

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. 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. James 1:2-5

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we^[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. 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. Romans 5:1-5

A friend and I have been memorizing the first chapter of James recently, so these verses have been on my mind. I also know quite a few people who have been going through very challenging situations recently, including difficult surgeries, Covid-19, shingles, and other trials, and of course, we are aware of the terrible challenges facing Christians in Afghanistan and in other parts of the world, so these words of James' seem particularly applicable. We also recently remembered the attacks of 9/11, which showed us, among other things, that even when we appear to be strong, we are still vulnerable and not in control of nearly as many things as we might wish. Trials and suffering beyond our control can come suddenly, but what we can control is our response to them.

Stephen and I have been talking recently about how if, and really only if, our goal is to grow in Christ likeness, we can see it not as a question of enduring but even of welcoming trials. That's not the same as inviting trials, which Scripture doesn't tell us to do, but we can see them as an opportunity, rather than a disappointment because of what they produce-- perseverance, character, and hope. And hope doesn't disappoint us, because of God's love.

Monday: What is joy? How would your perspective need to change for you to consider your trials a source of joy? Talk with God about this today.

Tuesday: James addresses his readers as "brothers." How could connection with others help you to view trials in a positive light? Ask God to help you be open to the encouragement he gives through brothers and sisters.

Wednesday: Pray for the ability to face and grow through your trials and especially for your trials to build perseverance in your character.

Thursday: Meditate on the idea of being mature and complete, not lacking anything in who you are. Ask God to give you an increasing desire to grow toward that goal.

Friday: Ask God for wisdom, not only for daily decisions, but also in order to gain perspective on your situation and difficulties.

Saturday: Praise God, who can turn our trials into opportunities to grow and strengthen us and who gives wisdom so generously and graciously.