

Discipline: The Path to Joy

✘ *Often we despise the thing that is designed to take us to the next level of blessing and anointing—the chastening of the Lord.*

I remember exactly where I was when the meaning of James 1:2-3 dawned on me. I wasn't at an all-night prayer meeting. I wasn't at the end of a 40-day fast. No, I was at a pizzeria in Kissimmee, Fla., in the summer of 1979, and I had just lost my temper.

I had been looking forward to enjoying a pizza from this particular place. But everything went wrong. First, the pizzas took 45 minutes to prepare. Then, as I carried them to my motel room through the pouring rain, they fell out of their wet paper bag into a puddle of water.

I had already told off the manager because I'd waited so long for the first set of pizzas. Now I was going to have to face him again to get new ones.

"How could all this happen?" I asked myself.

That's when James 1:2-3 came to me: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that

the
testing of your faith develops perseverance” (NIV).

This
verse had already been on my mind for weeks, since I was
planning to
preach on the book of James in the autumn. As I returned to
the
pizzeria, I said to myself, “Either James 1:2 is true or it
isn’t. And
if I plan to preach on it shortly, I had better begin
practicing what I
preach!”

This trial of
having everything go wrong with a long-awaited pizza, when
people all
over the world are starving, hurting, living in poverty or
dying from
disease, is almost too silly to mention. It was hardly the
greatest
trial a person could suffer.

But
I have to tell you, this episode—this “trial”—was pivotal in
my life.
Minutes before I returned to the pizzeria to apologize with
genuine
meekness to the manager, I repented before God for my anger
and
behavior.

In that moment a
new phrase was born to me: “dignifying the trial.” I decided
then and
there to dignify that situation by accepting the entire matter
as
something that God sent. It was a divine setup.

I not only repented to the Lord, but I also thanked Him for the whole thing. I apologized to the manager and cheerfully waited for another pizza. (For some reason, he wouldn't let me pay.)

When I returned to my family at the motel, I was a different person.

A GOD-GIVEN PRIVILEGE

According to James 1:2, a trial is a God-given privilege that we are to "consider" pure joy. The Greek word is hegeomai, meaning "to value highly, to esteem." In other words, what would naturally make us feel the opposite—upset or sorry for ourselves—is to be valued as a wonderful opportunity.

How do we make that adjustment in our thinking? Only by sufficient motivation. We must be inspired or stimulated to look at trials in a positive manner.

Take Moses, for example. The Bible says he "regarded" disgrace for the sake of Christ to be of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, "because he was looking ahead to his reward" (Heb. 11:26).

Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus Himself endured the cross because of "the joy that was set before him." He did not enjoy the taunts or

relish the physical pain. But He considered the cross pure joy because pure joy was coming. And it came!

The message of James 1:2 is that trials are a good thing, if we have a positive attitude toward them when they come. James certainly doesn't say we will enjoy trials. Instead, we must endure them.

But we can regard the thought of them as pure joy because of what they can do for us.

Every trial has the potential to lead to great reward. James wants us to see that—by faith. He wants us to understand that trials are the gateway to God's anointing in our lives.

THE GATEWAY TO GOD'S ANOINTING

If it is anointing you want, then expect suffering. If it is a great anointing you want, anticipate great suffering at some stage.

When I say, "anointing," I am talking about the power of the Holy Spirit to make us do what we do with ease and without fatigue. The main reason for burnout and fatigue among Christians is almost certainly because we go beyond our anointing; we go outside it rather than functioning within it.

We can pray for greater anointing—for the ability to do what we previously could not do in our own strength. This is a legitimate desire; Paul told us to earnestly desire the greater gifts (see 1 Cor. 12:31). God will answer this request so long as it is in His will and sought with His glory in mind (see 1 John 5:14).

Just don't be surprised when you wake up one morning with an enormous trial in front of you. Instead, grasp it with both hands, and consider it pure joy. It is a fairly strong hint from the Lord that you are going to receive the anointing you desire.

Of course, James does not specifically use the word "anointing." His exact words are, "Consider it pure joy...because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance" (James 1:1-3, emphasis added).

What does perseverance have to do with anointing? Perseverance is the next step forward—the link to a brilliant future. God does not lead us from A to Z, but from A to B.

During a trial, the immediate need is for perseverance. It is not the ultimate

goal; but it is what enables you to reach the goal that James envisions: "Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:4).

