

TESTED BY FIRE

To close 2020, our Chief Apostle has given the thought ***trials of faith*** for us to consider, using a verse from the first chapter of 1 Peter:

> *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is* ***tested by fire****, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*
>
> **1 Peter 1:6-7**

A trial can be defined as a test of faith, patience, or endurance through suffering or temptation. How has your faith been put to trial this year? What does it mean to be *tested by fire*, as mentioned in the Bible verse above? This term comes from the process of *refining*.

In metalworking, refining is the process of purifying a tainted metal through the use of heat. The final material is chemically identical to the original, only it is purer. Many times in the Bible, God is referred to as our Refiner, allowing trials and suffering in order to bring us closer to Him and His Son. Today, we'll explore this analogy to help us understand why God uses this refining process with us.

> *For You, O God, have tested us;* ***You have refined us*** *as silver is refined.*
>
> **Psalm 66:10**

THE REFINER BREAKS UP THE NATURAL ORE.

In biblical times, the refiner began by breaking up rough ore into small pieces. The ore was made up of minerals such as tin, copper, and zinc, but could also include gold or silver; this step was meant to expose those precious metals to the fire. Have you ever felt broken or fractured? What part of your character could God have been exposing? What precious gifts might be hidden under the surface?



THE REFINER THEN PLACES THE ORE INTO A CRUCIBLE AND PLACES IT IN THE FURNACE.

A crucible is a fireproof melting pot able to withstand extreme heat. After the ore is placed into the crucible, together they are put into a furnace and heated to the temperature where the silver begins to separate from other metals that would mar its quality. Proverbs 17:3 says;

> *The* ***crucible*** *for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart.*

The psalms often describe circumstances that leave the nation of Israel hopelessly struggling and helplessly in need of God, such as our beginning verse from Psalm 66:

> *For You, O God, have tested us; You have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; You laid a crushing burden on our backs... We went through fire and through water, yet You have brought us out to a place of abundance.*
>
> **Psalm 66:10-12 ESV**

Throughout its history, Israel, the nation chosen by God, repeatedly rebelled against Him. They were often overtaken by their enemies and suffering through these trials, would cry out to God for deliverance. When they turned to Him, instead of relying on themselves or foreign gods to sustain them, He came to their rescue.

As the crucible is heated, and the ore melts, the "dross" or impurities rise to the surface and are removed by the refiner. When God allowed the Israelites to live through suffering and trials, their sins rose to the surface. What dross in our hearts is God trying to separate and remove through our trials?

It's important to note that the crucible has a higher melting point and so is not affected by the heat of the fire. The ore, though it is melted by the heat, is never touched by the fire because it is held by the crucible. So it is with us: *God holds us*, and though we are affected by the heat of the fire, we are never burned.



THE REFINER RAISES THE TEMPERATURE TO A HIGHER DEGREE AND CONTINUES TO REMOVE IMPURITIES.

After the refiner skims off the dross, the heat is turned up and the crucible is put back into the furnace. Psalms tells us that this could be repeated, even up to seven times;

> *The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth,* ***purified seven times.***
>
> **Psalm 12:6**

As more impurities are skimmed off, the silver or gold is left more gleaming and precious than before. To check progress, the refiner looks for his own reflection on the surface of the silver. The more impurities that are removed, the less distorted the reflection.

Our Chief Apostle recently defined "blessing" as a gift or favor from God that brings us closer to Him. From this perspective, we understand that blessing could be *increase* in our lives or *decrease*. As we are put into the fire of suffering, and sin is exposed and skimmed away, our reflection of Christ becomes more evident and less distorted. This means that sometimes we must decrease. In the fire, in suffering, we begin to recognize what is valuable, and what we must cast off. Perhaps we have experienced this in different ways over the past year, realizing the true value of relationships, family, presence, hope, acceptance, and trust. Other things have been lost in the meantime; experiences we thought we would have, material wealth, perhaps we have given up opinions or priorities. But what have we gained? Clarity in what is important, purpose in our lives, stronger faith in God, and more love for those around us. When we are required to forgive, even in the face of injustice, we reflect Christ. When we are required to show compassion, to put others before ourselves, we reflect Christ. And ultimately, when a circumstance requires us to yield our will and trust God, we reflect Christ.

Just as the silver and gold requires many degrees of testing by the heat, so we are also tested many times in our lives. When we look at the life of Peter, we see that he endured many tests and trials, most notably his denial of Christ. Through the stories in the Bible, we know Peter at times seemed arrogant, judgmental, and prejudiced, and it wasn't easy for him to gain victory over these sins. Peter had to endure the fire to be refined and transformed. And through these trials, we see Christ extending grace, forgiveness, and restoration. As Martin Luther so beautifully wrote in the familiar hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is our God:*

> *Did we in our own strength confide,*
> *our striving would be losing;*
>
> *Were not the right Man on our side,*
> *the Man of God's own choosing…*



Alone, we do not have the strength to gain victory over our suffering and trials, but with Christ, we can endure. Just as God waited for the Israelites to come to Him for deliverance, He waits for us to turn to Him and put our trust in His plan for us. In Corinthians we read;

> *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; **but God is faithful**, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 10:13**



THE PROCESS OF REFINEMENT IS COMPLETED ONLY WHEN THE REFINER SEES A CLEAR REFLECTION OF HIMSELF.

Our trials and suffering give us hope. We are in God's hands! He is drawing us closer to Him, forming us to be like His Son, and His work will bring us through, to the *place of abundance*. His faithfulness to us, even when we're unfaithful, is reason to praise Him. And this is precisely the psalmist's response:

> *Blessed be God, who has not turned aside my prayer, or His loyal love from me.*
>
> **Psalm 66:20**

Through our refinement, in the heat of our sufferings and trials, we are taken through a process that brings us closer to God and makes us more wholly devoted to Him.

- KAH