

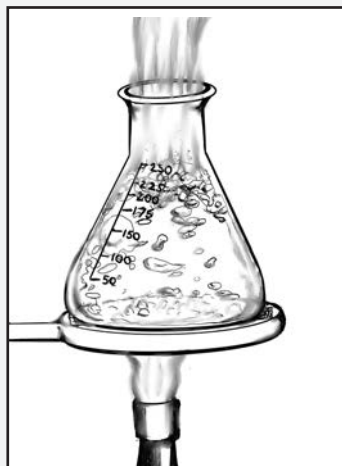
Tests of Faith



SABBATH—JULY 2

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Peter 4:12; 1 Peter 5:8; Romans 1:18; Jeremiah 9:7; 2 Corinthians 12:7.

MEMORY VERSE: “My friends, don’t be surprised at the painful things that you are now suffering, which are testing [showing; giving proof of] your faith. Don’t think that something strange is happening to you. But you should be happy that you are sharing in Christ’s sufferings. You will be happy and full of joy when Christ shows his glory [His shining beauty and His power as our King]” (1 Peter 4:12, 13, ERV).



This special pot or container is a word picture for a very difficult test.

SCIENTISTS IN LABS often mix different materials (liquids, solids, or gases) in a special pot or container. The container can be heated to high temperatures. When the container gets hot, the materials inside melt, spark, or burn bright, depending on what the scientists put in the container. This special pot or container is a word picture for a very difficult test. The container also is a word picture for the things in life that cause us to change or grow.

These word pictures help us understand something important that happens in our spiritual lives. This week, we will look at why we suffer and have difficult experiences. These experiences cause us to grow and change for the better. These experiences also help us to understand better what God does in our lives. Then, when we have another difficult experience in the future, we’ll know what to do.

SURPRISES (1 Peter 4:12)

“My friends, don’t be surprised at the painful things that you are now suffering, which are testing [showing; giving proof of] your faith. Don’t think that something strange is happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12, ERV).

Surprises, painful surprises, can happen at any time in life. A car crashes into you on the road. Or you get a letter saying that you lost your job. Or a medical test gives you bad news that you didn’t expect. Or someone you loved and trusted turns against you, someone that you thought really loved you. As bad as our pain can be, surprise always makes the pain feel worse.

This week we’ll look at a few types of tests that should not cause us any surprise.

To start, let’s go back to 1 Peter 4:12. The word for “surprised” in the Greek language means “strange.” So, Peter is telling his readers that painful tests are part of the Christian experience. These tests are normal. As Christians, we can and should expect tough tests.

The words written as “painful things” (1 Peter 4:12, ERV) come from a word in the Greek language that means “a burning.” In other places in the Bible, this Greek word shows us “a hot oven.” The hot oven is a word picture for our experience of suffering for our faith.

What is Peter telling us in 1 Peter 4:12–19?

Many of us are surprised when we suffer, because we do not have the correct view about the Christian life. We know there are two sides: God’s and Satan’s. We often think that anything that makes us feel good must be from God. Anything that makes us feel bad must be from Satan. But life is not so simple or easy. We cannot use our feelings to decide what’s from God or what’s from Satan. Sometimes our walk with God can be difficult. We may see that people who follow Satan look happy and enjoy big rewards in life. Job sees this problem. That’s why Job asks God, “ ‘Why do evil people live long lives? Why do they grow old and successful [have success]?’ ” (Job 21:7, ERV).

How can 1 Peter 4:12–19 help you explain to someone why he or she should not be surprised by painful tests?



The hot oven is a word picture for our experience of suffering for our faith.

THE SUFFERING THAT SATAN CAUSES
(1 Peter 5:8)

“Keep awake! Watch at all times. The devil is working against you. He is walking around like a hungry lion with his mouth open. He is looking for someone to eat” (1 Peter 5:8, NLV).

Read the verse above. What’s the message for us in this verse? Ask yourself, “How much do I believe these words?” What things do you do in your life that show your answer?



A lion can catch and eat almost anything it wants. Peter says Satan behaves the same way.

Have you ever watched a hungry lion? A lion can catch and eat almost anything it wants. Peter says Satan behaves the same way. When we look around, we see things in life that show us just how much the devil wants to destroy us. Death and suffering are everywhere we look. Satan is hard at work trying to destroy everything that is good and holy. We cannot escape from seeing the evil work that Satan does.

Read 1 Peter 5:8–11. How should Christians act when Satan tries to hunt and destroy everything holy and good?

What does God promise to do for people who are suffering? For the answer, read 1 Peter 5:10.

In 1 Peter 5, Peter talks about how Satan attacks the Christian faith. As we already said, Satan fights us in many different ways. For sure, we must understand that Satan is a powerful enemy. But we must not feel discouraged. Remember, Jesus beat Satan in the desert and at the cross. So, we must stay connected to Jesus. When we do, Satan can’t beat us. Because of the cross, Jesus’ win is our win, too.

Think about how Satan causes us to feel pain. Satan causes a lot of suffering on this earth. How can 1 Peter 5:8–11 help us to understand the reason for the suffering that happens to us on this earth?

