

# 3.EACH TRIAL IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME...

*Welcome all experiences cause you never know which one is gonna turn everything on.*



#NCSAMENTALHEALTHDEVOTIONS

## EACH TRIAL IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME ...

*2 Corinthians 3:18: "So all of us who have had that veil removed, can see and reflect the glory of God. And the Lord - who is the Spirit - makes us more and more like Him as we are changed into His glorious image." (NLT)*

There is a saying by Trina Paulus that goes: 'What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a beautiful butterfly.' I believe that right now we have the **opportunity to change**, to become more like God. Let me ask you a question: "Who are you becoming when you face personal trials or public hardships like this pandemic of COVID-19?" It may seem like the end of the world to us, but God sees this as an opportunity for a new and beautiful you. Who would you like to become during this time?

I see COVID-19 as the world's wake-up call. Amidst the chaos and confusion, we need to awake to the realisation that life is a precious gift. It is our responsibility as citizens of heaven and as human beings to now lead and live a spiritual life to the best of our abilities, to be the best we can be. For most of us it means looking at our current state of affairs and recognising all the changes that we need to make. This is the time to re-evaluate your goals and priorities and leave behind what has not worked so far. This is an opportunity for you to reflect the image of Jesus fully. An opportunity to change. But you need to be ready and willing to change. However by the time you realise that it is important for you to change your life, you may not know where to begin.

There is an expression that says: 'It is better to be prepared for an opportunity to change and not have an opportunity, than to have an opportunity for change and not be prepared for it.'

**RE-EVALAUTE YOUR GOALS AND  
PRIORITIES, AND LEAVE BEHIND  
THAT WHICH HAS NOT WORKED.**

No matter who you are, how old or young you are; no matter how far you have progressed in life, it is never too late to change and to become more like our Saviour. Sometimes God allows for distressing situations to push us to change and to become more like Him. To become who He created us to be, in His image, in His likeness. To be perfected. To get rid of those things that do not completely fit the image of Christ in our lives. Trials we need to go through often push us towards these changes. I often hear people say that our lives changed so drastically, and they wonder what life is going to be like once we get through this pandemic. I believe with the changes that are taking place now, we should re-evaluate and see which things of the past are worth holding on to in the future when things normalise again.

If this tribulation, this pandemic, or the trials of life that we are going through, is an opportunity for us to re-start again, an opportunity for us to form and change ourselves again, when is the right time for us to change? How long do we wait? Do we start immediately? Sometimes we hope we can accomplish personal changes by changing our environment. We know who we want to be, but we first want the circumstances to be just right. It is true that it is better for us to have a more favourable environment to help us better ourselves. The environment does help us and assist us in becoming better people.

Have you ever gone camping in nature or gone on a holiday to the beach? Did you notice a difference in your demeanor, in your words, in your actions and in your attitude, when you were in nature, away from the city life and the hustle and bustle of of it all?

**IT IS BETTER TO BE PREPARED  
FOR AN OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE  
AND NOT HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY,  
THAN TO HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY  
FOR CHANGE AND NOT BE  
PREPARED FOR IT.**

When you put your phone down, when you switch the internet off and you spend time with family? Have you noticed when the environment is different, you are different? Yes, nature has a calming and soothing effect on us. If the environment we have is favourable, it will definitely be favourable in helping us change in life. Unfortunately we cannot always be in favourable environments.

We sometimes wait, we look and we hope for a change in our environment. We hold back on our personal growth and our personal change. We have ideas that we do not act on, things we plan on doing one day – when our marriages are better or when people treat us better, then we will be nice to them. When we don't have all these bills; when our health is better; when we've weighed the outcomes and everything is favourable, then we will change. Then we will do the things we know we need to do. We are hoping and waiting for the economy to change, we are hoping for COVID-19 to pass, then we can change. Hoping and waiting for our income to change, hoping for the outside world to change. Hoping and waiting all the time ... .

Here is what I found out so far. These things are not going to change, not soon anyway. They may even get worse, for all we know. There is an expression which states that we should welcome all experiences because we never know which one of those is going to turn everything on(around) for us. A beautiful example of this is the story of the caterpillar. The caterpillar struggles to emerge from the cocoon. It is part of what makes it beautiful and strong, it is part of what makes its new wings to be strong and enabling the butterfly to fly better and to be a better butterfly.

**WELCOME ALL EXPERIENCES  
BECAUSE YOU NEVER KNOW  
WHICH ONE IS GOING TO TURN  
EVERYTHING AROUND FOR YOU.**

If the cocoon of a butterfly is broken open and its wings did not take the time to struggle to break itself free, its wings emerge underdeveloped and weak and the butterfly will not be able to fly. With us, in our lives, these trials that we face, are there to make us stronger, to help us grow more into the image of God that is already inside us.

