

These Inward Trials

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Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0:00] Well, we're studying J.I. Packer's *Knowing God* and we come to chapter 21. We're on the practical side and the application of *Knowing God* and it's called these inward trials.

! Now, Packer introduces this chapter on trials in this way. A certain type of ministry of the gospel is cruel. It is not mean to be, but it is.

It's prevalence is a major hindrance to knowing God and growth in grace at the present time. We hope that we may do service to some by exposing it and trying to show where it falls short.

So, pow! Right off the bat, Packer comes out swinging and Packer can pack a punch as we've seen before. The language is strong, isn't it?

He's clearly exercised about something. He feels deeply about this subject that he's talking about. He wants us to know God better. And anything that stands in the way of that as a hindrance or a roadblock must be removed.

[1:13] It cannot be allowed to stand. And he sees a certain type of ministry that stands as a roadblock to knowing God and knowing Him better. Well, what kind of ministry is he referring to?

Well, he goes on to explain it as an evangelical ministry. A church and a pastor or teacher who believes that the Bible is the very Word of God, that Jesus Christ is the very Son of God, that salvation is only in Christ by faith through grace.

He says, they've got all of these fundamental doctrines right. And someone might ask them, Dr. Packer, how could it be so wrong? How can there be such wrong and harmful effects if the foundations, the fundamentals are correct?

And Packer responds by saying, it is by wrongly applying those doctrines. All right? The wrong application of doctrines.

He compares it to a pharmacy shop full of all kinds of medicines, which if they're used properly will bring healing and do much good to the sick. But if used improperly can actually worsen a person's condition rather than to help it.

[2:27] So it is with truth and with many of the truths that people in this sort of ministry that he's referring to handle them.

So, he says, this ministry that is so cruel and so harmful starts by stressing in their evangelism the differences that becoming a Christian will make.

If you become a Christian, your sins will be forgiven. You'll have peace with God. You'll have joy. You'll have love. You'll have peace. You'll have all these things that you don't have now.

Direction and meaning in life. Purpose and power over sin and significance. And he says all these things are true. And that's why he says this is an evangelical ministry.

They're teaching truth. But he says it is possible to so stress these things as to downplay the tougher side of the Christian life. In other words, to downplay the trials of the Christian life.

[3:32] That we know the loss of loved ones as Christians. The loss of friends, of money, of health, of jobs. That there is the daily discipline of the Lord to deal with in the Christian life.

There's an endless war with the world. And with the flesh. And with the devil. And there's ongoing difficulties in our personal relationships.

There are even periodic walks in the dark. Where there seems to be no light. And we don't understand what God is doing.

So it's possible, he says, to give the impression that the normal Christian life is free from troubles.

It's life above the struggle. Now, to be fair, Packer acknowledges that it's also possible to err on the other extreme.

That is to so overstate the problems of the Christian life that we give the impression that the Christian life is one of gloom and sadness. But he's dealing with this particular problem that he finds

in his own day to be prevalent.

[4:45] That the normal Christian life is free from pain and trouble. Or, if there's the acknowledgement, yes, of course there's pain and troubles. But when they come up, all you need to do is just pray about them.

And immediately, they're fixed. And they go away. Or some quick two or three step formula that will immediately lift you from the struggle and the perplexity of life.

On to some higher plane where you don't feel that struggle. Now, so the Christian life is painted to be as all light hearted, happy and fun.

Now, I wonder, just to call a time out here. Where Packer speaks of its prevalence in his own day. Granted, he's writing 30, 40 years ago.

But how many of you have ever run into teaching, preaching, tapes, materials, where the Christian life was presented?

[5:46] Or there was at least this way to live the Christian life that's above the struggle? Could you share with us some of those ideas? And did you experience that?

Was it held out before you? Have you seen this kind of thing in the Christian arena? Anybody? Just Packer alone.

Mark? What? What? Someone who explained to me that was a Christ on the internet, shared it in. They believed that he needed to be actually glorified by the Bible. Hmm. We could attain a level of spiritual maturity where we had glorified bodies in the whole nine yards.

Okay. All right. Jim? What I've wanted to do, Pastor, is the health, wealth, prosperity movement.

