

ALL JOY IN ALL TRIALS NO. 1704

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“My Brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”
James 1:2-4.*

JAMES calls the converted among the 12 tribes, his Brethren. Christianity has a great uniting power—it both discovers and creates relationships among the sons of men. It reminds us of the ties of Nature and binds us with the bonds of Grace. Everyone that is born of the Spirit of God is Brother to every other that is born of the same Spirit. Well may we be called Brethren, for we are redeemed by one blood! We are partakers of the same life; we feed upon the same heavenly food; we are united to the same living Head—we seek the same ends; we love the same Father—we are heirs of the same promises and we shall dwell forever together in the same Heaven! Therefore, let brotherly love continue; let us love one another fervently with a pure heart and manifest that love, not in words only, but in deed and in truth.

Whatever brotherhood may be a sham, let the Brotherhood of Believers be the most real thing beneath the stars. Beginning with this word, “Brethren,” James shows a true brotherly sympathy with Believers in their trials—and this is a main part of Christian fellowship. “Bear you one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” If we are not tempted, ourselves, at this moment, others are—let us remember them in our prayers, for in due time our turn will come—and we shall be put into the crucible. As we would desire to receive sympathy and help in our hour of need, let us render it freely to those who are now enduring trial. Let us remember those that are in bonds, as bound with them, and those that suffer affliction as being, ourselves, in the body.

Remembering the trials of his Brethren, James tries to cheer them and, therefore, he says, “My Brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various temptations.” It is a part of our high calling to rise ourselves into confidence. And it is also our duty to see that none of our Brethren despond, much less despair. The whole tendency of our holy faith is to elevate and to encourage. Grace breeds no sorrow except the healthy sorrow which comes with saving repentance and leads to the joy of pardon—it comes not to make men miserable, but to wipe all tears from their eyes! Our dream is not of devils descending a dreary staircase to Hell, but of angels ascending and descending upon a ladder, the top of which leads to the shining Throne of God!

The message of the Gospel is one of joy and gladness and were it universally understood and received, this world would be no longer a wilderness, but it would rejoice and blossom as the rose! Let Grace reign in all hearts and this earth will become a temple filled with perpetual song—even the trials of life will become causes of the highest joy—so beautifully described by James as, “all joy,” as if every possible delight were crowded into it. Blessed be God, it is our work not to upbraid, but to cheer all the Brotherhood—we walk in a light which glorifies everything upon which it falls and turns losses into gains! We are able, in sober earnest, to speak with the afflicted and bid them be patient under the chastening hand of God. Yes, to count it *all joy* when they fall into various temptations because those trials will work out for them such signal, such lasting good, they may be well content to sow in tears since they are sure to reap in joy!

Without further preface we will come, at once, to the text and observe that in speaking about affliction—for that is the subject of the text—the Apostle notes, first, the essential point which is assailed by temptation, namely, your faith. Your faith is the target that all the arrows are shot at. The furnace is kindled for the trial of your faith. Notice, secondly, the invaluable blessing which is thus gained, namely, the *proving* of your faith, discovering whether it is the right faith or not. This proof of our faith is a blessing of which I cannot speak too highly. Then, thirdly, we may not overlook the priceless virtue which is produced by this process of testing, namely, patience—for the proving of your faith produces patience—and this is the soul’s surest enrichment.

Lastly, in connection with that patience, we shall note the spiritual completeness which is thus promoted—“That you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing.” Perhaps you have noticed the little variations I have made in the text, but I am now following the Revised Version which gives an admirable rendering. I will read it. “Count it all joy, my Brethren, when you fall into manifold temptations; knowing that the proof of your faith works patience. And let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing.”

I. First, let us think a little UPON THE ESSENTIAL POINT WHICH IS ASSAILED by temptation or trial. It is your faith which is tried. It is supposed that you have faith. You are not the people of God, you are not truly Brethren unless you are Believers. It is this faith of yours which is peculiarly obnoxious to Satan and to the world which lies in the Wicked One. If you had no faith, they would not be enemies of yours. But faith is the mark of the chosen of God and, therefore, His foes become the foes of all the faithful, spitting their venom specially upon their faith. God, Himself, has put enmity between the serpent and the woman—between the serpent’s seed and the woman’s Seed—and that enmity must show itself.

