

From Trouble to Triumph--Part 2

Review

Loving God is without question the key to enduring all the trials of life. Perhaps it is the most decisive evidence of a regenerate soul. True Christians are designated by James as those who love God (1:12). They endure trials because they have a strong love for God. Any relationship where the bond of love is strong will endure all kinds of adversity. He who endures the trials of life will be rewarded, having revealed himself as one who really loves the Lord.

As Christians we are eternally secure not only from God's viewpoint, but also as we persevere from our viewpoint. The perseverance of the saints describe those who hold fast to their love for God and their faith in Him. The question we will be answering in our study is this: How can we persevere through trials and be victorious in them? There are five key means to persevering through trials. Let us begin with the first one James discusses.

Lesson

I. A JOYOUS ATTITUDE (v. 2)

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into various trials."

A. Explained

James addresses Jewish Christians, whom he identifies in verses 1-2 as brethren belonging to the twelve scattered tribes of Israel. He encourages them to persevere through their various trials with a joyous attitude.

The Greek word translated "count" could also be translated "consider" or "evaluate."

Evaluating a trial as being joyful is something a Christian must discipline himself to do because joy is not the natural human response to troubles. He must make a conscious commitment to facing each trial with a joyous attitude. When Paul said to the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.... I have learned, in whatever state I am, in this to be content" (4:4, 11), he was a prisoner in Rome. He had learned to be content and rejoice in the midst of trials.

That's not something that happens by accident.

The Greek word translated "when," used in the subjunctive mood, means "whenever," implying the inevitability of trials. The compound Greek verb for "fall" (peript[ma]) literally means "to fall into the midst of." It is used in Luke 10:30 of the man the good Samaritan found who fell among thieves. Acts 27:41 say the ship Paul was on fell "into a place where two seas met," a place of turbulence.

The word conveys the idea of an unplanned, inadvertent occurrence that surrounds you. All of us are going to fall into the midst of inadvertent troubles from which

there seems to be no clear way out.

B. Expressed

1. Hebrews 12:2--Jesus never sought troubles, but He always accepted them. It was "for the joy that was set before him [that he] endured the cross, despising the shame." He went through the humiliation and suffering of crucifixion because He joyfully looked beyond the trial to what it would accomplish.

2. Hebrews 12:11--"No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them who are exercised by it." When you see a trial coming, have an attitude of joy from anticipating what perfecting work the Lord will do through that trial. Learn to cultivate a right attitude.

{*}Guaranteed Opportunities for Expressing Joy

Since our Lord went through pain to experience joy, we shouldn't expect anything different. Jesus told His disciples as He was preparing to send them out that they shouldn't expect anything different than He had experienced. He said, "It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher" (Matt. 10:25, cf. John 13:16). He was not talking about discipleship as modeling godliness, but as suffering. In John 15:18, 20 Jesus says, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.... If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." Trials are something every Christian can count on. But they are also new opportunities for joyful dependence on the One who allowed them.{e*}

3. John 16:2, 20-22--Jesus warned His disciples, "The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.... Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in travail, hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now, therefore, have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." Similarly we can rejoice in seeing beyond to the greater outcome.

We must have a decisive conviction that we're going to face trials with a joyful attitude. It is the joy of one who counts it a privilege to have his faith tested because he knows the testing will draw him closer to the Savior. That is when a trial becomes a welcome friend.

In trials you are much more sensitive to the presence of God. Your communion with Him increases as you search the Scriptures to find answers to your problems and ask people to pray for you. That draws you closer to the Lord, the very source of your joy.

C. Exemplified

1. By Jesus

We have not yet suffered to the degree Jesus did (Heb. 12:4). Have you ever thought about that? When I'm going through a trial, I'm always reminded of that fact. If He could endure the cross and see it as a joyous opportunity to accomplish the purpose of God, then I should be able to endure my small trial with joy.

2. By Paul

The apostle Paul seems as close to being like Christ as any man will ever be. Whenever he encountered trials he responded by rejoicing.

a) Acts 16:25--On their second missionary journey Paul and Silas were thrown into jail. And it wouldn't have been a nice place like some jails are today. Jails then were dark and filthy. The prisoners often were put in stocks, their limbs being stretched to an extreme, thus causing their muscles to tighten up into knots.

