

OCTOBER 2005—*Trials and Tribulations*

The longer we walk with Christ, the more clearly we see that there is really no end to trials and tribulations in life. They are a permanent feature of life with Christ. This can be discouraging or even disillusioning if we do not understand why such things are so necessary for our souls.

In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis explains one important reason why we experience tribulations in this life.

My own experience is something like this. I am progressing along the path of life in my ordinary contentedly fallen and godless condition, absorbed in a merry meeting with my friends for the morrow or a bit of work that tickles my vanity today, a holiday or a new book, when suddenly a stab of abdominal pain that threatens serious disease, or a headline in the newspapers that threatens us all with destruction, sends this whole pack of cards tumbling down. At first I am overwhelmed, and all my little happinesses look like broken toys. Then, slowly and reluctantly, bit by bit, I try to bring myself into the frame of mind that I should be in at all times. I remind myself that all these toys were never intended to possess my heart, that my true good is in another world and my only real treasure is Christ. And perhaps, by God's grace, I succeed, and for a day or two become a creature consciously dependent on God and drawing its strength from the right sources. But the moment the threat is withdrawn, my whole nature leaps back to the toys: I am even anxious, God forgive me, to banish from my mind the only thing that supported me under the threat because it is now associated with the misery of those few days. Thus the terrible necessity of tribulation is only too clear. God has had me for but forty-eight hours and then only by dint of taking everything else away from me. Let Him but sheathe that sword for a moment and I behave like a puppy when the hated bath is over—I shake myself as dry as I can and race off to reacquire my comfortable dirtiness, if not in the nearest manure heap, at least in the nearest flower bed. And that is why tribulations cannot cease until God either sees us remade or sees that our remaking is now hopeless.¹

Because of our enduring tendency toward independence from God and reliance upon our own resources, God must allow us to undergo trials and tribulations to help us remain dependent on him and be increasingly transformed into the image of Jesus Christ our Lord. In all of this, his glory and our ultimate happiness is his goal.

*Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.
That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses,
in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties.
For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

II CORINTHIANS 12:9b-10 NIV

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of HarperCollins, 1996), pp. 106-107.