

Insight from a Blacksmith

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Air surges up through the forge as the blower takes effect. Flames leap as the small, carefully constructed fire roars to life. A crackling sound emerges as I begin to add fuel in the form of chunks of coke. Gravel crunches beneath my feet as I step back between applications to avoid the worst of the eye-stinging, bituminous fumes caused by the fuel's dusty residue. It quickly burns away and the pure, intense heat of a coke fire becomes established. Rain patters lightly on the roof of my open-sided workshop. I am in a good place.

Meg, my ever-alert border collie, sprawls in her usual spot on the path outside the workshop. She will occasionally wander in to inspect progress and receive some affection.

I switch my gaze to the rusty strip of metal on the bench, anticipating the satisfaction of turning a piece of scrap into an object of beauty and function.

The battery-powered blower is the only concession to modern technology in this place. Everything else is indicative of a process which has remained largely unchanged for centuries, even millennia. I feel connected to an ancient wisdom.

The fire is now hot enough. I position the rusty piece of steel in the forge. Soon it is glowing bright orange. I take it out and begin hammering it on the anvil; the first of many cycles. Back in the forge it goes as the heat dissipates. Heat...hammer...heat...hammer... Gradually, the object takes shape. I revel in the creativity, the capacity to form something unique.

I think of the master craftsman, fashioning me according to his will. I too, have been through the fire many times, emerging stronger, more resilient, better equipped to fulfil my purpose. No wonder there are so many Bible references to being refined by fire. It can seem like torture at the time. We have to focus on the end product.

Eventually, the forging is finished. My creation is ready for grinding, cleaning and painting. Most of the imperfections will be removed or disguised. Those which remain will help to tell the story of this piece, adding to its character.

I leave the workshop, pleased with what I have made and at peace with my place in the world.