Okay. Good. You can have health, wealth, and prosperity if you're a Christian.

[6:50] Okay. Raj? There was a kind of such a message a long ago that you were popular in this day. Well, just like Joe and like God. Okay. He said, you know, there's no struggle in it.

There's no having to do it or anything. Just like God. Good. That's exactly what Packer's talking about. Ed? Okay. I think that my father's mother was in the kind of called the holiness church.

And there was the second blessing, a higher life. And then you could get to a position where you no longer sin. So I'm a little bit aware of that.

Although my grandmother never went to that degree. But she thought about it. Okay. The whole second blessing teaching that there's your regular economy-grade Christians and then there's your premium Christians.

And you get into that higher life by some second blessing. You come to the altar and do something there. We'll talk about the different ways.

[7:57] Any other experiences there? If you have enough faith, then you can do another way to do it. Okay. Okay. So there's one way of saying, why is it that you're living down here in the level of struggle and hardship and difficulty and pain?

It's because you don't have enough faith. If you just had faith, you could penetrate into this higher life. What are some other ways that are taught to get into this higher Christian experience?

Sometimes called the higher life. Sometimes called the deeper life. But it's getting out of struggle.

What are some other ways we penetrate? Mickey? Okay.

All right. The baptism of the Holy Spirit in which, and some would go on to say, by which we mean your ability to speak in tongues. is that the baptism of the Spirit and speaking in tongues will take you into this higher plane.

What's another? Dave? Dave? Okay. Okay. Okay.

[9:36] So again, not enough faith. Stop trying and start trusting. Yes, Jason. I think what's actually for us more dangerous, I think it is that if we can speak good enough, if we can be spending enough quiet time in the spiritual disciplines that God has called us to, then we take it as a surprise when we have struggles, when we have doubts.

So it's like we put our trust and discipline that God has given us, and then we're surprised when they don't work like we think they're supposed to. Okay, good.

Spiritual disciplines, nothing wrong with that. But when we expect that they will lead us into this trouble-free, trial-free existence, we've misapplied truth.

All right? Maybe you've heard other ways. The filling of the Spirit. There was popular campus literature, campus groups, that were talking about the filling of the Spirit, that that was what was needed, that if you would just be filled with the Spirit, you would be lifted into this state where everything is fine and we don't sin and all, but then when we fall out of that walk in the Spirit and

filling of the Spirit, and we come down into the fleshly area.

Maybe you've heard of people talking about getting out of Romans 7 and into Romans 8. You know that Romans 7 is about the struggle. So you get out of the struggle of Romans 7, and you get into the rest and peace and victory of Romans 8.

[11:15] Well, the reality is you only get there by death. And you die and you go to heaven, and then you know that rest without any struggle. But that's what Paul says in Romans 8.

But until then, we groan inwardly, don't we? There's this constant struggle. And it's not just in Romans 7. It goes on in Romans 8. Granted, yes, there's much to help us, and he does teach us that, but we don't get above the struggle.

So that's the sort of Christianity that Packer is reacting against very strongly here when he calls it cruel.

Now, why is it cruel? Why is it cruel, Jim? Because they never realize it unless they have themselves so deceived.

They can't, if there's troubles that follow the Christian life, and they still have these troubles, and they don't think they've achieved this. Good.

[12:21] Someone else, fill on that. Follow up on that. What becomes cruel about that? It doesn't prepare you for the reality of troubles.

It leaves us surprised and unprepared to meet them. All right, well, excuse me. Over here.

Dan, and then there. Did you read Packer's chapter?

Okay, that's the word he uses. Disillusion. Very good. Leaves them disillusioned. Well, I thought it was supposed to be like this, and it's not. Now, where am I?

What is this whole Christianity stuff? And they're disillusioned. Confused. All right? Let me just...

[13:17] Packer is not questioning their motives. Their motives are to gain more converts and to help Christians to know more in their joy and so forth in the Christian life and victory.

But he says that just because their motive is right doesn't make it any less cruel and damaging. Because here's how he pictures it.

