

CHAPTER 5

"THE WORLD"

⁴You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

James 4:4 (NIV)

¹⁵Do not love the world nor the things in the world . If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

1 John 2:15-16 (NASB)

¹⁴"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁵"I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

John 17:14-16 (NASB)

³³"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

John 16:33 (NASB)

¹⁹We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one.

1 John 5:19(RSV)

¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

1 Corinthians 2:12 (ESV)

What is meant by "the world" and "worldliness"?

The Greek word '*kosmos*', which is translated as '*the world*', does not mean this physical planet that we live *on*. It refers to this present evil age that we live *in*. It encompasses all the values, attitudes and ways of the unbelieving, non-Christian, God-hating world around us. The world, in turn, reflects the values, attitudes and ways of the Devil whom the Bible refers to as "*the god of this world*". However, it is not only non-Christians who are '*worldly*'.

We are all worldly to the extent that we reflect and adopt the standards of the world. One definition of *worldliness* is being attached to, engrossed in, or preoccupied with, the things of this present life. That affects Christians, not just non-Christians. We are all prone to it. Look again at how apostle John defines the nature of this present world:

¹⁶For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

1 John 2:16 (NASB)

John identifies three key concepts which, taken together, we might classify as '*worldliness*'. They are:

- a) the lust of the flesh
- b) the lust of the eyes
- c) the boastful pride of life

We shall examine each of these key phrases below.

- a) **the lust of the flesh** - this means our craving to satisfy the physical urges of our sinful nature. The power of these urges is reflected in the emphasis advertisers give to the use of sexual imagery to manipulate us to buy. Such adverts are only effective because the lusts within us are so powerful. The lust of the flesh causes us to operate without self-restraint or regard for right and wrong. This operates not only in relation to sex but also alcohol, food and any other things we long to have or that we use excessively, at the wrong time, or in the wrong way.
- b) **the lust of the eyes** - this refers to our desire for things we see. It is closely associated with greed, envy and covetousness. Again, advertisers rely heavily on these urges, and manipulate us through them. Consider how many of our conflicts and stresses come from being discontented with what we have and longing to have *more* things, *better* things and, in particular, *other people's* things.

This world reflects the character of Satan who lost his position in Heaven because he envied the Son of God and craved to be in His place. When we long for possessions, prestige and money, we are repeating what Satan did. It is the exact opposite of what Jesus did, when He came to this Earth as a man. He emptied Himself of all His glory until, in the end, there was no lower place He could go to.

- c) **the boastful pride of life** –This involves thinking of ourselves more than we should, focusing on self rather than other people, and seeking to exalt ourselves. It mirrors the attitude Satan showed in saying "*I will be like the Most High*". Few things are as ugly as pride. We hate it in other people but are blind to it in ourselves unless we go out of our way to look for it and ask God to help us to see it.

But I should make clear that God doesn't want us to think ill of ourselves or to consider ourselves useless or valueless. One could put it this way – "*God doesn't want us to think less of ourselves. He wants us to think of ourselves less*". So if you are a skilled violinist, God doesn't want you to pretend not to be. He just wants you to stop boasting about and dwelling upon what a great violinist you are.

Worldliness can therefore be recognised wherever we see any of these three things surfacing, i.e. the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life. These are Satan's ways of thinking and the rules by which this fallen world operates. But we are commanded to live in exactly the opposite ways. That is one reason why we are out of step with this world. It operates on the basis of pride and rebellion but we are commanded to operate with humility and obedience.

Likewise, the world reveres men's ability and their feral cunning. But we are commanded to look to God's wisdom instead. The world seeks to control, dominate and manipulate, but we are commanded to serve others and set people free. The world seeks to accumulate wealth and possessions, but we are meant to enjoy giving things away.

Therefore, it is not surprising that, as believers living in an unbelieving world, we are likely to get jostled about. The Christian life is like trying to walk away from Wembley Stadium just before the FA Cup Final, when tens of thousands of people are streaming towards it and bumping into you. That

would not be a peaceful stroll. It would be jerky and bumpy, requiring lots of stepping to the side as people collide into you.

Yet, how can such turbulence be avoided if you are resolved to walk in the opposite direction to the great mass of people around you? The bigger question, however, is whether or not you are determined to spend the rest of your life walking in the opposite direction to the crowd. Most of us are not, at least in this lukewarm, apostate generation.

The ruler of this world is Satan

This world system belongs to the Devil and is run by him. It reflects his values and his principles, rather than God's. That is why the Devil is referred to as "*the god of this age*", "*the prince of this world*", or the "*ruler of the world*".

