

Extreme Heat



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 22, Hos. 2:1–12, Job 1:6–2:10, 2 Cor. 11:23–29, Isa. 43:1–7.*

Memory Text: “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand” (*Isaiah 53:10, NKJV*).

As the wife of the famous Christian writer C. S. Lewis was dying, Lewis wrote, “Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not ‘So there’s no God after all,’ but ‘So this is what God’s really like.’”—*A Grief Observed* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1961), pp. 6, 7.

When things become really painful, some of us reject God completely. For others, like Lewis, there is the temptation to change our view of God and imagine all sorts of bad things about Him. The question is, Just how hot can it get? How much heat is God willing to risk putting His people through in order to bring about His ultimate purpose of shaping us into the “image of his Son” (*Rom. 8:29, NIV*)?

The Week at a Glance: Why do you think God is willing to risk being misunderstood by those He wants to know Him and love Him? How much do you think God is willing to be misunderstood in order to mold you into the “image of his Son”?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 30.

Abraham in the Crucible

Read Genesis 22. Out of nowhere and without explanation, God suddenly calls Abraham to offer his own child as a burnt offering. Can you imagine how Abraham must have felt? It was a totally revolting idea that a holy God should request that he sacrifice his own son. Even if Abraham thought that this was acceptable, what about God's promises of an inheritance? Without his son, the promise would be gone.

Why did God ask Abraham to offer this sacrifice? If God knows everything, what was the point?

God's request and its timing were not random. Indeed, it was calculated to exact the deepest possible anguish, for "God had reserved His last, most trying test for Abraham until the burden of years was heavy upon him, and he longed for rest."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 147. Was this the test of a mad God? Not at all, for "the agony which he endured during the dark days of that fearful trial was permitted that he might understand from his own experience something of the greatness of the sacrifice made by the infinite God for man's redemption."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 154.

This was just a test—God never intended for Abraham to kill his son. This highlights something very important about the way God sometimes works. God may ask us to do something that He never intends for us to complete. He may ask us to go somewhere He never intends for us to arrive at. What is important to God is not necessarily the end, but what we learn as we are reshaped by the process.

Jesus may have been thinking about Abraham's experience when He said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (*John 8:56, NIV*). Abraham could have missed out on this insight, dismissing the instructions as from Satan. The key to Abraham's surviving and learning through the whole process was knowing God's voice.

How do you know the voice of God? How do you know when God is talking to you? What are the ways He communicates His will to you?

Wayward Israel

The story of Hosea has some powerful lessons to teach us. Hosea's situation is remarkable. His wife, Gomer, runs away and has children with other men. Though she is sexually unfaithful, God calls Hosea to take his wife back and fully show his love to her again. This story is meant as a parable about God and Israel. The Israelites had left God and were prostituting themselves spiritually to other gods, but God still loved them and wanted to show His love to them. But just look at God's methods!

Read Hosea 2:1–12. What methods does God say He will use to pull Israel back to Himself? What would these experiences have felt like?

Hosea 2:2, 3 _____

Hosea 2:5–7 _____

Hosea 2:8, 9 _____

Hosea 2:10 _____

This story raises two important issues about the way we experience God when He is bringing us to repentance.

First, we risk not recognizing that God is at work. When Israel went through such hard and painful experiences, it might have been hard for them to recognize that their God was working for their salvation. When our path is blocked by sharp thorns or we are walled in so that we don't know where we are going (*Hos. 2:6*)—is this God? When our basic necessities disappear or we are embarrassed (*Hos. 2:9, 10*)—could our Father be in the middle of it all? The truth is that whatever we feel, God is always working to bring us to repentance, because He loves us so very much.

Second, we risk misunderstanding God when He is at work. We may recognize that God is at work, but we don't like what He's doing. While we are feeling hurt and embarrassed, it is easy to blame God for being cruel, for not intervening, or for not caring. But God is always working to renew us through His covenant of love.

Read Hosea 2:14–23. What does this passage reveal about God? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if you have been running from God in any area of your life. If you are convicted that you have been, why wait to go through the crucible? What's stopping you from surrendering all to the Lord now?

Surviving Through Worship

Read Job 1:6–2:10. What caused Job’s suffering?