The serpent bites at the heel of the true seed and, therefore, mocking, persecutions, temptations and trials are sure to beset the pathway to faith. The hand of faith is against all evil and all evil is against faith! Faith is that blessed Grace which is most pleasing to God and, therefore, it is the most displeasing to the devil. By faith God is greatly glorified and, therefore, by faith Satan is greatly annoyed. He rages at faith because he sees, there, his own defeat and the victory of Grace. Because the trial of your faith brings honor to the Lord, therefore the Lord, Himself, is sure to try it that out of its trial praise may come to His Grace by which faith is sustained! Our chief end is to glorify God—and if our trials enable us more fully to answer the end of our being—it is well that they should happen to us.

So early in our discourse we see reason to count it all joy when we fall into manifold temptations. It is by our faith that we are saved, justified and brought near to God and, therefore, it is no marvel that it is attacked! It is by believing in Christ that we are delivered from the reigning power of sin and receive power to become the sons of God. Faith is as vital to salvation as the heart is vital to the body—therefore the javelins of the enemy are mainly aimed at this essential Grace. Faith is the standard bearer and the objective of the enemy is to strike him down that the battle may be gained. If the foundations are removed, what can the righteous do? If the cable can be snapped, where will the vessel drift?

All the powers of darkness which are opposed to right and truth are sure to fight against our faith and manifold temptations will march in their legions against our confidence in God. It is by our faith that we live—we began to live by it and continue to live by it, for—“the just shall live by faith.” Once let faith go and our life is gone! Therefore it is that the powers which war against us make their main assault upon this royal castle, this key of the whole position. Faith is your jewel, your joy, your glory! And the thieves who haunt the pilgrim way are all in league to tear it from you. Hold fast, therefore, to this, your choice treasure!

It is by faith, too, that Christians perform exploits. If men of old worked daring and heroic deeds, it was by faith. Faith is the fighting principle and the conquering principle—therefore it is Satan’s policy to slay it even as Pharaoh sought to kill the male children when Israel dwelt in Egypt. Rob a Christian of his faith and he will be like Samson when his locks were cut away—the Philistines will be upon him and the Lord will have departed from him. Marvel not if the full force of the current shall beat upon your faith, for it is the foundation of your spiritual house! Oh that your faith may abide steadfast and unmovable in all present trials, so that it may be found true in the hour of death and in the day of judgment! Woe unto that man whose faith fails him in this land of peace, for what will he do in the swelling of Jordan?

Now, think of how faith is tried. According to the text we are said to fall into “manifold temptations” or into “various temptations”—that is to say, we may expect very many and very different troubles. In any case, these trials will be most real. The 12 tribes to whom this Epistle was written were an especially tried people, for in the first place they were, as Jews, greatly persecuted by all other nations. And when they became Christians, they were cruelly persecuted by their own people. A Gentile convert was somewhat less in peril than a Jewish Christian, for the latter was crushed between the upper and nether millstones of Paganism and Judaism.

The Israelite Christian was usually so persecuted by his own kin that he had to flee from them. And where could he go, for all other people abhorred the Jews? We are not in such a plight, but God’s people, even to this day, will find that trial is no sham word. The rod in God’s house is no toy to play with! The furnace, believe me, is no mere place of extra warmth to which you may soon accustom yourself—it is often heated seven times hotter, like the furnace of Nebuchad-

nezzar—and God’s children are made to know that the fire burns and devours. Our temptations are no inventions of nervousness nor hobgoblins of dreamy fear.

You have heard of the patience of Job—his was real patience, for his afflictions were real. Could each tried Believer among us tell his own story, I do not doubt we would convince all who heard us that the troubles and temptations which we have endured are no fictions of romance, but must be ranked among the stern realities of actual life. Yes, and note, too, that the trials of Christians are such as would, in themselves, lead us into sin, for I take it that our translators would not have placed the word, “temptation,” in the text—and the Revisionists would not have retained it—if they had not felt that there was a coloring of *temptation* in its meaning and that, “trial,” was hardly the word.

