

“You have tested us, O God; you have purified us like silver. You captured us in your net and laid the burden of slavery on our backs. Then you put a leader over us. We went through fire and flood, but you brought us to a place of great abundance.”

Psalm 66:10-12 (NLT)

This section of Psalm 66 reminds us that tough times happen in life. As Christians, we are not promised a life without difficulty. To be purified like silver sounds like a very uncomfortable process. In the ancient world Silver was purified through a smelting process that got the silver up to extremely high temperatures - think 900°C (1652°F). Modern processes can also include acids. Either way, that sounds like a process that forces change upon the silver, changing it from impure to pure. When the comparison between us and silver is suggested it implies that we should expect difficult things to happen to shape us and change us. They reveal our true character by stripping away what isn't helpful or useful for our created purposes.

But doesn't God say that He wishes good on us? Doesn't He promise that He wants to bless us and not harm us? See us prosper and have a hope for the future? (See Jeremiah 9:11) In a word: yes, this is also true. However, humans are not perfect and can, by nature, be very clingy to things that aren't really good for us. I don't just mean obvious things like drugs, alcohol and smoking and other addictions taken in excess, but what about TV? Perhaps our individual addiction is something different like gaming, or perhaps we exercise in excess? Just because it's good for us in theory, doesn't mean it's good for us if it takes our time away from God. If you put off that prayer time because you want to go for a run, perhaps you can try adding your prayer time into that run instead? Do you watch live TV? I haven't in years, but still remember when I used to...I actually gave it up for Lent because it was taking all my time, but what about silencing the adverts and using the time to just read a single verse of the bible or shoot up an arrow prayer for something you're meaning to pray about later? It's when these things take us from God that they are things that need to be removed and purified out of us and, as we are very attached or even addicted to them, this is extremely painful for our flesh (or ego if you prefer).

It isn't always the addictions that are the bad things for us. Sometimes it's friendships, work environments, and other relationships, the church building we worship at or even family commitments occasionally. Sometimes we know deep down that God has been trying to pull us out of our comfortable place for a long time but our fear of change wins and we stay where we shouldn't. All these things that are painful for us are, we know deep in our souls, actually good for us. God isn't doing anything bad, He isn't giving us bad stuff because He wants to for the fun of it, rather He lets bad stuff happen to teach us. And sometimes us going through some stuff helps us to be empathetic towards others going through the same situation or helps us to give others help to avoid the same thing.

Let's finish with looking at the last verse: getting brought to a place of abundance. Abundance doesn't mean 'stuff' but sometimes it can include that. Abundance is spiritual maturity. It includes counting our blessings rather than our troubles. This abundance is a deep seated joy and delight in the Lord and a deep gratitude for all we have been given in the knowledge that all we own is ours in trust for God. We are given stuff to look after...including all of creation, but we must - and I'm preaching to myself here - learn to know who we are and be confident in God alone with the understanding that all else is secondary.

Pray;

Father of abundance, we ask that we do not shy away from the purification of fire that we know we must go through to continue to become the people you created us to be. Help us to understand that sometimes we must pass through the storm to remove things from us that are unhealthy and unhelpful for us. We thank you for your love and that the things you allow us to go through are only allowed to give us increased Spiritual, Mental and Physical strength so we can carry out your divine purpose. Amen.