



**WHAT TO DO
WHEN YOUR
FAITH IS BEING**

TESTED

By Derek Prince

Tragedy, persecution, a broken marriage, a health problem, disillusionment with a leader, or a parent: sooner or later each one of us is confronted with painful situations.

Yet - as many stories in the Bible show - often God can and will use difficult times to test and to strengthen our faith.

Let me draw your attention to an Old Testament story that is over 3,000 years old, but the lessons are still relevant for us today.

God's people had passed through the waters of the Red Sea on dry land. Then their enemy, the Egyptians, had followed them in, and God had brought the waters back over the Egyptians, had swept them away, and put an end to that entire force of the enemy that was pursuing His people.

After this tremendous deliverance - in **Exodus 15:22-24** we read:

"Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they travelled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) [In Hebrew, Marah is the word for bitter.] So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?" NIV

The Israelites had experienced a glorious deliverance; they were triumphant; they felt everything was under God's control. Then in the wilderness they went three days without finding water. The children and the cattle became thirsty; they were all weary of the hot and dusty journey.

In the distance they saw the gleam of water. Some of them must have started to run to get there to quench their thirst.

But, oh, what a bitter disappointment when they stooped down to drink! The waters were so bitter they could not drink.

The people were totally unprepared for that situation. They could not conceive that such a thing would happen to them when God was leading them and when God had just granted them such a tremendous deliverance.

In a similar way, the fact that we have had a great victory in our lives does not mean we will never be tested again; rather, it means we will be better equipped for the next test.

When the people were unprepared, there was one person who was not unprepared, and that was God. So, let me tell you one thing, no matter how many times we may feel unprepared, God is never unprepared.

God's supernatural power can turn our sorrow into joy

Now the people grumbled but one man, Moses, had the sense to pray. We can find what followed in **Exodus 15:25-26**:

"Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood [a tree]. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the Lord made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them. He said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you." NIV

In Hebrew, the word 'tree' or 'wood' can also be used to refer to a gallows or a cross (see *Deuteronomy 21:22-23* and *Galatians 3:13-14*).

I believe the tree in the Exodus passage refers to one of the main themes in the Bible. It speaks of another tree that was raised, perhaps 2,400 years later, on a hill called Golgotha: the Cross.

When you think of the tree that was cast into the water, think of the Cross of Jesus and the fact that on that Cross Jesus took the bitter curse that we might have the sweetness of the blessing. Moses casting the tree into the pool is an example or picture of you and me taking what was accomplished on our behalf on the Cross and using it to make our bitter pool sweet.

We are called to exercise our faith in Jesus

It is important to see that the Scripture does not say the tree made the water sweet. There was nothing magical about the tree. The casting in of the tree was the act of faith that released the miracle-working power of God into the water. That is how God's power is released in our lives.

In 1 Peter 2:24 also, the Cross is referred to as a tree and the same truth is brought out.

"He himself [Jesus] bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die

to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." NIV

It was on that "tree" that full healing was obtained for the whole human race: spiritual healing from sin, physical healing from sickness, deliverance from the curse, the right to inherit the blessing.

The healing and the deliverance that come from the tree, which is the Cross of Jesus must be applied in our lives by an act of faith. Just as Moses, by an act of faith, threw that tree into the bitter water, so we, too, must exercise faith when we confront that bitter pool. We must have faith in what Jesus accomplished on the Cross and, metaphorically, take that tree and throw it into our bitter pool.

We are not to grumble; but pray instead

The Bible warns us clearly and often that we are going to be tested. So, we don't need to be unprepared like the Israelites. One particular passage that talks about the tests we are going to experience is in James 1:2-4:

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds..." NIV

When you are walking with the Lord and you are confronted with all sorts of

trials, do you consider it pure joy? Or do you do what the Israelites did – begin to grumble, "Lord, why did you let that happen? God, I thought you had this situation in control. Now I don't know what to do."