Trials are hard and times are going to get harder and sometimes we will want to quit. Nobody said it was going to be easy. In Matthew chapter 7 we read: "But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it." So yes, the Christian-life is difficult. The trials that we face are hard. There will be moments when we want to give up. There's going to be moments when it will seem impossible and the pain and disappointments we experience are just too much for us. We might even have thoughts of 'this is not worth it!'. Thoughts that tell us to go back to our old way of life. It was easier back then. It was more comfortable being in the cocoon. Even though it was dark, we were used to the darkness.

The Bible tells us that Israel went through the same experience when God set them free. They went through many trials and tribulations as they were wandering through the desert. God was still working on them, strengthening them. As they were struggling through these trials and hardships, they looked back to Egypt. They looked back because the changes that had to take place in them, the changes the wilderness was bringing, were too hard for them, too taxing. They wanted to go back to what was known and comfortable, even though they were slaves and even though it was destroying them emotionally and mentally. They asked themselves: "Is this really worth it?"

**WHAT YOU CONSIDER THE END OF  
YOUR WORLD, IS OFTEN GOD  
MAKING A NEW BEGINNING IN  
YOU.**

We need to be careful of comfort, because comfort may place us in inactivity. We get so used to the mess of life that we start feeling okay with it, and when things start to change for the better and it is difficult, we want to go back to the comfort of not having difficulties, even though we end up back in a mess.

An example of this is illustrated by the story of a homeless man who was given a new opportunity. Somebody rented a beautiful place for him to stay in. They furnished the house for him and took him off the streets. He didn't have to pay anything. They delivered food at his door every day. They gave him a job and said to him: "Go live your life. Become somebody new." The sad part is that two or three days later, when the person came to check on this man, everything in the apartment had been sold and the man was gone. They went looking for him and found him back on the street, begging, doing his old ways of life because it was easier, it was what he was used to, it was more comfortable.

Do you want to be comfortable, or do you want to be better? It is going to cost you effort and a retraining of self. Retrain yourself not to be who you were, but to be somebody different. Retrain yourself to put your phone down, to switch off the internet. Retrain yourself to get up early, to pick up your Bible, to behold the Word of God, instead of beholding the things of this world. A retraining of yourself to be kind to your colleagues even though they are rude to you.

The nice thing about changing ourselves, is that our retraining is going to take place in the school of Christ and that we have a manual on how to become. It is called the Bible. We can see in the Bible how Christ did things and by constantly doing what He tells us to do in this manual, we will realise that we are being transformed.

**BE CAREFUL OF COMFORT,  
BECAUSE COMFORT CAN PLACE  
YOU IN A STATE OF INACTIVITY.**

Jeremiah 17:7-8 tells us how this transformation takes place. It says: "But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat worried about the long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit." These trees changed despite their circumstances, because they were planted by a stream. A stream which symbolically represents Jesus Christ, the Water of Life. When we are rooted and planted in Christ, we will grow, despite our circumstances.

Now then, if circumstances are not going to change, how are we ever going to change our lives? Well, when you change, everything else changes. But, how do I change? Change is one of the hardest things to accomplish. Have you ever tried to change yourself? Have you been successful? How is that diet going? How many times have you given up on something that you started, e.g. New Year's resolutions? How many times have you perhaps quit smoking or stop doing things that you do not want to do?

We don't have to wait for the economy of the country or for circumstances to change. We only have to change ourselves, BUT we are too concerned about how we are going to achieve this goal. Do not be concerned about how you are going to achieve the goal. Only know that you have the goal of who you want to change into and leave the how it is going to happen to a greater Power than yourself, GOD. All you have to know is where you are going, what you want to be. The answer should always be, I want to be more like Jesus. I want to grow more in His image.

**WHEN YOU ARE ROOTED AND  
PLANTED IN CHRIST YOU WILL  
GROW DESPITE YOUR  
CIRCUMSTANCES.**

The verse in Corinthians that we started off with, summarises how we are going to change. It says: "By beholding Christ, we become changed into His image." By beholding, we become changed. How does this work? Does that mean we have to copy Christ? Imitate Him?

As a kid, I used to enjoy teasing my older brother. We used to travel far to go to church and on the way to church I would get bored. Quite often I asked my brother to play some game with me, and more than often, he would refuse. So I invented my own game, called the Imitation Game. We've all played it, right? Basically we say and do whatever the other person says or does. We repeat them. We mimic them. We mirror them. So, whatever hand gesture my brother would do, I would do. Whatever noise he would make, I would make. If he would touch me, I would touch him. This was obviously a highly irritating game for him.

Is this what the Bible means by 'beholding we become changed?' Does it mean we must imitate Christ? Do we become parrots? The answer the Bible gives is NO. When the Bible tells us to behold, it is not copying. We do not change by copying. We change by beholding, by looking, by listening. It is not our work to transform ourselves, it is God's work in us. It is the Holy Spirit in us that transforms us. We just need to show up. We need to be there, to see what He does, to behold Him. The way we do this is by Bible study, by spending time with God's Word, by spending time with the good things Christ has given us.

