

TRIALS

don't resent them as intruders

Juanita Purcell



DEDICATION

To the ladies in the Ladies' Bible Study at Tri County Baptist Church, The Villages, Florida. You graciously allowed me to teach this study to you before it was published.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Trials—Don't Resent Them as Intruders

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Preface

“Everywhere we turn we find hurting people whose lives are filled with disappointment, despair, and doubt. Yes, life is full of trials. Some have more, some have less, but all have some.” I wrote those words in 1991 in the preface of the first Bible study I ever wrote, *Trials—Don’t Resent Them as Intruders*.

Nothing has changed in people’s lives over the past two decades. Everyone is still having trials! However, I have changed as a result of the trials God has allowed in my life. I have some new insight and answers to the four questions that are considered in this study:

- Why does God allow trials?
- How can we handle trials?
- What can we learn from trials?
- How can we have joy in the midst of trials?

As you find the answers to these questions, you will learn to face your trials head on and not run from them; rather, you will learn from them.

I pray that as you study these lessons you will have a new understanding as to why God allows trials. I trust the things you learn will help you to handle your trials and learn what God wants to teach you through the trial. Most of all, I pray you will learn to have joy in the midst of your trials.

—Juanita Purcell

God's Plan of Salvation

Carefully ponder these Scripture verses, as they explain how you can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

God loves you and wants you to enjoy the abundant life He offers you.

- John 3:16—“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”
- John 10:10—Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

Man is sinful, and his sin separates him from God.

- Romans 3:23—“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”
- Romans 6:23—“For the wages of sin is death [spiritual separation from God].”

Jesus Christ's death is the only provision God has made to pay for man's sin.

- Romans 5:8—“But God commendeth [demonstrated] his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”
- John 14:6—“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

You must receive Jesus Christ as your Savior before you can personally experience His love for you and the abundant life He has planned for you.

- John 1:12—“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”

You can invite Christ into your life right now by an act of faith.

- Ephesians 2:8, 9—“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Are you ready to invite Christ into your life to be your Savior? Use the following prayer as a guide to help you express your desire to God: “Lord God, I know I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe Jesus died for my sins. Right now I receive Him as my Savior. Take control of my life, and replace all the restlessness and anxiety with peace and contentment.”

If you have prayed this prayer, tell your Bible study leader or a friend who has been trying to help you.

Learn to trust God’s Word—not your feelings—when doubts come.

- Romans 10:13—“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
- 1 John 5:11–13—“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

PART ONE: WHY DOES GOD ALLOW TRIALS?

L E S S O N 1

Why Trials? To Make Us More like Jesus

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29).

Why did their son end up on drugs?
Why did her husband die?
Why did I get cancer?
Why did Daddy lose his job?

Perhaps as you begin this Bible study, you feel like the lady who wrote these words: “I can’t believe it. I just barely picked up the pieces of my life and felt like I was coming out of the deep pit I’d been in for so long, and now something has happened to make my pit deeper than it has ever been before. Why, God, again? I feel so weak! Couldn’t You wait until I was a little stronger? Couldn’t You wait until a little more joy has come into my life? Couldn’t You wait, God? Did You forget, God? I am one of Your children, and I love You. Why again?”¹

Maybe you’ve asked those same questions. Why? Why? Why? What is the reason Christians hurt so badly? God allows trials in our lives for various reasons.

1. Read Job 5:7. Why should we not be surprised when trials make a sudden intrusion in our lives?

2. Look up each of the following references and discover what God says will happen to true disciples.
Matthew 5:11

John 15:20

Romans 8:17

2 Timothy 3:12

James 1:2, 3

1 Peter 2:21

Romans 8:28 and 29 contain four truths that can fortify and stabilize God's children *when* trials come. Notice I said *when*, not *if*. "My brethren, count it all joy *when* ye fall into divers [various] temptations" (James 1:2; emphasis added). Let's look at these four truths.

