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Psalm 66

"The Refiner's Fire"

Pastor Gary Hamrick

The Bible often compares God to a "Refiner," and us to "silver or gold." Silver or gold cannot reach its optimum value without other byproducts (zinc, lead, copper, etc.) being burned away. The only way to remove these byproducts is to put the precious metal under intense heat in a furnace. In the process of refining silver, the intense heat will cause all of the impurities (dross) to rise to the surface so they can be skimmed off and discarded. Sometimes God uses the intense heat of difficult life circumstances to cause impurities to rise to the surface so we can deal with those things that mar our lives. God wants to purify and perfect us to make us more into his image and likeness. Through the patience of our Good Refiner, we will be made into pure vessels for his use.

Historical Background

1. A song is obviously something sung, and a psalm is a song accompanied by a stringed instrument.
2. The author of this psalm is not known, and it is counted among the 50 psalms (one-third of the 150 psalms) referred to as "the orphan psalms," because it isn't attributed to a particular writer.
3. Pastor Gary said: "The theme of Psalm 66 is basically a psalm of praise for God's awesome deeds and his refining work in our lives."
4. [Psalm 66:8-12](#) mentions some kind of a hardship or trials the nation of Israel faced.
 - a. [Psalm 66:11](#) - *"You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs."*

- b. [Psalm 66:12](#) - *"You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water..."*
 - c. The writer may have been referring to the Israelites being in bondage in Egypt or the 70 years of exile in Babylon, under King Nebuchadnezzar.
- 5. Pastor Gary said: "Whatever this difficulty was, it served to test them and to refine them as the people of God. It was the process by which God would make them a better people."
- 6. [Psalm 66:10](#) - *"For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver."*
- 7. Pastor Gary said: "Before [we] can be refined, we first have to be mined... God goes after us and digs us out, and he takes us from the depths of some pit and he mines us for his purposes. [This] reminds me of the parable of the [hidden treasure] that Jesus taught."
 - a. [Matthew 13:44](#) - *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."*
 - b. Pastor Gary said: "You read almost any Bible commentary and there is almost [complete] agreement... that [the] treasure is Jesus, and [what we need to do] is find him and [give] up all we have to secure Jesus. But I disagree with those commentaries. It doesn't make sense [regarding] the overall view of the Gospel, because... [I didn't find] Jesus; he found me! I was dead in my trespasses and sins, [and] I was as lost as lost can be! It was Jesus who found me! ... We didn't find him; he found us. We weren't even looking for him [but] he came in our direction and pursued us and found us for his glory!"
 - i. [Ephesians 2:1](#) - *"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins..."*
 - c. *Victory in Jesus* - "He sought me and bought me with His redeeming blood... he loved me ere I knew him..."¹
- 8. When we are "mined" we have a lot of blemishes, imperfections, dirt, and debris on us, which requires the refining work of God.
- 9. Pastor Gary said: "He mines us and then he refines us so we will be of greater worth and value, and more conformed to his likeness... Refining rock, metals, and minerals always involves some aspect of washing, cutting, breaking, [or] heating..."

¹ http://www.popularhymns.com/victory_in_jesus.php

² <https://www.amazon.com/As-Silver-Refined-Answers-Disappointments/dp/1400073480>

10. Pastor Gary said: “God’s refining work can sometimes be very painful and very uncomfortable, because it is often through painful life experiences that God will do his refining work in our lives... God does his refining work in our lives to make our faith more genuine. Now, I don’t mean more genuine in the sense of sincere... I mean better quality.”
11. **1 Peter 1:6-7** - *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”*
12. Pastor Gary said: “... God takes us through the fire sometimes to burn away the impurities, and to bring to the surface some junk that we didn’t even know [existed] in our hearts... [and] junk that rises to the surface when the heat is turned up and metal is refined, is what silversmiths’ call [dross].”
13. The Bible includes a number of references to refining, including:
 - a. **Job 23:10** - *“But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.”*
 - b. **Zechariah 13:9** - *“This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God.’ ”*
 - c. **Isaiah 48:10** - *“See, I have refined you, though not [as severely] as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.”*
 - d. **Malachi 3:2-3** - *“But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver...”*