³¹Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.

John 12:31 (NIV)

⁴The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2 Corinthians 4:4 (NIV)

When Adam and Eve sinned, they effectively abdicated the rulership of planet Earth, which God had given to them. A vacuum was created which was then entered into and taken over by Satan. He has had the control of this world ever since and he will keep it until Jesus Christ takes it back from him completely at His Second Coming. For now, however, this world is run by Satan and it reflects him and his ways.

Therefore, in addition to having to fight a 'civil war' inside yourself against your own flesh, you also have to fight an external battle against this world system, all its values and what it stands for. That means you are going to end up in opposition to many things that are happening around you at work or in your neighbourhood or family.

The 'world system' is based on conforming and being squeezed until you fit into its mould

Most people are heavily influenced by the opinions of those around them. There is a strong craving to be accepted and approved of by others. In some people this longing to be accepted is so strong they cannot be happy without it and will do virtually anything to obtain approval.

We saw this during the years 2020-2021, in what I call "the covid hoax" when millions of people obeyed absurd rules, including isolating themselves in their homes, abandoning elderly relatives and closing down their churches for many months.

They also consented to having a series of "vaccinations" when the very best that could be said about those covid jabs was that they were "experimental" and "rushed". But I saw it as far worse than that as I discuss in my talks on covid and also in my audio series called "Modern Deceptions".

In my view our politicians and the scientists advising them were not incompetent, negligent or even reckless. If they had been all of these things, they would not be entirely to blame for their actions. I

believe that, on the contrary, they knew exactly what they were doing and were deliberately seeking to do us harm, and to kill many of us.

But even if you are not yet persuaded of all that, look at the long list of controversial issues and debates which have surfaced in recent years in which our politicians are *always taking us in the wrong direction* and putting us all under a lot of pressure to conform to what is obviously false and wrong. They never accidentally go in the right direction or pursue a godly policy without realising it.

But that is what would have happened if they had merely been incompetent and were making decisions on a random basis like tossing coins. It wasn't like that. The 'coins' always came down tails, never heads, which convinces me that the harm they did was all deliberate. Moreover, they are not content for us to merely shut our mouths and let them have their way. They insist that we publicly endorse their agenda. One sees this, for example, with all of the following issues:

- i) *homosexuality* promoted as a virtue
- ii) the promotion of *transgenderism*, i.e. the belief that men and women can change their gender and indeed that there are literally dozens of other genders to choose from besides male and female
- iii) *global warming* – the false idea that CO² operates to warm up the atmosphere and we therefore need to make drastic changes to our whole way of life, including ending the use of gas, oil or coal, even though we have, as yet, nothing to replace those energy sources – and even though our competitors, China, India and Russia are not pursuing any of these “green” policies and are going full steam ahead building coal fired power stations
- iv) *feminism*, i.e. resentment towards men, even to the level of hatred, and the desire to rebel against male authority, in particular rejecting the authority of the husband and father within the family
- v) *abortion* - a practice that has always existed, but only ever on a tiny scale with victims dotted about, here and there, whereas the killing of unborn babies is now a major business, operating on a huge industrial scale. Opposition to this murder is silenced by levelling the accusation that nobody would ever oppose abortion except on the basis of being “*anti women*” or “*motivated by hate*”. Most people fall for that trick and shut their mouths, including Christians who should instead be shouting from the rooftops.
- vi) *immigration* – over the last 50 years, but especially the last 20 years, and now at an even faster rate over the last 5 years, all the governments of the Western World (but nowhere else) are letting in a flood of Muslim immigrants, including illegal immigrants and immediately putting them up in 4* hotels (while our own native homeless people, including ex-military, are left to sleep on the streets).

Our governments lie to us and claim these are “refugees fleeing war”. Actually they are virtually all fighting age Muslim men, aged 18-30, never women, children or old men. The truth is these men are let in deliberately by our own governments so they can get ready to wage jihad and destroy the “Christian West” or “Christendom”. That is the real reason why they are flooding in, exactly in line with what the Koran tells them to do.

Therefore, on all these issues, and many more, hundreds of millions of people all over the West are intimidated into silence and pressurised into conformity because they don't want to be disapproved of or labelled as “far right”, “racist”, “narrow minded”, “Islamophobic” etc. But you are not entitled to be

silent. And all of those slurs and insults are invented and false anyway and are designed purely to silence you.

