

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, March 29, 2017 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



HANDLING HOUNDING HOUNDS
Biblical Help for What Hounds Us

“The Hounding Problem of Tests and Trials”
Various Scripture

G.K. Chesterton, an English-born journalist and Christian author, once stated, “Christianity has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult, and not tried.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What do you think he means by that statement? Why must Christians be “tried”? _____

Tempted and tried, we're oft made to wonder why it should be thus all the day long;
While there are others living about us, never molested, though in the wrong.

*(CHORUS) Farther along we'll know more about it, farther along we'll understand why;
Cheer up, my brother, live in the sunshine, we'll understand it all by and by.*

Tempted and tried, how often we question why we must suffer year after year,
Being accused by those of our loved ones, even though we've walked in God's holy fear.

Often when death has taken our loved ones, leaving our home so lonely and drear,
Then do we wonder why others prosper, living so wicked year after year.

“Faithful till death,” says our loving Master; short is our time to labor and wait;
Then will our toiling seem to be nothing, when we shall pass the heavenly gate.

-“Farther Along” by W.B. Stevens

2 Pressing Questions from the song “Farther Along”: Here are some of the questions the song leaves us pondering:

- (1) Why are we constantly tempted and tried?**
- (2) Why do the wicked seem to prosper and the righteous suffer?**

3 Truths About this World we live in: (based on John 16:33)

- (1) Jesus desires us to experience a “peace” in this world -
- (2) Jesus warns us that in this world we will have trials and tribulations -
- (3) Jesus reminds us that He has overcome the world and we can take heart in that – Why?

3 Truths About the “Evil One”: (based on John 17:15-19)

- (1) It tell us that the “evil one” is a real presence in this life -
- (2) It tell us that we need “protection” from the “evil one” in this life -
- (3) Implied, it tell us that the “evil one” is out to destroy believers (Christians) –

Here is what James, the half-brother of Jesus, said about trials in James 1:2-4: *“Consider it pure joy, my brother (and sisters) whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” –James 1:2-4 (NIV)*

Although it sounds absurd or perhaps at least a little sarcastic to say that the problem of hounding “trials” in our life should ever be counted a “joy”, we have discovered that maturing in our faith and finding a complete (or whole, full, mature) faith includes times of trial... sometimes great trial... sometimes trials that seem to hound and confound us on some level. Without them we may never really develop... and nobody, it seems, ever escapes the process. We simply cannot become the people God intends us to be without some headaches and heartaches along the way... some bumps along the road. So when troubles and hardships come... trials hound us we can do a couple of things with it:

2 Possible Responses to the Hounding Problem of Trials:

1. **Negative response... we can respond by becoming hardened** – Often when “trial of many kinds” (as James calls it) come our way, whatever that trial may be (failure, loss, discouragement, heartache, disappointment), it often throws us so off guard... we are so unprepared, that it knocks the wind out of our sails. It may leave us reeling, perhaps hurting so deeply or so confused and bewildered that we find ourselves growing angry... sometimes even mad. We get mad at God, mad at the world and mad at others. We can lash out and allow our pains and disappointments in life to literally harden and callous our spirit. We may grow bitter toward God for apparently allowing this to happen to us.
2. **Positive response... we can respond by becoming heartened** – The word “hearten” means to give strength, courage, or hope to, to encourage. Our trials truly do hardend us ro hearten us. That is essentially what James says. He is telling us that for a believer, the trial we experience in this life can actually serve to enable our faith to be heartened, full of hope and encouragement as we mature us and grow in the faith. So. Trials actually do “hearten” us causing us to draw closer to God than we have ever been in greater dependence and reliance on Him.

So the question is how do I develop a heartened, mature, faith rather than become hardened, wilt and die in despair and bitterness when I’m hurting or going through a very trying and hounding times? How do I turn moments of struggle, and hardship, and difficulty into opportunities to develop my faith? James mentions *“trials of many kinds”* which may also be translated as

“many kind of trials” and, let’s face it, there are many kinds of trial that we face in this life. We have talked about a few of these in the past few weeks of this study.

