasons:

1. If we follow God, then the world - and the Adversary - will hate us;
2. If we follow God, then God will “test” our faith.