In spite of that verse 25 says, "At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God." That is a joyous attitude in the midst of a very difficult trial.

b) 2 Corinthians 12:7-9--Paul mentioned "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan" that had caused him to suffer. Although he prayed three times for the Lord to remove that particular trial, it didn't go away. The Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9). Paul responded, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (v. 9). Paul recognized that he didn't need the elimination of the trial--only the grace to endure it. He saw the purpose of trials as drawing a person closer to the Lord (Phil. 3:10) and keeping him humbly dependent on His strength (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

c) Philippians 1:13-16, 18--Not all suffering is necessarily physical. Sometimes we go through emotional and mental suffering. Paul was a prisoner in Rome when he wrote the Philippians. His ministry had been greatly curtailed. Nevertheless he told the Philippians that his imprisonment had actually aided the furtherance of the gospel. Being chained to Roman soldiers, he had the opportunity to win them to the Lord (v. 13). There was a revival of sorts taking place in Caesar's palace.

Paul told the Philippians, "All the saints greet you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household" (4:22). The soldiers didn't know what they had on their hands: they thought they had a prisoner, but in reality they had a self-appointed evangelist to whom they were a captive audience!

Paul said, "Many of the brethren in the Lord, becoming confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some, indeed, preach Christ even of envy and strife [and] of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds" (1:14-16). Some had assumed Paul was in prison because he had failed in his ministry and the Lord had set him aside. Nevertheless he recognized that "whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in that I do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (v. 18). What a model of rejoicing in the midst of a potentially frustrating and discouraging situation!

d) Philippians 2:17--"If I have to be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all." If Paul had to die in the process of leading the Philippians to salvation, he could still rejoice because he considered himself expendable for God's purposes (cf., Acts 20:24).

e) Philippians 3:5-8--Paul realized the sacrifices that were necessary in pursuing the greatest priority, saying, "[I was] circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may win Christ."

f) Philippians 4:4--"Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice."

g) Romans 8:18--"The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." We can joyfully endure suffering in the present because of the glorious future promised us.

Paul learned to rejoice in difficult situations because he knew they would bring him closer to the Lord as he depended on His power to accomplish His purposes. Trials should be faced with a joyful attitude because they bring about proven faith, strengthen us, draw us into communion with God as we identify with Christ in His sufferings, and promise us better things to come.

3. By Job

a) Job 13:15--"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Obviously his wife, who advised him to give up hope, saying, "Curse God, and die" (2:9), knew nothing of approaching trials with the right attitude.

b) Job 23:10--"He knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tested me, I shall come forth as gold." Job had hope in the final product.

D. Evaluated

Commentator Warren Wiersbe said, "Our values determine our evaluations. If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us. If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to 'count it all joy.' If we live only for the present and forget the future, then trials will make us bitter, not better" (Be Mature, [Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1978], p.23).

If you can't rejoice in your trials, your values are wrong. You have not realized that God has a purpose in them. J. Oswald Sanders in his book Spiritual Leadership quotes early twentieth century poet and missionary to India Amy Carmichael ([Chicago: Moody, 1980], pp. 171-72):

Hast thou no scar?
No hidden scar on foot or side or hand?
I hear thee song as mighty in the land.
I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star.

Hast thou no scar? Hast thou not wound?
Yet I was wounded by the archers spent.
Leaned me against the tree to die and rent
By ravening beasts that compassed me I swooned.

Hast thou no wound? No wound, no scar.
Yes, as the Master shall the servant be,
And pierced are the feet that follow Me.
But thine are whole. Can he have followed far
Who has no wound or no scar?

We should count it a privilege and joy to bear in our bodies the marks of Christ (Gal. 6:17).

II. AN UNDERSTANDING MIND (v. 3)

"Knowing this, that the testing of your faith worketh patience."

If you're going to go through a trial victoriously, you've got to know a few things.

A. Know the Reality of Testing

The Greek word translated "knowing" (gin[ma]osk[ma]o, "to know through experience") directs our attention to the mind. Not only are you to have a joyful attitude in trials, but also an understanding mind that comes from personal experience. You need to know that your faith will be tested. When you come out of a trial and still have your faith, it confirms that you're really a believer. If you ask me how I know I'm a Christian, I'll tell you it's because I love the Lord and have gone through difficult situations with my faith still intact.