It does seem impossible to change by simply looking and listening to someone or somebody. However, scientific research has made an amazing discovery about how the human mind works in this beholding game.

**BY BEHOLDING WE BECOME  
CHANGED. CHANGED INTO WHAT  
WE BEHOLD. WHAT ARE YOU  
BEHOLDING EACH DAY?**



There is something called mirror neurons. They are 'smart cells' within the brain. Cells that work like mirrors. They assist people in imitation, in learning language by listening and observing. It helps in observational skills. These cells are basically helping people to change when they view things. Studies of the human mirror system also revealed that it can be activated by sound as well as by visual stimuli. A mirror neuron is a type of brain cell that responds equally whether we perform an action or whether we witness someone else performing the same action. In other words, whether we do something or see how someone else does it, the brain activates in the same way as if the action was done by you. Mirror neurones only activate and are specifically tuned in and switched on in response to actions with clear goals. I believe God has planted this biological system inside us to help us to become that which we behold, literally like a mirror.

Remember the mirror neurons are only turned on with specific actions that have clear goals, e.g. if someone moves his hand for no apparent reason, the mirror neurons will not activate and they will not imitate or copy or learn that which they have seen. If however, someone moves his hand with a very specific motive or reason or clear goal for the action, the mirror neurons will activate. So, this is a learning system. A system that changes us from the inside out. How uniquely did God put us together!

God knows He planted these cells inside us and He therefore says: "By beholding, you will become changed." What are you beholding during these stressful times? Are you listening and looking at the bad news and the things Satan is doing in this world? Are you spending your time in conspiracy theories and the negative things that are happening and the possibilities of terrible catastrophies that could come ahead?

**MIRROR NEURONS ASSIST YOU IN  
LEARNING BY BEHOLDING. HELPING  
YOU IMITATING WHAT YOU BEHOLD  
LITERALLY LIKE A MIRROR.**

Or are you beholding the goodness and kindness and the graces of God? Only beholding His character? Are you doing and imitating negative or positive things by beholding? Jesus says you are a mirror. Whatever you spend your time on, looking at, listening to, thinking about, is what you will become. Who are you beholding? What are you spending your time with?

I love the following quotation: 'Those who live the nearest to Heaven, will reflect the brightness of the Sun of Righteousness.' A mirror only reflects well if it is close to the image that it is reflecting. The closer the image is to the mirror, the better the mirror will reflect it. You need to come closer to Christ in order to reflect Him better. 1 Corinthians 15:48 says: "Earthly people are like the earthly man, and heavenly people are like the heavenly Man." Speaking about Adam and God.

As we behold, there is nothing that shows us that we are going to change. There is nothing about the caterpillar that tells the caterpillar it is going to be a butterfly. There is no proof right now that God is changing you while you are in this dark cocoon. You just need to trust God. You need to keep looking to Him in faith. There is a verse in the Psalms that says: "I lift my eyes unto the hills, where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth."

You need to learn to behold God. Lift God up before man. Lift up before man those things which are eternal and you will have strength every hour. Choose not to talk of darkness. Choose not to listen and dwell upon the things that are terrible and horrible and happening right now. The more you talk and dwell upon these horrible things, the darker and darker you will grow. God has given you a perfect model in His only begotten Son.

**THOSE WHO LIVE THE NEAREST TO  
HEAVEN, WILL REFLECT THE  
BRIGHTNESS OF THE SUN OF  
RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

By beholding Him, you will become changed into His image. 1 Corinthians 13:12 says: "What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; when Jesus comes, we will see Him face to face. What I know now is partial; then it will be complete - as complete as God's knowledge of me." As Colossians 3:10 says: "... and I have put on a new self. This is the new being which God, its Creator, is constantly renewing in His own image, in order to bring you to a full knowledge of Himself."

You might not reflect God one hundred percent right now. The image is dim. It is not one hundred percent perfect. But keep on beholding Him. The beautiful thing about this process is that the Bible says the more you behold Him, as the time comes closer, the clearer the image will become. And then, when you see Him on the clouds of heaven, you will see Him as He is, and you will be like Him.

In Psalms 107:35 we are told that God has the ability to change us. It says: "He changed deserts into pools of water and dry land into flowing springs." Psalms 30:11 says: "You have changed my sadness into a joyful dance; You have taken away my sorrow and surrounded me with joy."

Let us today be careful of beholding people and circumstances that are angry and sad and discontent with the things of life, because it will make us angry and sad and discontent with the things of life.

Let us behold Christ who is content, who is happy, who does not fear the troubles He goes through, who sleeps in the storm, so that we too, by learning from Him, by viewing Him, can sleep amidst the storms of life.

**HE CHANGED DESERTS INTO POOLS  
OF WATER AND DRY LAND INTO  
FLOWING SPRINGS-PSALMS 107:35**

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