

Coach House Church BEACONS

MADE MATURE AND COMPLETE

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Have you ever been forced to undergo an exercise programme? It's not a fun experience. Perhaps you got an injury, and had to go to physio to fix a certain collection of muscles and joints over a period of time. You may have nursed a broken leg back to health, incrementally, with little exercises so it doesn't atrophy and lose its functions. It's quite different than exercising for pleasure. I love going running because it de-stresses me and helps me get my mind into the right place after work and it's the exercise that I both want to do and choose to do. It is measured exertion in a form of exercise that I'm used to and enjoy. Of course I come back home exhausted, but it's all within the terms I've set and chosen – the distance, time, occasion, speed and any other goal I want.

When we are thrown out of our familiar patterns of exertion our endurance is tested. We may refer to this set of circumstances as a trial or test because it pushes our limits, and sometimes, we feel, beyond them.

Let's see what James 1:2-4 has to say about this.

2 My brothers and sisters,[b] whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; 4 and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

Nothing but joy? That sounds excessive. If we consider the depth and variety of the trials we experience, maybe in our own lives, we may feel like cursing God upon hearing this unwanted piece of scripture. However, we need to look carefully to see what the passage is saying. We are not to say that the circumstances of the trial or test are good in themselves – a broken leg, an awful job, a fractious relationship, ongoing depression – all these things are bad. They all involve things that are part of living in a world that is not perfect or as God intended.

Life is happening all around us and its often easy not to see circumstances in our lives as trials. Perhaps that's because, while life is difficult, we develop coping mechanisms that lead us to trust things other than God or prevent us even seeing things as a trial – binging TV, complaining, scrolling Twitter aimlessly (etc.). I've often been blind to trials in my life because I've chosen escapism and my Xbox One to avoid them. The trouble is, our faith doesn't grow under these circumstances. We grow in our relationship with God when our faith is tested.

The result of placing our faith in God while we experience trials is endurance. This isn't just endurance in the abstract, or endurance in the exact same way as a marathon runner. It is endurance in faith. Endurance isn't a magical quality by itself. Trials develop the ability to endure trusting God through all manner of circumstances. That is why we are told to let endurance have its full effect. I don't know about you, but when I face a trial, I want to find a way out of it as soon as possible. The last thing I want is a difficult situation which drags on. Perhaps you're tempted to quit that job, give up on that difficult person or simply avoid hearing Gods opinion on the matter because you know where it'll lead. If we recognise a trial, and back out too soon, we are missing out on the work God wants to do in us.

So what is the golden prize at the end of it all, which makes enduring trials worth it? According to James 1:4 it is us becoming 'mature and complete, lacking in nothing.' Does that sound a bit boring? It basically means that we will become the people that God wants us to be. 'What kind of person is that?', you might ask – it is the person who trusts Jesus no matter what, who has become determined, through practice to face every situation with God. More than that, they do face all trials and all circumstances with faith in God.

Even then, you might well say 'my trials are pretty hard and I don't want to face up to them, I'm not sure that's worth it'. Here's the thing, when you face trials and choose to trust in God, you will never be disappointed. God will give you everything you need to face them. Secondly, looking ahead to James 1:17 "every good and perfect gift" comes from God and he doesn't put us through trials for the fun of it. It is never without purpose, it is always for good and God will always be with you through it. As this becomes an ongoing pattern in your life, you will have greater and greater confidence in God no matter what you face. I've noticed in my own life that it's reduced my anxiety, it's stopped me feeling like a slave of fear during hard circumstances, and as the passage states at the beginning, I've managed to find joy through it.

If our lives are based around avoiding trials, life will catch up with us eventually. How many people do you know who fear the next news bulletin? How many of us try to insulate ourselves against trials with a big savings accounts and cautious relationships where we won't get hurt? How many of us avoid doing good, difficult things out of fear? How much of our lives is wasted because we can't see the bigger picture, consider our trials nothing but misery, and don't let God bring us into a mature place of trust? Isn't it better to live life with less anxiety because we know that God will be with us through all circumstances?

Two short cautions:

1. We don't have to go looking for trials, if we insist on trusting God in every area of our lives, they will come upon us soon enough.
2. God is not against wise planning and good stewardship of time, money, relationships and everything else as long as it is guided by faith in him (James 1:5-8 talks about asking God for wisdom in the very next passage).

What are the trials in your life? How might you trust God in the middle of them? I hope this short Beacon prompts encouragement and further thoughts, as ever, so much more could be said.



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