**WHEN OUR SINS CAUSE US TO SUFFER
(Romans 1:18)**

“God shows his anger from heaven against all the evil and wrong things that people do. Their evil lives hide the truth they have” (Romans 1:18, ERV).

Everything we do causes something good or bad to happen. If you stand in the hot sun with an ice cream cone, the ice cream will melt for sure. Sin is the same way. Sin always causes bad things to happen. God doesn't sit in heaven inventing new ways to punish people who sin. So, we must not blame God. He doesn't cause the bad things that happen when we sin. We do.

We make the problem worse because we think that we trick God when we sin. How? We think that we can sin and nothing bad will come from the experience. But sin makes us different, and God knows what we did. Paul shows us that sin will change our lives here on earth.

In Romans 1:21–32, Paul talks about how people fall into sin and what happens when they sin. Read these verses carefully. Then in your own words explain what Paul says.

In Romans 1:18, Paul talks about the bad things that happen because of sin. Paul says that God shows His anger. God lets humans suffer evil because of the bad choices they make. God does not always remove the pain from our lives that sin and our bad behavior cause. Many times, God lets us suffer so that we will understand that sin is deeply wrong and evil.

We've been talking about the sin that comes from breaking the Ten Commandments. But what happens when we break God's health laws? If we hurt our bodies because we do not exercise, fail to eat good food, or work too much, then we also sin against God. These bad choices also cause things to happen that can become a test of suffering.

In your own life, when did you suffer punishment right away because of a wrong choice? What lessons did you learn? What changes must you make so that you do not have this experience again?



If you stand in the hot sun with an ice cream cone, the ice cream will melt for sure. Sin is the same way.

TESTS THAT MAKE OUR HEARTS CLEAN (Jeremiah 9:7)

“So the LORD All-Powerful says, ‘A worker heats metal in a fire to test [to remove the parts that are not wanted in] it and see if it is pure [free from other metals]. I will test the people of Judah like [the same as] that. I have no other choice. My people have sinned’ ” (Jeremiah 9:7, ERV).

“Has God’s Spirit shown you a Bible verse that hurts you because it shows you the sin in your heart? Then you can be sure that there is something in you that God wants to hurt. God wants that part of you to die.”—Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour & Company, Inc., 1963), page 271, adapted.



“ ‘The fire is made very hot so the lead will burn away. But it is impossible [not possible] to make these people pure [free from sin]’ ” (Jeremiah 6:29, NIV).

How do you understand both the Bible verse and the quotation above? How did you feel when God made you free from sin?

Read Jeremiah 9:7–16. In these verses, God says that He will “test [remove the parts that He does not want in the hearts of] the people of Judah” (Jeremiah 9:7, ERV). Look at Jeremiah 9:13, 14 again. Why did God give His people a test? How will God do this work in His people’s lives? For the answer, read Jeremiah 9:15, 16.

When God removes sin from our lives, He often does things that we may not like. These things may cause us pain and suffering. That is why the experience can feel the same as a test. There are at least three reasons why the test may be a painful experience. (1) We feel pain when God allows things to happen in life that show us our sin. Jeremiah writes, “ ‘The fire is made very hot so the lead will burn away. But it is impossible [not possible] to make these people pure [free from sin]. Those [people] who are evil are not removed’ ” (Jeremiah 6:29, NIV). This verse shows us that sometimes God needs to do something big to get our attention. This big thing can often make us feel pain at the time. (2) We feel pain when we feel sorry for our sins. (3) Sometimes change is painful. God may ask us to stop doing things that were a big part of our lives for a long time. We suffer when we stop a bad habit. This change can cause us pain too.

How does God remove sin from your life today?

TESTS THAT HELP US GROW (2 Corinthians 12:7)

“The things God showed me were so great [wonderful]. But to keep me from being too full of pride because of seeing these things, I have been given trouble in my body. It was sent from Satan to hurt me. It keeps me from being proud” (2 Corinthians 12:7, NLV).

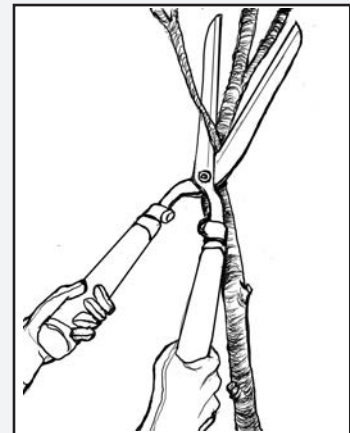
Any gardener will tell you that cutting a plant down is different from trimming the dead parts off the plant. We cut down plants we don't want anymore. We trim plants when we want them to grow. Both tasks involve a sharp knife. When we trim, we cut off the parts of the plant that may look important. Someone who doesn't know much about gardening may think we are destroying the plant! Trimming plants is an excellent word picture for the work God does to help us grow stronger. Bruce Wilkinson writes, “Are you praying for God to bless you? Are you asking Him to make you the same as Jesus?”