The natural tendency of trouble is not to sanctify, but to induce *sin*. A man is very apt to become an unbeliever under affliction—that is a sin. He is apt to murmur against God under it—that is a sin. He is apt to put forth his hand to some evil way of escaping from his difficulty—and that would be sin. Hence we are taught to pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” because trial has, in itself, a measure of temptation—and if it were not neutralized by abundant Grace it would lead us towards sin. I suppose that every test must have, in it, a measure of temptation. The Lord cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempts He any man, but this is to be understood of His end and design. He entices no man to *do* evil, but yet He tries the sincerity and faithfulness of men by placing them where sin comes in their way—and does its best or its worst to ensnare them—His design being that the uprightness of His servants may thus be proved, both to themselves and others.

We are not taken out of this world of temptation, but we are kept in it for our good. Because our nature is depraved, it makes occasions for sin, both out of our joys and our trials. But by Grace we overcome the tendency of nature and so derive benefit from tribulation. Do I not speak to many here, who, at times, feel strong impulses towards evil, especially in the darksome hour when the spirit of evil walks abroad? Have you not been made to tremble for yourselves in season of fierce trial, for your feet were almost gone, your steps had well-near slipped? Is there any virtue that has not been weather-beaten? Is there any love that has not, at times, been so tried that it threatened to curdle into hate? Is there any good thing this side of Heaven which has marched all the way in silver slippers? Did ever a flower of Grace blossom in this wretched clime without being tried with frost or blight?

Our way is up the river—we have to stem the current and struggle against a flood which would readily bear us to destruction! Thus, not only trials, but black temptations assail the Christian’s faith. As to what shape they take, we may say this much—the trial or temptation of each man is distinct from that of every other. When God tested Abraham, he was bid to take his son, his only son, and offer him upon a mountain for a sacrifice. Nobody here was ever tried in that way! Nobody ever will be. We may have the trial of losing our child, but certainly not the trial of having a command to offer him as a sacrifice. That was a trial peculiar to Abraham—necessary and useful to him—though never proposed to us.

In the case of the young man in the Gospels, our Lord Jesus tried him with, “If you would be perfect, go and sell all that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven.” Some have dreamed that it must, therefore, be the duty of everybody to part with their possessions—but this is silly! It would not be the duty of any man to offer up his only son and it is not the duty of every man to part with all his goods. These were tests to particular persons and others equally special and searching have been applied in other cases. We are not to try ourselves, nor to desire other men’s trials! It will be well if we endure those which the Lord appoints for us, for they will be wisely chosen. That which would most severely test me would, perhaps, be no trial to you. And that which tries you, might be no temptation to me.

This is one reason why we often judge one another so severely, because feeling ourselves to be strong in that particular point, we argue that the fallen one must have been strong in that point, too, and, therefore, must have willfully and earnestly have determined to do wrong. This may be a cruel supposition. We hastily conclude that the temptation must have been as feeble in his case as it would have been in our own, which is a great mistake, for a temptation which to you or to me would be no temptation at all, may be to another individual, of a peculiar constitution and under singular circumstances, a most fierce and terrible blast from the Adversary, before which he falls mournfully, but not with malice aforethought. Various temptations, says the Apostle, and he knew what he said.

And, dear Friends, sometimes these various temptations derive great force from their seemingly surrounding us and cutting off escape. James says—“You fall into various temptations”—like men who fall into a pit and do not know how

to get out. Or like soldiers who fall into an ambush; or travelers in the good old times when two or three footpaths surrounded them and made them feel that they had fallen into bad hands. The tempted see not which way to turn! They appear to be hemmed in. They are as a bird that is taken in the fowler's snare. This it is that makes calamity of our manifold temptations—that they hedge up our way—and unless faith finds the clue, we wander in a thorny maze.

At times temptation comes suddenly upon us and so we fall into it. When we were at rest and were quiet, suddenly the evil came, like a lion leaping from the thicket. When Job's children were eating and drinking in their elder brother's house, suddenly a wind came from the wilderness and the Patriarch was bereaved. The cattle were plowing, the sheep were grazing, the camels were at their service—and in a moment—by fire from Heaven and by robber bands, the whole of these possessions vanished! One messenger had not told his story before another followed at his heels! Job had no breathing time—the blows fell thick and fast!

