

The Purpose of Testing



Life's Bitter Pool (Part 2)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, sharing with you precious truths out of Scripture that have made the difference between success and failure in my life—and can do the same in yours. Our theme this week has a rather unusual title—"Life's Bitter Pool." It's based on an incident in the history of God's people, Israel, just after they had been miraculously delivered out of Egypt and had passed through the waters of the Red Sea as though on dry land. The incident is recorded in Exodus 15:22-26 and I'll just read them.

> "Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled 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?' Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him [a tree] a piece of wood. 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)

Yesterday I painted for you a picture of Israel's disappointment. They had had this glorious victory. No doubt they felt that all their problems had been settled once and for all. And then they went three days in the desert without finding water. They were thirsty, hot, weary, discouraged. They saw this pool of water gleaming there in the sun. But when they ran to it and stooped to drink, it was too bitter for them to drink. A terrible, bitter disappointment.

You know, in speaking to large and small congregations at different times, I've often asked people how many of you have had to struggle with disappointment. And very few people in such a congregation would say, "I've never confronted disappointment." It's one of the things that come across our way. And really, what I'm speaking about in my

talks this week, is how to understand and face disappointments and get the best out of disappointment. You see the people were unprepared. They just assumed that everything was going to be easy from then on. There would be no more tests of their faith. But God was not unprepared. God knew what to do. He had the answer. The people grumbled and got nothing. Moses prayed and God showed Him the answer. God had that tree ready. He knew what was to be done. But it was only through prayer that Moses could find the solution.

And I pointed out in my talk yesterday two lessons that apply from that story for you and me today. The first lesson is that great victories prepare us for great testings. They don't indicate that there will be no more testing. The second lesson was that the bitter pool was in God's program. He led them there. He had a purpose.

And then I said yesterday that we still come to bitter pools in our lives today. And I gave you some examples. A broken marriage, a business failure, a health breakdown, disillusionment with a human leader, or perhaps ever with a human parent.

Today I'm going to make a further application with this story. I'm going to speak on the purpose of testing. You see the question in our lives is not whether we will experience testing, but only how we will respond to the testing. The testing there at Marah exposed an area in the character of the Israelites that needed to be dealt with. An area that was expressed in grumbling. Let me tell you this that the Bible has nothing good anywhere to say about grumbling. And grumbling is a way, not to solve your problems, but to magnify them. It's not the way out of your problems to grumble. And if, when you come under pressure, you begin to grumble, then you are like the Israelites. There's an area in your character that needs to be dealt with. God knew that area was there all along, but He had to let you come to the bitter pool so that you'd find out what was really inside you. You see, that act of grumbling indicates lack of faith, lack of gratitude, self-centeredness, a lot of things that are serious problems and that hinder our further progress in the Lord.

The Lord had a lot further for Israel to go than the pool of Marah. He really was taking them to the land that He had promised. But they weren't fit to make the full journey to the Promised Land until that thing in their character, which was exposed at Marah, had been dealt with. So when you come your Marah, your bitter waters and you begin to grumble, realize that there's something in you that has to be dealt with. And God brought you to that place that He might deal with that thing. But He can only deal with it if you cooperate.

You see the Bible warns us clearly that we are going to experience testing. It's stated many times. One particularly clear passage is in the epistle of James, chapter 1 verses 2-4:

> "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, [I never read those words without asking myself, 'Is that how I react to trials of many kinds?' Is that how you react to trials of many kinds? When you're walking with the Lord and you're confronted with all sorts of trials, do you consider it pure joy? Do you say, 'Hallelujah! Praise God for this trial!'? 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.' Let me read on what James says:] 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)

You see one essential element in Christian character is perseverance. Until we achieve perseverance there are goals in God that we can never attain to. And perseverance is brought out by testing our faith. You see there's really only one way to learn perseverance and that is by persevering. And in order to persevere you have to be in a situation where perseverance is needed. James says, "Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." That's God's goal for you—mature, fully grown up, complete, a fully rounded Christian character, not lacking anything. Do you want that? Do you want to be mature and complete, not lacking anything? How could you wish anything else? Then you have to go through the processes. And the process may include your particular Marah, your particular bitter pool.