By dignifying your trial, James says, you will reach a place of indescribable peace and the highest level of anointing. You will have a soul uncluttered by greed and a heart filled with the very presence of God. You will experience pure joy.

DIGNIFYING YOUR TRIAL

Are you ready to dignify your trials and experience more joy and a greater anointing than you have ever known? Here are eight steps you can take when your time of testing comes:

1. Welcome the trial.

Welcome your trial as you would welcome the Holy Spirit; for it is the Holy Spirit who is behind the whole ordeal, along with the Father and the Son. Even though the beginning of a trial can be painful, say to the Lord, "I know You have sent this to me, and I want to get the maximum benefit You had in mind when You ordained it." This way, you begin to dignify the trial from the first moment.

2. Don't panic.

Satan's immediate goal when he is given permission to attack is to get you to panic. This is why he is compared to a roaring lion

(see 1 Pet.

5:8). The reason for the roar is to intimidate and cause fear and panic—to make you think you are defeated even before anything has happened.

Remember that God

OK'd your trial before it came to you. He reckoned that you were able to cope, or He would not have allowed it (see 1 Cor. 10:13). As the psalmist put it, "Do not fret—it leads only to evil" (Ps. 37:8).

3. See the trial as a compliment to you from God.

The kind of trial that God has allowed you to have is very possibly one that could not be granted to others around you. Whereas your first reaction (understandably) may be to feel sorry for yourself, on reflection you should be able to see that God gave this trial to you for one reason: You are up to it.

4. Never forget that God allowed the trial.

This point must be stressed because Satan wants you to feel sorry for yourself, point the finger at others, and become angry and bitter toward God. Instead, when a trial comes, stop and realize: This scenario has passed through God's filtering process. He could have stopped it, yes, but He didn't.

Try not to

get hung up on the vexing theological question of whether God caused—or only permitted—the trial to happen. There is a fine line between the two, and nobody in the history of the world has it all figured out.

Besides, whether your trial is something as big as physical pain or as small as losing your keys, it doesn't matter if God caused it or simply allowed it. You know this much: He let it happen. Your task is to dignify the trial, whether it is big or small.

5. Know that there is a purpose in the trial.

Were it not for this, there would be no point in counting a trial “pure joy.” James states that the immediate purpose of a trial is to develop perseverance that leads to joy so wonderful, you lack nothing.

Here is James 1:2-4 translated in The Message: “Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.”

There is a purpose in what you're going through. It may be to refine you; to

teach you a lesson; to equip you; or to teach you self-control. The bottom line is that every trial is designed to make you more like Jesus.

6. Don't try to end the trial.

As The Message puts it, "Don't try to get out of anything prematurely."

God will end your trial at the right time. It will last as long as it's supposed to last. Try to end it before its time, and you will fail the test.

Your assignment is to dignify the trial by letting it run its course, however long God decides that will be. If you do nothing to bring about its conclusion—if you let God be in control of the timing—you will not only pass the test, but you will also enjoy the fruit of righteousness that God purposed for you.

7. Don't grumble.

Here's a sobering thought: God puts grumbling alongside idolatry and sexual sin in the lists of evil deeds that brought His wrath down on ancient Israel (see 1 Cor. 10:1-12).

It takes no talent or training to criticize and complain. It is part of being a sinner. It takes great grace to endure trials and keep quiet in the hard times.

Remember,

God wants you to pass the test far more than you do. Why?

First, because

He loves you so much that He rejoices when you experience pure joy.

Second,

it brings Him glory when you dignify your trial by cheerfully enduring.

So trust God in the midst of your trial, and don't grumble.

8. Don't go looking for trials.

If pure joy is the ultimate result of dignifying a trial, you might

logically assume that you should go looking for fiery trials.

Wrong. The

qualification for a trial to be dignified is that it happens without

you doing a thing to precipitate it.

Jesus

told us to pray that we would not enter into temptation, or trial (see

Matt. 6:13). But when a trial comes—and it comes without you causing

it—consider it pure joy.

You may never have another trial that is like the one you are in right now. Dignify it. Welcome it without panic or grumbling.

Know that God has allowed this trial for a great purpose, and endure it to the end. You will be glad you did!

Read a companion devotional.

R.T. Kendall is the author of *Pure Joy* (Charisma House), from which this article is adapted.