The trial of our faith is most severe when various temptations happen to us when we look not for them. Is it not strange, then, in the light of these things, that James should say, "Count it all joy when you fall into various temptations"? Those were the days of tumults, imprisonment, crucifixion, sword and fire. Then the amphitheatre devoured Christians by the thousands! The general cry was, "The Christians to the lions!" Do you wonder, if sometimes the bravest were made to say, "Is our faith really true? This faith which is abhorred of all mankind, can it be Divine? Has it come from God? Why, then, does He not interpose and deliver His people? Shall we apostatize? Shall we deny Christ and live, or shall we go on with our confession through innumerable torments—even to a bloody death? Will fidelity answer, after all? Is there a crown of glory? Is there an eternity of bliss? Is there, in very deed, a resurrection of the dead?"

These questions came into men's minds, then, and were fairly faced—the faith of martyrs was not taken up at second hand, or borrowed from their parents—they believed for themselves in downright earnest! Men and women, in those days, believed in such a way that they never flinched nor started aside from fear of death! Indeed, they pressed forward to confess their faith in Jesus in such crowds that, at last, the heathen cried, "There must be something in it! It must be a religion of God, or how could these men and women and children so gladly bear their troubles?" This was the faith of God's elect, the work of the Holy Spirit!

You see, then, the main point of attack is our faith—and happy is the man whose shield can catch and quench all the fiery darts of the enemy!

II. That we may make the text more clear, we shall next, notice, THE INVALUABLE BLESSING WHICH IS GAINED BY THE TRIAL OF OUR FAITH. The blessing gained is this, that our faith is tried and proved. Two Sabbaths ago I addressed you upon the man whose bad foundations led to the overthrow of his house [[Sermon #1702—On Laying Foundations](#)] and I know that many said after the sermon—"God grant that we may not be like he was—may we have a firm foundation for our soul to rest on." Then you went home and you sat down and said, "Have I this sure foundation?" You began to question, argue, reason and so on, and your design was a good one.

But I do not reckon that much came of it. Our own looking within seldom yields solid comfort. Actual trial is far more satisfactory, but you must *not try yourself*. The effectual proof is by trials of *God's* sending. The way of trying whether you are a good soldier is to go down to the battle! The way to try whether a ship is well built is not merely to order the surveyor to examine her, but to send her to sea! A storm will be the best test of her staunchness. They have built a new lighthouse upon the Eddystone—how do we know it will stand? We judge by certain laws and principles and feel tolerably safe about the structure, but, after all, we shall know best if, in later years, when a thousand tempests have beaten upon the lighthouse in vain!

We need trials as a test as much as we need Divine Truth as our food. Admire the ancient types placed in the Ark of the Covenant of old—two things were laid close together—the pot of manna and the rod. See how heavenly food and heavenly rule go together! See how our sustenance and our chastening are equally provided for! A Christian cannot live without the manna nor without the rod! The two must go together. I mean this, that it is as great a mercy to have your salvation proven to you under trial as it is to have it sustained in you by the consolations of the Spirit of God. Sanctified tribulations work the proof of our faith and this is more precious than that of gold which perishes, though it is tried by fire.

Now, when we are able to bear it without starting aside, the trial proves our sincerity. Coming out of a trouble, the Christian says to himself, "Yes, I held fast to my integrity, by God's Grace, and did not let it go. Blessed be God, I was

not afraid of threats! I was not crushed by losses! I was kept true to God under pressure. Now, I am sure that my religion is not a mere profession, but a real consecration to God. It has endured the fire, being kept by the power of God.” Next, it proves the truthfulness of our doctrinal belief. Oh, yes, you may say, “I have heard Mr. Spurgeon expound the doctrines and I have believed them.” This is poor work! But if you have been sick and found a comfort in those doctrines, then you are assured of their truth! If you have been on the borders of the grave and the Gospel has given you joy and gladness, then you *know* it is true.

Experimental knowledge is the best and surest. If you have seen others pass through death, itself, triumphantly, you have said, “This is proof to me. My faith is no guess work—I have seen for myself.” Is not this assurance cheaply purchased at any price? May we not count it all joy when the Lord puts us in the way of getting it? It seems to me that doubt is worse than trial! I had sooner suffer *any* affliction than be left to question the Gospel or my own interest in it. Certainly it is a jewel worth purchasing even with our heart’s blood! Next, your own faith in God is proved when you can cling to Him under temptation. Not only your sincerity, but the Divinity of your faith is proved, for a faith that is never tried, how can you depend upon it?