B. Know the Reason for Testing

The Greek word translated "testing" (dokimion) means "proof." The Greek verb for "worketh" means "to achieve" or "to accomplish." Don't ever think trials don't accomplish something. They're designed to produce "patience" (Gk., hupomon[ma]en), better translated "endurance" or "perseverance." It's the tenacity of spirit that holds on under pressure while waiting patiently on God to remove the trial at the appointed time and then reward us. Each trial strengthens us as we gain more endurance.

God builds us up like a runner gradually develops the ability to run long distance. He starts small and works up to his maximum capacity. God allows increasingly greater trials in our lives to increase our endurance for greater ministry and joy, for the more difficult the battle is, the sweeter the victory. When you come out of a difficult trial, you can rejoice over God's delivering you. That proves Him to be trustworthy, and that strengthens your faith.

1. Psalm 40:1-3--David said, "I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath

put a new song in my mouth." Every time you come out of a trial you should be stronger.

2. 1 Corinthians 10:13--Paul said, "There hath no temptation [trial] taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tempted above that ye are able." Not everyone has the same ability to endure trials. A new Christian with limited knowledge and experience is not going to have the ability to endure the trials a mature Christian might undergo. This verse is God's promise that He will never put you through a trial you can't handle. The Lord will bring us trials to test and strengthen our faith, thus producing the necessary endurance to encounter greater trials. God faithfully works in our lives in a personal way to allow trials unique to the individual that take us to higher levels of spiritual maturity.

3. 2 Thessalonians 1:2-4--Paul wrote the Thessalonians, saying, "Grace unto you, and peace, from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth, so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience [endurance] and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure." Learning how to endure trials brought the Thessalonians growing faith, abounding love, and a tremendous testimony.

C. Know the Reward of Testing

Christ, while enduring the cross, anticipated the salvation of the world that would come as a result, and His return to glory. Likewise, we need to know that what's going on in our lives is producing something very beneficial.

1. Hebrews 11:24-29--"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the the first-born should touch them. By faith they passes through the Red Sea as by dry land, which the Egyptians, attempting to do, were drowned." Moses lived in light of what endurance would bring about in the future.

2. Hebrews 11:32-39--Many other Old Testament believers endured great trials because of their faith in God. The writer of Hebrews said, "The time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets, who, through faith, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again, and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tested, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented (of whom the world

was not worthy); they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having received witness through faith, received not the promise."

Those named and unnamed heroes of the faith trusted God in the midst of unbelievable circumstances because their eyes were focused on their future reward. Hebrews 12:1-2 therefore exhorts us to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and ... run with patience the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." Christ is the greatest example of enduring trials with joy.

III. A SUBMISSIVE WILL (v. 4)

A. The Request for Submission (v. 4a)

"But let patience have her perfect work."

This is a command demanding submission to God's purposes for the trial. Don't fight the trial and shake your fist at God. Accept it. If you refuse to submit to God, you may bring yourself under His chastening hand. Hebrews 12:5 warns, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons." If you fight against God's perfecting work, the trials may become more difficult.

The only productive way out of a trial is through it. If God want you in a trial, there are no short cuts you can take that will accomplish His purpose. First Corinthians 10:13 tells us that God provides the way of escape from each trial, but only after enabling us to endure the trial.

The Greek word translated "perfect" (teleion) is used in secular sources to refer to animals that are full grown. We can take it to mean "spiritually mature" in this context. That noble purpose should motivate us not to resist, for trials are the tools of His perfecting work in our lives.

1. Psalm 131:1-3--David here exemplifies the right submissive attitude: "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, like a child that is weaned of his mother; my soul is even like a weaned child." David likened his spiritual contentment to the child who has gone through the difficult weaning process and entered a new level of maturity.

2. Job 5:7--Job thanked God and willfully submitted to every trial the Lord gave him, even though his heart was sometimes confused. It wasn't the circumstances that bothered Job; it was that he couldn't seem to get an answer from God. Eliphaz instructed Job, saying, "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward. I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause, who doeth great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number; who giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields, to set up on high those that are low, that those who mourn may be exalted to safety." When you go through a trial, commit yourself

to God.