So the new convert heads into this new life in Christ or this new level of Christian living, convinced that all of his old problems and troubles are left behind. But instead, he finds his long-standing problems of personality, of nagging temptations, of sin that so easily entangle, perhaps not only remain there, but are even intensified and turned up a notch.

The dissatisfaction in various relationships continue. Circumstances don't necessarily get better either. And so becoming a Christian doesn't make everything go away.

And making this step of faith or whatever it's brought out to be does not lead to a life without struggle. Instead, we meet up with these difficulties.

[14:36] Then what? Now, Packer says to read our Bibles is to find that frustration, indeed to read Ecclesiastes, is to find that frustration is a part of the Christian life.

But to read the whole of the Bible is to find that frustration, struggle, feeling perplexed, it's all part of the normal Christian life. The Apostle Paul, if anybody knew the higher life, it was Paul.

And he says, we are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed. We are perplexed. We don't understand what's happening, but we are not in despair.

We're persecuted, but we're not abandoned. We're struck down, but we're not out. And so that's the Christian life. It's nothing strange to face increased pressures, temptations, and troubles.

It's to be expected. But for those not expecting, it can lead to cruel disillusionment, disappointment, when it hasn't materialized for me. And so what do I assume?

[15:40] Here I am in this church, or in this Bible study, and in my group of Christian friends, and everybody else is experiencing this joy and blessedness. Just look at their smile. And look at the way that they're carrying on this impression that everything's fine.

Well, then it must be me. The problem must be something with me. It hasn't worked out for me. I've lapsed from the normal victorious life being preached and experienced by everyone else around me.

My Christian life is subnormal because I'm struggling. How can I make it work again? And then come all the answers. And we talked about some of them, the steps of faith and all.

Packer holds out this cruel advice that was given to Him. That all difficulty and frustration in the Christian life is diagnosed as a failure to surrender some aspect of your life.

Some specific sin is down at the bottom of it. Or that all struggling is a lack of trusting, lack of faith.

[16:51] And so the answer is to find and to confess that hidden sin. The answer is to surrender and re-consecrate yourself to God. It's to maintain this higher Christian life in that way.

So when the problem comes, perhaps it's just to hand it over to Christ and to let go and to let Him deal with it. Or quit trying and start trusting and the Christian victorious life will return.

Now if it's true that we have not surrendered some aspect of our life, if it's true that we are cherishing some sin in our hearts, yes, the lack of peace and joy will result and we need to confess it and we need to surrender it.

That's true. But that's not always the case. That's not always why things are so amiss and troublesome in our lives. And if we make that one-size-fits-all application for everybody, then here we are.

Life is full of troubles and we'll think, I've got to scrape, I've got to examine myself again and try to find that sin, that lack of surrender.

[18:07] And Packer says, it can be enough to cause a man to go crazy. All of God's children must undergo discipline, training, hardship.

God is simply treating you as sons. He's bringing you up, you see. One Puritan said, God had but one son without sin, but He had no sons without affliction.

Even His own son had troubles, didn't He? Even the Son of God, Hebrews 5, 7, learned obedience by the things that He suffered. And so God is growing up His children.

He's stretching their powers of resistance. He's developing their character. He's training us in the school of trials and pressures and pain. I once heard Dr. Packer at a minister's conference give his testimony.

And that really gave me an insight into some of the heat in chapter 21 of knowing God because he explained how as a young Christian, that was the cruel teaching that was held out to him.

[19:22] He was struggling with sin and temptation as a Christian, as a new babe in Christ. And everybody else around him was saying, well, oh, doctor, he wasn't a doctor then.

Jim, you just need to surrender. You need to surrender some area of your life, some sin you're hanging on to. And it caused him to just look inward, look inward, look inward, and it nearly drove him crazy.

He literally said that it was John Owen to whom he owes under God his sanity. And in John Owen's writing on sin and temptation, he explains that this is the struggle of the Christian, of the Apostle Paul, that when I would do good, evil is present with me.

And I find right inside of me this struggle that when I would do good, there's a part of me that doesn't want to do good. And the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh so that you do not do the things that you would.

And that's what saved him from insanity is what he said. And I think that's why this is so personal to him and why he's so exercised by it.