Truth # 1: Go with what you know—not what you feel.

3. Read Romans 8:28 and 29.

(a) What are the first three words of verse 28?

(b) What do "we know" about our trials?

4. How can we forget what "we know" when our emotions or feelings take over?

"Just as we must learn to obey God one choice at a time, we must also learn to trust God one circumstance at a time," says Jerry Bridges. "Trusting God is not a matter of my feelings but of my will. I never feel like trusting God when adversity strikes, but I can choose to do so even when I don't feel like it."²

5. List five things you know about God and His nature from these verses.

Psalm 34:8

Psalm 145:17

Jeremiah 31:3

2 Thessalonians 1:5, 6

Hebrews 13:5, 6

6. When trials come, we may tend to doubt the things that we know. Read Isaiah 50:10. What should we do when we seem to be walking in darkness?

7. Read 2 Corinthians 10:3–5. What are we to do with our thoughts?

If we do not bring our thoughts under God's control, then Satan will control them and get a stronghold in our lives. When we dwell on things we can imagine would happen or on negative thoughts that turn our attention away from God, our minds put us in a prison of doubt and fear.

8. How can we replace the negative thoughts? Read Psalm 119:11 and Isaiah 26:3.

We are often tempted to think negatively during what we call “night seasons.” “Night seasons are not just a dry time in our lives, but a Father-filtered period of time where God draws us closer to Himself. It's a time where there is no known sin in our lives, and yet God allows circumstances that darken our understanding, that negate our feelings and that put to confusion all our own plans and purposes. It's a time where He lovingly removes all of our natural and comfortable ‘support systems’ (inside and out) so that He might replace them with total and unshakeable trust in Him.”³

We *know* God's Word is true, so we must feed our minds on it—especially in times when we are tempted to doubt. I have compiled a list

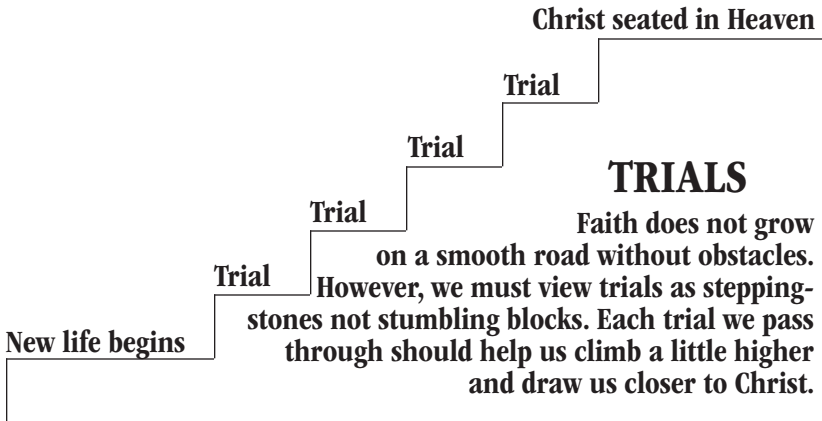
of verses that I call “Why Sink When You Can Swim?” verses (pp. 53, 54). Start memorizing these verses and filling your mind with the positive words of Scripture.

“Sometimes in pain we discount the value of truth by saying, ‘But I only know God’s truth from the neck up; it doesn’t make sense in my heart.’ That’s OK! It’s what you know from the neck up that will enable you to keep your head up. In time, it *will* make sense in your heart. Just don’t let go of the truth.”⁴

Truth #2: Remember that believers are under construction—not finished products.

- 9. How does Philippians 1:6 illustrate the truth that “believers are always under construction”?

- 10. Someone once illustrated the trial of our faith as a staircase to glory. How could this illustration relate to Romans 8:28 and 29?



11. Romans 8:28 says that “all things work together for good.” According to Romans 8:29, is God referring to our material good or our spiritual good?

