

Daily Devotional, April 27, 2020

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

The author of the book of James, the brother of Jesus, who became an instrumental leader of the early church in Jerusalem, penned these words of encouragement to both the 1st century Jewish and Gentile Christians who had moved to other regions outside of Palestine. These were people who were facing great scrutiny and persecution, and who needed support in upholding their new-found faith.

Notice that James does not say *if* you face trials, but *whenever* you face them. From his own experience as a persecuted believer he knows that we will face trials and yet in those trials he sees the hope in them, the possibilities of profiting from them. He is not encouraging them to put on a happy face, that is, to pretend to look happy in our pain and suffering, but instead to keep a positive outlook, to consider it “pure Joy” because our trials can produce positive results in our lives.

What James is saying is that when our outlook is right, we can turn these hardships into times of learning, for tough times can teach us perseverance. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 5:3-5: ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Paul tells us that we are to rejoice in suffering not because we love the pain, but because we know that God is using these difficulties to build our character, which in turn will develop our perseverance, which will then greatly *strengthen* our character and lead us to more deeply trust in God, and therefore to have greater confidence in the future that lies ahead.

We can’t honestly know what the depth of our character is until we see how we react when placed under pressure. It’s easy to be pleasant, kind, and courteous towards others when we have everything going rosy for us in life. But how do we react when the bottom is falling out? God wants to make us mature and complete. Hiding us from pain will not accomplish that. The challenge for us is to stop complaining about our struggles and instead, to look at our struggles as opportunities for growth.

In verse five, when James is talking about wisdom, he is not only talking about knowledge, but also about how to make smart decisions in the midst of difficult situations. And the beauty in this is that we don’t have to stumble blindly in the dark groping for solutions. God is with us in the deepest darkness, and all we need to do is pray and ask for God to grant us the wisdom to make the right choices.

Whenever we are facing tough times that seem ever so bleak, we should thank God for promising to always be with us. We need only to ask God’s help in solving our challenges and to give us the strength to endure them. Next, wait patiently, for God will never leave you alone with your troubles; God will always remain close-by to guide you in your growth and to soothe you in your anguish. And *that* should bring us *pure joy!*

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to endure. When hard times come my way, help me to look to You for perseverance and joy. Make me mature and complete through these trials. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.