You have a solemn duty to tell the truth, and to think the truth, and it will be no excuse at the Judgment Seat of Christ for you to say *“Well I admit I did go along with them, Jesus, and I didn’t speak up for the truth, but you must realise, Jesus, these people can be aggressive and I didn’t want to be unpopular at work or be criticised online.”*

So, the gravitational pull of the world system is not only felt in the areas of smoking, drinking, gambling, drug taking and promiscuity, it also affects us in a host of other ways too, causing us to become weaklings and cowards, too afraid to speak the truth about moral or political issues or to openly live our life as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Have you ever asked yourself about any of this or examined your motives for lamely giving in to intimidation and letting yourself be silenced and squeezed into the world’s mould? I recommend you do and that you make it a robust cross examination, because the vast majority of us are guilty of this and it is getting steadily worse.

You must become willing to walk alone, to say unpopular things, and to receive no approval or praise from the world around you, *including within the churches*, many of which are fast becoming as worldly, politically correct and brainwashed as the unbelieving world is.

To do this, you will have to train yourself to be courageous enough to think for yourself, and to say what you think, based solely on truth and on the Bible, not group think, public opinion or what the media say. And if you haven’t yet realised the media is totally corrupt and deceitful then you urgently need to wake up.

How much of a hold or a claim does the world have on you?

The only way you can answer this question is to interview yourself with some vigour, but you must not let yourself off the hook or accept flimsy or dishonest excuses. Always remember this world is currently ruled by Satan and therefore our natural place is to be opposed to this ‘world system’, not to fit in with it.

We are not meant to fit in. God wants us to stick out like a healthy thumb. We are also to make sure Satan has no “claim” on us, i.e. no right to speak into our lives or to influence us as a result of some aspect of our conduct which is sinful, unbiblical or disobedient.

³⁰I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

John 14:30-31 (ESV)

And if you feel Satan does have some claim on you, or that there is some area of sin, compromise or cowardice in your life which weakens you in your fight, then take steps to confront those areas and to repent/renounce/revoke etc whatever is the source of the problem. The most likely ‘claim’ that the demons, will have on you is your own cowardice, which is a grievous sin, although few people seem to realise that.

They excuse cowardice as a “weakness” for which they are not to blame. But the truth is we are fully to blame for it and God will not accept it as an excuse for disobeying Him or not doing your duty. Our cowardice is a sin, and of the highest order, because that one sin alone will lead you into many others.

Above all, cowardice will cause you to fit in when you ought to stand out, to be silent when you should speak out, and to do nothing when you should be taking action. But the only cure for cowardice is courage, which means being willing, *as an exercise of the will*, to be obedient and faithful even when you are afraid.

You cannot ask God to take away all your fear and tell Him that you will obey Him when it has all gone. It doesn't work that way. It is the other way round and therefore the only way to get rid of your fear is by facing it *while you are still afraid* and doing the very things you fear most. I can assure you this is true. I have been set free from a lot of the fears that used to hinder me. But in every case the fear only left me *after I had faced up to it*, and done what I was afraid of, never before I did so.

God will use the ‘furnace’ of affliction, adversity and suffering to ‘melt’ away the influence of the world and the flesh – as He did with Joseph

The main person who is responsible for dealing with your flesh, and reducing the world's hold over you, is yourself. That is to say God expects you to be actively engaged in dealing with both, doing whatever it takes to gain the victory over them such that you can grow into a mature, successful, productive, faithful disciple.

We need to get that fact straight from the start. The primary responsibility is yours and you must take action, discipline yourself, deny your flesh, humble yourself, reject ungodly values, refuse to conform with worldly standards, learn wisdom and develop the courage to stand alone whenever the truth is at stake. You have a lot to do.

Therefore, you can't just sit back and expect God to do it all for you or for the mere passage of time to make you mature. That will not happen unless you actively participate in the maturing ‘project’ and cooperate with what God (and godly pastors and Bible teachers) advise you to do. If you don't then the passage of 30 years in the Church will just turn you from an immature, carnal and worldly 20 year old into an immature, carnal and worldly 50 year old.

Nevertheless, although the main responsibility for getting yourself to a place of maturity is yours, God is also willing, indeed eager, to help any Christian who wants to be helped to grow up and become a solid disciple, such that they are no longer ruled over by their flesh or by the world. So, this help is available.

However, I need to tell you frankly that God's way of achieving your maturity for you by intervening and imposing the necessary ‘treatment’ upon you is harder, and involves a lot more pain and suffering, than you will get from choosing voluntarily to pursue maturity for yourself.