[20:34] Now, he says, what is wrong then with this teaching? Well, many things. It fails to grasp the New Testament teaching on sanctification and the Christian warfare. That the Christian life is a fight to the end.

You will fight and struggle and grapple and wrestle with sin until the day you die. And only then will you be utterly free from warfare.

Sanctification is ongoing and progressive. And furthermore, these forms of teaching of the Christian life don't understand the operation of indwelling sin.

That in the holiest Christian, there is still indwelling sin. And that indwelling sin will always make holiness difficult. It will ensure that there will be a struggle for every step of growth and grace.

So at any point of this, we could stop and spend the rest of the time on the Christian warfare, on the presence of indwelling sin in the believer's life. Furthermore, he says, it confuses the Christian life on earth with the Christian life as it will be in heaven.

[21:44] This is what Mark was talking about. He saw this fellow on the internet who expected that what will be in heaven should be experienced now. The full glory of heaven should be my experience now.

New body, no struggle, and health, and wealth, and prosperity. That is coming. You know that. The health, wealth, and prosperity teachers have it right. That is what is coming to the Christian.

But it's part of the not yet. It's not part of this age. It's when we meet Christ and the meek will inherit the earth and all things are yours and so on.

And there will be no more sickness and death. But they're wanting what is for the eternal age now. So that's a confusion of a truth. It's misapplying it.

But where Packer camps is that this teaching loses sight of God's present purpose and methods in achieving that purpose. What is God's present purpose in the Christian life and what are his methods for achieving that purpose?

[22 : 50] First of all, he says it's important that we understand God's present purpose in our lives. Is his purpose for me right now to give me a life without pain and struggle and disappointment and heartache and struggle?

Is that his purpose? If I think so, I've got it all wrong and I'm going to be confused. And he teaches us no, it's not his purpose. His purpose, the purpose of God for the believer right now is for us to be conformed into the likeness of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Romans 8, 29. He's predestined us to be conformed into the likeness of his Son because he would have many sons who bear the same image as his glorious one and only Son, Jesus.

Okay, so that's his goal. To make us like Christ. To bring us closer and closer into his image. To bring us closer and closer into fellowship with him.

To get to know him better. This is his goal for his people. Now the question comes as to methodology. How does God do that? How does God in grace accomplish this purpose?

[23 : 58] What is his method? How does he work such Christ-like virtue into our life? How does he bring us to know him better? And Packer says, It is not by shielding us from the assaults of the world and the flesh and the devil.

Oh, don't touch my little one here. He must not have any struggle. That's not how God teaches us to know him better. It's not by sheltering us from burdensome and frustrating circumstances, nor is it by eliminating problems in our relationships.

but it is rather precisely by exposing us to all these things and even in heavy doses of them so as to overwhelm us with a sense of our own inadequacy and to drive us to cling to him more closely.

And it is in clinging to him as one who is totally inadequate in myself that I get to know him better and I get to experience more of the power of his resurrected life and I become more and more like him.

So problems, troubles, trials, struggles are part of the methods that God is employing in the normal Christian life to take his ordinary saint and to make him into one who bears that extraordinary likeness of Jesus.

[25 : 23] Packer says the reason the Bible spends so much of its time reiterating that God is a strong rock, a fortress, a tower, a bulwark, is because so much in our life is calculated to make us feel our need for a bulwark, a castle, a tower.

we get into situations where we dare not trust ourselves and we need him and we lean hard on him. Well, that's the method that he's taking to drive us out of self-confidence and trust in ourselves to bring us to hope and to wait on the Lord.

In Psalm 61, 2, David says, when my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. What does it feel like to be overwhelmed?

Well, David says it's like being in an ocean or in a water that's over my head and the waves and the breakers are constantly pouring over me and I'm going under.

I'm overwhelmed. I can't handle this. And he says, when I feel I'm going under, when my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. When do we press after God to know him, to take refuge in him, except when we're overwhelmed?

[26 : 51] Do we think God does not understand that? He understands it clearly. So what's he after? He's after overwhelming situations to send us running to the rock that is higher than I.

It's part of his methods. It's not his only method. I don't want to say that is his only method of making us into the image of Christ, but Packer is saying it is a crime to say that it is not one of his methods to act like it's something extraordinary, something strange for the Christian life.