3. Psalm 37:1, 5--David said, "Fret not thyself because of evil doers Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass."

4. 1 Peter 2:20 Peter said, "If, when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." That is because you're really suffering on His behalf.

B. The Result of Submission (v. 4**b**)

"That ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."

Perfection, not endurance, is the goal of trials. Endurance is only the means to that end. When you go through a trial, you are strengthened and acquire greater endurance, which will allow you to go through greater trials to bring about spiritual maturity. "Perfect" obviously doesn't mean sinlessness--that would contradict James 3:2--but the maturity of spiritual fathers who "have known him [God] that is from the beginning" (1 John 2:14). When our faith is tested we're driven to deeper communion and greater trust in our Lord. That produces the stability of godly character and righteous living. In Galatians 4:19 Paul says, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." God's ultimate goal is for every believer to become like Christ.

James says that trials will make us "complete" (Gk., holokleros, holos means "whole" and kleros means "all the portions"). God wants you to be well-rounded, fully put together spiritually. The flip side of being complete is "lacking nothing."

God takes His Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and trials (1 Pet. 5:10) to bring about spiritual maturity in our lives.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why must a Christian discipline himself to evaluate difficult circumstances as something joyful (see p. 12)?

2. Where was Paul when he said he had learned to be content in any situation (Phil. 4:11; see p. 1)?

3. According to Hebrews 12:2 why did Jesus endure the cross (see p. 2)?

4. Why should we not expect to be free from trials (John 15:18, 20; see p. 2)?

5. Why can we rejoice in the midst of trials like the mother who gives birth (John 16:20-22; see p. 2)?

6. Explain why trials make Christians more sensitive to the Lord's presence (see p. 3).

7. What should motivate us to endure our trials with joy (Heb. 12:4; see p. 3)?

8. In spite of Paul's imprisonment in Rome and the criticism he received because of it, what things could he still rejoice in (Phil. 1:13, 18; see p. 4)?
9. Why could Paul rejoice at the prospect of dying in the process of leading others to Christ (Phil. 2:17; see p. 4)?
10. Identify and define what trials are designed to produce (see p. 6).
11. Why does God allow increasingly greater trials in our lives (see p. 6)?
12. Will God put you through a trial you can't handle? Explain. Support your answer with Scripture (see p. 7).
13. Why was Christ willing to endure the cross (see p. 7)?
14. According to Hebrews 11:24-29, what did Moses choose over the comfort and treasures of Egypt? Why (see p. 7)?
15. What may be the consequence of refusing to submit to the trials God brings into your life (see p. 8)?
16. What should God's noble purpose of bringing us to spiritual maturity motivate us not to do? Why (see p. 8)?
17. Differentiate between the means and the goal of a trial (see p. 9).
18. What is the result of submitting to the testing of our faith (see p. 9)?
19. Beside trials, what else does God use to perfect us (2 Tim. 3:16-17; see p. 10)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Memorize Romans 8:18: "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." If you are a Christian, you have an advantage in suffering that the unbeliever doesn't--the knowledge of a glorious future ahead of you. Paul was able to endure suffering because he had that eternal perspective. He said, "We faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

2. Warren Wiersbe observed that if you value the temporal physical realm over the eternal spiritual realm, trials will make you bitter rather than better. Evaluate your response to trials and determine what realm you value the most. Be honest with yourself because it is easy to deceive yourself into thinking that you following Christ when you are only admiring Him at a distance. Consider Amy Carmichael's poem on page xx, which asks why we don't have the same wounds and scars Jesus had if we are truly following Him (cf. 1 Tim. 3:12).

3.The old hymn "Be Still, My Soul" has some meaningful words well worth pondering if you are encountering a trial or know someone who is:

Be still, my soul--the Lord is on thy side!
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to thy God to order and provide--
In ev'ry change He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul--thy best, thy heavenly Friend
Thru thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Whatever that trial might be, leave it to the Lord to accomplish His purpose in your life. Praise Him for His wisdom, faithfulness, and personal love for you.

#ET
#ET
#ET