

How Can We Rejoice in Suffering?

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Scripture Reading: James 1:1-18, Jeremiah 31:7-14, Matthew 4:1-11, 1 Peter 1:6-7

Have you ever noticed how in times of pain or trial, we comfort our friends, loved ones, and even ourselves, with words like:

"You're going to make it through this."

"Tomorrow will be better."

"What can I do to ease your pain?"

Our endgame is an end to suffering. We pray for the bad times to go away. We beg that they would never come at all. A whole industry of mylar balloons and teddy bears exists bearing the sentiment, "Get Well Soon!" We ask the Lord to remove our thorns, to help us endure our hardships, and to bring us through suffering as unscathed as possible.

But Jesus' brother James, the author of this short letter, has an entirely different take on trials.

"Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials."

– James 1:2

Don't get over them. Don't rush through them or past them. **Rejoice in them.**

James tells us not to be so hasty to escape the faith-testing valleys because those valleys contain the fertile soil needed to produce steadfastness. And steadfastness—being immovable, unable to be shaken, deeply rooted—is perhaps the true "wellness" we should be seeking.

As Christians, we eagerly say we want to be like Christ. But many of us are really only asking for the good stuff. "Lord, make us loving and patient and joyful!" we sing in chorus and with enthusiasm.

Jesus was indeed all of those things, but He was also described by the prophet Isaiah as "a man of suffering who knew what sickness was" (Isaiah 53:3). Christ Himself learned obedience through His suffering (Hebrews 5:8). And so it is for us. It is from those dark yet fertile valleys that steadfastness begins to spring forth—first sprouting from faith, then budding into love, and flowering into patience and joy.

Today, or tomorrow, or whenever you find yourself in a place of trial—do not minimize it or rush through it. Instead, give thanks to the Lord. Pray for endurance and steadfastness from the One who has already endured and proven Himself steadfast.

As backwards as it may feel, this difficult trial or painful suffering is a time to thank the Lord. This is the time to rejoice.

We do not rejoice *because* bad things happen, or because this poor, fallen world is full of death, injustice, and sorrow. No. **We rejoice because the sovereign Lord calls us His own.** He loves us enough to descend with us into the dark yet mysteriously fertile valleys, to produce in us a steadfastness which cannot be shaken.

Thanks be to God.

“Blessed is the one who endures trials, because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”

– James 1:12