So what kind of things overwhelm you? Maybe just the responsibilities of being a husband, being a father, a wife, a neighbor, a member of a church, your job.

Or maybe it's probably for many of us, it's the combination of all the above. and all the above, little here, little there, and it soon becomes overwhelming to us and we can't cope and we can't bear with it all.

Do you think that God could keep us? Do you think that God could keep us from ever feeling overwhelmed? Do you think that in this life he could so control the circumstances and our relationships and our responsibilities and the struggles of my life so that they were always very manageable, very much able to be handled by me, never overwhelming me?
[28:22] Of course he could. And sometimes he does that, doesn't he? Life is going very well for us.

But that's not his plan to keep us in that zone, is it? And so he brings all these things to bear to make us say, oh, lead me to the rock that's higher than I.
I don't have any footing here. I have nothing in myself to make this work. One Puritan said, God leads us, God takes us into the deep waters, not to drown us, but to develop us.
Turn in your Bible to 1 Corinthians 10, 13. 1 Corinthians 10, 13. This is a passage that reminds us that God is the one who in sovereignty is actually responsible for every temptation that comes to our door.
If it meets us, that difficulty, that trial, that temptation of Satan, whatever it is, if it makes its way to my door, I can know that God is the one who sovereignly has allowed it, therefore has sent it on a mission to do me good.
[29:38] 1 Corinthians 10, 13. No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful.

He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. God will be tempted.
He will never let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.
So you can know that everything that reaches you, of trouble and trial and temptation, it's been measured out by God. It's not more than you can bear whatever the devil tells you.
I remember teaching this passage in a Bible study once and having a man just look me in the face and saying that's not true. God has given me more than I can bear.
[30:41] This says he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. That's not right. I have been tempted beyond what I could bear.

Well how do you answer a guy like that? Turn over to 2 Corinthians 1. Hold your place here and turn over to 2 Corinthians 1 because it almost seems like this guy had some biblical ammunition. He didn't offer it but in subsequent times I've thought about that discussion we had and I thought of this passage 2 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 8 it's the same apostle Paul has wrote the first letter to the Corinthians he's now writing the second letter and he says in verse 8 of chapter 1 we do not want you to be uninformed brothers about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia we were under great pressure far beyond our ability to endure so that we despaired even of life alright here Paul tells us that he was tempted and tried far beyond his ability to endure way above what he could handle but he told these same Christians back in chapter 10 verse 13 of his first epistle that God will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to endure so you've got your thinking caps on explain to me which is it how is that what is
Paul saying in this first letter what is he saying in this second letter how do these two come together unless we unless we believe that the Bible is not inspired and without error we must believe that these two things that appear to be contradictory have some way of not contradicting each other will not let you be tempted beyond what you bear and Paul says I was tempted way beyond what I was able to!

Ed? God knows us better than we know ourselves God also knows the power of his grace and what grace we do in our lives which we are lying to I think you said it well in those two statements brother anybody else Dennis he says back in first letter that when you are tempted you will also provide a way out so you can stand up under and then in the second letter Paul was on to say right after the verse you there that indeed in our hearts we felt a sense of death that this happened that we might not rely on ourselves on God who raises the dead he delivered us from such deadly good did you hear that in the back alright anyone else

[34:02] Jim hadn't thought about that possibly is giving further light on an earlier statement that he made in his earlier letters to clarify in other words when he says in his first letter that God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you're able we're not to think oh that means that God will always keep life easy and simple and manageable for me not beyond what I'm able to bear I can handle that so God will handle that I can handle that no not in yourself not in yourself because as Dennis pointed out what he's promising is that in the trial he will give you grace he will give you a

way out he will give you strength so that you can stand up under it so yes

Paul can say I was tempted beyond what I could endure but it's not beyond what I could endure looking to my rock who's higher than I who gives me strength in my weakness and multiplies his strength through my weakness and so yes God knows better than us what we can bear and he is counting on his grace that will be given to us in the trial to keep us from going under he promises to never send trial and allow temptation into our life that would smash us because he knows that he has grace to hold us up in the trial questions comments further dare may Amen.