Therefore, voluntarily humbling yourself, disciplining yourself and denying yourself by your own choice is by far the easier option – if you have any common sense. The problem is most of us don't have enough common sense to impose those things on ourselves. At any rate, we aren't willing to discipline or afflict ourselves strictly enough, and for long enough, to finish the job properly.

However, in principle, if you would only have enough sense to willingly do those things, take God's advice, and make right choices, then the process of changing from an immature, naïve, carnal, worldly timid new convert into a mature, wise, godly, courageous and unworldly disciple would be much easier.

It might involve a total of let's say "100 units" of discomfort, pain and suffering. But if you don't willingly subject yourself to those things and freely choose to humble yourself, deny yourself, discipline yourself etc, then you put God into a tight corner and give Him a difficult decision to make.

God could either:

- a) step back, do nothing, leave it all to you, and let you fail to deal with these things so that you remain immature, carnal, proud and worldly, such that you will probably be a failure as a Christian and even fall away completely OR
- b) intervene to help you by imposing upon you a set of circumstances, events and difficulties producing perhaps "500-1000 units" of discomfort which will have the effect of forcing you to grow up and to change *involuntarily*, because of your unwillingness to inflict these necessary things upon yourself by choice.

I call this second option "*the furnace of affliction*" and it is actually God's mercy and kindness which causes Him to do this. It is Him "*being cruel to be kind*" and it is done 100% for your benefit if you could only realise that.

Accordingly, if you freely choose to follow all of God's advice and impose a disciplined, diligent, self denying lifestyle upon yourself, then you can achieve maturity at the cost of only 100 'units of discomfort'. However, if you fail to do that and therefore make it necessary for God to intervene to do the job for you, it might require five to ten times as much discomfort, stress and pain to achieve the same outcome.

Obviously, therefore we should all come to our senses, see the point, and choose to do all of this voluntarily so as to get it over with more quickly and easily. But the problem is the vast majority of us are too foolish, weak, cowardly and flabby to make that choice, or to persist with it. Therefore God either has to intervene to impose the 'improvement regime' upon you or leave you to fail completely and get nowhere.

I wish I could tell you now that I was a model Christian who freely chose from day one to do all the right things and to humble myself willingly rather than requiring God to humble me, and to deny my flesh by choice rather than requiring God to do it for me by plunging me into painful circumstances against my wishes. But I can't say that.

Like most Christians, I didn't go anywhere near far enough in denying myself and I certainly didn't adequately humble myself. Therefore, God began to do the job for me, resulting in 5-10 times as much pain, stress and grief. He did it by putting me into situations of affliction that I never wanted to be in and His aim was to "*knock the stuffing out of me*".

In fact, God had already been doing this on a smaller scale for some years but, when I was 37, there was a very distinct turning point. I believe He gave me a choice as to whether to *ask Him* to step things up and increase the 'temperature' in the oven and keep me in the "*furnace of affliction*" for as long as

He felt was needed and do whatever it takes to humble me, defeat my flesh, remove the attraction of the world, and teach me wisdom.

I believe God gave me the choice as to whether to step up the intensity of the maturing programme and that I could have refused it if I had wanted to. But I chose to accept His offer. I made that decision in June 1999 shortly after my 37th birthday at which point I had already been (involuntarily) in God's furnace of affliction for many years and had come to have some understanding of what that is all about and why God does it.

So, by then I was no longer totally carnal or worldly. I had acquired some maturity and some wisdom but, in God's opinion, not enough of either. But then, one day I listened to an audio sermon on tape in which the speaker explained this concept of God's furnace of affliction and how it helps us, despite being very uncomfortable and even agonizing at times while we go through it.

The speaker then issued a challenge, accompanied by a frank warning, as to how much pain and stress it might involve. They invited the listener to freely, willingly, consciously *invite* God to put them into His furnace for as long as it takes and to do whatever it takes to achieve the job properly and to melt away all carnality, worldliness and foolishness such that we become a truly mature disciple capable of being used by God in the ways He intends.

I felt extremely convicted of the rightness of the message and of my great need to grow in maturity and I felt a very powerful yearning to achieve that and to become the kind of disciple God really wanted me to be. So, I accepted the challenge and made that invitation to God. And I really meant it. I knew it would be tough and could last a long time. So I had some idea of what I was getting myself into. What I did not know, however, was how tough it would end up being and how long it would last. I seriously underestimated both those things.

