

GROWING THROUGH TRIALS

"If everything seems to be coming your way, you're probably in the wrong lane." And "if you stay calm while all around you is chaos, you probably haven't completely understood the situation." That's funny. But often our problems in life are not. Health, relationships, financial, the list goes on. Thankfully the Bible shows us real people going through real life. Persevering in God's providence, and growing through trials.

James 1:2 says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Let's look at four ways you grow through trials.

1- God PROVES your faith through trials. James says the testing of your faith proves that it's real, and makes it stronger. Steadfastness means patient endurance. Enduring with patience. Letting God's plan and purpose work out, while you "learn to prove the reliability of God's grace."

In Mark 4:35 the disciples obey Jesus and sail across the sea of Galilee. But obedience led to danger. In a great windstorm, breaking waves were filling the boat with water. Is your life like that? *Where is God? Does He know? Does He care?* That's what the disciples asked Jesus, asleep in the boat. But never forget you are a pilgrim on earth, in warfare with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Don't assume obedience to God will make life easier. He promises strength, not ease. His path to proving your faith involves many tests to make you stronger, so you can persevere through the next wave of trials.

What did Jesus say after rebuking the wind and waves? "*Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?*" Likewise, your life experience proves your spiritual weakness. We tend to rely upon ourselves until trouble overwhelms us. But as you daily trust in Christ, who is always with you, then you deepen your dependence upon Him. Your faith grows stronger. You learn to rely upon Jesus in every life situation.

2- God PURIFIES your faith through trials. Peter learned his lesson well. Later in Acts 12 he is able to fall asleep in prison, even though James had just been arrested and put to death. God miraculously delivered him. And in 1 Peter 1:6 he writes to encourage believers, "*you rejoice though now for a little while you have been grieved by various trials.*" They were being distressed by all kinds of pressures.

But difficult circumstances expose God's grace. Peter says it's like the process of purifying gold, so that genuine proved and purified faith "*will result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus is revealed.*" That's the purpose - to remove the dross so the gold can shine. Psalm 119:67 says, "*before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey Your word. It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.*" You must lance the wound of an infected sliver. Chemotherapy can seem worse than cancer. But do you want disease to spread throughout your body if an awful medicine will cure it?

Jesus is the cure, and the effects of sin are so deep, only the Great Physician can excise it from our lives. He uses many agents. Sometimes our afflictions are self-inflicted, consequences of sin or disobedience. Job did not sin, and Satan can never do more than God allows, but only after affliction did Job understand God's holiness and righteous providence. The apostle Paul endured great trials for Jesus' sake, with great knowledge and spiritual experiences. His "*thorn in the flesh*" was given by God as a "*messenger from Satan to harass him and keep him from being puffed up.*" Instead of pride, he was humbled and purified.

You may never know this side of heaven specific reasons for trials. But that's not the point. What matters is how trials train and discipline you to turn from sin and self and turn to God. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, God told Paul, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.*" God is with you always, with all His healing grace to strengthen you, and accomplish His purposes in and through you.

Next time we'll explore 3- how God propagates your faith through trials, to bless others, and 4- how He perfects your faith through trials, to mature you in Christ. **With a surprising side effect: real joy.**