

The Crucibles (Tests) That Come



SABBATH—OCTOBER 6

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Jeremiah 9:7–16; Romans 1:21–32; 2 Corinthians 12:7–12; 1 Peter 4:12–19; 1 Peter 5:8–11.

MEMORY VERSE: “Dear friends, don’t [do not] be surprised by the painful suffering you are going through. Don’t [do not] feel as if something strange were happening to you. Be joyful that you are taking part in Christ’s sufferings. Then you will be filled with joy when Christ returns in glory” (1 Peter 4:12, 13, NIV).

IN CHEMISTRY LABS a scientist often puts different materials into a small metal pot and heats them to high temperatures. As the pot becomes hotter, the materials melt or burn brightly. The pot is called a crucible.

The dictionary describes a crucible as (1) a pot used for melting material in high heat, (2) a tough test, (3) a place or situation in which things are mixed to cause or to influence¹ change or development (growth).

These definitions also give us a better understanding of what happens in our spiritual lives. This week we will study some reasons why we may suddenly find ourselves under pressure and experiencing tests. These experiences cause us to change, develop, and grow in character.² This will help us to better understand what God is doing in our lives. So, when we enter a crucible, we will have an idea of what to do.

THIS WEEK'S LESSON UP CLOSE: What are the causes of the difficult times that we experience throughout our lives?

1. influence—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.

2. character—who you are; all the things that a person does, feels, and thinks are what a person is made of; your character is the sum of the choices you make, such as a choice to be honest or to cheat.

SUNDAY—OCTOBER 7**SURPRISES (1 Peter 4:12)**

Surprises—painful surprises—can come in many ways. A runaway car coming across the road into your path. A sudden notice that you are losing your job. A medical test that gives you unexpected (surprising) bad news. The failure of a seemingly loyal friend to defend you. The pain can be bad. But it is always made worse by surprises.

This week we will look at a few kinds of painful situations or crucibles that should not take us by surprise.

To begin, let us go back to the verse for today in Peter. The Greek word for “surprised” in 1 Peter 4:12 means to be “strange” or “foreign.” Peter is encouraging his readers not to fall into the trap of believing that fiery trials are strange to Christian experience. Rather, they should be expected.

The word used for “fiery ordeal” (NRSV) or “painful trial” (NIV) or “fiery trial” (NKJV) comes from another Greek word. It means “a burning.” In other places this word is translated “furnace.” This experience of suffering for our faith could be the same as being in a “smelting furnace.”

What is Peter’s message in 1 Peter 4:12–19?



Sometimes our troubles and suffering can make us feel as though we are in a furnace.

Many of us are surprised about suffering because we often have a very simple idea of the Christian life. We know there are two sides—God, who is good; and Satan, who is bad. And often we put everything that feels good in the box with God and everything that feels bad in the box with Satan. But life is not so simple. We cannot use our feelings to decide what is in God’s box or Satan’s box. Sometimes walking with God can be hard for us to do. And following Satan can seem to bring great rewards. Job is righteous (holy) but suffers a lot. He shows this when he asks God, “‘Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?’” (Job 21:7, NIV).

Peter was talking about trials (hardships) that are the result of standing up for Christ. But there are also other reasons that trials come. How could 1 Peter 4:12–19 help you to explain to a friend why he or she should not be surprised at painful trials in life?

MONDAY—OCTOBER 8**CRUCIBLES OF SATAN
(1 Peter 5:8)**

What is the message in 1 Peter 5:8 for us? Ask yourself, “How seriously do I take these words?” What things do you do in your life that show how seriously you take them or do not take them?



Satan prowls around like a hungry lion.

Have you ever watched a hungry lion? It is awful because the lion can catch and eat just about anything it wants. Peter says that Satan is prowling around in the same way. The sad part is that the results of Satan’s desire to kill are all around us. Everywhere we find death, suffering, and the twisting of things that are good and righteous (holy). We cannot escape noticing the work of Satan.

How should Christians act toward Satan’s prowling in 1 Peter 5:8–11?

What does verse 10 promise that God will do for those who are suffering?

Peter writes these words with Satan’s attacks on Christian faith in mind. But as we have said before, Satan is at work in many different ways. And we must understand that the power of Satan is real. But we must never be discouraged. This is because we must always remember that Jesus has beaten Satan, who is a defeated³ enemy. We also need to remember that we can never be defeated as long as we stay connected to Jesus in faith. Because of the Cross, Christ’s victory (win) is our victory.

Think about the other ways that Satan causes pain. How could reading 1 Peter 5:8–11 help us to deal with suffering that comes with living in a sinful world?

TUESDAY—OCTOBER 9**CRUCIBLES OF SIN
(Romans 1:18)**

Everything we do leads to a result. If you stand in the hot sun with ice cream, the ice cream surely will melt. Cause and effect (result) always go together. It is the same with sin. It always leads to consequences (results). It is not true that God would sit in heaven wondering what terrible things He could do to people who sin. No, sin itself comes with its own built-in results.

3. defeated—having lost the struggle for or against something; not winning.

The problem is that many times we think we can outsmart God and can sin without the results. But that never happens. Paul makes it very clear that sinning leads to both eternal (forever) results and painful results today.

In Romans 1:21–32, Paul describes both how people fall into sin and the results of those sins. Read these verses prayerfully and carefully and write out the important point he is making. Be sure to focus on the stages (steps) of sin and its results.

Two verses earlier Paul describes these results as the “wrath [anger] of God” (verse 18). God’s wrath in this verse means that God is letting humans experience the bad results of what they do. Even for Christians, God does not always act quickly to remove the pain that comes from our own actions. Many times God lets us experience the results of our actions so that we may understand how terrible our sin is.