Seeing what is for our spiritual good is a matter of perspective: “Like street-level parade viewers, we see only one segment of life at a time—a trial now and again, followed by a spiritual refreshing. But God sees the whole parade of life, the beginning and the end and everything in between. . . . Someday, when the parade is over, we will see all of life from His heavenly perspective, and we will exclaim, ‘What a great parade! It couldn’t have been better!’”⁵

Truth #3: Recognize that Romans 8:28 and 29 are for a select group—not for everyone.

12. Does God say “all things work together for good” for *all* people? To whom is the promise directed?

13. Read John 14:23. What is true of a person who loves God?

Truth #4: Understand God’s purpose for us—Christlikeness.

14. What does “called according to his purpose” mean?

As we become like Christ, God causes all things to work together for good. J. C. Brumfield explains: “‘All things work together for good’—not for pleasure, comfort, prosperity, health, or joy, but for good. What is ‘the good’? It is the good of the *soul* rather than the *body*; the good of the *eternal* rather than the *present*.”⁶

15. How do each of the following passages remind us that God is more concerned with our spiritual growth than with our having comfortable lives?

1 Peter 1:6, 7

Psalm 119:71

2 Corinthians 12:7–10

16. Trials should produce spiritual growth and cause us to draw closer to Christ. How do we gain the strength we need for times of trial? Read Philippians 4:13.

17. What has God been doing in your life to draw you closer to Him?

Let's review the four truths from Romans 8:28 and 29:

Truth #1: Go with what you know—not what you feel.

Truth #2: Remember that believers are under construction—not finished products.

Truth #3: Recognize that Romans 8:28 and 29 are for a select group—not for everyone.

Truth #4: Understand God's purpose for us—Christlikeness.

FROM MY HEART

You may be studying Romans 8:28 and 29 for the first time. You may have known Romans 8:28 but never really understood that verse 28 is incomplete without verse 29.

I remember well when Romans 8:28 and 29 became real in my life. I had been teaching a ladies' Bible study, and the theme was about becoming more like Jesus. Romans 8:28 and 29 were woven into several lessons. I began to realize that God allows all the good and all the bad in our lives

for one ultimate purpose: to make us more like Jesus.

We started this lesson with the question, Why does God allow trials? I am learning more and more that trials are custom-made by God to draw us closer to Him and make us more like His Son, Jesus Christ. So the next time I am in the midst of a trial and I began to think, “What good can ever come out of this mess?” I need to remind myself, “The only good I may ever see is that it helps me to grow spiritually and to become more like Jesus.” Since that is God’s ultimate goal for my life, I made it my number-one goal many years ago. However, time after time I have had to remind myself of that goal so I can stay on course in my journey toward Christlikeness. My heart is saying what Ruth Harms Calkin has written:

*Change me, God
Please change me.
Though I cringe
Kick
Resist and resent
Pay no attention to me whatever.
When I run and hide
Drag me out of my safe little shelter.
Change me totally
Whatever it takes
However long You must work at the job.
Change me—and save me
From spiritual self-destruction.⁷*

FROM YOUR HEART

Think about this lesson. How did God speak to your heart? What experience stands out in your mind as one God has used for your spiritual growth to draw you closer to Him? Was the pain worth the gain? Why?

Notes

1. Donna Carlson, personal writing (The Villages, FL)—edited for use in this book.
2. Jerry Bridges, “Is God in Control?” *Spirit of Revival* (Buchanan, MI: Life Action Ministries, March 2002), 9.
3. Nancy Missler, *Faith in the Night Seasons—Personal Application Workbook* (Coeur d’Alene, ID: Koinonia House, 2000), 9.
4. Joseph M. Stowell, *Through the Fire* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 45.
5. James T. Dyet, *How to Handle Life’s Hurts* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 2005), 33, 34.
6. J. C. Brumfield, *Comfort for Troubled Christians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1961), 46.
7. Ruth Harms Calkin, *Lord, I Keep Running Back to You* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1979), 46.