So, I then embarked upon a period of at least 13 years in the furnace, ending in 2012 when I sold my law firm and went full time as a Bible teacher. However, in some ways the furnace continued even after that point. Clearly God thought the project of bringing me to maturity was a vastly bigger job than I had ever imagined it to be.

I describe some of these events, ordeals and problems in more detail in my other books. The main stresses were experienced in my business career which suddenly became extremely difficult. Only a few weeks after I invited God to put me into His 'furnace of affliction' I discovered that one of my equity partners in my then law firm was stealing from the firm.

I was a one third equity partner and I went to see the senior partner and told him I had caught the conveyancing partner forging an invoice on the firm's letter head with the intention of receiving the money himself rather than it going to the firm. This was serious professional misconduct and indeed it was a crime. The Senior Partner was shocked and he promised to support me in tackling the wrongdoer.

So, we called a meeting to address it. However, in the space of two days, the wrongdoer exerted some form of leverage over the senior partner, whether by blackmail or otherwise. Therefore, when we met and I set out the facts, the senior partner just stared at the floor in embarrassment and said nothing. He could not look me in the eye because he had changed sides.

To cut a long story short, the two of them then combined together to vote *to expel me* as a partner for being "*disruptive*" – i.e. for tackling the conveyancing partner's fraud. So, all of a sudden I went from

being a one third equity partner in an established law firm with a good income to being nothing at all, not even an employee. Moreover, they also stole my £250,000 equity stake in that firm which meant I could not take that money with me to start my own new law firm.

Consequently, I had to start all over again in a new “law firm” if you can call it that, as it had no files, no clients, no staff, no equipment, no furniture, no anything. When I began on day one there was literally just me in a small newly rented office which was completely empty. I used my mobile phone as the firm’s telephone system, with myself as the receptionist, because there were no staff. The only furniture was a dining room chair from home for me to sit on.

It was a dreadfully crushing, bruising, humiliating experience on top of which there was also a sense of outrage and trauma at the injustice of it all, having my position taken from me dishonestly and all my money stolen – simply for being willing to tackle a thief! But that was only the start of my ordeal. The firm did begin to grow and God blessed it with an abundance of new clients through an advertising campaign which the Holy Spirit inspired. So I can’t claim that it was all bad.

However, in hindsight, that growth was far too rapid, due to my impatience to get back to where I had been and to ease my wounded pride. That impatience then led to me recruiting a lot of people, far too rapidly, which then led in turn to a long series of problems with unfaithful, lazy, incompetent, dishonest, negligent staff, many of whom I had to get rid of. Removing them was very stressful in itself on top of all the other pressures.

In addition to all that a series of events occurred in the church we were then in, for which I was the Chairman of the Trustees. In particular, it involved me discovering that the senior leader, to whom I give the name ‘Rick’, was carnal, deceitful and manipulative. I began to tackle him about his misconduct, but met with a wall of hostility from him and other leaders, some of which I discuss later in this book and also in my other books. So I was subjected to a campaign of lies and malice which resulted in us leaving that church, all of which was deeply traumatic, bewildering and stressful.

There were very many other incidents and stresses too, such as when my bank suddenly tried to close me down and also when I faced a series of false, deceitful employment tribunal claims from ex staff whom I had had to sack. There are just too many things to list here. But the eventual outcome of all that stress, pain, suffering and trauma was that it knocked all the pride and self sufficiency out of me and taught me what it really means to have nothing and to be totally dependent on God.

I likened it to having my ankle attached to a rope and being dragged by a tractor over miles of farmland, across rivers and through hedgerows. It was utterly disorientating and ego-destroying. Yet, God used it all. Indeed, many of the awful experiences I had in those years formed the basis for my subsequent series of books, in particular Book 5 which is about wisdom, and also Book 6 which is about how to identify and handle wicked people.

Many have found those two books useful but the point is I could never have written either of them if God had not put me through that long, agonising 13 year period in the furnace of affliction. He wasn’t just trying to change me and teach me a long series of lessons. He also wanted others to benefit from the many painful discoveries I made during those years. So, others have profited from the various ordeals I faced, but I have gained more from it than anyone else has and, looking back, I do not regret inviting God to put me into His ‘furnace’.

What I do know is that if God had given me the choice, incident by incident, along the way as to whether to have an easy time or a tough time, then on every occasion I would have chosen to be given an easy time. That is just the way we are. God knows that all too well, which is why He knows that sometimes we need Him to pile on the pressure for us and to subject us to ordeals we would never have chosen to endure if He had left it all up to us.