The question is not whether we will experience testing, but only how we will respond to it. James continues:

"...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." NIV

One essential element of our Christian character is perseverance. Until we develop perseverance, there are goals in God that we can never attain. Perseverance is brought out by testing our faith. There is really only one way to learn perseverance and that is by persevering.

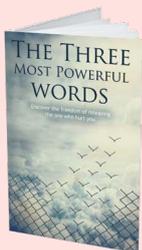
James says, *"Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."* That is God's goal for you: to be mature, having a fully-rounded Christian character.

The question is: Do you want to be mature and complete, not lacking anything? If you do want this, you have to

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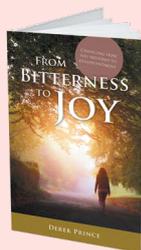


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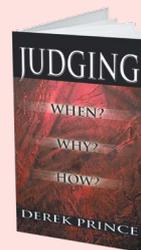
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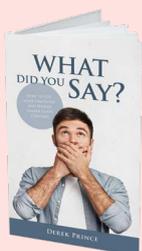
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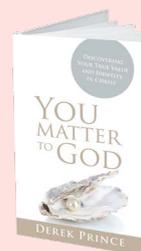
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go through the process; and the process may include your particular bitter pool.

Times of testing can deepen your faith

Grumbling is a way, not to solve your problems, but to magnify them. You will never find the way out of your problems by grumbling. On the shore of the bitter pool Moses prayed and cried out to the Lord. There was no other source of help but the Lord. And when Moses took that course to pray, rather than to grumble – God answered with a new revelation of Himself.

God's purpose in bringing Israel to the bitter pool was to help them learn perseverance. He set them in a situation where the revelation He had for them would be appropriate. It was a double revelation. First of all, He revealed to them the tree – the means of healing. Second, and more important still, He revealed Himself to them in a new aspect: the Lord their Healer.

A disappointment is one of the things that nearly all of us face. When your hopes are set high – you are moving forward and everything seems to be going right – and then it all falls apart and crumbles, you are left with nothing but disappointed hopes. That is a bitter pool.

What I want you to grasp is this: God led you to that bitter pool. He has something good for you at the bitter pool if you respond the right way.

Man's disappointments are God's appointments. When everything is going well and life is pretty easy, most of us tend to be somewhat superficial. We are content with the status quo; content to go to church, give our tithes, say our prayers and lead a respectable life. But God has something much deeper for us. He gets us to the bitter pool. Then, in the depths of agony and disappointment, we cry out as Moses did. And, when we do, we get a much deeper and fuller revelation of God, which only comes on the shores of the bitter pool.

How to turn the bitter pool into sweet water

Here are some simple, practical steps that you can take:

1. Recognise that the bitter pool is in God's plan for your life. He knows all about it, and He has the remedy.
2. Let God deal with any defects in your character that have been exposed by the bitter pool. If you grumbled when you should have prayed, there is something in you that must be dealt with by the Holy Spirit.
3. By faith accept what Jesus did for you on the Cross. *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."*
4. Thank God for what Jesus has done on your behalf. Begin to receive by thanking Him for whatever it is you need: forgiveness, healing (whether it is emotional or physical), release from resentment, bitterness, rebellion, confusion.

Thanking God, in faith, is like throwing that tree into the water. The purest expression of faith that you and I are capable of is simply thanking God – without seeing any change or waiting for the evidence, but believing what God says about the Cross of Jesus. Thanking Him releases that miracle-working power to change the bitter water to sweet.

Questions for Reflection

- 1 Read **2 Corinthians 1:3-11**. Reflect on Paul's attitude of faith and thanksgiving in the midst of hardships. How could this attitude have helped him?

- 2 Derek Prince says that grumbling only magnifies our problems. People might argue that sometimes there can be good reasons to grumble. What do you think?

- 3 The purest expression of faith is simply thanking God – not seeing any change, not waiting for the evidence, but believing what God says about the cross of Jesus. Have you tried this approach? What did it bring you?

- 4 In Isaiah 54:1-10, God reveals Himself by several names. Which ones? This revelation of Himself was an encouragement to His afflicted people. Take time to meditate on these names and what it means to your situation.