But, if in the darkest hour, you have still said, “I cast my burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain me,” and you find He *does* sustain you, then is your faith that of God’s elect! If in temptation you cry to God in prayer that you may keep your garment unspotted and He helps you to do so, then, also, are you sure that yours is the faith which the Spirit begets in the soul! After a great fight of affliction, when I come forth a conqueror, I know that I believe in God, and I know that this faith makes me a partaker of Covenant blessings! And from this I may fairly argue that my faith is of the right kind. I find it especially sweet to learn the great strength of the Lord in my own weakness. We find out, under trial, where we are most weak. And just then, in answer to prayer, strength is given answerable to the need.

The Lord suits the help to the hindrance and puts the plaster on the wound. In the very hour when it is needed, the needed Grace is given! Does this not tend to breed assurance of faith? It is a splendid thing to be able to prove, even to Satan, the purity of your motives. That was the great gain of Job. There was no question about his outward conduct, but the question was about his motive. “Ah,” says the devil, “he serves God for what he gets out of Him. Have You not set a hedge about him and all that he has? His is cupboard love—he cares nothing for God, Himself—he only cares for the reward of his virtue.” Well, Job is tried, and everything is taken away—and when he cries—“Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!” When he blesses the *taking* as well as the *giving* God, then the devil, himself, could not have the prudence to accuse him again! As to Job’s own conscience, it would be quite settled and confirmed as to his pure love to God.

My Brothers and Sisters, I reckon that the endurance of every imaginable suffering and trial would be a small price to pay for a settled assurance which would, forever, prevent the possibility of doubt! Never mind the waves if they wash you upon this Rock! Therefore, when you are tempted, “Count it all joy” that you are tried, because you will thus receive a proof of your love, a proof of your faith, a proof of your being the true-born children of God! James says, “Count it.” A man requires to be trained to be a good accountant. It is an art which needs to be learned. What muddles some of us would make if we had to settle accounts and manage disbursements and receipts without the aid of a clerk! How we should get entangled with balances and deficits! We could much easier spend money than count it. But when a man once knows the science of bookkeeping and gets into the way of it, he readily arrives at the true position of affairs. He has learned to count and no error escapes his eyes.

James gives us a ready reckoner and teaches us, in our troubles, how to count. He sets before us a different kind of measure from that which carnal reason would use—the shekel of the sanctuary was very different from the shekel in common commerce—and so is the counting of faith far other than that of human judgment! He bids us take our pen and sit down quickly and write at his correct dictation. You are going to write down, “Manifold temptations.” That would be so much on the wrong side, but instead, he bids you set down the proving of your faith—and this one asset transforms the transaction into a substantial gain!

Trials are like a fire—they burn up nothing in us but the dross—and they make the gold all the purer. Put down the testing process as a clear gain and, instead of being sorry about it, count it all joy when you fall into various temptations, for this bestows upon you a proof of your faith! So far there is sufficient ground for counting all trials joy. Now, let us go a little further.

III. Let us think of THE PRICELESS VIRTUE WHICH IS PRODUCED BY TRIAL, namely, patience—for the proof of your faith “works patience.” Patience! We all have a large stock of it—until we need it—and then we have none! The man who truly possesses patience is the man that has been tried. What kind of patience does he get by the Grace of God? First, he obtains a patience that accepts the trials as from God without a murmur. Calm resignation does not come all at once—often long years of physical pain, or mental depression, or disappointment in business, or multiplied bereavements are needed to bring the soul into full submission to the will of the Lord.

After much crying the child is weaned. After much chastening, the son is made obedient to his Father’s will. By degrees we learn to end our quarrel with God and to desire that there may not be two wills between God and ourselves, but that God’s will may be our will. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, if your troubles work you to that, you are a gainer, I am sure, and you may count them all joy!

The next kind of patience is when experience enables a man to bear ill treatment, slander and injury without resentment. He feels it keenly, but he bears it meekly. Like his Master, he opens not his mouth to reply and refuses to return railing for railing. Contrariwise, he gives blessing in return for cursing, like the sandalwood tree which perfumes the axe which cuts it. Blessed is that holy charity which hopes all things, endures all things and is not easily provoked. Ah, Friend, if the Grace of God, by trial, shall work in you the quiet patience which never grows angry and never ceases to love, you may have lost a trifle of comfort, but you have gained a solid weight of character!

