

# REFINE US, part 2

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Discouragement is a difficult battle to fight. Today, I want to show you how the devil suckers us into places of discouragement, and how you can be smarter than he is and, with God's help, avoid those snares or escape those traps.

## A Word To Be Tested

When you make a promise that you do not keep, it can be discouraging. But nothing I know of is more discouraging than failing to please God, who has been so gracious to us.

How many times have you imagined that you had trouble because you lack faith? Or, because you practice your faith inconsistently? Or, because you failed God in some way?

You need a bigger glimpse of the grace of God! And today I want to give it to you!

Which of the apostles had unfailing faith? Didn't they ALL fall asleep when Jesus asked them to support Him in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (in His hour of need)? And didn't they ALL forsake Jesus when He was arrested? And, in spite of that, didn't they ALL become leading elders of the Church that Jesus is building?

Is there anyone here who has *never* come up short in the faith department?

Is there anyone here who has been absolutely consistent in practicing Christian faith—never missed a step?

When you have failed God—and we all have—didn't He forgive you and set you on your feet again? Didn't He invite you to follow Him again?

God is *for* you! He's not against you. He's not trying to trip you up so He can throw you out. He's trying to lift you up so you can be the head (not the tail)!

It's Jesus Christ who makes you "more than a conqueror"!

But when it comes to Jesus' words, what sort of hearer are you? Are you eager to hear His words, like Mary, who sat before Him, listening? Well, it turns out that your attitude of *approach* to God's words is only half of the battle.

What you do with His words *after* you have heard them is equally important. And here's something revealing Jesus said about the condition of certain hearts that hear His words:

*Mark 4:16* *These are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, **when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.***

“Rocky ground” describes a shallow layer of earth above bedrock—a layer of impenetrable sand- or limestone. The earth is only inches deep, incapable of retaining sufficient water to nourish a tree, because the sun and wind quickly evaporate the moisture. And the layer of stone prevents roots from anchoring deep in the soil, so they, too, are dried up by the heat.

Shallow roots mean insufficient moisture and nutrients, and insufficient strength to endure high winds or heat. Get the picture?

What if my spiritual roots are also shallow, due to a hard layer of self-serving, self-protecting, self-interest? Won't it mean that I will lack the spiritual strength necessary to endure winds of change or heat of circumstance?

I've heard it said that “into every life some rain must fall.” But if that rain cannot soak into the ground because of its hardness, won't it turn to a flood that erodes? Is the outcome because of the rain, or because of the condition of the soil?

Jesus said, not if, but “*when*” trouble arises “*on account of the word.*” Personal trials or persecutions arise **because you have embraced God's words** in your life. Now, God is putting His promises to the test, and your life is the crucible in which those tests take place.

If you thought you were embarking on the easy road of life when you became a follower of Jesus, you were mistaken.

*Matthew 7:13 “You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. <sup>14</sup> But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.*

But it's also the great way of life! Jesus also calls it the “fullness of life,” “completeness,” “maturity,” and “perfection.”

The “highway to hell” may be broad, but it is not easy either. Life without Christ is no bowl of peaches, and resisting the Holy Spirit is difficult. I've heard many people describe their lives as “hell on earth.” I never heard *anyone* describe following Jesus that way. I'm just saying...

Someone here may choose today to follow Christ on that narrow road, even though it brings some trials. Do you sense the Holy Spirit pulling you towards Him now? Pay attention to that.

Personal trials or persecutions arise because you have embraced God's words in your life. Those tests are not given to *see if* God's words can stand up to it, but **to show that God's words are more than enough!** He watches over His words to perform them. He will not permit them to fall to the ground fruitless. But they will be tested in the heart and life of each one who receives them.

*Psalm 12:6 The Lord's promises are pure, like silver refined in a furnace, purified seven times over.*

They will be tested by the inner elements of our human nature and the outer elements of our life experiences.

Why does “trouble or persecution” arise? *“On account of the word.”* What is meant by “on account of the word”?

Tests and trials are not all on account of *your sins or failures*. Trouble and persecution are the proving grounds of God's word. They provide the heat that refines the silver.

“But if it's God's word, why does it need refining,” you ask. Great question! Because it comes to us as raw ore.

You read a verse in the Bible, and you think you've found something good, something special. But that's raw ore; it's in an unrefined state. Why? Because, as Jesus said, God's words “are Spirit and they are Life.” The writer of the Book of Hebrews said His words are alive and powerful (Hebrews 4:12). You've caught a glimpse of that—you've grasped their truth—but you have still to see it fulfilled in your experience.

Seeing it is not the same as possessing it.

You've caught a glimpse of raw ore, mixed with and obscured by other materials. It needs to be refined in order to reveal and release its potential.

Let me describe the process of refining ore by fire: Raw ore is chiseled from the earth and crushed, then heated in a crucible until its impurities burn up or surface, to be skimmed away. The silver is considered pure when the refiner can see his own reflection clearly on the molten surface.

What, then, is the purpose of this testing or refining? Testing is how the word gets applied in your life. Without a test, you wouldn't need to make an application.

“If I never had a problem, I wouldn't know that God could solve them. I wouldn't know what faith in God could do.” (Andrae Crouch)

Each person and circumstance present a unique environment for the application of God's word. When the word is applied with faith and held in faith until the trial passes, that word becomes a part of you. It becomes, literally, Christ in you.

What do the tests reveal? They reveal the Word's truthfulness, its durability, its superiority, its enduring power.

*Ephesians 3:10 God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety **to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.** <sup>11</sup> This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord.*

God uses the church—that's you—to display His wisdom. You are an object lesson for the heavens!

What is the intended takeaway? Glory for God. And victory for you. Stronger assurance means greater confidence and readiness.

If the "Sword of the Spirit" is the Word of God, then learning to lean on the Word with enduring faith is learning to wield the Sword with powerful effect.

The effectiveness of Jesus' confrontation with the devil in the wilderness was not because He quoted Scripture, but because He wielded those Scriptures appropriately in faith.

Jesus was not describing what He wished were so; He described what He *knew* to be so. He was speaking with *proven* faith—faith that had been tested.

Jesus' faith was not secure simply because He was the Son of God, but because, as the Son of Man, He had practiced His faith, held to His faith, and proven the words in which He trusted.

He was not just hoping the devil would listen to reason (like we have at times), He was instructing the devil, commanding his submission to the truth.

When God's words have been tested and proven in your life, you may wield them in a similar manner, causing the devil to return to his place and giving glory to our God and Savior.

## What Next

Here's what I want you to do with what I've shared today:

1. **Read the Word.** Gather those chunks of raw (and precious) ore from the Bible. Highlight them, write them down, commit them to memory, or share them with a trusted friend.
2. **Be prepared.** God's words will be tested in your life. Be ready to trust Jesus for wisdom and direction, for protection and provision.
3. **Practice the Word.** Learn to put God's word into practice. You won't master it the first time, but with practice, it will become second nature.
4. **Stand fast.** All you have to do to pass the test is *hold on*. Don't abandon your faith that God's words will adjust you and your circumstances.

Will you agree with me? Will you renew your commitment to stand upon the Word in faith and let the Lord refine His Word in you? There's pure silver to come!