

MAGH
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Growth Through Trials and Persecution

At the end of last year, I went through a really difficult season of what to me felt like persecution and character assassination from an individual. And honestly, it stirred up a lot of “this is just not fair” in me. It hit my flesh hard. I felt angry, defensive, and at times consumed by it.

What made it even harder was the hit to my ego - when your integrity and reputation, something you’ve built over years, suddenly gets questioned. That’s not easy to carry.

This whole story is still a testimony in the making. It may still be ongoing. But I want to share what the Lord has been showing me through it, in the hope that it encourages you, because every one of us will face seasons like this.

I will share more about what happened in a moment but for now, let’s reflect on how we perceive and react to challenges...

1. Persecution As a Training Ground

The truth is, we all experience challenges. But Scripture tells us those challenges aren’t to be wasted. They’re a training ground of opportunities—opportunities to grow, to mature, and to be refined in our faith.

James 1:2-4 says:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

This verse doesn’t say trials are enjoyable. It says they’re *productive*.

God uses pressure to form perseverance. Perseverance shapes character. In other words, pressure reveals what’s really being built in us.

Acts 14:21-22 also reminds us that perseverance through trials is essential for our spiritual growth:

“They (Paul and Barnabas) preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.”

Paul doesn’t sugarcoat it. He tells the disciples straight: hardship is part of the journey. Not because God is cruel—but because growth requires resistance.

We see this as a basic principle in nature, for a seedling to sprout from a seed it must break through the

outer layer of the seed. Even snakes will shed their outer skin as they grow. If we want to build muscle at the gym we need resistance and pressure from the weights.

Growing through resistance is everywhere we see – it is built into nature and every element of our world. But as individuals, when we are tested, because it's not comfortable our go to can be to complain about it and to not appreciate that God has actually built this in as a process for us to grow.

And this is so beautifully described by Apostle Paul in Romans 5: 3–4 where he says:

"We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."

***Let's Pray – Thank you Lord for the challenges we face and for letting pressure and resistance mould and grow us. Thank you for the perseverance and character it builds in us!*

2. Avoiding a Victim Mentality

One of the biggest dangers during persecution is slipping into a victim mentality. When we do that, we stop seeing what God is doing and start focusing only on what's being done *to* us.

I experienced this firsthand with the situation I encountered at the end of last year:

[Juan to share testimony]

However, as we advance in faith, the Word is clear we have to expect that attacks from the enemy will come.

The verses below highlight the inevitability of persecution for those who follow Christ:

2 Timothy 3:12:

"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

John 15:18-20:

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also."

So Scripture is clear: persecution isn't a sign you're doing something wrong - it's often confirmation you're walking with Christ!

But along with James who we've already heard from above, telling us to 'consider it pure joy', Matthew 5:10-12 also exhorts us to rejoice:

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

And 1 Peter 4:12-14 goes even further and says persecution is actually evidence of God's Spirit resting on us:

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

That reframes everything. What feels like rejection may actually be confirmation.

***Let's Pray – Lord please help me overcome any victim based thoughts I may have. Thank you for the times I have been persecuted for these confirm I am walking with You.*

3. Persecution As Spiritual Warfare

Last year I feel I was challenged and that went deeper in my walk with Christ. I felt I was called to step up in a lot of areas. Through a number of challenges (the house build/impact on marriage and my wife calling out I had 'too many exits'), I leant into God more than ever and by the end of November, I felt things had settled more at home and my wife and I were in a good place.

And so what happened (ie the story I shared above) straight after we had returned from our holiday felt like a backlash from the enemy in many ways.

Spiritual warfare is not a new concept to me (experienced since I was 12) so it was pretty obvious to me what this was.

But I know I have had a history of God protecting me and so I was confident in that. However, even when you recognize spiritual warfare, it doesn't mean you're immune to it. I found myself fluctuating - some days walking in the Spirit, other days reacting in the flesh.

The Bible reminds us that we must remain watchful of the enemy and always be ready should the enemy attack us:

1 Peter 5:8:

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

2 Corinthians 2:11:

“Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.”

Ephesians 6:12:

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

As we get attacked, the **impact on our ego** can be significant. Apostle Paul talks a lot about spiritual clothing and what we should be ‘putting on’ and ‘putting off’:

Ephesians 6:11-13 says to “PUT ON”:

“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”

Ephesians 4:22-23 says to “PUT OFF”:

“Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Paul makes it clear that spiritual clothing is intentional. You don’t drift into it. **You have to choose it - daily.**

Which I became aware of as I saw myself fluctuating between the flesh and the spirit as the individual's attacks became noisier. This can lead to limiting thoughts.

***Let’s Pray – Lord I am sorry for the times I revert to the flesh. Please help me daily to put on the full armor of God. To choose every day to put off my old self and put on my new self created after Your the likeness.*

4. When Persecution Limits Your Thinking

Under pressure, people tend to fall back on past experiences, and unresolved trauma can surface. These disruptions in thinking and behavior can cause thoughts to become unsettled.

Likewise, I was quite rattled and shaken during this time, but it was important for me to remember that while past experiences and trauma may try to limit my future, God places no limits on us and calls us to break free from the constraints of the past.

It’s like muscle memory.

Martial Arts Example

When I trained students in martial arts, we practiced repetitive movements long before sparring because they needed to block thousands of times first. This repetition builds muscle memory, allowing their senses and movements to respond instinctively and much faster.

Faith works the same way. When pressure hits, you may not initially rise to the occasion – the initial reaction can be to fall back on what you've trained in. If your faith is shallow then perhaps your initial reaction may be to ask God why He's let this happen or to just complain about the situation.

But we know as MAGH prayer warriors, as men of God that a strong faith means we know we can fall back on prayer, on scripture, on our community and in our full trust in the Lord.

You need to be able to train yourself in order to have resilience before you get attacked.

I reflect on this and I'm so grateful for God's training to date:

- If I hadn't received a prophecy two years earlier about God's protection over me...
- If I hadn't been planted at MAGH for years...
- If I hadn't had prayer warriors standing with me (like Ps Lakers, Ps Josh, brothers Eddie, Josh, Ronny and Barry that all stepped up – thank you!!!)...
- I would have felt completely lost.

When faced with the challenge I shared above, the muscle memory kicked in and instead of running into a sense of despair (which I would have done years ago) I instead clung to His promises and ways that bring me into His Presence. I also clung to the community He gave me.

2 Corinthians 4:17:

“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”

I know what feels heavy now is shaping something eternal in me.

Right now the storm has calmed but I need to be ready for what may come and when it does I will give thanks to God for it.

Gentleman please reflect on the following:

- “What does persecution or pressure tend to bring out in you?”
- “What spiritual muscle memory are you building right now?”
- “Who are the people you lean on when you're under attack?”

***As you reflect on the above, let's pray.*