There is something astonishing here. The angels come to see God, and Satan comes with them. God asks Satan where he has been, and Satan replies that he has been “ ‘roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it’ ” (*Job 1:7, NIV*). Then God poses this question: “ ‘Have you considered my servant Job?’ ” (*Job 1:8, NIV*). The question itself is not remarkable; what is remarkable is the One who asks it. It isn’t Satan who points out Job as a subject for examination—it’s God. Knowing exactly what is going to follow, God calls Job to Satan’s attention. Down on the earth, Job has absolutely no idea how hot his crucible is about to become. And though it’s very clear that it is Satan, not God, who causes Job’s suffering, it also is clear that it is God who gives His explicit permission for Satan to destroy Job’s possessions, children, and his own physical health. If God is giving permission for Job to suffer, what difference does it make whether God or Satan is personally inflicting the suffering? How can God be righteous and holy when He actively allows Satan to cause Job such pain? Is this situation a special case, or is it characteristic of the way God still deals with us today?

In Job 1:20, 21, how does Job respond to the trials?

It is possible to respond to such suffering in two ways. We can become bitter and angry, turning our backs on a God we believe to be cruel or nonexistent, or we can hang on to God more tightly. Job deals with his catastrophe by staying in God’s presence and worshipping Him.

In Job 1:20, 21, we see three aspects of worship that may help when in anguish. First, Job accepts his helplessness and recognizes that he has no claim to anything: “ ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart’ ” (*Job 1:21, NIV*). Second, Job acknowledges that God is still in total control: “ ‘The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away’ ” (*Job 1:21, NIV*). Third, Job concludes by reasserting his belief in the righteousness of God. “ ‘May the name of the LORD be praised’ ” (*Job 1:21, NIV*).

Going through a trial? Follow the steps that Job used. How might they help you, as well?

Surviving Through Hope

“We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:8, 9, NIV).

As God’s chosen apostle, Paul endured more than most people. Yet, Paul was not crushed. Rather, he grew in his praise for God. Read his list of hardships in 2 Corinthians 11:23–29. Now read 2 Corinthians 1:3–11.

In 2 Corinthians 1:4, Paul states that the reason for receiving God’s compassion and comfort is “so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (NIV). To what extent might suffering be a call to ministry? How could we become more alert to this possibility?

God wants to minister through us to hurting people. This means that He may first allow us to experience the same sort of hurts. Then we’ll offer encouragement, not from theory but from our own experience of the compassion and comfort of God. This is a principle from Jesus’ life (see *Heb. 4:15*).

Paul’s vivid descriptions of his hardships are not to make us feel sorry for him. They are for us to know that even when we’re in the depths, the Father still can intervene to bring His compassion and comfort. We may despair even of our own lives, and even be killed, but fear not, God is teaching us to rely on Him. We can trust Him, for our God “raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:9, NIV).

As Paul continues to set his eyes on proclaiming the gospel, he knows that God will rescue him in the future, as well. Paul’s ability to remain firm is supported by three things he mentions in 2 Corinthians 1:10, 11. First, God’s proven track record: “He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us” (2 Cor. 1:10, NIV). Second, Paul’s determination to fix his concentration on God Himself: “On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us” (2 Cor. 1:10, NIV). Third, the saints’ continual intercession: “as you help us by your prayers” (2 Cor. 1:11, NIV).

What can you learn from Paul that can help you keep from falling into self-pity amid your own struggles?

Extreme Heat

So far this quarter, we have considered many examples of the crucibles that God uses to bring purity and Christlikeness to our lives. However, some people may view these examples and conclude that God is a severe and demanding taskmaster. Sure, some may say, “We know that God wants something good for us, but these examples don’t reveal much care and love. Instead, God looks more like a bully. He sets out with a purpose that causes us considerable hard times, and there’s nothing we can do about it.”

It’s true that while living on this sin-filled earth, we will understand only a little of why things happen. In heaven we’ll understand so much more (*1 Cor. 4:5, 1 Cor. 13:12*), but for now, we will have to live with the tension of believing that God is present and cares for us, even though things don’t always feel too good. Isaiah describes this tension very well.

Read Isaiah 43:1–7. In verse 2, God says that His people will pass through waters and through fire. These are figurative of extreme dangers, but perhaps they hint at the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan, both fearful times—but times that paved the way to a new life. You may expect that God might say that He would protect His people from these dangers, that He would guide them along an easier route. But like the Shepherd in Psalm 23, He says, rather, that when the difficult times come, God’s people need not be overwhelmed, for He is with them.

Look back at Isaiah 43:1–7. Write down the different ways in which God assures His people of comfort during the times of water and fire. What picture of God does this paint in your mind? Which promises can you claim for yourself?

We can summarize what we have learned about God’s crucibles in three ways. First, God’s extreme heat is to destroy not us but our sin. Second, God’s extreme heat is not to make us miserable but to make us pure, as we were created to be. Third, God’s care for us through all things is constant and tender—He will never leave us alone, no matter what happens to us.

