



Hoof, Anvil, Fire, Wall, or Junk Pile

by Phil Ware

My brothers and sisters, you will have many kinds of troubles. But when these things happen, you should be very happy. Why? Because you know that these things are testing your faith. And this will give you patience. Let that patience work in you to give the result God wants. Then you will be mature and complete. You will be all that God wants you to be. (James 1:2-4 ERV)

We should be happy with troubles? Wow! That's a pretty tall order. Of course, the real issue is our goal in life. Do we aim at happiness or is true happiness being "mature and complete" — being "all that God wants" us to be?

As our family has gone through a short time of trouble, I found myself thinking about these kinds of things. In my visits with the Lord over these matters, it occurred to me that we often treat our faith kind of like we do horseshoes.

For some folks, their faith has been tossed to the junk pile. They keep it around, but just barely. Sometimes this is because their heart and faith have been broken by life and they are not sure it's still worth having. Other times, faith has been placed in the junk pile because it is viewed as irrelevant and unneeded; it's just an old trinket that reminds them of a past event.

Still others use their faith as a good luck charm. It's like the horseshoe on the wall or the rabbit's foot in the pocket that is supposed to insure good luck. When things are tough, then it's suddenly important, and its owners call on it to bring them good luck and get them out of trouble.

However, if our faith is something more than a good luck charm or a discarded relic from a past life, then our faith is dynamic

and growing — constantly being purified and refined so that it can be useful for the purpose God intended it. That means the fire, the anvil, and the hoof all are part of our faith's world.

The fire is that period of trial, trouble, and testing that purifies our faith and makes it malleable. To be shaped by the will of God on the anvil of maturity and truth, our faith has to be fired so that the Blacksmith of our souls can form us and make us ready to be used in specific ways for his glory. Just as each horseshoe has to be shaped and sized for use on a horse's hoof, our faith must also be shaped and sized by the fire of troubles and the bending and hammered pressures of our skilled Blacksmith at the anvil.

Fire and anvil are never much fun. We are not told to see this time as fun. Sometimes the fire and the anvil are heartbreaking. Other times they are exhausting. Still other times with the fire and anvil are disorienting and bone-wearying. But, James tells us we can be happy with a "pure joy" (NIV) because we know God is at work in us and in our circumstances to make us ready to be used for his glory as we are shaped by his holy love. (Romans 8:28-29)

So where is your faith right now? Have you put it in the junk pile and now find yourself merely going through religious motions? Is it on the wall, relegated to little more than a religious good luck charm? Or do you find yourself in the fire of troubles, trials, and testing? Do you feel yourself being shaped by powers and forces greater than you, but cannot yet see the plan God has to use you? Or do you find yourself on the hoof — strapped and fitted to a set of circumstances and being used by the Master himself? God's call to you is based on the place of your faith — hoof, anvil, fire, wall, or junk pile. No matter where you've put your faith, he still calls to you to make you more.

Please hear his call!