



Time, Heat and Pressure

I don't believe time, heat and pressure are a surefire way to create "better Christians." After all, a lot of time, heat and pressure went into the making of coal. But somehow it ended up soft, opaque and likely to combust. Why?

Do commercials ever make you weepy? Like the Hallmark ads before Mother's Day, or the ones that show people hugging in a crowded terminal, or maybe the black and white diamond commercials filmed in some fountain-graced piazza in Italy. Pigeons scatter in a rush as the boy faces the girl, holding a little black box. She takes it, gaze shifting tentatively from the box to his face and back again. Then, snap, it's open. And the camera zooms in on a great big hunk of...*charcoal*.

While weeping may ensue, I'm going to guess that it's not due to the romance factor. Yet the hunk of charcoal in the box is not that different from the hunk of rock you expect to see. Both are composed of carbon, but one is opaque, soft and brittle, while the other is reflective, transparent and brilliant. What makes the difference? A bit of time, heat and pressure.

If a hunk of coal wants to be a diamond, it must first rid itself of its impurities—ancient plants, fungi and bacteria—and become graphite. This takes time, heat and pressure. Then to morph again, the graphite would have to change its bonds.

In graphite, only three of the outer four electrons of each carbon atom are bonded to other carbon atoms, which makes its consistency slippery and crumbly. However, in a diamond, all four of the outer electrons are bonded to the four outer electrons of other carbon atoms forming a strong, solid, 3D crystal. It doesn't slip, it doesn't break. Again, this takes time, heat and pressure.

Not just a bit of time, heat and pressure... lots of time (billions of years), lots of heat (up to 2,000 degrees Celsius) and some intense pressure (imagine the Eiffel tower—all 9,441 tons of it—resting on your hand).

So, is this another article proclaiming that the painful trials in your life will transform you into a diamond of a person? No, mainly because I don't believe time, heat and pressure are a surefire way to create "better Christians."

After all, a lot of time, heat and pressure went into the making of coal. But somehow it ended up soft, opaque and likely to combust. Why? Why do some who endure heat and pressure over long periods of time become charcoal while other's lives are like diamonds?

I think it has something to do with the original matter. Remember those impurities found in coal? The fungi, bacteria and old dead plants? We humans have that too. Doubt, pride, selfishness. When those are in the mix, time, heat and pressure don't make us much more than crabby, pessimistic and, again, likely to combust. Without absolute faith in God through all circumstances, fully believing that he works all things for good to those that love him—those extraneous elements can keep us stuck in the muck. Trials themselves don't turn dark into light.

Secondly, whether or not trials turn you into a solid, brilliant stone or leave you a hunk of pencil lead depends on what you hold on to. A diamond has no loose electrons, and neither should we. For a Christian to endure hardship and come out stronger we must cling to God with all of our appendages, not leaving any loose electrons available to bond with some other potentially good atomic particle. If we do, we will head down a slippery graphite slope. We will find that doubts grow and we will think that we could be safer if we just hold out for something better, more tangible, more predictable. And we will get stuck as a pencil lead.

When we adhere to God and his righteousness alone, and don't allow our loose ends to get tied up in the things of this world, then the edict of James 1:2-4 will flow naturally. We will rejoice in all manner of trials, not because we chose to rejoice, but because it's just what happens when you are pure in spirit, a single element of faith, bonded completely to the Father. Then you can say, *Bring on the heat. Bring on the pressure. I can wait as long as it takes, because a diamond is forever.* □

—Susan Reedy