Where We Have Been:

- 1. The trial of waiting**
- 2. The trial of failure**
- 3. The trial of discouragement**
- 4. The trial of fear**
- 5. The trial of doubt**
- 6. The trial of loss**
- 7. The trial of temptation**

The Christian life is an overcoming life. Even though we will definitely have problems and personal struggles in this life (trials of many kinds), we will be able to overcome because of Jesus. Because of Him, we have victory over the world, including sinful habits, bitterness, loneliness, guilt, fear, and discouragement. God desires for you to live an overcoming life! Jesus, Himself, said in John 16:33, “*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*” And in 1 John 5:4-5, “*For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*” Christians are overcomers and truly are to live victorious Christian lives every day, but let’s be honest, there are many trial and struggles, heartaches and difficulties along that way that can daily steal our joy and paralyze our faith, destroy our relationship and weaken our walk... trials of many kinds that can embitter and defeat us if we let them.

"A gem is not polished without rubbing, nor a man made better without trials."
– Chinese Proverb

Sure it doesn't feel good to go through abrasive moments of trials and struggles. Sometimes they are recurring. Remember this, life is full of rubbing shoulders and exchanging words. Every time life would seem to cut you and grind you, it means God is working in you to make you a better you.

Life really is marked by problems... struggles... hardships... trials. We all have them. No one is immune to them... not even Christians. Some are major, most are perhaps minor... some linger... many can be resolved about as quickly as they appear. When we are in the midst of a trying time... a trial, they can all seem major at the time, and life impacting in some ways. No trial is easy at the time, otherwise it wouldn't be called a “trial.” In the process of growth toward maturity in our Christian lives, trials do actually play an essential role as we have seen. Trials put faith on the line, it may cause us to grow and mature in our faith walk, and it can actually create a greater reliance on the one who can truly handle the problems, and struggles and trials in our lives and cause us to grow closer to Him than we have ever been. This is especially true when a trial is especially challenging. In closing out our study on “The Magnificent Joy of Trials” there is no better help to be given for facing the trials in life that are sure to come than to point us to the One who can provide help and answers to our trial-prone lives.

I. A FRESH REMINDER ABOUT TESTS AND TRIALS THAT MAY HOUND US

It is important to be reminded about a few facts about the hounding tests and trials that may impact our life. We need to lay some ground work of our discussion on trials... make some important statements about trial and the Christian life especially. These are very important in clarifying both our perspective about trials as Christians and our maintaining a healthy spiritual approach in dealing with the very real and certain trials we will face in this life.

4 Initial Clarify Statements About Trials:

1. **It is incorrect to think that because one is a Christian, he or she will never face any trials or that all his or her trials will automatically be solved.**
2. **It is incorrect to say that all trials are specifically (exactly, explicitly) discussed in the Bible.**
3. **It is incorrect to believe that having a problem means one is unspiritual.**
4. **It is incorrect to assume that being exposed to Bible teaching (or being a Christian) automatically immunizes and inoculates one from trials in this life.**

II. A BIBLICAL APPRISAL ABOUT TESTS AND TRIALS THAT MAY HOUND US

The words of Paul in **2 Corinthians 4:8-9** reveal four levels of the reality of the trials that we “will” face... that will hound us in this life. Paul doesn’t imply that these things might happen, he assumes they will. He is the way he expresses it, *“⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”* The King James says it like this, *“⁸ We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.”* When James speaks of “trials of many kinds” in James 1:2-4 he is acknowledging not only that there are all kinds of trials we may face in this life, but also the varying degrees and levels of intensity of those trials. The levels of trials in this life are indicated by four terms.

