

Change How You View Adversity

Written by Bill Perkins

Why? It's the question that hits first and lingers longest. Why me? Why now? Why this? Most people don't even try to answer such questions. How could they? That's what makes the words of James, the half-brother of Jesus, so unexpected. He didn't hesitate to declare that the purpose of all testing is to produce "perseverance" (James 1:2-4). Instead of looking at the hardships we face, he exhorts us to look at the character it forms.

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But the outcome is uncertain. That's the kicker. There's no guarantee adversity *will* produce character. That's why Jesus told Peter, "I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith will not fail" (Luke 22:31-32). Jesus knew hardship could strengthen Peter's character—provided he maintain his faith in God. Such a spiritual reality changes how we view adversity. Or, it should.

That's why James told his readers, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials" (James 1:2).

Can you read those words without slamming on your mental brakes? I can't. The first time I read that line I misunderstood its meaning. I thought he was saying something like, "Rejoice that you have cancer. Be happy your dog died. Celebrate your business failure."

Weightlifting For the Soul

On the surface that appears to be what he's saying. But a closer look reveals something significant. James didn't urge us to be joyful *because* of the trials we face. Instead, he urged us to find joy *in the outcome* of those trials. We don't celebrate problems; we celebrate that God uses problems to make us better men and women. Adversity does for our soul what weightlifting does for our bodies. It makes us stronger. It empowers us to finish what we start.

If you're like me, you'd prefer gaining internal strength without pain. But that's impossible. There are no detours around suffering. Everyone will suffer hardship and disappointment. You'll experience the betrayal of a friend. You'll face seemingly endless delays. You'll know the pain of having well-thought-out plans fail.

Choose This When Suffering

While you can't avoid hardship, you can choose to cultivate joy during hardship—by believing God will use it to strengthen your character. That's the hope you must look to, like a guiding star, to help you navigate though dark nights.

The next time you want to ask God “why?” Reflect on the words of James. Ask God for the grace you need to see him through the fog of pain. Ask him to enable you to keep trusting him as he uses hardship to produce perseverance. If you'll do that, you'll experience spiritual growth . . . one trial at a time.