The Refiner Breaks Up The Ore

14. In biblical times, a silversmith started the process of refining by using a hammer to break up the ore.
15. In a manner of speaking, God accomplishes this in us when his Word breaks our hearts.
16. **Jeremiah 23:29** - *“ ‘Is not my word like fire,’ declares the LORD, ‘and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?’ ”*

17. When we come to faith in Christ for salvation, that's when we have been "mined" by God, who then begins his refining work in our lives.

The Refiner Places It In The Crucible

18. A crucible is a fireproof melting pot that is able to withstand extreme heat.
19. Pastor Gary said: "Our refiner God uses the heat of excruciating circumstances to purify our hearts and cleanse our character."
20. **Proverbs 17:3** - *"The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart."*
21. **Romans 5:3b-5** - *"And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."*

The Refiner Removes The Dross

22. **Proverbs 25:4** - *"Remove the dross from the silver, and [the silversmith can produce a vessel]."*
23. In our lives "dross" would be any motives, actions, words, or thoughts, which are unbecoming to God.

The Refiner Turns Up The Heat

24. After the dross is removed, the refiner places the crucible of silver back into the furnace; as many as seven times, because certain impurities will only come out at certain temperatures!
25. **Psalms 12:6** - *"And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times."*
26. Pastor Gary said: "The only way that we can ultimately become pure and right and holy and useful as vessels is when God's refining work has its way in our lives. And, sometimes that process is repeated over and over again."

The Refiner Sees His Reflection

27. Each time a refiner repeats the process of placing the crucible of silver in the furnace, the refiner's face is more clearly visible.
28. **Malachi 3:3** - "[God] will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver..."
29. Pastor Gary said: "When we more [resemble] his image; that's when God knows that we are done... Life is going to be a process, [and we won't be] completely done [in this life]."
30. **2 Corinthians 3:18** - *"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."*
31. God is not to be compared to a forest fire or an incinerator, but a refiner.
32. "When disappointments like these smash their way into your life, you may want to scream, 'How could God let this happen?' But what if God didn't just 'let it happen'? What if the things you call disappointments are really His appointments - events He is using to make you more like Christ? What if your circumstances are actually the flames of His grace, intended to melt and burn away the undesirable elements in your life, leaving you pure and radiant - like refined silver?" - Kay Arthur ²
33. Pastor Gary said: "I don't want [anyone] to misunderstand me. I'm not saying and I don't think Kay Arthur is saying that God causes everything grief and every horrible loss in your life as some kind of a divine appointment. But what if through those things he wants to make us better people... give you a better marriage... a better family... to know him better and to reflect him better? [May our] difficult times serve to be a refiner's fire in our lives to burn away all of the junk in our hearts that maybe we didn't even know was there, so that other people will be more able to clearly the Refiner in us."

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read **Psalm 66** to provide the foundation for this study.

² <https://www.amazon.com/As-Silver-Refined-Answers-Disappointments/dp/1400073480>

3. What are some of the ways people try to understand and cope with difficult times in life and God's refining work?
4. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the God's mining process. (See #7 through #10 above)
5. Read and discuss [1 Peter 1:6-7](#).
6. What are some examples of the blemishes, imperfections, dirt, and debris that God has removed in your life?
7. How would you describe your experiences in the refiner's fire?
8. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about times when the Word of God was used to break their heart? (See #14 through #16 above)
9. Read and discuss [Romans 5:3b-5](#).
10. Share examples of the motives, actions, words, or thoughts that have been burned away in the refiner's crucible.
11. How is the Lord making you into a useful vessel?
12. Read and discuss the Kay Arthur quote Pastor Gary shared. (See #32 above)
13. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about God's desire to make us into his image. (See #33 above)
14. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).