4 Levels of Trials:

- (1) **Troubles – “daily struggles, trials”** The NIV calls these being “hard pressed.” Other translations use the word “afflictions.” This is the actually the slightest level of trials. It is mild or moderate, none the less a real trial. The Greek word Paul uses is the one from which we get our word “pressure.” This type of trials is closely related to stress that comes from people, deadlines, interruptions, and delays. It is easily forgotten, but it attacks us on a daily basis. Daily trials!
- (2) **Perplexities – “without a way”** This indicates a level of trial which is more intense than the former daily grind trials we face.. It is also less often experienced, therefore perhaps a little harder to deal with. The Greek term translated here means “without a way” and conveys the idea of not knowing where to go or to whom we can turn. This kind of trial would include not knowing how to handle the situation that may include unfair treatment from people or circumstances.
- (3) **Persecutions – “tormenting problems”** This is an extreme level of trial. It can be either emotional or physical. This form of trial carries with it intense irritation and

stress that has affected us on the deepest painful levels and it does not pass quickly, but is tormenting. This is a level of trial that extremely difficult to handle and sometimes cause one to lose hope or abandon all hope.

- (4) **Destructions** – “**loss**” This is the ultimate in trial, maximum stress is felt and experienced. It can include the loss of someone or something near and dear to us; a spouse to divorce, a mate, child or friend to death; something you consider valuable; a dream. This is a trial that we experience that may feel very final and hopeless. It may feel as if there is really no way out of it but to accept it!

Now notice, once again that Paul does not deny the reality of struggles, hardships and trials for a believer. Nor does he indicate that Christian will not face these trials... some severe. As a matter of fact he is affirming that we will face these trials most certainly at every level. He does however tell us that the Christians... the believer finds something beyond himself or herself to give victory, hope, and help in the midst of trials. Notice his words again in **2 Corinthians 4:8-9**, “⁸ *We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”*

4 Christian Promises in the Midst Trials:

- (1) **The promise that troubles will not crush us**
- (2) **The promise that perplexities will not leave us despairing**
- (3) **The promise that in persecution we will not be abandoned** – Remember that Scripture teaches that our God will “... *never leave us or forsake us*” (Hebrews 13:5).
- (4) **The promise that in being struck down we will not be destroyed -**

**The promise is that our trials won't destroy us or overtake us because we have something beyond ourselves to see us through and give us victory. What is that?*

III. THE REALITY OF OUR TESTS AND TRIALS THAT WILL HOUND US

1. **Jesus warned us of the reality of our tests and trials in this life (Matthew 10:17-22, John 16:33)** – As chapter 10 of Matthew open, Jesus is sending out his disciple. The chapter is filled with many words of warning and preparation for what they would encounter at His followers. The chapter is filled with instruction on how to relate and react to a world that would be hostile at times to their message and life. Perhaps, some of Jesus most pointed and gripping words appear in verses 17-22, where he speaks to the reality of the tests and trials that His followers would face:

“Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” -Matthew 10:17-22 (NIV/green)

Elsewhere in John 16:33, Jesus said, *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* –John 16:33 (NIV/green)

Realities for Believers:

- (1) **Believers “will be” restricted and restrained** – The phrase *“they will hand you over”* (v.17) is a technical word in the Greek that speaks of handing over a captured and chained prisoner. It speaks of those who would want to restrict or retrain someone they perceive as doing harm. Certainly in this world we can see how believer (Christians) are often restricted and restrained. The gospel message is often today being restricted and restrained
- (2) **Believers “will be” accused and maligned** – The phrase “you will be brought before” in verse 18 speaks of one who is charged with a crime standing before a judge. It is legal language that speak of being arraigned, but in this case it implies being wrongly charged, unjustly accused and maligned before others. Are Christian today ever falsely accused and maligned in this world? Absolutely! Christians, today, are routinely accused and maligned in both television and print media as being narrow-minded, and bigoted because of the stands they often take on a whole host of social issues. When a believer boldly states the Bible truth that Jesus is the only way! he or she is immediately labeled a narrow-minded, bigoted, and prejudiced against other religions. On a more personal note, if you are bold enough to try to witness to a neighbor or friend... maybe even a family member, be ready to be accused or maligned with something along the line of, “You are not better than me! I know the things that you do, and your life is not better than my life.” The “evil one” like to stir up the world in order to malign and accuse Christians.
- (3) **Believers “will be” denied and spurned** - Verse 22 says, *“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.* These speak of close relations... trusted relations that are always supposed to love, support and protect us. The warning for believers here is that often those we trust and depend on the most will turn on us. We may find ourselves spurned by their love and their associations with us denied... perhaps much like Jesus was denied by Peter and spurned by the other disciples on the night he was arrested and taken to a cross. We may face the trial of rejected friendships, and even family kin in some cases for a totally committed faith.
- (4) **Believers “will be” hated** - Jesus said, in verse 22, *“All men will hate you because of me...”* Sounds harsh, but the reality is that, as the world so quickly turned on Jesus it will also turn on believers too. Remember that one day the crowd was shouting “Hosanah! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” and throwing coats and palm branches on the street in front of Jesus to celebrate His arrival and the next day they were shouting “Crucify! Crucify!”

