

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

November 10 & 11 '07

"True Identity - Find It, Live It" Series

This Week's Message: "Tested By Fire"

Pastor Mark Burch

Job 2:10 *"Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"*

Isaiah 48:10 *"See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction."*

Often the greatest times of spiritual growth, come as the result of suffering and pain. We don't like to think of hardship as a gift from God, but sometimes, God's greatest gifts to us, come in the form of "subtractions" instead of "additions." We grow on the valley floor... suffering drives us deep. The authentic faith – is one that has been tested by fire, and proven powerful and rich.

In our day of "easy-believism" when we expect only good from the hand of God, perhaps the greatest challenge to our faith and to our spiritual maturity is when the storms of life begin to howl. Finding Jesus in the midst of the storm and being able to praise Him despite our pain is one of the critical steps on the journey toward Spiritual Maturity.

We might not at first consider these trials as "gifts" but these "severe gifts" may be the catalyst for incredible spiritual growth if we will lean into God's purpose in them.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Talk about times in your life you were "tried by fire." How did these dark valleys strengthen your faith in God?
2. Has anyone in your group visited a persecuted people group? Let them share a quick story.
3. As you look back over the highs & lows of your life, how would you evaluate your spiritual growth? Do we grow more in times of peace or in times of trial? Why?

Digging Deeper (Looking to the Bible)

4. Take time to read Job 1. Also read Job 2:9-10. Talk about how we respond to 2:10 in our Christian world today. Why do we struggle accepting trials from God?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18. Why would God make us fragile clay pots instead of something stronger? What perspective allows us to endure present sufferings?
6. Read 2 Cor 11:16-30 & 12:9-10. Add to this discussion Philippians 4:11-13. Paul seems to be able to accept great blessings AND great trials as equally coming from the hand of God. Why do we lack this perspective?
7. "Severe gifts" are those that are painful at the time – but later have a positive effect. Read James 1:2-4 & 2 Timothy 1:7-12. What do these passages teach us?
8. Some might consider singleness a curse; but 1 Cor 7:7 & 32-35 talks of the benefit of this gift. How have you seen this lived out in the lives of godly singles?
9. The Bible is full of stories of godly men and women who endured severe suffering. Church history as well. So how can we today come to a better understanding and practice of suffering? Why are we so often like the "rocky soil" of Matthew 13:20-21? Why do we so quickly fall away?
10. As you move toward your prayer time – read 1 Peter 4:12-19 and think of the many Christians today who are carrying a heavy weight of persecution. How should we use our freedom – while we have it?

Taking It Home (Application)

11. Spend some time praying for the persecuted church. Thank God for the freedom we enjoy in the West and ask Him for the passion to exploit every opportunity we have.
12. Pray for the growth of the church in our region – the many unreached communities, towns, neighborhoods. Pray that God would raise up workers for each community.
13. Pray for one another – especially those who are facing a "trial by fire" at this point in time...pray for God's healing, for His strength, and for the perseverance to endure.