

Daily Trials, Genuine Joy, and Final Perfection

A Meditation on James 1:2-4

By Jason Van Vliet

Sing: Ps 138:1,2

Sing: Ps 138:4

Reading: James 1:1-8

Text: James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds... that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

We open to the book of James. And what a remarkable opening it is! In verse 2 James writes, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds." Do you consistently do that? Do you ever do that? When you are going through a trial in your life, do you ever say to yourself, "Now, I consider this to be pure, undiluted joy"?

Perhaps you would like to start with another question, "How is this even possible? Isn't this nothing more than pie-in-the-sky spirituality?" Let's be perfectly realistic. Trials bring on stress. And stress is not enjoyable. It's simply not fun. So why even talk about being joyful through trials? Can't we just be a little more honest, a little more authentic, a little more true-to-real-life and admit that we are usually more grumpy than joyful when the Lord takes us through a trial?

Perhaps the apostle James was able to find joy in his personal trials... but me? Not so much.

Before we close the case on this question, though, perhaps we should approach it from a different angle. Let's imagine for a moment. If someone were to give you a perfect house, would you be joyful? And I do mean give. They are not selling you this perfect house. You don't

have to go to the bank for a mortgage. They are just giving it to you, completely free of charge.

And it is the perfect house. It's made from all the latest, top-notch, quality materials, both inside and outside. The size of the rooms and the layout of the floorplan is just ideal for your situation, including both your personal and family needs. And there's not a flaw in house anywhere: not a single shingle that's loose, not even one chip in the paint, not even a speck of dust on the mantle. It's perfect in every way, lacking in nothing. Would you be joyful at the prospect of receiving that dream home? I suppose you would.



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Of course, you understand that you would have to go through some legal hassles in order to obtain full ownership of that house. And those legal hassles can be a trial of their own particular kind. "But," you say, "let's not fixate on all that paperwork. Look at the house. Look at how perfect it is. It's well worth whatever legal hassles it may take."

And of course, you realize you would have to go through some logistical hardships, as you

organize the move, sort through your garage and basement, decide what to keep and what to get rid of. “But,” you say, “There’s an upside to that as well. We actually needed to do a good, solid spring-cleaning anyway. We have been putting that off for years.” You see, when you focus on the final goal, the stress of the move does not take away from the joy of living in a perfect house.

Do you sense where this is going? Do you sense where the Holy Spirit is leading us in James 1? God really does put a diverse collection of trials and hardships into our lives. At one time it’s a physical hardship: dealing with diabetes or being diagnosed with cancer. Another time it may be a spiritual trial: wrestling with personal doubts or trying to call a wayward member of the family back to repentance. On other occasions it’s an emotional trial: a lingering sadness that’s hard to shake or an acute anxiety that strikes at the most inconvenient moment. And on top of that, there are financial pressures, academic hurdles, child-rearing challenges, and time-management issues. More often than not, a sizeable number of these trials will all pile up together, on top of you, each one adding to the weight that your heart has to carry around, both day and night.

And if you just stand and stare at the growing pile of trials, hardships, and challenges, then, no, there is no joy in that.

If you just stand and look over at other people, fellow Christians, who undoubtedly have their own trials, too, but seemingly have less hardships than you... well, no, there is no joy in becoming bitter over the (mistaken) idea that God might somehow be giving you the short end of the stick.

But that’s not what the Holy Spirit is telling you to do in this passage. He does not say, “Tally up your trials, count them one-by-one. The more suffering you see, the more joyful you should be.” No. That’s not what the Spirit of Christ is emphasizing here. Rather, he is teaching us to look through the hardship, cast the eye of faith beyond the suffering, and consider carefully the

end result. God doesn’t give you trials simply for the sake of giving you trials. He gives you trials for the sake of refining your faith, producing a steady, persevering character in you, and ultimately sanctifying you into a person who is perfect and complete in every way, lacking in nothing. And won’t that be something gloriously special!



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We understand that being sanctified unto perfection will not happen overnight. In fact, it will not be finished until we enter the life to come. So long as we live in this life, we still lack in virtue. We have far-less-than-perfect holiness, fervour, and love. But the length of time required does not cause the Holy Spirit to lose sight of the goal. He aims to make you perfect, and he will not stop putting you through many, diverse and necessary trials until he has reached his goal.

So, what’s more valuable? A perfect house, which one day turns to less-than-perfect dust and rust. Or, the gracious, freely given gift of perfect you—completely godly, flawlessly holy, and entirely fit to dwell with our Triune God in glory forever?

Which one do you desire more earnestly: the perfect house or the perfectly sanctified you? If you are more eager for the latter, the perfectly sanctified you, then consider it pure joy when you meet trials of various kinds because that is the God-ordained path toward becoming personally perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.