Observation: *The point is that the reality for believers is that being Christian is not always popular and the message we preach even less. The “evil one” will bring about all sorts of trial and test to dissuade you from proclaiming the message of salvation both verbally and practically in the way you walk. If necessary he will bring the “fired trial” of persecution to silence you!*

2. **Peter experienced the reality of our tests and trials in this life (Luke 22:31-34)** - Perhaps one of the most vivid New Testament examples of what we are talking about, the reality of this testing and trial, can be seen in the life of Peter. In Luke 22, Jesus has just observed the Last Supper with his disciple and he about to be betrayed and taken to the cross, when an interesting conversation takes place between Jesus and the disciple, Peter in Luke 22:31-34:

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brother.” But he replied, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.’” –Luke 22:31-34 (NIV/red)

3 Helpful Truths for Believers:

- (1) **If Satan can sift a Peter, he can sift you... that’s humbling**
- (2) **If Jesus prayed for Peter, he prays for you... that’s strengthening**
- (3) **If Peter can fall and rise again, so can you... that’s encouraging**

IV. THE GROUNDING REASONING FOR TESTS AND TRIALS THAT HOUND US

The reality is that happens in the life of a believer is amiss with God. Now, what do I mean by that? I mean, God sees, and know all! You are never out of the care of the God who hold you in the palm of his hand. What Satan may mean for evil, God means for good in the life of believer. Remember Jesus prayer in **John 17:15-19**, *“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.”* Despite the tests and trial that come our way, God is “sanctifying” us... that is “setting us apart for His purposes. There is actually a “sanctifying” reason that can emerge in the face of the tests and trials, that the “evil one” may be about to destroy us. Let me give you to good ones:

2 Reasons Behind Tests and Trials:

- (1) **Our spiritual growth and maturity in the Christian walk** - *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” – James 1:2-4 (NIV/red)*
- (2) **Our heightened hope and deepened relationship with God** - *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” –Romans 5:1-5 (NIV/white)*

V. THE RESPONSE TO TESTS AND TRIALS THAT HOUND US

Facing test and trials is never easy. We truly are “oft left to wonder why it should be thus all the day long!” And perhaps no one understood that better than the Apostle Peter. As we discovered earlier, Peter provided one of the most poignant (distressing) New Testament examples the reality of this testing and trial that we as believer often go through as Jesus warned him that “Satan wanted to sift him.” We know that that “sifting” took place in Peter’s denial of Christ. We too face the reality of being called to stand alone at those kind of dark and challenging moment in our life when the trials and struggles descend on us. How can we respond victoriously!

Years later a restored, and spiritually mature Peter... leader of the early church would write these words that might help us in 1 Peter 4:12-19, *“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trials you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or a thief or another kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, ‘If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’ So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” -1 Peter 4:12-19 (NIV/yellow)*

A Healthy Christian Response to the Tests and Trials of this Life:

- (1) **Don’t be caught off guard by them** – It truly rains on the just and the unjust. Christians are not immune to the difficulties and distresses in this life... as a matter of fact Peter knew that we are guaranteed them.
- (2) **Learn to see the silver lining in them** – God can actually grow us more through the trials than through the more pleasant moments of this life. We seem to depend and look to Him more in those moments.
- (3) **Strive to stay faithful, because He has is so faithful to you** – Listen, for a believer, when we look at what God has done on our behalf through Jesus Christ and the promises that are ours now and in the life to come, our trials and struggles in this life.. no matter how heavy they may seem right now... are worth it all! We could never pay Him back for all that He has done for us!