By the way, I am not alone in this, and the furnace of affliction is by no means unique to me. We see it in the lives of many Bible characters, perhaps the most obvious being Joseph, the son of Jacob, who became the Prime Minister of Egypt under Pharaoh. We can read his story in Genesis chapters 37 plus 39 to 48.

We see in chapter 37 when Joseph is 17 years old that God's blessing is already on his life and that God intends to use his life in a major way. But the problem is he is proud, immature and naïve. In particular, he is very unwise in the way he speaks so openly of his dreams to his brothers, needlessly arousing their envy and resentment in a way that would have been foreseeable to an older, wiser person. But the problem was he was very naïve and insensitive and he handled it clumsily.

Had he been wise and mature already he would have said nothing about his dreams, except perhaps to his father. But he wasn't yet wise or mature. Those qualities only arose as bi-products of the 13 year period of pain, grief, injustice and suffering which he endured from the ages of 17 to 30. Remember how he was betrayed by his own brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused of attempted rape by Potiphar's wife, and then put in prison for many years – all totally unjustly.

Sometimes, when we read his story, especially if we read it quickly, we fail to recognise the intensity of the traumas he faced, in particular being betrayed by his own brothers, and we underestimate the agony he went through. But God used those 13 years in Joseph's life, just as He did in a much smaller way in mine, to knock the stuffing out of him.

The intention was to take away his pride, "sandpaper" his character to remove the rough edges, and to melt away his self-centredness such that he would cease to focus on himself and learn instead to focus on what God wanted and on helping others. We see this transformation very clearly from this next passage which occurs two years before Joseph's release from prison, at which point he had already had 11 years in the 'furnace of affliction'.

Evidently God did not think that was long enough as the job was not yet complete. In this passage Joseph has just interpreted the dreams of the butler (cupbearer) and baker and he appeals to the butler to mention him to Pharaoh when he is released. Note from this passage how many times Joseph uses the pronouns "I" and "me" and how his plea is entirely about himself:

¹⁴ Only keep me in mind when it goes well for you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this prison. ¹⁵ For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon."

Genesis 40:14-15 (NASB)

What happens next however is the butler forgets Joseph and doesn't mention him to Pharaoh at all. God then leaves Joseph in the prison (furnace) for another two full years during which the affliction continues to do its work on his character. Note the stark contrast therefore two years later when the butler finally remembers Joseph and mentions him to Pharaoh after he has a strange dream. Joseph is then suddenly released and summoned to appear before Pharaoh. But look how differently Joseph

speaks now, deflecting all credit away from himself and attributing it all to God. The self-centredness has gone.

¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent word and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh. ¹⁵ Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” ¹⁶ Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, “It has nothing to do with me; God will give Pharaoh an answer for his own good.”

Genesis 41:14-16 (NASB)

Joseph is then instantly elevated to become Prime Minister of Egypt and he later rescues his own family from the famine, including the brothers who sold him into slavery. It was the experience in the furnace of affliction that moulded Joseph and made him ready to handle so much political power in a righteous way and not to let any of it go to his head. Note how radically he has changed from the proud, boastful, insensitive teenager who had no idea that he was antagonising his brothers.

Therefore, learn from my experience, and from Joseph’s, and don’t make it necessary for God to put you into His furnace of affliction, or at least not for so long or at such a high temperature. Why don’t you choose instead to be one of those exceptionally rare people who don’t require God to put them in a furnace at all, or at least not for long, because they voluntarily humble themselves, deny their flesh, refuse to be conformed to this world and seek in every way to grow in wisdom?

If you were to do all of that, and keep on doing it, there would still be discomfort and pain, but it would be far less – i.e. only 100 units of discomfort instead of 1000 units. Looking back, I certainly wish I had been as sensible as that. But I wasn’t. However, being realistic, the chances of you or anyone else being that sensible, on a consistent basis, and for long enough to finish the job of removing all your pride, carnality, worldliness and self sufficiency are not high. The truth is, therefore, that God is inevitably going to need to intervene to help you to finish the job.

Therefore, my advice to you is to recognise that fact and cooperate with Him as much as you can and in every conceivable way. Positively invite Him to do whatever is needed to bring you to a place of maturity. But, I think it is fair and sensible to also ask Him to do it as gently as possible and to have regard to your weakness. God is very kind as well as being realistic and pragmatic, and that is the sort of prayer He will be most willing to answer.