



The Gift of Trials—Part 3
Building Godly Character
From Sermon 12.20.20

Read *Philippians 2:5* & *James 1:2-3*

Review from Sunday's sermon: One scripture reveals God's will for my life: Christ-likeness. The other reveals one way He accomplishes that plan: trials. Although our trials are not fun, can hurt greatly, and make us doubt, they can also be viewed as a gift = God shaping me into a faithful child/servant. Christian discipleship is never one-and-done. It's a lifelong process of looking more and more like Jesus. God will use trials in my life both to test and produce my character.

1. What were the two analogies/word pictures, from Scripture, that explain God's shaping process? Pruning & refining.

2. What was the challenging truth about pruning that explains some of the loss trials bring? Pruning isn't just about removing the bad/diseased/unproductive. Many times God cuts off otherwise good/strong branches to allow for the best later on.

3. Although not exactly using the same language, Paul has a great example of "removing good" to allow for the best. Read and Discuss *Philippians 3:4-10*. [Also: My "home improvement show" illustration]

4. Is this the only agricultural word picture presented in the Bible? Not at all. Jesus used them all the time. Consider these others as well and how they tie-in to trials: *Galatians 5:22-23* & *Hebrews 12:7-11* (NIV) [requires planting, watering, feeding, weeding, pruning, & harvesting]

5. What is the process of refining and how does it illustrate God shaping the Christian? [Explain the process. Heating, melting (test), impurities, skimming, pouring, hammering, reheating...]
See also *Psalms 66:10* & *Zechariah 13:9*, & *1 Peter 1:1-6*

[Important Note: 1) If the process doesn't fully result in God's purpose, He loves me enough to send me thru it again. 2) Even once a quality (fruit) is achieved, He sends me thru a new one to accomplish new goals/the next Christ-like character.]

6. Read *Luke 2:8-20*. What was the trial of the Shepherds? God just invades their quiet lives. Angels show up and speak to them = they were scared to death. Confusion must have set in about a King born in their town and why God would reveal that to them.

6a. But, what was the Result of the Shepherds trial? The privilege of seeing Jesus Christ and being, forever, a part of the Christmas story. Even after this brief trial and encounter with Jesus, they were transformed from merely shepherds into missionaries.

7. List some of trials you have faced this year (perhaps you're still going through them). How could each be part of God's pruning process? How could they be some refining God is doing in your life and walk? What can you do to better cooperate with God's character building process?