

It's all about trials (James 1:2-3)

Recently we had Jonathan Leath, Pastor of Destiny Ministries, at New Life. When he stood up to preach he said that the Lord had given him the message for us almost as soon as I asked him to preach. The verses the Lord gave him were the two above. Wow, these verses keep popping up! When I was away on vacation in Florida, the Lord spoke to me and said, "It's all about trials, Gene." This is how His glory is manifest. When we remain calm in the midst of a trying circumstance we are actually a testimony to Him (see I Peter 4:15). When we overcome in pressing situations we are a demonstration of the conquering power of God (see Romans 8:35-37). And this passage in James tells us that when we face trials of many kinds we can rejoice because the Lord is using these trials to test our faith and mature us.

Trials are personal. They can hurt. They can be confusing and we can feel pretty lousy and pretty lonely in the middle of earthly messes. No one can fight your battles. Just as the baby chick gains strength pecking its way out of the egg, so do you when you fight the good fight of faith. I have rarely seen a person who has gone through a trial belittling the event. We usually look back with fondness on what the Lord has accomplished in us and through us by going through the ordeal. After the trial we stand with better perspective and know that the Lord was with us. I like what Peter says, "Dear friends, do not be surprised by the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange was happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (I Peter 4:12-13). There is a great joy that overtakes us when the Lord's glory is manifest in our lives through trials.

The author of Hebrews writes, "Endure hardships as discipline; God is treating you as sons..." (12:7a). Part of God's dealing with us through trials is his relentless pursuit to have a holy bride. Hebrews 12:10 says, "Our fathers disciplined us as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:25-27 that Christ died for the church to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water which is the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. There are two other words that are often used for holiness in the New Testament. They are the words *perfect* (or complete) and *mature*. The same words James uses when talking about the purpose of trials. God our Father really wants to complete his work in you. He wants to form Christ-like character which responds to life in exactly the way Jesus did. Scripture says that although he was a son Jesus learned obedience from what he suffered (Hebrews 5:8). Obedience to the Father is maturity, perfection, holiness.

So, let's let the Holy Spirit work in us. Let's let the Lord of Glory perfect our character. Let's learn to obey when we pass through the fire. Let's be holy as God is holy because without holiness, no one can see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). Don't get discouraged. This is the battle we all must face. We need to cheer each other on so that we can please the Lord and not man. Holiness feels so good. Don't forfeit heavenly gain for earthly imitations. Nothing, nothing can satisfy your heart like being in right standing with God!