We have studied the results of breaking God’s laws given for righteous (holy) living. But what about breaking God’s health laws? Our bodies are God’s home. We abuse our bodies by failing to eat healthfully or failing to exercise. If we regularly overwork, this is also a sin against God. And this leads to results that can create the conditions of a crucible (suffering).



Our bodies are God’s home.

How, in your own life, have you experienced the direct results of your own sins? What lessons have you learned? What changes must you make in order not to go through the same experience again?

WEDNESDAY—OCTOBER 10

**CRUCIBLES OF CLEANSING
(Jeremiah 9:7)**

“If the Spirit of God makes you remember a word of the Lord that hurts you, you may be sure that there is something He wants to hurt to death.”—Adapted from Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 271.

How do you understand Jeremiah 9:7 and the statement by Oswald Chambers above? What has been your own experience with the pain of going through the furnace of cleansing?

In Jeremiah 9:7–16, God says He will “refine and test” (NRSV), or “melt” (KJV), Judah and Jerusalem (verse 7, NIV). What two reasons does God give for this? How will the cleansing happen? (verses 15, 16).

God’s cleansing and testing require strong action. There are perhaps three reasons why such cleansing and testing may feel almost the same as a crucible (trial). First, we experience pain as God uses results to bring our sin to our attention (notice). A little earlier, Jeremiah writes, “The fire is made very hot so the lead will burn away. But it is impossible to make those people pure. Those who are evil are not removed [changed]” (Jeremiah 6:29, NIV). Sometimes strong action is needed to get our attention. Second, we experience suffering as we feel sorrow for the sin we now understand. Third, we experience frustration (disappointment) as we try to live differently. It can be uncomfortable and hard to keep choosing to give up the things that we do not want to give up.

Think about the sins that you struggle with. If God was going to

cleanse and test you today, how might He do it? What action could you take now to deal with this before God would want to take strong steps with you, as He did with Israel?

THURSDAY—OCTOBER 11

CRUCIBLES OF GROWTH (2 Corinthians 12:7)

“I could have become proud of myself because of the amazing [wonderful] things God has shown me. So I was given a problem that caused pain in my body. It is a messenger from Satan to make me suffer” (2 Corinthians 12:7, NIV).

Cutting down a plant and pruning a plant are very different things. We cut down plants that we do not want any more. But we prune plants to help them bear better fruit. Both methods involve a sharp knife. Pruning requires cutting parts off the plant that might seem the same as destroying it to an inexperienced gardener. Bruce Wilkinson writes, “Are you praying for God’s great blessings and asking Him to make you more like His Son?

“If your answer is yes, then you are asking for the shears [scissors].” —Adapted from Bruce Wilkinson, *Secrets of the Vine* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001), p. 60.



God prunes us to help us bear more fruit.

People have wondered what Paul really meant when he said “thorn in my flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7, NIV). Some think that Paul was talking about attacks from his enemies. Some think he was having a speech difficulty. But it seems that Paul was having a problem with his eyesight.—Read Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, p. 1107. Surprisingly, Paul believed that his “thorn” was “given [to] me [Paul].”

What do you think Paul meant in 2 Corinthians 12:7 by “given [to] me”? Who gave the “thorn” to him? How was God able to use the “thorn” for Paul’s good?

Notice that Paul’s “thorn” was given to him for a good reason: “to keep me from becoming conceited [bigheaded]” (verse 7, NIV). The “thorn” was not given to Paul because of any special sin he had done. But the “thorn” was given to him to help him not to sin in the future. Paul recognized that he

had a weakness to sin. He also knew that this “thorn” could guard against this weakness.

How does Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7–12 deal with his “thorn”? Do you think that Paul’s weakness helped him in other ways? How can Paul’s answer to his problem help you to deal with your “thorns”?

In what ways might God’s ideas for your spiritual growth be very different from your own? Think about areas in your life in which you need to grow more spiritually. What spiritual gifts and aid (help) would you like to ask God to give to you through His “pruning”?

FRIDAY—OCTOBER 12

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, Nov. 18, 1903; Ellen G. White Comments, p. 1182, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 4; “Enduring Trials,” p. 92, in *My Life Today*.

“God, who reads the hearts of men and women, knows their characters [who they are] better than men and women themselves know their characters. He knows that some have powers and abilities that might help advance His work. In His providence [watch care] God brings these persons into different positions and situations that help them find their weaknesses. He gives them time to correct these weaknesses and to fit them-

selves for His service. Often He permits them to pass through the furnace of suffering so that they may be made pure.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry [Work] of Healing*, p. 471.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ It really can be hard while we are experiencing the results of our sin. “Will I ever be able to be made right with God again?” we may ask. What promises does God make that can encourage us to keep going through such times and not give up? (Read what Paul writes later in Romans 5:1–11.) What can you say to someone who is asking this very question?
- ❷ What does Ellen G. White mean by “His [God’s] providence [watch care]”? How does this work? How do you know when something happens with God’s leading? What acts of God’s “watch care” have led to trials in your own life? As a class, discuss what
- you have learned at this time. How might you help someone else who is wondering if some event is really “His leading”?
- ❸ Do you know someone going through a crucible (trial) right now? Does it matter what brought the trial on? How should you act toward this person and his or her suffering?
- ❹ A young Christian man living in South America went through a bitter trial. After it was over, he moved to Europe and later said to someone, “I left my ‘old self’ in South America.” What does that mean? Why must we all leave our “old selves” somewhere? What part do trials have to do with being able to leave our “old selves” behind?
- ❺ As a class, plan an outing to a hospital or somewhere where you could be of help, comfort, and cheer to those who are being squeezed in a crucible.