The patience which God works in us by tribulation also takes another form, namely, that of acting without undue haste. Before wisdom has balanced our zeal, we are eager to serve God all in a hurry, with a rush and a spurt, as if everything must be done within the hour or nothing would ever be accomplished. We set about holy service with somewhat more of preparedness of heart after we have been drilled in the school of trial. We go steadily and resolutely about work for Jesus, knowing what poor creatures we are and what a glorious Master we serve! The Lord our God is in no hurry because He is strong and wise. In proportion as we grow like the Lord Jesus, we shall cast aside disturbance of mind and fury of spirit.

His was a grand lifework, but He never seemed to be confused, excited, worried, or hurried, as certain of His people are. He did not strive nor cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets. He knew His hour was not yet come and there were so many days in which He could work and, therefore, He went steadily on till He had finished the work which His Father had given Him to do. That kind of patience is a jewel more to be desired than the gem which glitters on the imperial brow! Sometimes we blunder into a deal of mischief, making more haste than speed—and we are sure to do so when we forget to pray and fail to commit our matters into the Divine hands. We may run with such vehemence that we may stumble, or lose our breath—there may be in our random efforts as much undoing as doing, for need of possessing our souls in patience.

That is a grand kind of patience, too, when we can wait without unbelief. Two little words are good for every Christian to learn and to practice—“pray,” and, “stay.” Waiting on the Lord implies both praying and staying. What if the world is not converted this year! What if the Lord Jesus does not come tomorrow! What if our tribulations are lengthened out! What if the conflict is continued! He that has been tried and, by Grace, has obtained the true profit of his trials, both quietly waits and joyfully hopes for the salvation of God. Patience, Brothers and Sisters! Is this high virtue scarce with you? The Holy Spirit shall bestow it upon you through *suffering*.

This patience also takes the shape of believing without wavering, in the very teeth of strange Providences and singular statements, and perhaps inward misgivings. The established Christian says, “I believe my God and, therefore, if the vision tarries I will wait for it. My time is not yet come. I am to have my worst things first and my best things afterwards and so I sit down at Jesus’ feet and wait for His leisure.” Brothers and Sisters, if, in a word, we learn endurance, we have taken a high degree! You look at the weather-beaten sailor, the man who is at home on the sea—he has a bronzed face and mahogany-colored flesh. He looks as tough as heart of oak and as hardy as if he were made of iron. How different from us poor landmen!

How did the man become so accustomed to hardship, so able to breast the storm, so that he does not care whether the wind blows south-west or north-west? He can go out to sea in any kind of weather. He has his sea legs on—how did he come to this strength? By doing business in great waters! He could not have become a hardy seaman by tarrying on shore. Now, trial works in the saints that spiritual hardihood which cannot be learned in ease! You may go to school forever,

but you cannot learn endurance there! You may color your cheeks with paint, but you cannot give them that ingrained brown which comes of stormy seas and howling winds. Strong faith and brave patience come of *trouble* and a few men in the Church who have thus been prepared are worth anything in times of tempest.

To reach that condition of firm endurance and sacred hardihood is worth all the expense of all the heaped-up troubles that ever come upon us from above or from beneath! When trial works patience, we are incalculably enriched. The Lord give us more of this choice Grace! As Peter's fish had the money in its mouth, so have sanctified trials spiritual riches for those who endure them graciously.

IV. Lastly, all this works something better, still, and this is our fourth head—THE SPIRITUAL COMPLETENESS PROMOTED. "That you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." Brethren, the most valuable thing a man can get in this world is that which has most to do with his truest self. A man gets a good house. Well, that is something. But suppose he is in bad health—what is the good of his fine mansion? A man is well clothed and well fed. That is something, but suppose he shivers with fever and has no appetite through indigestion? That spoils it all. If a man is in robust health, this is a far more valuable gift.

