The Purpose of Trials

Elmo C. Hadley · James 1:2–4 · December 9, 2024



Trials teach us submission to the Lord and deliver us from our own ways. They are God's way of developing patience in us. About the purpose of trials in our lives, James wrote: "*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing*" (James 1:2–4).

If everything went just the way we wanted, we would have nothing to be patient about. Patience requires setting aside our own will. Therefore, trials show just how willing we are to give up our own will to accept God's will for us.

What God Allows

We must never forget that whatever our circumstances, God has allowed them for our good. God's choice for us sometimes seems very hard to bear. But this is because we are not fully surrendered to Him or because we lack confidence in His love and wisdom. God is either choosing the very best for us in what He allows in our lives, or He deliberately chooses for us what He knows is not in our best interest. **Would we dare charge God with the latter? Never.**

In His providential dealings with us, He either orders or allows all that comes into our lives. He has the almighty power to prevent anything from happening, so if it happens, He has allowed it. Therefore, complaining is the same as saying that we know what is best for us better than God does or else that God does not care enough to give us what is best. One is pure pride; the other is distrust of His motives.

Who's in Charge?

We sometimes think, "Doesn't the devil also have a hand in what happens to us?" That is very true, as we see in Job's case. But we also see how the devil could not go beyond what God allowed (Job 1:12; Job 2:6) and what He allowed He used for even richer blessings in Job's life than before.

The devil is powerless to do anything without God allowing it. He is only a creature, as are all his hosts of demons. God is above them, no matter how mighty they may be. So even if we see the devil's hand in what happens, we must not forget to see God's hand above the devil's. God only allows him to go as far as it suits His sovereign purposes, to turn it into blessing for His people.

The Long View

"*All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose*" (Romans 8:28), and that includes even what the devil is allowed to do. Do not forget that God is working with a view to our eternal good and not simply with regard to this present time.

We so often look at things from a "here and now" perspective while God works with eternal results in view. God may choose a hard road for us, not because He delights in our suffering and hardship along the way, but because of the eternal blessing it will bring us.

"*You have enlarged me when I was in distress*" (Psalm 4:1). Distress is not sent from God for the sake of suffering but for the sake of enlargement. In times of distress, God sympathizes with His own. Paul referred to Him as "the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation" (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). And Paul's troubles were not light, for he says, "We were burdened beyond measure—so that we despaired even of life" (2 Corinthians 4:8). However, with eternity in view, he refers to them as light afflictions "working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Five Necessary Things

Five things are necessary to have peace and joy in time of trial:

1. Keep your mind on the Lord: "*You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You because he trusts in You*" (Isaiah 26:3).

2. Keep in touch with God by prayer: "*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your*

hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6–7).

3. Meditate upon the Word: "*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*" (Romans 15:4).

4. Yield your will to God: "*Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness*" (Hebrews 12:11).

5. Know that the Lord will sustain you: Last but not least, let us not forget that even though our trials or circumstances may continue for a long time, the Lord says, "*My grace is sufficient for you*" (2 Corinthians 12:9). He will sustain the soul that submits to Him and leaves all in His hands.

A Cause for Rejoicing

"*In this, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love*" (1 Peter 1:6–8).

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