

TRANSFORMED MEN

The Church during the pandemic

One-fifth of those who would normally be defined as (regular) churchgoers say they have never attended a service—digitally or in person—during the pandemic. 67% of those who've only attended once or twice during the pandemic admit their attention wanes in online services. (From the Barna Research Group, www.barna.com)

If this summarizes the state of the Church, how has the trial of the pandemic affected you? Has it made you stronger in your relationship with the Lord and with the Church? Has it changed your view and understanding of trials? Has it affected your view of the future?

Let's take a brief look at the topic of "trials"...

Trials and challenges

1. Definition of a trial: Trouble or hardship that tests somebody's ability to endure. Trials bring us out of the comfort zone; identify our strengths and weakness; and may cause us to either continue in hope or quit.
2. What James says about trials...
 - James 1:2-4 *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience (endurance). But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect (mature) and complete, lacking nothing.*
 - Verse 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.*
3. What Peter says about trials...
 - 1 Peter 1:6-9 *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved (distressed, extremely upset, anxious) by various trials, 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,...*
4. What Paul says about trials...
 - 1 Corinthians 10:13 *No temptation (test, trial) 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 (endure, stand up under) it. God's tests, whether He brings a season of testing or allows it, are never for the purpose of stumbling us but rather to instruct and strengthen us.

How can circumstances of life to transform us?

1. Romans 12:1-2 *I beseech (urge) you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present (to be at hand, available) your bodies a living sacrifice (a giving up of something valuable or important for somebody else considered to be of more value or importance), holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service (rational worship). And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*
 - Conformed — (4964 Suschematizo) Do not be fashioned after the pattern of this world. John exhorts us not to love the world in 1 John 2:15-17.
 - Transformed — (3339 Metamorphoo) A complete change of condition and being. This is the same word used for Jesus' transfiguration on the Mount in Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2.
 - Renewing of your mind — (342) Qualitatively new. We are transformed when we allow God's Word to change our thinking.
2. Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 3 that the letter of the Law was not able to change the human spirit. It's only function was to reveal our need for Christ (Galatians 3:24). Instead, it is the Spirit of God who changes us AS we continually look into His Face the way we would look at ourselves in a mirror, noticing every detail.
 - 2 Corinthians 3:18 *And we all, with unveiled face, continually seeing as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are progressively being transformed into His image from (one degree of) glory to (even more) glory, which comes from the Lord, (who is) the Spirit.*

Discussion

- How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego view their "trial" in Daniel 3:16-18?
- Do you believe that trials are ultimately designed by God to strengthen us and to (trans) form us more into Christ's likeness? (Job 1:6-22; 2:1-10; 42:10-17)
- How would a false, unbiblical view of trials and hardships affect our life?
- What areas in your life has the pandemic transformed you and made you stronger in the Spirit, in your thought life, and in your behavior?