“If your answer is yes, then you are asking God to ‘trim’ away from your spiritual life the bad parts. Then you will grow better and stronger as a Christian, the same as a plant does when we cut off the dead leaves and branches.”—*Secrets of the Vine* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001), page 60, adapted.

People often wonder about Paul's “trouble” (2 Corinthians 12:7, NLV). Some people think Paul's enemies hurt him. Other people think Paul had trouble with speaking. But Ellen G. White tells us that Paul had a problem with his eyesight (read Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, page 1107).

What do you think Paul meant when he said, “I have been given trouble in my body” (2 Corinthians 12:7, NLV)? Who gave this trouble to Paul? How did God use this trouble to bless Paul?

Paul says he was given the trouble “to keep me from being too full of pride because of seeing these things” (2 Corinthians 12:7, NLV). God gave Paul this trouble to keep him from sinning in the future. God did not send this trouble to Paul to punish him for his past sin. Paul understood that he was weak. His heart was easily filled with pride. So, God gave Paul this “trouble” to help protect him against a heart filled with pride.



Trimming plants is an excellent word picture for the work God does to help us grow stronger.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “Effectual Prayer,” in *Signs of the Times*, November 18, 1903; Ellen G. White Comments, page 1182, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 4; “God Permits Trial and Affliction to Purify Me,” page 92, in *My Life Today*.

“God knows everything that is in our hearts and minds. God knows who we are better than we know ourselves. God sees that some of us have precious gifts. If we use these gifts in the right way, then we can be a blessing to God in His work on earth. In His wisdom, God allows us to have difficult experiences to show us our weakness and sin. We may have hidden this sin from ourselves. God gives us a chance to correct these hidden problems and to make ourselves ready to be used by Him. Often God allows us to have awful experiences and times of suffering. These hard times help remove sin from our hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 471, adapted.



“God sees that some of us have precious gifts. If we use these gifts in the right way, then we can be a blessing to God in His work on earth.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① We suffer much doubt and fear when we sin. Often, we may ask, “Will I be close to God again? Will He accept me?” What Bible promises give you courage not to give up faith and hope during these difficult times? Read what Paul wrote in Romans 5:1–11. How can these verses help you give hope to someone who is suffering because of his or her past sins?
- ② Maybe you know someone in a difficult time right now. Do you need to know what caused this person’s suffering before you help him? Explain your answer.
- ③ A Christian young man lived in South America. He had a difficult experience and suffered much. After the experience was over, the young man moved to Europe. Later, he told someone, “I left my dead body in South America.” What does this word picture mean? Why must we all leave our “dead selves” behind when we follow Jesus? How do hard times help us do that?
- ④ As a class, plan a trip to a hospital or somewhere that you can help, comfort, and cheer people who suffer.

PART 2: BULLIED AT SCHOOL

Mother worried about her son, Junior. Junior was a cheerful 15-year-old boy most of the time. Then something happened at school, and Junior changed. Junior became angry and mean. Soon Junior decided to sign up for a Capoeira class. Capoeira is an African-Brazilian way of fighting. Mother was very upset at this news.

“Eduardo, I don’t want Junior learning how to fight,” Mother told her husband.

Eduardo said, “I can take Junior to class. His class is near the Candomblé temple where I work.”

Mother said, “Your religion worries me, too. I don’t want my son to fight or go to the temple.”

Father frowned. “Junior told me that some boys bully him at school,” he said. “That’s why he wants to learn to fight.”

The next day, Mother went to pick Junior up from school. While she waited, she told a woman named Dilma about her troubles. Dilma was the mother of Clifferson, who was Junior’s classmate. Mother said, “My son doesn’t have any good friends.”

A few days later, Clifferson invited Junior to play video games at his house. Mother was so happy that Junior found a new friend. So, she agreed to let him go play.

At Clifferson’s house, Junior met several boys playing a sports video game. After a while, Clifferson turned off the game and invited the boys to sing about Jesus. Then the boys opened Bibles and talked about how much Jesus meant to them. Junior asked, “Are you Christians?” Clifferson answered, “Yes. We meet to play sports games and talk about Jesus.”

Junior liked his new friends a lot.

One day, Clifferson’s mother invited Junior to go to church with the family. Soon, Junior stopped going to fighting class.

Mother saw that Junior was excited to leave the house every Saturday. So, she asked Junior what he was doing. Junior showed Mother the Adventist YouTube channel of the church where he went to worship. Mother started watching.

Junior told Mother that a man gave his heart to Jesus and got baptized at church. Junior said, “I want to be baptized.”

A few Sabbaths later, Mother went to church with Junior. She became very afraid for her husband when the Sabbath School teacher read Revelation 21:8. Revelation 21:8 warns that evil people will be punished in the lake of fire.

“That’s what will happen to my husband,” Mother thought. “He will die in the lake of fire.” So, Mother started to pray for Father.

Your 13th Sabbath Offering will help build eight churches in South America. Four of these churches will be built in Brazil, where Father (Eduardo Ferreira dos Santos) and his family live.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



The boys opened Bibles and talked about how much Jesus meant to them.