What do these texts teach you about the actions and character of God? *Ps. 103:13, 14; Matt. 28:20; 1 Cor. 10:13; and 1 Pet. 1:7.* How have you experienced the reality of these verses in your own life?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Test of Faith,” pp. 145–155, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Praise Ye the Lord,” pp. 315–319, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5.

“God has always tried His people in the furnace of affliction. It is in the heat of the furnace that the dross is separated from the true gold of the Christian character. Jesus watches the test; He knows what is needed to purify the precious metal, that it may reflect the radiance of His love. It is by close, testing trials that God disciplines His servants. He sees that some have powers which may be used in the advancement of His work, and He puts these persons upon trial; in His providence He brings them into positions that test their character. . . . He shows them their own weakness, and teaches them to lean upon Him. . . . Thus His object is attained. They are educated, trained, and disciplined, prepared to fulfill the grand purpose for which their powers were given them.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 129, 130.

“If in the providence of God we are called upon to endure trials, let us accept the cross and drink the bitter cup, remembering that it is a Father’s hand that holds it to our lips. Let us trust Him in the darkness as well as in the day. Can we not believe that He will give us everything that is for our good? . . . Even in the night of affliction how can we refuse to lift heart and voice in grateful praise, when we remember the love to us expressed by the cross of Calvary?”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 316.

Discussion Questions:

- ① In class, have someone recount his or her own test of faith that, if not quite as intense as Abraham’s, was still hard enough. What can you learn from that person’s experience, from his or her successes or failures?
- ② Review the last 24 hours of Christ’s life before His crucifixion. What extremes did He face? How did He endure? What principles can we take from His example and apply for ourselves when we are in the midst of our own crucibles?
- ③ Discuss the idea, touched on this week, about how through our own suffering we can minister to others who are suffering. No matter how true it might be, what are some of the problems we might encounter with this idea?
- ④ Ellen G. White wrote above: “Let us trust Him in the darkness as well as in the day.” That’s easier said than done. How can we help each other develop the kind of faith that will enable us to do just that? Why is it important to trust God in the bad times?

Part 5: Crashing a Baptism

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The day of Junior's baptism arrived. Five people, including Junior, were to be baptized at 4:00 P.M. at Alpha Seventh-day Adventist Community Church in Manaus, Brazil. "I won't go," Father said. "Drive me to the temple."

On the way to church, Mother wondered out loud whether Father might still show up in his high priestly robes from the Candomblé temple. "I don't care if Father comes in all his robes," Junior said. "I'll accept him."

At the church, Pastor Ricardo announced that Junior would be baptized first and invited him to share his story as he stood near the baptismal pool. Junior shared how he was bullied at school and his classmate Clifferson had invited him to a video gamers club that sang about Jesus and discussed the Bible. When Junior finished, he waded into the baptismal pool and turned around to look at the congregation. At that moment, Father, wearing his high priestly robes, entered the sanctuary. Mother burst into tears. "He's here," she said. "He said he wouldn't come, but he's here."

Heads turned to look at the back of the hall. Mother prayed silently, and church members familiar with Father's work also prayed. Others stared in amazement at Father's flowing robes. Everyone treated him with respect.

A church deacon stood beside Father, greeting him. "Welcome, Eduardo!" said the deacon, Roberto Fernandez. "We were waiting for you. Come!" He led Father to the baptismal pool, where Junior was waiting to be baptized.

A million thoughts filled Junior's mind. *God planned everything, he thought. No one knew in advance that I would be baptized first, and Father arrived just as I entered the pool. God's plans are perfect!*

Each of the five baptisms was supposed to take 10 minutes, but Junior's lasted an hour. Several friends from the video gamers club stood up to praise God for Junior's decision and to encourage him to be faithful. Pastor Ricardo asked the Pathfinders to sing, and everyone joined in.

As Junior came out of the water, the Pathfinders joyfully waved their yellow scarves. Junior, dripping wet, hugged Father. "Daddy, despite your religion, I love you very much," he said. Looking at the audience, he added, "I thank you for being here. But most of all I thank my father for being here."

Then Father addressed Junior. "Son, I accept your religion because many supernatural things have happened," he said. "I have kept you away from my religion this whole time, and I didn't want you to become involved in any religion. However, I accept your religion because I sense a supernatural energy right now. I only hope that my own path to Jesus isn't painful."

As the family got into the car afterward, Father said, "This is such a nice place, and the people are so nice." He was beaming with joy.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.