You see when you come to the bitter pool there's just two alternative responses. The people grumbled—that was the response of unbelief. Moses prayed—that was the response of faith. Which will you do? Next time you come to that bitter pool which are you going to do?

On the shore of that bitter pool Moses prayed. He 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, the response of faith rather than the response of unbelief, God responded with a new revelation of Himself. And that was God's purpose in bringing Israel to that bitter pool. He had something for them to learn. And He set them in a context, a situation where the revelation He had for them

would be appropriate. He responded with a revelation of Himself. It was a double revelation and I'm going to deal with that more fully in my following talks this week. First of all He revealed to them the tree—the means of healing. Second and more important still, He revealed to them Himself in a new aspect—the Lord their Healer. That was His ultimate objective in that experience at the bitter pool.

But today I just want to point out to you the principle. The principle has been summed up very succinctly in a statement that I heard somebody make once. Actually I really didn't like the statement when I heard it the first time because I thought, you know, this doesn't suggest that life is going to be the way I'd like it to be. But the statement was this, "Man's disappointments are God's appointments."

I've said already a disappointment is one of the things that nearly all of us face. And disappointment really is bitter. It is a Bitter Pool. When you've had your hopes set high and you're moving forward and everything seems to be going right and then it all falls apart—it crumbles—and you're left with nothing but disappointed hopes. That's a Bitter Pool. But what I want you to grasp today, I really want you to take this in—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." It is something to do with human nature, but when everything is going well and life is pretty easy, most of tend to be somewhat superficial. We'll be content with the status quo. We'll be content to go to church and pay our tithes and say our prayers and lead a fairly respectable kind of life. But God has got something much further and much deeper for us. And so, somehow or other He gets us to the Bitter Pool. And in the depths of agony and disappointment we cry out as Moses cried and then we get that much deeper and fuller revelation of God which only comes on the shores of the Bitter Pool.

So if you've faced a Bitter Pool or if you're facing a Bitter Pool, just bear in mind that "Your disappointment is God's appointment."

Well our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll continue with this theme: the bitter pool. My topic will be "The Healing Tree."

Radio Program

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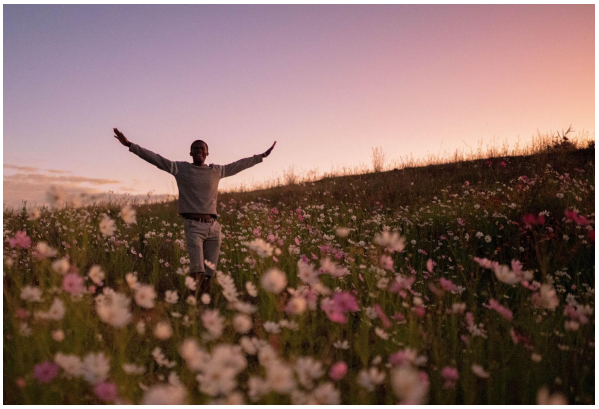

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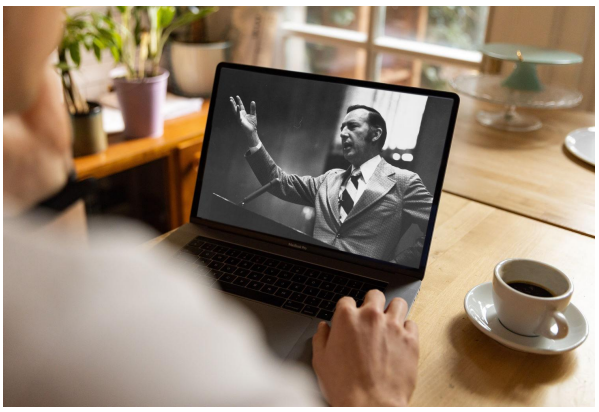

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