

A Wide Variety of Trials

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” - James 1:2-4

There is a wide variety of trials through which God sovereignly causes us to go, because there is much work to be done in our souls before we are fit to be taken to heaven. Some of these trials are delicate little touches from God, accomplishing a subtle adjustment in our character or worldview. We may see these God-ordained trials as irritations—car troubles, losing a valuable piece of paper, minor physical ailments, accidentally deleted documents on the computer, a bleach spot on your favorite garment, etc. Yet does anything come to us “by chance”? Jesus said not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from the will of your Father (Matt. 10:29). Each of these minor trials is a perfectly measured touch from God, and James says we should count them as “pure joy,” because God is accomplishing his purpose in us.

This is also true of intermediate trials, like major financial troubles, lingering and troublesome bodily infirmities, steady opposition from a co-worker or boss, loss of valuable property or possessions, etc. These are more aggressive treatments from the great physician of our souls, who desires to move more dramatically in us at that time. Though the direct cause and effect is sometimes hidden from us, yet there is a cumulative change in a Christian’s soul that God achieves by these means. Paul even goes so far as to say, “our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Cor. 4:17). Though these kinds of trials may not seem “light and

momentary,” according to Paul that is what they are. And James tells us that we should count it pure joy whenever we face trials of “many kinds,” and that includes these intermediate trials. Though they be more irksome and grievous than those daily minor trials mentioned above, they have a significant role to play in our growth in Christ.

Nor does this line of reasoning fall apart when we come to the most significant trials God brings us in our lives. Perhaps it is the death of a loved one, perhaps total financial ruin, perhaps permanent physical injury or disability, perhaps imprisonment or some other devastating event. These trials are the most powerful spiritual remedies in the bag of our spiritual physician, and He uses them only sparingly. Yet one must never believe that God has abandoned us to the devil at these times, for if God whispers to us in our pleasure, He shouts to us in our pain (C. S. Lewis). God wants us even then to “count it pure joy,” because our major trials are carefully measured out to us like a precise gram-weight of antibiotic and are brought directly to us under the loving hand of a compassionate Father. His ultimate purpose is to teach us perseverance so that we will be “mature and complete, not lacking anything.” Thus, without these trials of *many kinds*, we are “immature and incomplete, lacking something.” Perhaps we lack faith, perhaps we lack compassion for other suffering people, perhaps we lack detachment from this present transient age, perhaps we lack full and glad obedience to our heavenly Father. God knows what we lack, and every trial comes to us under His wise hand to accomplish this one purpose: the perfect maturity of the Church in Christ-likeness. So, by faith, we must count each difficulty in life as a celebration of God’s perfect plan. Soon this present age will end for us, and His work in us will reach its consummation. At that point our joy will also reach its consummation.