



**MEN**<sup>WITH</sup>  
**STRENGTHENED**  
**HANDS**

# Strengthened Through Providential Trials

**MEN**<sup>WITH</sup>  
STRENGTHENED  
HANDS

# God decrees afflictions.

- "If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?" (Amos 3:6).
- "I am the Lord, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating disaster; I am the Lord who does all these" (Isa. 45:6-7).

# God decrees afflictions.

Providence is "that continued exercise of the divine energy whereby the Creator preserves all his creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end" (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, BoT, 1958, 1998, p. 166).

He "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11).

# Six biblical reasons why:

**1. Sometimes an affliction is God's bringing retributive justice on the wicked.**

"Thus says the Lord, For three transgressions of Tyre and for four I will not revoke its punishment, because they delivered up an entire population to Edom and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood. So I will send fire upon the wall of Tyre, and it will consume her citadels" (Amos 1:9, 10).

# Six biblical reasons why:

**2. God allows His servants to suffer afflictions in order to promote the gospel.**

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (Col. 1:24).

# Six biblical reasons why:

**3. God allows believers to suffer afflictions in order to demonstrate their integrity, or to vindicate His approval of them.**

“You have been distressed by various trials so that the proof [or genuineness] of your faith ... may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:6, 7). See also Job 1-2; 2 Thess. 1:5.

# Six biblical reasons why:

## **4. God allows afflictions in order to strengthen a believer's character.**

"Consider it all joy ... when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.... so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:1-4). See also Romans 5:3, 4.



# Six biblical reasons why:

**5. God allows afflictions in order to chasten us to bring about righteousness.**

“He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:10, 11).

# Six biblical reasons why:

Hebrews speaks of the very same strengthening of character that James is talking about in James 1, but Hebrews adds the word *chastening*, or *discipline*, to underscore that we are deficient and need correction and training. **God is kind to chasten us. He is working on us, like a kind father, for our good.**

# Six biblical reasons why:

**6. God allows afflictions in order to manifest His power more clearly.**

“There was given me a thorn in the flesh ... to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness’ (2 Cor. 12: 7-9) See also 2 Corinthians 4.

# Six biblical reasons why:

But God's power is already perfect. So what did the Lord mean by "[my] power is made perfect in weakness?" Clearly, He didn't mean that His power needs some improvement objectively! He means subjectively, in our minds. I.e., "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in your eyes when you are weak. Otherwise you might start thinking much of yourself."

# Strengthened through trials

The heart of a man tends to rest in his circumstances, abilities, and resources rather than the God who gives them. We foolishly tend to trust God's gifts, not God the giver.

# Strengthened through trials

"Thus says the Lord, 'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the Lord" (Jer. 9:23, 24).

# Strengthened through trials

The heart of man is always seeking to assure itself based on some factor it thinks of as stabilizing. Then our heart glories in that factor. The question is: what is it? **What are you placing confidence in?**

# Strengthened through trials

**Boasting in wisdom.** i.e., strategies for success or confidence in self. Israel made alliances with foreign nations when God said not to do so. People always tend to lean on their own understanding, "darkening counsel without knowledge," as God himself put it when speaking to Job. *Examples:* "I'm a pretty resourceful guy! I'll figure this out." "I always trust my instincts; they never lead me wrong."



# Strengthened through trials

**Boasting in might:** *Examples:* "I can endure this. I can get knocked down a hundred times and get back up. I can outlast this."

**Boasting in riches:** *Examples:* "We have plenty of income. We have social security. The stock market won't crash again like it did in 1929. I worked really hard to save all my money. We live in the wealthiest nation on earth."

# Strengthened through trials

You could add all sorts of things to the list: parents, friends, connections, the cult of personality, a stable society, military might. The list of potential idols goes on and on. "Man's nature ... is a perpetual factory of idols" (Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11.8).

# Strengthened through trials

Trials shatter the idols. Trials make a man weaker, not stronger. They shatter our strategies. Our thoughts are blown up over and over till we fear we can no longer arrange the pieces back into a semblance of order. Our strength lessens. There's a mountain of work, and less energy to do it now. Our money is lost, or it loses its purchasing power.

# Strengthened through trials

Trials show us the rotten props we tend to trust in. Trials get us to stop relying on them and get us to boast in God as He directs in Jeremiah 9. Trials are God's kindnesses to us, for they move us in the direction of faith in God, and the life that comes with it, rather than in the other direction—Carnal security and the death that comes with it.

# Strengthened through trials

See the verses immediately before Jeremiah 9:23. Hardly a more horrifying picture can be imagined. All that death was visiting Israel because the people wouldn't fear God and trust Him. **This death is what trials help you avoid.** God's true people are chastened, because they tend to be earthly minded, and God intends to develop life and fruitfulness.

# Strengthened through trials

The hearts of Christian people continually need to have their rotten props demolished. We are always tempted to stabilize ourselves (to boast in) other things, rather than God. **A strengthened grip on God is worth the trial that produced it.** That is how we are strengthened through providential trials.

# Strengthened through trials

“Men are not stripped of all glory so that they’ll lie down in disgrace but so they will seek a better glory” (Calvin, on Jeremiah 9:23, 24).

If you find yourself more earnest in seeking God through Christ because of hardship, you’ve been strengthened by trials.

# Strengthened through trials

“Be content, ye are his wheat growing in our Lord’s field. And if wheat, ye must go under our Lord’s threshing instrument ... through his mill to be bruised, as the Prince of your salvation, Jesus was, that ye may be found good bread in your Lord’s house” (Samuel Rutherford, *The Loveliness of Christ*, 84)