Health is far more to be prized than wealth, or honor, or learning—we all agree to that. But suppose that a man's innermost self is diseased while his body is healthy, so that he is disgraced by vice or fevered with passion? He is in a poor plight, notwithstanding that he has such a robust frame, is he not? The very best thing is that which will make the man, himself, a *better man*! Make him right, true, pure and holy! When the man, himself, is better, he has made an unquestionable gain. So, if our afflictions tend, by trying our faith, to breed patience and that patience tends to make us into perfect men in Christ Jesus, then we may be glad of trials! Afflictions, by God's Grace, make us all-around men, developing every spiritual faculty and, therefore, they are our friends, our helpers—and should be welcomed with "all joy." Afflictions find out our weak points and this makes us attend to them. Being tried, we discover our failures and then, going to God about those failures, we are helped to be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Moreover, our trials, when blessed of God to make us patient, ripen us. I do not know how to explain what I mean by "ripening," but there is a sort of mellowness about Believers who have endured a great deal of affliction that you never see in other people. It cannot be mistaken or imitated. A certain measure of sunlight is needed to bring out the real flavor of fruits—and when a fruit has felt its measure of burning sun, it develops a lusciousness which we all delight in. So is it in men and women—a certain amount of trouble appears to be necessary to create a certain sugar of graciousness in them, so that they may contain the rich, ripe juice of a gracious character. You must have known such men and such women, and have said to yourselves, "I wish I could be like they are—so calm, so quiet, so self-contained, so happy—and when not happy, yet so content not to be happy, so mature in judgment, so spiritual in conversation, so truly ripe." This only comes to those in whom the proof of their faith works experience and then experience brings forth the fruits of the Spirit.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, there is a certain all-roundness of spiritual manhood which never comes to us except by manifold temptations. Let me attempt to show you what I mean. Sanctified trials produce a chastened spirit. Some of us, by nature, are rough and untender. But after a while friends notice that the roughness is departing—and they are quite glad to be more gently handled. Ah, that sick chamber did the polishing! Under God's Grace, that depression of spirit, that loss, that cross, that bereavement—these softened the natural ruggedness and made the man meek and lowly like his Lord. Sanctified trouble has a great tendency to breed sympathy and sympathy is, to the Church, as oil to machinery.

A man that has never suffered feels very awkward when he tries to sympathize with a tried child of God. He kindly does his best, but he does not know how to go to work at it. But those repeated blows from the rod make us feel for others who are smarting and, by degrees, we are recognized as being the Lord's anointed comforters, made meet by temptation to succor those who are tempted. Have you never noticed how tried men, too, when their trouble is thoroughly sanctified, become cautious and humble? They cannot speak quite so fast as they used to—they do not talk of being absolutely perfect, though they are the very men who are Scripturally perfect. They say little about their doings, but much about the tender mercy of the Lord. They recollect the whipping they had behind the door from their Father's hands and they speak gently to other erring ones. Affliction is the stone which our Lord Jesus throws at the brow of our giant pride—and patience is the sword which cuts off its head!

Those, too, are the kind of people who are most grateful. I have known what it is to praise God for the power to move one leg in bed. It may not seem much to you, but it was a great blessing to me. They that are heavily afflicted come to bless God for *everything*. I am sure that woman who took a piece of bread and a cup of water for her breakfast, and said, “What? All this, and Christ, too!” must have been a tried woman, or she would not have exhibited so much gratitude. And that old Puritan minister was surely a tried man, for when His family had only a herring and a few potatoes for dinner, He said, “Lord, we bless You that You have ransacked sea and land to find food for us this day.” If he had not been a tried man, he might have turned up his nose at the meal, as many do at much more sumptuous fare. Troubled men get to be *grateful* men, and that is no small thing.

As a rule, where God’s Grace works, these come to be hopeful men. Where others think the storm will destroy the vessel, they can remember storms equally fierce which did not destroy it, and so they are so calm that their courage keeps others from despair. These men, too, become unworldly men. They have had too much trouble to think that they can ever build their nest in this black forest. There are too many thorns in their nest for them to reckon that this can be their home. These birds of paradise take to their wings and are ready to fly away to the land of unfading flowers!

And these much-tempted ones are frequently the most spiritual men and, out of this spirituality comes usefulness. Mr. Great-Heart, who led the band of pilgrims up to the Celestial City, was a man of many trials, or he would not have been fit to lead so many to their heavenly rest. And you, dear Brother, if ever you are to be a leader and a helper, as you would wish to be, in the Church of God, it must be by such means as this that you must be prepared for it. Do you not wish to have every virtue developed? Do you not wish to become a perfect man in Christ Jesus?

If so, welcome with all joy various temptations and afflictions! Fly to God with them! Bless Him for having sent them! Ask Him to help you to bear them with patience and then let that patience have its perfect work—and so, by the Spirit of God, you shall become “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” May the Comforter bless this word to your hearts, for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.

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