So the overwhelming waves are meant to make us look to the rock that's higher. The crushing, overwhelming trials of life are meant to, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1, verse 9, Indeed in our hearts we felt the sentence of death, but this happened so that we might not rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

So it happens that we might rely on God. I don't expect you to hold your hand up or to answer me out loud. How many of you Christians have been in trials and can say as a result of those trials, you have come to learn something more about God?

Think about that for a moment. Because this discussion of trials finds itself in a book called Knowing God.

[37 : 15] Why is that? What's the relationship between trials and knowing God? Packer is saying that trials are one of the instruments, one of the methods that God uses to bring us to know Him better.

And can you not say that it was in that dark hour that you found the light of God's Word to be precious? Just one promise of His Word became exceedingly precious to you.

When you were forsaken by men, you found more joy in God's unfailing love for you. Whatever your trial, your frustration, your disappointment, has it not done this very thing to make us look to the Lord and to find our all in all in Him.

It's one thing to read in the Bible, God is a rock that is higher than I. It's another thing for me to feel the third wave going over my head and to run to that rock that is higher than I and to hang on to it and to find it doesn't move.

And it really is holding me up in the midst of the same breakers. That's why Packer is so upset about these teachings that would try to eliminate trials in the normal Christian life.

[38 : 43] You would ask to be stunted in your knowledge of God. No, because these are the ways He draws us nearer. These are the ways He opens His heart to us and shows us what He is like.

And so one writer says we should be more anxious that our affliction should benefit us than that they should be speedily removed.

Now trials by themselves do not make us better Christians. By themselves they exhaust us, they exasperate us, they depress us, they embitter us, they get the better of us.

But it is only as they drive us to Christ the rock that they will do us good and draw us nearer. That's God's design. To draw us to Christ. Put our neck in the yoke with Him.

He too was afflicted. In all their afflictions He too was afflicted, the Bible says. And even now He has a sympathy with you and your afflictions. So put your neck in the yoke with Christ and learn from Him.

[39 : 44] And make that trial to do you good. Let me close with a poem that John Newton wrote, writer of Amazing Grace.

It's probably a song I've been looking for some music to sing it to. But it's from this song or poem that Newton wrote that Packer takes his title for this chapter, These Inward Trials.

See if you can't relate to what Packer is saying. And what, I'm sorry, what Newton is saying. I asked the Lord that I may grow in faith and love and every grace might more of His salvation know and seek more earnestly His face.

I hoped that in some favored hour at once He'd answer my request and by His love's constraining power subdue my sins and give me rest. Instead of this, He made me feel the hidden evils of my heart and let the angry powers of hell assault my soul in every part.

Yea, more, with His own hand He seemed intent to aggravate my woe. He crossed all the fair designs I schemed, blasted my gourds and laid me low.

[41 : 11] The gourd being like Jonah's gourd that offered some comfort from the heat and God blasted that gourd and laid him low. Lord, why is this my trembling cry?

Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death? Tis in this way the Lord replied I answer prayer for grace and faith. These inward trials I employ from self and pride to set Thee free and break Thy schemes of earthly joy that Thou mayest seek Thine all in me.

These inward trials are my methods to drive you off of self-reliance and seeking your joy and the things below so that you can say like Asaph whom have I in heaven but Thee?

And there's nothing on earth I desire besides Thee. these are His methods. Are you in line with His aim? Have you embraced His aim for what He's up to in your life today?

His aim is to make you like Jesus. Have you embraced that? You must. Have you embraced His methods? All of them. Trials included. Personalize this lesson to your present trials or your present trials leading you to the rock that is higher than yourself.

[42 : 36] Let's pray. O Lord we're like a lump of clay that would crawl off the potter's wheel and not want the pressure of the potter's hands.

Forgive us when you you the one whose hands were pierced with nails out of love for us are the potter and we are the clay in such faithful loving hands.

Give us then to to trust You and to come to know You better. I pray for each of us in whatever our present trials are outward or inward Lord help us even use this day our fellowship the preaching the worship the rest to orient ourselves again to what You're up to in our lives and to grow closer to You to know You better we ask in Jesus' name Amen.

Amen.