

# *Does God Send Troubles to Build Our Character?*

From: In Defense of My Father:  
Toward a Better Understanding of the Sovereignty of God  
Part of Chapter 7 “Addressing Misconceptions”  
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## **Misconception> “God sends troubles into our lives to build character.”**

It is understandable that people believe the above statement because many passages have been misinterpreted to come to that conclusion. So, let us briefly look at the principal ones.

### ***Romans 5:3-4***

*And not only that, but we also glory (rejoice) in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> and perseverance, character; and character, hope.*

First, all people on planet earth experience tribulation (trouble, pressure). Unlike unbelievers who do not have God to help them, believers can rejoice. God has made this a feature in His kingdom—a provision of the New Covenant. For us, tribulation produces perseverance (patience, cheerful endurance), and this results in character (experience) which produces hope. One way to state this is that while tribulation might make an unbeliever bitter, it makes us better because all things work together for our good.

The above verses do not say that God is *sending* or *allowing* tribulations to build character. They are a fact of living on this earth. Nor does it say, as we have heard spoken so many times from the pulpit, that we should ask God for difficulties so that we may grow. This is nowhere written in scripture. There is no need to ask for trouble because in this world we will have it. Is your life free from trouble currently? Then rejoice and be glad. But even when life isn't as cheery as we might prefer, we may rejoice and be glad.

### ***John 16:33***

*“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”*

Jesus has overcome the world, and we are seated with Him in the heavenly places. Therefore, we can rejoice.

It is important to be reminded that persecution for our faith was predicted by Jesus and promised to all His followers.

### **2 Timothy 3:12**

*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

God isn't sending the persecutions either. When we desire to live godly lives, persecution will come. However, just as we can rejoice when we face troubles in this life, so we can rejoice when persecuted.

### **Matthew 5:10-12**

*"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

"Blessed" means supremely blessed, happy. "Rejoice" means to be of good cheer. "Be exceedingly glad" means to jump for joy. Persecution can be intense. Besides the fact that one is being falsely accused, there can be a sense of one's life being at risk. Feeling blessed, rejoicing, and jumping for joy does not seem like the logical response to persecution. If you've ever experienced it, you will agree.

### **Acts 5:40-42**

*When they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. <sup>41</sup> So they departed from the presence of the council, **rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.** <sup>42</sup> And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

What a beautiful demonstration of Christians rejoicing during persecution. Notice also that they ignored the threats to not speak in the name of Jesus Christ and instead continued to do so in the temple and from house to house.

Here is another passage often incorrectly used to conclude that God sends trials to build our character.

### **James 1:2-4**

*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials (temptations), <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith*

*produces patience. <sup>4</sup> But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

This passage is referring to the fact that Christians also face temptations. Jesus told His disciples to pray, “And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” Why would He tell us to pray this if temptations were good for us?

Jesus did not mean that God tempts/tests us with evil because James also wrote:

***James 1:13***

*Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.*

We will be tempted, but not by God, and we are wise to pray that we will not be tempted and instead be delivered from evil. When we are tempted, we do not fear. We count it all joy knowing that our faith in Christ will prevail and that this process results in our maturity—for our good.

In speaking of temptation, let us now bring to light another passage that is commonly misinterpreted. It has caused many a believer to suffer needlessly by causing them to believe that God is allowing suffering in their lives.

***1 Corinthians 10:13***

*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.*

This verse has been used to say that God “allows” us to suffer but He knows what we can handle and won’t allow us to suffer beyond what we can bear. It has often been said, “God must know you are a strong Christian for Him to allow this calamity in your life.” This is usually meant as a compliment and an encouragement.

But let us not ignore the context of this verse which is the temptation to do **evil**. Consider the entire chapter. It is not talking about the trials we face in life. It is talking about being tempted to sin. Believers are tempted just like anyone. Jesus was tempted to do evil, but He did not succumb. In Romans 6 we read that sin no longer has dominion over us because we are not under law but grace (Rom. 6:14).

We are all tempted to do evil, but this passage is declaring that God will not allow us to be tempted above our ability to resist. He will make a

way of escape so that we can bear (endure) it. We will easily be able to resist temptation—even the temptation to complain.

Speaking of complaining, let us look at this passage again.

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

*Rejoice always,<sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing,<sup>18</sup> **in everything give thanks**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

Being able to rejoice during hard times, persecution, and even when being tempted to sin is a glorious aspect of this New Covenant. We are instructed to give thanks in everything. Notice that verse 18 says to give thanks **IN** everything not **FOR** everything.

We do not thank God for evil. He is not the author of it, nor does He send evil to test us. We will be tempted. We will suffer persecution. We will experience trials, but we are also told to resist the devil and stand in the promises of God.

In all these things we rejoice because He has set us free to believe in Him. We don't give thanks when evil takes place. We resist evil. When we understand that God does not send these things, we are better able to turn to Him for comfort when they occur—to resist the enemy and believe in God. In this way, we rejoice.

Another misconception is that God tests us to see if we will remain faithful.

**James 1:12**

*Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been **approved**, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

Notice the word “approved” above. In the KJV, the word that is used is “tried.” For a long time, this was thought to mean that God tried our hearts through temptation and trials to see if we would remain faithful during them. But the word “tried” is better translated as “approved” as above. Trials, temptations, and troubles come. We joyfully endure them. This demonstrates that our faith is approved by God, not that the approval is ever put into question.

God knows what is in our hearts!

He doesn't need to put us through trials to figure that out.

Rather when we experience trials, temptations, and persecutions as a result of living on earth and being believers, we turn to Him for help and rejoice knowing that even these things result in praise to God and demonstrate His approval of our faith.

### **1 Peter 1:6**

*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,<sup>7</sup> 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.*

The KJV reads, “that the *trying* of your faith,” but it is better translated as “trustworthiness of your faith.” Again, God knows our faith. When we are tested, our faith is proven in the sense that it demonstrates, as the NKJV says above, the “genuineness” of our faith. Even though our faith is tested, again, not by God, it will prove to be genuine and give praise, honor, and glory to Jesus. Let’s look at this verse again.

### **James 1:12**

*Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been **approved** (KJV uses “tried”), he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

To whom is the crown of life is promised? Without taking a closer look at what the text actually says, we often reply, “The crown is promised to those who endure temptation,” but that is incorrect. It is promised “to those who love Him.” Those who love Him, all of those who believe in Him, will endure and we will do so rejoicing. All of us who love God will receive the crown of life.

It is apparent that we will go through trials, tribulation, temptation, and persecution in this life, but God is not the author of them nor is He “allowing” them to bring about good in our lives. They will bring about good in our lives, but He isn’t sending us troubles to bring about good. For those who believe in Him, those who love Him, He has provided the provision we need to find help in time of need through the victory of the cross and the benefits of the New Covenant.

These times in life are difficult enough without having the incorrect belief that God is sending them—that He is in a subtle way, against us. If we believe God is the author of these, it makes those experiences even worse. Instead, we rejoice in them all knowing that our God is for us, not against us.

### **Hebrews 4:14-16**

*Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a High*

*Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us therefore come boldly (assuredly, confidently, openly) to the throne of **grace**, that we may obtain **mercy** and find **grace** to help in time of need.*