

To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.

<sup>2</sup> Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. <sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup> But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. (NIV)

Text: James 1:2-8 A 9/3/17 He. 12:1-13 Mt. 15:21-28 Ps. 46 Resp. Rdg.: Ps. 119:64ff.  
Hymns: 243, 444, 424, 428

## FINDING JOY DURING TRIALS

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

There were two sons whose father loved them very much. Being typical children, there was much they needed to learn and much maturing they had to go through. Their father loved them enough to discipline and train them. He knew this was sometimes hard on his sons, but he also knew that it was absolutely necessary for them.

We are children of our heavenly Father. He loves us all very much. We're sinful by nature, and we sin every. We can let ourselves become comfortable with certain sins. We're prone to be content with our present level of faith, and not grow and mature in our faith. Our heavenly Father loves us enough to send us trials to discipline and train us and make us more mature Christians. And as we'll see, we can find **joy** during the trials God sends us.

In our Scripture Lesson from the twelfth chapter of Hebrews God acknowledged, "*No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful*" (v. 11a). Our heavenly Father understands that trials can be very hard on us. Yet He tells us in our text, "*Consider it pure joy ... whenever you face trials of many kinds.*" God isn't making light of the pain we experience during trials. He isn't expecting us to be able to put it completely out of our minds and somehow make ourselves happy. He is telling us that in the midst of pain and fear and sorrow, we can also have joy. And the joy God gives us helps us very much to endure our suffering.

The expression, "*consider it pure joy*" in the original text is speaking of a contemplating and learning process. It's a joy that's not based on our feelings, but that comes from a serious consideration of the external, objective facts of what God is doing for us through our trials. We

can “*consider it pure joy*” during trials **knowing**, as God assures us, that He’s accomplishing good things in us through them. Scripture says, “*No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it*” (He. 12:11).

Our body needs exercise so it can meet the physical demands life places on it. Our faith needs the exercise that trials give it so it can meet the challenges that Satan, the world, and our flesh confront it with. We’re told, “*The testing of your faith develops perseverance.*” “*Perseverance*” in the original is literally, “remaining under.” During trials we’re tempted to try to run away from our fears and the pain we’re suffering. The Lord helps us to “remain under” the pain of trials, and face our fears and overcome them. During trials we’re tempted to be impatient with God and come up with our own solutions to our problems. The Lord helps us to “remain under” the trial and learn what **He** wants to teach us. Peter exhorts us, “*Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may lift you up in due time*” (1 Pet. 5:6).

We’re told, “*Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*” A parent disciplines a child in order to teach the child. If the child is willing to learn, the discipline has helped him. But if he’s unwilling, it hasn’t. The Lord sends us trials to help us learn and grow. If we’re willing to learn, the trial is a blessing. But if we’re fighting God and being angry at Him and feeling sorry for ourselves, we’re not learning what God is trying to teach us. We need to ask God to help us “remain under” the trials He sends us so they can “*finish [their] work*” and we can learn what God knows we need to learn, and mature in our faith. With the psalmist we say to the Lord, “*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your Word. You are good, and do good; teach me Your statutes. ... It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes*” (Ps. 119:67-68, 71).

The Lord wants to teach us through trials to trust **His** wisdom, not our own. He tells us in His Word, “*Do not be wise in your own eyes.*” “*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding*” (Prov. 3:7, 5). We’re told, “*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God*” (literally from the original, “*he should keep on asking God*”), “*who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*” God promises to give wisdom to “**any**” and “**all**” of us who ask Him for it. Jesus tells us, “*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For **everyone** who asks receives...*” (Mt. 7:7-8a).

We’re told that “*God ... gives [wisdom] generously.*” We read in the second chapter of Proverbs, “*If you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding; ... then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright*” (vv. 3, 5-7a). God knows the things that each of us needs to learn. When we’re told

in our text that God gives us wisdom, the original is referring to wisdom in its broadest sense – whatever wisdom we need.

When we're going through trials we can struggle with feelings of anger toward God, self pity, fear, resistance to God's will, and stubbornness and pride. We're tempted to think God won't help us because of our sinful attitudes. But Jesus died for all of our sins on the cross. When we tell God we're sorry, He forgives us. When we ask Him to help us and guide us, He will. The Lord promises He gives wisdom *"to all ... without finding fault."* The writer to the Hebrews encourages us, *"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need"* (He. 4:16).

We're told that when we ask God for wisdom we *"must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."* Who of us never has doubts, especially during trials? When doubts come, don't dwell on them. Look to God's wisdom in His Word for the **real** solution to what's troubling you. Talk to the Lord about the doubts you're struggling with. Ask Him to forgive you for doubting, and to help you to trust in Him. He will forgive you and help you. Get out your Bible and read and meditate on what it says. The Bible says, *"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God"* (Ro. 10:17). God's Word chases away our doubts, and makes our faith strong and secure. Peter says, *"After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and settle you"* (1 Pet. 5:10).

The two sons whose father loved them enough to discipline them when they needed it had different reactions to their father's discipline. One son submitted to his father and was greatly blessed. The other son tended to give in to anger and resentment and self pity and pride, and to resist his father; causing himself much grief. When our heavenly Father seeks to bless **us** through trials, which of the two sons are we most like?

Ask God, and He'll help you to humbly, trustingly submit to His will. He'll help you to learn what He wants to teach you, and make your faith grow and mature. Ask the Lord for wisdom and guidance. He'll give it to you. With His help, guided by His Word, we can find joy during the trials sent to us by our loving heavenly Father. Amen.