

**The Refiner's Fire**  
**The Shepherd's Crucible**

Lesson #1 for October 6, 2007

Scriptures: Psalm 23; Romans 12:18-21.

1. When hard times come, who is responsible? Do we bring them on ourselves? Is the devil at fault? Does God ever "bring us into testing"? (Matthew 6:13) This quarter's lessons are about hard times and how we should regard them.
2. Do you agree with the words of Ellen White?

**God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory [225] of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him.**

Not Enoch, who was translated to heaven, not Elijah, who ascended in a chariot of fire, was greater or more honored than John the Baptist, who perished alone in the dungeon. "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Philippians 1:29.

**And of all the gifts that Heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor.**

{DA 224.5; MH 479.2; FLB 64.3; CC 278.5; HDL 19.1}

Not without a purpose does God send trial to His children... He subjects them to discipline to humble them, to lead them, through trial and affliction, to see their weakness and draw near to Him. . . . {HP 267.2, compare PK 578.1}

3. Do you believe that God directly guides you in your personal life? How does He do that?
4. Does God ever lead us into dangerous places? What about the stories of Daniel and his three friends? (Daniel 3 & 5)
5. Is it consistently true that trials lead to purification and righteousness? **Does God cause trials or does He only allow them?**
6. Can we be certain that we are being led by God? How often are we following our own paths while thinking that God is guiding us?
7. Do you believe that God is guiding His church? How does He do that?
8. What was the setting of Psalm 23 when it was first written? Does it help us to understand the words of that Psalm to be aware of the setting in David's life? (*Ed* 164.1)
9. This lesson focuses on what we can learn about our relationship with God through Psalm 23. The shepherd motif is common in Scripture. Many of the biblical heroes were shepherds at one time or another in their lives. Look at some of the ways in which God is compared to a shepherd: He gathers up the lambs in His arms (Isaiah 40:11); He rounds up the sheep and cares for every one of them (Jeremiah 23:3,4); no matter how far they are scattered, if they will come back to Him, He will bring them back to Himself (Ezekiel 34:12); God's sheep do not all belong to the same group! (John 10:14-16); although we may have been lost, God brings us back and cares for us (1 Peter 2:25).
10. Read Psalm 23:2-6. What basic needs does a shepherd provide for his sheep? Water,

food, and protection? Are those the things that we need today?

11. Look back over the recorded history of the church and God's people. Have God's people generally done better spiritually in prosperous times or in difficult times? Explain your answer. Tertullian said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." [*Apologetics* 50] When things are easy and prosperous economically, do we sometimes feel tempted to believe that we can manage on our own without God's help?
12. How would you describe the "paths of righteousness" that David talked about in Psalm 23:3? We can be thankful for being led into green meadows, beside still pools, and finally to God's house. But should we be thankful for being led into "deepest darkness" and "eating in the presence of our enemies"? Would God ever do such a thing? What is "right" about those paths? Notice these four particular aspects:
  - 1) Those paths lead to the perfect destination—God's home!
  - 2) If we follow God's will, those paths will always keep us close to Him.
  - 3) If we are faithful "sheep," the shepherd will teach us to be like Him.
  - 4) If we follow God's paths, He will provide opportunities for us to witness—even to our enemies!
13. **When the devil sends trials, what is his purpose and goal?**
14. If we find ourselves in "the valley of the shadow of death," is that evidence that God is not leading us? Would God ever lead us there? Does God ever force us to face our enemies even over a banquet table? Did Job "face" his enemy? Daniel?
15. What do you think is implied by the idea that we are being pursued by "goodness and mercy"? Goodness and mercy are descriptive terms that apply to people. Who is it that is good and merciful and pursues us?
16. When bad things happen in our day, people tend to blame God or the government. Is that fair?
17. When difficult times occur, should we pray to God to help us to get back to Him as if He had not been guiding us through the difficult times? Should we assume that when difficult times come, that we have lost our way and are no longer following God?
18. Almost the entire world struggles with the question of why bad things happen to good people. That is largely because they do not have the Seventh-day Adventist, "universe-wide" understanding of the great controversy between Christ and Satan over the character and government of God. Could you give a clear explanation to a friend who is asking that question about why bad things happen to good people?
19. Why do Christians have enemies? What did David have in mind when he talked about enemies? Read Matthew 5:44-48 and Romans 12:18-21. What do Matthew and Paul suggest to us about how to deal with enemies? How do you heap coals of fire on anyone's head?
20. Who is our greatest enemy? Do we see him actually working in our lives? What can we do about that? Do we see him working in the lives of our friends and associates? What can we do about that? How can we best be aware of his activities?
21. Is there any question about whether God wants us to join Him in heaven? Does God easily give up on us? Read also Ephesians 1:4; 2 Peter 1:10; Hebrews 11:13-15. In light of these verses and all of Scripture, are you absolutely certain that God's goodness, unending love,

and guidance are unquestionable?

22. Would you feel comfortable giving a testimony—based on your own experience—that God is guiding you?
23. We often describe God as unchanging. (Malachi 3:6) If that is true, why do we sometimes find that our paths are easy and yet at other times, very difficult?
24. How do understand these words from Ellen White?

**Those who are finally victorious will have seasons of terrible perplexity and trial in their religious life; but they must not cast away their confidence, for this is a part of their discipline in the School of Christ, and it is essential in order that all dross may be purged away. The servant of God must endure with fortitude the attacks of the enemy, his grievous taunts, and must overcome the obstacles which Satan will place in his way. Satan will seek to discourage the followers of Christ, so that they may not pray or study the Scriptures, and he will throw his hateful shadow athwart the path to hide Jesus from the view, to shut away the vision of his love, and the glories of the heavenly inheritance. It is his delight to cause the children of God to go shrinkingly, tremblingly, and painfully along, under continual doubt. He seeks to make the pathway as sorrowful as possible; but if you keep looking up, not down at your difficulties, you will not faint in the way, you will soon see Jesus reaching his hand to help you, and you will only have to give him your hand in simple confidence, and let him lead you. As you become trustful, you will become hopeful. {RH, April 8, 1890 par. 5; MYP 63; LHU 241}**

Christ has given us no assurance that to attain to perfection of character is an easy matter. It is a conflict, a battle and a march, day by day. **It is through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom of heaven. In order to share with Christ in His glory we must share in His suffering. . . .** He has overcome for us. Shall we, then, be timid and cowardly because of the trials that we meet as we advance? . . . {SD 198.2}

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Last modified: August 16, 2007

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